



The following are links to the resources and websites included in the article:

Digest of Educational Statistics: 2006

James O'Hagan's blog, "1 Laptop : 1 Student"

"It's Not All Flowers and Sausages"

Ms. Frizzle's blog

Jim Hollis's blog, "Teachers Love SMART Boards"

Cheryl Oakes blog, "Techtalk"

Sean Marchetto's blog, "Exploding Beakers"

Edublog awards

Blog on

Teachers around the world are finding their voices by blogging

By Heather Ellwood

Key the words "teacher blogs" into an Internet search engine and about 2.8 million results will flow onto the computer screen. It seems that teachers and educators the world over feel compelled to share their achievements, accomplishments, foibles and frustrations by Web-logging or blogging. With over 3.5 million K-12 teachers working in U.S. classrooms in 2006 (The Digest of Educational Statistics: 2006), not to mention those who teach the world over, these education-focused blogs have the potential to attract a huge audience.

Just like people, blogs have attitudes. And teacher blogs are no exception. A journey through a sampling of education blogs shows that while most stay within the standard reverse-chronological order structure that Web readers have come to expect, the tone and style varies from blog to blog.

Some appear to be vehicles for personal philosophies, such as James O'Hagan's "1 Laptop: 1 Student" blog, which as the title suggests, advocates a one-to-one ratio of students to computers. Other teacher blogs take a diarist or narrative approach, sharing stories of personal growth and frustrations, or the sometimes mundane nature of the teaching. On good days, they might chat about the breakthroughs made with challenging students. "It's Not All Flowers and Sausages" and "Ms. Frizzle's Blog" are two especially charming, albeit anonymous, examples. Other blogs tackle challenges facing classroom teachers when it comes to technology, management and motivation.

What all of these blogs have in common is an invitation to comment. And it's this open-door policy toward sharing that gives a fresh, always-in-flux-feel to many teacher-written and teacher-focused blogs. In the blogging world, ideas, exchanges and posts move at lightning pace. Educational discourse, conducted via blogs, appears to be in tune with the pace of change in real classrooms. Real issues are discussed by real teachers in near-real time. This wide-open sharing and free exchange is a revisiting of the coffee-break talk in the teachers' lounge of old, and often on a world wide scale.

For veteran teacher, Jim Hollis, blogging is more than just a portal to share his views on education, it is a convenient and user-friendly way for him to fulfill his responsibilities. Hollis manages the professional development part of an Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) grant that was awarded to Arizona's Hayden-Winkelman and Superior Unified School districts. The two-year grant funded the installation of SMART Board™ interactive whiteboards and other technology tools in the district's seven schools. To give the 78 Hayden-Winkelman and Superior teachers access to "a tool kit centered around the SMART Board interactive whiteboard" and "ideas on how to apply it to the learning environment," Hollis created the blog "Teachers Love SMART Boards."



With over 5,000 hits from six continents, Hollis says of his blog, "it's one of the most rewarding things I've ever created."

Jim Hollis, technology manager, Hayden-Winkelman and Superior Unified School districts, Arizona

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Sean Marchetto, science consultant, Calgary Roman Catholic School District, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

On his blog, Hollis posts daily updates and pertinent information on how teachers and students use SMART Board interactive whiteboards. Additionally, he hosts weekly training sessions about SMART Board interactive whiteboards to "keep the creative juices of the teachers flowing all year long." "Teachers Love SMART Boards" has only been up and running since mid-August 2007, and already the response to it has been overwhelming, according to Hollis. With over 5,000 hits from six continents, Hollis says of his blog, "it's one of the most rewarding things I've ever created."

In Hollis' opinion, the rewards teachers reap by creating and maintaining a blog are limitless. Not only does a blog provide instant feedback to teachers, but it can also become a virtual storehouse of information on any topic pertaining to education.

Sharing was the impetus to begin blogging for Cheryl Oakes, the Collaborative Content Coach for Technology in Maine's Wells Ogunquit Community School District. When Oakes went on a sabbatical in 2005, she needed a way to stay in touch with her students and community, and the development of a blog seemed like a simple approach to keeping the lines of communication open. Oakes' blog has since evolved into a vital aspect of her professional life. With a focus on technology integration and teacher development, Oakes' "Techtalk" has become a "continuing conversation about blogging."

Many teachers, Oakes believes, used to feel isolated and alone, in spite of working with other like-minded professionals. The Web and its resources break down the barriers built by those feelings of isolation. After a tour through a few blogs, teachers quickly realize they are not alone.

When it comes to blogging, says Oakes, "with very little money invested, any teacher can become a world traveler in the virtual spaces reserved for educators on the World Wide Web. You don't need a passport, you don't often need any special currency, you just need an adventurous spirit and some time."

A spin-off benefit for visitors to a blog, such as the one hosted and administered by Oakes, is that she has done a whole lot of groundwork. Bloggers, especially teacher bloggers, are eager to share, and this sharing results in explosive and exponential content growth. It goes something like this: Users visit blog. Users drive content. Content brings more users. More users drive more content. And suddenly, a virtual community has sprung up around shared experiences and common goals.

Sean Marchetto, a former classroom science teacher and now a science consultant with the Calgary Roman Catholic School District in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, agrees with the notion that a sense of community is formed, especially when it comes to subject-area specialties. Marchetto's "Exploding Beakers" blog, which he launched in September of 2007, is a clearinghouse of information, geared towards science teachers.

"The Internet makes raw information so readily available that it can be overwhelming, and what some teachers need most of all is some sort of contextualization to help process it all," explains Marchetto.

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Marchetto also believes that when it comes to this virtual community, bloggers have a responsibility to constantly maintain and polish their online presence.

"Part of what makes a successful blog is posting on a regular basis. Set up a schedule, make it habit. Not only does it help to make you a better writer, but if you post regularly, whether daily, weekly, bi-weekly, etc., people get an idea of how often to check back on your site. A lot of blogs lose visitors because people don't feel like they are making contact, either by not being able to leave comments or not understanding when updates occur," says Marchetto.

And if teachers are unsure where to search for a blog that best fits their niche, Edublog awards are given out each year celebrating the best in education blogs. Teachers new to the blogging world can take a virtual wander through the winners' circle and be amazed at the variety and quality of education blogs and forums.

This burgeoning online world is a boon for teachers everywhere because, as the cliché goes, there's something for everyone. And the blogosphere is growing all the time. Technology manufacturers, software development companies, search engines, education publishers and professional organizations are all contributing to the mushrooming of online forums and blogs specifically targeted to educators.

Perhaps that's because, explains Hollis, the power to blog rests with everyone, and creating a blog is an easy and painless process. "Every school, every teacher and every student has the ability to create and maintain a blog and share it with the world," he adds. "Blog software allows you to add content to your blog in a matter of minutes and have it updated for all to see in a matter of seconds. Learning how to use these applications is simple, and most people can have a new blog up and running in under an hour. Once launched, the possibilities are indeed endless." On that note, Oakes adds, "Blogging knocks down the walls of the school and lets you chat with folks around the world."

So whether you want to vicariously share in the universality of the teaching experience or find a vehicle to voice all of those great ideas stockpiled in a computer file, the blog world fits the bill. Start knocking down those walls, hit the keyboard and blog on.



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Cheryl Oakes, collaborative content coach for technology, Wells Ogunquit Community School District, Maine