ASYNCHRONOUS INTERACTIONS 2 : Blogs & Wikis

The first area we discussed was the methods of communication we used whilst online:

The 62 comments all seems to follow a similar theme that Facebook was mainly used for social interaction with family and friends, Twitter was certainly used for professional conversation first and social conversation with like minded people second. This discussion quickly moved onto the value of blogging. One person in particular had an issue with blogging. They said:

"Not seen many class blogs but my issue is that with a class blog what do kids learn to be able to actually do? What I want to see is evidence of kids actually creating their own blogs and doing something purposeful with them. That I can't find anywhere, if anyone has any links I would be grateful. We introduce our year 7s to edublogs in lesson 1 but none of them seem to follow it through. Some older students do "bite" with glogster but they only do so because of the social networking element of it and the it becomes problematic to keep them on task."

It became apparent that this view was looking more at the value of blogs and the ICT curriculum at Secondary level. After sharing different links, the author of that comment understood that blogs could give a meaning for writing and could have an impact on engagement.

The next area for discussion was looking back at when the group had first used blogs or wikis.

We had people in the group who had used these resources 10-15 years ago and others who had only just begun to use them. Some people linked some very early blogs

Discussion moved quickly on to the frustrations of having many of the web2.0 resources blocked in schools. The beauty of this group was that we had representatives from around the globe. People took heart in the fact that others from around the word were having the same problems!

Area 2: Problems that people have experienced with Blogs and Wikis

The use of children's images on the internet:

Never to name pupils with pictures, however, some pupils do this as the post has their signature on it and includes a picture of them. Good practice ensures edits are made to avoid this. This is done on an individual basis as it depends if the picture is the focus and important enough to be included in the post. It's also important to mention that each school should have a policy that states that each school collects permission for names and images to be featured on the internet but not at the same time in the same place. We searched for statistics on the risks on tagging names to photos on school website. This link http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pd f/Am%20Psy%202-08.pdf states that there is no inherent risk! My advice would be to include your approach in your policy, ask your parents what they want?

The time commitment of running a class blog/wiki and using new Web2.0 tools:

Many teachers see popular blogs and wikis and instantly think that so many extra hours have gone into the resource. One can't deny the amount of dedication it may take, it was a popular belief in the group that this investment of time was indeed an investment. For

example, my Pandora Project blog: http://pandora.heathfieldcps.net looks like it took days to put together. It did take a couple of hours to set up but it meant that I didn't need to create a display in my classroom which would have taken me hours to complete! All the finished pieces of work ended up on that blog. The reward far outweighed the effort needed to complete the blog space. With regard the Web2.0 tools, the word investment appeared here again. These tools seem to really engage the pupils. Taking a short time to get to know a tool will pay off 10 fold! One group member said that when implementing blogging in her school "What worked best was encouraging teachers to move at their own pace, when ready and offering lots of one on one support." I can certainly agree with this. Each member of staff received one to one support at their pace!

Posts having to be perfect:

Should blog posts by students have to be grammatically correct and spellings correct? Our group discussed how many school leaders would like this to be the case as a public blog/ wiki could be seen as the 'corporate' face of the school. My opinion was shared by many in the group that this should not be the case. Both of these resources rely on an audience. The audience need to see, comment and feedback on the pupils' learning at that level at that time. There is something quite magical about reading phonetically correct writing or emergent writing on a blog or wiki. My experience has shown that the audience isn't stupid, they know when a child may have Special Educational Needs, or is a poor speller, they respond sensitively and accordingly! We discussed the issue of marketing over learning. Some schools do need marketing, blogs can be a great way of doing this! HeathfieldCPS in Bolton has seen great marketing from its blogs but only because people have seen very openly the quality of learning.

Pending comments being viewable by pupils on their dashboard this included spam and threatening messages:

This was an issue with Wordpress and required a plug in to be written and installed. This plug-in was written by Peter Ford and was shared through Twitter to other bloggers. As a result anyone logging on to the blog who was set at 'contributor' level could no longer see pending comments.

