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Blogging for Informal Learning: Analyzing Bloggers' Perceptions Using Learning Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study defines a blog as a contemporary web-based environment that can make a difference in adult informal learning practice. An online survey with 70 adult bloggers in Korea was undertaken to understand the nature of adults' blogging and its meanings in terms of learning. This study investigates (a) adults' blogging experiences related to learning, (b) bloggers' perceptions of the usefulness of blogging in terms of four perspectives on learning processes (i.e., learning as an acquisition process, a reflection process, a practice-based community process, and an embodied co-emergent process), and (c) the link between adult informal learning and blogging. The findings show that the majority of participants became aware of positive changes, including learning experiences, in everyday life after blogging. Among the four perspectives on learning processes, bloggers perceived blogging mainly as acquisition and/or reflection oriented learning process. Also, adult bloggers identified the characteristics of learning through blogging as 'self-directed,' 'practical,' 'situative,' 'unlimited and accessible,' and 'self-regulated,' which are distinguished from those of formal education in schools. This study therefore implies that the blog can be a meaningful learning environment and the blogging can be a significant factor in having the informal learning for adults more enriched and fulfilled.

Keywords

Blog, Adult learning, Informal learning, Learning perspective

Introduction

This study intends to explore blogs as a meaningful environment for informal adult learning. A blog, an individually maintained web page, has been a social phenomenon for the last decade (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). As the latest development in web-based technology, the functions of blogs vary. They can be online personal journals (Wang & Hsua 2008), Web-based media facilitating communication and interaction with other bloggers (Godwin-Jones, 2003), or interactive knowledge-exchange tools (Herring et al., 2005). Blogs also can capitalize on the strength of authentic writing, the power of the writing process, and the engagement of collaborative writing (Boling, Castek, Zawilinski, Barton, & Nierlich, 2008). Today, more people are reading and keeping blogs. For example, as of March 2008, 184 million worldwide users have started a blog while 26.4 millions uses in US; 346 millions worldwide users read blogs while 60.3 millions in US (Winn, 2008). Since it does not require any specific programming skills such as writing HTML codes, this technology-enabled online space now seems to have gained world-wide popularity by making it easier to search and collect documents, share thoughts in an open public space, and contribute to communities.

Blogs have been studied on various aspects in different disciplines, for example, blogging for marketing in business sectors (Singh & Singh, 2008; Wright & Crossland, 2006) and blogging for expressing and sharing their political voices with explicit intention to influence others in political sector (Coleman & Wright, 2008; Franco & Ward, 2008; Wright, 2008).

The question now is: Can this new form of people's expression be used effectively for education and learning? We argue in the remainder of this paper that the chances are high. First, several studies indicate that the features of blogs are used for educational purposes, particularly for various kinds of classroom instruction (Boling, et al., 2008; Glass & Spiegelman, 2008; Haramiak, Boulton, & Irwin, 2009; Kajder & Bull, 2004; Martindale & Wiley, 2005; Quible, 2005; Ray, 2006; Wassell & Crouch, 2008). Researchers argue that blogging is an effective instructional tool in which instructors and students can communicate with each other to discuss issues raised in class. For example, college faculty members can use blogs as teaching and learning aids in a higher-education context (Glass & Spiegelman, 2008; Martindale & Wiley, 2005; Quible, 2005); and students can demonstrate their projects on blogs (Overby, 2009; Ray, 2006). K-12 teachers can use blogs to help their students reflect on their own thoughts (Kajder

& Bull, 2004) while pre-service teachers or student teachers can utilize blogs for their own professional development (Haramiak, Boulton, & Irwin, 2009; Wassell & Crouch, 2008).

While the studies addressed above have argued the usefulness of using blogs for educational purposes in which teachers actively lead for effective learning, their self-directed use by bloggers and its embedded meaning for effective learning remains an area of exploration. Also, less research has been conducted to explore blogs as a newly emerging space where learners can benefit informally.

