

ABDULLAH'S BLOGGING: A GENERATION 1.5 STUDENT ENTERS THE BLOGOSPHERE

Joel Bloch

The Ohio State University

ABSTRACT

Blogging has emerged as one of the most popular forms of online discourse. The ease and lack of expense in setting up blogs has raised intriguing possibilities for language learning classrooms. The unique nature of their architecture and their low cost have not only affected how students can publish and distribute their work to a wider audience but also how they see themselves as authors. This paper focuses on the use of blogs in an L2 writing course concentrating on the controversies surrounding plagiarism. Blogs were used as a means of generating ideas for their academic papers and as texts that could be cited in their papers. This paper analyzes the blogs of a Somali immigrant student to explore blogs' relationship to the development of his academic writing. His purposes and strategies for using blogs are discussed both as a way of seeing the variety of writing strategies he developed in his blogs, as well as what his use of blogs could tell his teachers about the strengths and weaknesses of his writing. The paper attempts to improve our understanding of how blogging in L2 composition courses can contribute to the development of a student's writing.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND RESEARCH

There has been tremendous worldwide growth in blogging in a variety of different languages. Blogging has been around for a number of years. Blogs have been used in various ways: as online journals, a means of designing hypertexts, and, more radically, to create what Blood (2002) calls the first native form of discourse on the Internet. She argues that blogging best reflects the dream of Tim Berners-Lee (2000), who was one of the principal designers of the World Wide Web, to make the Web into something truly interactive both in terms of how texts are read and how they can be easily posted and accessed. Blogs can be set up either by a teacher or a student, often at no cost, on a blogging service. Blogs can be set up for individual students, for a group of students, or for an entire class. The burgeoning interest in blogging has aroused the interest of ESL/EFL teachers who see blogging as a simple and low cost way of giving students access to publishing and distributing their writing on the Internet, as a method of providing them with the experience of writing in a digital format, and as a means of discussing issues related to their classroom work and their lives.¹

Blogs have what is called an open architecture, meaning that they can be viewed, if so desired, by anyone connected to the Internet. This openness is unlike the architectures underlying other forms of asynchronous technologies such as listservs and course management programs like WebCT, which cannot be viewed unless specific permission is given. These types of on-line discussions have been referred to as "gated communities" (Lowe & Williams, 2004). However, the openness can give students a greater sense of the variety of possible audiences they can reach, both for understanding these audiences and learning strategies to respond to them. As Fleishman (2002) put it, "blogging is the art of turning one's own filter on news and the world into something others might want to read, link to, and write about" (p. 107).

One of the most interesting questions that the growth of blogging has raised for composition teachers is whether the growth of blogging has changed the nature of authorship on the Internet in comparison to other forms of computer-mediated discourse. Unlike the creation of hypertext, which tended to de-center the author (e.g., Bolter, 2001), blogging seems to have reinstated the centrality of the author as the primary creator of the text. While listservs and websites are frequently organized around specific topics, blogs center on an author or small groups of authors. Readers can comment on the texts but the blog is still primarily identified with its author or authors. Shirkey (2003) illustrates this new role for authorship on the Web by citing the numerous cases of bloggers who have achieved fame and sometimes fortune because of their blogs.

One reason that blogging has become a popular form of online discourse has been in its ability to contribute to the discussion of issues in the public sphere throughout the world. Advocates of blogging have argued that they provide a radical approach to democratic expression uncontrollable by local authorities (e.g., Lebkowsky & Ratcliffe, 2005). The essence of democratic blogging is to be able to publish opinions regardless of status and free from traditional gatekeepers, creating what can be called a global "public sphere." Therefore, for ESL/EFL teachers, blogging would seem a potentially useful tool for creating a space to discuss issues that may not be the focus of the traditional classroom (Bloch & Crosby, 2006). For all these reasons, blogging seemed to be an ideal technology to use for a discussion of an issue such as plagiarism, which is both controversial and not always fully discussed in a classroom setting.

The focus of this paper will be on the blogging experience of one student, a Somali immigrant. This paper first examines how blogging was integrated into an L2 composition course, focusing in particular on how blogging can be used for helping students develop rhetorical strategies necessary for academic writing.