Hijacked accounts:

" Not specific to blogging but an implication for any system requiring a secure login for individual contributors (applies to email as much as blogging) is the issue of 'account hijack'. I come across this as an issue at least a couple of times every term with varying degrees of seriousness. Could be a peer, older sibling etc and involves someone contributing (often inappropriately) using someone else's login." Group Member.
We discussed that this could always be a problem and a policy notifying users of this issue, prevention methods and consequences could be the only solution, plus educating the users. Eliminating this threat is impossible – A policy stating that a school can not guarantee this from happening was seen as vital.

Comments from Spammers:

_"In my Children's wiki I did run into problems with the comment feature because it got popular and marketers began posting. I quickly deleted but it is a matter of me thinking they warrant the wiki being made private or disabling comments and I feel at this point in

time I prefer to have a public wiki."

In a blog, you can change user setting as shown in point 1. However, in Wikis it looks like to have the wiki fully public, this comment function might well be needed to be switched off.

One of the group member received a letter from a parent who did not allow her daughter to visit many sites including Cbeebies and went on to state that she wanted to keep her daughter a child for as long as possible and wanted the school to steer their pupils away from computers.

The group member also quote a response he made on a private forum on this matter raised above:

"I come across these very concerns fairly regularly. I would want to know what *exactly* are the parents' concerns here? We can only speculate but here are a couple of my initial thoughts/responses:

Someone might be able to see my child's picture on the internet... So what? What is bad about this? What might happen? Anyone could take a photograph of your child with a camera or mobile phone. That 'anyone' could be a passer-by or any parent – anywhere. It is interesting that many parents that object to the publication of a child's picture on the internet would be delighted for the child to feature in the press. It is also interesting that many of these same parents might have no problem sharing family photos through Facebook or similar.

Another parent/other might be able to 'see' my child on the VLE and potentially contact them and even 'groom' them… Really? How exactly? By sending them emails? What would those emails look like? As has been pointed out, the VLE has logs of all emails. Don't you think that using the VLE for such a purpose would be about the *least* sensible thing a potential predatory paedophile might do? In my opinion, your child stands a greater chance of being abducted in real-life than groomed via the VLE. Don't your children ever go to other people's houses for parties? What about (heaven-forbid!) sleep-overs? Have you vetted all the parents/adults that your child will/might come into contact with in real-life when you're not there to keep an eye on *everything* that goes on? At least in the VLE, we can see everything. I believe that for many parents, expressing what (in my opinion) are completely out-of-proportion concerns for their child re internet safety is one way that they can demonstrate how much they really care about their little ones. I also believe that media frenzy and scare-mongering has had a significant part to play. Did you know, that a vast number of bullying instances take place on school playgrounds, as do the vast majority of injuries at school such as grazed knees. In light of this, can I suggest that children no longer play outside. In fact, as a parent, I'm going to ask my child's school to keep my daughter in at playtimes just in case ;-) Of course, there are legitimate child-protection cases that occur from time to time in any school and I would be particularly mindful and sensitive to such cases."

Communication between pupils and teachers:

 One member of the group explained that their Headteacher had banned wikispaces or any platform that had private messaging that could allow communication between teachers

and pupils. Best advice was to use official school resources whenever communicating with pupils.

How to deal with mistakes/issues:

"My advice to schools is to teach, encourage appropriate use, keep a bit of an eye on things but to welcome any mistakes the kids make and grasp those as rich learning opportunities" By a group member.

"We had a little lad who decided to flash some unpleasant stuff in the vle to another classmate. It was reported and the logs showed it happened at home. The head invited the parties concerned in for a chat. It emerged that the unsavoury comments could not have been spelt by the accused however their older sibling from high school was quite adept at spelling. Precise time logs meant that bed times could be factored in and ultimately the true culprit was found out. The head, though let down, was pleased with the evidence available to make a good call. The opportunity for learning was massive as ****** says. The data doesn't tend to lie and transgressors will be found out. The challenge though is the whole anytime anywhere 'thing' that presents an interesting twist when stuff happens via 'safe' environments from home."