This study, therefore, aims to explore the nature of adults' blogging and its effectiveness in terms of their everyday learning. It investigates the reasons for adult bloggers' use of blog, their conception of learning, and the interpretations of the linkage between their blogging and learning. Therefore, the research questions were:

- Which experiences do the adult bloggers perceive conducive to learning?
- What are the potential uses of blogs for learning in relation to the perspectives of adult learning processes?
- What are the characteristics of adult informal learning through blogging compared to the formal education in school?

Theoretical Framework

Characteristics of Adult Informal Learning

To respond to the accelerated changes in the world and the increasing and diversified demands of society, lifelong learning has been considered not something extra but something required and essential. Since adult learning has become a major part of lifelong learning discussions in recent decades (OECD, 1996), contemporary adults have been encouraged to find learning opportunities in diverse places including home, educational institutions, workplace, community, and even cyberspace (Kwon, 2001).

Unlike children or adolescents who generally learn in formal educational settings such as schools, adults learn in more diverse and flexible settings and may learn significantly more in incidental and spontaneous learning situations than in educational settings. Adults also learn without any direct reliance on teacher or instructors, sometimes learning through serendipity. These cases correspond to informal learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). In a broader sense, informal learning includes everyday experiences from which we learn something (Merriam & Cafarella, 1999).

Informal learning has great flexibility allowing people to gain knowledge without instructors and externally imposed curricular criteria (Livingstone, 2001). With less restriction, it can be more learner-centered and learners can decide for themselves important things they want to learn.

This flexibility is favored by many adult learners. Empirical studies regarding adult informal learning show that the overwhelming majority of adults spend substantial time in the pursuit of informal learning (Johnstone & Rivera, 1965; Livingstone, 2001; Tough, 1971, 1978). For example, Tough's study found that more than two-thirds of adults' intentional learning occurred outside schools or educational institutions (Tough, 1971). According to these findings, informal learning can well be defined as one of the important and predominant forms of learning in adult lives.

Informal learning, however, has not yet been investigated fully due to its broad definition. Some of it is conducted by agency, the learner, obviously intentionally. Much of it, however, is hard to distinguish from life experiences since it occurs in everyday life. Indeed, it often is viewed as an "iceberg" phenomenon (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Brookfield, 1981) since so much of it is invisible and easy to underestimate. Whether visible or invisible, few studies have been conducted on how effectively informal learning enriches adults with tangible learning outcomes (Livingstone, 2001; 2002).

Researchers have attempted to classify informal learning to deal with it in more manageable ways. Even though some researchers often use informal learning and self-directed learning as interchangeable terms, many agree that informal learning includes more than the self-directed one shown above. According to Schugurensky (2000), informal learning can take different forms due to the presence or absence of intentionality and awareness of learning.

He defines informal learning in three forms - self-directed learning, incidental learning, and socialization (see Table 1).

Table 1. Three forms of Informal Learning (Schugurensky, 2000, p.3)

Forms	Intentionality	Awareness
Self-directed	Yes	Yes
Incidental	No	Yes
Socialization	No	No

In Schugurensky's classification, self-directed learning refers to 'learning projects' undertaken by individual learners. Since adults are believed to be self-directed in nature, or the contemporary world encourages learners to be more self-directed, adults pursue more and more self-directed learning opportunities, not fixed and full-time but open and flexible. Such informal learning is intentional because the learner intends to learn something before the learning process starts. It also is a conscious process in that the learner is aware of the learning when it happens.

Incidental learning, in contrast, refers to the learning experiences that occur when the learner may not intend to learn something. After the experience, however, she or he becomes aware of it. Thus, it is an unintentional but conscious process.

Socialization, also called tacit learning, refers to the internalization of values, attitudes, behaviors, or skills that occur in everyday life. The concept of socialization as a type of informal learning is very hard to research since it is neither intended nor perceived by the learner. Therefore, this study does not discuss socialization or tacit learning despite its significant value in adult informal learning.