Blogging and Generation 1.5 students

The composition course where blogging was implemented was our lowest level, post-admission academic writing course for non-native speakers. The majority of the students in this course were Asian, but about one quarter of them had come from East Africa and had spent at least two years in a US high school. The university has had an influx of East African, particularly Somali, students. Some of these students had experienced a great deal of difficulty in this course, and there was a high failure rate. There is a growing literature on these immigrant students, who are sometimes referred to as Generation 1.5 students, since they may have been partly raised and educated in their home culture and partly in the US high school system (Harklau, 2000; Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999; Leki, 1999; Roberge, 2002). The term Generation 1.5, which was first used by Rumbaut & Ima (1988), has often been vaguely defined. The term has been used to differentiate adult immigrants and their children born in the United States and those who immigrated but spent at least some time in the US school system and therefore may have become more acculturated to American life. These students have varying degrees of facility with speaking, reading, and writing in their heritage language as well as in English. The term is also useful in L2 composition to differentiate immigrant students from international students and from immigrants who arrived in the US after high school. However, the backgrounds of Generation 1.5 students are not monolithic and can be differentiated based on the degree of bilingualism (Valdes, 1992), as well as a variety of other factors, including cultural, economic, linguistic, and family backgrounds, that have been shown to differentiate the educational experiences of these students (Portes & Hao, 1998).

Research has indicated that Generation 1.5 students may have different backgrounds from international students who come from areas where literacy is widespread. Blanton (2005) uses the term "literacy interrupted" to describe how this difference in L1 literacy can affect learning to write in a second language. Blanton found that Generation 1.5 students whose literacy development had been interrupted do not always have experience working with texts as do students who have been writing in either their first or second language throughout their lives. These students may also learn in different ways than those

traditionally valued. Reid (1997) uses the term "ear learner" to describe how these students can rely on their oral skills to compensate for the lack of development of their written skills. Thus, the problem is not that they have lower levels of writing than other L2 students, but they have less, or perhaps no, experience with academic writing, what Blanton refers to as lacking a sense of the textuality of literacy.

Blanton's research indicates that different approaches for these East African students may be necessary. Our previous research had found that blogging could be useful in an academic writing class for students with these kinds of problems (Bloch & Crosby, 2006). The blogging experiences of a Somali student was therefore chosen. Somali literacy has only emerged recently (Lewis, 1993), and the ongoing political turmoil in Somalia has meant that many of the students have only a limited level of literacy in their home language. Their experiences in American high schools may have exposed them to some forms of literacy but not necessarily the kinds of academic literacy often found in college composition courses. Research into the types of writing found in US high schools has indicated that high school students often have little or no preparation with using texts (Hillocks, 2002). Hillocks found that much of the class time is focused on more expressive forms of writing such as personal essays or reviews of books. These forms of writing often draw more heavily on the students' oral language, which is often referred to as vernacular literacy (Camitta, 1993).

In this context, our teaching group felt that blogging could be used as a means of bridging between the more vernacular forms of literacy the students already possessed and academic forms of literacy in the classroom. However, integrating these vernacular forms of literacy still raises pedagogical questions for the composition teacher. Harklau (2000) argues that this vernacular literacy may not be valued highly in the academic writing classroom. In such a rhetorical context, the strengths of these students may be ignored while their weaknesses may be magnified, an imbalance that we hoped blogging could reduce. Therefore, while blogging itself could be considered an important form of literacy, it was also important to explore blogging as a tool in the acquisition of more academic forms of writing.

Blogging, Academic Writing, and Teaching about Plagiarism

The primary goal of the course was to introduce the students to formal academic writing and the rules for the rhetorical importance and proper attribution of source texts. The course was influenced by literature on the rhetoric of academic discourse (e.g., Bazerman, 1988; Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Latour, 1988) and the concept of genre (e.g., Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Swales, 1991). The topic of the course focused on the controversy over what plagiarism is, the definition of plagiarism, and the policies for dealing with it (Howard, 1999; Marsh, 2004; Pecorari, 2003), with the hope being that a blog-based discussion would then lead to an academic paper.

