

Exploring the discourse of academic blogs: staking a claim within higher education discourse

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If we Google “How to write a blog”, we get about 1 110 000 000 results in 0.30 seconds (13 February 2012). But how can we describe this explosive phenomenon called blogging, more specifically when used in higher education? This presentation provides an analysis of educational blog texts from several perspectives to describe how this type of digital text is evolving into its own type of discourse. The focus is on educational blogs in the higher education sphere, specifically around issues of open distance learning (ODL). As a genre, this type of blog has yet to be analysed in depth from a rhetorical perspective.

The presentation is a description of the linguistic and metatextual components of educational blogs and gives insight into possibilities of how blogging can be integrated into various teaching and learning scenarios. The blogs are analysed to identify themes and specific language and rhetorical features in relation to several issues: register and tone; information versus interpersonal focus; authorial stance and agency. At the same time, we have broadened the typical textual analysis scope to include metatextual issues such as webpage design and hypertextual features.

Preliminary results have indicated that blogs are increasingly used as a source of accurate, valid and reliable information and have moved beyond mere personal reflection. Blogging has changed the way information is disseminated, and in educational contexts, specifically challenging traditional conceptions of “the sage on the stage” and “the guide on the side”.

Because of the nature of educational blogging, with the comment function, the texts are no longer created by a single “dedicated author”, but go through a process of co-creation and ongoing engagement. In this way, blogging can play a unique role in higher education – by further enriching the teaching and learning environment, and by challenging our views of academic discourse.