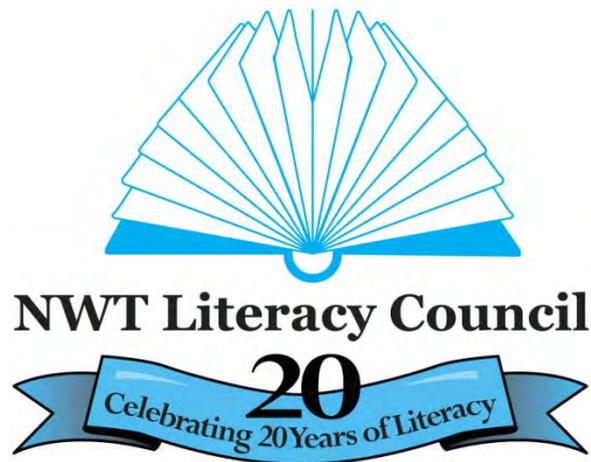


Blogging in the Classroom

**A Great Way to Engage and Inspire
 Learners**



“Our child is genuinely excited to come home and show us what he has written online. To read his own words and listen to his own voice on the Internet makes it all more real and fascinating for him. This also helps keep us in the loop.”

Jim, Parent

Blog Jargon

Blogger: any contributor to a blog

Blogging: the processes of creating or maintaining a blog

multi-blog: an online "conversation" taking place between several blogs

Did you know?

Teenagers are active bloggers – in fact, one-quarter of teens blog. Teenagers like blogging because, unlike an online profile, they aren't judged by their appearance or age – just on how interesting the content of their blog is.

What is a blog?

A blog (sometimes referred to as a weblog) is a web publishing tool that allows authors to quickly and easily self-publish text, artwork, videos, pictures, links to other blogs or Web sites, and a whole array of other content.

Blogs can be personal – like online diaries – or more formal and professional. Anyone can write a blog and there is no shortage of platforms. Postings are often short and frequently updated. They appear in reverse chronological order and can include archived entries.

There are many free blogger sites where you can literally set up a blog in minutes.

- Blogger-Create Your Blog Now
A free resource for creating and managing a classroom blog
- Bravenet WebBlogs
Create your WebBlog here.
- Landmarks Blog Meister
An online blogging and hosting tool for classroom educators.

Blogs work well for learners because they can be worked on at almost any time, in any place with any computer hooked up to the Internet. Educators can create a classroom that extends beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

Why blog?

So, why should you blog with your learners? There are many reasons why you may choose to use weblogs with learners. One of the best reasons is to provide a real audience for learner writing. Usually the educator is the only person who reads student writing, and the focus of this reading is often on form, not content. With weblogs, learners can find themselves writing for a real audience that, apart from the educator, may include their peers, learners from other classes in their community or the NWT, or even other countries, their parents, and potentially anyone with access to the Internet.

Benefits of blogging for learners

In addition to providing educators with an excellent tool for communicating with learners, there are numerous educational benefits of blogs. Learners can pick up lots of skills by blogging. Some of these include:

- **Developing their writing ability:** Learners are more motivated to write when they choose topics that are relevant to their lives. According to some new research, blogging can foster better writing skills, more thoughtful communication skills and intellectual exchanges.
- **Gaining creative multimedia skills:** To make an interesting blog that people want to read, the blogger must post regular entries and make them attractive and engaging for readers by adding elements such as photos, videos and hyperlinks. This requires the use of multimedia tools.
- **Developing and managing an online community:** A blog becomes a highly social environment when readers respond to the main topic or other readers' postings. This dialogue needs to be managed to ensure the conversation doesn't become stale, or worse nasty.
- **Communicating with family and friends:** Unlike *Facebook* where you have to be a member to view other people's pages, learners can develop a blog site that all of their family and friends can access.

Twitter and micro-blogging

- Micro-blogging is a style of blogging that uses very short posts, and Twitter is the most famous of micro-blogging sites. It is used to post brief responses that are fewer than 140 characters long, including spaces, to the question “What are you doing?”
- It may be difficult to imagine what the use of a micro-blog might be unless one has experienced it firsthand. The best thing to do is to create an account and experiment. As this is a social networking tool, the most important thing to do once you have registered is create a network. One way to do this is by searching for keywords you might be interested in and by following people whose conversations grab your attention.
- To get a better understanding of Twitter – check out [Twitter in Plain English](#)

Using blogs in the classroom

Aaron Campbell (2003) has outlined three types of blogs for classroom use.

- **The Tutor Blog** is run by the educator. The content of this type of blog can be limited to the curriculum, course information, homework, assignments, etc. Or the educator may choose to write about his or her life, share reflections about the local culture, target culture and language to stimulate online and in-class discussion. In this type of blog, learners can respond to what the educator has written through the comments feature on blogs.
- **The Class Blog** is a shared space, with educator and learners being able to write to the main area. Educators encourage learners to reflect on topics and make posts to the blog. Learners have a greater sense of freedom and involvement than with the tutor blog.
- **The Learner Blog** is the third type of blog and it requires more time and effort from the educator both to set it up and moderate it, but it is probably the most effective. It involves giving each learner an individual blog. The benefit of this is that this becomes the learner's own personal online space. Learners can be encouraged to write frequently about what interests them, and can post comments on other learners' blogs. The educator needs to make sure that they are the administrator for each learner's blog. This will help you make sure that what learners are writing about is appropriate.

