

(Kerry Johnson) Hi everyone and welcome to the first edition of E-learning Insights for 2008.

To start off the new year, I thought we'd bring the read-write web into the audio realm and put together a podcast with content from E-learning Insights listeners.

The question to be answered for this edition was: Do you blog or read other people's blogs? If so, why do you? If not, why not?

Participants were invited to submit their answers via email or to record their answers via a voice board available on our Vox Pops web site in edna's Sandpit Groups.

Non- bloggers first.

Rex, a secondary school teacher in the Northern Territory, is currently seconded to deliver career and transition support to HS teachers. He writes: I'm flat out getting teachers to email me back inside a fortnight! Many ask "what's a blog or a wiki" and there are still a number who don't like having to use the computer lab. I don't blog because 1) I don't know how 2) the ones I've seen are by people who have an audience so have something valued to say 3) blogging would take time I don't have for a return I can't see, so I'd rather play tennis and 4) blogging doesn't engage my clients because they don't have time either.

Louise is a primary school principal in Queensland. She doesn't blog and hasn't read any online. Her reasons are that if it's not part of her day to day work, she doesn't make time for it and says she is a digital immigrant and not a current classroom teacher. However, she says that she feels these excuses aren't good enough anymore and has put blogging on her list of things to play with this year.

Kim Edgar – manager of VET projects at education.au, has tried blogging, but it hasn't engaged her the way other tools have. However, she reads several blogs about education and innovation as well as personal blogs and feels many bloggers are creating valuable content and are contributing to distributing and expanding ideas. Currently, she says she spends a lot more time seeing what people are up to on social networking sites such as Facebook, Linked In and Twitter.

Kerry B, a Librarian and Trainee Breast feeding Counselor from WA also finds that other technologies better suit her needs. She said that she prefers the discussion forums in edna Groups.

And Kathy, a teacher in the NSW TAFE system has several reasons she neither writes nor reads blogs. She feels that many bloggers share too much of their personal life and are not always accurate. The networking aspect of blogging doesn't work for her and she thinks that blogs are too text-centric to be that new and engaging for her students, who do plenty of writing and reading already. She doesn't blog herself because she doesn't feel she is expert enough on any one topic to be able to produce a blog that would be interesting or increase anyone's knowledge.

Now to the bloggers. Although I'm a blogger myself, I was surprised by the variety of responses, not only in terms of WHY but HOW people blogged.

We'll start off with a Vox Pop from Colleen, a VET practitioner in Queensland.

(AUDIO) Hi, my name is Colleen Hodgins and I am currently the facilitator and coordinator for the diploma of e-learning at the Tropical North Queensland Institute which is based in Cairns, but I actually work throughout the region. I use blogging for my students as a way of reflecting on their learning within the program and we use a site called xanga.com, where we are able to subscribe on each others' blogs and therefore develop a sense of community around our learning processes and what's happening in this program. The blogging process is actually very successful for connecting students who are not geographically together. And most of my students come from across Australia and this has been quite a successful means of communicating and keeping in touch with what's going on in students' learning.

Some students like the process of blogging, others are not terribly fussed. However, it does provide an opportunity for reflection and becomes a repository of learning throughout the 18 months of the program.

I have thought about changing my blog address, but at the moment all students past and present are connected via this xanga blog, so it works for our community of learners.

http://xanga.com/M00_VIR

Jenni is a training officer from Adelaide who blogs in addition to running two web sites to promote her services. She does so to expand her influence and reputation in her area of focus.

<http://askjenniwright.com/>

Not all bloggers feel tied to text however – as our next few Vox Pops illustrate:

(AUDIO) Delia Bradshaw I work as an educational mentor in a whole range of adult education and vocational education settings. I love blogging because it brings out the artist in me. Being able to use colour and texts of different types and images and a whole multitude of combinations and permutations. I think blogs allow each of us to develop the artist in ourselves.

