

Happily blogging @ Belmore South



Kim Pericles,
*Assistant Principal
at Belmore South
Public School,
shares her*

*enthusiasm and success using blogs
as an engaging teaching and learning
tool with her students.*

My class has been blogging for just over a year, and it has made a huge difference to the way the class is organised, how I teach, how the students learn and how they demonstrate their learning. Here is a view of my Years 4, 5 and 6 classroom:

- Three boys are poring over the results of this week's English, European and Australian football games so they can rework ladders, disseminate information and answer questions on their *Everything football* blog.
- A group of students is reading through a pile of story maps on *Macbeth* constructed by the class to find the best and clearest examples to photograph and present in a *Bubbleshare* slideshow on our blog. A videorecording of the *Macbeth* performance is also on the blog (Figure 1).
- Two people are sitting quietly to one side, scripts in hand, practising reading the character stories they have written to introduce new characters in a game we are playing. When there is a quiet moment, these two will record



Figure 1 The performance of *Macbeth* can be viewed at allstars.edublogs.org/category/projects/page/2/

their introductions, which will be uploaded to an internet application which produces animated avatars that the students have designed, combined with their own voices (Figure 2). These will be placed on our class blog.



Figure 2 Students created characters using animated vokis

- Another group of students is working through the hundreds of photographs we have taken over the year, putting together photographic montages of the highlights

of their year. They will add this montage to their farewell post on their individual blogs.

- Some 'techno' students are working out how to upload the video we have taken of our class performing a Scottish dance so that we can post it on our blog. The Scottish students will then be able to see how well we understood and followed the instructions they sent from Glasgow on how to perform this dance.
- While waiting for a computer, some Year 4 students are decorating a cardboard box that has been home to Sandy, our class mascot. Sandy the otter was a present from a school in Scotland and has participated in all of our class activities over the year. The students will be designing an end of year photographic display for Sandy as well, so the students in Scotland can see exactly what Sandy got up to this year in Australia (Figure 3). The

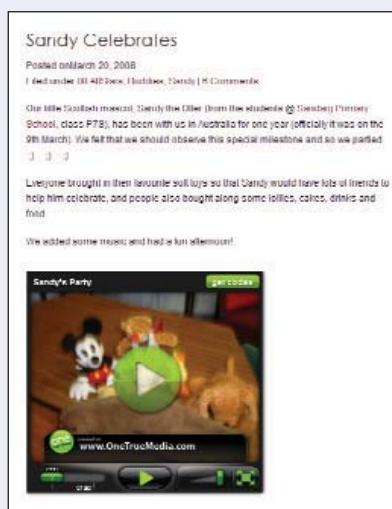


Figure 3 The students uploaded a video of Sandy's party

photographs will be posted on our class blog and Sandy's own blog too. Sandy's blog, *An otter down under!*, is available at <sandytheotter.learnerblogs.org>.

- One student works alone up the back furiously scribbling in a notebook. She wants to finish the next instalment of the book she is writing before the end of term. When she is happy with it, she will post it on her blog to get comments and feedback from her friends around the world. Some of the comments from her friends in two high schools in New Zealand will help her with clarity and expression, her primary school peers from the USA, India and Scotland will help with basic story lines and characterisation. It is a supportive but critical audience, and it makes this student work hard to get her writing just right.

Blogging has relevance for the school curriculum

Blogging is a simple but powerful tool that is available to classrooms and teachers wishing to make the most of the connectivity that is part of our world in the 21st century. Blogging is quite simple to set up, easy to control, and fits in beautifully with all key learning areas (KLAs) in your room.

Blog is short for the word weblog, which in its simplest definition is

... an easily created, easily updateable Website that allows an author (or authors) to publish instantly to the Internet from any Internet connection ...

