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**SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS E-LEARNING WITH THE HELP  
OF WEBLOG**

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**Abstract:** *E-learning swiftly evolved to m-learning, which relies on mobile technology. Thus, the weblog continuously contains the blogger and education becomes edutainment). Teachers can permanently maintain contact with their students offering feed-back on their blogs and initiating discussions. If coordinated, the activity on personal blogs becomes reflection in action. The blog functions as a platform of interaction and becomes an e-portfolio. With the help of mobile technologies, bloggers can easily improve the content of their e-portfolios and take account of every valuable suggestion they receive. In their turn, as members of a large creative community, they are supposed to offer feed-back to their colleagues' uploaded materials. As the weblog is an open sphere, almost everybody can interact and take part at different debates, irrespective of age and professional background. Such openness encourages students to defend and consider their intellectual output.*

**Keywords:** *edutainment, creative writing, m-learning, weblog, e-portfolio*

## **I. FROM DIARY TO SOCIALIZING SITES**

Weblog started as a public diary held and constantly fed by writers or journalists. The initial blogger was a personality, especially in humanistic fields, and the purpose was a more intimate communication with fans. With the advent of hyperliterature, the distinction between writer and reader became less and less dramatic. Paradoxically, although stardom and fetishisms dominate contemporary world, persons long to be personalities and, consequently, start to behave as such. Overlooking fashion conformity, everyone finds compulsory to communicate something.

Besides personal reflection and socializing satisfaction, blogs can be used in *cognitive apprenticeship*, which is described by Yungwei Hao as an “instructional model” lucrative in trying “to make thinking visible” [1]. Even if blogs can be lent pedagogical dimensions, they should still maintain the entertaining side. In this way, education becomes edutainment, assuring the constant interest of students with different mindsets.

The imperious need to communicate, to signal even irrelevant aspects of everyday life encouraged socializing sites like Facebook or Twitter to offer fast links from blogs to the larger platforms. In these conditions, every post can be shared with friends on Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. The post can contain texts but also photos and movies uploaded from the personal computer or from internet, as it is the case with YouTube. With the placement of the sharing button right under the clips on YouTube, everybody can swiftly send their preferences to socializing sites. The result of this interconnectedness is the absorption of blogs into the owners' personal pages on these megasites. Socializing can be professional or hobby-oriented. Thus, there are literary networks - as it is the case with *Rețeaua literară* in Romania - that offer the possibility to start a blog inside that network. This has many implications. Firstly, personal data get absorbed into the public realm and this increases responsibility towards communication. Secondly, such fluidity favours interdisciplinarity, as the

blogger has to address a larger and polymorphous audience. Therefore, stronger attractors must be resorted to so that a personal message could seize the general attention.

If “the Internet is a haven for the autodidact” [2], then we have to admit that education moves towards edutainment while e-learning progressively assimilates the *pocket-technology* and becomes m-learning. The mobile-learning allows bloggers to constantly manage their personal sites. As a matter of fact, education by means of weblogs is a synchronous e-learning. Blogs can be used as “filing cabinets” for collecting and storing ideas and information [3]. As for the asynchronous approaches, they are useful for teachers’ endeavours to control and stimulate activities on their students’ individual blogs.

### **1.1. Creative writing applications**

Owing to the fact that every weblog offers the option to create a blogroll, the personal site functions as a platform of interaction. Under the teachers’ guidance, the weblog is construed as an e-portfolio which supports the “pedagogy of productivity” and the constructivist advancement of e-learning [4]. This new type of pedagogy is productive when students are assigned the task of creating a *wiki*, which is the Hawaiian for “fast” [5]. A *wiki* is an encyclopaedia “in the works” [6] and “can serve as a coordinating tool, with schedules and ongoing discussions about issues that have yet to be resolved” [7]. But besides contributing to Wikiversity or WikiEducator, the weblog can be incentivized with the help of creative writing exercises. Thus, the blog acquires the attributes of a virtual creative writing workshop. It is very important to understand that creative writing is not only or mainly about developing creativity, but also about coordinating and stimulating thinking on different topics.

