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CREATING BLOGS TO LEARN: CASE OF BRAZILIAN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION SCHOOL

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze how students of the seventh grade of elementary education in Brazil studying at a private school utilize digital media to create a Blog. Research reveals that students in this age group, between eleven and thirteen, have difficulties developing Blogs due to a lack of digital literacy that allows them to manipulate information and media using this type of resource. This qualitative exploratory research uses as a unit of analysis 23 students, subdivided into seven groups for the development of the Blogs. Data collection was performed to raise students' prior knowledge by applying a survey questionnaire and observation reports generated

from the development of students' Blogs. The data analysis was performed in an interpretative way using the procedures proposed by the Discursive Textual Analysis in five phases: unitarization, categorization, description, interpretation, and argumentation. It was identified that students used social media as a basis for the development of Blogs. However, they presented difficulties in operating the interface and understanding its dynamics, and understanding metaphors such as the concept of digital address. It is intended to continue the investigation, expanding the scope of students of this age group in the creation and development of Blogs.

Keywords

Blog, Education, Teaching, Learning, Knowledge, Create, Technology

1. Introduction

New ways of thinking, producing, relating, learning, and teaching emerged with the appearance and popularization of digital technologies. Silva (2006) highlights that it is essential that the school, being the central literacy agency, incorporates practices that promote the mastery of digital technologies in its didactic-methodological universe.

The development of different activities using new digital resources can make learning more meaningful for students. The blog is one of these Information and communications technology (ICT) tools that, according to Boeira (2008), benefited from disseminating the internet that has gained prominence in recent years, enabling the use of the device to deal with almost all subjects, including educational ones. However, despite its benefits, it has been little explored in Brazil regarding its pedagogical potential: although 47% of students produce images, texts, or videos to publish on the internet, only 3% of teachers create pages or blogs with their students (CGI, 2018).

According to Dragomyretska (2018), a blog is an excellent technology to work in an extracurricular activity because of its interactive method, becoming an essential and helpful tool. Furthermore, Kohsamut and Sucaromana (2017) reveal that students from Thailand performed better scores on the English writing ability test after using the blog for learning. They also showed positive views about using blogs because they thought it was exciting and could learn more about the English language with the teacher's help.

However, creating a blog is not an easy task for students when inserted in the educational context. Oliveira (2016) observed in his research with 5th-year students of Elementary School

that many students had difficulty creating a Blog, possibly justified by their inexperience using the tool. This also proved to be an obstacle to sending and receiving emails.

In research developed with 7th-year students at Elementary School, Bierwagen (2011) infers that the students do not have difficulties researching suggested subjects or uploading files on the internet. However, the most severe problem for students is to share links to Blogs. Therefore, such literacy poses new educational challenges because students and educators must be more familiar with digital resources.

Silva (2006) shows that blogs can be understood positively by students by making them feel subjects of their own words, being interlocutors, and promoting a more reflective and attractive reading. Czerwinski and Cogo (2018) demonstrate that it is possible to encourage the blog as a space for interaction and construction of knowledge through the publication of comments.

Because of these and other possible barriers and potentialities for using the blog for educational purposes, it is asked: what are the difficulties of elementary school students learning to use digital media in creating a Blog? Therefore, the research objective is to analyze how students of the seventh grade of elementary education in Brazil studying at a private school utilize digital media to create a Blog.

Qualitative exploratory research was developed based on the Discursive Textual Analysis (Moraes and Galiazzi, 2016). It was found that students initially had difficulty defining specific terms related to Blog content. Later, they had trouble understanding the dynamics of the blog and its difference to social networks, confusing the concepts of HTML (HyperText Markup Language) and link, and difficulties in understanding metaphors.

2. Blogs in the educational context

According to Baltazar and Aguaded (2005), the word blog derives from the combination of the terms Web (network) and log (record, logbook). Jorn Barger coined it for the first time, around 1997, to refer to a web page where a compilation of other links was registered. However, the concept of a blog has been modified and is currently approached in different ways.