Richardson, (2006), p. 17

Blogs are also interactive. The most powerful part of blogging is the opportunity to comment on what you have read on a blog. This opens up conversations and communication between the author and the audience, and also demonstrates that learning does not stop at the door of the classroom. The excitement when we received our first comments on our

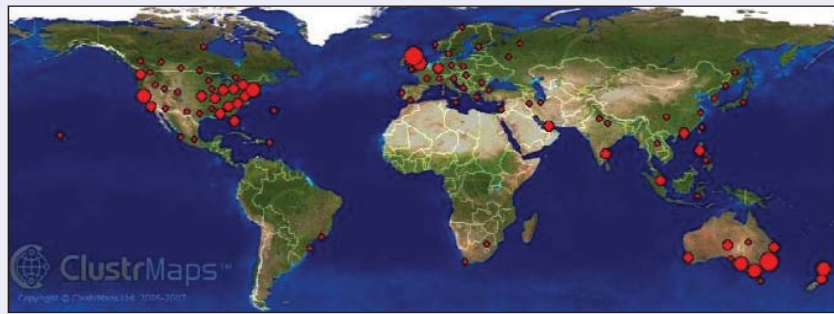


Figure 4 Visitors to the Allstars blog are automatically plotted on the freely available ClustrMap

class blog was unbelievable! We now have a little world map in the corner of our blog to see where our visitors come from. We have had over 13 000 visitors to our blog, which is very motivating (Figure 4).

Providing purpose and audience

Blogs can take many different forms and perform different functions according to individual and personal needs. From posting assignments and class news, to parent information, to sharing of class activities, to online publishing of student work, to showcases of student art, poetry and creative projects, to places to respond to concepts and ideas dealt with in class, to journal work, to linking with other classes in other parts of the world. Blogs are an effective way to provide authentic purposes and authentic audiences for classroom activities.

Imagine sharing a science activity on your blog and receiving questions from a class across the world that needs more information to understand exactly what you did and what happened. Your class then needs to re-think, research and re-explain more clearly what they did, what happened and why, in order to answer the questions asked by peers across the world. This is authentic learning for an authentic purpose.

Quality Teaching with blogs

A Quality learning environment is built through preliminary work with blogging. Explicit quality criteria, high

expectations and student direction can all be enhanced through discussion and negotiation with students, with a view to setting high quality guidelines for class and personal blogs.

After viewing a variety of class and individual blogs (including individual posts, comments and the general aesthetic backgrounds or themes), a negotiated set of guidelines can be formulated for the class. These can include blogging rules, topic guidelines, editing requisites, good commenting guides, positive responses, open ended question guides, and reflective openers. Displaying these negotiated lists and charts enables work of the highest quality only appearing on your blogs.

Continued reference to these criteria ensures that students know explicitly what is required. They can check and edit their own work against the criteria, which can lead to authentic student direction in their own learning. By identifying individual areas of weakness, students can work at these areas in an engaging and motivating way for a real purpose.

Students are very willing to work at a piece of writing until it is polished so that they can post it on the blog for the world to see and, perhaps, comment on. Students self edit their work, using quality criteria designed by them and their peers, so that their friends across the country, or the world, will read and respond to their ideas and thoughts.

The application of blogging to the classroom allows for greater Significance of teaching and learning.

Students are open to new technologies, and many are already using web technologies out of school to share news, to share photographs, and to make and share videos and games. Teachers can utilise their students' acceptance of new technologies to make their learning within school as relevant as their learning out of school (Figure 5).

