A Fall 2007 Workshop on...

Classroom Blogs
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Printable version (Draft #1) of workshop

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NOTE: Sources of information are identified by a code (e.g., "R01") which allows them to be matched to the resources in the resource tables that follow.

- Interesting statistics:
  - 80% of U.S. households had Internet Access by 2004 (R101)
  - In 2006, 12 million American adults kept a **weblog (blog)** and 57 million American adults say they read them (R103)
  - Thus many students come to our classrooms with a **facility** for maintaining and communicating through blogs (R103)
  - Thousands of teachers and students have already **incorporated** blogs and other new web tools into their classrooms and practice (R101)
  - Two-thirds of all blogs go for more than two months without being **updated** (R101)
  - Teenagers and young adults use blogs as **social tools** rather than learning tools and are often reckless in their online behavior. (R101)

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**BLOGS 101**

A start to our field trip to study blogs

**PART 1:**

Nature of Blogs

- What are blogs?
  - "A blog is a **user-generated website** where entries are made in **journal style** and displayed in a reverse chronological order. Blogs often provide **commentary** or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more **personal** online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave **comments** in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. Most blogs are primarily textual although some focus on photographs (photoblog), drawings (sketchblog), videos (vlog), or audio (podcasting), and are part of a wider **network** of social media." (R801)

- What are the benefits of blogs?
  - Easily **created** website (R101)
  - Easily **updateable** website (R101)
Allows one to publish instantly to the Web from any Internet connection (R101)
- Takes as much skill as sending an email (R101)
- Can send out updated information to "subscribers" almost immediately

What are the potentials of blogs?
- Can be private so that only (class) members can access them
- Not static chunks of content (R101)
- Engages readers with ideas, questions and links (R101)
- Asks readers to think and to respond -- almost demands interaction! (R101)
- Able to connect ideas and resources via linking (R101)
- Able to easily connect with external experts, journalists and authors of studied materials (making responses easier as well)
  - For example, see http://central.hcrhs.k12.nj.us/bees/.
- Are searchable -- people can find them (the above class website has been accessed over 1.5 million times)
- Can be subscribed to by interested readers
- Every bit a website -- can include graphics, photos, video and audio files and just about any feature found on "traditional" websites (R101)

There is a difference between "journaling" and "blogging" -- the latter involves interactive communication!

What are some examples of informative blogs?
- We will cover these in more detail later in the workshop
- But one example is Tim Wilson's "The Savvy Technologist" blog at http://www.technosavvy.org/ (R503, R101)
  - Latest post is at the top of middle column
  - Can scroll down to see last couple months of posts
  - Posts contain reflections from his daily work, ideas for lessons, responses to thoughts and ideas of others
  - Responses are easy to read and contribute to.
  - Blog is filled with links to other sources of information including to podcasts, personal affiliations, and other bloggers
  - For example, find the "podcasting" category and check out his "Tricking Administrators into Using Technology" post and reader responses.
Another example of the uses of blogs is shown on "Meredith's Page!" (R102, R101)
- She is a high school student with an assignment to study teen apathy
- Readers will find reflections on the class work she has done
- She has links to relevant articles
- She has a running news feed from Google news that picks up news articles with key words like *apathy* and *apathetic*.
- In effect, this blog has become an online archive of her work, thoughts, resources and feedback (an e-portfolio)

*There is no better way to understand the impact of the Read/Write Web than by becoming a part of it.* (R101, p. 40)
Research (R101, R103, R205) has found that blogs can:

- Promote critical and analytical thinking
- Be a powerful promoter of creative, intuitive, and associational thinking
- Promote analogical thinking
- Be a powerful medium for increasing access and exposure to quality information
- Combine the best of solitary reflection and social interaction
- Facilitate reflection and metacognitive analysis that was previously much more cumbersome
- Teach skills such as research, organization and synthesis of ideas
- Act as a democratic tool that supports different learning styles giving reticent students more opportunities to participate in class interaction
- Can "open classroom space where discussions are continued and where every student gets an equal voice." (R206)
- Teach new literacies that students will need to function in an ever expanding information society

In short, blogs can be a constructivist tool for learning.

*Blogs facilitate "connective writing," a form that forces those who do it to read carefully and critically, that demands clarity and cogency in its construction, that is done for a wider audience, and that links to the sources of the ideas expressed. (R101, p. 29)*

How can blogs be used in higher education?

