Educational Blogging, Laurel A. Clyde

Clyde, L.A. (2005). Educational blogging. Teacher Librarian, 32(3), 43-45.

The "InfoTech" article for the September 2002 issue of Teacher Librarian ("Shall We Blog?") provided an introduction to weblogs or blogs and blogging in general. In the December 2002 issue of Teacher Librarian, Theresa Ross Embrey provided "a guide to how teacher-librarians can use weblogs to build communication and research skills." She defined weblogs as "a cross between a diary, a web site, and an online community"; weblogs are sites built using specially designed blogging software that makes creating and maintaining a weblog a quick and easy process. Another key feature of weblogs is that they are organized with the most recent information (or "posts") first; as new posts are added to the blog, the older posts automatically work their way down the main page and then into the archives.

Weblogs have a number of applications in education, and particularly in the school context. There are a number of authoritative educational weblogs that can be used as sources of information and provide professional development material for teachers. There are weblogs that can be used by teachers and students as sources of information for curriculum-related activities. Some schools are using weblogs to provide information to parents and other members of the school community. Teachers and students are creating and maintaining weblogs as learning projects, as part of the learning processes in the classroom. This article will look at some of these educational applications of weblogs, with examples. The URLs of the cited resources are given at the end of the article.

Not all weblogs carry reliable, current information; like ordinary web pages, some are great resources and some are, well, not so great. Some are created purely to provide an online platform for the views or rantings of the blogger. Some exist to publish the creative writing of the blogger. Others, however, are created by experts in their subject field to provide news and updates and sometimes to create a community of interest around the blog. Before they are used in an educational setting, weblogs should be evaluated carefully, just as other web pages have to be evaluated. At the moment, however, there is no set of generally accepted standards or procedures available for evaluating weblogs to ensure that the information can be used with confidence. In response to this problem, I have proposed a draft set of criteria for evaluating weblogs (Clyde, 2004) that takes into account existing criteria for the evaluation of information sources, plus insights from the research literature and from observation of weblog use. The criteria will be refined through further research over the next year.

WEBLOGS AS SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

The best topic-oriented blogs contain useful posts that will help their readers to keep up to date on the issues. Some weblogs, particularly those created by subject experts (as indicated above), have emerged as authoritative sources of current information and opinion in their field. Not only are many information weblogs actually created by subject experts (or at least by people with an abiding interest in a subject), but they also often attract the participation of other experts through a "comment" facility. The following

weblogs are useful as sources of current professional information for teachers and teacher-librarians:

BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS

http://librarygoddess.blogspot.com/

"A high school librarian [in New Jersey] reviews books written for, or appropriate for, teens."

THE EDUCATION LIBRARIAN

http://www.educationlibrarian.com/

Information about educational resources, including Internet-based resources and commercial online information services.

EBN: EDUCATIONAL BLOGGERS NETWORK

http://www.ebn.weblogger.com/

Information about the use of weblogs in education, links to resources about weblogs, blogging tools, and other resources.

EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION SOURCES ONLINE

http://edsourceonline.blogspot.com/

"Information literacy resources for educators, librarians and students," from Brenda C. Cowe. The main page of this weblog also has links to a wide range of authoritative Internet resources that go beyond any narrow definitions of "information literacy."

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BLOG

http://elementary-school.blogspot.com/

This weblog, provided by Norma Jean Smith (Austin, Texas), has information about and links to web sites "designed for elementary school teachers and teacher-librarians."

INFORMATION LITERACY WEBLOG

http://ciquest.shef.ac.uk/infolit/

From Sheila Webber and colleagues at Sheffield University in the United Kingdom, this weblog provides information about conferences, new publications, and other resources in the field of information literacy.

JERZ'S LITERACY WEBLOG

http://jerz.setonhill.edu/weblog/index.jsp

This weblog covers a range of literacies, including reading and writing, visual literacy, and information literacy.

MESOJ

http://www.bloglines.com/blog/mesoj/

Mesoj is "an education blog from an education librarian," Jonathan H. Harwell. It provides information about, and links to, education resources with an emphasis on educational blogging.

WEBLOGS IN THE CURRICULUM

Classroom blogging has the potential "to motivate students, to build online collaboration, and enhance learning opportunities" (Holzberg, 2003). Weblogs can be used to promote literacy in the classroom through storytelling and dialogue (Huffaker, 2004). Blogging provides students with a venue to publish online for an audience and to engage in collaborative activities (if the weblog is set up as a group blog). Stephen O'Hear (2004) says that "as an educational tool [weblogs] can allow students to develop ideas and invite feedback." They are relatively inexpensive to create (if free blogging software is used) and can be updated quickly and easily (from a computer in the classroom, from a computer in another location, or even from a handheld computer or mobile phone). Once an item is posted to the blog, it can be read immediately, and feedback can be rapid if a facility is provided for comments.

Stephen Downes (2004) has described the use of weblogs to support student learning with fifth and sixth grade students at Institut St-Joseph in Quebec City, Canada. The blogs are used as "a virtual extension of the classroom," and they are used at three levels: "a classroom web space, where announcements are displayed and work of common interest is posted; a public, personal communication zone, where students post the results of their work or reflection; and a private personal space, resewed for students' thoughts and teacher guidance" (Downes, 2004). One of the students is quoted as saying that "the blogs give us a chance to communicate between us and motivate us to write more." Not all blogs provide for two-way communication, but when they do, the bloggers receive feedback from the class, or the school community, or even from around the world, depending on whether the blog is publicly available. The school principal says that the "objective [...] was to offer students and teachers a support tool to promote reflective analysis and the emergence of a learning community that goes beyond the school walls" (Downes, 2004).

Will Richardson, creator and maintainer of the Weblogg-ed weblog, says on his blog that weblogs give school students opportunities to write for an audience about things that are important or meaningful for them, and he advocates the use of collaborative blogs that

cross classroom and even school boundaries. Blogs have formed the basis of international projects, for example, with schools in a number of countries posting information about pollution counts or bird migrations. Richardson, a supervisor of instructional technology in New Jersey, established Weblogg-ed to collate and make available information about the use of blogs in the classroom.

The EdBlogger Praxis weblog is another that has been created to bring together information about weblogs in education. It carries a long list of teacher-created class weblogs that serve many different purposes. One such is Carmack's Critters, the blog of Mrs. Carmack's First Grade class at Butlerville Elementary School in the United States. The blog is aimed at parents of the students; Mrs. Carmack and her class members report on class activities and what they have learned, and parents are asked to support their children's learning through small activities in the home. At the school level (rather than the level of the individual class), the weblog of Lewis Elementary School in Seattle is a rich source of information about what is going on in the school. EdBlogger Praxis also has links to blogs where teachers can discuss curriculum topics, share teaching ideas, or report action research projects in their classroom.

The "Blogging Scavenger Hunt," a web page created for a professional development activity, has links to a number of other web sites related to blogs in education, including collections of educational blogs and sites that provide resources for teachers who are using blogs in the classroom. It is noticeable that very few of the educational web sites listed on the "Blogging Scavenger Hunt" (or on Weblogg-ed or EdBlogger Praxis) make any reference to the ways in which teacher-librarians might support the curriculum applications of blogging; in fact, teacher-librarians and school libraries are almost invisible in this world of educational blogging. Yet blogging in schools is an information-related activity that requires and develops information skills in students; it is also a teaching and learning activity that should be supported by school libraries in the same way that other teaching and learning activities are supported.

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