Students do not often have a clear enough understanding of plagiarism to be able to think critically about it and, as a result, are often vulnerable to being accused of plagiarizing. Students are usually lectured to about plagiarism without the chance to have any input on either the prescriptive rules regarding plagiarism or the potentially damaging consequences of violating or misunderstanding these rules. It was felt that, by engaging students in a discussion of plagiarism, they would be better able to understand how plagiarism is viewed in the university, its relationship to academic writing, and strategies for avoiding its consequences. In this way, the students could develop a critical perspective on some of the controversies regarding plagiarism.

As Graff (1989) has argued, the integration of the nature of the content and the form of literacy is a crucial element of what he calls a critical literacy. He argues that critical literacy should be seen as a dynamic process that is linked to a changing view of both self and society. Therefore, he goes on to argue that it must play a central role in learning to read and write.

The critical literacy we are seeking must be based not only on a radically revised and more demanding curriculum, but also on an epistemology and theoretical critique that grasps the centrality of ambiguity, complexity, and contradiction to literacy and life (p. 51).

In our course, blogging was integrated into this process of developing a critical view of plagiarism. Blogs have often been used in content area courses to foster a collaborative process of making meaning (Lowe & Williams, 2004; Wiltse, 2004). We chose to set up a class blog rather than have students set up individual blogs because we believed there was a greater probability the students would read each other's blogs if they were in one space, and we wanted to give them a greater sense of working together by having them read and respond to the blogs, and later to use them as texts in their academic papers. Little is known about the differences between using individual and group blogs (cf. Farmer, 2005). In his study of group blogs, Rutigliano (2004) found that they could be organized in different ways with different degrees of control, identification, and levels of access. We set up the blog so that anyone could read the blog but only the students in the class could post to it. Moreover, because there were two sections in this course, it was felt that a group blog would encourage the two classes to interact.

The specific assignments for postings to the blog attempted to exploit the different ways blogs are most often used in what is called "the blogosphere." To date, there have been two primary types of blogs: issues-oriented blogs that discuss social and political issues, and identity blogs that discuss personal issues. Based on these uses, four specific goals for the use of the class blog were created:

- 1) To write using a variety of genres both personal and academic
- 2) To discuss and negotiate a variety of issues related to plagiarism
- 3) To provide a space outside the classroom for students to collaborate and argue
- 4) To create texts that could both express students' own viewpoints and be used by other students to critique or support their views

By framing the use of blogs in this way, we hoped to capture different types of writing, which could be used to achieve the goals of the course. Although the focus of the class was on the teaching of academic writing, this kind of expressive writing has been shown to be important both for developing fluency (Casanave, 2004) and as a bridge between the students' oral second language and the academic language they are learning, which can be particularly important for writers who may not be literate in their L1 (Harklau et al., 1999).

THE BLOGGING OF A GENERATION 1.5 STUDENT

In this section, I am going to illustrate the use of blogs by focusing on one Somali immigrant student, whom I will call Abdullah. This student was one of three East African immigrants who had been placed in this post-admission L2 composition class. Abdullah's education prior to coming to the United States had been disrupted by the ongoing civil war in Somalia. Abdullah had attended high school in the US for three years, and, like many members of this younger generation, he had received a very spotty education in the resettlement camp.

In order to discuss how Abdullah used the class blog and what it told us about his writing development, I will analyze several of his blog entries. One of our first goals was to have the students use the blog as a means of presenting a more personal image of themselves to the other students. As Farmer (2004) argues, blogging can provide writers a means of projecting themselves as "real people" in a virtual world. In the first assignment, we had asked the students to write about themselves as an introduction to their classmates and their teacher. As his introductory entry indicates, Abdullah had a fascinating life and ambitious plans for college.

I was born in Mogadishu in 1985 at Banadir Hospital. Mogadishu is the capital city of Somalia in East Africa. I grew up in Madina County. Madina is one of the largest counties in Mogadishu. At the beginning of 1991, the central government of Somalia collapsed because of the dictator who had been in power over twenty-one years. After that, we hoped new government would come. Unfortunately, leaders disagreed about forming the new government and this triggered a civil war.... After two and half years while I attended Dunwoody High School, my brother decided to move to Columbus, Ohio. I enrolled at Walnut Ridge High School and continued working hard in school. I earned academic achievement honor roll and super honor roll. I was named to the All City Soccer Team, and I was named third team in the central district.

