

WRITING IN A COMMUNITY: TEACHERS' AND PUPILS' COMMENTS ON AN INTERSCHOOL WEBLOG

Luís Filipe Barbeiro

School of Education and Social Sciences – Polytechnic Institute of Leiria (PORTUGAL)
barbeiro@eseecs.ipleiria.pt

Abstract

Commenting on a weblog is one of the most striking features of the interactivity dimension made possible by Web 2.0. In addition to the dissemination of pupils' texts, this dimension of interaction justifies the introduction of weblogs in educational settings. The pedagogical potential of weblogs raises some questions about comments, specifically concerning the functions they fulfil within a community and their characteristics as a text (sub)genre. In order to answer these questions, we performed an analysis of the comments on a weblog that was created in association with projects promoting the use of the Internet. This blog, *Interescolas (Interschools)*, addresses a community of primary schools and mobilises a diversity of participants, namely pupils, teachers, and project coordinators. In this study we looked for differences between the comments by pupils and teachers in order to grasp the dimensions that are present in the comments of both groups, and in order to deduce from the teachers' comments guidelines that may be adopted in order to enhance the pedagogical role of comments. The results showed significant contrasts with regard to the extensiveness of the comments of these two groups and identified some areas for developing the potential of commenting activities that are within the range of pupils' capabilities. The possibilities include mobilising pupils' personal experiences and reflections, specifying and justifying the superficial evaluative statements that pupils make in their comments, and promoting an attitude of rewriting towards texts, in accordance with the interaction dimension that Web 2.0 has made possible.

Keywords: teaching/learning strategies; elementary education; learning communities; cooperative/collaborative learning; pedagogical issues.

1 INTRODUCTION

In contrast with previous Internet environments, the characteristics associated with Web 2.0 emphasize the dimensions of participation, interaction and distribution [1]. Rather than finished products or artefacts, Internet companies are selling services with which the users can create their own products.

Weblogs are privileged tools in this new environment. They permit the creation and dissemination of products, which are generally written texts, and encourage participation and interaction through comments. In addition, a weblog can be a conjoint project promoting collaboration in the administration of the blog and in the writing of text. Weblog interaction is at the service of knowledge dissemination within a community. Membership of this community can involve several degrees of involvement, ranging from regular authorship to occasional visits.

The most visible expression of interaction promoted by blogs consists of comments [2, 3, 4]. The potential of weblog comments is related to the bifacial nature of reading and writing: readers are invited to participate by giving their own views and opinions in response to posts, while the author has access to feedback from a wide audience in cyberspace [5]. This kind of interaction is not limited to the expression of initial reactions; bloggers can continue, deepening discussions and the exchange of opinions [2]. In this way, readers can raise their level of competence in critical reading and authors can benefit from new perspectives that they can incorporate into their own creative processes.

Weblogs have proved useful in schools, as part of the process of learning to write. This use of weblogs has brought two dimensions into focus: publishing and interaction. As for publication, weblogs are an easy way to publish pupils' texts, offering them an opportunity to get feedback from readers through comments. Weblog publishing makes it possible to activate communicative purposes and to find other readers for pupils' texts than just the teacher and classmates. The prospect that their texts will be published has a positive impact on pupils' commitment, enthusiasm and attention during the

process. Their aim is now to construct a text that deserves to be published, one that will take account of readers' knowledge, points of view and likes or dislikes. As Godwin-Jones says, "students... may be more thoughtful (in content and structure) if they know they are writing for a real audience." [6, p. 13]. Reports on projects implemented in schools have demonstrated the benefits that the aim of disseminating a text to an audience brings to the revision component of the writing process [7, 8]. Boling et al. in [7, p. 506] point out that "[w]riting for an audience of their peers motivated both classes to extensively revise and edit. In contrast to pencil-and-paper writing activities, students enthusiastically reworked their ideas to help their virtual partners grasp the ideas they wanted to communicate." Handsfield et al. in [8, p. 45] also highlight this dimension: "In the blog, (...), they asked and responded to one another's questions, and because they were writing for a larger audience (their whole class, instead of just their teacher), they became more careful writers. Students who previously did not proofread their writing soon began adding conventional punctuation."

