

That's Blog Worthy: Ten Ways to Integrate Blogging into the Health Education Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Blogs are popular, innovative, online platforms for learning. Blogging allows for synthesis of content and helps sustain student engagement in the health education classroom setting. Objectives: Students will define a blog, execute a blog to apply learned health content, and post and respond to other students' health-related blogs. Target Audience: Students in high school health courses.

INTRODUCTION

A web log (i.e., blog) is very similar to a website in that both allow for self-expression, and they may contain narrative comments, video, audio, photographs, sketchblogs (images or drawings chronicling events), gaming, political editorials, and links to other blogs or sites.¹ Unlike a website, though, a blog is more fluid and changing as the online community or individual posts new information to share.² Blogs can be “closed” (private), open only to certain people and in a certain platform, or “open,” which permits access by anyone on the Internet.³ Compared to the typical “discussion board,” blogs are not as structured, usually not edited, and they frequently include a variety of tools for self-expression.^{4,5}

Results from previous research has been used to demonstrate that blogging increases the blogger's sense of social connectedness online and the ability to network.¹

Participation in blogs also can enhance an individual's writing skills and encourage readers and writers to synthesize current ideas or research. Blogs provide bloggers an opportunity to voice their opinions and share their personal stories. Blogs can build interest, raise awareness, generate support for an issue or cause, and may propel individuals to take social and political action outside of the virtual environment.^{1,3}

In 2007, almost 112 million American adults were reading or hosting blogs.⁴ Blogs are simple to create, implement, and use. They provide a platform for quick online collaboration through the rapid sharing of resources, knowledge, links to information, as well as offering the opportunity for critical reflection and debate of ideas.^{6,7} Teachers can respond to students at a faster rate than through discussion boards or other asynchronous online methods.⁸ Consistent with online learning, blogs provide both students

and instructors a high level of autonomy, while offering a new opportunity for peer dialogue and interaction. Through blogging, students who normally do not feel comfortable speaking in a traditional in-class setting may voice their opinions and thoughts in a less threatening online environment.^{3,9}

In today's high-tech, fast-paced environment, it seems critical to motivate and engage the “Web 2.0 generation” by integrating technology into the classroom. Blogging requires students to analyze, apply, synthesize, and evaluate, reaching the highest levels of

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Bloom's Taxonomy.¹⁰ Creative classroom techniques incorporating technology foster a more vibrant learning environment where students can develop their interpersonal and health communication skills.

OBJECTIVES

At the end of this teaching idea, students will be able to define a blog, execute a blog to apply learned health content, and post and respond to other students' health-related blogs.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

To complete this activity, access to the Internet is required. In addition, students will need access to a blog site to create their blog. If teachers are inexperienced with creating blogs, they may want to visit free, popular, and user-friendly blog sites, such as Blogger.com.

TARGET AUDIENCE

This activity is designed for students in high school health courses.