- Post class announcements and updates by the instructor
- Automate access to distribution of class handouts
- Share multimedia resources including photos, audios, videos and screen-action captures
- Showcase examples of good student work or expectations for homework contributions
- Prepare students for meaningful in-class discussion

- Continue class discussions by students as part of class assignments, requiring students:
  - to read critically
  - find connections and articulate the relevance of those connections
  - make editorial decisions
  - find and identify accurate and trustworthy sources of information
  - bring primary sources into the classroom (including authors, scientists and politicians)

- Use as a collaborative work spaces for group research on the class or department level
- Use as an e-Portfolio -- for collection, reflection, and presentation to peers, instructor and potential employer
- Expand the classroom walls to conduct experiments online, share results globally and invite experts into the process
- **Connect** a class with another class somewhere else in the world
- **Archive** the learning that teachers and students do (R101)
- **Archive** meeting minutes along with ongoing dialogues between get-togethers (R101)
- Last but not least, folks can have blog contents "fed" to them so they don't miss useful information. This is an improvement over online discussion rooms. (R103)

*Writing stops; blogging continues. Writing is inside; blogging is outside. Writing is monologue; blogging is conversation. Writing is thesis; blogging is synthesis. This is not to minimize the importance of writing... but to argue for its expansion into an ongoing process. (R101, p. 31)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University of Houston's &quot;Blogs in Education&quot; website (R201)</th>
<th><a href="http://awd.cl.uh.edu/blog/">http://awd.cl.uh.edu/blog/</a></th>
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<tr>
<td>Will Richardson's &quot;Weblogg-ed: Learning with the Read/Write Web&quot; blog (R203)</td>
<td><a href="http://weblogg-ed.com/">http://weblogg-ed.com/</a></td>
</tr>
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<td>&quot;Blogging Across the Disciplines: Integrating Technology to Enhance Liberal Learning&quot; research article by Davi, Frydenberg and Gulati, 2007 (R204)</td>
<td><a href="http://jolt.merlot.org/vol3no3/frydenberg.htm">http://jolt.merlot.org/vol3no3/frydenberg.htm</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Flatley's (2005) &quot;Blogging for enhanced teaching and learning&quot; (R206)</td>
<td>Business Communication Quarterly, 68(1), p. 77-80</td>
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PART 3:
Feeding of Blogs

● What are RSS feeds? (R101)
  ○ RSS is a tool to help you **consume** all the available information on the web in efficient and relevant ways
  ○ RSS stands for **Real Simple Syndication**
  ○ Blogs and some other websites generate behind-the-scenes code in a language called **XML**
  ○ This code (referred to as a "**feed**") makes it possible for readers to "subscribe" to the content that is created at the blog so they no longer need to visit it
  ○ You click on a "**subscribe**" button (or right-click and copy the orange RSS Feed link) on the blogs and other websites which you are interested in and are available as feeds
  ○ A type of software called an "**aggregator**" or feed collector checks the feeds you subscribe to, usually every hour, and collects all the new content from those sites.
  ○ When you are ready, you open your aggregator to read what it has **collected**.
  ○ You can **file** information for later use, click through to the site itself, or delete information if it is not relevant.
  ○ **Thus you can check one site instead of 30!** (R101)

● What are some examples of RSS feeds? (R101)
  ○ The **New York Times** and hundreds of other newspapers, magazines, television stations, etc. have feeds.
  ○ **Blog search engines** (see Part 4) will help you to find sites that might have information relevant to your interests.
  ○ A few **examples** of feeds or sources of feeds are listed in the table below and more are listed in the "hands-on" RSS portion of this workshop (Part 9).

**Why is RSS the "new killer app for educators"?**

○ It will make you and your students smarter and more **effective** consumers of information on the Internet
  - Students can be immediately **updated** when new information about research topics is published.
    - For example, you can use RSS (via **Google News**, for example) to create a feed for a particular topic such as "**global warming Washington State**" and have results come right to your online mailbox or classroom blog as soon as they are published on the web.
    - RSS may be a great help to improve the media and information **literacy** skills of your students.
Educators can track the web for discussions on teaching and learning and find resources such as those in Part 5 below.

Teachers can collect the work from students' individual blogs, reducing reading time and making classes more paperless.