Moreover, the nature of a blog, which is associated with the events of everyday life, opens up the possibility of finding relevance in quotidian experiences, taking these as a source of writing, which encourages expressive writing [3, 9, 10, 11]. In our daily lives, all of us regularly engage in conversations. Blogs also provide a resource for informal interaction. Interaction is the second aspect of the educational potential of blogs [3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15]. Interaction can initially take the form of a reaction and then develop through new answers or comments as further reactions bring readers into a "conversation", either about the text itself or triggered by the text. Besides getting their work published, bloggers expect to receive comments from others [4, 13]. One of the most frequent activities of bloggers is checking whether their posts have been commented on [16].

As a discursive genre, weblog comments are clearly distinguished from the text (the 'post') that motivates them. This contrast is often extended to their linguistic features: the care (as to both form and content) that the aim of publishing brought to the text usually does not apply to comments. Instead we find here the relaxed style of informal face-to-face conversations, as is revealed by the use of abbreviations and graphic symbols and by the immediacy of emotional responses.

One question arises: are comments a mere sub-product of the use of weblogs or, alternatively, can the dimensions of interaction and participation associated with them play a role in active learning? Because comments confirm for pupils the dimension of social participation and the existence of an audience for their texts, we can immediately answer that question in the affirmative. If we take the issue further, we must ask what their specific contribution to learning is, in addition to the confirmation of the presence of an audience. For this, we may ask which characteristics apply to blogs as a genre when they are associated with learning environments. The findings can be used to develop new learning opportunities and to redesign activities towards enhancing the role of weblog comments in learning.

In a previous study [17], the analysis of the articles (posts) and comments in a blog from primary schools showed that the comments, and not only the articles, can play a role in the process of knowledge construction. This happens in several ways: by expanding the text topic through individual reflection, by presenting personal experiences associated with the topic, by appreciating the knowledge that the pupils have revealed in their texts, by asking the authors questions about the topic or event in order to get supplementary information, by answering those questions, or by suggesting corrections or updating the content of posts. Alongside this process of knowledge construction there is a salient interpersonal dimension. In fact, the component of knowledge construction is activated in a more general setting, that of the interpersonal dimension. The results of this study point to some strategies that may be adopted in order to enhance the role of the activity of commenting on knowledge construction: by asking questions of the authors, expressing personal opinions and experiences related to the topics, etc.

In educational settings, the making of comments on weblog posts can be done in a systematic way, in accordance with specific formats or guidelines, rather than being merely the result of spontaneous reactions. There are some projects that take this approach. For example, Yang in [5] presents a project involving future teachers, in which the participants were called upon to publish their reflections about the subject they were studying (theories of teaching) and to comment on other students' reflections. The results confirm that blogs constitute a good way to promote learning through critical reflection, and that the commenting activity can play a relevant role in this process.

In turn, Xie, Ke & Sharma in [18] find a significant increase in the level of reflective thinking in college students as a result of keeping a blog throughout a semester ("The findings of the study confirmed that if students are constantly engaged in journaling/blogging activities, their reflective thinking level

demonstrated by their journal entries would increase over time”, p. 23). Nevertheless, they did not find significant differences between the experiment group, for whom blog maintenance was accompanied by interaction and peer feedback through comments, and the control group, for whom this interaction did not exist. The authors attribute the growth of reflective thinking to writing (“When students are writing, in order to produce an articulate statement they need to first construct ideas in their mind”, p. 22), in accordance to the positions of Britton in [19]. As for the absence of a significant contrast between the groups with and without feedback, the authors seek an explanation in the low level of reflective thinking found in many of the comments studied (“A closer look at the peer feedback in the study revealed that students did not engage in meaningful or constructive feedback activity. Their comments were more social (such as “good job”, “I agree”) rather than providing informative or constructive prompting.”, p. 23). Miura & Yamashita in [3] also point to the relevance of social factors. Their results suggest “that communication with readers who gave positive feedback strongly encouraged blog authors to continue writing” (p. 1452). The results of Xie et al. in [18] and Miura & Yamashita in [3] confirm the salience of the interpersonal or social dimension and launch the challenge of finding strategies through which to increase the contribution of blog comments to learning.