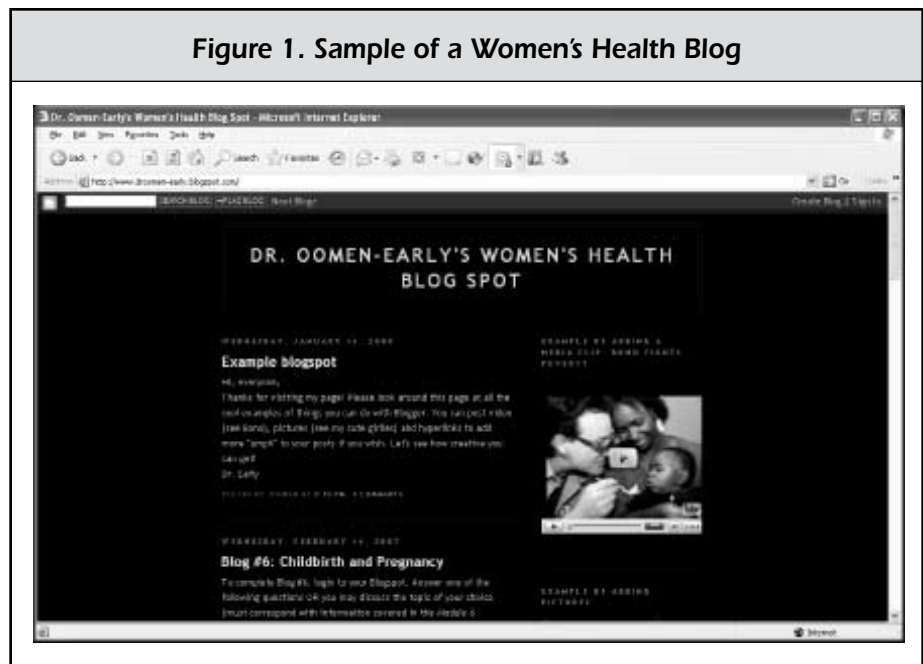
PROCEDURE

To demonstrate how to easily create a blog site, the teacher will guide students to a blog site that is already created by another instructor or professional in the health field (e.g., see Figure 1). Students who have never been exposed to blogging should visit Blogger.com, create their own account, and make a practice post. All students should create their own blog site, post content, and respond to comments from other class members.

Next, the teacher should involve students in a variety of blogging exercises. A myriad of ways exist to implement blogs into both the traditional and online health education classroom. The list below provides ten easy ways to integrate blogs into health education coursework. Before any blog is posted, the teacher should review and edit drafts.

Ten Ways to Use Blogging in the Health Education Classroom

1. *Develop a list of resources for a health issue.* Typically, bloggers enjoy lists because they ap-



peal to the younger audience's more fast-paced nature and desire for quick information.^{4,5} Have students create a list of online resources and video links specific to a particular health issue for a determined population. Other students are invited to comment and provide feedback to each learner regarding ways to improve the resource list.

2. *Initiate a health-based advocacy campaign.* Instruct each student to create a letter or email to his/her local legislature or representative advocating that action be taken regarding a current health issue that he/she deems important. Fellow students are invited to comment on the proposed advocacy action and offer suggestions for improvement or awareness of the health issue or ways to implement community change.

3. *Conduct health-related interviews with community members.* Require students to interview someone from the local community about that person's perspectives or experiences related to a topic being covered in the health course. Another interview exercise involves having students talk to leading health experts in the community. Interviews should be posted on the blog for an interactive discussion among peers in the class.

4. *Analyze a consumer product.* Have students review a consumer product from a health and

safety aspect, such as food nutrition labeling, the safety and effectiveness of herbal medications, and so forth. Instructors are encouraged to relate this learning activity to government health and safety regulations.

5. *Discuss current issues in health.* Ask students to list three current issues in public health and provide justification why they believe these are such important topics and how these issues impact society. Students also can be encouraged to blog on the future of public health.

6. *Swap healthy recipes.* Have students post health-conscious recipes for other students to try. Blogs like this one can be fun while, at the same time, promoting nutrition awareness. Also, this blog should help increase feelings of social connectivity among fellow students in the class.

7. *Facilitate a health debate.* Instruct students to start a blog debate on a controversial health issue, such as abortion (if this topic is not restricted by the school district) or mandatory immunizations.

8. *Chronicle a health behavior change.* Have students pursue personal health behavior change projects such as a fitness or physical activity program, nutrition activity, or stress management endeavor, and post a chronicle of their behavior change progress on blogs for peer



Figure 2. Sample Rubric to Assess Blogging Activity

To receive full points available, the blog must:	Points
be at least 100 words.	
be well written and easy to read.	
reflect critical thought and creativity.	
contain accurate content.	
use at least three different credible websites (if applicable).	
provide references where appropriate.	
TOTAL POINTS	

support, feedback, and recommendations.

9. *Create a health newsletter.* Blogs can be used as a mechanism for students to write, edit, and publish an interactive newsletter focused on health education and health promotion.

10. *Create a drug or substance abuse prevention and awareness campaign.* Ask students to develop a drug prevention campaign on their own blog site, choosing a specific drug for the awareness campaign and highlighting relevant prevention links. For variety, the teacher may want to ensure each learner chooses a different drug or substance.

ASSESSMENT

To assess the degree to which students

executed a blog to apply learned health content, detailed written instructions and a rubric (Figure 2) should be provided prior to implementing this learning activity. To assess each learner’s definition of a blog, consider using oral or written quizzes. Students also should be assessed on posting and responding to classmates’ blogs. Two peer postings may be a reasonable requirement. Teacher observation or a check sheet may be good tools for assessing peer postings.

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