

Coming of Age

an introduction to the **new**
world wide web

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**Coming of age:
an introduction to the **new** world wide web**

**Featuring case studies and how-to articles by leading practitioners in
the world of education**

**By
Terry Freedman (Ed)**

Preliminary information

Publishing

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We are looking at ways of keeping this publication up-to-date online. We haven't decided on a solution yet, but we have a "holding page" which collates the blogs of some of us: see <http://web2booklet.suprglu.com/>.

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Your tasks...

This booklet has been made available to you free of charge, but we would ask you to do the following four things in return:

- Pass it on to as many people as you can: friends, co-workers, your students, your teachers, via your website....
- Look at the websites and blogs of the contributors, who gave so freely of their time in writing chapters for this publication.
- Investigate the resources mentioned...
- ... and try them out in your classrooms – no need for wholesale revolution, just small-scale experimentation will be fine!

The contributors: quick reference guide

There is a fuller biography of the contributors at the beginning of their articles.

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Introduction

By Terry Freedman

About Terry Freedman



Based in the UK, Terry Freedman publishes the ICT in Education website (<http://www.ictineducation.org>), the aim of which is to provide practical advice on the use of technology in education. He has taught in inner city schools, been Head of Department, worked at the Qualification and Curriculum Authority and held a 3rd tier officer post – Head of E-Education – in a London local education authority. He was also an inspector for ICT and Business Education, has advised the private sector, and has advised government agencies on specific issues.

Terry is also the Vice Chair of the advisory body, Naace, and is a member of the British Computer Society and the BCS's Education and Training Expert Panel. He is also a Fellow of Mirandanet (an ICT research body), a trainer for the Senior Leadership in ICT course and an assessor for NaaceMark, a quality assurance seal of approval for schools. He is also the Communications Chair for the Administrator Special Interest Group for the International Society of Technology in Education, based in the USA.

*A prolific writer, Terry has had some 1000 articles published in the Times Educational Supplement and other national and international periodicals. He has also written several books, including the well-received *Managing ICT*, and is a member of the UK's Society of Authors.*

The purpose of this booklet

The web is, and always has been, an exciting place for education in terms of the possibilities it offers for research and collaboration. Now, it is even more exciting, with the appearance and development of new tools which have become collectively known as “Web 2.0”.

The purpose of this booklet, which brings together the expertise and experience of a range of leading-edge practitioners, is to provide a gentle introduction to Web 2.0 to teachers who aren't at present too sure of what it's all about.

The aim of the booklet is not to be comprehensive, which is impossible in a sense: there seems to be new tools appearing every day. It is, in fact, intended to be a “taster”, to encourage you to dip your toe in the water.

What is Web 2.0?

A cynical response might be, “just another label”! In fact, whereas until recently the world wide web has been seen pretty much as a publishing medium, and therefore a fairly one-sided affair in many respects, it is now regarded more as a participatory platform. That's what blogs, wikis and so on are really all about: not merely another way in which “ordinary” people can publish their views, but a means whereby just about anyone can contribute to an ongoing “conversation” in which knowledge is both discovered and constructed as it goes on.

But hey! If all this sounds somewhat esoteric, don't worry about it, but just enjoy reading about other educationalists' experiences and resolve to try out these things with your own students. (If you wish to explore the concept of Web 2.0 further, see the article by Steve Lee and Miles Berry on page 19, and look at Chris Smith's <http://www.shambles.net/web2/>.)

What this booklet contains

As well as the experiences of some of the leading practitioners in the educational use of blogs etc, the booklet contains practical information and advice about getting started, some reviews, and lists of resources you might like to explore.

Now, because I wanted this to be a book which felt alive, and to reflect the different perspectives of the people who contributed to it, I was deliberately open-ended in my brief to them. Consequently, there is some repetition, for example about RSS feeds and other matters. I think that's OK because it means that if you don't understand what one person has written there's a chance you'll understand it from the way someone else has explained it!

Although some articles wax philosophical, the main aim of the booklet is to provide you with enough information and enough confidence to try something out for yourself. It says, in effect:

- “1. This is what X is;
2. This is what Joe Soap thinks about X or how he implemented it in his classroom;
3. If you fancy having a go, here's what you need to do.”

Over to you

Try things out and then, in the true spirit of Web 2.0 contribute to our FAQs about Web2.0 through the wiki we hope to create in due course. In the meantime, we'll keep you up-to-date with developments at:
<http://www.terry-freedman.org.uk/db/web2/>.

Glossary of terms used

Alpha release

The very first release of a program, ready for in-house testing. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_stage.

Becta

The British Educational Communications and Technology Agency: <http://www.becta.org.uk/>.

Beta release

The version of the software ready for testing by “real” users. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_stage.

Blog

Short for web log, or online journal.

Blogosphere

The “universe” of blogs as a whole.

Blogroll

A collection of links to other people’s blogs.

Constructivism

In education, the idea that knowledge is created through an active process on the part of the learner. (Social constructivism is similar, but involves collaboration and exploration with others. Hence, the blogosphere and, especially, the edublogosphere are excellent examples of social constructivism in practice – or ought to be!

CV

Short for “Curriculum Vitae”, this is what the Brits call a resumé.

DfES

Department for Education & Skills – the UK’s education arm of government: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk>.

Edublogosphere

The same as blogosphere, but applied to education blogs.

Open source software

Software which is distributed free of charge with its source code, enabling others to take part in developing it. See: http://www.terry-freedman.org.uk/artman/uploads/computers_in_classrooms_15.pdf for a special edition of the Computers in Classrooms newsletter focusing on open source software.

Podcast

This is an audio recording that you can subscribe to via RSS and listen to on a computer or (usually) an mp3 player at a time of your choosing. It takes its name from the iPod – but you don’t actually need an iPod to either make or listen to a podcast.

Resumé

This is the American term for CV.

RSS

Usually taken to stand for Really Simple Syndication, RSS is what makes it possible to subscribe to podcasts and blogs. See the chapter by John Evans, What Are RSS Feeds and Why Haven't I Heard About It?(RSS Feeds from an Educator's Perspective) on page 11 for a fuller explanation.

Semantic web

The *semantic web* is an extension of the web that will allow people to find, share, and combine information more easily. It works by using machine-readable information.

Shibboleth

This is a "universal" method of website log-in being explored and piloted by Becta in the UK. See <http://www.becta.org.uk/corporate/display.cfm?section=22&id=4665> for fuller details.

Vlog

A video blog. This is a relatively new development. A vlog is similar to an ordinary blog, but uses video rather than text. See Video blogging: Terry Freedman interviews Paul Knight, on page 48, for more details.

VLE

Virtual learning environment: software which allows teachers to track students' progress, manage course content, and so on. See <http://ferl.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?page=248> for a fuller explanation.

Vygotsky

A great proponent of social constructivism, Vygotsky introduced the concept of the zone of proximal development. This is the area of knowledge that is just out of reach of a learner, but which can be brought within his or her reach through working with a peer.

Web 2.0

Well, there's some debate about exactly what it means! See the introduction to this booklet, Steve Lee's article and the following:

<http://www.squidoo.com/introtoweb20/>.

<http://www.roughtype.com>.

http://ross.typepad.com/blog/2006/02/fact_checking_n.html (thanks to Steve Lee for these 3).

<http://m.fasfind.com/wwwtools/m/2756.cfm?x=0&rid=2756> (thanks to Stephen Downes for this reference in his newsletter OLDaily¹).

Wiki

A web page that can be edited in situ by anybody who has been granted access to it. This is a great tool for collaboration and is mentioned in several chapters in this booklet. See "Wikis: an introduction" on page 83 for a more comprehensive exposition.

Year 1 etc

The main phases of school life in the UK are as follows:

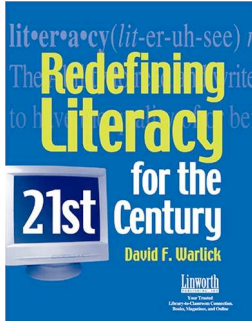
¹ <http://www.downes.ca/news/OLDaily.htm>

- Early Years (1-3 Yr olds)
- Foundation Stage (3-5 Yr-Olds)
- Key Stage 1 (5-7 Yr-Olds)
- Key Stage 2 (7-11 Yr-Olds)
- Key Stage 3 (11-14 Yr-Olds)
- Key Stage 4 (14-16 Yr-Olds)

A note on spelling

Sorry, folks, but I'm a Brit, so I've used British spelling and grammatical conventions throughout!

Book Review: Redefining Literacy for the 21st Century



Reviewed by Terry Freedman

Redefining Literacy for the 21st Century, David F. Warlick, ISBN: 1-800-786-5017.

To buy this from either the USA or UK, go to the reviews section of the ICT in Education website (<http://www.ictineducation.org>) and click on the appropriate link.

David Warlick, as anyone who has seen him in action delivering a keynote address or has followed his various blogs would agree, is the master of the counter-intuitive phrase designed to make the listener jolt upright and take notice. In this case, the quote on the back cover amply fulfils this function:

“If all our children learn to do is read, they will not be literate.”

That summarises the goal of the book itself: to actually redefine literacy. Nothing too major then!

The book begins by describing a scene of the future as if it's the present. It's always dangerous to do that, and although it's a pretty thinking-out-of-the-box kind of vision, in a sense it is already out of date in some respects: namely, listening to a book on a tablet PC. It may be different in the USA, but certainly in the UK the tablet does not appear to have had the hoped-for unqualified success.

But that is, in a sense, to split hairs. The principles of the vision are sound, with technology being used and experienced as an integral part of the educational process (in the broadest sense of the term) rather than simply for its own sake. In other words, in Warlick's vision of the future it is well and truly embedded.

The story, as Warlick points out, is founded on a number of assumptions about technology and other factors – for example, the children in the story are confident users of the technology: in other words, there is no doubt that they are “digital natives”. But, acknowledging, in effect, that everything dates, the author invites the reader to contribute to the debate online because, as he says, we know almost nothing about the future for which we are preparing our students. Scary.

The book provides a great overview of the digital landscape in an educational context. For example, bemused teachers will welcome the guide to instant messaging jargon (assuming their school hasn't banned IM, of course!).

What I especially like about the book is its checklists of action items. So many so-called visionary tomes leave me thinking, “OK, but what do I do?”. Whether you're a principal, media specialist, technician, teacher, student or parent, this book will give you plenty to think about and some practical things to try out.

For USA residents, the book is excellent value for money at around \$26. For UK readers, at £25 it's a little pricey but, on balance, worth the investment.

Effective e-Learning through collaboration

By Steve Lee & Miles Berry

About Steve Lee



Steve Lee is a Senior Software Developer working at Exeter College as the 'MIS Programmer', creating an MIS Intranet and data resources using mostly web and database technologies. He is also on the schoolforge.org.uk Executive Board and co-web master.

He is involved in Assistive Technology software, a member of the BCS Disability Group, technical consultant for the Drake Music Project, a volunteer for ITCH and writes the occasional article for Ability Magazine. He is working to bring Open Source to Assistive Technology Software.

His latest interest is various techniques for customising 'off-the-shelf' software to meet individual accessibility needs and how Open Collaborative Communities can help and involve disabled people.

Steve's interest in education has increased recently due to working at a FE college and having children at school. His website is <http://fullmeasure.co.uk/>.

(For Miles' biography, please see page 44.)

The benefits of e-Learning

e-Learning delivers many enhancements to the teaching and learning experience; the biggest impact occurs when the technology enables social and collaborative interaction where all parties actively build their understanding.

It's hard to miss the fact that e-Learning provides learning resources in interesting electronic media and makes them available 'anywhere, anytime'. Such media provides enhanced impact, improved accessibility, can be re-purposed for new uses and also help improve differentiation. However the required media production skills can be beyond teachers' experience, and often publication is by commercial publishers, or a specialist media or web unit. This can have the effect of de-professionalising teachers, who lose control of the materials they use with their learners.

Even where teachers do remain in control of learning materials, a commonplace approach to e-Learning is to simply publish resources appropriate to the learning. Such content may be 'interactive' or describe activities to be performed but is otherwise passively consumed by the students. This can alienate learners, who feel reduced to the level of recipients of content rather than participants in learning. Other methods are used by many teachers to more fully engage students, for example Tim Rylands' (<http://timrylands.com/>) use of the Myst computer games in literacy classes, resulting in impressive improvements in descriptive writing, especially from boys. Teachers in the creative arts often use collaboration and group work around technology to create works in media such as music technology, videos or animations.

Learning in the classroom

In ordinary, classroom teaching, we now enjoy a range of approaches that improve on the traditional 'talk and chalk' method used on its own. These embrace a social, interactive and constructionist approach to whole class teaching. As stated in the 'About Learning' (<http://www.demos.co.uk/catalogue/aboutlearning/>) report of the Demos-led Learning Working Group:

“experienced teachers draw on a mixture of common-sense knowledge, in which learning usually means acquiring factual knowledge that can be memorised and reproduced in written forms, and much more elaborate psychological accounts, which emphasise that learning is a search for meaning that is built upon pre-existing knowledge and is often realised in a social environment rather than something that simply takes place ‘in the head’ of the individual.”

Many students find that their learning is most effective when they actively construct knowledge during group social interaction and collaboration. Characteristics of such approaches also include: an awareness of multiple perspectives, provision of realistic contexts, a sense of ownership and voice, learning as a social experience, an acknowledgement of multiple modes of representation and a sense of self-awareness (metacognition, or learning about learning). These approaches are variously called social constructivism, social learning, collaborative learning or aggregated learning. The theories of social constructivist (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_constructivism) epistemology and Vygotsky’s ‘zone of proximal development’ (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lev_Vygotsky) provide a rigorous underpinning for such pedagogies.

Evolution of the web

ICT technology centred around the intranet and web are also in a process of evolving from a ‘place’ into social and collaborative platform in which many are rapidly developing a voice and an awareness of multiple perspectives. Publishing information on the web no longer requires programming or web design skills: anyone can do it with the new sites that are emerging. Some are calling this “Web 2.0” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0) and it is having an enormous impact on how we get things done, and is much closer to Tim Berners-Lee’s (<http://www.w3.org/People/Berners-Lee/>) original conception of the Web as a read-write medium. As Ross Mayfield of SocialText (<http://www.socialtext.com/weblog/>) recently said in his blog:

“[Users now] Google, Flickr, blog, contribute to Wikipedia, Socialtext it, Meetup, post, subscribe, feed, annotate, and above all share. In other words, the Web is increasingly less about places and other nouns, but verbs.”

For example news gathering is now performed by individuals at the scene and posted by them on the web directly, rather than being the territory of the traditional press and media. Furthermore, students are increasingly familiar with using technologies such as the internet, email and the web in these ways collaborative ways, often for social or recreational purposes but also on issues of group importance.

Bringing these two developments together creates the ability to facilitate the social constructivist learning exemplified by the best classroom practice through ICT. This provides new, more effective ways of teaching and learning, beyond the traditional constraints of time and location. With this approach, the focus is moved from the technology and media itself, to the communication and collaboration which forms the heart of the learning experience.

ICT used in this way enables educators and students themselves to rapidly create and publish their own content, and enables the shared construction of knowledge artefacts and meaning, thus moving into the realm of social constructionist. Such creativity happens without the need of technology experts,

but with plenty of scope for innovation, creativity and collaboration. Furthermore, because the technology acts as a levelling force, in which all may collaborate as equal partners, students who might not ordinarily contribute, perhaps as a result of a disability or shyness, can now join in activities as equals. Perhaps somewhat disconcertingly, the levelling effect also means that students can readily amend tutors' work, or enter in lively discussion with experts.

Many of the available tools allow for 'asynchronous' interaction, meaning each person can be involved at a different time as best suits them, with the archive of the conversation available to all. This allows students and teachers to fit in with busy schedules, meets the needs of those with a range of learning styles, provides flexible class timetabling, and means that class sessions can concentrate on key social interaction, with assessed activities left till later. In addition to flexibility in timing, there is flexibility in geographic location: students can contribute from any location given suitable access.

Teachers can easily view input from students, make assessments online and in most cases full audits of the 'conversations' or amendments are made allowing later analysis. For example, Drew Buddie (<http://merapolis.co.uk/moodle/>) describes an assignment for his ICT students to create a 'fair use policy' document. He created a shared document that could be easily be edited by himself and the students (actually a wiki, see below). After he seeded it with a statement that was obviously incorrect his students soon made 28 edits to the document and created a high quality policy by collective agreement.

Information sites such as Wikipedia, (<http://wikipedia.org/>) the Open Encyclopaedia, and its siblings, including wikibooks (<http://wikibooks.org/>) , allow students to contribute to a hugely useful and globally available resource. Thus students can produce, vet and elaborate an existing resource to develop it for others whilst learning themselves. Many express surprise that the editing privileges which such resources provide are so rarely abused, and on the exceptional occasions when they are, a process of peer review quickly and effectively deals with any difficulties, without the need for an appeal to authority.

These ways of working are also extremely effective for teachers to use themselves for collaboration at college or wider scopes. David Hargreaves, the chair of Becta (<http://www.becta.org.uk/>), believes that having educators working collaboratively in 'innovation networks' is the only way forward for education, thus modelling themselves the sort of collaborative, social learning they hope to encourage in their students.

There is a cost associated with this way of working, however, and an institution seeking to implement such technology needs to be aware that, as these web-based services become the medium for learning, there is a need to provide a level of service and reliability over and above that required for a more passive, resource presentation approach to the web. Similarly, whilst such technology is essentially an empowering one for all learners, there are circumstances in which some students may not have access to the web from home, and some strategy for bridging this 'digital divide' should be in place.

So what tools are available?

Well, a large range of interaction styles is possible and the following categorisation is a guide only, as many of these technologies can be adapted to

other modes. Furthermore the 'many' designation given below may be a closed community, such as a class, school, or college, or may be unrestricted access.

One-to-one

Email and SMS Texts

Text is sent direct to user's mobile (cell) phone. Email can be extended as a many-to-many tool through mail lists, which can provide for discussion, announcements and dissemination of documents.

Instant messaging

Text-based messaging, similar to SMS but via a computer and with better support for extended conversations; it often notifies users when their friends are logged on.

VoIP

Free internet telephone calls, often with video or shared desktop facilities; the market leader is Skype (<http://www.skype.com/>).