It is by discovering the characteristics of pupils’ comments that we will be able to generating strategies for enhancing their role in learning. This knowledge will cover aspects and dimensions that are activated spontaneously but also those that are within pupils’ abilities and can be promoted intentionally, on basis of explicit guidelines for tasks or specific activity formats.

In another study [20], we analysed the comments that were published on the weblog *Interescolas*, focusing on the three dimensions corresponding to three P’s associated with writing (Participation, Product and Process) and on the dimension of appraisal that the comments activate. The results revealed a large presence of the Participation dimension, i.e. of interpersonal and social aspects. The dimension associated with the Product, which consists mainly of text appraisal, is also central. On the other hand, the dimension related to Process, i.e. to the narrative of process or to proposals for rewriting, is tiny. The appraisal dimension intersects with all these aspects and emerges as a major feature of comments on weblogs. The comments are nearly always positive. However, as Xie et al. also find [18], in most cases the appraisal discourse that is present in comments remains superficial, expressing either affect (such as “gostei” [*I liked*]) or appreciation (attributing qualities such as “bom” [*good*], “fixe” [*cool*], etc.), given for social or interpersonal reasons. In fact, the cases where these qualities are justified or specified are very few [20]. The implications are that certain strategies must be adopted to support this comment activity and induce pupils to consider specific dimensions of writing and texts, deepening the degree of explicitness and appraisal explanation that usually characterises their comments on blog texts.

In this article, we intend to continue our analysis of the blog *Interescolas*, as a basis on which to develop proposals for the use of weblogs and comments at the service of writing development. Our present analysis will focus on the structural characteristics of comments and, because *Interescolas* has a diversity of participants, we will look for differences between two groups of commentators, namely, teachers and pupils. The contrasts between the comments of the different groups of participants can provide guidelines for the implementation of commenting activity in educational settings. Besides being active participants on the weblog *Interescolas*, pupils and teachers have different roles with regard to knowledge and the teaching and learning of writing. We may observe whether some of the features of the teachers’ comments are also present in the pupils’ and whether they can enlarge the horizons for the pupils’ commenting activities.

2 SECTION

2.1 *Setting: the blog Interescolas*

The weblog *Interescolas* (www.interescolas.esecs.ipleiria.pt) constitutes an initiative promoted in association with two programmes: the CBTIC@EB1 and PNEP projects. The CBTIC@EB1 project (Basic ICT Skills in Primary Schools) was developed in 2006. The aim of the Project was to promote the use of ICT in primary schools. The PNEP programme (Programa Nacional de Ensino do Português / Portuguese National Programme for Language Learning) is a programme of continuous training of primary teachers in the discipline Portuguese language. It includes as one of its goals the increased use of ICT in association with language learning. It has been being developed since 2007/08.

The creation of the *Interescolas* weblog took place in January 2006 in the context of the CBTIC@EB1 project at the School of Education in Leiria. It was intended to provide space for participation, diffusion and interaction, taking advantage of the potential of ICT. From the beginning the promoters of the blog invited the various participants in the project to take part: the members of the coordinating team, the monitors who were responsible for the training in the primary schools, the teachers and the pupils. The *Interescolas* blog became the main webpage of the project and the place where pupils could see their works published. As a shared project, the blog gave the pupils from the primary schools involved the guarantee that they would be read by their peers at other schools. Besides, it developed into an open space for reflection and interaction among participants, mobilising them to regularly update the contents of the blog.