AUDIO

Michael Coghlan

Hi everybody! Do I blog? Well, sort of. I don't have much of a desire to regularly journal my thoughts in written format. I think it is mainly a question of time and I think so many other people do a great job that I'm happy to feed off all the things that other people write. When I do blog, I tend to use it as an audio blog or media blog for a couple of reasons. I prefer to put my thoughts down in audio rather than go through what to me a comparatively arduous task to write down those same thoughts and also I kind of use my blog as a demonstration site for the way that media can be incorporated into a blog. You'll notice that all the entries, bar a few, are media or audio types of postings. Another issue of course is to whether to blog or podcast, and for someone like myself who prefers to speak my thoughts rather than write them, then podcasting to me seems an alternative that is preferable. So – I blog, yes, but not in the typical way and I tend to podcast more than blog. Cheers!

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

(AUDIO) I'm John Travers and I'm a formerly a teacher and school principal interested in technology and now I work for education.au

A major reason for me having a couple of blogs – small scale ones – is, I guess, ego. It's a way to push oneself out there and put your views forth. Most of us are pretty happy to have opinions and views in conversations and we have these conversations among friends and acquaintances whom we can more or less trust. So we let fly. So I don't think it's a big extension to go from that to using a blog. I suppose the strange thing about using a blog is that you don't know who is reading it so you can't read the facial expressions of people you're talking to or you don't know who the audience is. So, ego is one and I think that's fairly important.

Another one is just if you think you have something to say that you think would be of use to other people I don't think that means big ego, it just means that you've made a reasonable judgment that you have some information that might be of use to other people.

The thing that encourages me to make a modest number of blog entries to a very small audience I must mention is because the tools are so jolly good! I think that blogs are amazingly flexible – they're about the easiest to use piece of technology – you can incorporate movies and links and embedded things and you can use images and slide shows and so it's not just text. But text is pretty good too. So that's why I do a bit of blogging.

<http://itravers3.blogspot.com/>

Allison Miller is a Project Manager with the Australian Flexible Learning Framework who also does staff mentoring on e-learning within TAFE SA. She says she's only recently begun taking blogging more seriously. She initially started by using it as a repository of notes from workshops and conferences as a reference for herself. But recently she's found that she enjoys getting feedback and comments on her blog, so she makes sure to consider what she blogs and makes sure it is relevant to people who might be following or reading her blog. So she asks questions to provoke people to stir up a discussion. During her holiday, she took the time to explore other people's blogs and has found it enriching to find out what other people are doing in the realm of e-learning and using technology in education. She's also enjoyed giving comment and feedback on other peoples' blogs and that's resulted in widening her network. Allison says that she finds that when she blogs and wants other people to know, she has to promote what she's doing. And she does that via social network sites such as Twitter, Facebook and Pownce. It's important that if you blog you start to find who your audience might be and to promote yourself to them.

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

This notion of blogs as a series of interconnected conversations is carried through in several other Vox Pops:

(AUDIO) This is Chris Betcher from Sydney, Australia. I'm a teacher and I've been working with technology and students and teachers for about the last 15 years or so. I've also worked outside the education sector in a range of different areas and at the moment I do a lot of blogging and podcasting.

So your question was do I blog and the answer is clearly yes. Why do we do this? Well blogging and podcasting and the web 2 environment actually provides an unbelievable personal learning network for people with like interests to get together and actually share things on a consistent basis and it's through that sharing of ideas and the conversation that we actually grow in terms of what we are doing in classrooms and what we are sharing with other teachers. So that's probably the biggest reason for blogging: the sense of community it engenders. And you only really get that when you start to blog yourself.

Do I read blogs? Of course I do and that's part of the blogging phenomenon, that sense of community and sharing. So as well as writing I also read a lot of blogs and have a feed reader that goes out and monitors feeds – there's probably well over a hundred feeds being monitored through that feed reader and really that's all part of the online community.

The other really important part of this personal learning networks that gets formed is a tool called Twitter. And Twitter is a basically 24-hour nonstop chat from people whom you choose to follow. And I'm following about 200 at the moment. Obviously it's nice to occasionally turn that off but again an incredible environment in which to grow and learn. So that's why I blog!

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

www.virtualstaffroom.net

(AUDIO)

I'm Kathryn. I look at emerging technologies and how we can use them for teaching and learning at Murdoch University in Perth, WA.