When I graduate from Walnut Ridge in June 2003, I plan to attend the Ohio State University for four years in order to earn my degree in Pre-Medicine. I will then go to medical school and become a surgeon. Hard work and persistence are a way of life for me, and I take these qualities into everything that I do. I have been encouraged by many and I try very hard to be just as encouraging to others. From the time I was a small child I have always known that the way I can best help improve the quality of life for others is to become a surgeon. I want to absorb as much knowledge and master as many skills as I can, and share what I have learned through helping and healing others.²

Because he had spent more time in an English-language environment, Abdullah spoke more fluently than the other, predominately Asian, students in the class. By having the students blog without concern for grammar, we hoped that we could draw out the more developed aspects of their language ability. Writing about personal experiences allows them to draw more upon their vernacular forms of literacy. Using this form of literacy can give a writer a sense of authority and authorship, both of which may be more difficult to obtain when they write academic papers (Blanton, 1998). Abdullah seems to bring a strong sense of authority to his writing, which was consistent with what has been seen in previous research on East African students. For example, in her study of an Ethiopian Generation 1.5 student, Blanton (2005) found that her student also demonstrated a clear purpose when writing online. Blogging may foster a more oral and personal style of writing with which some students may feel more comfortable.

Bloggging, as with other forms of online discourse, can also foster the development of social communities, if only for a short period. This sense of community was important because of the disparate backgrounds of the students, who were primarily from Korea and Taiwan, except for the three East Africans and one Arab student. We found, at least among the immigrant students, that some felt there was a tension between these groups. As one of the East African students explained to her teacher, there were really "two classes" (Cathryn Crosby, personal communication, November 14, 2003), which indicated the distance the East African students felt from their predominantly Asian classmates who sometimes came to the university with what Harklau (2000) calls "privileged social status and educational backgrounds" (p. 58). As Abdullah's first blog entry illustrates, publishing and distributing personal information through blogging can be a good way to break through some of those barriers, particularly in situations where students feel isolated.

Using Blogs to Foster Critical Literacy in an Academic Writing Class

Another goal for the use of blogging was to provide a space for students to think critically about plagiarism and the policies regarding plagiarism that had been institutionalized by the university, while using the kinds of rhetorical strategies for critical evaluation that they would also need in their academic writing. Much has been written about how online discourse can foster an alternative writing space in which writers feel a greater sense of freedom to express their ideas and to argue than they might feel in the classroom (e.g., Bloch, 2004), which can in turn help students develop a critical perspective in their writing (Bloch & Crosby, 2006).

We wanted students to voice their opinions on how they thought plagiarism should be defined and how it should be dealt with in the university. The university was at that time considering the use of the plagiarism detection website (www.turnitin.com), which had been mentioned in the article the students had read about a high school girl accused of plagiarism (Heaton, 2003). Being able to critically evaluate prior research has been shown to play an important role in establishing the validity of claims in academic writing (Latour, 1988). Therefore, it was hoped that the students could draw upon their blogs when they later wrote their papers. In this blog entry, Abdullah was asked to critically evaluate whether *Turnitin.com* should be used by the university.

The site www.turnitin.com is designed to detect the unoriginal student work. The idea is good; it helps teachers to see if students were able to do the project independently. This site gives a fast possibilities to check essays and get strong evidence about what internet sources were used and how much. The problem about this site appears after checking: how to interpret the results.

This posting shows Abdullah's potential for developing an argument in his academic writing. Abdullah is able to present both sides of the controversy over the use of *Turnitin.com*, identifying the problem of interpreting whether a piece of writing had, in fact, been plagiarized--an issue that has become one of the major criticisms of the website (e.g. Marsh, 2004). Abdullah even goes beyond the assignment to offer a suggestion for how students should deal with problems related to using source texts without having to cheat by copying from the Internet. In the way he evaluates both sides of the issue, we see evidence of a more formal academic style, reflecting a critical academic literacy we hoped he could also display in his classroom assignments.