When the project ended, the blog went through a period of reduced activity. It was reanimated in October 2007, with the launch of PNEP. Having been incorporated into this programme, it remained active through the school years 2007/08 and 2008/09. The blog team included the coordinators of the programme, the teacher trainers who conducted the training sessions at schools and the school teachers who were the trainees. That is, the entitlement to author blog entries was assigned to these individuals. This entitlement allowed all of them to publish and edit their own articles, in addition to the activity of commenting, which was accessible to all visitors/readers. The comments were made visible only after approval by the coordinating team of the blog and the programme.

The *Interescolas* blog and its association with the two programmes have supported the emergence of an interschool community. The blog has promoted interaction between pupils and teachers from the primary schools involved in the programmes, and these programmes have created a common interest and common activities among the participant teachers and schools, including the pupils.

This study focuses on the differences between the comments from different groups of commentators, namely teachers and pupils. In addition, it addresses the characteristics of the textual genre "comment", as it was activated in the context of the *Interescolas* blog. Accordingly, the research question that guided the study is:

What are the differences between the comments from the different groups of commentators, namely teachers and pupils, on the *Interescolas* blog?

The differences covered by this question may refer to structural features, but also to indicators relating to comment length or to the dimensions mentioned above (participation, product, process and appraisal).

2.2 Corpus

The corpus under analysis consists of 676 comments on pupils' texts that were published on the *Interescolas* blog. These comments are linked to 250 texts, from a total of 556 pupil-authored texts published on the blog during the periods under consideration. Consequently, there is a set of 306 pupil-authored texts that did not receive any comment.

These comments comprise all the comments that were received and validated concerning the texts in question. As was said above, the team in charge of the blog adopted the policy of filtering the comments that were offensive or obscene or consisted of advertising. The comments under analysis and the respective texts were published from the beginning until the end of July 2009.

The corpus maintains the diversity of the authors of the comments. It includes comments made by pupils at primary school, but also at other school levels, by teachers, including the teachers from the coordinating teams, the teacher-trainers and the trainees, and by other people who had access to the blog, specifically the pupils' relatives, as well as people living in the villages described in the texts, and all the other visitors, who are not always identifiable. The distribution of the comments among these groups reveals that the comments from the primary-school pupils predominate (309, corresponding to 46%). The comments from pupils at other school levels are only 9 in number (1%).

Among the teachers, we have 51 (8%) comments made by members of the coordinating teams of the CBTIC@EB1 and PNEP programmes, 103 (16%) by the teacher-trainers of these programmes, and 33 (5%) by other primary teachers. In this group we have included the comments made by the future primary teachers, i.e. the teacher trainees of the School of Education. These teacher trainees had contact with the blog through the information made available in the School of Education by the teachers coordinating the programmes and on the School webpage. The participation of these students is coherent with the goals of the programmes. It makes it possible for these students to get

into and maintain contact with the work that is being developed in the primary schools. Alongside the information about the programmes, the coordinating team from the School of Education also invited the trainee teachers to participate in the blog with posts and comments.

In addition to the participants that we have already mentioned, the corpus includes comments from the children's relatives, some of them living abroad, from the people of the villages that the pupils visited and described in their texts, etc. Finally, there is a residual group of 111 (16%) comments whose author is not identifiable.

2.3 Data analysis

The analysis of the comments included parsing, in order to find the basic units mobilised, to observe the presence of different dimensions and to compare the groups. In this analysis, we considered the following levels of linguistic units: the word and the clause as well as the text level corresponding to the whole comment.

Each of these units was categorized according to the variables under analysis, i.e. the different groups of participants and the different dimensions. We divided the commentators into three large groups of participants: i) the *pupils* (who mostly are at primary school level, as said above); ii) the *teachers* (who could have specific roles in the programmes we have mentioned); iii) and the group of *other participants* (who for the most part remain unidentified).

