Five Steps to Starting a Class Blog

By Kathleen Morris

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This guide explains how you can get a classroom blog up and running in five steps.

Introduction

Congratulations on making the decision to start a class blog! Blogging is an exciting and dynamic tool that can be used in so many different ways in the classroom.

Students of all ages can reap an enormous amount of rewards from blogging when it is working effectively in the classroom. There are rewards for teachers too!
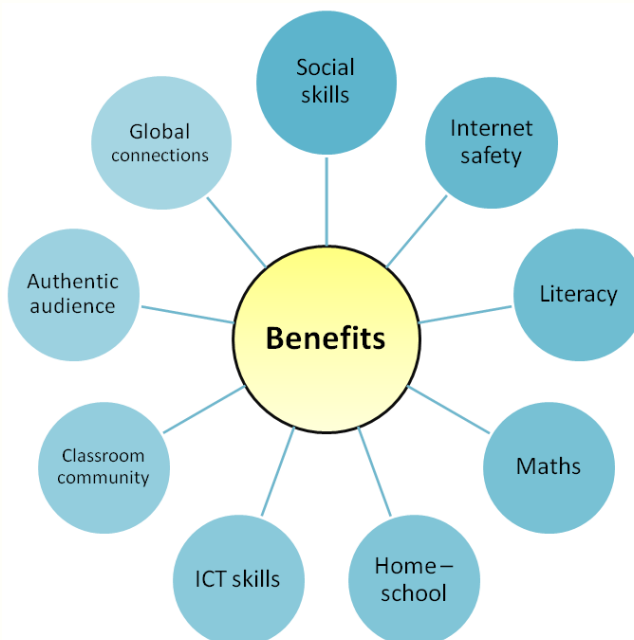
Before you start, you need to find the motivation to begin and persevere with blogging. If you need reminding of some of the benefits of blogging, or need to convince your school community of the benefits, check out this post and this video.

Kathleen Morris, August 2012   http://primarytech.global2.vic.edu.au

1. Choose Your Platform

Option One: For DEECD/CEO employees in Victoria, Australia

If you are **working in a Victorian Government or Catholic School**, I strongly recommend you head straight to Global2. Global2 is a DEECD sponsored Edublogs Campus Site. That means you get all the best features that Edublogs offers for free! Support for Edublogs Campus subscribers is extensive.

When you go to the Global2 site, simply click on this icon on the right hand side of the page to make your blog.

Make A New Global2
Blog

Click Here

Follow the prompts and you will have your free Global2 blog in minutes.

Tip: When setting up your blog, consider making your URL (website address) your teacher name (eg. Mrs Morris) rather than your class name (eg. 4KM). This will allow you to continue the blog if you teach other subjects/year levels in the future. URLs cannot be changed.

Option Two: For all other teachers

If you are **not in a Victorian Government or Catholic School**, and your school doesn't already have a preference for a blogging platform established, you will need to choose your platform.

There are **many** blogging platforms out there but my personal favourite is Edublogs. Blogger is another alternative with some good features. I have also seen Posterous and Weebly work quite well for some classes.

I have found pros and cons for both Blogger and Edublogs which I will briefly summarise.

Edublogs has a free version but to access better features, obtain more support and to create student blogs, you (or your school) will need to pay for a subscription. Click here to find out about costs.

Edublogs is purely for education with no adult content, and allows you to create student blogs from a class blog. The personalised support offered by Edublogs is excellent.

Blogger is Google's blogging platform (the domain service provider is called Blogspot). It is totally free. Blogger has a good range of theme templates and sidebar gadgets available, however, I have found the overall features to be more simplistic than Edublogs. This is not necessarily a bad thing for some teachers and students who want their platform to be as simple as possible.

Specific support is also **much** more limited than Edublogs, but because of its large worldwide usage, there are a lot of Blogger forums, help sites and videos on the web.

One important point to note with Blogger is that there is a navigation bar at the top of each blog that allows you to *"go to the next blog"*. It looks like this:
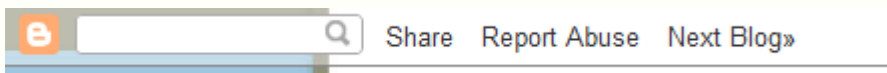
This could potentially cause safety issues for your students if the "next blog" is inappropriate.

A quick Google search for "remove Blogger navbar" will give you many links to instructions for removing the navigation bar.

Still not sure what platform to use? Check out these blogs to see the difference between Edublogs and Blogger blogs.

BLOGGER BLOGS

Mrs Yollis' Classroom Blog

Open the Door to B4

Ugandan Global Project

EDUBLOGS BLOGS

4KM and 4KJ @ Leopold Primary School (Global2 blog)

Mr Salsich's Class Blog

Mr Avery's Classroom Blog

2. Find Support

You don't necessarily need to go to a professional development session to learn how to start your class blog. It is easy to teach yourself and you won't be alone on your learning journey.