Feeds are a great way to track what other people are reading and bookmarking for future use.

Feeds let you track what other people might be saying about your own blog by alerting you whenever someone is linking back to you.

Individual feeds can be blended together in a group for easy inclusion into a class assignment.

*If you are an educator, RSS is the one technology that you should start using today, right now, this minute. And tomorrow, you should teach your students to use it.* R101, p.75

**AGGREGATORS are part of many computer operating systems already. You have one within your Internet Explorer 7**

- Try searching for (and subscribing to) RSS feeds via a couple of the search engines listed below
  - Visit **RSS Compendium** and find the RSS feeds for the University of Washington and Seattle University
  - Visit **Google News** and find feeds for information on dinosaurs
  - Visit the **Weather Reports** via Internet Explorer 7
    - find the **RSS feed** for Seattle weather
    - **Subscribe** to it
    - Find it in your "favorites" and check it out!

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>RSS Compendium (R301)</th>
<th><a href="http://allrss.com/rssfeeds.html">http://allrss.com/rssfeeds.html</a></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bloglines (click on &quot;Find Newest Feeds&quot;) (R302)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bloglines.com/topblogs">http://www.bloglines.com/topblogs</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google News (click on &quot;Advanced search&quot; and enter a key word)</td>
<td><a href="http://news.google.com/">http://news.google.com/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yahoo News (click on &quot;Advanced&quot; and enter a key word)</td>
<td><a href="http://news.yahoo.com/">http://news.yahoo.com/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Weather reports</td>
<td><a href="http://www.rssweather.com/">http://www.rssweather.com/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Earthquake notification</td>
<td><a href="http://earthquake.usgs.gov/">http://earthquake.usgs.gov/</a></td>
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### How do you find blogs?

- Use **Google Blog Search** for blogs on a specific topic.
- Click on "**Newest Feeds**" or view the **most popular** feeds at [http://www.bloglines.com/topblogs](http://www.bloglines.com/topblogs).
- **Major blog sights** listing blog search engines include:
  - And there are plenty **other blog search sites** including:
    - [http://technorati.com/](http://technorati.com/)
    - [http://feedster.com/](http://feedster.com/)

- **Bookmark** a website/blog with links to blogs of interest. A good resource for educational blogs is James Farmer's blog (R502).

### Now let's find an interesting blog to add to the list below

- Visit the **technorati** site above
- **Search** for "blogging pedagogy" or perhaps another topic of more interest such as "orca whales".
- Find a blog of interest and check out the **comments** to it

| Tom's "Braziunas Family" blog (R401) | [http://braziunas.blogspot.com/](http://braziunas.blogspot.com/) |
| Jean Kent's travel blog (R402) | [http://www.offexploring.com/jkent20/home](http://www.offexploring.com/jkent20/home) |
| The award winning blog about experiences with traveling on London's Underground subway system (R403) | [http://london-underground.blogspot.com/](http://london-underground.blogspot.com/) |
PART 5: Educational Blogs

- **Where can we explore for educational blogs?**
  - **Edublogs** (R510) is the "myspace" site for educators
  - The list below provides great places to start.
  - Educators share ideas for using blogs in classrooms at various learning levels in R511.
  - Just from the links below, we can see that many K-12 students are now entering college with extensive experience in using educational blogs in their classrooms.

- **What tools are available to help assess specific blogs as sources of information on the Internet?** (R101, p. 39)
  - Find as much information as possible about the author by searching for who registered a domain name at [http://www.internic.net/](http://www.internic.net/)
  - Find out what kind of reputation the blogger has among his/her peers by checking on how many other bloggers have linked to that particular blog
    - Go to [http://technorati.com/](http://technorati.com/)
    - Enter the URL of the blog into the search form
  - Take a look at the "blogroll" -- the list of blogs that the blogger links to -- in order to help determine if the blog has a particular agenda

*For a blog to be used as part of a research effort, you should be able to identify who the author is, what he/she does for a living, what his/her level of expertise is, and what judgments others have made about him/her. Anything less renders the source less than acceptable (R101, p. 39-40)*
A great link on this topic is:  http://www.eschoolnews.com/eti/2005/06/000877.php

Try this:

- Find who owns http://www.virtualcollege.org/.
- "Assess" Jean Kent's "Faculty Development Blog" as a source of information!