Guidance document link that went down well: http://blogs.msdn.com/b/ed ucation/archive/ 2011/05/02 /a-social-media-policy-to- encourage-the-use-of-socia l-media-by-teachers-in-nsw .aspx

Web2.0 tools and the over 13 issue:

 I think I'm right in stating that this is derived from the USA where law states that you have to be 13 to enter a contract (clarification). Discussions travelled along the lines of schools that were either using a single VLE or a mashup of many different Web2.0 tools. Many people in the group used different Web2.0 tools inside their blogs that had age restrictions. One approach was to risk assess themselves and carry on if deemed safe, one group member shared a link to their advice blog: http://staffweb2tools.word press.com/ Acceptable use policy: https://docs.google.com/Do c?docid=0AYa5dxypo0IXZGN2Z 2RoZ2ZfNjdnZmc2dHNoeA&hl=e n_US and Data Protection Policy: https:// docs.google.com/Do c?docid=0AYa5dxypo0IXZGN2Z 2RoZ2ZfNzZmMnZyODZjcA&hl=e n_US Both of these are CC licensed, not for profit, able to make derivatives with attribution. Links from John Sutton.

Dealing with blogging about your own workplace:
One group member shared an example of how she keeps things positive when referring to her own school: http://whatedsaid.wordpres s.com/2010/11/13/10-ways-t o-make-meetings-effective/

One group member shared this link to an article that she had read and reflected upon it: "Have you seen this story? http://www.nytimes.com/201 1/06/04/opinion/04zimmerma n.html?_r=1&src=tptw I especially like the paragraph that reads - "But these defenders have it backward. The truly scary restrictions on teacher speech lie inside the schoolhouse walls, not beyond them. And by supporting teachers' right to rant against students online, we devalue their status as professionals and actually make it harder to protect real

academic freedom in the classroom." I am just now beginning to record some thoughts and reflections on an e-learning group wiki (http://elearningclassroom. wikispaces.com/ Classroom+1 5) but still not quite ready to set up my own professional blog... I guess I am actually fearful of overstepping the mark or sound like I am more than just a classroom teacher..."

Filtering issues:
Links: My own school featured in this article: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/edu cation/ educationnews/7068246/S chools-to-spend-thousands-to-a ccess-YouTube.html

After spending many hours most weeks on the phone to Bolton LA (UK) They piloted a new filtering project on HeathfieldCPS. I also have full filtering control at school which for a small 1 form entry Primary School I feel very proud and something I take very seriously. This was an issue that was discussed and many people thought this this was one of the most frustrating issues they faced as ICT leaders in their schools. It's also worth mentioning that members of the group from different countries like the USA, Australia and New Zealand also felt the same frustrations. One member of the group was in a school that had NO filtering at all! She wrote:

"We have just had issues, we have no filtering. Children were accessing inappropriate you tube clips during wet lunch and morning tea time. It has highlighted the inconsistency of teachers expectations of net behaviour. The offenders had NO consequences. If my children are on anything that I haven't directly linked to the wiki they're banned from the computer for a week. So annoying, we were thinking of turning off routers, banning computers at this time, etc, but are we punishing the kids that aren't abusing the system. We will not block you tube as all teachers use it. My school used to have no-teacher no-internet. But it seems quite "old school".

One member posted a link to a wiki they are developing that demonstrates some good learning that has taken place through the use of YouTube: http://ytlearn.pbworks.com/w/p age/40768576/ytlearn

I didn't manage to get a definitive list of Web2.0 tools that are blocked as this differed so much from authority to authority, from state to state and country to country. What I can report is the level of frustration is very high. I was the only one in the group who had full filtering control and this means that I can instantly unblock or indeed block a site/tool/blog that shows as being blocked.

Case Study - The Development and Impact of blogging at Heathfield County Primary School

"Hi my name is Binyameen and I am an 11-year-old student attending Heathfield Community Primary School. In the next few minutes I am going to talk to you about how blogging has changed my life."

This session opener from a Year 6 pupil at the 2011 Bradford bMoble Conference wasn't an exaggeration. Blogging has created a revolution in teaching and learning, as Binyameen continued to explain.

"Nearly a year ago I had no idea what blogging was, however ever since we started it in Year 6 I haven't been able to stop. This new digital way of learning has had a huge impact on me and on my literacy, as my skills on blogging has pushed on that. Writing in books is boring where only the teacher sees your work, whereas on the computer the whole world gets to see it." And Binyameen isn't the only one excited...

