

SCHOOL BLOGS ABOUT SEXUALITY: AN EXPLORATORY DOCUMENTARY STUDY

Gabriela Petró VALLI^a, Ana Luísa Petersen COGO^b

ABSTRACT

The objective was to analyze the structure of school blogs on sexuality and their utilization by adolescents. This quantitative, exploratory and documentary study was performed with 11 blogs designed by students and available online in March of 2012. The information was submitted to hypertext analysis and descriptive statistics, taking research ethics norms into consideration. Group and education blogs developed in Portuguese and Brazilian schools were most often signed by their authors and suffered few updates. The written posts mixed scientific and informal languages, besides presenting videos and images. Every blog included information regarding the number of followers, visits, comments and a contact to answer questions. The highlighted discussed topics were birth control methods and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Blogs are a resource for health education that should promote active discussions and rely on the participation of health care professionals.

Descriptors: Nursing. Blogging. Educational technology. Adolescent. Sexuality.

RESUMO

O objetivo foi analisar a estrutura e a utilização do blog escolar por adolescentes, ao abordarem a temática da sexualidade. Trata-se de pesquisa quantitativa exploratória documental, realizada com 11 blogs criados por estudantes que estavam disponíveis online em março de 2012. As informações foram submetidas à análise hipertextual e da estatística descritiva, observando-se os preceitos éticos em pesquisa. Os blogs grupais e educacionais desenvolvidos em escolas portuguesas e brasileiras eram na maioria assinados pelos autores e sofreram poucas atualizações. As publicações escritas mesclaram linguagem científica com informal, apresentavam vídeos e imagens. Informações sobre a quantidade de seguidores, acessos, comentários e contato para dúvidas não foram encontrados na totalidade dos blogs. Entre os assuntos discutidos, destacaram-se métodos contraceptivos e doenças sexualmente transmissíveis (DSTs). Os blogs são recurso de educação em saúde que necessitam assumir o seu espaço de discussão ativa e podem contar com a participação de profissionais da saúde.

Descritores: Enfermagem. Blogging. Tecnologia educacional. Adolescente. Sexualidade.

Título: Blogs escolares sobre sexualidade: estudo exploratório documental.

RESUMEN

El objetivo fue analizar la estructura y el uso del blog de la escuela para los adolescentes, abordando el tema sexualidad. Se trata de investigación exploratoria cuantitativa realizada con 11 blogs creados por estudiantes que estaban disponibles en línea el marzo de 2012. La información sufrió análisis de la estadística descriptiva, con observación de la ética en investigación. Los blogs y el grupo educativo desarrollado en Brasil y escuelas portuguesas fueron firmados en su mayoría por los autores y sufrió menos cambios. Las publicaciones escritas se mezclan con el lenguaje científico informal, tenían videos y fotos. La información sobre la cantidad de seguidores, visitas, comentarios y contacto para cuestiones que no se encuentran en todos los blogs. Entre los temas tratados, se puso de anticoncepción y las enfermedades de transmisión sexual. Los blogs son la educación característica de salud que necesitan para tomar su espacio y el debate activo puede incluir la participación de profesionales de la salud.

Descriptorios: Enfermería. Blogging. Tecnología educacional. Adolescente. Sexualidad.

Título: Blogs de escuela sobre sexualidad: estudio teórico exploratorio.

^a Nurse, Master's Degree from the Graduate Program in Nursing, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, CAPES Fellow, Member of Group from Study and Research on Nursing Teaching and Technology (GEPEEETec).

^b Ph.D. in Nursing, Associate Professor, Nursing School, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Professor, Graduate Program in Nursing, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Leader of GEPEEETec. Nursing School, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil.

INTRODUCTION

The internet has changed the access to information, making it a source of research on health information in addition to changing social relationships between individuals^(1,2). Blogs are among the highly popular virtual interaction tools among teenagers, also referred to as “Internet journal”. This digital genre is a type of public virtual diary that contains information about a particular person, place or situation, being used to express ideas, opinions and position face a certain subject⁽³⁾.