The blog can be understood from the perspective of being a website (Escobar, 2007), a discursive genre (Souza, 2016), an instrument of expression (Aguar, 2006), or as a pedagogical resource (Silva, 2008).

Since 1999, specific platforms have emerged for creating, editing, and publishing blogs at low or no cost and without the need for prior knowledge of HTML, increasing the number of Blogs on the Web (Baltazar and Aguaded, 2005).

According to the Internet Live Stats project, more than 1 billion and 700 million blogs are already created, increasing significantly every second. One of the most prominent Blog management tools is Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>). As Boeira (2008) explains, as soon as the blog is created, it is already possible to edit the first post, as long as there is a good understanding of the text editing tools. Posts are presented in chronological order, with different templates available for the user to choose.

For Santos, Grossi, and Parreiras (2014), regardless of the hosting platform used, it has two essential components: the posts, which are small texts, usually short, published by the authors or administrators of the blog; and the comments, which are the opinions and contributions of the readers. These aspects contribute to the blog being used to express ideas, disseminate information, communicate experiments, results and share knowledge.

According to Souza (2016), the blog's structure allows addressing simply and directly the most diverse themes using texts, videos, and images, through the frequent and immediate chronological record. For these characteristics, the blog was understood and used as a diary or virtual journal since its beginnings, requiring constant updates on the part of the authors (Santos, Grossi, and Parreiras, 2014).

For Senra (2011), interactivity is a widely explored resource on Blogs that results in collaborative learning networks. According to Boeira (2008, p.3), "teachers and students of all levels of education discover in the creation of Blogs another way to learn, teach, inform, know, share, publish, and communicate".

According to Lais (2016), technological advances reflect directly on subjectivities and, consequently, cause changes in reading and writing. According to the author, a specific and hybrid linguistic form emerges in the digital environment, requiring a more critical reading and a more contextualized text production. Thus, the blog would be considered a digital genre. According to Silva (2008), blog posts are generally short, but there is no standardization on the use of language and consensus on the formality of writing.

Therefore, as Souza (2016) points out, this causes new pedagogical needs and the deepening of studies related to literacies in the educational environment through the new forms

of communication required in the networked society, cyberspace, and cyberculture. According to Boeira (2008), the use of Blogs in education is a theme that imposes itself today, and it is a subject that the school cannot simply ignore.

Silva (2008) emphasizes the importance of the teacher's role in demonstrating the different styles and variations of speech/writing when using the blog. As a result, students develop autonomy and can read and produce texts more professionally with relevant content and critical thinking. Furthermore, the blog allows the teacher to make asynchronous interventions, correcting and guiding students without being limited to the time imposed by the classroom. At the same time, the student can also carry out his activities at his own pace and exercise his freedom of expression (Senri, 2011).

Baltazar and Aguaded (2005), in their study with Blogs on education, classified them into three categories: Teachers' Blogs, Students' Blogs, and Disciplines' Blogs. The Teachers' Blogs are those used as class diaries, with information about classes, calendar, complementary material, summaries, bibliography, among others (Baltazar and Aguaded, 2005) is made available. This blog is helpful as a reference for organizing the class and consulting materials, but it promotes little dynamism and communication.

On the other hand, the Students' Blogs were grouped according to their different uses, which are: the discipline Blogs created to be assessed, as a work or as a partial grade of a discipline; repository Blogs storing links to articles, blogs, websites, studies, and relevant materials; the peers Blogs, which can be created in groups so that they can communicate, exchange information, study together, clarify doubts, among others; individual or collective blogs for the publication of projects.

The third type, the discipline Blogs, are those maintained collaboratively by teachers and students. In this blog, everyone can participate, write posts and comments, ask questions, and publish projects. This Blog category has the most significant potential in the teaching-learning process due to its dynamic and interactive nature (Baltazar and Aguaded, 2005).

3. Methodology

This research was classified as exploratory qualitative, with data collection and analysis based on the Discursive Textual Analysis (Moraes and Galiuzzi, 2016). The unity of analysis was composed of 23 students enrolled in the 7th year of Elementary Education in 2019 at a private school in northeastern Brazil. They were between 11 and 13 years old. There were 14 male

students and nine female students. They have experience with smartphones and computers and YouTube, online games, and communicating via WhatsApp.

