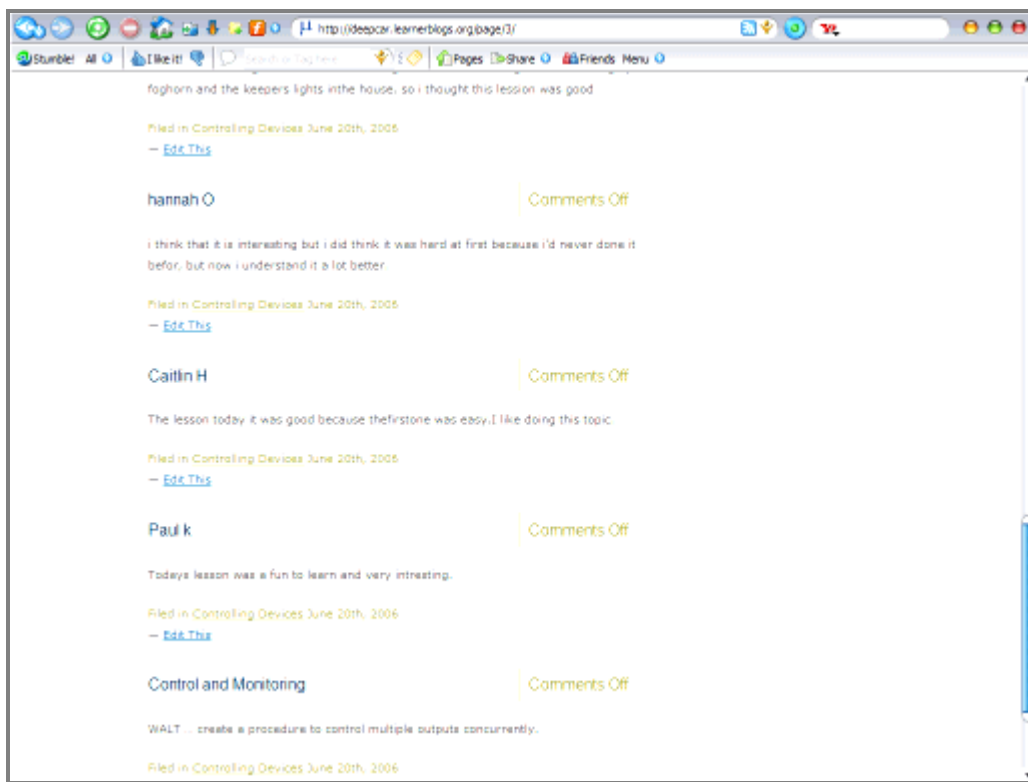


Weblog Pilot - Evaluation July 2006

(Sheffield West City Learning Centre)

This evaluation will examine the positive and negative aspects of the blogging trialled so far. It will also look at some possible future uses of blogging.

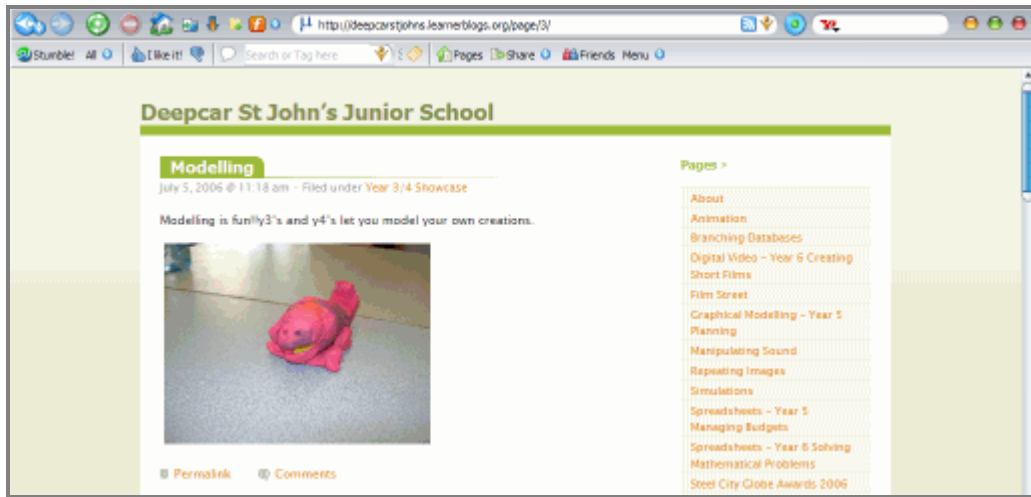
Initially a blog was created on learnerblogs.org. The commenting facility was disabled as learnerblogs is a public system. The blog was used by the ICT coordinator, who at the time taught all the ICT units of work across the school. This blog was logged onto one PC in the ICT suite and an easily accessible link made to post a message. Pupils could post a message whenever they wished, or when they were directed to. The teacher would usually put the learning objective onto the blog at the start of the session, and children could comment on how they felt the lesson had gone for them etc. Essentially the blog was acting as a lesson feedback system. It was very quick to access and the children took to it very easily. The teacher found it a good way to establish learning levels for the lesson which could be reviewed in the plenary session.



At this stage a blog was set up for a computer club for girls.

The blogging moved on to creating a school event blog.