Writing had long been identified as in need of improvement at Heathfield Primary School. Not unusually, there was a particular concern with the writing of boys. Two years ago, with an even more challenging cohort than usual approaching their final year, headteacher Dianne Spencer and deputy David Mitchell determined to research approaches and techniques that could have impact in this vital area.

Inspiration came from Jack Sloan's Blog at Chorlton Park School in Manchester Senior Staff set off on a round of visits to other schools seeking ideas to try out at Heathfield. He was impressed by the work created on Jack Sloan's Blog at Chorlton Park School, in Manchester, which was showcasing the value of a creative curriculum. It was felt blogging held out a real chance of inspiring some of Heathfield's reluctant writers and that a radical whole-school approach could be the best way forward.

Within 4 weeks of the visit, the school had created a whole-school blog site, with one blog for each class. Working with Year 6, David led by example, creating both his own blog and one for his class.

The initial blog was project based, and focused on trying to reach those reluctant boys. This, the first group to experience blogging at Heathfield was a challenging class on many levels. Staff knew they would need lots of new ideas and inspiration to maintain longterm interest in blogging, and for this the teacher brought in many web 2.0 tools – like Voicethread, Animoto, Audioboo, Coveritlive, PrimaryPad, PhotoPeach – to keep the blogging fresh and the pupils writing.

By the end of that year, after just seven months, that Year 6 blog had attracted around 100,000 hits and 1,500 comments. With the writing clearly improved, senior staff knew they had a hit on their hands.

As with all education innovations, however, the key evaluation measure would be the impact upon pupil learning. The initial aim of the blogging project had been to address the under-performance in writing, and help the pupils improve their SATS scores. They were not to be disappointed. The SATs writing results clearly showed the success of the innovation, moving from only 9 per cent achieving level 5 in the previous year, to 60 per cent in the current year.

This figure is even more impressive when taking into account that the projected figures at the start of the year had indicated a weaker cohort this time round, and had predicted a decline in performance. Instead they saw each child making on average 6.6 points progress in writing, equating to two years' progress in just 12 months. Convinced of their success, senior staff needed to determine the next step.

Embedding and spreading success – starting with teachers
Having led the way with Class 6, and now convinced of its impact, they turned their attention to the task of embedding blogging across the school. Teacher professional development in blogging was next on the agenda. This was done in a typically supportive and relaxed manner, reducing pressure and allowing the teachers to develop their own approach and pace.

Each teacher was trained after school using a very informal 1:1 technique, so that they could develop their own skills according to need, and find their own reason for using a blog that was appropriate to their curriculum and pupils. Support continued after initial training so that each teacher could develop at a sustainable speed.

The teachers also supported "live" pupil sessions in the evening, after school, where the pupils shared tasks and socialised under the supervision of a teacher. This was all done at the demand of the pupils who by now were wanting more time than they could be allocated in class for their blogging. One of the nicest results of this approach was that each class blog has a different look and feel. This was because during the 1:1 training, teachers had been encouraged to find their own identity for their blog, and to use it to answer issues specific to their pupils. For example a Year 4 teacher used her class blog with Voicethread embedded to communicate and collaborate with a Year 4 class in Australia. The Reception blog focused more on images, and is an oasis of visual beauty where PhotoPeach is used each week to update the parents on the progress of their children.

At the end of May 2010, the school moved its focus from working with Year 6 to Year 5 and getting in some early preparation before the summer break.

The next idea was for a new Year 5 class to participate in an international World Cup project. With 32 nations in the FIFA World Cup, the "Blog the World Cup" project had been set up as 32 blogs on a collaborative site, one for each competing nation. Each blog was managed by a class (or school) and a live online draw was made to allocate classes and schools to the different country blogs. Heathfield drew Germany, so Year 6 wrote about their country and its team on their dedicated blog (http://germany.blogtheworldcup.net/). In just 28 days during the World Cup they had people from 100 countries visit their website, with 30,000 hits, and 400 comments to pupils, including two comments from the German Embassy in London, from the Ambassador for Culture and Education.