The parents of the individuals signed a Free and Informed Consent Form, authorizing their children's participation in the research. The school also gave consent to become a locus for data collection. The research was accepted by the Research Ethics Committee associated with the Federal University of Ceará, Brazil.

The research was divided into three stages: planning, data collection, and analysis. In the first, the data collection and analysis instruments were prepared, and the preparation of equipment for the construction of the blog by students.

The second collection was subdivided into five phases using the following instruments: a survey questionnaire to capture students' prior knowledge about concepts linked to Blog content and four observation reports, used when students were in the development process in groups.

The data were recorded in a field diary for further development of the report. The report has information on the date, time, location, activities developed by the students, description of the actions of each group during the exercise, evidence of the difficulties encountered by the students, and the results obtained after the activities within the blog built by the seven (7) previously defined groups. All activities were carried out in the school's computer lab under the guidance of English and computing teachers with text writing in English.

Data analysis was performed by comparing the results obtained in the collection instruments when interpreting students' written and spoken speeches. The procedures proposed were used by the Textual Discursive Analysis to assist the process subdivided into five stages: unitarization, categorization, description, interpretation, and argumentation (Moraes and Galiuzzi, 2016). Faced with an organized method for understanding the studied phenomenon and searching for the emerging elements of the research, a recursive sequence composed of five (5) phases was used: unitarization, categorization, description, interpretation, and argumentation.

Two categories were defined. The first one concerns the difficulties students have in learning to use digital media to construct a blog. The second is related to the transformations associated with the concepts of blog, post, and link, incorporating digital text and interaction in the digital environment, considering the use of comments and publication of texts in the blog.

4. Results and Discussion

The data are presented to preserve the identity of the individuals in an organized manner. Therefore, the subjects of the research will be labeled from A1 to A23 when referenced individually. Likewise, the student groups will be labeled from G1 to G7.

4.1. Survey Questionnaire

Regarding the understanding of the Blog concept, 6 out of the 23 students associated the blog with the idea of a virtual journal, where details of the individual's personal life are shared: "A website where a person posts photos, texts and things about his life" (A5). Another six students associated with a means of expression, a place where there is discussion and sharing of ideas: "A website where you can share your ideas" (A18). Another five students responded more generally, in such a way that it was not possible to represent a precise idea about a blog: "It is a website created by you" (A23). The remaining six students answered, "I don't know" (A2) or "I don't know how to explain" (A19).

Just as there are differences between students' ideas in understanding a blog, several authors take different approaches to explain the concept. For example, the definition presented by Santos, Grossi and Parreiras (2014) refers to the word blog as a record made on the internet, serving as an electronic diary or a virtual journal, corroborating the ideas of part of the group of students.

Escobar (2007) states that a blog can be considered a specific type of website, characterized by the presence of posts, ease of creation and publication of pages, and use of the reverse chronological order, partially corroborating the ideas of another group of students, mainly in what concerns the use of the term "website".

In this sense, students did not express the importance of time and its correlation with the idea of a blog highlighted by the authors.

Regarding the concept of posting, the students did not specify the idea of the object to be sent but to the place where they could send the messages. Therefore, posting would be related to sending "something" to a blog, social networks, or the internet. Of the 23 students, 2 told the post to the blog: "I think that posting is putting something on your Blog and complementing it" (A19). Another five students related to the idea of social networks: "Something that anyone can expose on social networks" (A7). Most of the students, 14 out of the 23, though more broadly, associating the posting to the internet: "it is when we post a very cool photo of what we are

doing. Example: a photo eating ice cream”(A22). Of the total, only two students said they did not know what posting meant.

Santos, GrossiandParreiras (2014) explain that the essential elements are posts and comments, crucial aspects of social networks. In this sense, students may associate posting more to social networks than the blog’s idea. However, the association of the idea of posting to the place where the information will be published denotes those students think in a similar way to the authors. The posting expresses the information in these spaces as experiments, results, or just sharing knowledge.