Some games software

FOAF

Friend of a friend – a means to develop trusted, social networks, see eg orkut (<http://www.orkut.com/Home.aspx>)

One-to-many

Static content web sites

Documents or multi-media made available for download or streaming.

Dynamic content web sites

Database-backed websites providing information tailored to the viewers particular requirements.

RSS

Really simple syndication provides a mechanism to track changes to multiple websites simultaneously, and to share content (typically blog posts) with other websites - an example of the semantic web.

Blogs

Extremely popular on-line diaries, easy publishing and sharing of text and other media such as photos. Comments can be posted by readers, and community blogs provide for shared authoring. Recent developments allow easy updating with text, photographs or even video, direct from mobile phones. Good for sharing experiences and views and are having a major impact on newsgathering. Eg Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com/>), Moveable Type (<http://www.moveabletype.org/>).

Podcast

An audio-based blog, designed to be downloaded to a portable mp3 player, with notification via RSS. Video equivalents are also appearing.

Folksonomies (or social tags)

A mechanism to allow authors to highlight other similar content to a reader, using informal, keyword tags; particularly effective for sharing bookmarks (eg <http://del.icio.us/>), but also used for blog posts (Technorati – <http://www.technorati.com/>), and photographs (Flickr – <http://www.flickr.com/>).

e-portfolio

In this context, a web-space allowing users to share their work with a wider audience.

Many-to-many

Content management systems (CMS)

These allow online group creation of content with workflow, CMSs can also provide shared authorship photo albums and blogs.

News servers

Topic-based news sites with open item posting and comments.

Forums Discussion

Websites where text conversations are organised as topics and threads.

Chat

Popular live group discussion using text. Audio and video conferencing are effectively an extension.

Games

Multi-user games allow collaboration. eg Nesta Futurelabs' Racing Academy (http://www.nestafuturelab.org/showcase/racing_academy/racing_academy.htm), or World of Warcraft (<http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/>).

Wikis

Web sites that can be collaboratively updated using only a web browser. They excel at enabling group development of ideas and information sources. Eg Wikipedia (<http://wikipedia.org>).

Version control systems (such as CVS (<http://www.nongnu.org/cvs/>) and subversion – <http://subversion.tigris.org/>)

These keep track of all the changes to a set of files, allowing several authors to work together on a project. Typically employed in open source software development, but can also provide audit trails for document management systems and wikis.

Almost all of these tools are available as hosted web services or open source software (itself a model of social constructionist principles) and can be readily installed on an intranet or extranet. One particularly effective approach is to collect together some of these tools into a cohesive, unified framework, often called a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) or Learning Platform. VLEs have been used by Further Education (FE) colleges and Higher Education (HE) establishments for quite a while and, now that many schools and Local Education Authorities (LEAs) are also using them, the features will be familiar to students as they enter FE and HE establishments. Moodle (<http://moodle.org/>), the leading open source VLE, provides modules for assignments, chat, forums, lessons, messaging, surveys, workshops, and wikis, and online assessment

amongst many others. An alternative, or perhaps complementary, approach gives even more control to learners, by providing the tools for them to create their own personal learning landscape for example Elgg (<http://elgg.net/>) makes available tools for blogging, social networks, e-portfolios and folksonomies.

Conclusion

Hopefully this article has provided a flavour of the power of a collaborative approach to using ICT and the tools that are readily available. This is itself an example of such open social interaction, having been collaboratively created as a page (http://schoolforge.org.uk/index.php/Effective_e-Learning_through_Collaboration) on the www.schoolforge.org.uk wiki.

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What Are RSS Feeds and Why Haven't I Heard About It?(RSS Feeds from an Educator's Perspective)

By John Evans

About John Evans



John Evans is principal of St. François Xavier Community School in St. François Xavier, Manitoba, Canada. He has been a teacher for over 25 years. The integration of technology into the classroom is one of his passions. He has served on several provincial curriculum development committees including the Interdisciplinary Middle Years Multimedia project (IMYM) and provincial Health curriculum. He currently is involved in the provincial Action Research for the Implementation of the Technology as a Foundation Skill Developmental Continuum as a divisional team member. John is a co-leader in the Prairie Rose School Division's own IMYM project where teachers are trained in the integration of technology. John also maintains the IMYM Tutorials blog at <http://nlcommunities.com/communities/joevans>. As well as presenting on technology integration issues, John has also presented across the province on the topic of Teacher Wellness.

Introduction

If you've never heard of the term RSS or RSS feeds you are not alone. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project², 26% of the average American internet users have never heard of the term and a further 64% aren't really sure what it means. In this article I will give the reader a brief overview of RSS and its application for busy educators.

So what is RSS? RSS is an acronym that stands for Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication depending on who is describing it. According to Wikipedia, "RSS is a family of XML (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/XML>) file formats for Web syndication (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_syndication) used by (amongst other things) news websites (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Website>) and web logs (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog>)...The technology behind RSS allows internet users to subscribe to websites that have provided RSS feeds; these are typically sites that change or add content regularly."³ The vast amount of information on the internet coupled with its accessibility for any user can be overwhelming. Now this is the exciting part...instead of being overwhelmed and overloaded, RSS allows the user to be in control of the information coming to them. They can set up their own collection of incoming information feeds of their choice and sift through it with less difficulty and far less time than ever before.

Web logs (blogs) and news sites are the most common use of RSS feeds. When new content is added to a blog or web site, that content is automatically updated to every subscriber of that RSS feed. A software program called an aggregator automatically pulls in the feeds. The aggregator program can be desktop-based residing on one computer, or web-based allowing access from multiple computers. Most aggregator programs are free and can be easily

² PEW/INTERNET & AMERICAN LIFE PROJECT (July 2005). Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Data_Techterm_aware.pdf

³ Wikipedia, Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS_%28file_format%29, November 2005

obtained on the internet. Some web browsers now have a newsreader feature built in and the feature is promised for newer operating systems coming in the near future such as Microsoft's upcoming Windows update. Popular sites such as My MSN, My Yahoo! and My AOL each have built-in RSS readers. All that is required by the individual once they have decided on their feed aggregator of choice is a few minutes of setup and then subscribing to the feeds that interest them.

Setting up a news aggregator is relatively easy. My preference is Bloglines at www.bloglines.com. I like it because it is free and it is web-based, meaning I can access it from any computer connected to the web.

There are many guides on the internet to take you through the set-up procedure but the one I prefer is "RSS: a Quick Start Guide for Educators"⁴ at Will Richardson's Weblogg-Ed blog (www.weblogged.com). This will take you through setting up a Bloglines account and has plentiful tips for using it in education. A more extensive explanation of RSS Feeds can be found at the Contentious⁵ blog written by Amy Gahrn, a self-described content strategist, in her 12 part series entitled "What are Web Feeds (RSS) and Why Should You Care?"

So why would this be of this interest to you? Well, if you are using the internet as a source of information, and visit sites on a regular basis, sifting through the material you like to read can eat up a lot of the time in your day. With RSS feeds set up in your aggregator, you'd only have to go to one location to read all of the news content on all of those sites. As Will Richardson, teacher and self proclaimed blog evangelist and RSS advocate explains in his Quick Start Guide, "when you're ready, you open the aggregator to read the individual stories, file them for later use, click through to the site itself, or delete them if they're not relevant. In other words, you check one site instead of 30... not a bad trade-off for a typically busy teacher"⁶. For busy educators, any tool that can save them some of their valuable time is a welcome resource.

Finding RSS Feeds

Internet sites that have RSS feeds can be determined by the presence of any of these icons:



Sometimes they are displayed boldly near the top of the web page or they may be hidden near the bottom of the page in an unobtrusive link. The fact is that RSS feeds are becoming commonplace and can be found more frequently. As more and more RSS feeds are created by a growing number of sites, RSS feed

⁴ Richardson, W., RSS: A Quick Start Guide for Educators, Ver. 1.5, Updated 3/29/05 Retrieved from www.weblogg-ed.com.

⁵ Gahrn, Amy, Contentious Blog, What are Web Feeds (RSS) and Why Should You Care?, Retrieved from <http://blog.contentious.com/archives/2004/05/04/what-are-webfeeds-rss-and-why-should-you-care>, 5/4/2004.

⁶ Richardson, W., RSS: A Quick Start Guide for Educators Ver. 1.5, Retrieved from www.weblogg-ed.com, Updated 3/29/05,

lists (eg RSS Compendium⁷) and search sites (eg Feedster – www.feedster.com⁸) are being created that list links to RSS feeds from most areas of the internet. RSS feeds can also be found through a simple Google or Yahoo! search.

Educational Applications

The following list is not exhaustive but just a few of the ways that RSS feeds can be used by educators. As more and more sites develop and support RSS feeds for their content the list is sure to expand.

Professional Development

I have found the ability to subscribe to various news sources, blogs and websites to be one of the most timely and cost-effective forms of professional development I have ever experienced. Through my Bloglines account subscriptions to various RSS feeds from blogs – which include technology-centred topics as well as subject content topics, technology newsletters, news sources and a variety of personal interest subscriptions, I have been able to keep-up-to-date on a wide variety of subjects from leading experts in the field. I feel like I am closer to the leading edge of what is going on in my field.

Time Saving

I used to spend a large amount of time surfing the internet for topic specific content. Now I'm tracking more information in a shorter period of time. One of the nicest things about RSS feeds is that for those content sites I have subscribed to the information about content updates on the site comes to me. I no longer have to surf through a long list of sites in my favorites list. I choose the sources of the information that I receive and can choose to read it now or later.

Up-to-the-minute content specific feeds in your teaching area

Any teacher of a content area such as social studies or world events can find up to the minute information via an RSS feed. For example if the teacher were focusing on a particular current world event, it is possible to subscribe to and read news on that topic from several different sources. The aggregator checks for feeds at regular intervals from 15 minutes to hourly. The updated information is timely, immediate and because you can get information from a number of reputable sources you know the information is accurate.

Information coming from contrasting sources

Teachers and their students could subscribe to feeds from different parts of the news world about a current event in the news to compare and contrast the information and/or to check to see if there were any biases. For example, an RSS feed from the BBC news may have a totally different emphasis on the London bombings than the feed from the New York Times or Reuters. What would a news report of the elections in Iraq contain if it came from a Middle Eastern newspaper? Giving this kind of information to students allows them to

⁷ RSS Compendium, <http://allrss.com/rssfeeds.html>. This is a collection of links to major collections of feeds, sorted into categories. Ex. Companies/Business, Education, Finance, etc., November 2005.

⁸ Feedster, www.feedster.com. Search tool for finding RSS feeds from a variety of sources on the Web, November 2005.

experience current events in the timeliest manner possible with a world perspective on the particular event.

Sharing what you are doing with other educators

Any teacher who is using technology in their teaching likely has some information that they would be willing to share with other teachers. If that teacher has a blog or webpage, that information can be shared with literally thousands of other teachers via an RSS feed. Whether a teacher records their reflections, a lesson plan, some web site links, a new concept or idea, other teachers around the globe can learn from their experiences.

While the above list is short, I do believe that RSS feeds will have a major impact on the way we receive our information in the future. Some marketing experts even suggest RSS feeds may be a viable alternative to email – no spam, no viruses and, at this point, no advertising. Being aware of and in control of the information and news that is pertinent to anyone is vital. RSS feeds allow this to happen in a relatively painless non-technical manner. It's an upcoming tool that any educator would be wise to incorporate in their professional toolkit.

Further reading

See also:

<http://nlcommunities.com/communities/joevans/archive/2006/01/18/46606.aspx>.

Blogging: shift of control

By Alan November

About Alan November



Alan November is an international leader in education technology. He has been director of an alternative high school, computer coordinator, technology consultant, and university lecturer. He has helped schools, governments and industry leaders improve the quality of education through technology.

*Alan's areas of expertise include planning across curriculum, staff development, new school design, community building and leadership development. He has delivered keynotes and workshops in all fifty states, across Canada, and throughout the UK, Europe, Asia and Central America. His writing includes numerous articles and best-selling book, *Empowering Students with Technology*. Alan was co-founder of the Stanford Institute for Educational Leadership Through Technology and is most proud of being selected as one of the original five national Christa McAuliffe Educators.*

Building Learning Communities Summer Conference: each summer Alan leads an education technology conference with leading-edge presenters and participants from around the world. Visit www.novemberlearning.com/blc for more details.

The power of blogging

Blogging represents one of many tools that pioneering teachers are using to empower students to take more responsibility of managing their own work and adding value to the world. Educators are typically not neutral about blogging. There are fierce defenders and fierce critics. Each has an important voice. As Will Richardson points out, "One of the reasons we fear these technologies is because we as teachers don't yet understand them or use them. But the reality is that our students already do. It's imperative that we be able to teach our kids how to use the tools effectively and appropriately because right now they have no models to follow."

Chris Burnett

www.visitmyclass.com/blogs/burnett

"Never. I will never use a blog in my teaching." My colleague, Chris Burnett, a writing/literature teacher in inner city Michigan for 12 – 14 year olds was clear about her feelings for blogging as she walked out of her first "How to Blog" workshop in the summer of 2004 at my Building Learning Communities Conference in Boston. Chris was a veteran teacher of more than twenty years who was piling up the reasons not to use this popular web communications tool. At the time, she was not alone. Here are common concerns I've heard from other teachers:

- Blogs give too much freedom for students to express themselves
- Teachers will never be able to control comments
- Students and parents will have too much access to other students' published work
- Students will feel too much pressure to improve as they see the work and comments of others.

One year later, Chris has replaced these misgivings with sheer determination for publishing a blog that features student work for authentic review. It is an understatement to say she has changed her mind. She now gives her own workshops for teachers who are willing to learn more about the power of this medium.

“Blogging is now central to student motivation and the whole process of students taking more responsibility for the quality of their work. I have never had students who are so excited about writing. For the first time in my career, I have students who are submitting their writing to me without an assignment, just so they can have their work published for review by an authentic global audience. We have had the author of one of our books, Chris Crowe who wrote the very powerful Mississippi Trial 1955, reply to our blog. “I’m especially pleased by your students’ reaction to my characters; I tried to make the fictional people as complicated and interesting as people are in real life. The students’ insight into the issues and characters are right on, and it’s clear they’re doing careful reading and thinking. I’m looking forward to talking to everyone in a week or two.”

Chris goes on to explain, “Perhaps what surprised me the most is that when the school year finished I had students who continued to reflect on their writing during our summer vacation. It is very validating to me to have a student come back to school to share how they visited the class blog during their vacation to see if there were any comments from around the world. I hope that my students that I have in class this year will be just as enthusiastic about publishing on the blog. One can only hope.”

How often have your students reflected on their writing portfolio during summer vacation?

Shift of Control

Unlike word processing, or using an interactive whiteboard, or having students present a PowerPoint presentation to classmates behind closed doors, blogging shifts the concept of the control of information. Perceptions of time, space and relationships are expanded. The audience moves from teacher and class to the world. Teachers are no longer the sole or even the primary arbitrator of student work. It is even possible that teachers do not have to work as hard to motivate traditionally failing students or to set much higher expectations for excelling students. Parents can now have access to the writing of an entire class compared to only what their own child brings home written in their hand. Because of her blog, Chris has had requests from Turkey and the Caribbean for writing partnerships this year.

Darren Kuropatwa

<http://pc40s.blogspot.com>

Enter “pre cal” into Google and in the top spot you will find: <http://pc40s.blogspot.com>. This is the class blog of Winnipeg mathematics teacher and department head, Darren Kuropatwa. Darren is another pioneer who has engaged his students in producing a student guide to pre-calculus and calculus. Each day a different student is the official scribe of the class and is responsible for producing notes for publication of that days’ discussion. Students are challenged to produce accurate notes with accompanying illustrations and examples by their classmates. At the end of this year, his classes will have produced a Student’s Guide to Understanding Calculus.

Before blogging we would expect hard working students to be able to read the calculus text book. Darren expects his students to **write** the “book”/blog.

Indeed, Darren’s students are published around the world in real time. To be ranked number one in Google means that there are more links coming into his site than any other listing for the search term “pre cal.” A recent check using the link command in AltaVista (www.altavista.com) shows almost 900 websites linked to the class site including conferences, commentaries by leading educationalists and other mathematics teachers. (Go to AltaVista and type: “link:http://pc40s.blogspot.com” to generate today’s list.)

Darren knows the power of students who understand that their work is being referenced by almost 1,000 organizations around the world. His students are contributors to the world’s “knowledge commons.” Not only does he teach calculus, he teaches students that one of the responsibilities of global citizenship is publishing knowledge products to add value to the world.

Bump in the Night

As with all technologies there can be serious abuses. We must balance the few amazing stories of blogging with what can go very wrong. We have all heard the horror stories of what can happen when students pick up a free blog (blogspot.com, livejournal.com, myspace.com, and many other free sites). Death threats to fellow classmates, inappropriate pictures by young teen girls who are looking for dates are horrible examples that are local to me.

The Pew Charitable Trust, a leading internet in Society research organization, reports that 1/5 students in the United States already have their own blogs. As with email, instant messenger, and text messaging, the question is not about whether students will be blogging. Eventually, the majority of students will have a blog. The real issue is what is the professional response to blogging? Because of abuse on the public sites that are not controlled by teachers, some schools are blocking all access to any blogging sites. The blame is on the technology and there is no opportunity for pioneering teachers to provide adult role models. (As a point of information, with the right software, all comments to a class blog can be moderated by the teacher for complete judicial control.)

There is another option. Using the medium to teach responsibility is a direction recommended by Anne Davis, an educational consultant from Georgia State University in the Instructional Technology Center, College of Education: <http://anne.teachesme.com/>

Anne writes, “Sometimes when I see all the stuff that is posted on blogs by teenagers I find myself wishing that someone had given them some guidance. Lots of them are just not thinking. We need to build these types of things into our discussions in our classrooms. I like to think that good teaching about responsible weblog use would help. “We will need courageous leaders who are willing to explore the strengths and weaknesses of this medium. Our students will live in a world where they will have access to increasingly more powerful communications tools. Who should teach them how to manage the power of these tools? We have come face to face with technologies that are now threatening the existing culture of teaching and learning. We will either try to defend the status quo or we will carefully analyze the risks of moving forward to provide powerful role models for our students.

