

Web-log Benefits In Teaching Writing

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Every year students come to school seemingly more wired than the year before. In fact, it is a rarity to find any student who does not have access to a computer. As students become more technologically literate, the trends of reading and writing are shifting from paper-based texts to screen based texts. Methods of writing instruction are following suit and teachers are implementing technology to facilitate these new teaching methods. It seems that one of the more popular technologies used is the Web-log, or blog, an online journal which allows anyone with access to a World Wide Web connected computer to publish their writing with little or no experience.

Blogging is an authentically collaborative medium of public writing. It allows students to develop and maintain control of their discourse, and teachers to develop assignments and activities that promote a democratic classroom that encourages student writers to collaborate, critique, and define knowledge. Used effectively, blogs address both these virtues of writing and give students ownership of writing and a responsive audience that is authentic in cyberspace.

Blogs can be used to facilitate directive based assignments or projects where the teacher sets the agenda of the discussion and writing, or where the student is free to exercise their own methods of discourse, similar to writing in a journal, but with a difference of having an audience that is not limited by the relatively minimal availability of the text.

Blogging provides a writing space for a student to claim ownership like no other medium of writing. Similar to a journal, the student has complete control over the discourse and can choose what audience they might direct their writing towards, but unlike journals, which has an audience of primarily the author and a select number of readers, the audience can be anyone with access to a computer connected to the World Wide Web. Not only will students be able to experiment with writing for an unknown audience, they will receive critical and “real” feedback from their audience.

Little or no web literacy is one of the aspects of blogging that can make it a popular technology in writing lesson plans. The ability of blogs to separate content from web design allows a user, or author, to simply sign up with a blog service provider, choose a design for the blog, and begin writing.

So, how do I get started implementing blogs in teaching writing? Like many aspects of teaching writing, the success of using blogs to supplement composition lessons relies on the directions and methods of the teacher. Consider blogging yourself. To understand the finer details of blogging, starting and maintaining a personal or professional blog is advised. This technology presents an opportunity for hands-on experience and may spark ideas for how to best apply blogging to your writing lesson plans. Spend time visiting other classroom blogs. There are many different methods to use blogs in writing. Blogs are analogous to blank sheets of paper. They are tools which students use to compose,

but unlike a piece of paper, blogs have the unique characteristics of continuous feedback, collaboration outside of the classroom, and a broader audience. Visiting other classroom blogs provides an opportunity to see how other teachers are implementing blogs.

Start by modeling blogging for your students. Like other mediums of writing there are successful blogs, and not so successful blogs. Showing students what is expected of their blogs, and participation in the reading and commenting of other blogs will reduce confusion and misunderstanding.

Make the blogs more public. One of the more significant and unique aspects of blogging is the opportunity for students' writing to be published for, and commented on, by an authentic public audience. One method of making a students blog more public is to have the students read other writers blogs, make comments, and then invite them to read their blogs. Before long, students may find they have a network of readers commenting and recommending their blogs.

Explain the "reach" of blogs to your students. Just as there are benefits to having students' writing being made public, there are also downfalls, but these pitfalls can be avoided with the explanation that what is published can be read by anyone including teachers, parents, current or eventual employers, school administrators, and even police.

To these suggestions might be added that a teacher give purpose behind the blogs. A common misuse of blogs is letting students set their own agenda for what writing they might choose to do. Students do need the direction of a "teacherly" assignment to write. Research and experimentation is essential to discovering how blogging can best be used to supplement writing lesson planning. The options are nearly limitless.

These sites allow you to create and modify your own blog. The set up is painless and takes just a few minutes. No technical knowledge is needed.

Blogger--<http://www.blogger.com/>--This free site will give your own sub domain name as well as allow you to choose a template for the layout of the blog. Good for teachers who just want to give blogging a try before starting with their classes.

21Publish--<http://www.21Publish.com/>--Bar none the best blog host for schools that I've come across. It allows teachers to set up a blogging community and make it totally secure--no one can join the community unless approved and all entries and comments can be regulated. 21Publish is full-featured, meaning users can post images, audio, video, links, and even documents.

edublogs.org--<http://edublogs.org>--Another free site created just for those in education.

Blog Resource Sites:

Weblogg-ed--<http://www.weblogg-ed.com>--This site, maintained by a high school Supervisor of Instructional Technology, is dedicated to "discussions and reflections" on

the use of Web logs and other technologies in the classroom. Lots of great resources here!

The Educated Blogger--

[\[http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue9_6/huffaker/index.html\]](http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue9_6/huffaker/index.html)--This article explores the role of Web logs in the classroom.

Ferdig, Richard E., and Kaye D. Trammell. "Content Delivery in the 'Blogsphere,'" T.H.E. Journal Online. February 2004. (February 13, 2004).--

[\[http://thejournal.com/articles/16626\]](http://thejournal.com/articles/16626)--This article is a fine introduction for teachers looking to incorporate blogging in their classrooms. They emphasize equality and audience in the use of blogs in the classroom.