As for the understanding of the concept of link, students used terms with different meanings. Of the 23 students, 8 related a link to a code: “It is a code/set of words that take you to a certain website, image, video, etc.” (A2). Another three students related to the idea of an address: “It is an electronic address that takes you directly to a specific website or post” (A4). Another two students to the idea of a shortcut: “It is a shortcut to enter websites” (A16). Another eight students brought varied answers: “When we repost something from another site” (A6). And two students did not know how to answer.

According to the Priberam dictionary (2017, p. 96), “link consists of an icon or a string of text that, when activated, allows access to an electronic information in another location (document, file, Internet page, etc.) “. While the link informs the address of the web pages, they are composed of HTML documents. Internet browsers offer ways to access the code for what has been loaded and processed.

However, some students believe that the page’s address defines its construction, considering that eight students used the term “code” to describe a link, with definitions that fit the meaning of HTML code. Student A12 explained the link as “A code that incorporates pages”, while A9 replied, "It's the website code". Few students have approached the definition of a link like the dictionary definition, associating it with the idea of an address and a shortcut to access information elsewhere on the internet.

Regarding the understanding of the concept of incorporation, only two responses were made explicit: "to follow a character" (A6) and "it means to make another type of Blog" (A11). The other 21 students replied that they did not know what incorporation was.

In the blog context, embedding is how the author can edit the HTML formatting of his post or insert codes of external content, such as videos from YouTube. For Santos,

GrossiandParreiras (2014), through the simple incorporation of articles, images, or videos, the integration between students, teachers, and family members is promoted through socio-digital inclusion processes. However, students do not know how to define this element of a blog. They may not see the facet of this type of digital resource or prefer to use it to share information within their private community of colleagues of their age.

Regarding the understanding of how to make comments on a Blog, there were four types of responses. Of the 23 students, nine students provided answers related to a more technical aspect, describing some action taken for a specific purpose: "I think you will go to the bottom of the Blog and there will be a textbox with an option to comment" (A18). Only three students related the comments in a Blog to social aspects such as etiquette, reflection, and empathy: "Be polite and think how the person who reads your comment will feel" (A5). Another two students highlighted both aspects, technical and social: "Click on comments and type what you think about the subject" (A8). The remaining nine students were unable to answer.

In a survey with elementary school students, Ono (2015) found that few knew how to publish or respond to comments on Blogs. Therefore, using the blog as a digital interaction tool in the educational context tends to be a challenge. Part of the students associated the idea of comment with the original meaning of the word related to the concept of conversation and discussion between people. On the other hand, there was a connection between the idea of comment and its function in social networks, reinforcing the relationship between blog concepts and social networks.

As for the understanding of the blog post, the students responded with four different ways of thinking. Of the 23 students, 9 associated the publication with more technical aspects, describing the type of content citing its support, text, audio, video, among others: "Images, links, and videos, also texts" (A21). Another eight students linked the publication in the blog with a description according to the purpose of communication and expression: "Everything you find interesting for other people" (A20). Finally, another five students related to more generic ideas, bringing descriptions like "everything" or "anything": "Everything you want" (A11). Only one student said he did not know about the subject.

According to Baltazar andAguaded (2005), blogs maintained collaboratively have great potential in the teaching-learning process due to their dynamic and interactive character. In this way, students seemed to be more connected to technical ideas and generic ideas at others,

showing little awareness of this moment of interaction with others through a genuine sharing of their materials.

Thus, analyzing the Survey Questionnaire revealed that students present generic concepts about the elements that make up a Blog, denoting little intimacy with its use in school daily life. It is also noticeable that blog and social network ideas are connected, interconnected in the students' cognitive structure. For many of them, the blog is a social network. Both platforms are similar. The main difference between them is the form of the production and the publication of the content since social networks require a specific media standard and do not allow customization on formatting the text.

4.2. The Development of Blogs

The results obtained on phases two to five of data collection are presented, highlighting the categories, with discussion based on the theoretical framework used in the research.

After the first login on the Blogger platform, groups G1, G3, G5, and G6 experienced difficulties because they did not know if they should continue using the group name or use a term representing the team responsible for the blog account.