In the adolescent universe on the internet, blogs become an important tool to search and exchange information, as it allows users to communicate on a controversial subject without undergoing possible social restrictions, allowing a space of mutual help and social interaction⁽⁴⁾.

One strategy that has been used in elementary and middle schools in Brazil and Portugal is creating blogs to disseminate what was developed in the classroom on sexuality, since there is an increasing number of cases of sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) and pregnancy among adolescents, as well as early sexual initiation^(5,6). In these “virtual diaries”, students share information acquired and their experiences and are willing to answer the questions of those who access the blog and become interested in the theme. It seems that this strategy is effective since the adolescents also build their identity from social processes on the internet, and also because the relationships established in the virtual media are reflected in the behavior taken on in the real world.

The option to analyze blogs comes from the need of health professionals to insert themselves in schools developing health education activities with the support of digital educational technologies that interest teenagers. Assuming that adolescents often seek information on the internet about sexuality, one wonders how the students introduce and discuss this topic on blogs and how this resource has been used by teenagers as a space for health education. The data from this study may collaborate with health professionals who work with school health, signaling the possibility of interdisciplinary integration through the use of digital educational technologies. This study aimed at analyzing the structure and use of the blog tool developed in the school environment by adolescents to address the topic of sexuality.

METHOD

This exploratory and documental study was performed with a quantitative approach with the objective to investigate, free from any pre-established hypotheses, a condition that currently does not count with a systematized structure⁽⁷⁾.

A study performed with data from the internet aims at achieving deeper and broader understanding of the phenomena under study and, to do this, contextualizes and acknowledges its dynamic character. In this context, the number of components in the sample is less important than its relevance to the research problem, so that the elements of the sample are now deliberately selected as the characteristics required are introduced to the study⁽⁸⁾.

The blogs were selected intentionally, i.e., it is a sample whose elements were selected according to criteria that derive from the research problem⁽⁸⁾. Eleven blogs were selected that respected the pre-established criteria of inclusion. Blogs about sexuality, created by students in school activity, produced from 2007 to 2011, in Portuguese, hosted free on BlogSpot platform, to which they had free access and who were online during the period of data collection.

Data collection was performed in March 2012 by visiting the selected blogs. Blogs were identified from crossing the word “blog” with the keywords “sexuality” (29,800 blogs), “sexuality in adolescence” (23,800), “sexuality in adolescence designed by students” (24,100) and “students’ blogs on sexuality” (19,600). As a study limitation, the wide diversity of keywords is highlighted, which can be used on the search site and may have excluded blogs that would fill out the inclusion criteria. The blogs that respected the inclusion criteria were analyzed after completion of an instrument with the following items: purpose, authorship, content, updates, target audience, contact for questions, number of visits, followers and comments. Screen prints were obtained and filed. The content analysis of the hypertext structure of the blogs was organized and the results obtained were submitted to descriptive statistics with the presentation in absolute and relative frequency.

Because the blog was public, open and available to interested parties, the data collected could be worked out and disseminated without authorization of the people who originated them, or to whom they were related⁽⁸⁾.

The authorship of blogs has been kept anonymous, despite being the collected material freely accessible on the internet, in compliance with Copyright Act No. 9610 of 1998⁽⁹⁾. The research project was registered and approved by the Research Committee of the Nursing School of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (under number 22026).

RESULTS

An analysis was conducted on 11 (100%) sexuality blogs created by students in school activities from the content developed in the classroom. The blogs were intended to inform the wider society, namely teenagers, about the issues related to sexuality, as well as disclose the work done in school.