Do I blog? Oh yes I do. I've been looking at blogs for probably the last 18 months almost 2 years now. I see very little difference between the act of reading a blog and the act of writing a blog. To me it's all one big one conversation. So even though I don't write something in my blog for the last three days ago, I'll feel as if I've been very active in the blogosphere because I've been out commenting on other people's blogs and have been reading what they've got to say and sometimes I feel that I don't have anything to add to the general conversation. But I see blogging as very much a social thing and not an isolated thing. I find that blogging helps me clarify my thoughts. It lets me keep up to date with new things happening in the world of information technology and emerging technology which is where I work. It lets me contact some really cheeky, informal interesting people with great minds that I really enjoy interacting with. I just love that stimulation aspect of it! I also like the fact that if I'm asked a question, sometimes – because two weeks ago I spent two hours slogging over a teeny, tiny blog post to get my thoughts clarified – I give this answer that sounds like I sort of have just said something quite smooth off the top of my head – and it's because I've blogged about it.

I also find that often I'll do a throw away post maybe six months before and then I'll find that it's become really relevant because something's changed – like the way that Facebook suddenly opened up to the world when it opened up its API so that I could go back to the things I thought about Facebook before. I just really enjoy blogs and blogging.

<http://librariansmatter.com>

(AUDIO)

I'm Kerrie, I'm the Assistant Manager of edna in Professional Learning and Online Communities. You might expect me to be an expert blogger, but I'm really still on my P plates. Blogging is one of those things I do now that I didn't do 18 months ago. Besides my education.au blog – I also have two blogs on Blogger for my non-professional interests. I get a lot of pleasure and information from reading the blogs of others. I've settled on reading the blogs of others through software on my computer rather than a web-based place like Pageflakes, simply because of the time involved in setting up something new. I have learnt just recently that a very important part of being active in blogs is not just to write postings yourself but to respond to the postings of others – either by commenting on them or by referring to them in your own blog.

<http://blogs.educationau.edu.au/ksmith/>

Tom Cotton, assistant manager of edna says he started blogging as an experiment. I had no idea why I should blog. But after a little while, things became a lot clearer. The benefits of blogging - such things as it forces me to synthesize my thoughts, I can use it to record useful information and actually it helps me to reflect on my learning journey as I do stuff. What I try and do is focus on making a positive contribution rather than just pointing to other peoples' works. I can actually have interesting inter-blog discussions with other bloggers using quotes and trackbacks. So it's really quite an interesting medium. And that's why I blog.

We'll finish our look at blogging with a Vox Pop that has some excellent advice. Penny is a research student exploring the use of ICTs in teaching and learning in WA. She's been a part of online communities since the days before the world wide web when she ran an IRC channel:

What I like most about blogging is the opportunity to participate in communities. As a graduate teacher, I found the first years of teaching to be really tough. But through blogging I also found that I wasn't alone. I joined a couple of teaching communities on Live Journal one for teachers generally and

one for graduate teachers specifically. And I found that the posts made by members to be a significant source of support – and it was a great place to vent. It was also from an international perspective. And you know what? Teachers are paid badly everywhere. We've all had our run-ins with admin. We've all had interesting supervisors. We've all had Jonah in our classes. And, you know, sometimes we all just don't know where to start. We all need to talk about it. Blogging is a great place for it. I find it highly rewarding and lots of fun. But a word of advice: keep your "what I did on the weekend" blog private or friends only and quite separate from any professional learning blogs you may participate in. You don't want Jonah finding those New Years Eve pictures and getting creative with PhotoShop.

(Kerry Johnson)

You'll find the links to all our bloggers' blogs together with information and resources on blogging on the episode page for this podcast. Visit the podcasting resources section of the edna web site: <http://podcasts.edna.edu.au> and click on E-learning Insights.

Before we go, there are a few announcements to make:

First up, the 2008 edna workshop series is coming to an Australian capital city near you. Each one day mini conference will include guest speakers, hands-on sessions and presentations and opportunities to network with other educators. Workshops start at the end of March -- for more information, visit www.edna.edu.au/workshops

InspirED- a new education.au initiative – is sponsoring a video competition to find the best and most innovative use of technology to enhance teaching and learning in the classroom. You can win prizes, including a digital photo gram and free attendance at an education.au seminar in 2008. Learn more about the competition and InspirED at the InspirED web site: <http://www.inspired.edu.au>

And that's E-learning Insights number 16. If you'd like to provide feedback on this or any other episode, send an email to podcast@edna.edu.au.

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This has been Kerry Johnson for E-learning Insights.