

Article originally published in *Educators' Spotlight Digest*: Volume 1, Issue 3 (Fall 2006)

## ***Blogging: A Tool for Information Literacy***

***By Pam Berger***

Did you respond to the latest posting on the journalism blog? How did you set up the RSS feed? Do you know of any good blogs on Manga? These are not questions from a science fiction novel but rather student interactions in 21st century classrooms and libraries. What it means to be literate is changing. Web 2.0, the term coined for the next generation Web, moves the Internet from being simply web sites and search engines to a shared network space that offers students a place to publish and broadcast their own writing, collaborate on projects and engage in conversations. Students with their mobile and non-mobile devices -- cell phones, MP3 players, laptops, digital cameras, computers, etc. are always online and connected to one another and to the Web. Blogs, one of the first traces of Web 2.0, displays the Web 2.0 principles of interactivity, user participation, and collective intelligence.

In a few short years, blogs have grown into an exciting medium for individuals to express their opinions, participate in an online community, communicate ideas, share relevant information, and document important events as they happen. Thanks to free and inexpensive blog hosting sites, anyone can blog. A recent study (July 2006) found that eight percent of internet users, or about 12 million American adults, keep a blog. Thirty-nine percent of internet users, or about 57 million American adults, read blogs – and a majority of them are under 30 years old.

### **What are blogs?**



Blogs are a cross between a journal, a website and an online community. They are a specific type of a web site that consists of many entries on a single web page posted daily or at least weekly and usually include a title and date. The typical blog format is to list entries in reverse chronological order with the most recent entry on the top of the page making it easy for people to scan quickly through the entries. The best indication of a weblog is its format. If web page entries are arranged chronologically like a diary, perhaps with secondary topical

categories; are a few paragraphs long with, perhaps, links to "more" or "read on" or a mechanism enabling visitors to comment on stories - you are on a blog.

Blogs have changed the way many people look at the Web. Using blogging software you can post content to a web site quickly and easily, making it very appealing to those who want to share information. Creating a blog for your school library is free and easy. You can collect and make information accessible to students and teachers to support information fluency and encourage reading.

### **Why develop school library blogs?**

School library blogs are an extension of what we already do, but they give us an opportunity to be more responsive -- to reach out to the faculty and students: to offer guidance in locating relevant resources, share new research tools, encourage reading through book reviews and online book discussions, share student work, highlight news, and announce library events.

Dr. Tim Tyson, Mabry Middle School Principal, tells how he used blogging to maximize student engagement and academic achievement, as well as student collaboration with peers and professionals around the world in this podcast:

(<http://nlcommunities.com/podcasts/1798/blc06/entry84464.aspx>)

After you listen to it, check out the school library's blog, Mabry Media Center (<http://mabryonline.org/blogs/media/>).

Explore a few of these school library blogs, and decide about what features and characteristics they have that you think are important.

### **School library blogs:**

Li-blog-ary

<http://www.galileoweb.org/liblogary/>

Grandview Library Blog

<http://www.grandviewlibrary.org/>

Gargoyles Loose in the Library

<http://www.uni.uiuc.edu/library/blog/>

Hunterdon Central Library

<http://central.hcrhs.k12.nj.us/imc/>

Mission Read

<http://cjhsimc.edublogs.org/>

Muller in the Middle

<http://mullerinthemiddle.blogspot.com/>

For additional school library blogs look at this list:

[http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/links/index.php?title=School\\_libraries](http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/links/index.php?title=School_libraries)

School Librarians' Professional Blogs

The Never Ending Search

<http://joycevalenza.edublogs.org/>

Infomancy

<http://schoolof.info/infomancy/>

Blue Skunk

<http://doug-johnson.squarespace.com/blue-skunk-blog/>

Alice in Infoland

<http://www.aliceinfo.org/blog/>

From the Inside Out

<http://fromtheinsideout.squarespace.com/blog/>

School Libraryland

<http://ashworth.wordpress.com/>

Kathy Schrock's Kaffeeklatsch

<http://kathyschrock.net/blog>

### **Why encourage students to blog?**

Blogs are a natural for students. The November 2005 Pew Internet & American Life Study

([http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP\\_Teens\\_Content\\_Creation.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Teens_Content_Creation.pdf))

revealed that 57% of teens who use the internet could be considered content creators. These 12 to 17-year olds have created a blog or webpage, posted original artwork, stories or videos online. Teach students to



create inquiry or research blogs that are similar to a journal where students record their research journey including reflections, frustrations, successes, new learning, etc. or suggest they develop a blog on a topic that interests them. Why? Because blogging offers motivation and supports information fluency:

- Blogging is writing for the world to read. Publication makes the writing more meaningful and in turn students take more care in what they are writing.
- Students learn to be explicit in connecting to someone else's ideas. Blog postings usually include reference to another blog or website, and rather than use citations, as we do with print to connect to another's ideas, in blogging you hyperlink to the website where you found the information. This helps and encourages students to be clearer in their connections.
- Blogging teaches organization and synthesis of ideas. Blog postings are short and precise and blog authors need to write clearly and succinctly.
- Blogging encourages reflection. In addition to functioning as a journal, blogging software automatically archives all postings and they can be searched and re-read at a later time.
- Blogging is interactive. Blogging software has built in comments and track back features to connect students to other students, the school librarian, teachers and parents.

The Blooming Bloggers, 5th grade students at J. H. House Elementary School, have put together "The T.A.G. Blogging Machine" to teach other students how to blog. You'll find this Power Point presentation on the The Write Web (<http://itc.blogs.com/thewriteweblog/>).

### **How do I get started?**

The simplest method is to sign up with a free blogging service provider, such as Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>) where you can literally start a blog in 2 minutes. You create a username and a password, enter a description of your blog and select a visual theme from a list, which you can change later if you decide you don't like it. Then you choose a URL and start typing. If you are a fast typist, you can hit the Submit and Publish button before 120 seconds elapses and your blog will be go online immediately. In addition you might want to check out Kidzlog (<http://kidzlog.com>), 21Publish

(<http://21publish.com>), School Blogs (<http://www.schoolblogs.com>) and TeacherHosting (<http://teacherhosting.com>)

Getting started with blogging from the technical aspects is not difficult but the writing and content part needs preparation. Start small by posting annotated links that would be relevant to students and faculty or perhaps start by blogging books. Gradually start to add more content and comments, reflections and questions to your posting and slowly encourage readers to participate in your blog. Decide what features best support your library program based on the needs of your students and faculty. Get feedback from your faculty and students.

Now it's your turn

Explore the links provided in this article along with The Educational Bloggers Network (<http://www.ebn.weblogger.com/>); get a feel for the educational/library blog world, the issues, the software and the lingo. Identify a few blogs that interest you, read them for a while and then start blogging! And keep in touch – join me at my blog (<http://www.infosearcher.com>).

### **About the Author**



**Pam Berger**, an educational technology/library consultant and trainer with over 20 years of library experience, is Publisher and Editor of *Information Searcher* and author of *Internet for Active Learners* (ALA Editions).