Visit Alan November’s blog: www.novemberlearning.com/blogs/alannovember

For workshops and seminars relating to blogging, join Alan at the Building Learning Communities Summer Conference, July 17-20, 2006. See www.novemberlearning.com/bc for further details.

Photo-sharing and clip-art

By Terry Freedman

Introduction

If you like taking photos then you will probably want to share them with others. There are a number of photo-sharing sites available, perhaps the most well-known of which is Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>).

There are others too, though: see this review:

<http://www.little.org/blog/PermaLink.aspx?guid=f132eca2-705e-4216-836e-09832dc00bb4>

Do-it-yourself “clip art”



Let's face it: clip art is, generally speaking, boring. And the reason is not hard to fathom: if a popular program comes with clip art all ready to use with no extra payment needed, then people who are in a hurry are going to use it. The question is: should we not encourage children in schools to look beyond the standard fare?

The answer is a cautious “yes”. Why cautious? Because one of the things we should be teaching children is that there's no point in reinventing wheels just for the sake of it. If a piece of clip art is just right for the purpose, then why not use it? The problem is, many teachers seem to go no further than telling kids where the clip art menu item is. In the words of the standard school report, they could do better.



One way is to create their own photographic clip art with a digital camera. Storage is no longer a problem if a class Flickr account is opened: it's free. What's more, there are thousands of photos on Flickr which have been uploaded by other users, many of which can be used free of charge under certain conditions. Most of these pictures are as unique as the people who took them.



There is another outcome of going around taking photos: you start to notice things more. Here's an example: when I went around taking pictures according to a theme of “numbers”, I noticed for the first time ever that London buses have three numbers: the licence plate or registration number, the bus number itself, of course, and also, inexplicably, another number displayed in the driver's windscreen.



That outing also made me start to notice that some shops advertise goods at 50% off while others advertise goods at half price. Does that make a difference to people's perceptions? I have no idea, but I do know that once I'd got going I started to notice numbers all over the place – and I noticed even more numbers in some of the pictures when I looked at them afterwards on my computer screen.

What better way to fire up a young person's interest in numbers and in their environment?

My most recent venture was to take pictures of patterns in the street: it's astonishing what you notice once you really look. Some are very nice indeed. And there would have been even more of them had I remembered to charge up the camera battery and the spare battery before leaving home!

You can see the photos I've referred to by going to www.flickr.com/photos/terryfreedman

Good practice guide

Before closing this article, a few words of caution about using Flickr, some of which apply generally.

1. It's good practice to tag photos, and discussing with children the most appropriate words and phrases to use is a worthwhile exercise. Part of the information & communication technology (ICT) curriculum in the UK is concerned with finding things out, so pupils need to know that the use of appropriate tags makes this process a whole lot easier.

2. You will need to exercise the same sort of attention to what pupils search for as you would for any internet search. Although I haven't found anything explicitly pornographic on Flickr, there are pictures with ample amounts of flesh on display. I'm not sure if they would be blocked by an ordinary filtering system. Clicking on a link to Yahoo image searching resulted in my being transferred to Yahoo with the safe searching option on by default.

3. Remember that people own the copyright in their pictures, so you can't use them without permission. Flickr makes available 6 different kinds of copyright licence and explains what each one means in terms of what people can do with the photos. It might not be a bad idea to put a summary of these on your classroom wall or on the school intranet or home page. Children should be encouraged to check to see what, if any, licence has been assigned to the photos they wish to use – and to ask the owner's permission if none has been assigned (or ask you to do that for them, to prevent their identity being revealed). By the same token, you should decide what rights you're going to assign to the class photos you upload to Flickr – what a great opportunity for a class discussion followed by a democratic decision!

4. You can't take pictures of people and post them on the web without their permission – at least, that's the position in the UK.

You will also, obviously, need to ensure that photos of children are not published without their parents' permission, and to make sure that the children cannot be identified individually: see the UK's Information Commissioner's advice on taking photographs in schools:

<http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk/cms/DocumentUploads/taking%20photographs%20in%20schools.pdf>.

5. I'd also recommend going a step further and not taking photos that easily identify businesses or which feature car registration or other identifying details. Perhaps I'm being unduly cautious, but it seems to me that we should at least be encouraging pupils to consider the rights of other people. I for one would certainly not like my car or house details plastered all over the internet, and would feel pretty aggrieved if I discovered that someone had done so.

But notwithstanding those few caveats, digital photography is a great way of creating clip art, and for making the environment come alive and helping children to see new things – or new aspects of old things. And Flickr (and similar tools) help take it all a step further by encouraging and facilitating the cross-fertilisation of ideas, and collaboration. That has to be a good thing!

This article was first published on the <http://www.ictineducation.org> website on 7 August 2005.

Factoring Web logs to their Fundamentals

by David Warlick

About David Warlick



David Warlick is a 30 year educator, living in Raleigh, NC, USA. He currently provides consulting and public speaking services to education associations and agencies around the world.

Learn more about Class Blogmeister at <http://classblogmeister.com>

Learn more about David Warlick's services at <http://davidwarlick.com/> and his web site for teachers at <http://landmark-project.com/>

Read his blogs at <http://davidwarlick.com/2cents/> and <http://www.techlearning.com/blog/main/>

Introduction

During much of 2004, I included in many of my conference presentations, brief explanations and demonstrations of blogging technology, or web logs. Teachers grasped the concept easily. After all, as a technology, blogging is pretty simple. But the potential of a writing environment with peer review and authentic assessment explicitly designed into it, drew a lot of attention and lots of questions. The number one barrier was that student posts immediately became public, with almost no oversight by the teacher.

The birth of Blogmeister

With no alternatives available and my 2004 December weeks without extensive travel, I set out to build a blogging service that offered teachers a comfortable level of control over their classroom blogging content. By the end of January, educators, predominantly from outside the U.S., began knocking on the digital door of Class Blogmeister. They wanted school pass-codes so that they could set up classroom web logs, and set their students blogging.

Almost immediately, I began to receive e-mails from teachers saying things like, "I can't believe that my students are begging me to let them write." Just yesterday, I received a message from a teacher from the Outer Banks including some quotes from her students – "This is so cool!" and "I don't want class to end!"

It is not an uncommon occurrence, to have students become so motivated in classrooms that infuse technology. But I suspect that the excitement expressed by student bloggers has less to do with "technology" and much more to do with something far more fundamental.

Writing is often taught as a technology – a tool that we invented to enable us to communicate across time and space. We teach it as a set of rules and procedures to be followed precisely, as students are given contrived prompts and formulas to write to. The difference that students see in blogging is that it is much less about writing as a set of rules, and much more about communicating.

Students are not merely writing what they believe their teachers want to read – what some students refer to as "playing school". Instead, they are writing to a real audience, understanding that the audience will be responding to what they have to say. Students are in control, and empowered to influence other people through the skilfulness of their writing.

This is a deliciously potent lever, with which to help students develop better writing skills. Rather than a task to be performed, students are communicating.

Their success appears not only from their grade, but from the interactions that they participate in, where the quality of their writing becomes either brilliantly or brutally apparent.

Virtual Support via the Blogosphere

By Mechelle De Craene

About Mechelle De Craene



Mechelle is a special education teacher in Florida She is certified (K-12) and holds a Masters degree in Special Education with an endorsement in gifted education. She has worked in both urban and rural school settings and has taught children with a range of special needs both at the primary and secondary level..

Mechelle is a graduate student at the University of Florida in the Department of Special Education. She hopes to become a professor focusing on pedagogical issues related to both educational technology and special education.

Her primary goal is to keep advocating for children, especially those with special needs and those who live in poverty.

She is also a MirandaNet scholar currently collaborating with Dr. John Cuthell on a NeoPiagetian theory related to ICT, provisionally titled Cybernetic Developmental Theory.

Follow Mechelle's research at <http://elgg.net/mechelledc/weblog/>

Introduction: blogs in the classroom

According to the Perseus Developmental Corporation, 52% of all blogs are created and maintained by 13 to 19-year-olds (Twist, 2004). Yet many teachers in the U.S. still do not use blogs as a learning tool in their classrooms. Additionally, when researching the few pedagogical blogs out there, I found that, of the blogs used in classroom settings, most were geared toward gifted students.

Blogs and special needs students

Thus, I pondered how blogs could be used by students with special needs. What I found was that blogging can be a tool that promotes autonomy in the classroom empowering students to take ownership of their own learning process. Additionally, the medium of blogs also allows students to share their knowledge in a publishable format which in turn may teach their online audience. Now more than ever, the audience can influence and inspire young authors, thereby scaffolding students' writing abilities as their skills evolve. Hence, blogging can be very Vygotskian, so to speak.

Surprisingly, within our Information Age, pedagogical blogging was new to my school. Many of my peers had never heard of blogs before and much of the research on blogs comes from the U.K. When I explained to my fellow teachers, some expressed concerns about potential legal issues.

I still wanted to explore the use of blogs in the classroom, and selected a small group of 8th grade students (i.e. age 14). To start with, the girls and I had a "refresher" discussion on internet safety. Each of the girls picked a pen name for confidentiality.

Acceptable Use Policies

Acceptable Use Policies (i.e. internet permission slips) were signed by the girls' parents at the beginning of the year. "Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) typically establish expectations for how students and faculty will use school resources, procedures they are expected to follow and consequences when expectations and procedures are violated"(Grabe & Grabe, 2001).

Currently there are no official laws, rules, or guidelines for blogging in U.S. classrooms. Therefore, we came up with some classroom guidelines.

“Preparing students to be responsible users of the internet also involves helping them learn what is safe and appropriate behaviour” (Grabe & Grabe, 2001). Each school year, I ask my students for input on the classroom rules and wanted us to share in cultivating the cyber climate as well.

Our rules included safety guidelines such as not to reveal students’ and/or teachers’ names, addresses, phone numbers, or the name of our school. Hence, we all had varied and somewhat creative pen names. Interestingly, when I asked the girls for suggestions regarding the classroom blog guidelines, I noticed a pattern among their comments. I placed these comments into the following main categories: (1) confidentiality (2) authenticity (3) respect, and (4) teamwork. Much of the discourse pertaining to blog rules took place online between the students.

The purpose of our blog

The purpose of our blog was to serve as an experimental digital platform for class discussion. Since all the participants were considered “at-risk”, addressing the social-emotional needs of my students was a part of their curriculum. We decided to use the blog to discuss various topics that concerned them. In a sense, our classroom blog served as a virtual peer support group.

I asked the girls which topics they would like to discuss on the blog and the following were their suggestions: (1) music (2) hobbies (3) self-esteem (4) parents (5) boyfriends (6) sex (7) drugs, and (8) education. The girls then voted on which topic they wanted to discuss. The topic of self-esteem was chosen. Many of the girls said they chose self-esteem because they believed that the other topics were all interconnected with self-esteem.

Prior to discussing self-esteem online we read a chapter titled Self-Image and Self-Improvement in the Life Skills Training: Promoting Health and Personal Development book by Dr. Gilbert J. Botvin. This served as a springboard for our online discussion. Additionally, I posted a blogger prompt inspired from the chapter.

It is my contention that a blogger prompt is different than a journal prompt due to its interactive nature. A blogger prompt has to encourage participants to address issues from multiple perspectives. Whereas, most journal prompts do not encourage multiple perspectives and lead to a monocular thesis, which are often as 2D as the paper it’s written on.

The outcomes

There were a total of 31 posts made relating to blog guidelines, topic choice, and self-esteem. One of the girls defined self-esteem as, “something you feel within yourself.” The girls also listed factors which they discussed as possibly contributing to one’s self-esteem. They are as follows: (1) family (2) friends (3) boys (4) race, and (5) their environment. The girls expressed themselves in their posts via direct statements and question format. Overall, the girls supported and encouraged each other via their blog postings.

A verbal interview indicated none of the girls knew what a blog was prior to our blogging project. After blogging, I administered a written survey. When all five of the girls were interviewed they all reported positive feelings with regard to blogging.

The following are some of the students' responses showing how they felt about blogging: (1) "Great, because you can express yourself however you want and people understand what you're going through"; and (2) "I felt good about blogging 'cause I can talk about stuff I'm interested in." When asked, "Do you like blogging better than journaling on paper? Why or why not?" the following responses were given: (1) "Yes, because it is much easier for me to do because typing is easier than writing"; (2) "I like both really because the subject (i.e. writing) really keeps me going"; and (3) "On the computer because I like to type, and on paper it's boring." In response to the question, "Are you planning to keep on blogging" four out of five of the students said, "yes." The student who replied, "no" said, "no, because I don't have a computer." When asked, "What did you like about blogging in English class" the following were some of the responses: (1) "I got to chat with other people and got to know what other people think"; (2) "I like it when we talk about self-esteem" and (3) "I like that we can just keep it real on our blog."

When we had an additionally class discussion about self-esteem the girls said that there were things they could say online that they wouldn't want to say aloud in the classroom. They said they didn't want to reveal such personal emotions in front of the boys in class. Concluding, they each expressed feelings of encouragement and peer support. Furthermore, all of the students showed increased motivation with regard to writing. Thus, virtual support via the blogosphere can be meaningful for students today.

References

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The international Edublog Awards 2005

By Josie Fraser

About Josie Fraser



Josie Fraser is currently working as an educational technologist at Wyggeston & Queen Elizabeth I College – a city-based 6th form (16-19) college in Leicester, England. She is also seconded to manage a multi-institutional (60,000+ students) roll-out of the Open Source learning platform Moodle (<http://moodle.org/>), and she works as a freelance consultant and speaker, mainly around emerging technologies and staff development.

Essentially, Josie's mission is to help promote the use of a wide range of technologies to support and enhance teaching and learning. She is particularly interested in how technologies can make learning more engaging, dynamic and accessible, and more student-centred.

Education as a whole has only just started to take advantage of Information Learning Technologies to support active, creative learning, so a large part of her role is concerned with change management. She also designs and run workshops, seminars, events and training programmes, and undertakes a range of consultative work.

Find out more about Josie at <http://fraser.typepad.com/about.html> , and read her blog at <http://fraser.typepad.com>.

Fear of blogging

Recent news regarding student use of web logs has not been particularly positive. Fears that students may misuse the platform or, conversely, find themselves at the mercy of evil blog trawlers, have led to institutions calling a halt to student blogging – in at least one instance, even in the student's own time. Rather than looking at how the curriculum might best address the task of supporting learners in becoming responsible, web-savvy citizens, sites such as MySpace (<http://www.myspace.com/>) and Xanga (<http://www.xanga.com/>) are, instead, being outlawed.

And it isn't just obviously recreational sites that are being blocked on school networks. Although educators, learners and researchers have been using blogs constructively for over five years now, educational web logs – edublogs – are currently being blocked at district level by school authorities (see <http://incsub.org/blog/2005/edublogs-being-blocked>). In effect, this means that despite the recognition by multiple governments of the value of e-learning (to individuals and economies), and despite an emerging body of research and numerous examples of great educational practice, web logs – which provide a simple way for educators and students to create and participate in collaborative, conversational and distributed learning communities – are being excluded from the day-to-day business of education.

The Edublog Awards

Last year saw the second international Edublog Awards, a web-based event that recognises the many diverse and imaginative ways in which web logs are being used within education, and promotes positive and creative uses of new web technologies in the classroom. Peer-nominated blogs from across the globe compete in 10 categories, these being:

- Most innovative edublogging project, service or programme.

- Best newcomer.
- Most influential post, resource or presentation.
- Best designed/most beautiful edublog.
- Best library/librarian blog.
- Best teacher blog.
- Best audio and/or visual blog.
- Best example/ case study of use of web logs within teaching and learning.
- Best group blog.
- Best individual blog.

The full list, descriptive paragraphs, and links to all the finalists can be found at the Edublog Awards site at <http://www.incsb.org/awards/> – providing a powerful example of how educators are harnessing the potential of weblog technology, and a rich snapshot of the methods and practices of the learners and educators at the forefront of educational technology today.

The results

Winners were announced at the awards event webcast, hosted by Worldbridges (<http://worldbridges.com/livewire/>) on Sunday December 18th.

The Awards

The international Edublog Awards (<http://www.incsb.org/awards/>) are an online community-based initiative designed to recognise and celebrate excellence in educational and scholarly blogging (edublogging) and promote the use of web logs to support teaching and learning.

The awards were founded by James Farmer (<http://incsub.org/>) in 2004, in response to a call by Alex Halavais (<http://alex.halavais.net/>) for an award programme in response to the under representation/recognition of educational uses and users of blogs in existing blog awards, and are currently managed by Josie Fraser (<http://fraser.typepad.com/edtechuk/>). This year's awards team were geographically based in Europe, Canada and the US.

The event is designed to achieve four things:

- Promote and publicise the positive and creative use of new web technologies and practises in the classroom and throughout both formal and informal education.
- Create an annotated archive/resource which captures the spirit and concerns of the edublogging community and exemplifies best practice.
- Recognise and reward the achievements of individual edubloggers.
- Contribute to edublogger community building and networks of practise.

You can find the full list, descriptive paragraphs, and links to all the finalists at the Edublog Awards site:

<http://incsub.org/awards/2005/the-edublog-awards-2005-shortlist/>

You can find the list of winning blogs and bloggers here:

<http://incsub.org/awards/2005/winners-announced/>

You can listen to the awards ceremony and acceptance speeches here:

<http://edtechtalk.com/node/190>

You can see the impact the awards had on the community here:

<http://www.technorati.com/search/edublog+awards>

Blogs you **must** read!

If you would like to expand your blog-reading horizons, there is no better way than to find a few bloggers whose writing you like, and then check their blogrolls – the list of blogs to which they subscribe – in order to see which blogs **they** are reading.

If they are listed in Bloglines (<http://www.bloglines.com>) you can see who else subscribes to their blog – and then explore the blogs of those subscribers!

You can get started by looking at the blogs of the Edublog award winners and, of course, the finalists – the website addresses for these are given towards the end of Josie’s article on this page.

Below are just a few of my own favourites which you might like to explore.

However, here is something to ponder.

Everyone knows that finding good information on the internet is like finding a needle in a haystack, right? In fact, it's worse than that because when you find a needle at least you know it's a needle, as opposed to something masquerading as a needle; you don't have to go looking for objective proof that it's a needle.