Of the total, nine (81.81%) blogs were created by students from schools in Portugal and two (18.18%) by students from Brazil. The 11 (100%) blogs were created by groups of students from different schools being that four (36.36%) were created by students who were coursing the twelfth school year in Portugal. The other groups of students were distributed in other stages, one (9.09%) group in the ninth school year in Portugal; three groups (27.27%) in the eighth grade, being two (18.18%) groups from Portugal and one (9.09%) group from Brazil, and other three groups (27.27%) just identified the school of which they were part, being two (18.18%) Portuguese schools and one (9.09%) Brazilian school. As for the discipline that proposed the creation of the blogs, only seven (63.63%) blogs from Portugal had this information, having been created in the discipline 'Project Area'.

The publication of the posts, or text blocks, was signed by all participants in ten (90.90%) blogs and was held individually in one (9.09%). In general, the 11 (100%) blogs have from one to nine updates, these being held in the months following the opening of the blog. Only three (27.27%) have published updates in different years.

Six (54.54%) blogs state the number of followers, having from one to five followers. As for the number of visits, only two (18.18%) blogs state that information, ranging from 299 to 753 hits until the time of data collection. The comments to publications occurred in six (54.54%) blogs, of these, three comments (27.27%) are praises on the theme of the blog and the other three (27.27%) discuss the matter

published. Contacts for inquiries, such as e-mail of the authors, electronic address of the source of information and useful telephone numbers, were found in two (18.18%) blogs.

As for language, there prevailed in eight (72.72%) blogs text blocks in formal style, with scientific character information. On the other hand, in three (27.27%) blogs, there prevailed informal text publications, characteristic of the spoken language.

The most discussed matter was birth control methods, found in nine (81.81%) blogs, followed by STD's in seven (63.63%). Other topics were teenage pregnancy, sexual abuse, puberty, sexual orientation, the influence of the media on teenagers' sex life, the role of parents in this context and general questions regarding the theme.

DISCUSSION

The development of educational blogs, as shown by the data in this study is an educational practice that teenage students find interesting, being a teaching resource that intends to break away from the traditional school tasks whose records are not socialized⁽¹⁰⁾. Using computers in school allows for new forms of interaction and may generate a network of learning enabling dialogue, not only between the student and the teacher. In this sense, a blog is a resource of the digital mean that favors the exercise of argumentation and exposition of opinion among groups of adolescents, using the same language and with common interests, which is often impaired in the classroom, even more so when it involves the discussion of a polemic matter such as sexuality.

Blogs created and invigorated by Portuguese students are increasingly present on the internet; the term Portuguese school blogosphere is already in use⁽¹¹⁾. In Brazil, studies point to the importance of the blogs in education; however, this tool is still little explored in the Brazilian school environment^(10,12).

Even though the creation of blogs about sexuality is an activity proposed by a discipline, this task arouses students' interest not only for the topic, but also for the use of technology. Moreover, the teenagers' group tendency makes the peer group to be the main source of information, which justifies the interest of other adolescents for blogs.

Blogs are classified as self-reflective groups and informative groups because they were created

by at least two students who discuss and publish the authoring activities of the entire group. They are also classified as educational blogs because the authors reflect on the information discussed in class and organize group work that is shared in the virtual environment^(13,14). During the evaluation of the blogs, it was perceived that the groups show cohesion in publications, as none of them had any contradictory posts, demonstrating that there is consensus among the group members on that which is published. This is characteristic of learning networks, in which a group of people, by means of information and communication tools, gathers around common interests, enabling new learning.

Generally, blogs merge information of scientific nature along with publications characteristic of spoken language, which is expected for this communication tool when created by teenagers, considering that this hybridism commonly occurs in blogs^(14,15). The relationship between the blogger (blog's author) and the reader is built through the language used in writing the posts and the answers to visitors' comments. The language is responsible for garnering the readers, for making them even more interested in the subject presented, contributing to the beginning of relationships in the virtual environment, especially when directed at teenage audiences.

