L2 BLOGGING: WHO THRIVES AND WHO DOES NOT?

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While research has reported generally enthusiastic results regarding L2 blogging, some studies have found contrasting blogging experiences among individual learners. Consequently, this study investigated the factors underlying such discrepancies by exploring 33 EFL learners' experiences of participating in a blog project at a Taiwanese university. The students wrote personal blogs and responded to each other over a ten-week period. Data was collected through a questionnaire and individual interviews with 10 of the students. Drawing on a sociological approach, specialization codes of legitimation (Maton, 2007, 2014), the study found salient differences in the students' educational beliefs and practices, which appeared to be linked to their positive or negative blogging experiences. By analyzing the relations between the pedagogical design, learners' existing educational dispositions, and their blogging experiences, the study argued that the blog project assumed learners of a certain type - those who recognized themselves as "knowers" in terms of their blog content - while disadvantaging others who did not possess this attribute. Practitioners are therefore advised to exercise caution when designing blog activities.

INTRODUCTION

Nearly two decades after their first appearance, blogs continue to be utilized in second language (L2) teaching and learning. Blogs' educational affordances, such as their capacity to expand learning beyond the classroom walls and to archive the learning process, thereby allowing reflection and metacognitive analysis, are well-documented in the literature (see Ducate & Lomicka, 2005; Godwin-Jones, 2003). Many of these educational affordances of blogs are shared by other Web 2.0 technologies. Nevertheless, a defining characteristic that sets blogs apart from the "older" asynchronous online communication technologies, such as discussion boards, is that blogs are often owned by individuals; that is, bloggers have control of their work in terms of its content and presentation. This freedom to make choices for their own blogs can lead L2 learners to develop a sense of ownership, thereby enhancing their motivation to write. In addition, unlike discussion boards, blogs are intended to be visible to audiences on the Internet, so learners are likely to be careful about their language accuracy. On the other hand, in comparison with the "newer" social networking applications, such as Facebook, whose focus is primarily on developing friendship (Merchant, 2011), blogs are commonly used as online platforms for their authors to share knowledge about a particular topic. Accordingly, blog posts are often expected to be longer and of a more intellectual nature than Facebook messages. These characteristics of blogs make them a particularly suitable pedagogical tool for L2 education.

Researchers have investigated the potential of blogs for facilitating learners' development of various skills in L2 learning contexts, which can be roughly divided into three categories. First, blogs have been used to provide language skill practice, most typically in writing (Bloch, 2007; Vurdien, 2013), and

recently also in speaking (through voice blogging) (Huang, 2015). Studies in this category have concluded that learners' writing performance improved with regard to their knowledge and use of vocabulary, grammar (Vurdien, 2013) and rhetorical strategies (Bloch, 2007), and that they considered their pronunciation, oral communication fluency, and confidence in speaking to be enhanced (Huang, 2015), although Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson and Freynik (2014) cautioned that the results of this line of research were based on non-experimental research.

In the second category, blogs were utilized to sharpen L2 learners' metacognitive skills, such as their abilities to conduct autonomous (Alm, 2009; Bhattacharya & Chauhan, 2010), reflective (Absalom & De Saint Léger, 2011; Murray & Hourigan, 2008) and collaborative learning (Mompean, 2010). Through analyzing the number and content of learners' blog contributions, and surveying their perceptions, this strand of research has reported evidence of the targeted learning behaviors. Sun (2009), for example, through observing her EFL participants' processes of making voice posts, identified their self-regulated behaviors, such as monitoring and evaluating their own learning. In another study, by having learners with better coordination or language skills help their peers write blogs in groups, Bhattacharya and Chauhan (2010) found that the initial interdependence among their participants eventually led them to develop independent decision-making skills and an ability to take independent action.

Finally, an increasingly number of studies have explored how blogs assist L2 learners in developing intercultural competence. Participants in these studies blogged with native speakers of the target language (García-Sánchez & Rojas-Lizana, 2012; Yang, 2011) or fellow learners of a different linguistic and cultural background (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015). Blogs have also been used for L2 learners to reflect on and share their cultural experience on their study abroad sojourn (Comas-Quinn, Mardomingo, & Valentine, 2009; Ducate & Lomicka, 2005; Elola & Oskoz, 2008). As these projects tend to involve learners communicating with people outside the immediate educational contexts or entail learners physically departing from classroom settings to obtain cultural knowledge *in situ*, the authenticity of learning is augmented. This form of learning, Melo-Pfeifer (2015) argued, engages learners in "significant social writing activities which gain visibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the 'other'" (p.16). Researchers have reported learners' more sophisticated understanding of the target culture (Elola & Oskoz, 2008) and development of their linguistic repertoire (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015). It has also been noted that L2 learners' travel blogs can be of interest to future students of a similar L2 program, other students of the target language, and even family and friends (Ducate & Lomicka, 2005). Arguably, this type of blogs has greater potential than the other two types to attract audiences on the Internet than the others.

