

Virtual Schools and Cyberpedagogy: the Hybrilog as a Bloniversity

Pedro Andrade

FBAUL, Largo da Academia Nacional de Belas-Artes

1249-058 Lisboa PORTUGAL

Email: pandrade@netcabo.pt

Resumo

This paper is structured as follows: 1. A brief conceptualization about virtual schools and digital learning, that aims to contribute to the emergence of a knowledge that speaks about schooling in a different way than traditional education theory does. This knowledge, regarding essentially digital schools, is cyberpedagogy. 2. We will present here a new type of blog, the hybrilog (Fig.1 and <http://web.mac.com/pedro.andrade>). An hybrilog is a blog consisting of several types of blogs, each one based on a different media (e.g. a text vlog, a video blog, etc.). The social sphere where blogs operate has been referred as blogosphere. Similarly, the social scape where hybrilogs circulate can be denominated hybridosphere. 3. A discussion concerning inedited kinds of learning spaces, namely the bloschool or bloniversity, which are, respectively, a digital school or a digital university that has the form and features of a blog. For instance, the hybrilog may act as a bloniversity, as we will see.

1. The virtual school and digital learning.

In our information society, educational processes have been transformed irremediably after the arrival of Internet. In fact, digital schools constitute one of the social places where hypertext and its reticular contents are configuring the very nature of many types of learning practices for several years. In late modernity or post-modern world, digital walls must be broken down as well inside learning activities (Burniske, 2001). Digital divide can be surmounted by implementing open content inside virtual learning systems (Breck). Digital learning, and specially distance learning, is closely related to managing knowledge, instead of just accumulating it. And connected knowledge is more useful than segmented one (Weigel, 2001). Digital literacy, or the competence to use digital devices, languages and knowledge, is fundamental to every citizen nowadays (Tyner, 1998). Illiteracy, meaning the lack or deficit in digital skills, must be surpassed (Allen, 2002). Edutainment, that is, education through entertainment, can be implemented by virtual reality, affective

interaction, mobile learning, AI, artificial life, among other educational tools (Pan, 2006). Ethics is a must in digital age, to regulate appropriate uses of computers, data privacy, author property and particularly, the validity of student work (Johnson, 2003). Science and research also are being modified by the internet (Cordi, 2004). Virtual Science Centers are some of the most interesting places where digital science education is being applied (Tan, 2005). David Rose (2002) suggests an Universal Design for Learning (UDL), in another words a research-based framework taking in account learning differences through flexible curricula.

Schooling contexts are multiple. Online communities contribute to changing cognitive skills in individuals, and to their mode of participation in societies (Renninger, 2002). One of the most compelling learning communities are virtual universities, where innovation and challenges must occur (Dutton, 2002). For this purpose, digital courses and educational metadata are diffused through synchronous or asynchronous collaboration (Hazemi, 2001). Online learning (Maeroff, 2003) is shaping diverse implementations of the Virtual Campus and e-learning business, in aspects like electronic delivery, the quality of information and the new interaction modes between teachers and pupils.

Furthermore, the digital classroom requires an active learning (Heide, 2001). Virtual Corporate universities in business schools (Baets, 2003) constitute other contexts where organizational and individual training contribute for improving human capital. The use of computers must not be an excuse for teachers to demission from teaching. On the contrary, digital instruments and methods must be integrated with other pedagogical and personal necessities (Kravitz, 2004). For instance, instead of giving old practices in hightech packaging, it is crucial to transform instruction itself, by connecting the school with home and student parents, improving multiple

literacies, and learning with different devices like laptops, PDA's and wireless ways of communicating between computers (Gordon, 2003). Besides that, the library is a complementary pedagogical context, complementary for the design of electronic courses and for promoting information literacy (Johnson, 2005).

On the side of learning practices, multimedia systems and devices are being utilized to promote student engagement and skills. Nevertheless, some questions must be posed and principles must be implemented: for example, the adequacy of content/area to the mode of information presentation; the assessment of multimedia student projects; the financing of equipment and logistic tasks in multimedia school programs (ASCD, 2002). Multimedia can transform learning into a fun experience transmitted for instance through stories, like science-fiction, social commentaries, etc. (Ohler, 2004). Moreover, discussion is central to collaborative learning (Bender, 2003). On the leisure side, one of the most popular instructional methods is teaching through games (Iverson, 2004; Gee, 2004). Likewise, simulations are specially effective in many learning situations, because pupils are able to react against 'linear learning' associated with classical 'linear educational system'. Last generation is habituated to work with complex digital skills even before going to school. In this context, schools need immersive learning environments to teach those new kind of students (Aldrich, 2003). E-learning simulation games provide the best of digital teaching methods: they are goal-oriented, contextual, interesting, challenging and interactive (Pfeiffer, 2005). Finally, evaluation practices are central, specially regarding to new technologies, like e-learning (Horton).