Issues such as contraception and STD's were the most raised by students on their blogs, having been discussed through text elements, images and videos. When addressing such matters, scientific and formal language was used to explain what they are and how to use contraceptive methods, as well as to explain the diseases, their characteristics, prevention and treatment. On the other hand, they used informal language, next to spoken language in an attempt to establish communication with the reader and draw his attention to the theme under investigation. Such initiatives can contribute to other teens that do not have the opportunity to talk about sexuality in school or with their family, have reliable information, contributing to a safe sex life.

Existing comments indicate that there was an attempt to interact on the part of the readers of blogs, but this did not happen at the frequency that would be desirable. The comments posted represent the interaction, characteristic of this digital media⁽¹⁴⁾. In the context of the blogs, comments may

instigate the continuation of what has already been discussed in the classroom, contributing to develop ideas about the subject and reading and writing skills. However, this interaction expected for the blog tool was not observed, as the few existing contacts were specific remarks and were not timely returned by the blog authors.

Good classroom blogs deal with dynamic elements, subject to constant changes and updates⁽¹⁵⁾. However, the analyzed blogs show few updates, and these are concentrated on period of time next to their opening, even if the topic allows discussions to occur over time, running from the repetition of ideas and allowing more originality in what is published.

The blogs were built using blocks of text, images, videos and links presented in reverse chronological order, i.e. the oldest post appears as the final record, while the latest post appears first, containing authorship, date and time of publication, as well as space for comments. In this context, that which differs in the interface of blogging are the formatting options and how hypertexts are made.

Hypertext is a new way to communicate, interactive and participatory in nature, which relies on the interaction between textual elements, images, videos and links that transport the reader to various types of text⁽³⁾. Hypertext was used by the students to address a diversity of subjects within the topic of sexuality, acting positively in the teaching/learning process, since the student actively participates in the search and construction of knowledge. In addition, when using the blog as a learning tool, students mobilize and develop skills directly related to Information and Communication Technology⁽¹⁶⁾.

The current stage of life of the students, blog authors, is characterized by several conflicts, crises and feelings of doubt, and it is in this context that sexuality begins to emerge. The teenagers, trying to find the answers to their uncertainties, seek them no longer in the family, but rather in new social actors. Parents become the target of criticism and questioning, while the company of other teenagers becomes essential⁽⁵⁾. In this regard, blogs, while virtual interaction tool, become a space for discussion and sharing of doubts and feelings on matters related to sexuality.

It is during the adolescence of their children that families may feel unprepared about how to

educate them, because they feel unable to guide, inform and direct them regarding sexuality in its various dimensions. Despite this feeling, the family plays a decisive role in the education of their children, since it is here that ethical and humanitarian values are learned necessary for life in society⁽¹⁷⁾. Of the blogs analyzed, only one has publication related to the participation of the parents in the sexual life of their children, a publication performed by means of a survey. Here, more than half of the participants responded that they do not speak about sex with their parents, but they would like to do it. On the other hand, the few teens who talk to their parents about this issue refer it happens amid embarrassment.

The dialogue between parents and children about sexuality issues does not happen due to difficulties in communication or related to the education received at the time the parents were adolescents⁽¹⁷⁾. In spite of having little addressed in the blogs, the parents' participation in their children's sexuality, it is fundamental that this matter be discussed in the family as early as possible so that the children and adolescents clarify doubts and may cultivate safe habits when they start their sexual life.

The influence of the media in the lives of children and adolescents, especially in regard to sexuality, was addressed in a *blog*, having been discussed by students, parents and health professionals. It is characteristic of this stage of life to follow trends previously established standards, especially in the media. Because adolescence is a complicated phase of life, teenagers become more vulnerable to what is conveyed in the media, promoting the practice of unhealthy habits⁽¹⁷⁾. The publication of this issue on adolescents' blogs may bring awareness to other adolescents that not all behavior transmitted in the media should be adopted as a health life practice, because it can be incompatible with his socio-economic condition or with the development phase at which he is.

