Blogging in the Classroom

When students blog as part of their learning experience, the posts have a focused purpose. The objective of publication on a blog is to communicate within the context of the classroom. Students create content which is shared with an authentic audience, whether it be students in their own classroom, parents, or students and teachers from other schools. A blog is used to communicate. The expectation is that knowledge will be shared and that publishing becomes part of the knowledge making process. This happens as writers read each other's posts and respond with their own thoughts and feelings. Students develop an awareness that the content they are publishing is public and they must be aware of quality and accuracy. When blogs are used by students, we have the potential to be able to teach them to write critically and be reflective about their message and other's writing.

Features of a Blog

- Blog posts are created by one author, usually
- Reverse chronological order
- Readers are often encouraged to comment on the posts to create "conversation".
- In an educational application, blog posts and comments are usually monitored by the teacher before they appear on the web page.

Integrating Technology Students are Already Using

Over 70% of young people join Social Networking sites, most of them posting content, contributing to photo storage sites, and contributing to video sharing sites like YouTube. Their audience for posting content is most certainly their own peers. Using real-world tools in the classroom is not only engaging, but provides an opportunity to teach children responsible and ethical use.

Connection to Illinois State Standards

State Goal One: Read with understanding and fluency
- Analyze how authors and illustrators use text and art to express and emphasize their ideas (e.g., imagery, multiple points of view). (1C)

State Goal Two: Read and understand literature representative of various societies, eras and ideas.
- Make connections from text to text, text to self, text to world. (2B)
- Engage in literary discussions (e.g., conflict, resolution, realism). (2B)

State Goal Three: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.
- Develop compositions that contain complete sentences and effective paragraphs. (3A)
- Choose the appropriate form, (e.g., letters, essays, poems, reports, narratives), voice and style appropriate to the audience and purpose. (3B)
- Using available technology, select effective formats for publication of final product. (3B)
- Write creatively for a specified purpose and audience (e.g., short story, poetry, radio, scripts, play play, TV commercial). (3B)
- Write a narrative account that establishes context, creates a point of view and develops a focused, powerful impression. (3C)
- Compose a multi-paragraph persuasive piece which presents one position of an issue that offers sufficient support through multiple strategies (e.g., cause/effect, compare/contrast). (3C)
- Begin to establish a personal voice and style. (3B)

Consistent with Curriculum Focus on Writing
- Enhances improvements to the writing program
- Engaged Learning – lit circles, project based learning, cooperative groups
- Publishing work and receiving feedback from an authentic audience
- Promote critical and analytical thinking
- Promotes creativity
- Combines solitary reflection and social interaction
- Constructivist
- Collaborative

Uses for Blogs in the Classroom
- Media literacy - read and write about what they watch, read, see on TV or the news
- Manage course information - easy publishing of notes, syllabus, homework, activities, and assessments
- Extend in class discussion - allowing quiet, shy, or ESL students a less pressured opportunity to participate
- Summarize readings - ensure students are prepared when they come to class
- Literature Circles - thought provoking questions and set up a structure for collaborative contribution
- Summarize projects or group presentations - group blogging makes information accessible to everyone
- Class newsletter - communicate with parents and other members of the community
- Online portfolio of best writing pieces
- Collaborate with students at another school
- Literature assignments
- Communicate with parents with a class newsletter
- Provide Writing prompts
- Vocabulary activities
- Online readings to read and react to
- Post photos on class activities
- Invite student comments on issues to encourage writing voice
- Online book club

Management Tips for Setting up Student Blogs
- Have students use one (and only one!) publishing tool, such as Classblogmeister
- What's features are needed in a blogging tool?
- No information identifying the school
- Use first names only
- Prevent students from using tools that allow them to "blogroll" or access random blogs - blogger.com
- Teacher monitored
- All articles comments must be approved before they appear on the Internet
- Monitor with an RSS reader (Bloglines)
- Comment at least once for every student the first couple of weeks
- Specify minimum post size
- Provide guided questions for reading response
- Require comments
- Decide how to grade: quality or quantity? Provide a rubric.

Comments Key to Success

Blogging is a "conversation". The writer expects others to read posts and for the piece of writing to generate some kind of reaction or emotion. Without the expectation that their audience would read, reflect, and respond, there is no reason to post on a blog. Just as your students appreciate meaningful feedback on papers, essays, and during conferences about their work, bloggers need feedback in the form of comments. The connection between the writer and the audience is essential. Students should be taught to make appropriate and significant comments to each other. The primary reason is to learn to be ethical users of the internet. Learning to write thoughtful comments help us become higher level thinkers. In addition, writing comments help motivate the writer to continue the conversation.