Whatever platform you choose, there are avenues for support. Make the most of these to help you learn about blogging. If you're totally new to blogging, it's going to be a learning journey for both you and your students. Start small and stick with it.

General Support (for any blogging platform):

- **Twitter** *(I am @kathleen_morris and there are many other very helpful bloggers on Twitter)*.

- Read other **class blogs** for ideas *(check out the list on the Edublogger site)*. ***Note*** *do* get inspiration from others but *do not* directly copy other people's work. That is a breach of copyright, etiquette and a form of plagiarism.

- Are there any **other teachers** interested in blogging at your school or in your PLN? Buddy up with them and learn together.

- Sign up for the **Blogging Teacher Challenge** or **Student Blogging Challenge**. Both are free professional development to help you and your students to become better bloggers. They are run by Edublogs but you don't have to have a blog through Edublogs to join.

Edublogs (or Global2):

- Visit the **Edublogs support page** for an extensive range of videos and written tutorials. This is the very first set of tutorials you'll need to set up an Edublogs Blog.

- Read the **Edublogger Blog** by Sue Waters and Ronnie Burt – a mine of information!

- Follow **Edublogs** on Twitter (@Edublogs).

Blogger:

- Visit the **Blogger support page** for getting started guides and tutorials.

- Follow **Blogger** on Twitter (@blogger).

- Use Google to search for answers to your questions.

3. Set Your Guidelines

Before you start blogging with your students you need to think about what sort of **guidelines** you want to have in place. There is no right or wrong answer here. Decide what will work best for you, your students, your parents and your school. Your school may already have blogging or internet guidelines that they'd like you to adopt.

Questions to consider:

If you're starting from scratch, these prompts may help you (or your class) establish your own blog guidelines.

• Will you include **photos** of the students? Will you include students' faces? Will names be matched to student photographs?

• Will you select the option (in Edublogs) to include you blog in **public searches** like Google?

• Will you ask parents to **not use their surname** when they comment so they don't identify their child?

• Will you select the option to have all **comments** sent to your email for approval before appearing on the blog?

• Will you set up **protocols** with your class so they know not to reveal personal information on the blog and use courteous language online?

• Will you **read all students' blog posts** before they are published?

Publishing guidelines:

You may or may not decide to publish your guidelines on your blog. You may prefer to send home a copy of your blogging guidelines or display them in your classroom. Regardless of how you publish your guidelines, it's wise to decide on your guidelines and discuss these with your students and school community before you begin blogging.

Example guidelines:

Click here to find the guidelines for my 2012 class blog, *4KM and 4KJ @ Leopold Primary School.*

Click here to find Mr Salsich's guidelines for his third grade class blog.

Reminder it is okay to look at other class blog guidelines for ideas, but it is not okay to copy them without acknowledgment (ie. say where they're from and link back).

4. Introduce Your Blog to Parents

Parent permission is crucial. My school has a general internet permission form which parents sign at the start of the school year and technically this covers blogging. However, I create my own notes about the classroom blog as I want parents to be fully educated and informed.

One thing I have learnt is that parent participation in blogging offers the children so many advantages. Often, parent participation does not come easily and it simply cannot be left to chance. I have found **education** to be the first step to getting families involved in the class blog.

Below are links to my 2012 parent permission notes in PDF format. Feel free to use the ideas for inspiration. If you use my wording in your own notes, acknowledgement is kindly requested.

4KM and 4KJ Blog Permission Note 2012 K Morris

4KM and 4KJ Blog Information Note 2012 K Morris *(This note has evolved over the years to include FAQs that parents often asked in previous years. In 2012, I really wanted my notes to inform parents that blogging is a well thought out and beneficial activity as I found many parents were unaware of this.)*

I also create a **handout** to help parents navigate the class blog.

10 Steps to Navigating the 4KM and 4KJ Blog 2012

Other ways to introduce blogging to parents

I include a **Learn About Blogging** set of pages on our class blog.

When we have had a **Parent Information Night** early in the school year, I talk to the parents about blogging and commenting, while answering any of their questions.

Ongoing support for parents is provided via email newsletters throughout the year.

We held a **Family Blogging Afternoon** in 2011 and 2012 to introduce families to blogging.

My class also runs one or two **Family Blogging Months** a year to encourage family involvement in our class blog. This is an idea that our blogging buddy, Linda Yollis, came up with a number of years ago.

Blogging creates a bridge between home and school, and the family involvement in student learning is simply priceless. Any opportunity to get families involved in blogging is worthwhile.

5. Introduce Your Blog to Students

I start the school year by introducing the students to the **concept of blogging** and familiarising them with the **terminology** (post, page, comment, link etc). If you've never blogged before, you might like to start by reading and commenting on other class blogs.