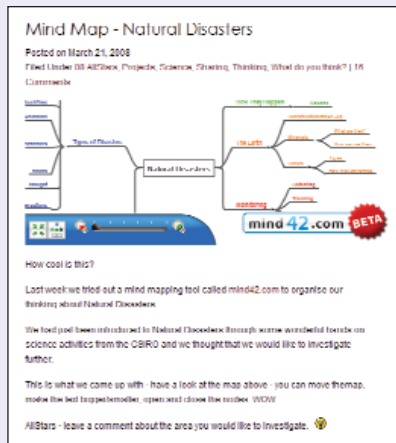


Figure 5 A mind mapping tool, mind42.com, is used to organise thinking for the study of natural disasters

Our students have the background and cultural knowledge to be unafraid of technology, of trying something new. My class will always help me to learn how to use certain applications that we need to enhance our class blog. They will prepare blogging posts at home, as part of their research at school, as a journal of their experiences in debating, or game making, or athletics. They are also able to continue their at school experiences at home because blogging makes this an easy link, especially as the students are highly motivated to share what they are doing.

Connected learning

Blogging has become central to how my class operates. We read our class blog daily to

- look for new comments
- co-construct answers to questions and responses to comments
- check out our friends' blogs from other schools and construct comments

- ask questions and share what we are doing too.

The students are connected: to their learning at school, and to their peers around the world. They are integrating what they are learning to construct meaningful and relevant ways to share their learning with new audiences.

Quality learning

Blogging fits easily into most Key Learning Areas; the obvious connection is through English. However, through experience, it has opened up doors to most other aspects of the curriculum. It is easy to add photographs, video, animations and cartoons to your blog that enable the sharing of classroom activities to family, friends and classes around the world.

We have shared science experiments, our class play, reports on excursions, books read, periods in history, debating results, athletics carnivals, maths constructions, reflections on school programmes and school performances. We have recorded ourselves singing and dancing, we have created artworks, added music and put it together in a multi media presentation as part of a global blogging project (Figure 6).

Connecting, constructing and sharing

Our blog is central to the learning in our classroom; it provides a real purpose for the learning activities that



Figure 6 The students' multimedia presentation of Twinkle twinkle for a Voices of the world task

we undertake. Our reading circle texts and responses are shared, our maths investigations are reported on, and our PE lessons are demonstrated. We are connected to our learning and to our friends around the world.

We share our knowledge of the history of Australia with a class in Scotland who are studying Australia. Together we construct a wiki to demonstrate our learning, and its there for everyone to see and comment on.

We share our study of Shakespeare through our performance of *Macbeth*, with insights and information from schools in England.

We share our questions with a school in Geelong that is undertaking a *Passion project* on a personal topic.

Our learning is purposeful and relevant, and blogging has been the way forward. ■

References and further reading

- 08 AllStars, Belmore South Public School. Viewed 4 April 2008. <allstars.edublogs.org>.
- Considine, T. (2008) 'Technology and learning: demystifying Web 2.0 technologies', *Scan* 27(1), pp. 16–19.
- Kim's blog, Kim Pericles. Viewed 4 April 2008. <kpericles.edublogs.org>.
- Marshall, J. 'Introducing Ebenezer Q. Emu', *Scan* 26(4), pp. 37–38.
- Mind42.com: collaborative mind mapping in your browser, Irian solutions. Viewed 4 April 2008. <mind42.com>.
- Moore, D. (2007) 'Games-based learning: motivating students to become multiliterate', *Scan* 26(3), pp. 18–23.
- O'Connell, J. (2006) 'Engaging the Google generation through Library 2.0: Part 2', *Scan* 25(4), pp. 41–46.
- O'Connell, J. (2006) 'Engaging the Google generation through Web 2.0: Part 1', *Scan* 25(3), pp. 46–50.
- Quality teaching in NSW public schools: discussion paper, (2003) Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate, NSW Department of Education and Training, Sydney. SCIS 1131553 [For the full range of Quality Teaching support materials go to <www.det.nsw.edu.au/proflearn/areas/qt/resources.htm#1>].
- Richardson, W. (2006) *Blogs, wikis, podcasts, and other powerful web tools for classrooms*, Corwin, Thousand Oaks, Calif. SCIS 1336914.
- Voices of the world, The High School of Dundee, Scotland. Viewed 4 April 2008. <votw.wikispaces.com>.