The roles of instructional agents is also transformed by digital learning, at the same time they change learning through technology (Gooden, 1996). Particularly, lifelong learning is one of the more

central challenges of present times (van Weert, 2004). In our learning society, adult learning may empower more citizens, and not only those who can frequent official education institutions. Instruction takes place as well at home, at work and inside wider communities (Selwyn, 2005). In information society, pupils are 'cyber-savvy students', according to Anne Hird (2000). This means that their perception of the world is strongly shaped by the internet. Teachers often don't have this kind of cognitive experience. If they don't adapt to the pupil expectations about classroom learning, instructors may lose authority regarding teacher-student relationship. In an educational environment where most universities use digital systems (Moonen, 2001), flexible learning may be one of the answers to new virtual agendas.

2. The Sociology of Hybridosphere.

In this contradictory era, when mass media convergence co-inhabits with publics' divergence, 'pure' blogs just can't exist. Nowadays, the blog phenomenon is grounded mainly on text diaries, which are published, first of all, through textcasting, that is, periodical text diffusion by the internet. Meanwhile, blogs had engendered a multitude of descendents, for instance the vlogs (Fig.2) and the plogs. Indeed, video-diaries or vlogs are transmitting messages principally through video clips instead of written words, that is, through videocasting. Furthermore, the term 'plog' sometimes means a 'personal blog', as it happens in one of Amazon's services. Nevertheless, this is a pleonasm, because blogs, essentially, are personal diaries diffused in the Internet. Other times, the word 'plog' is used in the sense of a 'project blog'. A project blog is a blog made by a collective author. But isn't this connotation as well a pleonasm, at least partly? P.L.O.G. is even the name of a rock group. In my

perspective, plog means 'poetry blog', that is to say, a virtual poetic diary diffused world wide by poetrycasting.

Let's try to clarify this matter more deeply. What has been happening in the last two centuries is this: the personal diary written by hand in the XIX century was one of the ancestors of the contemporary blog. They have similarities, but also differences. The manual personal diary has a private nature, at least until it is published, say, in a book. The majority of blogs are private when they are produced, although some of them are already written in a collective style. Nevertheless, at the very moment they enter in cyberspace, all blogs become public, except those who are, in some manner, coded into a private language. After all, blogs are diaries only apparently private, because usually they are written on the same media vehicle that diffuses them to a wide audience, that is, the computer connected with the internet.



Fig. 1 Hybrilog Welcome

Page Fig. 2 Vlog post page

Habermas circumscribed the constitution of the public sphere since the late XVIII century / beginning of XIX century. The modern public opinion emerged at that time, originated from a former popular opinion. This modern public opinion co-exists with a private sphere (and the corresponding private opinion) and with a semi-private sphere/semi-private opinion. The semi-private opinion is deployed typically by collective subjects, like institutions, organizations and associations. Nowadays, blogs are inhabiting a special kind of public sphere, the cyberspace, where they engender a cyber-opinion. Cyber-opinion is a global opinion, distinct from the former main types of public opinion, which are the national public opinion and the local public opinion.

Moreover, Mikhail Bakhtine forged the concept 'hybridization'. Applying this notion to cyberspace, what we find in the internet, as the most genuine entities, are hybrid things. These mixed media things can be better thought through mediating concepts, like 'vlog' or 'plog' and not only 'weblog' (or blog), which in itself is already an hybrid idea. Mediating concepts and hybrid concepts construct new and hybrid meanings, distinct from 'pure' meanings that populated the modernity arena.

So, what can we deduce from these perspectives, at least in my point of view? For instance, consider the poetic-video-diary I constructed as one of the blogs of my hybrilog. Being a diary diffused in the internet, it is a blog. As I use digital video, this diary becomes equally a vlog. And when I communicate poetry through it, I transform it in a plog. Synthetically, this poetic-video-diary results from a mixed media combination of the previous diaries. And it derives from a multicultural dialog, as it uses English and Portuguese, two of the more worldwide spoken languages. Thus, its more genuine name should be ' poetry-video-blog ' or, briefly, pvilog, and its mode of delivering posts should be called videopoetry casting.

Furthermore, an artblog (Fig. 3) is a digital diary containing art works, and delivered in a current sequence across the net. Such a strategy of planetary dissemination of art works is named artcasting. In the same perspective, a hyplog (fig. 4) can be considered a diary that posts hypermedia regularly inside the web, circumscribing hypercasting. Finally, a gamelog signifies a type of blog that diffuses games, in a immediate or at least durable rhythm. This ubiquitous style of global game spread is denominated gamecasting.