As for the variables, we considered: i) the length of the comment; ii) the comment's structural properties; iii) the writing dimensions of participation, product and process; and iv) the appraisal dimension. We measured length by using the number of words and clauses as measures. The comment elements that were considered resulted from an exploratory analysis of this text genre, which revealed a similarity with other genres such as the letter. We considered three main parts, each with its own elements: the opening part, the textual body, and the closure of the comment. The opening and closure components include relatively predetermined elements: initial greeting, salutation, and self-presentation. The body corresponds to the content element of the comment. The closure can include words of encouragement addressed to the reader, wishes, valediction, compliments and signatures. As for appraisal, the global results from Barbeiro in [20] showed that the appraisal values were nearly always positive. However, these values are seldom grounded in explicit explanations or specifications; rather they are expressed only superficially. With our research question in mind, we wanted to know if there is a difference between commentators, i.e. between pupils and teachers, with regard to the appraisal level. Our analysis therefore focused on the foundation of the appraisal, i.e. on the presence or absence of an explanation and justification of the attitudinal and evaluative values expressed by the commentators.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Comment length

Our starting point for the comparison between the comments of the different participant groups, namely the pupils and the teachers, will be the measure of comment length. The results of the data analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – Comment length

Groups	No. of words (mean)	No. of clauses (mean)
Pupils' comments (N=317)	22.8	4.0
Teachers' comments (N=237)	43.8	8.0
Others' comments (N=122)	28.4	4.1

As to the number of words and the number of clauses, the results show a considerably higher value for teachers' comments than for pupils' comments and also than for others. The one-way ANOVA statistical test reveals that the differences between these groups are statistically significant ($F=24.161$ $p=.000$, for number of words, and $F=63.761$ $p=.000$, for number of clauses). Multiple comparisons (Scheffé test) reveal that significant contrasts are found between the comments by teachers and the comments by the other two groups.

It may be that the presence or absence of particular structural elements in the comments contributes to the observed differences in comment length. Besides this factor, it is content that is mobilised in the comments and the amount of information inside each constitutive element that contributes to the extensiveness of the comment.

3.2 The constitutive elements of comments

In order to characterise the "comment" genre in weblogs used in an educational setting, we analysed the corpus in order to identify the elements that constitute this genre. Table 2 presents the frequencies we have found for these elements, in total, and within each group.

Table 2 – The presence of structural elements in the comments in the corpus

		Total N=676		Pupils' comments N=317		Teachers' comments N=237		Others' comments N=122	
		N.º	%	N.º	%	N.º	%	N.º	%
(Opening) 186 (28%)	Initial greeting	143	21,2	79	24.9	53	22.4	11	9.0
	Salutation	84	12,4	35	11.0	44	18.6	5	4.1
	Self-introduction	89	13,2	52	16.4	32	13.5	3	2.5
Body	... — just Body	307	45,4	160	50.5	54	22.8	70	57.4
(Closure) 333 (49%)	Incentive	111	16,4	15	4.7	80	33.8	16	13.1
	Wishes	44	6.5	13	4.1	24	10.1	7	5.7
	Farewell	36	5.3	27	8.5	8	3.4	1	0.8
	Compliment	103	15.2	37	11.7	38	16.0	26	21.3
	Signature	199	29.4	67	21.1	119	50.2	11	9.0

As for the structural elements of this text genre, we find two optional parts, the Opening and the Closure of the comment, and an obligatory part, which constitutes the Body of the comment. The elements that are present in the opening and the closing parts of the comments are similar to those of letters. In the Opening, we find the initial greeting (generally "Olá" [*Hello*]); the salutation addressed to the authors of the post, for instance, "Joana" or "alunos da escola X..." [*pupils from school X...*]), the self-introduction of the commentator ["Nós somos alunos da escola Y..." [*We are pupils from School Y...*]]. In the Closure, we can find encouragement given to the authors ("Continuem a enviar os vossos textos." [*Keep sending your texts.*]); the expression of polite wishes ("Desejamos um bom trabalho!" [*Enjoy the work*]; "Bom Carnaval!" [*Have a nice Carnival!*]); the valediction ("Adeus" [*Goodbye*]); the compliment ("Beijos", [*Love*]), and the signature, using the name or the commentator's status, specifically in the case of collective authors ("Margarida S., monitora" [*Margarida S., monitor*], "Os alunos da escola X..." [*The pupils from school X...*])). The presence of closing elements is more frequent in the comments in the corpus than the presence of opening elements: nearly half of the comments present some closing elements, while only 28% present an opening element. Many comments (45.4%) do not present either opening or closure elements.