So why do so many “edubloggers” think that the concept of blogrolls, which are lists of blogs that subscribers to a blog subscribe to, and similar devices (such as, in effect, shared favorites) are so wonderful? →

I can see the (superficial) attraction of having many more potential sources of information, but if finding good information is like finding a needle in a haystack, what is the point of increasing the size of the haystack?

David Warlick’s 2 cents’-worth: <http://davidwarlick.com/2cents/>

But She’s a Girl: <http://www.rousette.org.uk/blog>

The E-Learning Queen: <http://elearnqueen.blogspot.com/>

Mark Berthelemy’s Connections: <http://www.berthelemy-family.org.uk/blogs/index.php?blog=5>

Stephen Downes’ OLDaily: <http://www.downes.ca/news/OLDaily.htm>

Teach42: <http://www.teach42.com/>

Weblogg-ed News: <http://www.weblogg-ed.com/>

Xplanazine: <http://www.xplanazine.com/>

Technology & Learning: <http://www.techlearning.com/blog/main/>

David Jakes:

<http://www.jakesonline.org/>

Miguel Guhlin:

<http://www.edsupport.cc/mguhlin/>

Wes Fryer:

<http://www.wesfryer.com/default.htm>

Elgg and Blogging in primary education

By Miles Berry

About Miles Berry



Miles is deputy headteacher and information systems manager at St Ives School, Haslemere (www.stiveshaslemere.com), a small day preparatory school for girls in Surrey, England, and has been teaching maths and IT in prep schools for a number of years now.

His professional interests include the use of open source software in schools, independent and collaborative learning, opportunities for the gifted and talented, and the role of knowledge management in schools.

He is a member of the British Computer Society's Education and Training Expert Panel, Becta's learning services stakeholder group, a Mirandanet fellow, and the winner of the 2006 Becta ICT in Practice award for primary teaching. He uses Elgg for his own blog at <http://elgg.net/mberry/weblog>

Why blogging?

One of the things I find most exciting about ICT is its potential for collaboration and communication. Our usual start to Year 6 ICT lessons, of designing a personal homepage, never really did this justice, as my pupils spent so long collecting together clip art and photos, that the medium took over from the message, and whilst they were reasonably pleased with the results, the content was static, and no-one else visited their pages.

This year, I decided to tackle things rather differently and jumped on the blogging bandwagon. The notion of an online journal, shared with the rest of the class, was an immediately appealing one to my pupils – they grasped the concept very quickly and could see far more value in sharing their ongoing thoughts and experiences with their class mates than the snapshot of their hobbies and interests which the old-style homepage provided.

The challenge

The first challenge was to find the right tool for the job. I wanted something that would meet each of the following criteria:

- Facilitate pupils' reflections on the breadth of their learning.
- Promote independent learning and learner voice.
- Be fairly easy to use.
- Have (at least the potential for) an elegant, non-cluttered look and feel that users can customize for themselves, without having to worry too much about design, at least initially.
- Have fine-grained access control, so that I can choose which blogs are open to which users, eg to prevent access to pupils' blogs from non-registered users, also perhaps so that pupils can choose which of their entries are available for others to read.
- Be open source, ideally running under LAMP (Linux, Apache, MySQL, PHP), so that we could host it ourselves.

About Elgg

My search eventually led me to Elgg (see <http://www.elgg.net>), which is open-source blogging software for education, but far more besides. Elgg, developed

by a team led by Dave Tosh and Ben Werdmuller is about providing the software tools for a customizable, social, 'learning landscape', and so includes personal profile, weblogging, e-portfolio, social networking and RSS tools, all packaged together as an integrated piece of open source software. The real strength of Elgg over other blogging tools is the integration of social network technology, which builds on the support for personalised learning and learner voice which blogging can promote, to allow learners to connect with others, forming online learning communities. At St Ives, we believe that education is at heart a social activity, rather than a solitary pursuit, and that sharing knowledge, ideas and problems is the key to learning, as well as fostering a sense of belonging and development. Now, we already have in place a Moodle virtual learning environment (see <http://moodle.org>), but the courses created there are very much in the control of the teachers, with pupil contributions being restricted to pre-defined activities. Elgg complements this beautifully, since here the learner is at the centre and is given control and ownership, and, at least in our approach to its use, all learning and experience is valued, not just that associated with particular online courses.

Before readers get too excited, I should admit that Elgg is still in development, and has only recently left the alpha-release stage. Whilst installation wasn't quite as stress free as for Moodle, my pupils have been quite excited about the idea of working on experimental code, and like the idea of being able to contribute to Elgg's development by spotting bugs or suggesting features. For schools not brave enough to try installation themselves, Elgg's developers have launched a hosting service at <http://curverider.co.uk>.

Elgg in practice

So, how have we used it? We started the year's ICT lessons away from Elgg, by looking at html coding, and authoring a simple web-page by writing the tags by hand using Notepad⁹.

I'd recommend this to anyone, as it's a great introduction to the technology underlying the web, produces a real "Wow!" effect when they see the code transformed into output, and concentrates the mind on using format effects only where necessary. As Elgg didn't then have an integrated html editor, it also gave the pupils some control over formatting, and would allow them to include hyperlinks in their blog.

The first lesson on Elgg itself was spent putting together their online profiles. Elgg allows the site admin to customize the profile headings and display options, which can provide an easy way to put together an online CV (resumé), or outline record of achievement. Used in this way, linking information on this page to explanatory entries in the blog or e-portfolio allows these achievements to be backed up by evidence. Our use focused more on documenting likes, dislikes, achievements and ambitions, and fitted in closely with the Personal, Social and Religious Education programme for the term.

They also had great fun designing their 'avatar' or icon which would accompany their blog posts, using the Creative Commons set over at www.stortroopers.com.

⁹ Editor's note: there is a number of good html reference websites, such as <http://www.w3schools.com/tags/default.asp>.

Evaluation

The blogging itself went very well indeed. Right from the start, I emphasised that this was their space, to write about the things that mattered to them, with the option of keeping it private or sharing entries with the rest of the class (we'd decided against opening up access to the rest of the world, because of child protection concerns). Things worked best, for the majority at least, when they were given a theme to write about, such as "First impressions of Year 6", a book review, an evaluation of a unit of work, etc, but these were only ever suggestions, and some of the most interesting entries were from those who used the blog to explore ideas of their own, or talk about experiences out of school. Here are a couple of the early ones:

"Yesterday's Drama Workshop was really fun. Chris was a really good actor and it was lovely to watch him in action. He put so much facial expression and movement in that it was very difficult to get bored, because each time he saw someone looking bored he made you all jump.

It's impossible to name my favourite scene because it was all so good. He stayed all day doing all the different classes at different times. Year 3 after break, year 4 after lunch and year 5 and 6 at the end of the day. When we had the session in the afternoon we started off by picking what sort of person we were, choosing a number between 1 and 5. I was two so I was quite poor and shy. But some people were 5, being very rich and proud and some people were 1 being very poor and shy. We then made a scene up. I was with [redacted] and [redacted] and me were shoplifters and so we worked on that. All together it was a truly enjoyable day."

"The first couple of weeks being in year 6 have been brilliant. It's great to be back with my friends after the holidays. The practice common entrance papers weren't as bad as I thought and I was very pleased with my mark.

I am really enjoying my responsibilities being house captain and science monitor. Although we haven't had a house assembly yet, green house are having fun with designing competitions, looking after the other house members and planning the house assembly.

Today we are playing in a netball tournament at Barrow Hills. It's only a fun tournament, but I'm still determined to win. I'm playing at goal attack, but as it's a versatility tournament we change positions every half time. If we win this, we will have won all the tournaments that we have ever played.

These blogs are really fun and I will always try to keep it up to date."

I was particularly pleased that they'd taken on the idea that there's more to blogging than simply recounting events, and that some degree of reflection or analysis was called for here. I've also been pleased that a good number of the pupils have used Elgg outside of ICT lessons, mainly from home, to keep a record of things they've done both inside and outside school. A number of them have also used it as a way of highlighting particular issues to do with their school work – such as worries over entrance exams (which fall in January), concerns over particular topics, or indeed recording successes.

"I haven't done any papers yet as I am saving them for later in the holidays. So far I have done all of the English punctuation worksheets, a few chapters of MEP and some of the mini tests for science (the ones in the purple book), also the test on the meanings. I have stopped until the 27th now so that I can have Christmas Eve, Christmas day and Boxing day off. I'm not finding it as difficult

as I thought to find time to revise , but now that I am in the New Forest, it is very easy to get distracted by dog walking, bike rides, shopping etc. I have had to force myself to stay inside for at least an hour each day to do a bit of each subject.”

It was also great to see the enthusiasm they’d shown for commenting on one another’s blog entries, with one girl in particular making an effort to respond to everyone else’s posts.

Of course, many of these comments were of the ‘me too’ nature, but even these helped the pupils realise that there was an audience interested in what they were writing.

Sharing

Elgg makes it easy for my pupils to store their work online, in a secure environment, so they can get to files and folders from home or school. Because of Elgg’s social model of learning, whilst they can make files private, or shared just with their teacher or their group, Elgg encourages them to share their work with the rest of the community, with all the opportunities for collaborative learning, voice, and writing for an audience that this implies.

Image files can be embedded straight into blog posts, to help illustrate entries, and make better use of the vast number of digital photos we store on the fileserver.

Podcasting

We’ve also experimented with rudimentary podcasting, using the open source program Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>) to record and edit audio, such as Speech and Drama pieces, and then uploading these to share via Elgg. To be fair, a crowded computer room doesn’t make for an ideal recording studio, but I can see huge potential for this for our more auditory learners. We’ve also explored Elgg’s customizable themes, but getting to grips with this is, at the moment, a little bit too ambitious for Year 6; that said, my pupils have welcomed the opportunity to experiment.

Tagging

As users add files and posts into Elgg, they add keyword tags; the system then suggests other posts or files with the same or similar tags, connecting learners with other with shared interests. This could go a long way to meeting Ruth Kelly’s ambitions for personal learning spaces, which “will be more than simply a storage place – a digital space that is personalised, that remembers what the learner is interested in and suggests relevant web sites, or alerts them to courses and learning opportunities that fit their needs.”

Friends

There are tools for setting up lists of ‘friends’, whose blogs you’ll follow, and then using a Friend of a Friend (FOAF) system to locate other blogs that you might be interested in. Similarly it’s possible for users to create their own community blogs, which would allow those with a shared hobby or studying a particular course to share their experiences and insights more effectively. We haven’t made much use of these ourselves, but it’s easy to imagine them working very well in a larger Elgg installation, shared between more than one school, such as at LA or RBC level. The Elgg developers themselves are interested in exploring Elgg’s use to support inter-school collaboration or twinning.

Next steps

Although we use Elgg quite happily alongside Moodle, it's possible to imagine doing lots of e-learning via Elgg rather than a more conventional VLE, with teachers using their blog and e-portfolio, or a shared class blog, to post lesson notes and resource links, or to initiate discussions, and pupils responding either via comments or through their own blog. There's a team in New Zealand working on Elgg-Moodle integration which will soon provide direct links between Moodle courses and a learner's Elgg space, There's also support for aggregated RSS feeds from Moodle forums, Flickr streams, del.icio.us bookmarks or elsewhere.

Well, where next? We plan to carry on using Elgg over the course of the year, as it's such a good way of promoting learner autonomy and voice, and I hope my pupils will want to keep their blogs and e-portfolios going when they move on to their next schools. Rather than opening up access to their blogs, I'd like to include some of the posts anonymously on the school website, to give the pupils that sense of writing for a wider audience. I'd be very excited to see my colleagues, and my pupils' parents, setting up their own blogs, with Elgg facilitating an extended learning community around the school. I'd love to explore some sort of collaboration with other schools, and building links between my pupils' learning and that of other pupils, but we haven't really got our heads round how to deal with child protection in a wider context – anonymity would be worth exploring, but ownership has been important for us; perhaps Shibboleth¹⁰ federated authentication will allay some of our concerns. Integration with Moodle will be interesting to follow, and I hope both projects will continue their development side by side.

I'm sure that software like Elgg has a huge amount to offer to schools, because it acknowledges the crucial social dimension of education, and makes the computers a tool for communicating knowledge, experiences and problems between people, rather than merely serving up pre-packaged content; in short, it's personalized learning with the person at the centre.

Miles has asked for his contribution to be published under creative commons attribution, non-commercial, share-alike terms (see <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/>)

¹⁰ See http://www.becta.org.uk/corporate/press_out.cfm?id=4934 for further information.

Using blogs in school

By Terry Freedman

Pitfalls

There are some pitfalls ahead if you decide to approach blogging in a genuine way. Blogging is both a way to publish stuff very quickly, and to comment on other people's views very quickly. Like any conversation, you can't predict the direction it will take. And also, like any conversation, other people will be mentioned and referred to as a matter of course.

Viewpoints

So, the first thing you need to know and be prepared for is that students will come across and be exposed to points of view that may lie outside their usual circle of friends, family and acquaintances. They need strategies and tools to help them make sense of these new, perhaps "heretical", thoughts. In other words, they need to be able to start to evaluate information as to its plausibility and accuracy. How fortunate that these are precisely two of the skills that the UK National Curriculum, and other curricula around the world, require students to possess!

Genuine blogging also entails expressing views. You will need to decide whether you wish to take the risk, because there is a chance that they will say detrimental things about other students, teachers and the school.

Rules

You will need a set of rules to which everyone adheres. For example, using a blog to launch a personal attack on someone is not only potentially libellous, but even potentially criminal. Even if it is neither of those things, it could amount to cyberbullying, which is a nasty and irresponsible use of the medium. As for complaining about the school, it may be diplomatic to keep such conversations private, ie not accessible to the general public. After all, all families have arguments, but that's no reason to make it a spectator sport!

In my experience, however, the most hardline thought police come in the guise of teachers of English. These people (rightly) believe that the English language is to be cherished and respected, but sometimes seem to lose sight of the fact that the whole point of language is to facilitate communication.

Now, when I am reading a book or a newspaper article and discover a misspelling or the incorrect use of an apostrophe, I get slightly apoplectic. But as far as I am concerned, that kind of thing in blogs (and, for that matter, emails and discussion forums) not only doesn't detract from the message, but in a strange way enhances it. It conveys an air of urgency: that it was far more important to get the message out quickly than to worry about niceties like spelling!

Yet another thing which will be likely to upset the guardians of English is the fact that it is OK, in this context, to publish half-formed thoughts, ie the equivalent of thinking aloud. That is, the usual process of drafting and redrafting before publication may be swept aside as the thoughts are refined publicly, with the assistance of other people and their comments.

And why not? Web 2.0 is all about collaboration, which is exactly what this is.

But of course, the caveat is that students also know when such cavalier attitudes are not appropriate. Spelling and grammatical errors in an interview-

seeking email (increasingly common these days) is unlikely to guarantee success, whilst including half-formed thoughts in an exam situation has tended not to be recommended as a strategy.

Commenting on blogs

As for commenting, I would suggest that bloggers should make it both possible and easy for people to comment on their blogs, in order to encourage the online conversation. Unfortunately, though, some people's conduct is such that it's necessary to either moderate comments before they go live, or have some kind of registration system that people have to go through before being permitted to make comments (though this isn't foolproof).

The corollary of this, of course, is to ask would-be commenters to make comments which are both polite and useful. For example, simply saying "You are wrong", is a pretty pointless exercise because it does nothing to move the argument on.

A good rule of thumb, not just for blogging but for any online activity, is: if it's not acceptable in the physical world, then it's not acceptable in the virtual one.

Further reading

<http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art1204.asp>.

<http://weblogtoolscollection.com/archives/2004/08/02/blog-comment-etiquette/>.

<http://blogs.tedneward.com/2005/08/27/Comment+Etiquette.aspx>.

Thinking about creativity... Thinking about blogs!

By Peter Ford

About Peter Ford



Peter Ford is a teacher and educational consultant based in Nottingham in the UK. He specialises in helping schools and universities harness the potential of internet technologies to enhance teaching and learning in the classroom and beyond.

Peter has used web logs extensively with students since 2000 and is a leading exponent of their use in educational settings. His personal weblog can be found at <http://www.fordlog.com>

Creativity

If we were asked to list our creative heroes, it is probable that we would include many outstanding individuals whose creative endeavours have positively impacted our lives in some way. These exceptional individuals have operated with originality, adding value to society with their works and ideas.

My list would include people such as Christian Barnard, a heart transplant surgeon (http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/christian_barnard.htm); Michael Morpurgo, an author (<http://www.michaelmorpurgo.com/>); Taylor Mali, a poet (<http://www.taylormali.com/>); Tim Berners-Lee, a scientist (<http://dig.csail.mit.edu/breadcrumbs/blog/4>); Sarah Jane Szikora, an artist (<http://www.sarah-jane-szikora.com/>); and more controversially, Wayne Rooney, a footballer (<http://www.manutd.com/bio/bio.sps?iBiographyID=6977>).

The creativity that we reserve for such exceptional people has been described as 'Big C' creativity. As teachers, however, we are in the business of developing the day-to-day creative potential of all our individual students. The promotion of 'little c' creativity in our schools may not win international acclaim and recognition but it will ensure that our students are able to adopt a creative approach to 21st century life and adapt effectively to the striking changes taking place across the economic, political, social and technological landscapes of society.

Much helpful advice continues to be written about creativity and our students. The emphasis in some of the literature is on the pedagogy of 'drawing out' the creativity of students across the curriculum, while other works highlight the need to 'tap into' the creativity that students are already producing outside the school environment, particularly in their embrace of new technologies. These approaches to creativity are of course not mutually exclusive and both have, in my view, the same crucial common denominator for success – the creative and innovative teacher.

Teachers who wish to promote creativity in the lives of their pupils need to be able to model and share the range of creative experiences from their own lives – as individuals working in communities which are shaped by engagement in, and resistance to, the wider social, economic, cultural and political arenas in which education takes place¹¹.

As teachers, we have a duty to be creative and innovative in the classroom. Of course every lesson is not characterised by invention. We are busy people,

¹¹ <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/education/contact/academicstaff/LovelessA.htm>

doing our best not to drown in a sea of top-down prescription, proscription and conscription. Often our ideas are derived from other sources such as schemes of works, textbooks or from our tried-and-tested materials gathered over the years. There is nothing wrong with that if it is coupled with an occasional foray, when we can, into avenues of fresh ideas, approaches and invention. If teachers are able to innovate from time to time and then share with others what they have done, then effective ideas can spread. It is this sort of grass-roots innovation that moves the teaching profession on.