Issues to watch for

- **Correction.** It is difficult to use a blog for correcting learners. You can always correct learner written work before posting to the blog, or you can do class correction sessions using work published in the blogs.
- **Privacy.** By their very nature, most blogs are public. Anyone with access to the Web can find and read a blog, and write comments (if this feature has been turned on). If privacy is an issue, then you will be better off using a blogging tool that allows different levels of access rights.
- **Appropriate comments.** Young people tend to treat their blogs and online profiles as though they are a private place – which is not the case. Learners need to be guided to write about appropriate things. What is written on the web can stay with a person for a very long time!
- **Internet safety.** Learners should be warned of the safety risks involved in online activities. Ask learners to fill in a Learner Internet Safety Pledge form. For children and youth, get parents to sign the form too. You can download a form from the NWT Literacy Council's website. The form has several statements that start with *I will...*

I will not reply to any messages or bulletin board items that are suggestive, obscene, aggressive, or distressing.

Preparing learners for blogging

- For young people, inform parents of procedures and secure parental permission.
- Teach learners safe, acceptable, and sensible behavior as online authors and readers. Get learners to sign the Learner Internet Safety Pledge (see www.nwt.literacy.ca).
- Teach the non-posting rules of no complete names, e-mail accounts, or references to reveal location.
- Set clear expectations regarding tone, respect, and consequences.

Here are some other reasons for using blogs:

- **To provide extra reading practice for learners**
The educator can produce this reading, or other learners in the same class, or, in the case of comments posted to a blog, people from all over the world.
- **As online learner journals that peers can read**
The value of using learner journals has been well documented. Usually they are private channels between educator and learner. Using a blog as a learner journal can increase the audience.
- **To guide learners to online resources appropriate for their level**
The Internet has a bewildering array of resources that are potentially useful for your learners. The problem is finding and directing your learners to them. For this reason, you can use your tutor blog as a portal for your learners.
- **To increase the sense of community in a class**
A class blog can help foster a feeling of community among the members of a class, especially if learners are sharing information about themselves and their interests, and are responding to what other learners are writing.
- **To encourage shy learners to participate**
There is evidence to suggest that learners who are quiet in class can find their voice when given the opportunity to express themselves in a blog.
- **To stimulate out-of-class discussion**
A blog can be an ideal space for pre-class or post-class discussion. And you can use what learners write about in the blog to promote discussion in class.
- **To encourage a process-writing approach**
Because learners are writing for publication, they are usually more concerned about getting things right, and usually understand the value of rewriting more than if the only audience for their written work is the educator.
- **As an online portfolio of learnerwritten work**
Learners gain much from keeping a portfolio of their work. One example is the ease at which learners can return to previous written work and evaluate the progress they have made during a course.

Where to start

There are lots of sites where you can set up a blog for free, but perhaps the best known and one of the most reliable and simple blogging tools to use with learners is Blogger (<http://blogger.com>). It takes only fifteen minutes from setting up an account to publishing the first post using this valuable tool.

The educator sets up the tutor blog or a class blog. With a Class blog, learners will need to be invited to participate by e-mail. The educator can either set up learner blog accounts beforehand, or do it at the same time with a whole class in a computer room. The former gives the educator more control of learner accounts, but some advantages of the latter is that learners have more choice (of username, design of the blog, etc.) and a greater sense of 'ownership' of their new virtual writing space.

Tips for managing learner blog settings

- Use the '*Settings*' in Blogger to add yourself (under Members) as Administrator of the learner blog. This is invaluable if learners later forget usernames or passwords, and can also help if inappropriate posts are published
- Make sure you change the setting and turn the '*Comments*' feature on. This will allow the others to respond to things the learners write on their learner blogs.
- Also in '*Settings*', you will find an option to receive an email whenever a learner publishes their blog. This will save you time regularly checking learner blogs to see if any of your learners have posted.

Keep your learners interested

- Respond to learner posts quickly, writing a short comment related to the content. Ask questions about what the learner writes to create stimulus for writing.
- Actively encourage learners to read and respond (through the commenting feature of the blog) to their classmates.
- Writing to the blog can be required, and it may form part of the class assessment. Encourage learners to post their writing homework on the blog instead of only giving it to you, the educator.

Check out the NWT Literacy Council's website under Digital Literacy for more information on using technology in the classroom. You will find:

- More information on blogging.
- A link to the NWT Literacy Council's blog.
- A Learner Internet Safety Pledge that you can download.
- An overview of Using Technology in the Classroom.
- A complete unit on digital storytelling including examples, handouts, links to tutorials and links to other websites.
- Information on social networking.

Acknowledgements

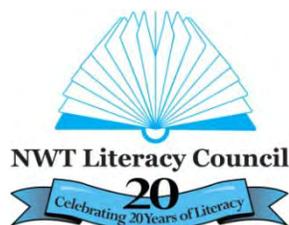
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Information from this booklet courtesy of Web 2.0 in the Classroom:

<http://web20intheclassroom.blogspot.com/2008/10/ways-to-use-blogs-in-your-classroom-and.html> and Teaching English

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/articles/blogging-elt>



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