This approach to critical discourse relies heavily on the students' ability to reflect on and critique the texts they were reading in class. We often found, however, that when using source texts, the students either stuck very close to the text, sometimes to the extent of what might be called either plagiarizing or patchwriting (Howard, 1999), or, more often, simply ignored the text. To help them reflect on this relationship between this kind of intertextuality and plagiarism, we gave them another story about a Generation 1.5 student named Marita who had been accused of plagiarism for not understanding the nature of the constraints that are placed on textual borrowing (Rose, 1989). Rose identifies the problem that students such as Marita have as an inability "to weave quotations with her own prose, to mark the difference, how to cite whom she used, how to strike the proper balance between her writing and someone else's, how, in short to position herself in an academic discussion" (p. 180). This problem was not simply one of writing ability but one of conceptualizing the rhetorical purpose of textual borrowing.

One of the goals for using blogs was to help students learn to "weave" their own ideas with the source texts. Abdullah does not seem to have such a problem. In this blog entry, he writes about his evaluation of three online paper mill sites where students can download papers.

I visit all the three websites. I deeply look spark notes and cheat house. The similarities for both are, they teach you how to do easy work and get A' to not stress out and that we call plagiarism because you using their ideas. Spark notes mention in there website they provide study guide and that is not bad idea. They provide most of the subjects and I looked up the math and chemistry parts. They gave us the summery of the books. Some way it good idea and the other way it is plagiarism. The good way for example, the math part when you look up the formulas if you forget how to do the problems and that is helpful. I do not thing that is plagiarism. But when you use this websites as your second teach that is plagiarism.

Abdullah begins his blog with a summary of the site and then argues that the site could be useful for certain purposes but also that its use might result in accusations of plagiarism and then goes on to explain his reasoning. In these first two blogs, Abdullah demonstrates a variety of discourses. As Gee (1996) has

argued, it is critical for students to go beyond their own primary discourses and for teachers to provide scaffolding for their attempts. Abdullah demonstrates here an ability to "weave" the texts he had read with his own ideas, which could serve him well for meeting the course goals for academic writing. The problem, however, as Blanton (2005) found, is whether students such as Abdullah can transfer their strategies from an oral form of discourse to a more academic form.

Entering the Public Sphere as part of the Writing Process

The approach we used in the course was based on research on how knowledge is created in a social context and how the writing process reflects this knowledge creation process (Olson, 1999), which has been called an "invisible college" by Crane (1972). Latour (1988) has argued that the formal academic paper can be seen as the manifestation of this social process. Blogs are forms of software that can help create social communities where both readers and writers can interact. Blogs can reflect the writer's engagement with herself and with a community (Efimova & de Moor, 2005). The technology of blogging, such as the ability of blogs to be commented on by the reader as well as aggregated together so that the reader is notified whenever a blog she is interested in is updated, has contributed greatly to the complex ways in which readers and writers interact in the blogosphere. Chesher (2005) argues that the ability of the reader to interact with the writer in these different ways transforms and enhances the position of the author.

In academic writing, authors must play powerful roles in establishing the truth and the significance of their claims. As Latour (1988) has pointed out, academic writers often critique the previous literature in order to establish a basis for their own research and in order to support their claims. In the past, we had found that students had a great deal of trouble taking such critical positions. However, our previous research has shown that students often expressed critical ideas in more depth in their blogs, as well as in other forms of online discourse, than they did in their classroom assignments (Bloch & Crosby, 2006; Bloch & Panferov, 2003). Being able to take such positions was especially important in discussing an issue as controversial as plagiarism. Howard (1999) has argued that definitions of plagiarism are often vague and contradictory. However, students often receive only a brief warning at the beginning of the course. In their readings for the course, the students encounter various, and often contradictory, definitions of plagiarism and policies regarding punishment. In the course writing assignments, the students are expected to write about their opinions on these definitions and policies. Abdullah, like many of the other students in the class, did not feel that there was a necessity for a radical change in policy regarding plagiarism.