Processes of Adult Informal Learning

Adult informal learning, either self-directed or incidental, follows different processes with different outcomes. No single theory of learning comprehensively explains these various learning processes. Many learning theories have contributed to this discussion and offered unique and valuable perspectives on the process of adult learning (Mitchell & Livingstone, 2002). For example, adult learning not only includes the acquisition and accumulation of information, but also embraces "making sense of our lives, transforming not just what we learn but the way we learn, and it is absorbing, imagining, intuiting, and learning informally with others" (Merriam, 2001, p. 96). It also engenders certain identities and belongingness to adult learners (Merriam, Courtenay, & Baumgartner, 2003) while it brings total changes to the agency and the related objects (Law, 1992).

To address the adult informal learning processes and outcomes through blogging, this study depends on Fenwick and Tennant's (2004) categorization of adult learning, which, according to them, can be viewed from four different perspectives: (a) an acquisition process, (b) a reflection process, (c) a practice-based community process, and (d) an embodied co-emergent process.

First, "learning as acquisition" understands knowledge as a substantive skill or competency, concept, or new language that a learner can acquire. Fenwick and Tennant illustrate that the acquisition is related to "how mental information processing occurs and how cognitive structures develop and change" (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004, p. 57). Not only knowledge contents but also strategies or skills to develop new knowledge can be acquired.

Second, learning involves a reflection process. "Learning as reflection" interprets learning as a meaning-making process. This kind of learning often brings transformative outcomes that can lead learners to challenge and transform their assumptions and values (Mezirow, 1991; Schugurensky, 2000). As learners interpret what they sense, depending on the aspects of personal interests or familiarity, they transform the existing knowledge or even construct new and/or unique ones. This means that, for example, each blogger will most likely construct a very different understanding of what he or she reads on the same blogging site. Although all adults are exposed to a myriad of experiences, not everyone learns the same from them. Learning happens "only when there is reflective thought" (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004, p. 60).

Third, learning can also be viewed as a social activity embedded in authentic social relations. The concept of community of practice (in abbreviation, CoP) explains that any group of individuals collaborates to pursue shared goals and works. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that individuals learn as they participate by interacting with the community (with its history, assumptions and cultural values, rules and patterns of relationship), the tools at hand (including objects, technology, languages and images), and the moment's activity. They learn and form a certain identity after this process.

The fourth perspective views adult learning as a co-emergent process. This perspective criticizes the view of learning as participation in a community of practice because it still separates individuals from group, humans from environment, subject from object (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004). The co-emergent process is, in contrast, a holistic perspective on learning processes. That is, it is not limited to the state that individuals and communities learn something from something somewhere. Rather, the learning systems and human beings co-adapt, organize and transform interactions to create new forms of knowledge and the learning systems. Overall, learning is a highly complex process in which the individual's cognitive and social dimensions of learning are co-emergently achieved through interactions with the knowledge system, and the outcome is the fundamental change for the both, the learning systems and human beings.

The meaning of this classification of adult learning in terms of its process can be connected to the issue that this study focuses on - adult informal learning. First, acquisition of knowledge is necessary for learners at all age levels; but its significance cannot be too overemphasized for adults in these days when lifelong learning such as continuous job-related training has become the norm. Second, learning through meaning-making or reflection is more meaningful for adults in that it reconstructs the meaning of existing experiences, which adults are assumed to accumulate more than children or adolescents throughout the years of their lives. Third, as adults are involved with various communities, it is important for them to gain appropriate identities related to these communities. Learning through community-based processes is therefore important to adults whose relationships and interactions within a community play important roles for their careers and personal lives. Lastly, considered a part of complex learning systems, adults develop through continuous interaction with people and objects around them, which in turn affect and advance the whole systems.

Thus, adult informal learning often takes place in adults' everyday lives and is quite valuable. In this study, various scholarly definitions and classifications regarding adult informal learning are used to conceptualize the meaning of blogging as adult informal learning. Schugurensky (2000)'s categorization of informal learning helps to formulate an argument that blogging can facilitate either self-directed learning, incidental learning, or socialization depending on whether there is intention or awareness. By using Fenwick and Tennant (2004)'s categorization, blogging activities are to be understood as learning activities that require uniquely different processes to yield various outcomes of learning such as acquisition of knowledge, reflection of experience, formation of identity by participation, and co-emergent change of both learners and the system.