While most L2 blog studies have reported attaining their pedagogical goals, a small number of investigations have identified unfavorable learner experiences and perceptions. For example, some learners were found to be reluctant to publicize their work online for fear of criticism (Alm, 2009); others lacked motivation to participate in blog activities because they were not interested in the topics and viewed the tasks as extra homework (Vurdien, 2013), while still others felt their peers' comments on their blogs lacked variety and depth, hence disengaging them from the activity (Lee, 2010). Although these experiences were not shared by the majority of the learners in the studies, they indicate that the frequently claimed educational benefit of blogs in motivating and empowering learners through personalizing learning did not materialize for all learners. Indisputably, no learning tool or environment is amenable to every learner; however, considering that previous research on L2 blogging has paid little attention to discrepancies between learners' experiences, the study reported in the rest of this paper aimed to address this gap in the literature by exploring how the same blogging environment may empower some learners while disengaging others. Specifically, the study investigated EFL learners' blogging experiences at a university in Taiwan, with a view to understanding the differences in learner experiences, and the factors underlying them. It examined the teaching design and learner experiences through a sociological approach - specialization codes of legitimation (Maton, 2007, 2014). By doing so, the study also sought to introduce an alternative theoretical perspective for understanding learners' experiences of L2 blogging.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Specialization codes of legitimation is one dimension of Maton's Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), which emerged in the late 1990s by building upon Basil Bernstein's (2000) sociological theories, and has been applied across a burgeoning array of social fields and educational practices, including linguistics (Hood, 2011; Matruglio, Maton, & Martin, 2013), educational technology (Chen, Maton, & Bennett, 2011; Howard & Maton, 2011), school courses (Lamont & Maton, 2010; Macken-Horarik, 2011), higher education (Shay, 2011; Wolff & Luckett 2013), and design studies (Carvalho, Dong, & Maton, 2009). LCT describes education as comprising fields of struggle where actors' beliefs and practices represent competing claims to legitimacy; that is, actors within a field are constantly "striving to attain more of that which defines achievement and to shape what is defined as achievement to match their own practices" (Maton, 2014, p.17). Specialization codes of legitimation, abbreviated as LCT(Specialization), is then a means to understanding the dominant basis of achievement, or what makes actors and practices special and worthy of distinction, in a field. Underpinning LCT(Specialization) is the notion that every practice, belief or knowledge claim, is about or oriented towards something (i.e., its object) and by someone (i.e., its subject). Educational contexts or practices, for example, embody messages as to both *what* is valid to know and *how* (i.e., their object), and also *who* is an ideal actor (i.e., their subject). When applied to L2 learning, the "what" refers to the language skills to be learned and the "how" denotes procedures through which these skills are learned, and the "who" is the language learner. According to Maton, when analyzing an educational practice, one can then distinguish two kinds of relations: relations between the practice and its object, called "epistemic relations" (ER), and relations between the practice and its subject, called "social relations" (SR).

Each of these relations may be relatively strongly (+) or weakly (-) emphasized in a practice. The relative strength of the two relations then allows the practice to be categorized with a "specialization code" (ER+/-, SR+/-) (Figure 1). The four possible specialization codes, annotated with their referents in L2 learning contexts (either language skills or language learners), are:

- *knowledge code* (ER+, SR-), where possession of specialized knowledge (i.e., language skills) are emphasized as the basis of achievement, and the attributes of actors (i.e., language learners) are downplayed;
- *knower code* (ER-, SR+), where specialized knowledge (i.e., language skills) are less significant and instead the attributes of actors (i.e., language learners) are emphasized as measures of achievement;
- *elite code* (ER+, SR+), where legitimacy is based on both possessing specialized knowledge and being the right kind of knower; and,
- *relativist code* (ER-, SR-), where legitimacy is ostensibly determined by neither specialized knowledge nor knower attributes.
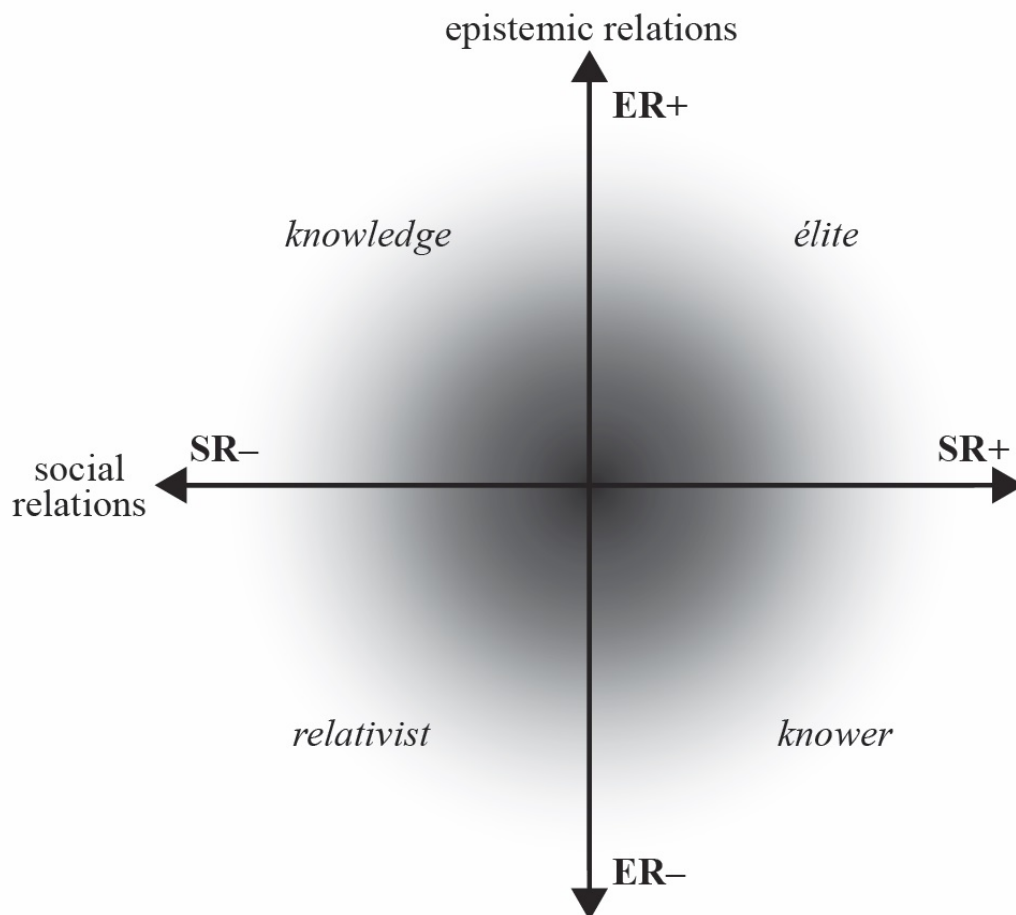
epistemic relations

ER+

knowledge   élite

social
relations   SR−   SR+

relativist   knower

ER−

Figure 1. Specialization codes (Maton, 2014, p.30).