From virtual diaries, weblogs evolved to e-learning portfolios and, lately, to group blogs where members have the possibility not only to comment upon the posts of the blog’s owner, but to post their own contributions. More than ever, blogs “allow for essential out-of-class dialogue” [8] and gain significance in “peer editing and sharing thoughts on the ideas presented” [9]. Continuing classes in the virtual reality has democratizing effects. Teachers are no longer intimidating presences and the system of role-playing enhances chances of assuming responsibilities. Of course, teachers, although common members of the blog, should stir the exchange of ideas and raise new topics for debates; but essentially a blog is the most suitable environment for unlocking introverted reactions. As Karim A. Remtulia put it, e-learning borrows the characteristics of Jean Baudrillard’s simulacrum. This happens because face-to-face adult education is avoided. Due to the diminution of the physical presence, the desire to express oneself is set free and e-learning is projected into hyperreality. Virtual reality can be, in terms of education, more feasible than the physical reality: “An e-learning that is hyperreal presents a pedagogy that is more real than reality” [10].

### **1.2. The blogroll**

Further stimulation of educational blogs could be achieved by listing the blog on the megasites specialised in classifying and advertising blogs. Megasites of this type, focusing on e-learning blogs, could become a common reality in the future. They would constitute “a wide array of communities formed around shared interest” [11].

Teachers’ input on students’ individual blogs or on the group blog is crucial. The electronic content is to be selected and oriented. We have to keep in mind that crude information is very often insignificant. “Information in its broad, cosmic sense is raw material, an indistinguishable mass. It’s noise, it’s randomness, it’s what presents itself as inherently meaningless, chaotic. It is entropic” [12]. Students are supposed to learn how to be effective and selective. They have to train their minds in order to resist the infinite temptations of virtual world. The “participatory web” [13] should be organised in “communities of practice” applied to the “fields of knowledge” [14]. Going digital implies the creation of a “digital identity” [15] by assuming a moral and professional stance. Cristina Costa underlined that “these days the individual has access to better and more modern tools than what most institutions and organizations are able to provide” [16]. Such a digital identity could be shaped by managing the blogroll, which involves links to other blogs. This interconnectivity relies on the concept of *followers*, as it happens on Twitter. One blogger can surf the web “jumping” from a blog to another. The sites that present certain interest can be bookmarked and, if they display ongoing

attractive posts, can be listed in the blogroll subsequently. Tagging the favourites is a form of classification free of structure and taxonomy and is named “folksonomy” [17].

In many cases, courses are prompted by annexes posted on Yahoo groups created ad-hoc. Creating blogrolls can work pretty much in the same way. As blogs can be followed on mobile phones – actually gadgets – students are always connected and they develop a “netiquette” [18]. E-learning through “sharing resources” [19], shapes characters and attitudes. With the *gadgetizing* of mobile phones students carry with them “the equivalent of whole encyclopaedias being available on handheld devices” [20].

If we take into account the advantages of individual blog compared with those of the group blog, we could devise the following table:

**Table 1. The impact of the activities on individual and group blogs**

<i>Activities</i>	<i>Individual blog</i>	<i>Group blog</i>
Debates	Asynchronous	Synchronous
Projects	Colleagues can offer feed-back commenting under posts	The construction of a text respects the principles of jigsaw puzzle
Photos, MP3 and MP4 files	Personal favourites can be displayed and shared on socializing sites	Uploaded materials are the result of consultations and negotiations between students
Assessment of class activities	The student-blogger is openly critical and suggestive, but less confronted with colleagues’ and teachers’ arguments	Criticism towards class activities is balanced by plural approaches
Teachers’ involvement	On a weekly basis, reduced to short commentaries and comprehensive incentives. Having to visit many blogs, teachers are constrained to quantitatively shorten their feed-back. Long-term tasks and quizzes are favoured.	On a daily basis. Teachers’ constant feed-back and stimuli accelerate and organize activities on the blog. Short-term tasks and quizzes are favoured.
Students’ involvement	Intense, owing to the fact that it is a unique administrator	Less intense, due to the fact that there are many administrators and each one is active on a daily basis.

