

Welcome to the



BLOGOSPHERE

The Educational Use of Blogs (aka Edublogs) by Jan Ray

The push-button publishing capabilities of edublogs align well with teachers' busy schedules.

Ready for a brainteaser? What was born in 1997; promotes reflective analysis, intellectual interaction, as well as the dissemination of information; and provides push-button publishing? Give up? This truly prodigious youngster is a blog!

What Is a **Blog**?

Proclaimed as the “Word of the Year” in 2004 by the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (2004), *blog* is the official abbreviated name for *Weblog*. The *Weblog* began as an online journal, with a single author providing hyperlinks to Web sites of interest and posting personal commentaries for the world to read, ponder, and discuss—sometimes rather heatedly (*Encyclopædia Britannica* 2006). In 1999, the *Weblog* was nicknamed the *blog* as it expanded to accommodate diverse users—from families to special interest groups, from communities to corporations (Blog 2005). With nearly 50 million people blogging in 2005, this forum for personal expression has grown exponentially (EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative 2005)!

How Does a **Blog Work**?

A blog can be thought of as an electronic bulletin board that is as easy to create and use as an e-mail account. (Honest! No hassle. In other words, no HTML syntax distress, no uploading to server issues, and no page formatting concerns.) After creating a blog at a host Web site, you simply post informational text (announcements, schedules, and the like) to share with your intended audience. Hyperlinks, pictures, and audio segments also can be effortlessly added to enrich your blog. If you so choose, visitors can post comments to your blog as well.

How Can a Blog Be Used in the Classroom?

Blogs used for education, dubbed *edublogs*, are rapidly emerging, as techno-savvy teachers embrace the instructional potential of this online tool. Here are just a few of the many ways edublogs can support instruction.

Edublogs to Communicate

When used as an electronic bulletin board, an edublog provides a fast, efficient means of communication. Whether posting class announcements for parents or providing schedule reminders for students, edublogs eliminate the “I didn’t know about . . .” or “I lost my . . .” excuses associated with the traditional hard copy dissemination of information. (Of course, new excuses, such as “my computer crashed” or “the dog ate my wireless receiver” may be forthcoming.)

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Edublogs as Instructional Resources

When used as an instructional resource, an edublog helps teachers, parents, and students overcome homework hurdles. Teachers can post tips, explanations, or samples to help reduce confusion. They also can post hyperlinks to Web sites that provide assignment-related homework helpers and resources, such as online dictionaries (www.dictionary.com), maps (www.maps.com), and even educational games for concept reinforcement (www.primarygames.com; www.funbrain.com).

Cristina Runkles, a third-grade teacher, has maintained an edublog for three consecutive school years at Oakdale Elementary School in Ijamsville, Maryland. Runkles’s edublog is entitled “Blog Away on a Paperless Journal.” In her most recent posting, Runkles asks students to explore links to eight geometry Web sites accessible from the edublog. Some of these links present Web sites with interactive games related to 2-D and 3-D shapes. Other links present Web sites with game-like assessments or quizzes.

The students are asked to post their comments to the edublog, explaining what they learned about geometry after visiting the linked sites. A recent post from Bball Girl read, “I tried all the games and thought Geometry Rainbow was the hardest because sometimes you didn’t know how to spell the words. The difference [between] 2D and 3D is [that] 2D is flat and 3D is popping out at you. I learned that geometry is something that you really have to consntrat [concentrate] on.”

Note: The “Blog Away on a Paperless Journal” edublog may be explored at www.tblog.com/templates/index.php?bid=runkles1.

Edublogs as Collaborative Tools

A group edublog “gives students an opportunity to work together on projects” (Molina 2005, 2). For example, students may create an edublog dedicated solely to a class field trip to a local art museum. From planning the excursion beforehand to reflective analysis of objects of art viewed afterward, the edublog enables students to document and share their journey with others.

Students even may collaborate with students from other schools, using an edublog as a common medium for completing an interactive project. Students from Calvine High School in Elk Grove, California, and students from Maple High School in Lompoc, California, maintain the “Always Running—La Vida Loca” edublog. For this interactive literature project, students read *Always Running* (Rodriguez 2005), an award-winning, yet controversial, autobiographical account of a young Latino man’s life,

growing up as member of a street gang in East Los Angeles. As explained on the edublog, students at the two sites “explore and compare contemporary issues in their own communities to author Luis Rodriguez’s experiences.”

Note: The “Always Running—La Vida Loca” edublog may be viewed at <http://blogs.writingproject.org/blogwrite118>.

Collaboration is not limited to students! Teachers may use a group edublog “to collaborate with each other on curriculum or professional-development issues” (Toner 2004, 2). Instructional or grade-level teams who teach with themes and integrated content readily can plan and design their lessons or units, as well as share resources, through a group edublog.

Edublogs as Showcases for Student Projects

Need a publishing venue for your students’ projects? Consider creating an edublog dedicated to showcasing students’ work. If your students compose haiku, cinquain, acrostic, or any other type of poems, publish them in a poetry edublog. If your students assemble origami creations, photograph them using a digital camera and create an *eduphlog*—an educational photo log of their works of art. Each photograph can be added to the eduphlog simply by clicking a photo button and navigating to the picture file. Projects using audio files and video files can be accommodated as well.

At the “5B@MAS” edublog, students in Gordon Brune’s fifth-grade class post commentaries and reflections they have written and illustrated in response to current events and assignments. The edublog also includes field-trip pictures and a QuickTime® video.

Note: The “5B@MAS” edublog may be viewed at http://epnweb.org/blogmeister/blog.php?blogger_id=251.

Resources for Blogs

Create your own edublog. Go to any one of the following Web sites for free blog setup and hosting:

- tBLOG: www.tblog.com
- Blogger: www.blogger.com/start
- BlogEasy: www.blogeasy.com
- MyBlogSite: www.myblogsite.com

For a review of these and other free blogging services, visit Blog Hosts Reviews at <http://impressbooks.com/LinksPages/BlogHostRev.htm>.

The Downside of Edublogs

Though edublogs have tremendous educational potential, teachers should be aware of their downside. Two issues teachers must face when using edublogs relate to accessibility and student safety.

Accessibility Issues

Using edublogs requires both a computer system and access to the Internet. Though nearly all students have access to computer systems and the Internet while at school, the most recent census statistics reveal inequitable access at home. Nearly 70 percent of White (Non-Hispanic) and Asian-American children have both computers and Internet access at home, while fewer than 40 percent of American-Indian, Hispanic, and African-American children have both computers and Internet access at home (Becker 2000). Based on these statistics, teachers should determine whether or not students have computers and Internet access at home before assigning edublogs as instructional tools outside of the school environment.

Student Safety Issues

Teachers or students who post class work on an edublog—whether text, drawings, or pictures—should follow the “Kids’ Rules for Online Safety” established by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. These rules are designed to protect children from online predators, harassment, bullying, and more. So, personal information, such as students’ last names, addresses, and telephone numbers are definitely out!

Note: The “Kids’ Rules for Online Safety” may be viewed at www.safekids.com/kidsrules.htm.

Final Thoughts

Are you ready to create your own edublog? Whether used as a means of communication, an instructional resource, a collaborative tool, or a showcase for student projects, you will find that the push-button publishing capabilities of an edublog will align well with your busy teacher schedule. ■

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