It should be noted that the concepts of "epistemic relations" and "social relations" may be manifested in different empirical forms in different studies. In the present study, epistemic relations were realized in the data as "language skills" and "the teaching of language skills"; and social relations were realized as "personal knowledge and experience" and "the personal dimension of the learning process." Table 3 presents these manifestations in an analytical framework for these two concepts, which was adapted from Chen (Chen, 2010; Chen et al., 2011) for use in the present study. A detailed explanation of the framework is provided in the Data Analysis section.

As studies have shown (see Maton, 2014), specialization codes can be used to analyze a diverse range of practices (e.g., curriculum, teaching approaches, beliefs) with a variety of methods (e.g., documentary analysis, surveys and interviews). For example, by analyzing extracts from published articles, Hood (2011) identified disciplinary differences in how writers sourced other authors in academic texts. The study found that the discourses in natural sciences were specialized by a knowledge code and those of the humanities embodied a knower code. Carvalho et al. (2009) examined designers' perceptions of the basis of achievement in four design-related fields using a survey and interviews. The study argued that a lack of shared understanding among the four fields was due to a clash between the underlying specialization codes characterizing each field. Of particular relevance to the present investigation is Chen et al.'s (2011) study of Chinese students' experiences of online courses at an Australian university. Through interviews and document analysis, the study concluded that the Chinese students, as a cultural group, were characterized by knowledge-code learning orientations, which clashed with the knower code characterizing the Australian teaching practices. The mismatch was found to lead to feelings of anxiety and depression among the students. Drawing on theoretical and empirical insights from Chen et al.'s research, the present study departed from it by considering differences among learners *within* the same culture through a case study in Taiwan.

LCT(Specialization) was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study because it provides a set of tools for analyzing and comparing: 1) what the teacher required of the learners in the blogging environment; 2) learners' dispositions related to English learning, such as their beliefs, attitudes and established learning practices; and 3) their blogging experiences. The analysis and comparison, in turn, enabled the study to reveal the factors that caused some learners, but not others, to thrive in the blog project.

METHOD

The study was conducted with 33 EFL students enrolled in an elective course, *Learning English with Corpora & the Web*, at a Taiwanese university. It was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the differences in learner perceptions and experiences of the blog project?

    a) What do the students value in the project and what does this convey about their educational dispositions?

    b) What characterizes those who experience the project positively and those who perceive it less positively?

2. How do specialization codes help explain the differences?

    a) Which specialization codes characterize the pedagogical intentions, the students' educational dispositions, and their blogging experiences, respectively?

    b) What are the relations between these specialization codes and their implications for the students' blogging experiences?

Project Context

The course *Learning English with Corpora & the Web* aimed to help students develop independent learning skills for studying English by introducing them to a selection of online resources, including Web 2.0 technologies and public corpora. The researcher was the instructor of the course. Blogs were introduced to students as one of the Web 2.0 technologies, and the blog project was conducted to allow students to experience communicating their thoughts to a general audience in English. It was expected that through this experience, students would see blogging as a useful way to learn English independently. As such, the use of blogging in the present study fell into the second category of L2 blog research discussed earlier when reviewing the literature, which focuses on developing learners' metacognitive

skills.

The project was implemented for ten weeks, in which each student wrote a personal blog on a topic of their choice. The teaching design aimed to maximize the educational potentials of blogs, particularly in terms of extending learning beyond classroom settings, and empowering learners by allowing them to control their learning. The blog topics chosen by the students could be categorized into music, arts, travel, sport, health, pop culture and college life. All the posts each student made on their blog had to be connected to their chosen topic, consistent with how a blog is used in real life. This was to enhance the authenticity of the blogs, and therefore the possibility of their attracting outside readers. The teacher-researcher highlighted this purpose to students to encourage them to write for a real audience.

Students were required to write one post on their blogs every week. To facilitate interaction, they were also asked to comment on two of their classmates' blogs every week, one assigned by the teacher to ensure that every student received at least one comment each week, and the other of their choosing. To avoid giving students too great a workload, their further responses to these peer comments was encouraged, but not mandatory. Over the ten-week period, the students ($N = 33$) wrote a total of 247 posts and made 536 comments (i.e., each student made an average of 7.5 blog entries and 16.2 comments). The teacher provided weekly language feedback for the whole class (hereafter "language notes"), which was a collection of language revision suggestions for each student, intended as an additional learning resource. The suggestions were intentionally minimal, with the teacher correcting only one sentence from each blog, usually a sentence characterizing students' commonly-made errors. Students were required to revise their blogs based on the language notes; however, while this was stated in the project requirements announced to students, the teacher-researcher did not emphasize it in class. Rather, to guide students to find their own language errors, a "self-editing" activity was held after students made their first posts, in which they were taught to use online resources to edit their English. Finally, a "meeting partners" activity was organized in the sixth week for students to socialize with those whom they had interacted with on their blogs. Such a face-to-face meeting at the mid-point of an online project has been found to help foster trust among learners, thus making them more willing to share their personal feelings online (Michinov & Michinov, 2008). Note that while the course was delivered face-to-face, classes were held in a computer lab, with each student conducting mostly individually-based learning tasks through their own desk-top computers. The relatively low physical interaction among the students made the "meeting partners" activity necessary.

Table 1 outlines the pedagogical intention behind each of these aspects of the project, and provides an analysis of the intentions using LCT(Specialization). All seven aspects of the project were considered to be of equal importance in the implementation of the project. As illustrated in Table 1, the pedagogical intentions reflected a knower-code learning environment, as 5 out of the 7 aspects of the project were characterized by a knower code. For example, in guiding students to write their blogs (the first aspect in Table 1), the teacher constantly reminded them to focus their writing on their own experiences and perspectives related to the topic. On the other hand, the teacher did not highlight the need to focus on language forms and writing structure. According to the analytical framework for the LCT(Specialization) concepts used in this study (Table 3), this emphasis on the learner's personal experience and knowledge, and the downplaying of language skills, indicated that the pedagogical intention behind this aspect of the project embodied stronger social relations and weaker epistemic relations. This aspect of the project was therefore specialized by a "knower code" (ER-, SR+).