Meaningful comments are always:
- Stated in a positive tone
- if there is a need to be critical, it should be stated like "advice". For example, "It would be helpful if....", "Next time try...."
- Specific and making reference to the post
- Express a feeling that you are on the writer's side, always being respectful
- Using school appropriate language and conventions

The following are good comment starters:

This made me think about.......
I wonder why.......
Your writing made me form an opinion about.......
This post is relevant because.......
Your writing made me think that we should.......
I wish I understood why.......
This is important because.......
Another thing to consider is...
I can relate to this.......
This makes me think of.......
I discovered.......
I don't understand.......
I was reminded that.......
I found myself wondering.......

Source: Ann Davis http://adavis.pbwiki.com/Significant Comments

Using Wikis in the Classroom

Definition

A wiki, according to the definition at Wikipedia, (the most well known wiki) is a collaborative website where the users can contribute. If any teacher or student who is at this site or any of it's pages would like to contribute to the page, make corrections, or additions, the "Edit This Page" button will change this page from a static web page to a word processing document. It is just that easy. Most wikis are more open to collaborators.

Features

- webpage with an edit button
- easy to correct mistakes
- easy to allow people to contribute
- does not prevent the making of mistakes
- "wisdom of crowds" – collaborative (wikipedia)
- "notification" – asked to be notified when changes occur – that's how stuff gets fixed in 2 minutes.
- web 2.0 applications work with old computers - no need to spend money on software

Create your own wiki:

- Wikispaces (preferred in classroom work because teachers and students can obtain ad free space)
- PBWiki
- Wetpaint

Purpose of a Wiki

The purpose of a wiki is to facilitate participation in an easy-to-use online environment by a community of people who care about the content because they have ownership of the process and the results.

Issues
Adoption issues include:

Application or Use – examples in the "real world" include sales processes, technical documentation, work group collaboration, and event planning. An example of how a space like this is used in a school is here. So far over over 60,000 K-12 educators have signed up on wikispaces (not to mention all the other wiki websites available). They use their wikis for a variety of purposes including digital portfolios, group projects, and demonstration of learning across a wide variety of subjects.

Open vs. Secure – the less control the more powerful the tool, the more control the more security, different levels of control are available. This wiki is protected, meaning that only authorized users can contribute. Anyone however can read the wiki, which is why we do not use names or identifying information.

Quality, Accuracy, and Moderators – New users need to understand that a wiki is a tool, like email and a word processor, no more or less accurate than those tools. The colaborative nature of this type of work offers the opportunity for review by others, including the moderator, which in this case are the teachers. Click here for a comparison of wikipedia to Encyclopedia Britannica. Click here to see how the founder of wikipedia wants his site to be used.

Process
1. The first step is to invite people. To participate in wikis, including wikipedia, a person has to use an email address, user name, and password. In this case and with most educational wikis, the website administrators take care of the user list so that students' email addresses are not used.

2. The home page and the navigation bar on the right side is the framework or template for people to start.

3. Personal profile pages that identify the user with their user name and contact information are important in most wikis because then the community or guests can identify the writers, lending credibility to the content. Schools do not use profile pages for anyone other than the teachers.

4. As new pages are created, the navigation bar grows and the content gets organized as needed.

5. Encourage visits. Companies may put non-essential information on the wiki so people will visit often ie sign up sheets, list of places for lunch, staff birthdays, photos of an event. In this application, students are compelled to visit to contribute.

6. Create a scaffold or template for people to fill in the blanks. Most wikis do this.

7. When people ask for information that is on the wiki, email them the link to the specific page, training people to check the wiki and increasing the value. For

example, classrooms can use each others' wikis as resources to learn about different topics.

   8. Adoption spreads as users invite or compel other users to contribute.

Roles

Champion – a person who can train others or help them get started

WikiGardener or WikiGnome – those who like to fix typos, find citations for quotes, fix broken links, and add links

WikiFairy - someone who makes format changes to make the wiki more visually appealing.

WikiTroll – those who like to insight a reaction from others by posting controversial content or doing disruptive things. WikiTrolls do not exists when wikis require a login with a secure password because they are not anonymous

Obstacles

- Empty pages where people don't know where to start
- One person takes control – all members feel a sense of ownership, accomplishment, and responsibility when they all contribute fairly equally
- Too much organization – a wiki should start out with the least amount of structure because structure will be added over time as the need arises

Resources
Richardson, Will, Blogs, Wikis, Podcoasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms. Corwin Press 2006.