The school is a privileged space for the promotion of adolescent health, because it is a place where they are gathered and where they remain for a considerable period of time, and this space can provide the involvement of various stakeholders in education, including parents, teachers and health professionals⁽⁵⁾. In this regard, the construction of blogs by students on sexuality represents a par-

ticipative teaching methodology, in which the same use a language close to that spoken in everyday life, highlighting the importance of the issues that encompass sexuality being addressed by teachers and health professionals with expressions used by these in their day-to-day, with the objective to get close to them and facilitate understanding of the information received.

The professional nurse has, as one of their many skills, the development of health education actions^(17,18), so as to plan and implement actions that promote adolescent sexual health, working in health services and schools. Through the exchange of ideas, information and guidance to adolescents and their families, this professional can avoid problems related to sexuality⁽¹⁸⁾. When working with issues under this topic, the nurse needs to take into account the particularities of each family, thus contributing to a safe and responsible sexual practice.

The family, the school and the health professional, therefore, are jointly responsible for sex education of adolescents through their guidance and awareness^(17,19). This triad should be able to sensitize the adolescent to assume a risk-free sexual behavior, stimulating healthy life styles. Education actions in this context allow integration of parents, teachers and nurses in continued care and permanent adolescent health, favoring their proper development.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed at reviewing the structure and use of the blog tool by adolescents to address the topic of sexuality developed in the classroom. Eleven blogs were identified as having been created by students in school activities with the objective to inform society in general, especially teenagers, about the issues related to sexuality, as well as disclose the work done in school. The blogs developed in Portuguese and Brazilian schools have demonstrated similar proposals in relation to addressing issues of sexuality with the support of digital technology.

The publications showed that there was no continuity in the utilization of the tool, assuming that at the end of the activity, the authors have abandoned the blog, a fact that undermines the possibility of a broader discussion among teenagers.

It also identified that the structuring of blogs did not contemplate a few requirements considered important for the development of this tool such as the information about the amount of followers and hits, the comments of visitors and the availability of contacts in case of doubts.

The blog is a virtual interaction tool common among adolescents, having been used by students to disseminate and exchange information about sexuality, becoming a space for social interaction and mutual help. This technological mediation allows the adolescent to establish relationship with other teens interested in the topic, decreasing feelings of doubt, isolation and shyness. Students streamlined the approach of the content through the use of images and videos that facilitate the understanding of the subject, in addition to enriching it, and resorted to simple and applicable to the reality of teenagers. When used in the school environment, the blog becomes a tool that supports teaching and an educational resource on health.

The results of this study point out the importance of having the participation of health professionals in health education activities in the school communities, describing the information that can be disseminated and discussed on social networks. Likewise, it is evident that for adolescents, the development of blogs is a viable strategy, easy to perform and with the possibility of interaction that contributes to the discussion of topics within their interest, especially in the health area.