Table 1. *Pedagogical Intentions of the Project from the Perspective of Specialization Codes.*

Aspect of the project		Pedagogical intention	Coding orientation
a)	Writing blogs	To motivate learners to write in English by allowing them to discuss their personal experiences and perspectives	knower (ER-, SR+)
b)	Reading blogs	To expose learners to a variety of topics their peers are interested in, thereby allowing them to see the personal aspects of their peers	knower (ER-, SR+)
c)	Writing comments	To encourage learners to express their opinions of others' posts	knower (ER-, SR+)
		To enhance interactivity among learners	
d)	Reading language notes	To alert learners to correct language forms	knowledge (ER+, SR-)
e)	Writing on one topic	To build a link between blogs and their authors, thereby helping learners develop a sense of identity to their blogs	knower (ER-, SR+)
		To enhance the blogs' authenticity, hence maximizing the possibility of external readers	
f)	Meeting partners	To facilitate social interaction	knower (ER-, SR+)
g)	Self-editing	To alert learners to correct language forms	knowledge (ER+, SR-)

Note. Aspects a, b, c, e, and f de-emphasize language forms; aspects d and g de-emphasize learners' personal attributes.

Participants

All students ($N = 33$) in the course participated in the study by completing a questionnaire voluntarily and anonymously. They were all aged between 19 and 22, and consisted of 1 first-year (3%), 12 second-year (36%), 13 third-year (39%), and 7 fourth-year (21%) students. About 70% of them (23) were female. The students were enrolled in different degree programs: 13 from social sciences (39%); five each from commerce (15%) and foreign languages (15%); four from law (12%); two each from communication (6%) and sciences (6%); and one each from liberal arts (3%) and international affairs (3%). They had studied English as a foreign language for approximately seven years, and none of them had experienced living in an English-speaking country.

Table 2. *Interviewee Demographics*

Group	Student	Blog topic	Gender	Degree program	Year at university
1	A	Flamenco	Female	Social sciences	Fourth year
	B	Rock bands	Male	Social sciences	Third year
	C	Animation	Male	Foreign languages	Second year
	D	Shopping	Female	Liberal arts	Third year
	E	Baseball	Male	Social sciences	Second year
2	F	Health	Male	Social sciences	Fourth year

G	A school club	Female	Social sciences	Second year
H	A pop singer	Female	Communication	Second year
I	Movies	Female	Law	Second year
J	College life	Female	Commerce	Third year

Twenty-four of the students volunteered to be interviewed: 13 were interviewed. These 13 students were selected because they were representative of the overall participants of the study with regard to their year at university, gender, and major. This paper focuses on 10 of these interviewees because data collected from their interviews helped address the research questions. Like the overall participants of the study, the majority of these 10 interviewees ($n = 8$) were second- or third-year students, followed by fourth-year students ($n = 2$), and more than half of them ($n = 6$) were female. In terms of disciplinary background, 5 were taking a major in social sciences, and 1 each was from commerce, foreign languages, law, communication and liberal arts. Table 2 outlines the information about these interviewees, as well as their blog topics.

Data Collection

All data collection was conducted in Chinese. The teacher-researcher administered the questionnaire to the class at the end of the project. The questionnaire contained two questions. The first question asked students to rate the usefulness of the seven aspects of the project for their learning on a scale of 0 to 5, with 0 being the most negative rating and 5 the most positive. The seven aspects of the project to be rated were: a) writing my blog; b) reading others' blogs; c) commenting on others' blogs; d) reading language notes; e) focusing my blog on one topic throughout the project; f) meeting partners; and g) self-editing. The students were also invited to give reasons for their ratings. The second question asked students to provide suggestions for improving the project ("How do you think the project can be improved to help students learn more?"). At the end of the questionnaire, students were invited to volunteer for individual interviews and to do so by either leaving their names in the questionnaire or contacting the teacher-researcher through email.

The purpose of the interviews was to identify positive and less-positive blogging experiences and to explore the relations between these experiences and learner characteristics. Each interview lasted for about an hour. During the interviews, students were asked to discuss various aspects of their blogging experiences, such as their approaches to completing the tasks and their views of their own work and learning process (see Appendix for the interview questions). They were also invited to comment on the questionnaire results. All interviews were translated into English by a research assistant and checked by the teacher-researcher for language accuracy.

To mitigate possible effects caused by the power relations between the teacher and students, the teacher-researcher conducted the interviews after the students had received their final grades for the course. In addition, to further reduce effects of teacher-student relations, the interview questions were carefully written to highlight that the emphasis of the study was on students' views of their own learning in the project rather than on their evaluation of the effectiveness of the project. For example, to categorize learners who experienced the project positively or less positively, instead of asking the students how satisfied they were with the project, these two questions were used: 1) "What gave you a sense of achievement in the project?" and 2) "If the project were to continue, would you participate, or would you prefer that the teacher conduct another type of project to help you learn?" Students who gave positive responses to both questions were generally categorized as satisfied learners and those who gave negative responses to both questions were classified as less-satisfied learners unless their responses to other questions suggested otherwise. As a result, among the 13 students interviewed, five were categorized as

"satisfied learners", another five were classified as "less-satisfied learners" (Table 2), and the remaining three could not be categorized into either group. The three students therefore were not the focus of this study.

Data Analysis

Students' overall approval ratings of the seven aspects of the project in the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. After the assumption of normality was confirmed using a Shapiro-Wilk test ($W = .975$, $p = .636$), a paired-samples t test was performed to determine whether the differences between students' mean ratings for the two knowledge-code aspects and their mean ratings for the five knower-code aspects of the project were statistically significant. Interview data was analyzed in two stages. In the first stage, the analysis focused on identifying themes emerging from the data. Examples of such themes were: "audience awareness had a positive effect on satisfied learners but a negative effect on less-satisfied learners" and "less-satisfied learners preferred being given writing topics while satisfied learners considered this demotivating". The generated themes were further sorted into two broad categories: "content of learning" and "teaching methods". In the second stage of analysis, the interview data was examined through the lens of LCT(Specialization), using the adapted analytical framework (Table 3). To determine inter-rater reliability of the coding at this second stage of analysis, a colleague of the teacher-researcher, who was already familiar with the theory, independently coded five randomly-selected interviews (approximately 40% of the interview data) that the teacher-researcher had previously coded. The inter-rater reliability was calculated at .84, which was satisfactory for the study, as a figure of .80 is generally considered sufficient for establishing confidence in rater reliability (Green, 1998; Mackey & Gass, 2005), especially for what Mackey and Gass (2005) would classify as a reasonably high-inference coding scheme.