To define the blog's name and its personalized URL (Uniform Resource Locator), groups G2, G3 and G6 had difficulties because they did not know that special characters and space cannot be used to define an internet address. The platform itself showed error feedback. However, the students still asked the teacher for help to proceed. The G5 experienced the same difficulty. However, this happened because they tried to use the home address of one of the members to define the blog's address.

The students on G6 haven't experienced difficulties when creating the blog, but they took a long time to define the group itself. They struggled to reach a consensus. G1 and G6 students felt insecure about choosing the Blog theme, as they did not know if it was possible to change it later. The G7 had no difficulties at this stage. Below are the URLs of the Blogs created by each group:

- G1 - <https://theextraordinarymalala.Blogspot.com/>
- G2 - <https://jubs0v.Blogspot.com/>
- G3 - <https://glaja.Blogspot.com/>
- G4 - <https://malala07.Blogspot.com/>
- G5 - <https://nobeldapa.Blogspot.com/>

- G6 - <https://hdjrl.Blogspot.com/>
- G7 - <https://segueacalldamalala1337.Blogspot.com/>

Regarding the first blog post, groups G1 and G4 asked for help, and only groups G2 (Figure 1) and G3 published the posts on their Blogs.

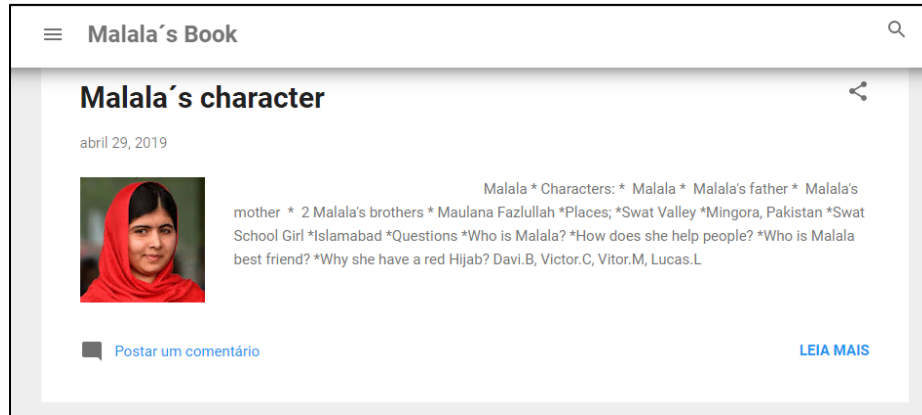


Figure 1: Group 2 Blog

(Source: <https://jubs0v.Blogspot.com/>)

For the second post, all groups used text editing features such as Microsoft Office Word and Google Docs, which are more familiar. G1 had difficulty recovering access to the blog created in the previous class. The G4 was the only group that concluded the activity. The other groups failed to post to their respective Blogs.

For incorporating the video in Blogs, groups G1 and G4 did not remember how to set the Blog editor for the HTML writing mode, and groups G2 and G5 did not identify the share option in the YouTube interface. The G5 faced technical problems with the computer, and the G6 struggled to carry out the copy and paste commands. The G4 divided tasks between the members and, while half of the group had to choose the video and incorporate the content, the rest had to write a short text to complement the content of the post. As a result, the G4 completed the tasks much more quickly than other groups.

Regarding sending the blog link, the G3 (Figure 2) sent the Blogger's editor page link, and G6 sent the embed code for the YouTube video, which was not correct. The G4 sent the URL of the blog's homepage instead of the link to the specific publication (performing the activity partially correctly). The G7 was able to complete the task according to what was requested. All teams made the publication according to the requirements requested, but G1, G2, and G5 did not send the link.



