



Online theme audio conference
Wednesday 13 August 2008, 4-5pm

Present from NSSFT: Angela Page (chair), Warren Hall, Jill Hammonds, Marg McLeod, Sherry Chrisp, Suzie Vesper

Special guest: Allannah King

Present from clusters: Tim, Melinda, Kim, Judy, Carol, Kate, Irene, Rosemary, Sue

Apologies: Kathe Tawhiwhirangi-Perry, Tessa Gray, Anne, Jane

Why use a blog instead of a wiki, a website, or some other online tool?

- Free, easy to host. You don't need a proxy server, specialist software, or have to have skills in web development.
- Feedback via comments – very satisfying.
- Ease – can also get ease from a wiki, but a blog is so much easier to access and also allows comments.
- With web pages, the Internet was something you looked at but didn't participate in – blogs and wikis have changed that.
 - Strategies to encourage families to become involves have included sending chocolate fish to those who leave comments, etc. 😊

Our students now have blogs (or we have a class blog). What do we do next?

- Who would want to visit a web page that is the same day after day and doesn't change?
 - Post/update regularly to encourage repeat visits.
 - Keep updates current. What is happening *now* (yesterday, today, tomorrow)?
- To get started, set up 6ish posts then:
 - send a newsletter home with the blog address
 - link to your blog from school website or another address that is easy to remember
 - link each child's blog to the main class blog (if students have individual blogs)

- Regularly updated blogs are a great incentive for parents to see what own children are doing
 - Fosters home-school links

Should we use our blogs to focus on one particular area of learning, or a whole range of contexts?

- Depends on your *purpose* for blogging and decide what you want it to be for
 - Could link a few areas together together
 - Some examples of specific areas could be: writing blog, reflective journal, artwork showcase
- Could use a combination of tools (eg wiki for publishing), but a blog offers ease of feedback (comments) or can be used as an ongoing newsletter
- Other stuff you can add which adds value
 - audio
 - voicethread
 - slideshows
 - delicious account (linked to)
- Take the time to carefully set up the structure for your blog. After an initial time outlay, content can be re-linked to and used again from year to year.

What happens for children who have limited keyboarding skills, vision, difficulty with navigation, poor spelling etc? Does this become a barrier for them to blog?

- You don't have to have every word spelt correctly ... or do you?
 - Need to decide on protocols which are suited to your blog's purpose and your students' age/level
 - Younger blogs can certainly feature inventive spelling, if you deem it appropriate.
- Tools such as web readers can read web sites back to young children
- As with all teaching and learning, judge the frustration level of the child and use your teacher judgement for when to step in
 - eg offer support with typing
 - formatting, etc
- Allannah, as a teacher, looks through every blog post before publishing it to check content, appropriateness, etc
 - Cyber safety – runs parallel to blogging
 - protocols
 - no surnames, telephone numbers, addresses
 - Remember: a teacher can check what goes out on their own class blog, but can't check what their students post on other people's blogs (comments etc)
- **Jill** – web usually shows the final model, not necessarily the process, ie it is published work

- **Allanah** referred to a blog by Jody Hayes – teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes School in Palmerston North
http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=1638
- **Suzie** mentioned Meadowbank Primary School – inventive spelling (Marnie Thomas) <http://room23writing.blogspot.com/>
- **Kate** – ECE children can contribute to blogs by telling someone what to write for them
- **Allanah** – Greenwoodkindergarten.blogspot.com – video blogging (ECE) instead of writing <http://greenwoodkindergarten.blogspot.com/>
 - **Irene** – why video as opposed to photos?
 - To enhance security and get away from needing to have written permission (using back shots, and lower-quality video)
 - Is dependent on broadband/good bandwidth connection – an assumption made that viewers will have this

What do parents/the community think of their children blogging? What has been the effect on home-school relationships?

- **Kate** – Centre is in the process of getting one up and running. Staff have sent out survey to parent and received positive feedback. Have asked what they want on the blog. Extended whanau.
- **Allanah** – children who have left the class/older siblings still refer to class blog and write comments to teacher/students via blog. Also estranged parents (eg overseas) are able to keep in touch with their children even if they are not there with them.
- Who owns the blogs? Teacher or school/class?
 - Allanah's class blog has been running for three years now – students (and teacher) have sense of ownership.
- Students have strategies for attaining readership, eg one boy provides links to games. He writes for his audience, eg NZ terminology explained for American audience.
 - 1000 hit party – every time the counter hits 1000, they celebrate!
- **Jill** – relationship with parents. Takes quite a long time for parents to come in and respond. Need to have parents comfortable with the process, eg invite parents into the classroom, have children show them their blog and how to make comments.