Fig. 3 Art blog index page

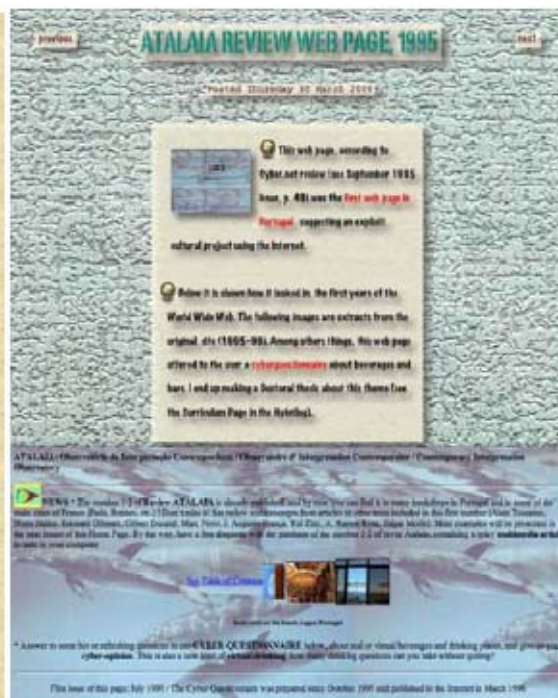


Fig. 4 Hyplog post page

As a central consequence of what has been said above, we have to stop thinking in the blogosphere separated from the multiple real and virtual worlds we live in. Definitively, we must begin constructing hybrid public spheres, or hybridospheres inside the Internet, using hybridlogs. Producing an hybridlog allows an author to construct a blended or webbed digital style of writing, using the virtualities of different and complementary media. Conversely, a reader may experiment, in the same hybridlog, diverse kinds of media reading.

The result of the multiple methods of casting we mentioned before is named hybridocasting. Therefore, the blogosphere is no longer based in an unique method of blogging, and presently is being transformed deeply by the emergence of these plural modes of casting in the Internet. A major effect of this process is the birth of an inedited hybrid cyberopinion developed daily by infonauts. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hybrilog>).

3. The hybrilog as a bloniversity.

To conclude, let me articulate the two precedent sections. We may say that the hybrilog constitute one of the possible examples of a credible digital school or university that takes the form of the blog (bloschoool or bloniversity). As a matter of fact, the blog is the new muse not only of our cyberspace, but also of our cybertime. The bloschool is one of the natural 'sons', successors and inheritors of the physical school. And an hybrilog can easily send posts on a dialy basis, using different media more efficiently than a normal blog does, as well inside an instruction process.

This gradual hybridization, parallel to the 'pedagogyzation' of blogs, is testified in other types of blogs, like the 'klogs', or knowledge blogs. About this issue, Christine Boese (2003), applying Paulo Freire's theory on dialogic pedagogy, states that " ...klog interface features allow political openings to change corporate cultures in ways most groupware never intended, with a goal of a dialogical, critical pedagogy through workers helping and teaching other workers outside the realm of 'official policy'. Personal blog sites of journalists in the employ of large, knowledge-commodity organizations such as Time Warner release this same tension into public spaces and reveal the very real disruption on a large scale that klogs can create on a small scale." Nevertheless, klogs, like other

kinds of blogs, may also work "... as a tool of company surveillance" . Likewise, hybrilogs may use dialogical pedagogy, helping different professionals in diverse activities to instruct one another about several skills. Indeed, hybrilogs are constructed applying multiple skills, each set of skills corresponding to each type of blog they lodge. Let's hope that no one will use a hybrilog to spy others.

Concerning content and language issues, according to Rebecca Blood (2002), blogs can be used at least in 3 different ways: (a) short-form journals, where the writer's subject is his daily life; (b) notebooks, that contain personal or public matters using longer content pieces than in journals; and (c) filters, which organize personal information around search links. Kevin Brooks applies this typology to teaching activities, noting that: (a) journal blogs are the most popular among his students. A consequence of this is the relegation of the instructional potential of the other two kinds of blog. (b) Notebooks work mainly as a collaborative writing instrument among pupils, similarly to discussion boards. (c) Filter weblogs are more demanding to students, but they are poorly presented. In general, Brooks (2003) states: " weblogging seems like such a potentially rich set of online activities because it is relatively low-tech compared to producing hypertext or websites, and it incorporates familiar writing skills like summary, paraphrases, and the development of voice." Teachers can use this hybrid nature of the blog writing to better motivate their students.

In this classroom arena, other blog styles of writing are the following: "reading responses", that is, pieces of information that answer to questions posed by students; a set of "articles and items of interest that [pupils] find on the web related to class"; "research responses" ; "personal explorations on [diverse] diverse topics' (Lowe, 2003).

Thus, in cyberspace, bloggers, and specially educative bloggers, are developing a peculiar style of writing that we could call blowritting or blog writing. In this perspective, an hybrilog can combine this hybrid nature of the instructional blog writing with its own hybrid nature, which means the fact that the hybrilog is a mixture of several types of blog. In another words, the hybrilog permits the access to each specialized media (and respective metadata) inside each kind of blog, and unifies these media through its own embracing nature.

In a certain sense, in education or in other areas, these plural applications of blog virtualities show that we don't cope anymore just with hypermedia, but as well with hybrimedia. In fact, the hybrilog uses a sort of hybrimedia disposif in its form and is a meta-blog device relatively to its content.

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