The elements of the Body of the comment are not so structurally fixed as are the opening and closure elements. They are characterized essentially by their semantic content, which can vary a lot from post to post in the blog, and from comment to comment.

The comparison between pupils' and teachers' comments, with regard to the presence of structural elements, reveals that:

— the teachers' comments present the elements of Opening and Closure to a higher degree: the percentage of comments that only contain a Body is 50% in the case of the pupils and 23%, in the case of the teachers; this contrast derives above all from the presence of the closing elements: while the teachers have 174 comments (74%) with closure, in the pupils' comments this value is 115 (36%); as for the presence of opening elements, the proportional values of pupils and teachers are close (30% and 31%, respectively);

— the elements with higher contrasts are the presence of encouragement (5% vs. 33% respectively for pupils and teachers) and the presence of a signature (21 % vs. 50 % respectively); although it is not exclusive to teachers' comments, the presence of the encouragement element seems to be connected principally to the status of the teachers.

3.3 The dimensions of participation, product and process in the comments

The dimensions concerned with interacting, and consequently participating in a community, are evident in the opening and closing elements of comments, which are similar to those of letters. Inside the body component, which is guided by content, we find other dimensions, concerning the written product and the writing process, than that of participation. In Table 3, we may observe the frequency values for the presence/absence of these dimensions in the comments and the distribution of the clauses.

Table 3 – The dimensions of participation, product and process

	Total	Participation		Product		Process	
a. Presence in the Comments (N=676)		N.º	%	N.º	%	N.º	%
Pupils' comm.	317	273	86.1	158	49.8	16	5.0
Teachers' comm.	237	218	92.0	176	74.3	21	8.9
Others' comm.	122	105	86.1	56	45.9	6	4.9
b. Distribution of clauses (N=3672)		N.º (average)	%	N.º	%	N.º	%
Pupils	1278	920 2.9	72.0	305 1.0	23.9	53 0.2	4.1
Teachers	1897	1247 5.3	65.7	493 2.1	26.0	157 0.7	8.3
Others	497	384 3.1	77.3	96 0.8	19.3	17 0.1	3.4

The results presented in Table 3 show a large presence of the participation dimension in the comments of all the groups. The presence of the product dimension is also very high in the teachers' group (appearing in 74% of the comments) and is less in the other groups, with values lower than 50%. The dimension relating to the writing process is the least frequently found, showing much lower values (5% to 8%).

If we consider the number of clauses associated with these three dimensions, both the absolute and the proportional values keep on showing the predominance of the participation component, as compared to the product dimension and the exiguous values of the process dimension. The comparison between the groups reveals significant additional differences with regard to the global results ($F=29.411$ $p=.000$, for participation; $F=35.190$ $p=.000$, for product, and $F=4.1012$ $p=.017$, for process). The multiple comparisons show significant differences between teachers and pupils for all three dimensions.

The higher number of words and processes (clauses) presented by teachers in their comments is mirrored in the presence of certain distinctive features, namely the emergence of reflections that develop the topic of the post, the presentation of commentators' personal experiences, and the explanation of their appraisals. The occurrence of these features is largely due to the comments from teachers, as we can see in Table 4 (which presents the absolute values for each group and the proportion corresponding to the distribution across all the groups).