How do we get a wider audience for our blog than just parents and interested locals?

- As teachers, we should open up our classrooms.
 - Blog ourselves (or Twitter). Use it to find others who are interested in what you are. Ask them to comment etc.

- ePals – NZ are a novelty factor for UK, US and they are keen to participate.
- Refer to Allannah's delicious links re collaboration.
- **Suzie** – partner classes. Look where others have blogs. Find other class blogs. Leave comments on other blogs and an address for your own blog.
 - Why should anybody comment on your blog if you don't comment on theirs?
- Bloglines/Google Reader/RSS – teacher and students subscribe to each others' blogs.
- **Warren** – do you make time available to comment on others' blogs?
 - **Allannah** – her classes don't have ICT time; it's reading/writing time. eg reading time today is reading/commenting on blogs

What about security issues, if my students post photos of themselves or reveal what school they go to?

- Internet use agreements
- Parents have to agree that their child's image and work can be published on the Internet – permission form
 - Can get around that slightly by having 'back on' photos, or picture of a book, rather than the child actually reading it
 - Have to respect parents' wishes
- Blogmeister can be completely closed off to invited/selected users only
 - However, if you are going to do that, why bother blogging?
 - The Internet is made for publishing. If you're not going to let people look at it, there's not much point!

Should I, as a teacher, have my own blog, too? How will I find the time to maintain it? And what will I write about??

- Something has to go! Choose what is more important for you to do, and delegate the stuff that isn't important.
- **Suzie** – it actually takes very little time to maintain a blog. Schools she worked with required their teachers to blog, and many teachers were surprised at how little time it took to maintain once set up.
- Remember that people you need help from might not be in the room next door, but might be elsewhere (Skype, Twitter, blog).
 - People are willing to help!
 - You might be able to help someone else, too.
- **Jill** – important that *you* drive the blog; *it* doesn't drive you. If you have nothing to say, say nothing! On other days, you might have several things to blog about, depending on your passion/mood.

- **Allanah** – has classroom blogging monitors for a week. They are required to post at least once. Class blog is maintained as a group. Others can suggest a post (whiteboard?), then cross their names off once they've posted.

What are the essentials? ie There are so many ideas we can focus on: what's the bottom line?

- The Internet and using Web 2.0 tools can help people remember things, think about stuff, and reflect on learning.
- Bling4 your blog has lots of useful tips – Allanah's blog about blogging <http://bling4yrblog.blogspot.com/>
 - Everything Allanah has used has been free (except Quicktime and Flickr accounts)
- People have helped her for free – pay it forward/back.
 - Skype, Twitter - community

What advice can you give a teacher who is part-way along their blogging journey?

- **Jill** – Blogs are not just an educational phenomenon. They are everywhere and used in sport, business, and other activities. We owe it to our kids to get on board with blogging and equip them for this world.
- **Allanah** – the kids are doing this without us; it would be good to support them in it.
- Make use of the free online tools available to promote readership
 - Cluster map
 - Sitemeter
 - Worldwide audience
- Kids tend to try things out – let them!
- People use Blogspot because it is easy
 - can remove navigation toolbar at top of page leading to 'next blog'
 - Bling4your blog – explains how to remove that
 - Preview changes before you do that to make sure it works!
 - Edublogs doesn't have those kind of problems

Question from the floor

Judy – do you change your blog each year and change to a new address (with your class)?

- **Allanah** likes to keep the same blog.
- **Suzie** – has had classes set up as a *class* blog, rather than a teacher's. Can determine ownership. Can import previous content from other blogs if you wish.
- **Judy** – if you had the same blog, would you feel like you're repeating yourself the next year?
 - No – just linking to existing content, not necessarily repeating it

The meeting finished at 5pm.

Thank you to everyone who participated, asked questions, and was involved in the discussion during this audio conference. Special thanks to our guest, **Allanah King**, for so freely sharing your knowledge and expertise. 😊

Minutes taken by Angela Page
National Support Service Online Facilitator