When the time came for a new Year 6 group, senior staff considered the school's next move but were unprepared for what happened. New bloggers were not interested in the fancy Web 2.0 tools, they just wanted to write. They had seen how much exposure the previous Year 6 had been getting, and they had one aim... to knock them off the Google Number 1 ranking search for 'Year 6 Blog'!"

As the news has spread, and as the Heathfield blogging has attracted the various awards, via public presentations and news coverage, Heathfield staff and their bloggers have

attracted great media interest. This year has seen the pupils work live on their blog with author Pie Corbett, Sky News presenter Tom Parmenter and with various newspaper reporters and media coaches. They have produced 5,000-word creative stories from home and have appeared live on BBC1 Breakfast TV to 4.5 million viewers.

'Quadblogging' was an extension idea to involve other schools in the students' experience of blogging and commenting, and was widely welcomed and influential in spreading the word. In quadblogging, four schools agree to spend one week out of every four focusing on one school blog in turn, visiting and reading and leaving comments. This increases the interest and incentivises more contributions from children in preparation for the regular surge in visitors. It has proved a successful spur to get schools blogging.

Blogging has become an embedded way of life at Heathfield Primary School, and nowadays when the pupils start a new project, a project blog is launched at the same time. All this has been driven by the pupils' demands for more and more opportunities to blog. However the revolution came when the learners stepped up the action for their own blogs It had never been part of the original plans to give pupils a blog each, nor to give pupils direct responsibility for blogs of their own. Mindful of the need for internet safety, and with possible concerns about blogs open to the world, the Heathfield blogs had always been carefully managed and moderated whole-class blogs.

However student voice will out, and the school has recently had to change tack to recognise that some students will always demand more creative freedom. Pupils had inquired about having their own blogs in earlier classes, but staff had always explained that ideally all the writing should held together in one place. This also meant staff could keep a close eye on things and could approve comments or pupil blog posts quickly.

However, staff became aware that a number of the pupils had independently begun to set up their own WordPress blogs and were beginning to create their own content. This rather forced his hand, and he realised he would need to embrace their development to allow him to help steer and monitor their independent learning.The school are glad that they embraced this move when they look at what was achieved.

 For example Fern in only five days created a blog to host a story in which her audience would decide the direction of her story through voting for what should happen next. To do this she included polls. One development that has been really exciting with Fern's blog was finding that PollDaddy allows students to add audio into the polls, and not just written text.

Another example: Raja began using a completely different Wordpress theme (CommentPress) to publish a new book, ' World Like No Other'. CommentPress is a theme with the distinct appearance of a book, and which allows an audience to comment on a specific part of the writing – now Raja is thoroughly enjoying his writing.

Not to be overshadowed, two other pupils, John and Matthew, had a different plan, which was to get their audience to vote for a favourite team from the Football League. John and Matthew would then research and produce a fact file about the winning team, and post club news for two to three days before another poll wold be launched including teams from another league. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the school's location, Manchester United won the first poll!

This pupil-led evolution has given the school cause for more thought:

"These developments, which occurred over only a few days have demonstrated that by keeping an open mind, being flexible and listening to the pupil voice, you can evolve the tools you have available to enable even deeper learning to occur".

Need, strategy, provision, implementation, professional development, collaboration and sustainability... in every way blogging at Heathfield has been an excellent model for anyone keen to explore how to innovate using technology in education.

Conditions for innovation
- A real problem to solve and a logical approach that focuses the innovation being tried to the problem that you are addressing.
- An environment where failure is an option. Many innovations may work in one situation but not another. Many will not succeed as hoped... but unless you are allowed to fail you won't even feel encouraged to try.
- Opportunities to see what is working in other schools, and engage with fellow teachers on their own experiences of trying out innovative techniques. It is always reassuring to hear that others experienced innovative challenges, and pick up tips on perhaps ways of trying things a little differently.
- A supportive headteacher who has the attitude 'We need to do something new... if we do what have always done we will get what we have always got!'
- Something that is exciting to the pupils, which captures their imaginations and will motivate them to engage.
- Something that is equally exciting to the teacher – pupils quickly pick up on a teacher who is passionate and enjoying their work. Blogging has made me a bubbling, outgoing, excited, childlike teacher who frequently gets even more excited than the pupils do!
- Surround yourself with similar people. You need help and motivation thoughout an innovative project, and other enthusiastic innovative teachers are the best source of that inspiration.