The school held two ICT events open to parents and two or three children recorded the event on the blog. Parents at the event were also encouraged to add messages and it was felt that this would be a good way to give an overview of the events for parents who couldn't attend. This blog has now been used to record other events e.g. sports day, again when parents were asked to post messages whilst in school. The ICT Coordinator has also uploaded pictures to this blog to link directly to a post or to supplementary pages.



A blog for each year group was then set up. This enabled all teachers to let their children to comment on lessons/work as they had in the first attempt at blogging. Teachers have started to use these blogs and most staff have agreed to use them after the summer break. The ICT Co-ordinator has also now set up a blog for the teachers. This is a place for the teachers to comment on work seen around the school in their roles as subject coordinators and class teachers. This blog is on a public system but is solely for the use of school staff. There is potential to use this blog as an information system to inform school governors and other visiting authorities.

Since setting up these blogs two other schools have expressed interest in piloting similar systems. These schools have created blogs which are ready to use in the new academic year. The possibilities of inter-school communication are being considered i.e. Children from one school commenting on messages posted on another school's blog. All of these weblogs are set up on learnerblogs.org, and as a result of this 'known' users can be allowed to post comments on other school blogs without opening the comments to general public access. There is also the option to moderate all comments that are posted to the blogs.

Monitoring all this activity has been a challenge, and the solution has been to set up accounts with bloglines.com to track the blogs through their rss feeds.

Pros

Home school links

Weblogs are web based, and because of this they can be viewed by anyone using the Internet. This means that parents with access to the Internet can easily view a school's blog. Blogs also have the potential to allow parents to comment on messages that have been posted. This is a superb opportunity to involve parents in their child's schooling and for them to gain an understanding what is 'going on' in school.

Accessible

Weblogs are an internet based technology which means that they can be viewed from anywhere with an internet connection.

Fast

Blogs are very easy to access being based around templates which are quick to complete.

Instant Feedback / Review

Children are able to comment about their personal task and their own learning for the lesson. The teacher can use this in plenary sessions to establish the level of understanding for the lesson, and to consider where to start the next lesson in terms of reviewing and developing the children's learning. As this is instant, it is very engaging for the children and they seem to take more account of what other children have said rather than listening to oral contributions.

Engaging

As a medium the blogging has engaged pupils. The pupils enjoy seeing their words on screen or interactive whiteboard and they particularly enjoy seeing the images that have been posted on the message and pages. In the trial, pupils were very keen to complete entries on the school/class weblogs.

Easy

Blogs are very easy to use. A "#post a message" link was added to the blog side bar which can be clicked on when using the blog in class and logged into the blog. From then on pupils can just click on the link and add extra messages. The system is template driven and just requires the user to fill in the boxes and click on 'publish'.

Categories

Learnerblogs uses the Word Press software which includes a category feature. Categories can be setup on the blog and as each new entry is posted the author can tick the categories relevant to the message. The blog can then viewed by categories. In the trial the categories were titles of units of work, or dates of key events, or even an emotional response eg positive or negative.

Dynamic/Current

Messages on a blog are very quick to add and easy to modify, and this encourages people to keep the weblogs up to date.

Automatic Archive

Learnerblogs automatically archives entries and lists the months over which the blog has been written. It also automatically shows the previous 10 posted entries.

Interlinked

Weblogs are very easy to link together, and one blog can reference another blog and/or comment on that blog. In the school setting this means year or class blogs can be linked, and enables blogs in different schools to be linked together.

Cross Curricular

The basis of blogging is writing as this makes it very easy to find applications for blogging across the curriculum. The trial blogging has been used mainly within ICT activities and whole school events. The staff weblog is beginning to be used by other teachers comment on curriculum activities within the school.

Pictures

Learnerblogs can include pictures in messages. Pictures need first to be uploaded and then they can be dragged onto the message area. Pictures are automatically displayed as thumbnails. There is the option to show pictures at different sizes although this process is more cumbersome. (See <http://blogpilot.edublogs.org/adding-images/> for more details.)



Page System

Learnerblogs offers a main blog and an option of pages. The main blog is a chronological message system and these messages can have comments posted against them. Pages stand outside the blog and are not date specific. They allow authors to write up an event, project or some research.

Cons

Reliance on the Internet

Weblogs are web based and therefore they are reliant on the internet. The blog obviously becomes inaccessible if there are connectivity or server problems. Although this is a potential issue the pilot had very few problems - namely the weblog servers were briefly inaccessible on two occasions.

Technical Side

Authoring onto a blog is very easy. With child safety being paramount, a little setup/configuration is required. The actual setup process is not difficult but it does require some understanding of what effect different options have.

Reliance on Pupil Literacy

Blogs are mainly text based and because of this there is reliance on a certain literacy level. In the trial there were no notable problems although it may be an issue in some educational settings. However uploading pictures allows those with low literacy skills to engage with and understand the essence of the posts.

Security and Safety

Pupil's online safety is obviously paramount. This meant that the blogs had to be configured with that in mind. It also meant that some other blogging systems are less suitable for children. One of the major blogging systems for example randomly links to other blogs. These other blogs are not rated and could contain a variety of information. Blogs by default allow readers to post comments on messages. So far this has been disabled. It is possible to allow comments only from a particular group of users and force all comments to be moderated before they are displayed.

Where next?

- Video blogs
- Use in other curriculum areas
- Develop teacher use
- Improve parental involvement
- Link to schools SEF and other action plans
- Link to blogs with other schools to view and comment

Further Information is available on <http://blogpilot.edublogs.org/>

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