Blogs

What is a Blog?

A Blog can be described as a very simple webpage where the entries (or posts) are organised in reverse chronological order. A blog is usually open to the public and many are free to create. It is generally the work of one author but group blogs are not uncommon. Blogs can also offer an opportunity to interact with readers. Readers can post comments like with a guest book on a website. Blogs can also be regarded as a form of personal publishing on the Internet.

The word blog is short for weblogs or web based log.

Possible Educational Uses

From a teacher's point of view, a blog can become a class notice board, an archive of links and documents or as a collaboration or discussion tool with his/her students. It can also be used by the students as a learning reflection tool. Blogs encourage students to write and also to read on a topic they wish to comment on. Bloggers continually search, filter and post ideas and information which engage higher order thinking skills. As blogs are open to the world in the same way as websites, it is possible to allow comments from the readers and to get feedback. Students can use this feedback to improve on their work.

Blogs also make it very easy to embed video, audio or flash movies. It is also possible to attach word processing, spreadsheets and pdf files into a blog.

Selecting appropriate software

Blogging software breaks down into two categories, each with its own advantages and disadvantages.

Hosting services:
A hosting service is a website that will allow users to create a blog on their server. The hosting service will require you to register a username and password. The hosting service will have an admin page consisting of forms where you can add content for your blog. This simplifies the process of updating your blog. The hosting service will also supply a range of style templates to decorate you blog. It will provide some useful accessories such as a flash movie viewer or a facility to update your blog using email.

As you are using a hosting device your blog url will generally be of the form of username.hostingservicename.com.

There are quite a few hosting services available although some caution may be need in selecting one in an educational context. Blogger is the best known hosted blog service and has been used in classrooms however it has a feature which links random blogs to your blog which may not be age appropriate for some classes. Another feature of some hosting services is the inclusion of ads on the blog page. Again some may not be suitable for some classes.

There are hosting services that have an educational focus. These services have removed the negative features outlined above to make it more useful and safe for the classroom. Edublogs.com and Learnerblogs are two such examples.

Installed applications
This involves installing a piece of software on your own webserver or website server provider. An installed application may provide a better solution to institutions as access can

be controlled. However using an installed application will require some technical knowledge to setup and maintain.

Some of the better known examples of installed applications are Moveable type, WordPress, Live Journal. Microsoft has produced a desktop Blog writer called Live Writer which works with most of the most popular hosting blog services.

Technical and Purchasing considerations

Cost:
Most Blogging solutions on offer are free but a purchased solution may provide advantages that a free solution may not, such as webspace and technical backup. Some installed applications software are free or have an education price available to schools.

Technical:
Even with the free hosting options some html experience maybe useful in getting more value out of your blog. An installed solution may require a high level of time and experience to maintain a webserver.

Content regulation:
Blogs are a public tool and a forum that can be used to express personal viewpoints. It is very important that teachers and students are aware of copyright issues and netiquette when expressing their view point on a blog.

Potential problems and pitfalls
Like Email and Internet websites, blog is also afflicted by spam; advertising all types of non educational material through the comments. Most Blogging solutions provide some features in defending against spamming. Using filters and restricting the ease of commenting will help to reduce the amount of spam received. Another issue is inappropriate comments and posts from students. Both blogging etiquette and comment moderation by the teacher will reduce the impact of this hazard. It is also good practice to prevent anonymous commenting by requesting a valid email address to be confirmed prior to commenting.

Scoilnet blogs
A new Scoilnet Blogging service is also being developed. It will be based on the Wordpress platform, on which edublogs is also based, and is planned to be offered as a Scoilnet service and hosted on the Schools Broadband Network. Details of this new service will be sent to schools interested in expanding into this area.

Examples of Educational Uses of blogs

Some Irish schools have used blogs to enhance the learning of their students

http://msmccarthy.21classes.com/
French blog called L*e Soleil, la lune et les étoiles* created by French class in Loreto St Michaels Navan. In Sept 2008, they won *European Award for Languages - The Language Label*

http://scoilnetprojectindia.blogspot.com/
Trace the progress of a group of transition year students who travel to India to build a school.

http://stthomaspeterswell.blogspot.com/
It is a school blog of a small primary school in Patrickswell Co Galway informing parents, students and local community of school events and news. This blog has been live since December 2006

Relevant Web Sites

Will Richardson Blogging resource page
http://supportblogging.com/Educational+Blogging
Will Richardson, a US English teacher that was an early adaptor to blogs for use in education. This site contains a comprehensive list of Educational blogging resources.

Using Blogs to Enhance Learning – Some Helpful Tips
http://www.openeducation.net/2008/10/10/using-blogs-to-enhance-learning-–-some-helpful-tips/
Some useful advice on using blogs in the classroom

Vicki Davis Educational Blog
http://coolcatteacher.blogspot.com
Award winning blogger and educator who also was a co-founder of Women of Web 2.0, which is a website looking at new Internet tools from a female perspective

Note: While the advice sheets aim to act as a guide, the inclusion of any products and company names does not imply approval by the NCTE, nor does the exclusion imply the reverse. The NCTE does not accept responsibility for any opinions, advice or recommendations on external web sites linked to the NCTE site.

This Advice Sheet and other relevant information are available at:
www.ncte.ie/ICTAdviceSupport/AdviceSheets/