Methods

Within a mixed model research approach (Johnson & Christensen, 2004), an online survey questionnaire was developed for this study and included both quantitative multiple-choice items and qualitative open-ended questions. The online survey was designed to derive respondents' self-reports in terms of how adult bloggers use blogs, their general understanding of the usefulness of blogging, and the meanings of blogging in their everyday lives and learning.

The survey questions generally were grouped into three categories: demographic background, personal experiences with blogs, and the perceptions of learning in relation to blogging experiences. As part of the survey, a questionnaire (see Table 2) consisting of twelve items on a Likert scale (from 1, strongly disagree to 5, strongly agree) was developed specifically to investigate bloggers' perceptions of the usefulness of blogging for different types of learning based on the four perspectives identified by Fenwick and Tennant (2004): Learning as (a) an acquisition process, (b) a reflection process, (c) a practice-based community process, and (d) an embodied co-emergent process.

Table 2. Questionnaire for the usefulness of blogging for learning

Learning perspectives	Items
Learning as an acquisition process	1. Blogging can be useful in acquiring various kinds of knowledge and information.
	2. Blogging can help me develop my own expertise in some areas.
	3. Blogging can help me engage more actively in my fields of interests.
Learning as a reflection process	4. Blogging can help me experience the 'a-ha' moment that transforms my old views to a new one.
	5. Blogging can provide me opportunities to grow by looking back on my own thoughts, views and experiences.
	6. Blogging can be useful to describe and/or express my thoughts and views.
	7. Blogging can help me gain new awareness and set up plans on the basis of it.
Learning as a practice-based community process	8. Blogging can be useful to build up some social networks around me.
	9. Blogging can help me realize the influence of other bloggers on me.
	10. Blogging can help me realize the importance of it as a collective activity in a community.
Learning as an embodied co-emergent process	11. Blogging can make me communicate with the world and can influence every area of my life.
	12. Blogging can help me create new knowledge and I can share this with others as an expert.

Data Collection

Seventy Korean adult bloggers (i.e., over 20 years of age) were recruited for the study. They were users of Naver (<http://www.naver.com>), which is one of the representative blog service providers in Korea. Bloggers enrolled in any formal education programs (e.g., college, university, graduate school) were excluded because their uses of blogs could be influenced by formal education, which may affect the focus of the study, adult informal learning. To recruit the participants, the strategy of snowball sampling was used. Each researcher initially invited a couple of Naver bloggers among personal acquaintances who fit the criteria for participation and asked them to introduce the survey to other bloggers.

The majority of survey participants were in their 30s (57.2%), female (75.7%), and office workers (40.0%) or professionals (20.0%). Forty-three participants (61.4%) had used blogs for more than two years. The detailed demographics are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Demographics of the Survey Participants

Category	Items	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Gender	Female	53	75.7 %
	Male	17	24.3 %
Age	20-29	20	28.6 %
	30-39	40	57.2 %
	Over 40	10	14.3 %
Occupation	Office workers	28	40.0 %
	Professional	14	20.0 %
	Self-employed	9	12.9 %
	Full-time housewives	8	11.4 %
	Other	7	10.0 %
	Job-seekers	4	5.7 %

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. A statistical analysis was conducted to investigate whether there are any correlations among the variables describing the participants: their demographic information, their patterns of using blog, their recognitions of change in life through the blogging, their descriptions

of learning, and their perceptions on the usefulness of blogging for learning. The results did not show any meaningful correlations between and within variables. It would be difficult to articulate the behavioral patterns of using blogs accordingly. Bloggers use blogs in many different ways depending on their own purposes, preferences, and life styles. Hence, it is necessary to investigate more qualitatively regarding various features that would be found from their blogging experiences.