Figure 2: Group 3 Blog

(Source: <https://glaja.Blogspot.com/>)

In summary, the groups presented the following difficulties in developing the activities on their Blogs:

- Confusion between-group name and username – G2, G3, G4, G5, G6
- Insert image – G1, G4, G5
- Publish first post – G1, G2, G3, G5, G6, G7
- Send link to the post – G1, G2, G3, G4, G5
- Alternate between the text editor and embed content editor on Blogger – G1, G7
- Getting embed code – G2, G5
- Post final comment – G5, G6

Oliveira (2016) and Ono (2015) demonstrated in their research with 5th-grade elementary school students that there are variations in the level of aptitude presented by students regarding the use of technologies related to the blog. In the present study, none of the groups performed all activities according to what was requested. Part of the difficulty comes from using the platform itself. Oliveira (2016) observed that students do not know how to create a Blog independently, given their inexperience with the tool, corroborating the results obtained.

Although Bissolotti, Gonçalves and Pereira (2015) explain the need for interfaces to be designed for children and young people focusing on entertainment, visual appeal, usability, age-adapted content, and the incentive for learning, the Blogger platform does not have this purpose

of specific use which can aggravate the difficulty that the groups presented for the development of the proposed activities.

It is understood that, due to the more regular use of social networks, students are more familiar and comfortable accessing the pages of the respective social network. However, in the blog case that follows a different logic, students had difficulties creating and accessing the blog, triggering several problems, including the limitation of the understanding that students could build structures in a collective digital object. In this sense, using the social network metaphor to introduce the blog concept can paradoxically cause obstacles and confuse them using the two types of digital tools.

Bierwagen (2011), in his research with 7th-grade elementary school students, observed that they did not have difficulties in researching what was requested, nor in uploading the file in Google Docs, but they had a significant problem in posting a link. In this research, one of the groups had difficulty copying and pasting links to the blog, contrary to the research presented by Freire and Rodrigues (2010) and Valli (2015). Nevertheless, they defended that this is a common practice in Brazilian schools.

However, it is notorious for students to be unconcerned when copying and pasting links on their respective Blogs, especially when noting that, in some groups, the links pointed to different places on the internet. In this sense, the results obtained converge to the findings of Valli (2015) when characterizing the problem of authorship, credits, and material reliability when students need to transfer links from one place to another within the extensive network.

Regarding incorporating content in Blogs via HTML, all groups performed satisfactorily even though they did not know how to explain what incorporation meant in the survey questionnaire. It is important to note that this was one of the few activities that all groups performed correctly.

They used a single profile from the beginning, compromising the activities promoting interaction in the digital environment. For example, even though the groups haven't asked for help making comments, none completed the task using individual profiles. The same happened with publications. This phenomenon is like that verified by Ono (2015), in his research, students did not know how to post or respond to a comment on the blog.

The challenge arises from the structural difference between the blog and the other social networks, especially when using the Blogger platform. For example, students are used to creating

an account that is automatically matched to a profile. On the blog, this aspect is different. Therefore, it is essential to explore this idea cautiously to make them aware of the potential of building a collaborative virtual space and the reasons for the importance of developing their digital and collaborative skills.

5. Final Considerations

Considering the problem of possible barriers and not explored potentialities for using the blog in the educational context, the research objective was to analyze how the 7th year students of Elementary Education at a private school use digital media to build a Blog.

It was noticed that students have little contact with the use of the blog, even though they know it concept in an abstract form. They consider the blog to be like social networks and have the same structures. However, features such as editing HTML and publishing content are elements that are not yet easily used.

Initially, in the survey questionnaire, the most significant difficulties presented were defining the meaning of embedding, explaining how to make comments on a Blog and how to publish some content on the internet. In addition, when developing the Blogs, the groups had difficulties operating their interface and understanding its dynamics. For this reason, they did not provide access to their colleagues so that the development would be effectively collaborative in the virtual context.

Thus, there is a need to raise students' awareness of the benefits and reasons for using this digital tool and provide adequate time to explore and practice the acquired skills. Therefore, students can learn more significantly, finding meaning for their intellectual production combined with the development of digital technology in practice.

As this is exploratory research with a small number of students and in a private school, the study does not allow generalizations; it is limited to describing the data obtained from a select group with interpretive analysis based on the discourse of the research subjects. Thus, it is intended to continue the investigation with many students of this age group, including an audience of public schools in different contexts of creation and development of Blogs.

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