The creative teacher is more than just an innovative practitioner though. To be a catalyst for creativity then we must also be willing to share from our own experiences of creativity in action in our own lives. Skills and knowledge that underpin many creative processes need undoubtedly to be taught but there is also a creative element of subjects that is more 'caught' than taught. In short we must practice what we preach!

Now the blogging bit: a challenge!

If you agree with the idea of the occasionally-innovative teacher, let me point you in the direction of creating a blog as a potentially creative tool in your hands and a platform for sharing your attempts at innovation. If creativity is just not your thing in teaching then a blog will simply frustrate and waste your time. You have been warned!

Should you decide to accept this challenge then you will create a blog for your own use as an educator. You will evaluate it as a way of sharing ideas and modelling personal creativity. You will consider how a blog could be used with students and trial one activity with some students. You can work at your own pace.

The technical skills required for creating and using a blog are similar to that required for writing and sending an email. The mechanics can be mastered reasonably quickly. Using a blog, however, to model creativity, to share ideas and to impact teaching and learning depends almost wholly on the creative vision of the teacher.

For that reason this challenge covers only the basic mechanics of blogging and relies heavily on teachers to adapt the use of blogs to their own circumstances. You can read about how others have used blogs in the case studies in this booklet. You can read of my experiences at <http://ford.naaceblogs.org/12/>. You will have your own creative ideas though and it is these that will fuel the success of your blogging

If after completing the challenge, you decide that blogging is a totally inappropriate educational tool, you will at least, be able to make that assertion from the authority of practical experience. Most critics of blogging do not have that luxury.

The blogging basics

Go to www.edublogs.org and figure out how to create your own blog. The process is quite simple and involves filling a box like the one pictured below.



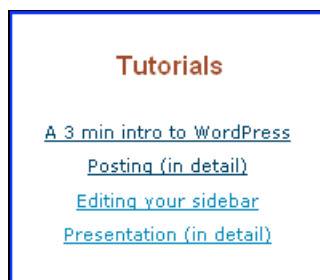
Create your edublog

Choose a username:

Name your blog:

Pop in your email:

You will automatically be sent an email with your login details. While you are waiting for your email to arrive, click on the 'A 3 min intro to WordPress' link in the Tutorials section (see below). This will give you an on-screen tutorial of the main features of the blog. After watching this overview you should be equipped to log in to your blog and produce your first piece of writing.



Your first piece of writing should include the following text: "I am undertaking a trial of this blog to see how it could be used creatively in education."

When you have posted it, give yourself a pat on the back and reflect on the fact that all the hype you have heard about blogs boils down to writing in a box and pressing a button to publish it! That simplicity in the creative hands of teachers and students is a powerful tool for teaching and learning.

Feel free at this point to explore some of the other features of the blog. See what you can find out and realise that this is how the majority of our students work when getting to grips with new software.

Now it's over to you ...

This is where the blogging tool fades into the background and your creativity comes to the fore.

- Write a post about a subject that is personally important to you.
- Add a suitable picture and some hyperlinks to related websites.
- Write a post about what you consider to be the most creative or innovative professional experience you have had in the classroom.

When you have completed these posts:

1. Email the weblog address (URL) of your blog to someone you know and ask them to comment on your blog by pressing the comment button on a post they want to respond to.
2. Surf to my personal weblog at <http://www.fordlog.com> and leave a comment with your weblog address. I'll respond!

3. Make sure you read your comments and respond. Think about how it feels to read what people are saying about your blog.

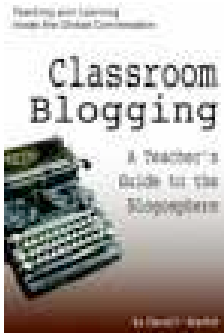
Now it's over to you and your students...

While you await your comments, think about an activity with students that your blog could be used for. Hopefully earlier activities and the reading of some case studies will have started your creative brain ticking over. Here are some guidelines for the first activity:

- Keep the activity simple and manageable.
- Plan and test your idea.
- Implement your idea with a smile on your face in the expectation that, Murphy willing, it will be a great success ;-)
- Describe and evaluate the activity on your blog so others can be inspired or warned of potential pitfalls.

When you have completed all these sections then you will be in an excellent position to decide whether blogging has a part to play in your creative profile. Remember as well to include this piece of action research on your CV (resumé)!

Book Review: Classroom Blogging: A Teacher's Guide to the Blogosphere



Reviewed by Terry Freedman

Classroom Blogging: A teacher's guide to the blogosphere, David F. Warlick, ISBN: 1-4116-2903-5.

To buy this from either the USA or UK, go to the reviews section of the ICT in Education website (<http://www.ictineducation.org>) and click on the appropriate link.

The education world seems, at least in the UK at the moment, to be divided into two groups: those who have heard of blogging, and those (the larger group) who haven't. The first group is divided into two groups: those who use it in some form with their pupils, and those (again, the larger group), who don't.

I haven't done the research on this, but from conversations and reading my guess is that teachers don't tend to incorporate blogging into their classroom practice either because they don't know how they could do so and still meet the requirements of the curriculum, or simply because it all seems a little too technical and arduous. If so, this book could be the answer.

Most people approach blogging for the first time in the same way, and with the same trepidation, as in the days when swimming instruction consisted of being pushed in the deep end and told to sink or swim! So it's quite nice to see that Warlick provides both a short history of blogging and what he calls an anatomy of a blog, in which he explains what all the various elements are. Like the rest of the book, it is pretty readable. For example, reading this I was able to understand, for the first time, what a trackback is.

The title of the book is slightly misleading in the sense of underselling itself, because the book also covers, in brief, other avenues of expression such as wikis. That's a useful inclusion because it goes some way towards enabling teachers to select the best tool for the job.

The technical sections are very readable, such as the information about RSS.

My only criticisms of the book are as follows. Firstly, there is quite a long section on how to use Blogmeister. Now, that's fair enough, in a way: Blogmeister is a free classroom blogging resource written by the author and available from his website, <http://landmark-project.com>; so it's understandable that he should wish to write about his own product in his own book. However, and here's where the second criticism comes in, the section on what you can use blogs for is great – but far too short! So, the upshot is that, for me at least, it would be better if the Blogmeister bit was cut, and the application suggestions expanded.

Nevertheless, on the whole this is good value for money: readable, comprehensive, inexpensive – and doesn't weigh too much either!

Book Review: **New Tools for Learning**



Reviewed by Terry Freedman

New Tools for Learning: Accelerated learning meets ICT, John Davitt, ISBN: 1-85539-131-7.

To buy this from either the USA or UK, go to the reviews section of the ICT in Education website (<http://www.ictineducation.org>) and click on the appropriate link.

You may be surprised if you look in the index of this book: you won't find any mention of blogging, podcasting or wiki-ing. But on reflection that is not so surprising at all, because the book is about teaching and learning, not technology as such.

Indeed, as Derek Wise says in one of the quotations liberally sprinkled throughout the book:

The book has a number of strengths, not the least of which is to challenge the reader in a non-threatening way. The author's approach in this regard can best be exemplified by his advice to anyone setting up an intranet or similar:

"... don't mention intranets unless it's going to help understanding or development. Call it a shared area ... descriptive but low threat."

The book contains good ideas for classroom activities and in-service training. As far as the former is concerned, I should have liked to have seen more step-by-step guidance in some areas, such as setting up a radio station. The elements you need are clearly explained, though not necessarily how to manage the process.

Another strength of the book is that it doesn't insist on using the latest software or hardware in order to achieve something. Indeed, Davitt states that version 4 of Flash was probably the best developed so far in terms of usefulness in the classroom, whilst Microsoft Word is too feature-rich for educational purposes. I especially liked the section on how to put an overhead projector to good use.

The book focuses on different learning styles, visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. What educationalists need to be able to do, if they are serious about addressing the needs of students with different learning styles, is to take new developments, such as wikis, and see how they might fit into the VAK framework. Davitt shows how to think about these issues, and provides a particularly useful table which relates intelligence type to software tools and types of activity.

Phrases like "... much of what it foretells will come to pass" lend the book an unfortunate air of superiority which, having read other work by Davitt, and seen his presentations, I am sure was not intended, and the sideswipe at the UK's inspection body Ofsted ignores the fact that in dire schools the inspector may have been the only person likely to improve learning. Nevertheless, it's a good resource which, to a large extent, is future-proof.

Diary of a Potential Podcasting Junkie

By Chris Smith

About Chris Smith



Chris Smith runs the massive Shambles website from Thailand – so large, in fact, that whenever I’m commissioned to write an article on a subject, Chris usually has at least a page dedicated to it!

Chris has worked in education for over 35 years. After teaching in the UK for about 8 years, he took up a post with the English Schools Foundation in Hong King, where he stayed until 2002 having taught in 16 schools, with a total of 800 teachers and 12,000 students.

In 2002 he moved to Thailand and set up a consultancy designed to offer support to International Schools across S.E. Asia, especially in the area of “ICT Across the Curriculum.

His services include ‘up-front’ work in schools with administrators, senior management, teachers, students and parents.

You can see Chris’s e-Portfolio at www.shambles.net/csmith.

The beginnings...

Working briefly in an International School in Hong Kong allowed me to buy a newly released video iPod. I’m not sure why I purchased this new one as I already had a regular (yet old) iPod that holds my 5,000 song collection and still has lots of free disk space. But the lure of an iPod that could also show video could not be resisted and I parted with my dollars for my ‘toys for boys’ purchase.

My first technical challenge (easy) was to upgrade my version of iTunes, the free software from Apple, running on my Windows XP laptop. This version of iTunes now also works as a podcast aggregator and organises all the programmes downloaded from the internet before they are sucked into the iPod.

Finding good podcasts

I was now ready to start looking around for podcasts that had some relevance to education, however tentative. There is a lot of ‘hype’ with the term “podcasting” but it is in fact not much more than the ability to produce audio/video mp3/mp4 files to then be downloaded from the internet and played either directly on your computer or on a portable player. One of the important extensions to this technology is the ability of the software (aggregator) to automatically check online for new programmes and download them without requiring your active involvement.

Some users are suggesting that podcasting is simply a resurrection of the ideas of the old ‘ham’ or ‘short wave’ radio hobbyists. I’m inclined to agree with them but with the caveat that the ‘broadcasts’ can now be portable in a device in your pocket to be listened to when you wanted to rather than when transmitted. I suddenly have this mental image of all the students on the school bus all plugging in their Japanese earrings (headphones) and listening to homework assignments on the way home from their portable players, I bet the driver would appreciate that – but I digress.

The first podcast I found, using the Directory at Yahoo <http://podcasts.yahoo.com/>, was TWiT (This Week in Technology), a sixty minute informal roundtable discussion of the latest trends in digital technology

from a group of USA ICT innovators; this is audio, not video. The informal style was a little disconcerting at first but each programme has resulted in gems that are relevant to my work in ICT in Education and has forced me to keep a notebook and pen close by to make notes as I listen. (there is still a place for the old technology!)

This subscription was quickly followed by others to, for example, 'Learning and Teaching in Scotland', 'IT Conversations', Naace, 'Daily SearchCast' and Comedy365... but all audio. With no video yet in sight I needed to find something to look at on my 4x6cm screen in order to justify my original expenditure.

Using a number of different podcast directories, I searched and subscribed to podcasts (VideoBlogs) offering video, which included TILT, DL.TV and Diggation. First impressions were that the video did not really help much, the programmes could generally be listened to without looking at the screen which was often just displaying a 'talking head'. One additional disadvantage is that these particular files were very large and took an age to download.

Probably my most valuable introduction to multimedia education podcast opportunities was TILT, (Teaching Improving Learning with Technology), produced by Danny Mass out of the USA. There are not many programmes available and the quality is variable but what Danny does illustrate are some of the ways that this media could be used in teaching and learning: he is somewhat of a trailblazer for which I'm appreciative.

This is, of course, only half of the story: I've been looking at being the passive recipient of podcasts..... but the contribution to learning is almost certainly strongest when students are producing their own podcasts. There are several examples in the lists below: don't miss the ESL Students' work in a school in China.

Was it worth spending extra to get the video iPod rather than a cheaper audio-only mp3player? The answer today is probably no... but I'm optimistic that during 2006 I shall be changing my mind.

There are exciting times ahead, but what would be on my wish list for this week?. It would be for Becta to set up a weekly audio podcast in the same informal style as TWiT but with the content being focused on 'ICT in Education in the UK'.... and maybe thirty minutes' duration instead of the hour. Now that would be great to listen to in the car on the way to work or while sun-bathing by the pool.

Have fun!

Podcasting resources

– containing all the links of items mentioned above (and more).

List of websites with general information about podcasting, what are they and how to set them up

<http://www.shambles.net/pages/learning/ict/podcast/>.

List of podcasts related to education

<http://www.shambles.net/pages/learning/infolit/edupodcast/>.

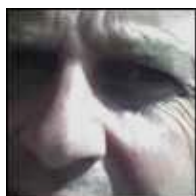
List of podcast directories

<http://www.shambles.net/pages/learning/infolit/podcastdir/>.

Podcasting

By Dai Thomas

About Dai Thomas



Dai Thomas has taught in various schools in South Wales, Sussex, England and other countries for nearly two decades. During this time he has developed a keen interest in online working and has worked on various research projects in conjunction with the research departments of Sussex University, Ultralab, Institute of Education, London University, Mirandanet research Centre, Southampton University and Mirandanet Academy, Bath Spa University. Past and current projects include curriculum development work with the NIE Colombo Sri Lanka, consultancy work for Free State education board, South Africa, researcher for evaluation of workshops for e-learning for the museum service, Becta and online e-facilitation work for The General Teaching Council (GTC)

Dai currently works as the Director of ICT at Warden Park Specialist School in West Sussex and is a Mirandanet Fellow. You can read some of his research papers and the occasional rant at my website and blog etc on <http://www.daithomas.org.uk>.

“Sir I’m on iTunes”

“Podcasting is a blanket term used to describe a collection of technologies for automatically distributing audio and video programs over the internet via a publish and subscribe model. Podcasting enables independent producers to create self-published, syndicated “radio shows,” and gives broadcast radio or television programs a new distribution method.”

<http://www.wikipedia.org> [Accessed November 2005]

I first came across the idea of delivering audio from my school website whilst undertaking research into Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) some years ago. This audio took the form of WAV or MP3 files that were simply accessed for download through my VLE system or websites. I later played with page-embedded players so that the user did not have to download any third party software if they could not play the format. But all this was before the revolution.

By “revolution” I mean the iPod generation. Millions of iPods and an associated myriad of Mp3 players from major manufacturer to unknown unbranded devices flooded the UK market.

It would not be unusual now to take a straw poll of a class at your local secondary school and realise that nearly 90% of students have some type of MP3 playing device. How could I harness this powerful technology and make it have an impact on learning and the school?

I started to deliver short radio type magazine programs which were, by and large, edited and manufactured by my students, 11- 16 year olds in a secondary school in East Sussex, England.

The programs were popular and some teaching staff members were even dusting off their computer phobia to access the traditional media through very untraditional means. One of the most popular programs was ‘Teacher’s Choice’ where teaching staff were asked to put together a selection of their favourite

music tracks. This opened up discussion between some students and staff that had never existed before.

I later discovered excellent services such as the award-winning Radio Waves <http://www.radiowaves.co.uk>. This premium service allows your school to easily record and upload an mp3 audio file to a website and then access the file through a flash-based page-embedded player. The only issue with this site was that I had to pay for it!

Autumn came and the leaves started to turn once more and I took up post at a new school. I decided I needed to produce a low-budget internet-based radio station to raise both staff and student awareness of what you could achieve using ICT but also to act as a vehicle for communication between the school and students, parents and governors.

I have been researching for some time open source-based software products that allow you to create VLE and content-driven sites. It was during one of these research periods that I started to find out more about podcasting and cheaper alternatives to the premium services offered by some companies.

The Technical Bit

I run a Linux-based web server from home which is useful to me and acts as a development platform. This server has a database (MYSQL) and also a scripting language interpreter (PHP) fully installed. This sounds technical but in fact can be very easily achieved. I use a range of LINUX-based distribution packages and some come already bundled with both MySQL and PHP. I currently use SME server <http://smeserver.sourceforge.net/HomePage>.

Once you have a fully-working web server with MySQL and PHP installed you can use a host of free open source goodies. This type of server configuration is called LAMP (Linux, Apache, MySQL, PHP). You can run a LAMP system on a windows based machine too: there is a range of systems available, but a good choice would be Xampp¹².

I also use some premium web space which has MySQL and PHP facilities. Shop around but I use Bluehost¹³ services for around £50/\$75 per year.

Whichever way you intend to run it, a LAMP system will allow you to run all sorts of open source scripts such as Moodle (Virtual Learning Environment), Joomla (Content Management System) WordPress (Blog) PHPbb(forum discussion board).

Audio blogs and podcasting

“A blog is website that contains written material, links or photos being posted all the time, usually by one individual, on a personal basis. The term is a shortened form of weblog, although the latter term has since fallen into disuse.”

<http://www.Wikipedia.org> [accessed November 2005]

Ok you can take a deep breath now the technical bit is over, but it really is not that difficult. A computer administrator or support staff could have this up and running in hours rather than days.

¹² <http://www.apachefriends.org/en/xampp-windows.html>

¹³ <http://www.bluehost.com>

Now the exciting bit! During my research forays into the deepest internet I came across an open source developer who was interested in audio blogging.

Gerrit van Aaken has produced a super tool to run a web based blog and added audio blogging capabilities. Gerrit's Loudblog is fantastic! Check it out at <http://www.loudblog.de>.

"An MP3 blog is a type of weblog in which the creator makes music files, normally in the MP3 format, available for download. They are also known as music blogs or audioblogs. MP3 blogs have become increasingly popular since the beginning of 2003. The music posted is normally hard-to-find, often has not been issued in many years, and selections are often restricted to a particular musical sub-genre or theme. Several MP3 blogs offer music in Advanced Audio Coding (AAC) or Ogg formats, as well as MP3"

<http://www.Wikipedia.org> [accessed November 2005].