Students have a responsibility while they write their essay. It means if some students use another's words or ideas without a reference or permission, they must be taken punishment for their fault. Therefore, students must honest, and teachers have a responsibility for keeping the students' honest. Teachers believe their all students are honest, but in reality, it is always not. So, teachers watch students whether they are honest or not for their academic essay. As a science technology is growing, for example, Internet is very helpful for students. Students can get knowledge from Internet about what they don't know. It is very easy. Just drag, copy, and then paste it on your screen.

Abdullah believed that there needed to be some kind of university policy regarding plagiarism because, as he put it, not all students are honest and plagiarism has become easier. His argument was consistent with what most of the students had written about the university policy. As they weighed the consequences of each story they read, many indicated a need for a more nuanced approach depending on differences in the backgrounds of those accused of plagiarism and the nature of the act of plagiarism they committed.

It was critical for achieving this type of open discussion to stimulate a more interactive atmosphere in which the writer's opinions were considered as valuable as those expressed in the texts they had read. These types of interactions often necessitate taking a critical view of what others have already written,

which might be difficult for students in a face-to-face classroom discussion though not in online written discussions.

In order to foster such a discussion, the students were asked to respond directly to blog entries they disagreed with. In this blog, Abdullah directly responded to a classmate's blog about whether the high school student in the story they had read should have been expelled.³

I disagree with Shimpei.

What do you mean she deserve expelled. In your assignment you mention you have strong reason that Haley should expelled from school. You gave some example but not enough. Before you think she should expel from school I should suggest that, you but yourself in that situation. If you did so, you should not said she deserve her punishment.

Abdullah's blog entry demonstrates a facility with not only critically evaluating his classmate's opinion but also giving support to his argument. His strategy for expressing his disagreement was to first evaluate the weakness of the argument and then give a counter argument, which was what we hoped he could also do in his classroom writing.

The blog entries also provided insight into the social context to support this interactivity. In this entry, Abdullah reflects on the process of reading his classmates' blogs.

First of all, I had to read all of the blogs because I need to response each writing. It took long time to understand each student's idea because I had to read from first week's blogs to present blogs. Moreover, I had to divide whose writing agrees with my idea or disagree. Almost all classmates' ideas disagreed with my idea and I had to explain why I disagree with them. Many classmates thought academic plagiarism must be punished, but I thought the punishment like expulsion is not the best way for academic life of students. So, sometimes I had confused whether I got a wrong idea because I got a different idea than other classmates. In the some of writings, I was confused what they wanted to say, so I read their blogs deeply.

The fact that the blog entries were posted online and the students could read them at their leisure may have been a major factor in creating a critical dialogue that would not necessarily have been accomplished in the classroom. This kind of self-reflection could be helpful in the transfer between the blog and the classroom assignment. Gee (1996) argues that the ability to move from acquisition, which is subconscious, to learning, which is conscious, requires the student to develop a certain level of meta-knowledge about the task, which these students are struggling with. The blogs also provided the teachers with insight into the kinds of rhetorical strategies that could be transferred into the classroom. In individual tutorials with the students, teachers could indicate aspects of the blogs that the student could use in the academic paper.

In this blog entry, Abdullah reflects on how he was able to situate his own ideas about the appropriate punishment for plagiarism within the context of his classmates' opinions. There is evidence in his blog of the kinds of rhetorical skills in developing an argument we felt necessary for his classroom-based academic writing assignments. First, there is an ability to synthesize the opinions he agrees or disagrees with, and, second, to cite, at least informally, the other students' opinions and respond critically to them. Even the confusion the student expresses is useful for both the student and his teacher to understand the kinds of problems the students are having with their reading of the texts and how that confusion could relate to one's writing.

Creating Texts with Blogs

Along with developing their own ideas, one of the main goals of the course was to have students understand the rhetorical power of citing texts, in part so students would not think that the only reason for

citation was to identify the author. This goal was crucial both for helping students develop their academic writing and to help them develop a deeper understanding of plagiarism. Students often seem to feel that claiming ownership to ideas, even if they are not their own, is an important rhetorical strategy for expressing their opinions. Unfortunately, this strategy sometimes can result in accusations of plagiarism. However, as Latour (1988) has argued, the opposite is often the case in academic writing. Writers frequently cite texts to show that others have already discussed the topic or to support their own claims. Disagreements with other authors must be accounted for and neutralized in order to establish the validity of one's own claims.