To explain the analytical framework used in this second stage of analysis, as shown in Table 3, the framework is divided into two sections: the epistemic relations (ER) section on the left, and the social relations (SR) section on the right. Each of these two sections has three columns. The first column in each states what ER or SR means in the present study in the aspects of "content of learning" and "teaching methods." (For example, in relation to "content of learning", ER means an emphasis on language skills, and SR means an emphasis on personal knowledge and experience.) In the second column of each section are indicators for deciding the strengths of ER and SR (i.e., whether a piece of data was coded as ER+/- or SR +/-). The third column contains example quotes of the indicators drawn from the empirical data.

Using the top row of the ER section as an example to illustrate how the data was coded using the framework, the example quote (by a student) in the third column, "when reading others' blogs, I learned words and phrases that were new to me, and I could see the errors they made, and learned from that," suggested the student considered language skills to be a significant form of legitimate knowledge in the learning context (as shown in the second column of the top row of the ER section). As this indicated an emphasis on language skills (see the first column), the data was coded as exhibiting stronger epistemic relations (ER+) in terms of the content of learning. (Note that LCT uses "stronger/weaker" or "relatively strong/weak" rather than "strong/weak" to avoid the binaries of strong/weak.) Likewise, turning to the top row of the SR section, the example quote (again by a student) in the third column, "you may get to know different people through your blog. You may hear new perspectives, even those from people in different countries," was coded as manifesting stronger social relations (SR+) in terms of the content of learning because it highlighted personal knowledge and experience (as shown in the first column of the SR section).

Table 3. *Analytical Framework for Epistemic Relations and Social Relations in this Study.*

	Epistemic relations (ER)				Social relations (SR)		
	Concept manifested as emphasis on:		Indicators for deciding ER strength	Example quotes of indicators from empirical data	Concept manifested as emphasis on:		Indicators for deciding SR strength	Example quotes of indicators from empirical data
Content of learning	Language skills	ER+	Language skills are emphasized as a significant form of legitimate educational knowledge.	When reading others' blogs, I learned words and phrases that were new to me, and I could see the errors they made, and learned from that.	Personal knowledge and experience	SR+	Personal experiences and opinions are viewed as legitimate knowledge in the language learning context.	You may get to know different people through your blog. You may hear new perspectives, even those from people in different countries.
		ER-	Language skills are downplayed as less important in defining legitimate educational knowledge.	I wouldn't be put off by language errors someone made on their blog. I normally focused on reading the content.		SR-	Personal experience and opinions are downplayed and distinguished from legitimate knowledge in the language learning context.	Except for those who know me personally, who would care about my life or what I think?
Teaching methods	The teaching of language skills	ER+	Procedures for learning language skills are explicit to learners and emphasized as a significant form of pedagogy.	The teacher could teach us certain words in class and then ask us to practice using them in our blogs.	The personal dimension of the learning process	SR+	Individual learners' preferences are explicitly emphasized as a significant form of pedagogy.	I don't like to be restricted to writing in a certain format. My incentive to write is stronger when I'm given more freedom.
		ER-	Procedures for learning language skills are implicit to learners and downplayed as not significantly shaping pedagogy.	The teacher didn't ask us to, for example, exchange our writing with a partner, and then tell each other how to improve their sentences.		SR-	Individual learners' preferences are downplayed as not significantly shaping pedagogy.	If everyone wrote about the same topic every week, they would be writing to fulfill the assignment, rather than writing what they really wanted to write.

Note. +/- indicates "stronger" / "weaker"

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings through the lens of specialization codes in two parts. The first part reports what students valued in the project and what this conveyed about their educational dispositions by drawing on the quantitative data from the questionnaire. The second part discusses the differences among the students' educational dispositions and the impact of these dispositions on their blogging experiences, based on the interview data.

What Learners Valued in the Project and Their Overall Educational Dispositions

Table 4 shows students' ratings of the seven aspects of the project, which indicated that they considered the only two knowledge-code oriented aspects of the project to be the two most beneficial aspects. As shown in the table, "reading language notes" was rated as the most valuable for their learning ($M = 4.61$ out of maximum score of 5, $SD = 0.55$), followed by "self-editing" ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.81$). All five knower-code aspects of the project were rated lower than these, with "writing comments" ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.87$) and "meeting partners" ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.91$) being perceived as the two least beneficial aspects. Also, results of the paired-samples t test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the students' mean ratings for the knowledge-code aspects and their mean ratings for the knower-code aspects of the project ($t = -8.35$, $p < .01$). In other words, students gave a statistically significantly higher score for the knowledge-code aspects ($M = 4.48$) than the knower-code aspects ($M = 3.66$) of the project.

These results suggested that the students as a whole valued the opportunities to learn language forms over those to express their opinions of their classmates' views and to socialize with them. The epistemic relations characterizing the students' educational dispositions were thus stronger (ER+), while the social relations weaker (SR-). Together, these gave a knowledge code. Clearly, there was a code clash between the knower-code pedagogical intentions of the project and the students' overall knowledge-code learning dispositions. To investigate the effects of the code clash, the study turned to the interview data.