The MP3-based audio files are simply uploaded using an administration interface and then published via a web page.

The system even uses a flash-based embedded player and can easily be podcast to your friendly pod-catching software. I have registered my sites with iTunes podcast directory, but anyone could access the RSS feed from the website and use this in a pod-catching piece of software such as iPodder¹⁴.

"Really Simple Syndication is a member group of the RSS family for web syndication. The specification was adapted from Dave Winer's Scripting News and Netscape's RSS 0.91 and is maintained by an advisory board at the Berkman Center for internet & Society at Harvard Law School. The commonly found versions of Really Simple Syndication are 0.9x and 2.0.x. The specification states that any RSS 0.9x is a valid RSS 2.x document, but not vice versa. Note that RSS 1.0 is an incompatible standard based on the W3C's Resource Description Framework."

<http://www.Wikipedia.org> [Accessed November 2005]

The birth

And so it was born: Warden Park Radio <http://www.wardenparkradio.net>. The site has been up and running for some months now and a first test program made. I currently have a range of students and staff editing and recording suitable program material. The school has plans to use the site for publicising events and general news etc. The students love working with this media: they all want to become radio stars!

Although I have not completed any formal research into this area it is obvious that students enjoy working in this type of media. In many respects it has a traditional feel and maybe that's also why some teaching staff can easily access this type of broadcast system.

I have seen students develop good communication skills, problem solving, and organisation of others. They technically improve their understanding of preparing materials for an audience and how to technically manipulate files in sound editing software such as Audacity. Music is also a powerful influence and our iPod generation are motivated both to use ICT to produce it and play with it. The issue of copyright using music is an obvious one but I either publish music that

¹⁴ <http://ipodder.sourceforge.net/index.php>

students have created or use royalty-free music samples, some broadband consortiums now can access huge banks of royalty free music as part of their “grid” resources.

It is hard to give any quantitative data on the positive aspects of this type of work, but the qualitative observations are evident.

Finding and subscribing to a podcast via iTunes

By Terry Freedman

1. Download and install iTunes from <http://www.apple.com/itunes/>
2. Go to the iTunes Music Store from within iTunes.
3. Click on Podcasts.
4. Browse through the category of your choice.
5. Find a podcast that seems interesting, listen to it, and, if you like it, subscribe to it.
6. iTunes will update your podcasts automatically each time you run it, or you can right-click on one and update it manually.
7. Enjoy listening to your selections!

Obtaining information about a podcast in iTunes

By Terry Freedman

1. Click on the title of the episode.
2. Right-click.
3. Select **Get info**.

Giving Students a Second Listen

By Shawn Wheeler

About Shawn Wheeler



Shawn Wheeler is the Director of IMT – Services & Training for the Peoria Unified School District in Glendale, Arizona and an adjunct instructor for Northern Arizona University. Shawn is the author of several whitepapers and podcasts. He also has written two books, including “The World Wide Web and Your School District” which has been acquired by Microsoft. He has presented at many Southwest and national conferences, including NECC and TechEd and has been a Microsoft-sponsored featured speaker. He also produces Adventures in Podcasting (http://staffweb.peoriaud.k12.az.us/Shawn_Wheeler/podcast).

His background includes serving as project manager for several wireless laptop deployments, creating custom training materials, deploying a large-scale educational web portal, and serving on several educational technology advisory boards.

The start...

The most enchanting facet of technology is the fact it is constantly changing. In October 2005, I realized the term “podcasting” was entering my brain with increasing frequency. Considering a primary function of my job is to evaluate new technology and its ramifications in education, I felt compelled to look into this term. Sitting at my computer, I “Googled” the term; within minutes I had entered a new world. An entire subculture had been born and I found myself an outsider looking inside.

One of the first sites I encountered was <http://www.podcast.net>. I picked a Genre, (Learning & Instruction – what else?), and began listening to a few shows. To be honest, I was not impressed with what I heard. However, the concept intrigued me. Could this work in our classrooms?

Podcasting in education

I began to remember the times I read through my notes as I studied for a test thinking, “I know the teacher had more to say about photosynthesis besides “Makes plants grow,” I sure wish I could have recorded the lecture”. It was at that moment the light bulb appeared above my head. Podcasting has value in education. This technology isn’t just for techno geeks with a love of their own voice. This technology would extend the learning day, change the way students review for tests and allow those students who were absent to hear the lesson. Podcasting was going to change education.

With this revelation, I found myself quickly immersed in the Adventure in Podcasting. Reading everything I could find on the web about podcasting and related tools, my excitement grew and I wanted to share this with the world. Okay, that is a bit much, but I certainly wanted to share this with the teachers in my school district.

On November 25th, I published my first podcast and its corresponding web page titled Adventures in Podcasting¹⁵. The focus of the show is an audio archive of the process involved in bringing Podcasting to my school district. I share with the listeners the triumphs, challenges and disappointments I

¹⁵ http://staffweb.peoriaud.k12.az.us/Shawn_Wheeler/podcast

encounter along the way. With any luck, those listening to the show will learn from my experiences and embark on their own adventure while implementing a positive change in the education of our children.

My first non-believer

Recently, I came across my first non-believer. I am not sure if this person truly did not believe in the concept of podcasting or simply was not interested in trying something new. Either way, it left a horrible taste in my mouth and one I needed to cleanse. Once again, I found myself in front of my computer looking for validation of my belief in podcasting. I hit the motherlode! Bearing in mind that podcasting is still in its infancy and education embraces change at glacier speed. The Education Podcast Network, (<http://www.epnweb.org>), is loaded with content from other educators just as passionate about podcasting. EPN is provided by David Warlick and The Landmark Project with a focus of bringing teachers together to share podcast content. Looking through the podcast subjects, I was not only vindicated but surprised. Topics such as History, Science and Language Arts, (in American Basketball terms), are a “Slam Dunk¹⁶”. I would have assumed the subjects Mathematics, Theatre Arts, Visual Arts and certainly Dance would not lend themselves to podcasting. Fortunately, there are educators who think “outside the box”.

I began reading the descriptions and listening to various podcasts beginning with Dan’s Math Cast... Mathematics for the Masses. Even with my Math skills, I was able to close my eyes and visualize the example questions being solved as he described the process in his podcast. His show also included a Math Problem of the Week as well as a Math Joke or Riddle. I tip my hat to Dan’s Mathcast.

Being a teacher of Technology, I felt compelled to visit Computer/Tech Skills topics on EPN. I was not surprised to see 23 podcasts listed in this subject area. However, I did have a sense of unity with fellow podcaster Brian Ferguson who hosts Brainwave. Listening to Brian’s podcast, I learned that I was not the only person who wanted to be a part of this new subculture and felt remorse for missing its birth.

My next podcast took me to Mabry Middle School and home of Podcast Central. This podcast, sponsored by Dr. Tim Tyson, features podcasts not only that he created, but ones created by his students as well. Additionally, this was the first example I had found of a student-created podcast. As if Dr. Tyson was not out far enough on the edge, Podcast Central had also published eight video podcasts or vodcasts, including one high-energy advertisement for the Physical Education department on the Frisbee. Well done Mabry Middle School.

I rounded out my visit that evening with Art Film Design hosted by David Tames. David took me on an audio tour and interview with Camila Chaves Cortes about her exhibit titled Postcards from the Big Dig on display at the Paul Dietrich Gallery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Anyone can walk through a gallery and enjoy works of art; however, few of us ever have an opportunity to hear about the artist’s inspiration for a particular piece. With a little imagination, I could see the images as they were discussed. I wonder what his show would sound like in the Pompidou.

¹⁶ I am assured by my American colleagues that this means that the topics cited are obvious candidates for podcasting. Thanks to Peggy George and Shawn Wheeler for explaining it!

What the students said

Feeling particularly pleased with this new knowledge, it was time to talk to the people who would benefit most from podcasting. I began with my 18-year old student intern; I asked Brandon his thoughts on podcasting. Just as I suspected, he said it was a great idea and would gladly listen to his teachers' lectures again. He was however, disappointed when I told him it would be difficult if not impossible to have podcasting fully implemented in his high school before he graduates, (three months from now).

I was so pleased with his responses, I asked him if he would be willing to interview some of his classmates about the topic of podcasting. Armed with my Olympus Digital Recorder, Brandon became my number one reporter.

The following day, he entered my office with 7 minutes of audio from his classmates expressing why they thought podcasting was a great idea. Some of their reasons include:

- Listen to past lectures / review for tests.
- Improve grades.
- Audio would allow better understanding than reading the PowerPoint slides or worksheets.
- Remediation or clarification.
- Second chance to hear the information due to the speed the teacher speaks or students inability to keep up while taking notes.
- When absent, audio would be better than trying to decipher a classmates notes.
- It's mobile and on demand.

As educators, we continually strive to improve our teaching for the benefit of our students. When we speak to our classes, we expect them to listen and learn. We should also keep in mind this: if it was important enough to say to the class, it is important enough for the class to hear it again. Podcasting gives the class that opportunity.

Podcasting: a review of recording devices

By Terry Freedman

Introduction

If, like me, you like to read magazine reviews before buying equipment, you're in for some disappointment as far as podcast recording is concerned. The reason is that, whilst a lot of magazines review MP3 devices for their **playing** functionality, I haven't seen anything that deals with the recording side of things beyond mentioning that they have a voice or radio recording feature. So, this review tries to fill the gap!

Rather than try to review every device or manufacturer available, I decided to look at what I thought would be a representative sample. Unbeknownst to the companies concerned, I was not only interested in the device per se, but in the way I was dealt with. The way I look at it is this: if, as an educator, I'm going to be spending a substantial amount of money that could be spent on textbooks or software or whatever, I wanted to know that I am valued.

Another aspect of this side of things is how long it takes to contact someone who can make proper decisions or give support. To be honest, that aspect didn't quite pan out as I'd hoped because I was dealing mostly with the companies' PR departments rather than with the companies themselves. Still, on the grounds that you can, at least to some extent, judge a company by the conduct of its representatives, perhaps this approach wasn't that bad after all. In the event, three of the four companies were very helpful, though Apple was a bit slow due to the small size of its PR team and the fact that I contacted them during the lead-up to an important product launch!

Products for review

The companies whose products I wished to review were:

- Apple.
- iRiver.
- Creative.
- Olympus.

So, how did the products shape up?

The results

Apple iPod Product reviewed: iPod 20GB

There are two big things going for the iPod. First, it looks fantastic. Second, there is no shortage of accessories for it.

But the question is, how useful is it for educational podcasting?

Now, I had some frustrating experiences with the iPod. I borrowed one whilst at Alan November's conference in the USA (see <http://www.novemberlearning.com/Default.aspx?tabid=29> for details of the 2006 conference). Unfortunately, something kept going wrong, and it had to keep being reset. Fortunately, there was an Apple person on hand to do it, but I couldn't help but think how frustrating that would have been had I been back at the ranch. Still, things do go wrong, so I thought I would try again once back in the UK.

The iPod required a Belkin microphone to turn it into a recording device. When you plug this into the appropriate socket on the top of the iPod, the Record menu appears on the screen.

So, what was it like to use? I realise that this is “politically incorrect”, as it were, but I actually found the controls quite fiddly. Probably that’s something which would right itself after a while.

More importantly, perhaps, what was the quality of recorded sound like?

Well, I have to say that it was quite superb. It was the best device I tried out for recording talks. Firstly, it was easy: you just stand the thing up on the desk and away you go. On playback there was no detectable background noise or hiss, which reflects quite well on the Belkin accessory.

i-River H320

The device worked straight out of the box and did not require any accessories, although as with the Olympus you do get a much better quality of recording the better the quality of the microphone.

Like the iPod, the i-River is robust enough to stand on a desk or table without toppling over in the middle of recording!

The results were very good, especially in an interview situation, but I found that the quality of the recording I made of a talk left something to be desired, no doubt because I was only using the built-in microphone. It was easy enough to amplify the volume with Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>) however.

Again, I found the menu system somewhat arcane. Perhaps this is merely a sign of aging!

Olympus WS 200

This was the least expensive of all the products reviewed here, and with good reason: it is not a fully-fledged mp3 player (although it does have limited capabilities in that direction), but a digital dictation machine.


So what has this product got going for it? It doesn’t have the sexy look and feel of an iPod or an i-River. It doesn’t have a huge capacity for ones music collection. It doesn’t come with distinctive earpieces. All of which, in a school context, add up to one huge advantage because it is not the sort of product, dare I say it, that any self-respecting criminal would steal. But if they do, it’s not the end of the world because it was less than half the price of each of the others.

But what about the sound quality? It was definitely not as good as either the iPod or the i-River, but – and this is important – if you take the view that a difference is only a difference if it makes a difference then the sound quality is perfectly acceptable. (If you listen to my podcast about the mp3 revolution you will be able to judge for yourself, because it was recorded on the Olympus using nothing more than the built-in microphone.

To be fair, the quality of recording in a lecture theatre wasn’t much to write home about. It was sort of OK, but that could have a lot to do with the quality of the microphone, which is serviceable but not brilliant.

However, I was so impressed with it that I bought myself one, and in conjunction with a decent microphone the quality is very good indeed. If you listen to my introductory podcast (Go to <http://www.ictineducation.org> and then



click on this icon: , and are able to block out the fact that I have no pretensions to being a sound engineer, you'll see what I mean. The sound quality of the speech is very good, and that was only slightly fiddled with in Audacity to make one section slightly louder. Perhaps an even better

A very neat feature that must be mentioned is that to connect it to a computer you simply pull it apart – and you have a USB drive.

Just one slight disadvantage. In the version I bought (the 300), you have to convert the files before you can manipulate them. No problem: just download Advanced Audio Converter, which is free, from <http://www.softwaredepo.com/>.

Zen Creative

Unfortunately, the company did not have a device available at the time I asked, and said that it should be available in about 6 weeks' time. That was back in August 2005. I'm still waiting.

The bottom line

Each of these devices has their proponents. Both Leon Cych (<http://l4l.co.uk/@blog/?p=5>) and David Warlick like using the i-River, whilst David Baugh (<http://www.ipodined.org/>) and countless others swear by the iPod.

I think the answer is as follows: for general use in the classroom and on school trips etc, buy several Olympuses – there are some very inexpensive ones available these days. But as a great believer in exposing both students and staff to great-looking and high quality equipment, in order to really inspire them and make them feel special, and to be able to push the boat out, I would say why not spend a packet on an iPod, an i-River and a shed-load of accessories? They need the opportunity to make informed choices – and you need more toys to play with!

Other useful websites

Create an RSS feed for your podcast

Go to <http://www.rss-info.com> and download RSS Editor. It's free, and it's pretty intuitive to use.

Alternatively, if you use a podcast production program, it may already have a built-in feed creator and editor.

You will also need to upload your podcast to a server on the internet. Again, if you use a podcasting program it will probably have a built-in FTP (file transfer protocol) facility. Otherwise you can find free ones on the web.

In order to use the FTP program, you will need to know the following:

- The ftp address of your website.
- The name and location of the folder into which you wish to store your podcasts.
- Your user name.
- Your password.

Caution: podcasts can take up a lot of room on your server.

List your podcast – and find others'

<http://www.feedburner.com/fb/a/home>.

<http://www.podcastingnews.com>.

<http://epnweb.org/>.

<http://podcasts.yahoo.com/>.

<http://www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts/>.

<http://www.podcastalley.com/>.

<http://www.podcastpickle.com/users/>.

<http://www.podcast.net>.

Highly recommended by S. Wheeler:

<http://www.podcasting-tools.com/>

Podcasting and wikis

By Ewan McIntosh

About Ewan McIntosh, Teacher, Blogger and Podcaster



A podcasting blogger in Scottish education, Ewan launched the first open-comment open-posting school blogs in the UK and first schools podcast in Europe. He is currently the Development Officer for the Modern Languages Virtual Environment, a pilot programme for the Scottish Schools Digital Network.

Ewan also speaks internationally about using Web 2.0 tools in education and educational management, and has played a significant role in raising the number of UK schools using these technologies.

His blog, <http://edu.blogs.com>, is updated daily with thoughts and webcasts of presentations and seminars.

Podcasting for an audience

Blogs, podcasts and wikis are what we refer to as ‘social software’ and this is a very revealing piece of jargon. For in the current UK classroom socialising is positively discouraged. I began to encourage socialising offline, in the classroom, and online, on blogs and podcasts, and saw a monumental improvement in students’ work and grades.

The reasons for the best work were clear: students were not doing their work for me, for their parents or even for themselves. I couldn’t expect every student to have an innate desire to learn, could I? No, they were doing it “for their public”. My students had about 30,000 different readers and 11,000 listeners hanging on their every word, subscribed free of charge to our school blogs and podcast, waiting to see what had happened on the latest school trip or charity day at school.

Podcasting is where an individual can create an audio file – in school we call it a radio show – on their computer. They place it on a blog and instantly the show’s subscribers receive the latest edition. It’s as simple as that. I’m surprised that more schools weren’t doing it when we launched Europe’s first schools podcast in collaboration with students in a Polish partner school. That was in May 2005, when podcasting was six months old. Now there are numerous schools realising the potential of students who weren’t performing as well as they could have done. And the only differences? Firstly, students were using a computer or MP3 recorder to capture their thoughts. It’s tech and it’s fun. Secondly, they were realising very quickly, from their web statistics and comments left on their blogs, that large numbers of people were listening to their work. On a regular basis. They now had an audience to keep happy, to keep entertained, to keep interested. Making interesting and entertaining copy is more than we ask in the curriculum of speaking tests and assessments.

Why are social technologies such a Big Deal?

I challenge anyone to reckon that blogging, podcasting and wikis are not a big deal. In my experience it’s only those who don’t know (and some who, with ignorant pride, refuse to ever learn) that would even bother to question that. It’s not that I or any other blogger have some kind of cause to fight, a cause from which we stand to gain.

It’s just that these social technologies work for something in learning.

And lots of people are using them.

Yes, there are only 30 million public blogs, the same again in private ones and a tiny proportion of internet users have a Flickr photo-sharing account. But there's a new blog every minute and many more are reading them and looking at the pictures. These are the early days at the beginning of the renaissance. In fifty years I hope that our kids wonder what all the fuss was about – these tools will be just another part of the daily toolkit, and might even be obsolete.