Table 4 – Topic reflection, personal experiences and appraisal explanation in the comments

	Topic reflection		Pers. experiences		Appraisal explanation	
	N.º	% ¹	N.º	% ¹	N.º	% ¹
Clauses (N=3672)						
Pupils	75	14	43	29	64	32
Teachers	369	70	96	64	111	56
Others	20	16	11	7	25	13

¹ Percentage values corresponding to the distribution of occurrences among groups.

Any of these parameters implies an expansion of the comment. Although the values are quite low, the fact that these features are also in the pupils' comments shows that they are capable of including them in their comments. In fact, some of the pupils already do mobilise these features in their comments. Perhaps others could do the same if these dimensions were dealt with in the classroom work devoted to visiting and commenting on blogs.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The *Interescolas* weblog is a blog maintained by different categories of participants in a community of primary schools. These participants include pupils (the majority), their teachers and the members of the teams coordinating the programmes that hosted the blog. They also include the visitors that discovered the blog on the Web and left a comment.

The analysis of the comments made by the different participants allowed us to find differences, namely between teachers and pupils, with regard to the salience of specific dimensions (the extensiveness of the comments, the writing dimensions of participation, product and process, and the appraisal dimension). From an educational perspective, these differences, and specifically some features of the teachers' comments, may function as guidelines in the development of the activity of commenting on blogs, with pedagogical purposes, regarding reading and writing skills.

A quantitative difference immediately emerges with regard to the extensiveness of the pupils' and the teachers' comments. Pupil-authored comments tend to be much shorter and their nature is preeminently interpersonal, with purposes that are closely aligned with the social dimension of politeness. The interpersonal dimension is also strongly present in the comments by the teachers. However, our analysis also reveals that teachers are at pains to make their comments contribute to learning. They expand their comments by sharing their reflections and their personal experiences in connection with the subject of the post.

An implication of our results is that the expansion of comments through this kind of device (reflection and presentation of personal experiences) is one way to develop pupils' skills. The fact that some pupils already display these features in their comments shows that it is possible to implement this kind of strategy in primary school work. Through this work, with support and guidance from teachers, it will be possible to increase the number of pupils mobilizing personal reflections and experiences in their comments. In this way, their comments will make a richer contribution to the community that shares the blog as a project and to the visitors to the blog, and to the authors of the comments themselves. In fact, the pupils can also benefit from the effort of activating and making explicit their reflections and experiences related to the topic of the post.

Something similar happens with the appraisal dimension, which is one of the most salient dimensions of comments. In most cases, appraisal is restricted to the attribution of values. Almost invariably, these values reflect a socially positive appraisal of written products and pupils' efforts. By deepening appraisal through explanation and justification of the values that are attributed to the text document or the act of participating in the blog, it will be possible to transform commenting into a learning activity.

Besides the aspects already mentioned, ICT, through Web 2.0, has also created an opportunity to develop the writing process. It goes beyond the creation of a published product by mobilizing the dimensions of participation and interaction made available by the Internet. Weblogs are a valuable way to access these creations and the attendant interaction. By means of their comments on the

weblogs, participants can appreciate the published products and can also propose alternatives and suggestions. In this way, comments can activate the dimension of reflection and rewriting.

The analysis made it possible to find the structural elements that characterize the comment as a textual genre within this educational setting. It turns out to be a rather open genre that may be close to epistolary texts, depending on the presence of certain opening and closing elements that usually also occur in letters, establishing a direct relationship between the author of the comment and the addressee (the author of the post). Being optional, these elements may be the object of a decision by the author of the comment, much as happens with content. These interpersonal elements can fulfill the function of supporting or framing the content that is activated in the body of the comment. In this way, through activation of the interpersonal dimension, blog comments as a genre become scaffolding tools with which to develop pupils' skills in activating and expressing their points of view about texts and other aspects of blogging