## II. THE BLOGROLL

It is obvious that each type of blog has its advantages and disadvantages. From the teachers’ point of view it seems more profitable to offer feed-back and stimuli on a group blog. The teaching process is most of the time synchronous owing to the fact that a few members will be always logged in. In this way, communication is spontaneous and continuously fuelled. The teacher has only to trigger a debate, a quiz, or to orientate the activity on the blog. The students will go on by themselves afterwards, until a new teacher’s intervention throws in another challenge. The individual blog minimizes teachers’ participation, on account of sharing time with many students’ blogs. On the other hand, it encourages responsibility, a sustained rhythm, and an unflinching attitude towards proffered statements and contestations. If the individual blog strengthens the blogger’s personality, it, nonetheless, provides only screened interaction – through the blogroll – with other bloggers. Indisputably, the group blog enhances cooperative disposition and makes more flexible the creative skills. In both cases, the bloggers will desire to customize their blogs, as they are their e-portfolios – their pride and joy, as it were.

In both situations it is vital that teachers should ask “open-ended questions rather than closed ones” [21]. The objectives of this lively activity are to update students’ “technology literacy, to make personal e-portfolios by collecting artifacts from different courses into blogs, and to prepare for carrying out reflective practice in their future careers” [22]. Even in the case of creative writing exercises it matters a lot that the tasks should be connected to everyday life. This doesn’t mean that contemporary education is inclined to accept commercial compromises. Culture can perfectly mingle with professional fields. Actually, it is highly desirable that theory should overlap practice and vice versa.

### **2.1. Parallel structures**

It would be quite useful for teachers to open their own blogs, in parallel with their students’ individual and group ones. The modern learning process implies equality of chances and collaboration. That is why it comes just naturally for students to have the opportunity to access their teachers’ blogs. Of course, the pattern could be the same with the one used in students’ case. Teachers should create individual blogs and a group one for all the teachers involved in the teaching process. On the teacher’s individual blog students could visualize model courses and task-solving situations. Thus they have the possibility to comment on different posts and offer their feed-back, which is of highest importance for educators. The only way to keep education healthy and dynamic is to incessantly maintain the dialogue between educators and students. We actually obtain a square wherein every angle represents a blog. There are two group blogs and two types of individual blogs. Surprisingly enough, it is possible to discover that students’ blogs are more creative and better-built than those of their teachers. It is normal that the generations who grew up with computers in their houses should be proficient in working with such tools. But here it is not a competition between teacher and student. The former is supposed to guide the latter in crossing the virtual world without falling into its traps. It is crucial for students to understand that computers are powerful tools that can improve or damage their humanity.

In setting up their own blogs, teachers offer models of effective use of internet facilities, but benefit, as well, from students’ suggestions. This flow of information and support is the touchstone for an open and pragmatic education. Teachers’ group blog is a platform for exchanging methods, techniques and opinions between teachers of different objects of study. Sharing such a blog will encourage the interdisciplinary educational approach. The dialogue teacher-student is not wholesome if it is not mirrored by the dialogue teacher-teacher. Without this type of collaboration, a relation of power persists in schools. Teachers of diverse specializations tend to overestimate their domains of study. Consequently, some students can end up overloaded with tasks in one or two scientific fields, on account of being considered extremely gifted by their respective teachers. If some teachers dramatically incline the arms of the scales, the equilibrium is endangered and the affected students will not be able to cope with the demands of the curricula. As long as teachers plan together their demands and expectations, education will stay balanced and the graduates will have the advantage of an open-minded start in their professional lives.

## **III. CONCLUSIONS**

As Yungwei Hao remarks [23], it is effective that both types of blogs should be put into practice. Teachers’ interventions on individual blogs regard subtler and more characteristic aspects of one-to-one education, while on group blogs teachers mainly coordinate activities and may even encourage students to “tutor” each other. The transfer of responsibilities from teachers to best students furthers asynchronous e-learning towards the synchronous one. Inter-students tutoring activity is valuable and helps them to develop teaching abilities. Besides correcting their own and their colleagues’ mistakes, students have the chance to improve their social behaviour in terms of subtlety, tact, and elegance. Contemporary pedagogy remembered the gains of the pedagogical approaches during the Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, and stressed the importance of thinking, creating, communicating, and finding solutions. The activities of memorizing and reproducing are only secondary parts of education. Weblogs offer the chance to achieve all these goals by combining text,

sound, image and extended communication. At present, weblogs are a useful tool for synchronous and asynchronous education. In the near future anyway, it is possible that they would be absorbed into larger platforms, socializing sites, for instance. The accent is increasingly put on continuous communication. In order to stay tuned to these tendencies, the teaching methods have to include the virtual developments and the appetite for communication. More than including them, contemporary pedagogy is supposed to offer guidance towards a superior usage of these almost infinite openings.

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