Table 4. *Students' Ratings of How Beneficial the Seven Aspects of the Project Were to Their Learning.*

Aspect of the project	Coding orientation	*M*	*SD*
Reading language notes	knowledge	4.61	0.55
Self-editing	knowledge	4.36	0.81
Writing blogs	knower	4.18	0.63
Writing on one topic	knower	4.06	0.89
Reading blogs	knower	3.58	0.99
Meeting partners	knower	3.26	0.91
Writing comments	knower	3.18	0.87

Note. N = 33; six-point scale (0 = Least beneficial, 5 = Most beneficial)

Differences among Learners' Educational Dispositions and Their Impact on Blogging Experiences

To tease out the factors separating positive and negative EFL blogging experiences, the results presented in this section are based on the interviews with the 10 students categorized as satisfied or less-satisfied learners. The satisfied learners are referred to as students A, B, C, D, and E (hereafter "group one"), and the less-satisfied learners are referred to as F, G, H, I, and J (hereafter "group two") (Table 2). The discussion concentrates on comparing their characteristics primarily in terms of their attitudes towards the content of learning, and also in relation to their views of the teaching methods of the project.

Content of Learning

Characteristics of Satisfied Learners. A strong theme running through the interview data was that group one students had a lot to say about their topics. The majority of them (A, B, C, E) stated that they had sufficient content to add to their blogs if the project were to continue for another semester. For example, student E, who wrote about baseball, commented:

> I have plenty of things to write. There were about ten games being played every day… I normally watched my favorite teams, but I also paid attention to special incidents about other teams. Without this blog, I would've been chatting with my friends or people on the Internet about the games anyway.

As indicated in the quote, the content of student E's blog was an important part of his everyday life. In addition, he and the other students in this group considered themselves to have a degree of expertise in their topics, and some (A, B, C) also demonstrated the intention to educate readers about their topics. For example, the following statement by student B, whose blog was about rock bands in the 70s and 80s, shows that he claimed expertise in his topic based on his experience of being a guitarist. He felt the experience entitled him to decide for his readers worthwhile information to learn about the bands:

> The musicians I wrote about are all my favorite and *I know* a lot about them. *I know* what is so legendary about them and what is worth writing. Based on *my* knowledge, I decided which interesting parts I wanted to include in my post…. Because *I have played* the guitar for a long time, I don't want to introduce some mainstream musicians. That kind of information is not interesting. (Italics added by author to emphasize key aspects)

The remark was echoed by student A, who wrote about flamenco. Albeit in a less assertive tone, she noted that in being a flamenco dancer, she was capable of selecting key information about the dance and describing it in a way that made flamenco more accessible to her readers:

> I find online information about flamenco overwhelmingly long, and even as a dancer myself, I can't always grasp the point immediately. I hope that after reading the brief and simple descriptions of flamenco on my blog, my classmates would have a basic understanding of the dance.

On occasion, students received only one peer comment or none at all. However, the students in this group were apparently not disheartened by this, largely because of the confidence they had in their knowledge of their topics. Three (B, C, E) felt that it was likely caused by their classmates not knowing enough about the topic to write a comment. Many (A, B, C, E) also added that they considered writing their blogs a worthwhile experience even with a lack of peer comments because they were able to document their feelings and thoughts about something they were devoted to. The ability to write about their devotion in a foreign language had a significant meaning for this group. One said with noticeable pride, "Having the capability to keep an English blog about animation is a manifestation of my passion for it" (C). To another student, this capability also brought about a sense of ownership of her work, as suggested in this remark:

> The feeling that I have organized *my understanding* of Flamenco *by myself* gave me a great sense of achievement. I used to only listen to other people talking about it, or read about it on the Internet. This semester I felt I had documented *my* knowledge about the dance. (A) (Italics added by author)

Another characteristic this group had in common was their conscious effort to build a self-image through

their blogs, which indicated they had readers in mind while writing. For example, student B said:

> Readers may be judging who I am by what I wrote. They may be evaluating whether I'm really a guitarist myself, or simply someone who listens to rock music. Who knows who will be reading my blog?

The above quote also showed the student was considering the possibility of having an audience outside class. Audience awareness led some students (A, C, E) to refrain from using jargon and information that required insider knowledge to decipher. For example, one student stated, "If I said a pitcher was injured because of a particular way he threw the ball, I think none of my classmates would understand me" (E). Another student (B) who started using some technical terms after he shared his blog with his guitarist friends outside class mid-semester, expressed an even stronger audience awareness by saying, "They wouldn't want to read detailed explanations of the simple stuff," adding that in order not to lose his non-guitarist readers in class, he attached Chinese translation to those terms.

Finally, while all students in this group said they were happy to receive feedback on their English, most of them (A, B, D, E) noted they did not consider a detailed correction of their English necessary. Moreover, although they all revised their sentences after reading the teacher's suggestions, only one (C) stated that he read the teacher's language suggestions for other students. Some (A, B, D) also mentioned that when reading their classmates' blogs, they did not pay much attention to their classmates' English. When asked if they felt their English had improved because of the project, all of them gave an affirmative answer. In their explanation, as the project proceeded, they were able to write more in a shorter time. The following observation made by student D was shared by many other group one participants (A, B, C):

> When writing the third or fourth post, I was quite satisfied with my writing. I felt I had a better sense of English. I mean, I didn't get stuck at as many places as before. Compared with my previous posts, I could feel I wrote much faster.

Student D added that she had never experienced this kind of progress before because in the past, she had only written in English for exams. When writing for that purpose, she noted, "I worried about a lot of things, such as structure and grammar, and I concentrated on inserting fancy vocabulary and sentence patterns into my writing to impress the marker." Another two students also said that in their later posts, they found they were able to skip the step of translating their thoughts from Chinese to English (A, C).

In summary, this group shared a number of characteristics: they had strong passion for, and claimed expertise in the knowledge they shared on their blogs. This enthusiasm and confidence was accompanied by a palpable ambition to teach their audience about what they knew. They also developed ownership of their work, seeing it as reflecting part of their selves. Together, these themes revealed that the group recognized the knowledge they had obtained in their personal life as valid knowledge in educational settings, such as in the blog project. As illustrated, they thrived at being allowed to bring their personal knowledge to the blogging environment, through which they shared the social aspects of themselves with people inside and outside school. This emphasis on the socially based characteristics of the learner as the basis of legitimate insights indicated that the social relations characterizing this group's educational dispositions were relatively strong (SR+). Moreover, while highlighting the personal knowledge displayed in their own and their peers' blogs, this group downplayed the significance of English language skills. Even when discussing their language improvement, the students accentuated how it had become easier for them to express *their* thoughts (the "who") rather than on the attainment of language skills (the "what" and "how"). The relative de-emphasis on language skills embodied weaker epistemic relations (ER-). In short, regarding the content of learning, this group demonstrated relatively strong knower-code (ER-, SR+) educational dispositions.