REFERENCES

- [1] Knobel, M. & Wilde, D. (2009) Let's Talk 2.0. *Educational Leadership*, 66 (6), 20-24.
- [2] Mishne, G. & Glance, N. (2006). Leave a reply: An analysis of weblog comments. *WWW 2006*, 22-26.
- [3] Miura, A. & Yamashita, K. (2007). Psychological and Social Influences on Blog Writing in Japan: An Online Survey of Blog Authors. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12, 1452-1471.
- [4] Kim, H. N. (2008) The Phenomenon of Blogs and Theoretical Model of Blog Use in Educational Contexts. *Computers & Education*, 51 (3), 1342-1352.
- [5] Yang, S. (2009) Using Blogs to Enhance Critical Reflection and Community of Practice. *Educational Technology & Society*, 12 (2), 11-21.
- [6] Godwin-Jones, B. (2003) Emerging technologies: Blogs and wikis: Environments for on-line collaboration. *Language Learning & Technology*, 7 (2), 12-16.
- [7] Boling, E., Castek J., Zawilinski, L., Barton, K. & Nierlich, T. (2008) Collaborative Literacy: Blogs and Internet Projects. *The Reading Teacher*, 61 (6), 504-506.
- [8] Handsfield, L., Dean, T. & Cielocha, K. (2009) Becoming Critical Consumers and Producers of Text: Teaching Literacy with Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. *The Reading Teacher*, 63 (1), 40-50.
- [9] Murray, L., & Hourigan, T. (2006) Using micropublishing to facilitate writing in the foreign language. In L. Ducate & N. Arnold (Eds.), *Calling on CALL: From theory and research to new directions in foreign language teaching*. San Marcos, TX: Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium, 149-180.
- [10] Godwin-Jones, B. (2008) Emerging technologies: Web-writing 2.0: Enabling, documenting, and assessing writing online. *Language Learning & Technology*, 12 (2), 7-13.
- [11] Chou, C., Yu, S., Chen, C., Wu, H.-C. (2009). Tool, Toy, Telephone, Territory, or Treasure of Information. *Computers & Education*, 53 (3), 308-316.
- [12] Ducate, L. & Lomicka, L. (2008) Adventures in the blogosphere: from blog readers to blog writers. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 21 (1), 9-28.
- [13] Stefanone, M. A. & Jang, C.-Y. (2008) Writing for Friends and Family: The Interpersonal Nature of Blogs. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13, 123-140
- [14] Wang, K. T., Huang, Y.-M. Huang, Jeng, Y.-L. & Wang, T.-I (2008) A blog-based dynamic learning map. *Computers & Education*, 51 (1), 262-278.

- [15] Churchill, D. (2009). Educational applications of Web 2.0: Using blogs to support teaching and learning. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 40 (1), 179-183.
- [16] Pena-Shaff, J., Altman, W., & Stephenson, H. (2005). Asynchronous online discussions as a tool for learning: Students' attitudes, expectations, and perceptions. *Journal of Interactive Learning Research*, 16, 409-430.
- [17] Barbeiro, L. (2008) Escrita, Participação e Aprendizagem: O Caso do Blogue Interescolas (Writing, participating and learning: the case of the *Interescolas* weblog). In L. Barbeiro & J. A. B. Carvalho (Coord.) *Actividades de Escrita e Aprendizagem (Writing activities and learning)*. Leiria and Braga: Escola Superior de Educação, Centro de Investigação em Educação (CIEEd)- U. Minho. CD-ROM.
- [18] Xie, Y., Ke, F. & Sharma, P. (2008) The effect of peer feedback for blogging on college students' reflective learning processes. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 11 (1), 18-25.
- [19] Britton, J. (1978) The composing processes and the functions of writing. In C. R. Cooper & L. Odell (Eds.), *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.
- [20] Barbeiro, L. (personal communication) Weblogs, writing and learning: the role of interschool communities. Paper presented at the 42nd Annual Meeting of the *Societas Linguistica Europaea*. Faculty of Letters, University of Lisbon, September 2009.