Introducing my students to their **blogging community** is done from Day One. We have established many "blogging buddies" over the five years I have had a class blog and each year my students and I continue these relationships.

Commenting: a starting point

It is so important to teach students to write **quality comments** if you want to improve their literacy skills and help them to engage in meaningful conversations on the blog. In 2010 I wrote a post about how I teach commenting skills. Find it here.

At the start of the year, I write all the posts on the class blog and the students' job is to write quality comments.

My team teaching partner, Kelly Jordan, and I created a poster we use to teach students about quality commenting.

You might like to create some sort of poster, rubric or guideline for your class to follow when commenting.

**How can I write a great blog comment?**

http://4kmand4kj.global2.vic.edu.au

★ Write your comment like a **letter** by including a **greeting, content and a closing.**

★ Always use **correct spelling, punctuation, grammar and spacing.**

★ **Compliment** the writer in a specific way, ask a **question** or **add new information.**

★ Write a **relevant comment** that is related to the post.

★ **Do not reveal any personal information** about yourself in your comment.

★ Always **read over the comment and edit** before submitting.

When your blog is up and running, **maintenance, consistency and reciprocation is key**. You and your students will eventually need to become part of the **blogging community** to reap the full rewards that blogging can offer. Silvia Tolisana has provided some excellent advice about these topics on her blog here.

Blogging continuum

In my class, students have the opportunity to **earn their own blog** throughout the year and I make them aware of this process early in the school year. Find out more about how I set up student blogs here.

Throughout the year, this is the rough **process** I use to introduce students to blogging.
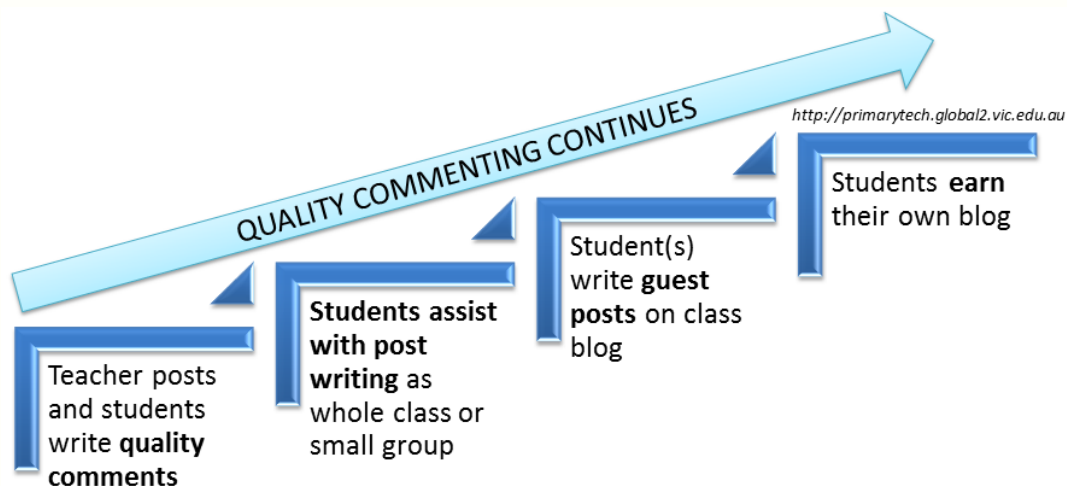
Beyond the classroom blog

I recommend starting with a class blog and persisting with this form of blogging until it is running well in your classroom and you/your students are comfortable with it.

When you and your students have built a blogging "skill set", you might be interested in connecting with blogging buddies or working on global projects. These are really exciting aspects of blogging that introduces students to a new range of personal and educational benefits. I have written a post on my blog with many tips to finding blogging buddies. I have also produced a guide to starting a global project.

Conclusion

Here are some final words of advice as you embark on your blogging journey.

Start Small: don't expect to know everything at once and don't compare your blog to more established classroom blogs. Begin with simple posts that include text and images. Set yourself a goal to publish a new post every week or fortnight. As you build your skills and confidence, you can post more regularly and begin embedding web 2.0 tools.

Integrate: don't make blogging an add-on. Integrate mathematics, literacy and other subjects into blog posts and comments. Make blogging part of your literacy block or homework schedule. Find more advice on integrating blogging into your classroom curriculum here.

Collaborate: find a buddy to learn with, either someone at your school or another educator online. Don't be afraid to learn *with* your students; you don't have to be the expert. You might even set up a joint blog with your whole grade level, or with another class. Sharing the workload can make blogging easier and more enjoyable.

Celebrate: while blogging is a lot of work, the rewards are plentiful. Celebrate your achievements and reflect on your success regularly!

Good luck and find more posts about educational blogging on my blog, Integrating Technology in the Primary Classroom.