So why should teachers look up from their textbooks and take note of blogs and podcasts? The reason these social technologies work is because they are social. But they are also changing the way that we socialise.

A changing-changed social world

These technologies cater for a need until now unfulfilled by the on-off yes-no 1-0 binary of technology. They are allowing us to socialise in a different way. Where technology has thus far helped us in a changing world, social software tools are being proactive in helping us work, rest and play the way we want to and not, for the first time, the way that the rest of society wants or expects us to behave. Nowadays, children and teachers have less time to socialise than before and taking breaks from learning is frowned upon.

So where are we getting our social input? The answer: learners are getting our social input on mobile phone messaging, MSN chat, on multiplayer games (World of Warcraft <http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/lowbw.html>), on blogs (and on leaving comments on Flickr <http://www.flickr.com/> : I've added this last bit since discovering the friends you can make through a mutual passion for taking pics of Paris).

Independent Digital Lifestyles

This digital lifestyle is just what I am living this year as a home and mobile worker. I use MSN (virtual) to 'chat' with colleagues over a coffee (not virtual), Skype to phone for free to friends and colleagues around the world I wouldn't have made / wouldn't have kept in touch with / wouldn't have known about, blogs to expand my thinking on hi-tech stuff and not-so-hi-tech stuff, to keep informed of my mother's life and to keep her informed of mine (there's nothing worse than having not phoned your mother in a month; blogging removes some of the shame). I use Flickr to store and share my photos with families and friends, as well as to search for like-minded souls who might be of professional benefit for me and my projects, and who I might be able to help out. Flickr and LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/>) have together helped me branch out my professional reach in no time at all. I even started an ICT Policy Strategy wiki in a totally spontaneous and natural way. This slightly awkward glove actually fits!

For some businesses and entrepreneurs blogging has meant that they no longer need to live in cities to make a living. They don't need to please people they're not interested in, either, because they can reduce their costs and do more of what they want to do. Overheads are so low/non-existent that workers are able to pursue what they feel is important: we can ignore things we find boring without losing face. Try ignoring someone in meatspace: not easy. But in a virtual world we can choose to ignore people, not give them our attention. Our attention is worth something. And so is our inattention.

Another thing that blogging has allowed individuals to do is become self-employed to a large extent. "Your people speak to my people" is not required any more. Things can be done for free, where agents would normally not allow that (they want the commission). You can solicit people for a job by leaving a

comment on their blog – subverting the middleman via interconnectivity. Hierarchy is subverted. The mobile phone takes it a stage further, making the digital subversion quicker, a quick response unit of the blogging world, if you will.

Often, in this deluge of information, the Non-Believer (not that blogging is ever some kind of personality cult) will proclaim: “I want to filter information”. In a beautifully simple exemplification Anina (<http://anina.typepad.com/>), points out that information filtering is not useful in fashion. There’s a need to see things that take you out of your comfort zone, teach you something new or point out something that needs resolved. Like white socks and sandals, man.

Why give learners a social life?

What’s wrong with classrooms, textbooks and paper-driven homework diaries and learning logs? Nothing much. But our kids think differently to the way that most of our teaching population think. Maybe if learners are so tapped into technology and the attention filtering I have mentioned this explains why so many learners have trouble paying attention in the traditional 50-minute lesson.

And if I, a teacher aged 27 who has had a computer since the age of six, has blogged since 2001 and has won two national awards for the connections my websites have made for kids is already using these tools to socialise, goodness knows what our children are going to be doing in 27 years’ time.

Finding time for knowledge and wisdom

“I never have the time”. “The internet’s just providing too much information these days”. “No-one ever knows where to start with all this information”. Common symptoms of the Non-Believer, enough to stop him or her ever starting their own blog, podcast or del.icio.us bookmarking site (<http://del.icio.us/>). But there is some truth in what these detractors say.

The internet could be seen as becoming a victim of its own success by providing a means for the masses to not only seek information but, in the past few years, to provide their own versions and interpretations of information in real time and at the click of a mouse. Information which would have been interesting in a book two years ago would now be of more interest in a blog, defunct in days or hours as it is reinterpreted by scores, hundreds or thousands of others around the globe. (This is why the concept of a blog as a portfolio of work is such a bizarre thought for me: it’s setting your work up to be reinterpreted when, with the finished products of a portfolio, you want to present, for better or for worse, a final version of your thoughts. But I digress...)

As educators we believe we work first and foremost in the knowledge industry, yet our current attitudes and beliefs of what in fact constitutes knowledge are widely out of touch with the reality of modern knowledge systems.

As Dave Weinberger noted in his article in Smart Tech’s ieMagazine Autumn 2005 (http://edu.blogs.com/edublogs/2006/01/time_for_knowle.html):

“The traditional idea of Western knowledge goes back to the Greeks. They had an intensely practical problem: When the citizens of the city spoke up in Athens’ democracy (no women, poor people or slaves need apply), how could they decide whom to believe? The craft of rhetoric was advancing. Could human judgment keep up with it? Are there ways of discerning a true opinion from a false one? What makes an opinion worthy of belief? Thus did the quest for knowledge begin.”

I, along with Weinberger, would take issue with this definition, though, based on some excellent writing in this year's Newsweek Issues 2006 (http://edu.blogs.com/edublogs/2006/01/time_for_knowle.html) that makes the salient distinction between 'knowledge' and 'wisdom'. What Dave Weinberger is describing latterly is more to do with wisdom than knowledge. I ask how much our classrooms, schools and education systems are geared up to impart wisdom. Do most teachers you know teach wisdom? Would they know how to ascertain the author, date and time written of a web page or blog post? Do they know how to use referencing tools such as Google (<http://www.google.com>) and Technorati (<http://www.technorati.com>) to work out the relative reliability of opinion? Do they know how to realize when someone with a high rating in one of these references is abusing their position? Do they know how to teach their students to think for themselves when they find someone at the end of the Long Tail, with few references, but a great point to make?

And to go back to knowledge, in our blogged and tagged world, what is knowledge? Thanks to del.icio.us and the interlinked world of the blogosphere every person has a different account of knowledge.

So what can we do with so much information, and is this the first time that we have had to cope with this onslaught of information. Is this info flux a Bad Thing?

Info Flux: a Bad Thing?

Note the question mark. Fareed Zakaria's opening piece in this year's Special Edition Newsweek (http://edu.blogs.com/edublogs/2006/01/time_for_knowle.html) does a first class job at positioning today's knowledge crisis within the context of world history. My favourite quote is from Thomas Hobbes, 1651: "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". He was describing the average life of the average human being. Those who did not have that particular life were those with knowledge, generally merchants, princes and priests.

Well, here's my take. In today's knowledge society the gap is probably growing between those who have the knowledge and those who don't, except those without the knowledge don't have to inhabit Third World countries. As Ethan Zuckerman and Rebecca MacKinnon's Global Voices project shows, the Third World is able to use web logs and podcasts to increase their knowledge and thus compete in the global knowledge economy of which we are all part. No, those who are going to chance a life that resembles Hobbes' "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, short" one are at the moment those who are choosing to ignore this information society – ad they include a scary number of our teachers.

Leapfrogging the info flux until it's safe to come out

Another (great) point made in this Newsweek story is the description of industrial revolution. Britain slogged it out, inventing everything that makes the world go round today (penicillin, phone, steam engines, TV, tarmac... and, yes, all of these were from Scottish inventors ;-)). America, then Japan, Taiwan, then Korea and then the rest of China jumped onto our bandwagon and made a killing. Britain paid for the R&D in sweat, toil and tears but the others, quite rightly, waited until it was a safe bet. France made the mistake of guarding its information (in Minitel) instead of making the Minitel public and sharing the secrets. If they had done that they would have been the inventors of the internet. Imagine if they had privatised that one...

The problem for Scottish teachers, and almost certainly for those elsewhere in Europe at the moment, is that the R&D of today is taking place in the same countries that jumped on our bandwagon. I feel we're seriously missing the boat on the information bandwagon through our education system's reluctance to adopt 'risky' (in their eyes) solutions that have potential. Meanwhile, our students are living in a vacuum of knowledge – the knowledge that really matters to them in their futures – because their elders are not actively seeking to put in the effort to make risky projects work. Like John Logie Baird, Alexander Bell, James Watt and all these other Scottish inventors who took huge risks in their projects.

This very British relationship with the computer goes back to the computer's inventor (yes, he was a Brit, too). Having made a prototype of the Difference Engine that did very little but which had obvious potential for the early 1800s, Charles Babbage needed a benefactor to test it out on a larger scale. He ended up getting the money and spending it on something he thought would be better. He didn't share this with anyone. He spent all the money and died a lonely, detested, mocked man.

If he had been able to share his knowledge with a wider community in the way that we can now someone would have left a message on his blog telling him to go with his original thought. If he wrote back and refused they would have bought the idea from him and done it themselves, saving the human race the 200 year wait, the Industrial Revolution and two World Wars. With a blog, a podcast maybe, his sources and plans bookmarked in del.icio.us, he would have been liberated, empowered, faster, better and more successful in making his project work.

And so why, when we have the tools, do teachers, Local Authorities and national authorities refuse to use and endorse them?

Recording a podcast on a computer

By Terry Freedman

What you will need

Assuming your computer has a sound card, you will need the following:

- A decent microphone. I purchased a Sony ECM-MS907 on Leon Cych's recommendation (see <http://l4l.co.uk/@blog/?p=5>). It has two settings (close-up and hall), and is battery-powered. You can get away with cheaper microphones (I used one costing less than £10/\$15), but you will notice the difference.
- Sound editing software. Audacity is free from <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>. It's a bit technical, but you don't have to learn it all, of course! I've tried podcasting software for the PC, but have found Audacity to be more flexible. For the Mac, Podcaster from Kudlian (<http://www.kudlian.net/products/podcaster/>) is supposed to be very good, as is GarageBand from Apple (<http://www.apple.com/ilife/garageband/>).
- Music software (such as GarageBand – see above) or websites: two good sources of free music released on a Creative Commons Licence are <http://freesound.iaa.upf.edu> and <http://podsafeaudio.com/>.

What if the recording level is too low?

1. Check the mike's setting.
2. In Control Panel, go to Sounds and Audio Devices Properties?Audio?Sound Recording?Volume?Advanced?1 Mic Boost, and click in the box, then on OK.
3. Find out the name of your sound card from the Audio section (see above), then enter its name in a search engine, then locate and download an updated driver for it.
4. Configure the soundcard driver via its menu and tab systems.
5. If necessary, use Audacity to amplify the volume of the completed recording.

Uses of podcasting in schools

By Terry Freedman

This is not meant to be a definitive list!

- Record lessons for students (and parents!) to access in their own time.
- Enable students to do a presentation about themselves rather than only sticking to PowerPoint!
- Create a short introduction to your school, or the course you run, for potential students to access, and to let parents know what they can expect their children to be doing – get student contributions too!
- Create a class or even a whole-school radio station.
- Enable students to submit work in the form of a podcast.
- Create audio resources for use by sight-impaired students.
- Find and use podcasts as part of project research materials.
- Use foreign language podcasts to improve linguistic skills.
- Use podcasts to get an insight into another country's culture, or another person's daily lifestyle.
- Enable students to create dynamic presentations without the complexity of digital video.
- Subscribe to various podcasts in different subjects in order to provide extra resources.
- Provide students with a different way of carrying out surveys in the local area.
- Create an audio blog of a school field trip.
- Create an enhanced podcast entitled "My summer holiday".
- Subscribe or listen to different podcasts in order to help students develop their critical faculties.
- Ask students to create a podcast to meet a real need, as part of a coursework project.

Video blogging: Terry Freedman interviews Paul Knight

About Paul Knight



"I am 36 and live near Nottingham, UK. I scraped through school with the absolute minimum. I went on to do a Youth Training Scheme which included a qualification in IT pre-internet. I've had more jobs than years worked since 16 and it was only recently I did a course in Video Production and Editing Using Final Cut Pro at my local college; I found learning about something I was actually interested in quite easy and managed to pass with flying colours.

I have been video blogging since September 2005, since I started making little funny shorts and wanted to post them on the net. I found dailymotion.com and I have posted there ever since and my popularity has grown and grown. I joined the Yahoo group for videobloggers and have made friends all over the world. I now post on dailymotion and blip.tv, and I post video also to googlevideo and the archive for prosperity.

The most expensive item for filming was my camcorder at £200. I made my own steady cam for less than £15 and have studio standard lighting which I mottled together from various spotlights and stands cobbled together from my local DIY superstore and old speaker stands, the lighting only cost around £30 including cable.

The interview

What exactly is video blogging?

That is possibly one of the hardest questions to answer, due to the individual complexities of it all. Video Blogging is quite simply **up to you**, there are no rules, although most sites you might want to use for storage don't allow pornography, racism or child abuse, which is a good thing. It's personality, creativity and reality that makes a video blog, only you can do your own stuff and that is what it's all about, really.

What's the point of it? Putting it another way, is the extra effort involved, compared with ordinary blogging or even podcasting, worth it in terms of results?

When it comes down to brass tacks, some people blog to show off, some people blog to show people where they went on holiday, others blog to keep in touch with relatives abroad. Many people blog their new baby, dog or favourite pet, but when you film it you capture so much more than words or photos, it gives your blog a new depth and there is more feeling there. There is extra effort involved, it all revolves around something called bandwidth. Basically, to videoblog easily you need a broadband connection: your video files will be big compared to photos, there is compression software out there, most come with your editing suite so try not to worry too much at this point. An example is, you take a film of you and the kids, its 5 minutes long and you captured it on a DV cam (standard digital camcorder) if you save it at its current size which is big enough to be shown on your 32" TV without looking too shabby, the size of the file will be something daft like 2GB, but then you change then size down to say 320 x 240 and then compress it down as one would compress a CD track to be played on an MP3 player. Its a bit fiddly at first, but with a little practice you should be able to save after editing, in the compressed size.

What hardware and software is needed to get started? Cutting through to the chase, is it going to cost a fortune to do it?

Nah, I do most of mine on the cheap! All you need really is a computer, the software that comes with it and if not there is free or cheap editing suites available to download from the net, a broadband connection otherwise you'll be uploading 'til next Christmas, and some kind of capture device. By this it could be a digital camera that takes video clips, a mobile phone that takes video clips, a web cam or a digital video camera (for simplicity you a camera with DV out, it really is a bit too complicated to get your old dusty VHS-c or Video 8 to upload onto your computer. And that is all you need. If you want your video to look a bit more professional, buy a cheap tripod for about £15 (\$25-30). You can then upload your finished masterpiece for free at various hosting sites around the world. Then use a free Blogger Blog found at <http://www.blogger.com> as your template for your web site, that's free too.

OK, so I can manage on the meagre amount left to me after I've paid my dues, but what about the technical aspects? In other words, will I need a degree in computer science, video production and sound engineering?

Not at all, the editing software should do a lot of that for you. Most of these editing suites are based on the linear time editing, whereby you can take you clip, edit it down to take away the bits you don't want and the drop it into the timeframe that you want it to be played back in and build up your movie like you would build a lego house, block by block. As for sound, if you want music in the background you do it in the same way, there are volume controls for sound so that you can fade in and fade out or fade up or fade down within those blocks.

Video files take up a huge amount of server space, so where would I store them

- There are 5 places I can think of off the top of my head, that you can store your videos for free forever (well at least until the site closes down) they are <http://www.dailymotion.com>
<http://www.blip.tv>
<http://www.ourmedia.com>
<http://www.youtube.com>
<http://www.archive.org>.
- Or pay for space at <http://www.dreamhost.com>.
- There is also something called google.video (<http://video.google.com/>) where you can store your video but you can't refer to it from your blog, this is just a stand-alone archive.

What sort of help/community support is available?

Absolutely loads, there are at least 5 videoblogging yahoo groups, several Google groups there is an ever growing community from mostly America but now from all over the world. We are mostly friendly and love imparting our knowledge to new starters. Most importantly, don't be afraid to ask any question of these guys and gals.

Speaking as a former school pupil, how do you think video blogging could be used in education. How do you think you might have benefited had it been around when you were at school?

Immensely. At the end of the day it's a form of communication and that is very important in my humble opinion towards a child's growth and awareness that there is more out there than just the area in which they live.

Just lately, Steven Spielberg sent 250 sets of camcorders and dvd recorders to some children in Palestine, just so they could blog. It's turned out to be a great success, and some are actually posting interesting stuff on line now. As for my own education, it was back in the dark ages when a 16 bit machine took over a whole air conditioned room and had the storage capacity of 2mb and ran on 128 ram. Video was not an option. Even when I did my City & Guilds in IT, the internet wasn't around and networking was a fairly new concept.

What 3 things do you think people need to be aware of before taking the plunge?

Because it is open to the public, it is open to public scrutiny. You will get spam. Be aware that you will use a lot of bandwidth uploading your stuff and watching other people stuff. You will make friends, lots of friends from all walks of life from all countries and cultures. That's three isn't it?

What have you personally found to be the 3 greatest benefits of video blogging?

The friends, the sense of community and the personal "People actually like my work and effort."

Are there directories of video blogs that u would recommend?

Check out <http://www.dailymotion.com> or <http://www.Blip.tv>; you will have to register with them to pass comments etc., but hey you might be inspired by these videos to do your own and show them on these sites.

Is this an idea whose time has come?

It's here now, and about time too. But people need to get over this home made video thing that is "You've been framed".¹⁷ This show was popular because you could make money off of it. In Video blogging you possibly won't get paid £250 for every clip shown. It is an art form, it's about being creative, not destructive, it's about being less pedestrian, it's about inflating your ego, it's something else to do with your computer rather than buying dvd's and holidays, downloading illegal copies of the latest blockbuster or using chat rooms.

Paul's videos may be found at <http://www.dailymotion.com/pjkproductions>.

¹⁷ <http://www.itv.com/page.asp?partid=2799>

Video blogging in schools

By Terry Freedman

Does video blogging need to be complicated? What I am about to say will probably antagonise the purist, but the equipment need not be incredibly expensive or specialised.

For example, many still digital cameras have a video mode which is perfectly adequate for video blogging – especially if you are prepared to spend time editing the results (using, for example, Microsoft Movie Maker).