REFERENCES

- 1 Moimaz SAS, Saliba NA, Sumida DH, Zina LG, Chehoud KA. Oral health on web: na evaluation of brazilian sites. *Pesqui Bras Odontopediatria Clín Integr.* 2005;5(3):235-240.
- 2 Garbin HB, Neto AFP, Guilam, MCR. The internet, expert patients and medical practice: an analysis of the literature. *Interface Comun Saúde Educ.* 2008;12(26):579-588.
- 3 Corrêa EF. Gêneros textuais no contexto digital & educacional [Internet]. São Paulo: LAEL – Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo; [2011] [citado 15 Ago 2011]. Disponível em: <http://www3.unisul.br/paginas/ensino/pos/linguagem/cd/Port/44.pdf>.
- 4 Baker JR, Moore SM. Blogging as a social tool: a psychosocial examination of the effects of blogging. *Cyberpsychol Behav.* 2008;11(6):1-3.
- 5 Fonseca AD, Gomes VLO, Teixeira KC. Perception of adolescents about an educative action in sexual orientation conducted by nursing academics. *Esc Anna Nery Rev Enferm.* 2010;14(2):330-337.
- 6 Torres CB, Barbosa SM, Barroso MGT, Pinheiro PNC. Investigating the vulnerability and the risks of adolescents in the midst of STD/ HIV/ AIDS in their several contexts – a exploratory study. *OBJN* [Internet]. 2008 [cited 2011 Dec 19];7(1). Available from: <http://www.objnursing.uff.br/index.php/nursing/article/view/1138>.
- 7 Tobar F, Yalour MR. Como Fazer Teses em Saúde Pública: conselhos e idéias para formular projetos e redigir teses e informes de pesquisa. Rio de Janeiro: Fiocruz; 2001.
- 8 Fragoso S, Recuero R, Amaral A. Métodos de pesquisa para internet. Porto Alegre: Sulina; 2011.
- 9 Brasil. Lei n. 9.610, de 19 de fevereiro de 1998: altera, atualiza e consolida a legislação sobre direitos autorais e dá outras providências [Internet]. Brasília (DF); 1998 [citado 17 Ago 2011]. Disponível em: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/l9610.htm.
- 10 Pimentel C. Blogs na escola: uma alternativa [Internet]. Rio de Janeiro: Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro; [2012] [citado 27 Mar 2012]. Disponível em: http://www.filologia.org.br/xiv_cnlf/tomo_3/2451-2459.pdf.
- 11 Gomes MJ, Silva AR. A blogosfera escolar portuguesa: contributos para o conhecimento do estado da arte. *Revista de Ciências da Informação e da Comunicação do CETAC* [Internet]. 2006 [citado 25 Mar 2012];3:289-309. Disponível em: http://prisma.cetac.up.pt/artigospdf/16_maria_joao_gomes_e_ana_rita_silva_prisma.pdf
- 12 Mantovani AM. Blogs na educação: construindo novos espaços de autoria na prática pedagógica [Internet]. 2006 [citado 26 Mar 2012];3:327349 Disponível em: <http://educivica.com.sapo.pt/blogsnaeduca.pdf>.
- 13 Primo A. Blogs e seus gêneros: Avaliação estatística dos 50 blogs mais populares em língua portuguesa. In: [Anais do] 31º Congresso Brasileiro de Ciências

- da Comunicação – Intercom; Natal, Brasil. Natal: INTERCOM; 2008.
- 14 Silva A. Blog educacional: o uso das novas tecnologias no ensino. Vertentes [Internet]. 2008 [citado 20 Dez 2011] Disponível em: http://intranet.ufsj.edu.br/rep_sysweb/File/vertentes/Vertentes_31/adriana_da_silva.pdf.
- 15 Barba C, Capella S. Computadores em sala de aula: métodos e usos. Porto Alegre: Penso; 2012.
- 16 Gomes MJ, Lopes AM. Blogues escolares: quando, como e porquê? [Internet]. Setúbal: Centro de Competência CRIE da ESSE de Setúbal; 2007 [citado 25 Mar 2012]. Disponível em: <http://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/bitstream/1822/6487/1/gomes2007.pdf>.
- 17 Almeida ACCH, Centa ML. A família e a educação sexual dos filhos: implicações para a enfermagem. Acta Paul Enferm. 2009;22(1):71-76.
- 18 Gurgel MGI, Alves MDS, Moura ERF, Pinheiro PNC, Rego RMV. Desenvolvimento de habilidades: estratégia de promoção da saúde e prevenção da gravidez na adolescência. Rev Gaúcha Enferm. 2010;31(4):640-6.
- 19 Valli GP. Tecnologias educacionais digitais: análise de *blogs* escolares sobre sexualidade [trabalho de conclusão de curso]. Porto Alegre (RS): Escola de Enfermagem, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul; 2012.

**Author's address / Endereço do autor /
Dirección del autor**

Gabriela Petró Valli
Rua Tamandaré, 42, Bom Fim
94070-160, Gravataí, RS
E-mail: gabi130987@gmail.com

Received: 15.03.2013
Approved: 27.08.2013