The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended survey questions (e.g., the experiences of change in life through blogging, the definitions of learning, the characteristics of learning through blogging and learning in school) were analyzed using the microanalysis method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to fully understand their blogging experiences by “coding the meaning found in words or groups of words”(p. 65) and improve the credibility of our interpretations regarding the results of data along with rich descriptions. To ensure the inter-reliability in coding, all of data was reviewed by three researchers respectively and the consensus among three researchers was involved.

Findings

Blogging Experiences related to Learning

In terms of bloggers’ behaviors, the statistical analysis of the survey responses did not offer any meaningful correlations between and within variables: the participants’ demographic information (e.g., age; occupation) and their patterns of using blogs (e.g., the number of hours spent blogging including managing their own blogs and visiting others’ blogs; the numbers of neighbors who they regularly had visited and who regularly visited their blogs). The results show that it would be difficult to articulate the behavioral patterns of using blogs. Bloggers use blogs in many different ways depending on their own purposes, preferences, and life styles. Hence, it is necessary to investigate more qualitatively regarding various features that would be found from their blogging experiences.

Out of 70 survey respondents, 61.4% had used blogs more than two years and thus were relatively steady users of blogs. While the majority of participants (68.6%) indicated that they engaged in blogging about two hours per week, there were 13 bloggers (18.6%) who had spent more than five hours, ranging up to 30 hours, per week. Interestingly, when they were asked to estimate the time spent managing their own blogs and visiting others’ blogs, the total figures were higher than the numbers of hours for blogging they indicated.

Regarding the purposes for using blogs, 43 participants (61.4%) indicated that they had used blogs for the sharing of information in relation to general issues. Other reasons were identified, such as (a) for satisfying personal interests and hobbies (40.0%) or (b) for developing their own expertise on more specific areas (30%), (c) for expressing and reflecting by themselves (37.0%), such as writing journals including personal experiences, thoughts, and opinions, and (d) maintaining social relationships (37.0%) by connecting with other bloggers (see Table 4).

Table4. Reasons for Using Blogs (Multiple Choices)

Reasons	No.	%
Sharing information	43	61.4 %
Personal interest or hobby	28	40.0 %
Self-expression and self-reflection	24	37.0 %
Maintaining social relationships	24	37.0 %
Developing expertise	21	30.0 %
For fun	15	21.4 %
Interpersonal communication	14	20.0 %
Developing self-identity	13	18.6 %
Observing others’ lives	7	10.0 %

Based on their blogging experiences, the participants were asked if there had been any changes in their lives and their way of thinking after they began blogging. Forty-six respondents (65.7%) gave positive answers and explained the changes in areas as below:

- Ways to deal with information and knowledge (23%):

"I got a habit that I searched and collected information like collecting different coins. I became sort of expert-minded on certain topics." (participant 30)

"Easy access to information gives me stronger desire to experience a certain thing." (participant 13)

- Personal ways of thinking (23%):

"I reflect myself by sharing thoughts with other people." (participant 25)

"Blogging gave me a chance to look back on my life. I realize that journaling the moments is so meaningful. Now I find a common day more precious than before." (participant 57)

- Self-development (40%):

"I could see myself more objective while writing a blog. And I could arrange and organize the things around myself better." (participant 60)

"I feel that the range of perspective or thoughts became broader." (participant 14)

- Social relationships (15%):

"My relationship with friends and colleagues is more extended and deepened since I could stay in touch with them using blogs." (participant 61)

"Sharing my thoughts and feelings by blogging led to another level of social relationships and I actually became more extrovert." (participant 63)

Meanwhile, 24 participants (34.3%) reported that blogging had no influence on their ways of thinking or on their life as a whole and explained that they used blogs in a limited way simply for sharing information or for fun.