Characteristics of Less-Satisfied Learners. Like their group one counterparts, group two exhibited shared characteristics, although most of these were in direct contrast to those of group one. The first salient characteristic was that group two did not demonstrate passion or lasting commitment to their blog topics. In fact, all of them experienced difficulty focusing on their topics. One discussed the stress of having nothing to say about her topic:

> The night before the due date, I would start worrying there was nothing new I could say about this singer. I chose her as my topic because I happened to be listening to her latest album at the time. I didn't plan what I would write about her, so I became a bit anxious. I felt I was running out of ideas all the time. (H)

Another gave up on her initial topic because she was not willing to dedicate time to researching it:

> I had wanted to write about music, and I spent a lot of time looking for information in the first two weeks. But then I found it took too much time, so I switched to writing about miscellaneous things that happened in my daily life. (J)

Second, in terms of audience awareness, two students (H, I) in this group showed that they were conscious of the larger audience on the Internet, but the awareness had a negative impact on their writing. Contrary to their group one peers striving to construct a positive image because of the awareness, these two students in group two detached themselves from their writing by avoiding disclosing their opinions, as indicated in this quote by student I:

> I wouldn't say what was on my mind that might sound too critical. I might touch on the issue but I wouldn't go into too much depth…. People may get upset, and I worry about the consequences. I mean, some people may leave nasty messages on my blog. I don't like that.

The rest of the group said that it had never occurred to them that people outside class might read their blogs even though the teacher had mentioned the possibility. Typical comments provided by these students were "Who would read my blog? It's just an assignment; it's not like I have written something that's a big deal" (F), and "Except for those who know me personally, who would care about my life or what I think?" (J). These statements also suggested that, unlike group one, the students did not think their blogs would offer valuable information to others. Neither did they share Group one's sense of mission to introduce what they knew about the topics to their readers. This observation was confirmed when another two students (F, G), who wrote about health tips and volunteer work experience, gave a lukewarm response to the question about whether or not they would be pleased if their blogs helped other people learn about their topics. Regardless of the relatively large number of responses some of his posts had attracted, student F noted, "It gave me a chance to practice English, and that's all."

Finally, in contrast to their lack of enthusiasm about their writing content, this group expressed great concern about their language improvement. The data indicated that they did not find participating in the project a satisfying experience because they felt it did not help them improve their English. Student H, for example, said, "In my blog, I always used words I already knew, so I didn't feel I was making any progress." Some (H, G, J) likened blogging to writing a diary, stating that blogging was too informal to be as effective as writing a traditional essay in terms of pushing them to learn language forms. As G noted:

> When blogging, you write whatever is on your mind, but when writing a formal essay, you have to have an introduction, a conclusion, transition signals, things like that. The teacher could have required us to do more things like this in our blogs.

Summing up, with respect to the content of learning, group two experienced the project very differently to

group one. They suffered from having little to write and did not deem what they wrote to be of value to themselves nor to others. Put another way, they felt their personal insights were not worth sharing, which indicated a downplaying of their socially based attributes. This de-emphasis on the social aspects of the learner was also exemplified by students H and I's suppression of expressing their personal views on their blogs. The social relations characterizing this group's educational dispositions were thus relatively weak (SR-). In addition, this group's comments regarding the project's drawbacks in offering them new language skills to learn (the "what") manifested an emphasis on the epistemic relations (ER+). Together, the specialization code represented by group two's educational dispositions concerning the content of learning was a "knowledge code" (ER+, SR-).

Teaching Methods

Because group one's characteristics regarding the teaching methods can only be fully understood once group two's responses have been presented, this section discusses group two's responses first.

In addition to feeling that they did not learn new words and formal writing structure through blogging, group two students noted that their learning was hampered by the insufficient amount of direct teacher instruction in writing skills. Student I, for example, expressed her need for the teacher to lecture on language forms, which was echoed by two other group two participants (G, H):

> In the past, after we wrote an essay, the teacher would usually tell us our mistakes. The teacher would also lecture on correct grammar or the usage of words we didn't know. So we could learn them. But with blogging, I often didn't know about the mistakes I might have made.

When asked to comment on the suggestions for improving the project raised in the questionnaires or by other students during their interviews, and invited to offer additional suggestions, group two's responses revolved around the teaching methods, including three in particular: the teacher assigning the same writing topic for the whole class, so they could compare their own writing with others' writing (G, I); the teacher requiring them to practice using words, phrases or sentence patterns taught in class in their posts, and checking for correct usage (G, H); and also generally, the teacher making more corrections of their writing (F, G, H, I, J).

All group one participants were strongly against the first two of these suggestions, insisting that being able to write about a topic of their interest was the greatest strength of the project and that it would be "very annoying" and "contrived" (B) to be "forced" (A, E) to use certain words or sentence patterns in their posts. Regarding the third suggestion, one student (C) spoke favorably of more error corrections, while the others said that although they welcomed it, it would not have given them a stronger incentive to write their blogs. It is worth mentioning that student C revealed he edited his posts more carefully after he realized the teacher would not do so for him.

In summary, with regard to the teaching methods, there was also a marked contrast between the two groups' views. Group two's apparent need for more instructional guidance suggested they felt the control over what knowledge they learned and how they learned it should reside with the teacher. As illustrated, they did not appreciate the freedom to decide what to write, appearing to be disoriented with such a teaching strategy. Put another way, to them, individual students' learning preferences were secondary to explicit teaching procedures - epistemic relations were highlighted (ER+) while social relations were downplayed (SR-). Group two's educational dispositions pertaining to teaching methods, like their dispositions concerning the content of learning, were thus also specialized by a "knowledge code" (ER+, SR-).