Students can, in fact, use their mobile (cell) phones, although this does raise issues about the digital divide. In fact, movie-making on mobile phones has become a cult pursuit in itself, with the grainy image lending a film-noire quality to the result. A recent article¹⁸ on the internet reported on the first film festival of such movies, held in Portugal. See

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/breaking/spotlight-on-mobile-phone-movies/2006/01/31/1138590489119.html> for details.

There has also been a competition for movies made with a mobile phone – see <http://www.cellflixfestival.org/main.html> for details.

The important thing about all this is that with a bit of imagination and creativity, students should be able to make video blogs without having to use state-of-the-art equipment to do so. My own forays into the world of vide blogging (<http://www.dailymotion.com/terryfreedman>) were made with a digital still camera and recorded onto an SD card. They were edited with Movie Maker and Audacity.

Having said all that, I personally think there is less to think about with podcasting. Or, to put it another way, I think it's easier to get reasonable results with less aggravation.

So, how might video blogs be used in schools? Here are some ideas, but this is not meant to be a definitive list!

- Record lessons for students (and parents!) to access in their own time.
- Record discussions (“talking heads”) either as a course resource or as part of a student’s e-portfolio.
- Enable students to do a presentation about themselves rather than only sticking to PowerPoint!
- Create a short introduction to your school, or the course you run, for potential students to access, and to let parents know what they can expect their children to be doing – get student contributions too!
- Enable students to submit work in the form of a video.
- Find and use videos as part of project research materials.
- Use foreign language video blogs to improve linguistic skills.
- Use digital videos to get an insight into another country's culture, or another person’s daily lifestyle.

¹⁸ <http://www.smh.com.au/news/breaking/spotlight-on-mobile-phone-movies/2006/01/31/1138590489119.html>

- Provide students with a different way of carrying out surveys in the local area.
- Create a video blog of a school field trip.
- Create a digital video entitled “My summer holiday”.
- Watch different video blogs in order to help students develop their critical faculties.
- Ask students to create a digital video to meet a real need, as part of a coursework project, such as for use by a local business.

Wikis: an introduction

By Terry Freedman

What is a wiki?

Imagine a web page which you can edit right there in situ. You can add text, and even add links to pages that don't exist yet – in fact, creating the link creates the page! That, in essence, is a wiki, which takes its name from the Hawaiian word meaning “quick”.

Of course, there are limitations, such as not being able to include sophisticated graphics, or even any graphics, as a general rule. However, as a collaborative tool, it has enormous potential – such a shame, then, that its use in schools, at least in the UK, is sporadic to say the least.

So, what sort of (useful) things can you do with a wiki? The most well-known example of a wiki is Wikipedia. This is an online encyclopaedia which is created, amended and monitored by members of the online community. (See the article on page 85 for a comparison between Wikipedia and Britannica.) So, using that as a starting point, how could you make use of the power of a wiki?

What you have to do is think “collaboration” rather than think “web page creation”. Web pages created with a wiki are usually pretty basic in terms of appearance and formatting, but that's not the point: if you want a “glossy” web page then use a web page creator or html editor. What a wiki enables you to do is share ideas in much the same way as you might capture points from a discussion on an electronic whiteboard or on a flipchart – with the added benefits that it can be accessed from anywhere in the world if you want it to be, and you can track changes, and who made them.

Ideas for wikis

Ideas for using a wiki might include:

- Develop group ideas for a project.
- Capture ideas for a policy or strategy (for example, students could use a wiki to develop a set of protocols about good conduct online).
- Create a resource for others to use.

See the interview with John Bidder on page 87 for an innovative project which explores the potential of wikis in Bolton, England.

Wikis vs forums

So how is a wiki different to a discussion forum? Well, although a discussion forum can obviously contain links, it tends to have a rather linear appearance: someone posts a message, then someone else responds, then the first person reacts to that, and so on. That's clearly very valuable, but when you look at a discussion forum it does not have the immediacy of a “big picture” view which the wiki does.

I like to think of it as the difference between a set of bullet points and a three dimensional balloon diagram or concept map. Both have their value, but perhaps another dimension to consider is that a wiki lends itself to having short amounts of text connected by hyperlinks, rather than a lot of text. In other words, it enables you to conduct an online discussion without limiting it to students who have a relatively high level of literacy, and without excluding those students who have a visual learning style.

A word of caution

Unfortunately, it's not a good idea to have a completely open wiki because of the risk of spam or hacking attacks. To go some way to prevent such things, or at least casual attacks, make it necessary for would-be contributors to log in first.

Examples of wikis in education

http://davidwarlick.com/wiki-warlick/index.php?title=Ten_Reasons_to_Increase_Education_Funding

This was set up by David Warlick in order to help promote a debate about funding issues in schools.

<http://writetechnology.wikispaces.com/>

Writer Miguel Guhlin set up this wiki in order to collect examples of research into the impact that technology has had on writing.

<http://westwood.wikispaces.com/Westwood+wikilinks+page>

This was set up by a teacher to enable her students to create wiki pages for developing their ideas.

<http://ictineducation.pbwiki.com/>

I set this up to capture people's ideas about Every Child Matters and ICT.

Wikipedia vs Britannica

By Terry Freedman

Introduction

There has been much debate in the blogosphere about the relative merits of Wikipedia and Britannica. Britannica, as is well-known, is regarded as an authoritative source of information which is written and peer-reviewed by experts in their fields. Wikipedia, on the other hand, is based on what might be called the free market principle. In traditional economic theory, if there was no government or other official intervention, consumers would have perfect knowledge of the market, because there would be no barrier to accessing the knowledge or passing it on to others. This would ensure that poor or over-priced goods and services would disappear quite rapidly because people would simply stop buying it.

The underlying principle of Wikipedia is exactly the same: misinformation will, sooner or later, come to light when a member of the community discovers it. At that point, unlike the situation with, say, discovering an etymological error in the Oxford English Dictionary, the person who discovered the mistake can immediately correct it.

Here is a summary of the arguments for and against Wikipedia as they have appeared in the blogosphere. I am afraid I have not kept track of who said what, but I believe that the lists below are an accurate representation of the arguments. I have not ascribed weighting to the arguments, which I think is a personal matter. However, I think it would be dangerous to merely count the number of points for and against.

At the end of the day, it seems to me that what is most important is not the source of information in itself, but the pupil's ability to evaluate its plausibility and accuracy using a range of techniques.

For Wikipedia

- Children can amend and contribute to knowledge base.
- By same token, gets across to children that textbooks etc are not bibles: need to question and verify sources of information.
- Kept up-to-date much more frequently than Britannica.
- Is peer-reviewed by the world community.
- Peer review by a broad spectrum of people means that more than one cultural viewpoint is taken into consideration (potentially).
- In a comparison with Britannica, it was found that Wikipedia had an average of 4 mistakes per article whilst Britannica had an average of 3, so we could take the view that a difference is only a difference if it makes a difference.
- A range of subjects can be covered which Britannica would probably not cover at all.
- A relatively new development is the introduction of a new "language": child-speak, in order to render the articles more accessible to children .

Against Wikipedia

- Expert-written article can be amended by someone who doesn't have full knowledge of the subject.

- Contentious opinions can be passed off as facts until they are picked up by someone.
- Inaccuracies can be published and go undetected.

Setting up a wiki

Setting up a wiki for yourself is pretty easy, especially if you have a website which is run on a Linux (as opposed to a Windows) server. Many web hosting deals come with a comprehensive control panel and a range of software, much of which can be installed without a great deal of technical knowledge.

However, if you intend to run a wiki on a school system, there are a few factors you need to take into consideration:

Can a wiki be installed on the school's web server? If your web space is provided by one of the regional broadband consortia (in the UK) or some other all-in-one education service, the answer will be "no". You will need to either find a work-around, such as a facility which allows you to do similar things to a wiki, or acquire another website – which means having another domain name, which may give rise to "political" issues and which, in any case, will cost money.

If you do decide to go down the do-it-yourself route, do you have the time and expertise to maintain it? If not, and if there is nobody else in the school who can, perhaps this is not the most appropriate solution.

An alternative is to use a free service, which you can find by typing something like "free wiki hosting" into Google. One that I am using at the moment is <http://www.pbwiki.com/> (see <http://ictineducation.pbwiki.com/>) – it is too soon for me to recommend it as such, but so far it seems fine. It enables you to make the wiki private or public, and requires people to enter a password before they can edit the page. You can upload files as well, and a history of changed pages is maintained. It took about 5 minutes to set up – and that included waiting for email confirmation!

Wikiville: an interview with John Bidder

By Terry Freedman

About John Bidder



John Bidder was a primary-trained teacher in Bolton, UK. Then he worked as an advisory ICT teacher as a school improvement officer for number of years.

He followed his interest in exploring the internet when it was finding its feet around '97.

John has received awards for his contribution to the UK's Primary National Strategy publications¹⁹.

He is also a conference speaker: e.g. BETT; Resource; Cumbria T & L; State of Guernsey; State of Jersey; and Manchester University.

He launched <http://www.BoltonTLC.org.uk>, and <http://www.TheICTTeam.blogspot.com>, a local authority learning platform (2004).

John is a keen proponent of international collaboration through ICT working, for example, with Dr Chris Tan (University of Hong Kong & Australia), and Will Richardson (USA).

John has worked extensively in the area of developing online communities and took on the role Virtual Teacher's Centre Manager for Bolton.

He is currently head of service/curriculum ICT Strategy for Bolton Curriculum ICT Team in role of Adviser for ICT & Innovation. The service was graded as a "1" (ie Excellent) by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted²⁰) with six areas of excellence highlighted.

The interview

Briefly describe the project.

We ran two 1 day workshops with students and teacher representatives from Bolton's high schools. There was a 3:1 ratio of students to teachers.

In terms of learning we were focusing upon the development of a range of concepts which were driven by an acute awareness of audience & purpose.

Concepts investigated were strongly related to issues connected to the following:

- Working collaboratively online e.g. writing, drafting, editing & re-drafting.
- Social responsibility/values e.g. students setting the guideline for engagement with WikiVille, deciding on acceptable/ unacceptable practice such as plagiarism & causing offence.
- Critical thinking & web literacy e.g. challenging what we find online and being slow to accept what was found as 'the truth'.
- Cultural differences and the way in which the media paints our lives and therefore influences our perception of the world e.g. how we can re-address this through vehicles for 21st Century global student voice, like WikiVille.

¹⁹ <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/>

²⁰ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>

The actual output was the Wiki itself.

Why use a wiki, as opposed to, say, discussion forums or bulletin boards or blogs or grid for learning CMS?

Wiki is a much mistrusted and misunderstood technology because of its intrinsic openness – ironic really that we mistrust that which is so open. This brings to the fore the issue of web literacy, which is much overlooked. It also brings Wikipedia into the spotlight and generates some excellent discussion about patterns of research by students, what they think it is, why they do/don't trust the information there etc. It's easy to extrapolate this debate into one about the whole of the web.

I also wanted to shake the traditional concepts of students being consumers of writing held in books and websites published by authorities. I wanted to empower students to become the authors in their own specialist areas – e.g. they are all experts in the knowledge of where they live and what it's really like to exist there. Wiki, in my mind at least, was the natural choice for a project of this type. Wiki's are potentially highly scalable and community-driven with the potential to have all the social features of a small town or city. There are few rules initially and therefore things are pretty dynamic and need some guidance, teamwork & leadership. Who will provide this? The students will. Alongside the learning outline above in your first question, WikiVille aims to give those students who never get the chance to lead or influence within the usual constraints of every day school life just that opportunity.

WikiVille equals "community" in this case. For large-scale engagement blogs on this occasion don't quite do it due to their propensity for single-voice activity. Grids for Learning – that's **so** 20th Century and 'read only' web! Bulletin boards are great but again there's a real sense of 'been there, done that' and frankly I think everyone's quite bored of them.

Why Will Richardson, as opposed to, say, using someone from the UK, or doing it yourself?

I could have done these sessions myself no doubt – but it would have been quite different to the ones that were ultimately brought about through Will's involvement. Will has extensive experience in teaching journalism & media studies, and consequently he's a natural at enabling young people to discuss and question the validity, style and so on of written material.

The level of engagement from our schools was also contributable to Will being involved. Would a school feel more compelled to send 3 students and a member of the English Department out on a one day workshop run by the Local Authority (LA), or by a globally-renowned international educationalist from the States? Hmm. Tough one!

What did Will actually do?

Will led the workshops, working directly with the students and teachers.

The "techie" bit: what software are you using and where is it installed?

Using MediaWiki – as used by Wikipedia – installed externally to the LA on a hosted server.

How are the outcomes being evaluated?

We have a research partner in the University of York – detail is not available regarding methodology at this stage.

I raised an issue at QCA²¹ recently, that people aren't using wikis etc for the National Strategy units because there is an implicit frowning upon such innovation, or people are frightened to anyway because of league table considerations. Do you see this as a way of seeing if such things can be used effectively in the context of the national curriculum?

Without doubt! I can think of a whole raft of other applications for this technology – I've already had one student in the WikiVille team "Skyping" me with their own ideas which were better than mine!

Is there any advice you might give to someone in your position in another LEA who may want to do something similar?

Just do it – the overheads are low and you've very little to lose apart from sleep and your job if it all goes belly-up! Seriously though I learned so much from this activity about attitudes to learning, how students are programmed to write for the teacher as their audience and about how much we need to do to remedy the situation/climate which has been brought in by target driven learning. So long as the experience is genuinely shared and owned by all parties its probably hard to go wrong.

So far, have there been any unexpected positive or negative outcomes?

Unexpected? Its all been unexpected –especially the reaction from colleagues in other countries who are being supportive in a range of ways. WikiVille is not mine – because everyone's contributions are so unique and improving gradually over time as people find their 'voice', they quite literally have a piece of WikiVille for themselves. Ownership has become unexpectedly a strong feature of the project so far.

Would it be possible to find out from you afterwards how it went?

Yes – I'd leave it a few months to see how things bed it and how we spread the word. Hopefully though things are already moving and colleagues in the States, Australia, UK & beyond are already joining in.

Visit Wikiville now! http://www.wikiville.org.uk/index.php/Main_Page

²¹ The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority: <http://www.qca.org.uk>.

Social bookmarking

By Terry Freedman

Why maintain a links database in the traditional way when you can use a facility known as “social bookmarking”? The idea is simple: you have a list of your own favourite websites. So do I. So does everybody else. Imagine how powerful it would be if we shared that information! That’s the idea behind social bookmarking.

You choose a service, and then when you bookmark websites you describe it using tags, ie keywords. For example, you might tag a web page as being about e-learning and history. Once you’ve added the site, anyone can find it if they search on one of those keywords. Furthermore, if you click on one of the tags, you’ll see the sites that other people have tagged with the same keyword.

There are downsides, of course. The main one is the flip side of the coin, that is to say, if looking for information is akin to looking for a needle in a haystack, what social bookmarking does is to increase the size of the haystack! That is not an argument for not using it, but it is an argument for making sure that students are taught good information-searching skills, including the ability to evaluate the plausibility and accuracy of the information they find.

Another disadvantage is that you have to be careful in your use of keywords: you have to think about what other people may use. A good example is “e-learning”: it would be a good idea to use “elearning” too!

Finally, there are quite a few of these tools, and they don’t all (easily) talk to each other. If you’d like to find out more about what’s out there, have a look at this quite comprehensive review:

<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/april05/hammond/04hammond.html>

Forums, instant messaging and other ways to participate

By Terry Freedman

Introduction

This is a brief run-through of the facilities available which enable people to participate in discussions or contribute to a conversation in other ways.

You can set these up yourself if you have the right web server set-up and access, or you can use 3rd party services.

This is not intended to be a definitive list, but hopefully will give you some ideas.

Remember: the higher levels of the UK's ICT Programme of Study, and similar schemes in other countries, require students to discuss issues, act upon feedback from others, and so on, ie you can't achieve the higher levels just by being technically competent or even technically excellent.

Surveys and polls

These are a quick way of canvassing opinion on particular issues. To some extent you can achieve the same thing with an electronic whiteboard and a student voting (response) system, except that the main difference here is that you can set up a survey and give people a certain period of time in which to respond.

The responses to, and results from, such exercises can provide a useful starting point for discussion in a classroom.

Forums

Forums provide an opportunity for a more discursive discussion of an issue.

It's a good idea to make it necessary to log in in order to add or edit comments, otherwise you can spend a lot of time deleting inappropriate entries.

Forums are also useful in that there is a record of a discussion so that issues raised can be chewed over in class at a later date. They also tend to show how students are thinking, which can be useful for assessment purposes, and also the amount they contribute. It is not uncommon for students who are very shy and retiring in class to "come alive" in the context of a written discussion.

Forums can also be used to elicit general feedback, say about a website, although it is probably more appropriate to set up a form or survey for this purpose.

You can see an example of a more structured approach here:

http://www.terry-freedman.org.uk/over_to_you.htm.

Instant messaging

There's an interesting article at the BBC website about instant messaging (IM):
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3031796.stm>

IM is a great way to carry out a conversation in real time, which is one of the main ways it differs from a forum. That is to say, with IM you answer each other there and then, whereas with a forum you say your piece whenever you like.

It's useful to have the IM set to keep a record of the conversation, so that you can see who contributed what at a subsequent time.

It's a great pity that many schools' response to IM is simply to ban it. Whilst it may not be appropriate to allow access to the commercial services available,

simply barring access not only potentially prevents students from experiencing the positive aspects of IM, but also fails to address the fact that most of them probably use it at home anyway. The very least the school could do would be to teach students how to remain safe in such environments.

IM, especially if there is a group or conference mode available, is a great way to have a discussion with people in other locations. Real businesses use IM to enable virtual teams to get together, or for teams to have a virtual meeting. Throw in a web cam facility and you have rudimentary video conferencing which can only enhance the students' opportunities to participate in meaningful discussions as part of their work. You can find out more about keeping safe in forums and similar environments by going here.

<http://www.gridclub.com/freearea/tasters/cybercafe/base.htm>.

Finally, it's worth mentioning the opportunities collaborate on documents in real time. For example, look at Writely, at <http://www.writely.com/>, or some of the other facilities listed at <http://www.shambles.net/web2/>.

Further reading

David Jakes looks at using Flickr and using wikis in the classroom at http://www.techlearning.com/blog/main/archives/2006/03/the_changing_fa.html.