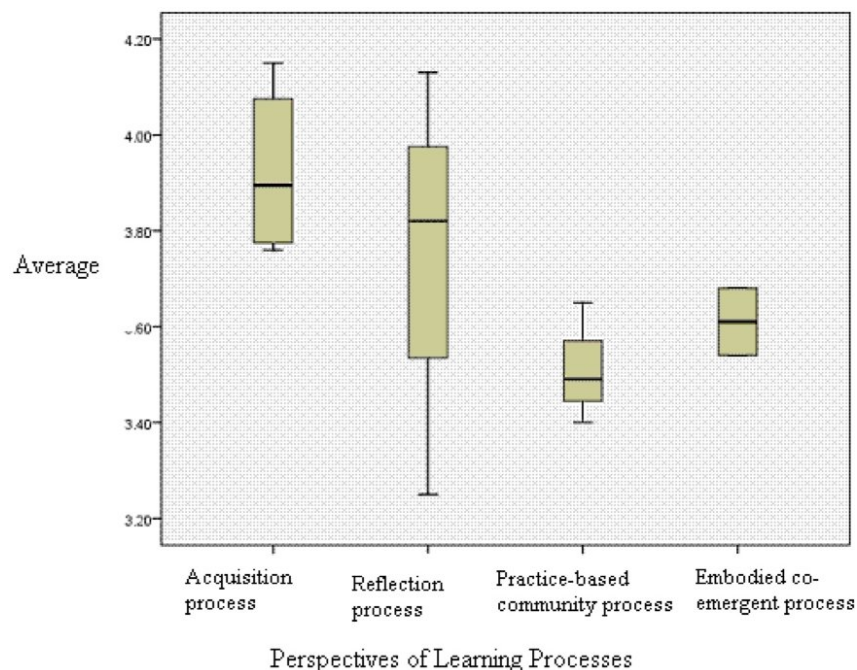


Figure 1. The degree of agreement on blogging as learning process in relation to four perspectives of learning processes

No matter whether they recognized any changes in their life after using blogs, the majority of participants (90.0%) agreed that they had experienced some kind of learning through their blogging activities. For further analysis of their responses in terms of learning, the following section will describe their perceptions of the relationship between

blogging and learning based on Fenwick and Tennant's (2004) four perspectives on adult learning discussed in the first section of this paper.

Perception of the Usefulness of Blogging for Learning

To understand bloggers' perception of the usefulness of blogging for learning, the results of the questionnaire asking about the relationship between blogging and learning (refer to Table 2) were analyzed. In Figure 1, the X-axis indicates the four perspectives of adult learning process: Learning as an acquisition process, a reflection process, a practice-based community process, and an embodied co-emergent process. The Y-axis shows how strongly the survey participants agreed with each perspective on learning in relation to blogging.

These results revealed that the majority of participants believe that blogging is most valuable in acquiring specific knowledge, expressing thoughts and opinions, and maintaining their interests. However, the analysis reveals, at the same time, that the participants were not sure of the value of blogs on other perspectives such as community-based learning and co-emergent learning processes. It implies that the blog is considered more as a personal online space in which individuals' learning can occur as distinct from a group-based learning space, such as an online community or online discussion forum which can be created in the blogosphere, the community of blogs.

More specifically, Table 5 presents the degree of agreement on each item across the learning perspectives.

Table 5. Bloggers' Perception on the Usefulness of Blogging for Learning

Items	Scores	Averages
1. Blogging can be useful in acquiring various kinds of knowledge and information.	4.15	3.97
2. Blogging can help me develop my own expertise in some areas.	3.76	
3. Blogging can help me engage more actively in my fields of interests.	4.00	
4. Blogging can help me experience the 'a-ha' moment that transforms my old views to a new one.	3.79	3.75
5. Blogging can provide me opportunities to grow by looking back on my own thoughts, views and experiences.	3.82	
6. Blogging can be useful to describe and/or express my thoughts and views.	4.13	
7. Blogging can help me gain new awareness and set up plans on the basis of it.	3.25	3.51
8. Blogging can be useful to build up some social networks around me.	3.65	
9. Blogging can help me realize the influence of other bloggers on me.	3.49	
10. Blogging can help me realize the importance of it as a collective activity in a community.	3.40	3.61
11. Blogging can make me communicate with the world and can influence every area of my life.	3.68	
12. Blogging can help me create new knowledge and I can share this with others as an expert.	3.54	

Overall, the three aspects of blogging for learning that participants most strongly agree with are as follows:

- (1) Blogging can be useful in acquiring various kinds of knowledge and information. (4.15)
- (6) Blogging can be useful to describe and/or express my thoughts and views. (4.13)
- (3) Blogging can help me engage more actively in my fields of interests. (4.00)

Most participants agreed strongly that blogging would be the most useful in knowledge-acquisition but that it would be in pursuit of general information rather than seeking expertise-focused knowledge. Participants also agreed that blogging would be very useful in reflective learning that leads to transforming old perspectives or even generate new ones, but that building specific action plans for these tasks is less related to blogging. Next, the participants remained neutral or slightly tended to agree that blogging would head learning as a practice-based community process. The results indicate that individual bloggers hardly consider the sense of belonging to a community since they do not intend to participate in collective activities and to build collective knowledge but rather they are interested in fulfilling their own intellectual desires and needs. Bloggers seem to identify blogging mainly as acquisition and/or reflection-oriented learning processes based on a self-centered rather than a community-centered perspective. Further insights on this are mentioned in the discussion section.

Links between Adult Informal Learning and Blogging

To clarify some characteristics of blogging as informal learning, the survey participants were asked to describe and compare it with learning in school, that is formal education. Their responses to each type of learning are presented visually by using a “word clouds” application (<http://www.wordle.net>), which enables the frequency of used words visualized. As seen in Figure 2 and 3, the words (characteristics) indicated more frequently are shown with larger font size and darker color.

These characteristics were categorized generally into three themes: (a) learners’ role, (b) contents of learning, and (c) learning process. The large amount of descriptions emphasized what roles learners would take when they were engaged in blogging, what types of contents/information they were dealing with, and how their experiences encountering contents/information (learning) was processed.

Speaking of learners’ role in blogging, ‘*self-directed*’ was most highlighted. Bloggers believed that blogging helps users active and self-regulated. The contents of learning, including more practical information, are seen as being generated from individuals’ own experiences, thoughts, or views, even information not yet authorized as approved facts or knowledge.



Figure 2. Descriptions of the characteristics of informal learning through blogging

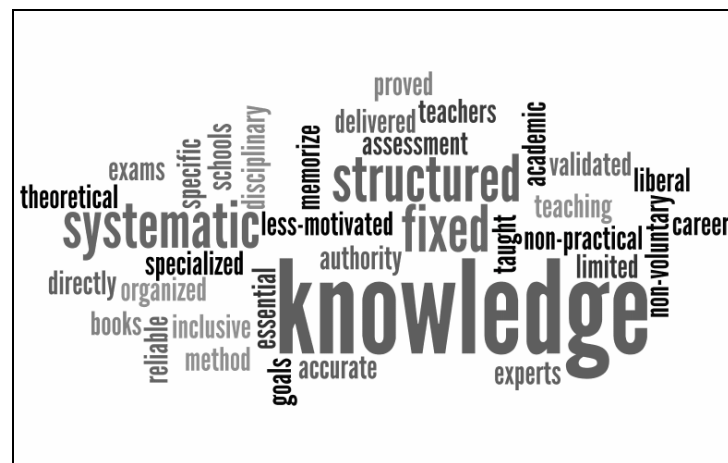


Figure 3. Descriptions of the characteristics of formal learning in school

Figure 3 demonstrates the characteristics of learning in school. Learners in formal education settings are seen as passive and less motivated since they are mainly led by authorities such as school systems or teachers. The characteristics of contents from school are also considered as very specific, systematic, and structured, which may contain both positive and negative perspectives. The learning process is also viewed as delivered by authority

(teachers or schools) and fixed. In sum, their various descriptions of learning through blogging in comparison with formal education were summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Difference of characteristics between informal learning through blogging and formal education at schools

Themes	Learning through blogging	Learning in school
Learner's role	Self-directed Self-meaning making Self-motivated Active Voluntary	Passive Non voluntary
Characteristics of learning contents	Practical and tacit knowledge Social and everyday life Situating Subjective Unlimited Multiple directions	Theoretical knowledge Structured and organized Curriculum-based Disciplinary Non-practical Fixed
Learning process	Self-regulated Open Flexible Process-oriented	Guided Structured and organized Fixed Outcome-oriented