By contrast, group one's responses to group two's suggestions for improving the project indicated that in terms of teaching methods, group one valued the space allowed for personal predilections in their learning processes, considering too much teacher control to be an imposition to their writing. Accordingly, group

one's educational dispositions relating to teaching methods, like their dispositions regarding the content of learning, also represented a "knower code" (ER-, SR+).

DISCUSSION

This study explored Taiwanese EFL learners' experiences of participating in a blog project with an intention to understand potential discrepancies in their views of this form of learning. Using Maton's (2007, 2014) specialization codes as the theoretical framework, the study yielded two major findings. The first was that the students, as a whole, entered the blogging environment with educational dispositions at odds with those considered desirable in the environment. Specifically, the pedagogical design, aiming to empower individual learners by recognizing their personal experiences and perspectives as valid educational knowledge, was specialized by a knower code. The design constructed learners as already legitimate knowers by virtue of who they were. However, the educational dispositions of the students in this study tended to be characterized by the opposite knowledge code, which devalued what was prioritized in the teaching design and focused on language skills instead. The consequences of this code clash came to light in the blogging experiences of some students, who were arguably the "wrong" kind of knowers for this type of learning, which will be discussed hereafter.

The second finding of the study was that the differences in individual learners' educational dispositions led to their more, or less, positive blogging experiences. Those who prospered in the project tended to possess stronger knower-code educational dispositions, which matched the pedagogical design. By regarding it as legitimate to bring their personal knowledge to the blogging environment, and also being ready to do so, the students showed they recognized the basis of achievement in the project resided in the characteristics to do with themselves (i.e., the social aspects of the knower), and they could identify with it. They also had the means to realize it. As discussed in the preceding section, they had abundant personal knowledge of their blog topics, and they were empowered by the ample freedom to present it in their preferred ways. They were therefore pre-equipped with the attributes assumed by the pedagogical design, which made them the "right" kind of knowers for the project. These students' blogging experiences could therefore be conceptualized as knower-code ones.

On the other hand, those who were less satisfied with the project envisioned a clear-cut boundary between educational knowledge and everyday knowledge. To them, the possession and manifestation of good language skills, regardless of what is being communicated through the skills, defined a successful learner. They also held direct instruction by the teacher to be essential for effective learning. In this form of thinking, it is specialized knowledge of the field that shapes the knower. This relatively strong knowledge-code educational disposition was not considered desirable in the blogging environment, rendering the students the "wrong" kind of knowers for the project. As a result, unlike the former group, their experience of the project was not one of freedom from the constraints of bounded and controlled knowledge, but rather one of an "absence" of guidance and direction from the teacher. Not recognizing their own or their peers' personal insights shared in the blogging context as valid educational knowledge, and feeling that they were not taught valid knowledge in the blogging environment, the students experienced the project as devoid of legitimacy. Accordingly, they could not base their success on their positions as knowers or on the "right" procedures to gain knowledge. The experience embodied a "relativist code" (ER-, SR-), empty of knowledge and knower. I therefore conclude that when a learner whose educational dispositions represent a knowledge code enters a learning context specialized by a knower code, a code clash and a resultant relativist-code experience can be anticipated.

Blogs and other Web 2.0 technologies have facilitated practitioners' use of teaching approaches that emphasize the socially based attributes of the learner as well as the personal and social dimensions of learning. While the convergence of these technologies and pedagogical approaches obviously has its merits, the study found that this form of teaching practice assumes a particular type of learner. It is therefore advised that practitioners exercise caution when implementing this kind of teaching practice

with learners who may not be equipped with knower-code dispositions. In addition to making the basis of achievement explicit to learners, one way to address this problem is to incorporate some optional knowledge-code tasks in the teaching design; another is to find ways to help learners who do not possess the desirable learning attributes to cultivate them. This may include exposing them to learning behaviors and attitudes compatible with the learning environment, modeled by the teacher or by their fellow learners through collaborative work.

Finally, it is important to consider the limitations of this study and avenues for further research. The study argued that differences in L2 learners' educational dispositions led to their differing blogging experiences. This does not discount the possibility that other factors beyond the scope of this study, such as language proficiency, gender, and disciplinary differences, may also have played a role. Future research could investigate these factors. Another important direction for further research is to develop methods for identifying knowledge-code and knower-code educational dispositions to help practitioners diagnose the needs of their learners.

CONCLUSION

By investigating the relations between a blog-assisted language teaching design, learners' educational dispositions, and their blogging experiences, the study reported in this paper found that a knower-code EFL blog project is favorable to learners of a certain kind and disadvantageous to others. The paper demonstrated how an alternative theoretical perspective could offer new insights into the problem under study. In short, a code match between a learner's educational dispositions and the blog design resulted in the learner experiencing the project positively as enabling space for personal creativity, whilst a code clash between a learner's dispositions and the blog design caused the learner to experience the project negatively as withholding knowledge and direct instruction from him/her. As illustrated, LCT(Specialization) provided concepts that allowed learning and teaching practices, as well as their relations, to be systemically analyzed and compared, leading to a theorization of EFL learners' blogging experiences. Future research utilizing this theory to investigate other dimensions of language teaching and learning practices will be valuable.

APPENDIX: Interview Guide

1. How did you choose your blog topic?

2. Which entry in your blog is your favorite? Which entry took the longest time to write?

3. Describe your process of composing a post, from deciding what to write to publishing it online.

4. What gave you a sense of achievement in the project?

5. What pleased/frustrated you about writing a blog?

6. What do you think about people you don't know reading your blog?

7. What influenced your decisions in choosing a blog to read?

8. What influenced your decisions in choosing a blog to comment on?

9. Were you happy with the comments you received in terms of quantity and quality?

10. Did it bother you if/when you didn't receive at least two comments on each of your blog entries?

11. If the project were to continue, would you participate, or would you prefer that the teacher conduct another kind of project to help you learn?

12. How do you think the project can be improved to help students learn more?

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