In order to give students the opportunity to work with a variety of different opinions regarding plagiarism, blogging was used to create a large pool of texts that the students could discuss in their papers. The students were required to cite their classmates using the same rhetorical strategies they used for citing the texts they had read in class. Although Coffin and Hewings (2005) express concern whether this approach to using online discourse may confuse students about the concept of authority, we wanted students to become more creative participants in the discussion of plagiarism by having them create texts that could be cited by classmates in such a way that each student's own ideas could be valued as much as those in the texts they were reading. Students are often taught implicitly or explicitly that their forms of English, as well as their ideas, are "inferior" to the standard forms of English used in the academy. This sense of inferiority can have a negative influence on the students' sense of self as well as their ability to learn the target language (Kubota, 1998). Changing their attitudes towards their own and their classmates' writing may help them in developing their writing skills. As Canagarajah (1999) has argued, it is crucial for the language learning process that the students' own languages, both their first and second, be valued even when they diverge from standard forms.

In order to give texts this kind of value, it was necessary for the students to gain some expertise in what they were writing about. By reading a number of articles on plagiarism and then writing and publishing their own texts on the topic, the students were developing an expertise about plagiarism that went far beyond the five-minute orientation they had received from the university. Having this expertise would also free them from having to write only on topics they knew about, as lacking expertise in an area may precisely cause a student to plagiarize (e.g., Rose, 1989). Having this knowledge could also help them avoid the trap L2 students often fall into of having to plagiarize because they feel they have nothing to say. By giving them a wealth of background on the topic in the form of student-generated blog entries, information that would be difficult to plagiarize from external sources, students had one means of avoiding having to plagiarize to complete the assignment.

It was also hoped that thinking about the textuality of blogging would help them achieve another level of metacognition about how the blogging and classroom assignments were related. This metacognition often involved knowing what one could transfer directly from the blog to the classroom assignment. One way to facilitate the transfer between the blog and the paper was to encourage students to recognize that what they had written in their blogs could also be used in their classroom assignments. Seeing such a connection between the types of writing can help them see how their writing in one context can also be used in another. Students often seem to feel that these writing environments are not related to each other, even though they were using similar rhetorical strategies in both. Therefore, to facilitate this process of transfer, we asked them to simply cut and paste ideas from the blog into the paper. Ironically, they had read an article warning them about the consequences of cutting and pasting from the Internet (e.g., Heaton, 2003); however, we felt that this act of cutting and pasting and then synthesizing what they had written was potentially useful for helping them develop their ideas in classroom assignments.

Another way teachers helped students make the connection between the blogs and the papers explicit was to focus on developing the conclusions of their papers, where students were expected to express their own opinions. By having them connect the blog to the paper, it was hoped that students would gain a degree of metacognition about the relationship between what they had written in these two spaces. Although cutting

and pasting is obviously a lower level skill that may not suffice when they were faced with similar writing assignments in other courses, this approach could lay the basis for a better understanding of the connection between the two contexts.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to explore how blogging can be used in a L2 composition classroom. The paper is not meant to present an ethnographic study of Abdullah but rather an examination of what can be observed from his blogs about how he is negotiating meaning among various forms of literacy. Nor is this research an attempt to examine the totality of one student's literacy development. Rather it is limited to an analysis of how one writer blogged in a specific rhetorical context, that of an academic writing class.

I can only present a brief analysis of whether our approach was successful in helping Abdullah achieve the goals of the course. Overall, Abdullah progressed well through the course, particularly in his development of rhetorical strategies. However, there is less evidence that the blogging helped him with aspects of his writing such as grammatical control. Future research needs to examine more thoroughly the relationship between blogging and the development of academic writing ability.