The below quotations highlight the distinctiveness of learning through blogging as informal learning process:

“Until now, our learning at school forces us to be passive and teachers-led, but once you are involved at blogging, you can follow your curiosity on your own, re-construct the knowledge you searched and upload them on your space. In this perspective, learning through blogging seems to be more active and voluntary.” (participant 16)

“You can learn something as much as you want by picking up a route you like. But at school, the subjects are chosen by the school curriculum and you have to prove what you have learned even if you do not want to. There is a big difference between school and blogging. It is like enforcement and autonomy.” (participant 49)

“Blogging is like swimming in sea widely open to any direction while schooling is like a ship having a single specific direction.” (participant 55)

Overall, the findings show that the characteristics of blogging match well with those of adult informal learning, such as self-directed, self-regulated, and learner-centered learning. The adult bloggers seem to understand the notions of informal learning and to gain the benefits through blogging.

Discussion and Conclusions

The study illustrates certain ways in which a blog is a contemporary web-based environment that can make a difference in adult informal learning practice, as perceived by a sample of adult bloggers. In this study, the majority of participants became aware of positive changes, including learning experiences, in everyday life after blogging. The changes were not physical but intangible such as ways to deal with information and knowledge, personal ways of thinking, self-development, and social relationships. In examining the usefulness of blogging in the learning process, the majority of participants believed that blogging is valuable in acquiring specific knowledge, expressing thoughts and opinions, and expanding one's interests. Yet the blogging was not perceived as an activity that can play an important role in creating membership in communities or building new fields of knowledge/expertise. Third, adult bloggers identified the learning through blogging largely as ‘self-directed,’ ‘practical,’ ‘situated,’ ‘unlimited and accessible,’ and ‘self-regulated.’ The participants seemed to agree that blogging would generate ideal learning environments, particularly for adult learners who want to learn informally.

These findings provide us several important insights. First, blogging may be useful helping learners' knowledge acquisition and reflection processes. It is not a surprise since bloggers can easily access unlimited resources through the Internet to discover whatever they need and express their views and thoughts through reflective writing on blogs.

However, the bloggers, particularly the participants in this study, hardly consider their blogging activities as a community-oriented learning practice. This finding need to be interpreted with caution, as much of it depends on the strategy used in recruiting the participants, as individual bloggers and not as members of certain communities. It is possible that different findings would obtain if the participants were recruited within a community of bloggers, such as a classroom-based community or a collaborative learning community, in which blogging either is the main activity or plays a complementary role.

Second, the findings of this study indicate that blogging is a significant factor in making informal learning more enriching and fulfilling for adults. Adults learn more efficiently if learning can be self-directed, practical, and reflection-oriented and blogging helps adults to have that kind of learning materialized more easily in their lives.

Moreover, with the current emphasis on multi-skilling and continuous professional development, the meaning of adult learning becomes more important. Blogging is used to share specific knowledge and help promote learning.

So far, the nature of learning through blogging has been investigated mostly in formal education settings. In order to maximize its potentials, however, as insights emerge from this investigation, it can be expanded through adults informal learning. Many aspects of blogging can strengthen adult informal learning and blogging can be seamlessly embedded to adult informal learning environments.

Since the target participants of this study were Korean using a Korean blogging site, it would be noteworthy to apply the study to different cultural groups of participants and blogging sites, which may expand the findings of this study.

Furthermore, innovative social networking, such as Web 2.0 and mobile systems, can influence effective adult informal learning. Using advanced mobile technology could lead to more spontaneous and frequent interactions and hence become the future type of blogging. The proliferation of social networking in society will aid this notion of blogging from merely one of alternative learning environments to one that integrates core learning across disciplines, ages, or types of learning.

Overall, the extent to which blogging is utilized for adult informal learning will depend mainly on the further guidelines and studies on the broader context of learning and social networking technology.

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