| James Farmer's "incorporated subversion" blog (R502) | http://incsub.org/blog/ |
| Tim Wilson's "The Savvy Technologist" blog (R503) | http://www.technosavvy.org/ |
| The "2006 Edublog Awards" blog (R504) | http://incsub.org/awards/ |
| "SCCD Rich Media Summer Institute 2006" blog (R505) | http://podcast.seattlecolleges.edu/fd/rmsi/rmsi-blog.html |
| Jean Kent's SCCD "Faculty Development" blog (R506) | http://sccd-fd.blogspot.com/ |
| Ken Smith's Indiana University "Weblogs in Higher Education" blog (R507) | http://www.mchron.net/site/edublog.php edublog.php |
| Tom Griffith's "Teaching & Learning in the Future" blog (R508) | http://futurenorth.blogspot.com/ |
| Bud Hunt's "Bud the Teacher" blog (R509) | http://budtheteacher.typepad.com/ |
| Edublogs -- the largest education community on the Internet (R510) | http://edublogs.org/ |
| Anne Davis' "EduBlog Insights" website (R511) | http://anne.teachesme.com/ |
Barbara Ganley at Middlebury College says: "How can a teacher expect her students to blog (or to use any other tool, strategy, or technique) if she doesn’t use it herself, exploring the impact it has on her thinking, writing, research and creativity?" (R606 and R101, p. 45)

What are some useful features of classroom and special academic interest blogs?

- Check out the syllabus, evaluation rubric and other well-organized links in classroom blog R601
- Check out the category links and search feature in R602 (Click on "paleoclimate" or find "braziunas")
  - Try out the *share, comments* and *blog reactions* options at the bottom of each posting.
- Gather ideas from the practical design of R605
- Note how individual student blogs are linked into a classroom blog linked from R606

<table>
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<th>Blog Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jay Keeton's &quot;SOC 110 Sociological Reasoning&quot; class blog (R601)</td>
<td><a href="http://gr-soc110-s.blogspot.com/">http://gr-soc110-s.blogspot.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Real Climate: Climate science from climate scientists&quot; blog (R602)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.realclimate.org/">http://www.realclimate.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Michael Ryan's &quot;Palaeoblog&quot; (R603)</td>
<td><a href="http://palaeoblog.blogspot.com/">http://palaeoblog.blogspot.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom's NSCC &quot;GEL 100 Dinosaurs&quot; class blog (R604)</td>
<td><a href="http://nsccdinosours.blogspot.com/">http://nsccdinosours.blogspot.com/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Brian Holt's PSY 206 class blog (R605)</td>
<td><a href="http://developmentalpsych.blogspot.com/blogspot.com/">http://developmentalpsych.blogspot.com/blogspot.com/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>North's e-Learning Support Center blog (R607)</td>
<td><a href="http://nscc-dl.blogspot.com/">http://nscc-dl.blogspot.com/</a></td>
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PART 7: Contributing to blogs

● Posting to another blogger's website (R101, p. 46)

   ○ Posting to another person's blog is a great way to get the feel of publishing your thoughts.

   ○ Visit one of the blogs below (or perhaps one of the blogs listed previously) and contribute several postings.
     ■ Start small -- use your first post to link to something of interest and simply identify its source.
     ■ With your second post, provide a link and add a couple of sentences to highlight what you think is meaningful or important about what you've read.
     ■ With your third post (which could be "homework")!, consider writing more in depth about what you are reading or about your own personal experiences and reflections on teaching and learning.

Be a public blogger! Put your name on your work.

Just wait until that first person responds to something you've written; that's when you'll truly start to understand the power of the Read/Write Web. (R101, p. 46)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blog Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tom B.'s NSCC &quot;GEL 100 Dinosaurs&quot; class blog (R701)</td>
<td><a href="http://nsccdinosaurs.blogspot.com/">http://nsccdinosaurs.blogspot.com/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tom G.'s NSCC &quot;Teaching &amp; Learning in the Future&quot; blog (R702)</td>
<td><a href="http://futurenorth.blogspot.com/">http://futurenorth.blogspot.com/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>North's e-Learning Support Center blog (R703)</td>
<td><a href="http://nscc-dl.blogspot.com/">http://nscc-dl.blogspot.com/</a></td>
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