Judging the overall usefulness of blogs in this context was also affected by the particular methodology used to implement them. By purposefully telling the students not to worry about grammar and spelling, for example, we deemphasized the development of these aspects of academic literacy in favor of a focus on more macro level features of rhetorical development.

While blogging was still a classroom assignment, we felt that our implementation of blogging could foster the same kinds of discussions found in the blogosphere. In her discussion of Generation 1.5 students, Blanton (2005) recommends drawing upon the students' oral language to discuss the same topic they will write about. We tried to accomplish this by allowing students to write their blogs in an informal manner without concern for grammatical correctness. The result was that, at least for the duration of the course, Abdullah, along with his classmates, became bloggers who were contributing to the development of ideas in the blogosphere, even if they had only a small audience. Even in an academic writing class, allowing space for alternative forms of literacy can help students reconceptualize themselves as writers. However, it is clear that by becoming bloggers, they increased the amount of time they spent writing, reading, and generating ideas as well as demonstrating a variety of complex rhetorical strategies. For students whose literacy, to use Blanton's term, has been "interrupted," this use of blogging can be a valuable pedagogical tool.

The use of blogging with this student, as with the use of any other technology, cannot be understood or evaluated outside of the context in which it was used. It was important for our understanding of blogging that we examine its usage in a specific rhetorical context with a specific type of student. In making these observations, I have tried to speculate on how the blogs may or may not facilitate his development of a narrowly defined set of rhetorical goals that are common to academic writing. At the same time, the "orality" of the discourse of these students (Blanton, 2005; Harklau et al., 1997; Reid, 1997), raises interesting questions about whether these students can use blogs in ways that differ from students who have more experience with print literacy. While the use of blogging discussed in this paper can tell us something about the pedagogical value of blogging, the results are not generalizable to other rhetorical contexts with other types of students.

Despite this caveat, there were some areas of composition pedagogy where blogging is potentially useful. As Lowe and Williams (2004) have argued, blogging can facilitate an interactive means for creating knowledge, which we hoped could later be transferred into classroom-based writing assignments. Abdullah's blog entries allowed him to publicly participate with his classmates in the process of knowledge construction. By making this process public, his classmates could share in how he was creating knowledge, and his teachers could better understand the strategies he was attempting to use.

These findings raise a number of pedagogical questions about the role of blogging in a composition classroom. Teachers often ask the question: "What do we do with blogs?" What we have tried to show is that the question should be reversed to be "What problem do we have that blogging might be the solution for?" We can see in the blogs evidence of Abdullah's ability to fulfill some of the goals of the course, including developing an "expertise" in the topic and displaying a variety of rhetorical strategies that could be transferred into his classroom assignments.

There are many other issues with blogging that also need to be addressed. Is blogging a unique form of discourse or only another form of asynchronous discourse? Does blogging really encourage interaction or is it a monologic form that does not foster the same kinds of interaction that other forms of online discourse do (e.g., Krause, 2005). If blogging is to remain an important technology inside the composition classroom, these issues will have to be explored further.

Blogs, however, are more than tools; blogging is also a form of literacy in itself, which can be valued as what Heath (1983) called a "literacy act." While there is evidence that there may be important differences in the nature of literacy and authorship than is found in other forms of print and online discourse, the relationship between these forms of discourse is not clear. For now, having students blog in class is a pedagogy that can be useful in the development of their writing ability while making them contributors and not just consumers of information on the World Wide Web.

NOTES

1. See <http://esl.osu.edu/staff/bloch/weblog/esl.htm> for examples of how blogging is used in ESL/EFL contexts.
2. No corrections were made to student blogs.
3. When this data was collected, *Blogger.com* did not allow for comments to be posted, so the students were asked to respond in their blog to previous blogs by their classmates. Today, these responses could be made as comments to the individual blog. The implications of this change in the architecture can be an interesting question for future research.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joel Bloch teaches ESL composition at The Ohio State University. He has a PhD in rhetoric from Carnegie Mellon University and an MA in ESL and Education from the University of Michigan. His publications include articles on technology, plagiarism, evaluation, and Chinese rhetoric. He is currently writing a book on technology in the L2 composition classroom.

E-mail: bloch.10@osu.edu

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