Blogging Policy

Aims and Objectives

Whilst blogging has been around for 10+ years, more and more schools are now giving their pupils a voice and an audience through blogging. These are mainly in the form of class blogs but can also be in the form of project blogs or individual pupil blogs. Whilst there are many blogging platforms, Wordpress is the most popular. This policy will outline the safe management of setting up and running a blogging platform. A successful blog can:

→ Safely give your pupils a wider audience for their learning.
→ Encourage reluctant learners to participate and succeed
→ Allow pupils to receive feedback safely from many different people
→ Allow your pupils to peer assess each other's learning
→ Encourage parental engagement
→ Provide a platform that you can embed Web2.0/3.0 tools into
→ Promote your pupils' learning across the globe

e-Safety

Blogging involves pupils working on a blog whilst in school and also at home. To be able to post, pupils need to log into the blog either using an individual sign in or a class sign in. The advantages of individual sign in is that this gives more ownership to each pupil. Most blog platforms allow accounts to have different permissions. Contributor is the lowest level that allows a user to post. A contributor can submit a post for review, however, this will need to be authorised by the admin before it appears on the blog. The 'Contributor' permission level is recommended for Primary School. Any other permission level above that of 'Contributor' will allow posts to be viewable as soon as the pupil clicks 'Submit'.

Heathfield Primary School has sought permission for each child to have access to a blog, has sought permission to display the learning from each pupil and has sought permission for the photographs of each pupil to be displayed on a blog. Names do not appear alongside images of pupils unless additional permission has been sought by the class teacher.

Each pupil with a unique log in has been told to keep this private, if a pupil or parent thinks their log in needs changing, this can be done in the 'profile' setting on the dashboard. Parents and pupils are to contact the named admin should this need clarifying.

Blog Rules:

Using a blog safely is the most important thing about being a blogger. The following rules, if followed, will minimise any risks and will ensure that you will stay safe whilst blogging.

Don'ts:
1. Never give away any personal information about your location or identity.
2. Don't post pictures of yourself without specific permission from your teacher or parents.
3. Never give out your log in details to anyone..
4. Don't use text language in your posts

Do's:
1. Post about whatever you like.
2. If you receive a comment, it is polite to respond, say thank you and reply to a question if they have left one.
3. Comment on other people's posts too. Blogging is about commenting and posting!
4. If your post doesn't appear straight away, you teacher might be busy, do be patient.
5. Try to post about things that your audience would like to read.
6. If you see anything that shouldn't be on your screen, do tell your teacher or parents immediately.
7. Do visit other class blogs regularly to read and comment. This helps people come back to your blog.
8. Try to show off your best work/writing whilst blogging and use the tips people suggest to you to improve.
9. Always tag your posts with your first name and include key words specific to your post.

The Role of the Blog Admin/Teacher:

The blog admin normally is the class teacher. This responsibility as gatekeeper is key to ensuring safety for the pupils using the blog. The following guidelines should be followed if a successful flowing blog is to be achieved:

1. Visit the blog regularly. It is better to visit short and often than catching up once a week. Your bloggers will appreciate comments and posts being approved quickly!
2. If you use a shared computer, log out at the end of each session.
3. Promote the links on the class blog to the parents and the wider community. Twitter is a great way to promote a blog.
4. A blog can take a while to gather momentum and an audience. Be patient... the audience will come!
5. Your users will need to log in. For a quick solution, you can have one Username and Password for your class to get posts on the blog. However, for older pupils of 7+ they are more than capable of having their own log in.
6. The safest permission setting for your blogger is 'Contributor'. This will allow them to log in and post but the blog admin will need to approve each post.
7. Mention the blog in assemblies and have it on display at parent evenings or school events, a blogging culture will soon be established!
8. Make sure each blog looks different in your school. This will help keep the interest high for the pupils from year to year.
9. Visit other blogs regularly and promote these to your class through links on your blog. What goes around comes around with blogging and strong loyal communities will form quickly.
10. Try using a free project like Quadblogging. This will give your pupils a quick audience. See http://quadblogging.net for more details.