

SIESWE Learning Technology Infosheet #4

Blogging

What's a Blog?

A web log (usually shortened to blog) is a web-based journal consisting of a series of short articles normally appearing in reverse chronological order. Blogs are maintained by an individual (or small group) and usually focus on a particular subject or topic. Readers of blogs can add comments at the foot of each article agreeing, disagreeing, or developing the original article. Bloggers frequently reference other articles and web pages on the internet, building up a rich seam of interconnected articles related to the topic under discussion.

Blogging is a relatively recent phenomenon but one that has experienced an exponential growth from twenty three known blogs in 1999 to an estimated 70 million by the end of 2006. This growth is probably explained in part by the ease of use of blogs: requiring almost no knowledge of how web pages are put together, no jargon or techno-babble to learn, and no ICT technicians to consult, blogs put the blogger, as author, firmly in control.



learningtechnology@team.wordpress.com

Since blogs are often maintained by enthusiastic individuals writing about a particular area of interest you can find blogs on almost any subject under the sun including health and social care (see the selection below). There are family blogs, community blogs, media blogs, corporate blogs and Edublogs (focussing on educational applications).

Since they are updated frequently, a blog written by someone with genuine expertise in their area of interest, can be an excellent way of keeping up to date with the latest developments. However, since anyone can start a blog, it's an unfortunate fact that the vast majority of blogs consist of the idiosyncratic ramblings

of those millions of individuals that make up the human race. So how do you sort the wheat from the chaff?

Searching the blogosphere

Of the 70 million blogs in the world how do you find those that may be of particular personal or professional interest? Thankfully there are several search engines that specialise in searching the blogosphere including: technorati (technorati.com); google blog search (blogsearch.google.com); and Icerocket blog search (icerocket.com). There is a good chance that, once you've found a blog of interest, it will include links to other blogs with related content and similar quality. Blog content changes frequently

and constantly returning to your favourite blogs in search of relevant material can become a chore. A better way of staying up to date is to subscribe to the blogs feed using an RSS feed-reader which will allow you to quickly and easily scan the latest blog entries from your desktop (see the SIESWE Learning Technology Infosheet on RSS and Podcasting for more information about RSS and feed-readers).

Blog uses in education

The personal journal format of a blog makes it an excellent tool to encourage reflective discussion. Of course not every learner is going to want their reflections placed on the open internet for anyone to comment, but there are now technologies that allow educators to set up blogs inside learning environments where access can be controlled and moderated: elgg (elgg.org) is an excellent example of this sort of new learning environment.

Like any other technology used for learning blogs will only add value if their use is clearly linked to particular educational purposes and learners are supported and feel comfortable in their use. Educause (2005) suggest that:

Blogs offer students, faculty, staff, and others a high level of autonomy while creating a new opportunity for interaction with peers. Blogs provide a forum for discussion that goes beyond coursework to include culture, politics, and

other areas of personal exploration. Students often learn as much from each other as from instructors or textbooks, and blogs offer another mechanism for peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and acquisition.

Edubloggers

A number of blogs are maintained by educators who discuss the application of blogs, wikis, podcasting and other new technologies in an educational context. For example, Ewan McIntosh (a Scottish modern languages teacher) maintains a lively blog at edu.blogs.com to share news and developments with the Scottish and worldwide education community, posting news, links, thoughts and ideas to generate discussion.

Related Internet Links

- Blogger*
www.blogger.com
- Wordpress*
www.wordpress.com
- Typepad*
www.typepad.com
- Livejournal*
www.livejournal.com
- The big blog company*
www.bigblogcompany.net
- Psy blog*
www.spring.org.uk
- Peter Beresford's blog*
www.bizbuzzmedia.com/blogs/peter_beresford
- Trevor Philpott's blog*
reducingreoffending.blogspot.com
- Blogging against disablism day*
tinyurl.com/yqmc8b
- The occupational therapy blog*
www.housingot.co.uk/page9.htm
- Educause Learning Initiative (2005), 7 things you should know about blogs*
educeuse.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7006.pdf
- Ujlicsak, M. (2004) Can blogging be used in education?*
 Futurelab
www.futurelab.org.uk/viewpoint/art21.htm
- The Edublog awards 2006*
incsub.org/awards/2006/