



## Blogging and the Media Specialist, Part 2

# MEDIA MATTERS

**By Frances  
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Does it seem as if all your students are either blogging or commenting on their friends' blogs? Web logs, or blogs, are one of the most popular tools of what has become known as Web 2.0, the Web as an interactive, personal communication medium rather than a static means of one-way, mass communication.

In the March 2006 Media Matters column, regular columnist Doug Johnson gave an overview of blogging and described how school library media specialists can find blogs and use them for professional development. This issue, he asked me to write about how students use blogs and how library media specialists and teachers can use blogging in their programs.

### **The Teen Blogger Versus the Adult Blogger**

Teenagers blog very differently than adult bloggers. Their focus is primarily on self-expression and community, and only secondarily on information. Teen blogs are typically diary-like, decorated and customized, and often feature interactive or multimedia elements such as polls and sound clips. Teen bloggers take maximum advantage of social functions that allow them to link to like-minded souls. For example, a LiveJournal (<http://www.livejournal.com>) profile typically links to friends lists, friend of lists, group blog memberships, interests, and even maps of friends' locations.

Like other technologies, blogging has spawned its share of unanticipated consequences. Many teen bloggers have a skewed sense of privacy, forgetting that their posts can be read by the world at large. When I talk to my students about

privacy they think I mean withholding basic factual information about themselves, such as their home addresses and telephone numbers. They don't understand how much they reveal about themselves in the course of routine postings. Although unknown predators may take advantage of this information, teens are probably more likely to be hurt by those they know. The result is, at best, gossip and teenage drama and at worst, serious bullying. Oddly, teens often feel violated when their "private" thoughts are read by parents, teachers, or school administrators.

The adult professional blogger is a different creature altogether, usually focused primarily on information and information networking and, secondly, on self-expression. This blogger embeds links within posts, values archived posts, provides permalinks (permanent URLs) to individual entries, and often includes a blogroll (a list of favorite blogs).

### **Taking the Plunge**

Why should media specialists create their own blogs? Blogs provide a natural environment for active learning, as well as an opportunity to connect teens to the media center.

So how do you get started? In March, Johnson described the mechanics of the process and provided a list of resources. You can host a blog yourself or you can use a hosting service such as [blogger.com](http://blogger.com) or [edublogs.org](http://edublogs.org). School climate will influence how blogging is managed. What is the level of administrative and technical support? How open is the culture of the school? For example, will commenting be allowed on a

school blog? What are the potential consequences one way or the other? Look at the blogs of other library media centers and schools to find models and develop ideas that suit your own setting. Media center blogs should also provide RSS feeds so readers are always alerted to new content. If readers have to keep checking your site, you may drop from their radar.

### Ways to Blog in the Media Center

**Official Face Blogs.** A good way to start blogging is to create a blog that serves as an “official face” of the media center—the spot for news, updates, and communication with students, staff, and parents. Blogs of this sort focus on current information and are generally not highly interactive. Some media center Web sites are created with blog software, which makes it easy for the site to be maintained and updated by multiple staff members. The Huntingtown High School Library Media Center (<http://www.hhsmedia.blogspot.com>) is one such example. Library news takes center stage, and links to databases, class research projects, and other information appear in the right column. At Mabry Middle School (<http://mabryonline.org/blogs>) every teacher, including the media specialist, has a blog, and the principal is the Webmaster!

**Single-Purpose Blogs.** Blogs can also be highly focused, dedicated to a single function rather than acting as a global resource. For example, the blogging environment is a natural one for hosting book discussions such as the book club blog at Hawley Library Media Center at Winnacunnet High School in Hampton, New Hampshire (<http://bibliotalk.blogspot.com>). Blogs are also effective platforms for posting information about class assignments and projects. The teacher blogs at Mabry Middle School are good examples of this type of use. The students (and their parents) in Renee Kaplan’s

language arts classes can check her blog (<http://mabryonline.org/blogs/kaplan/>) for daily homework assignments, class notes, and student work. In contrast, my blog (<http://www.uni.uiuc.edu/library/blog>) is a “single-purpose” blog in that it fulfills a public relations function for my library. I think of it as the virtual personality of our Web site, a way of extending a human voice and presence beyond the walls of the school building.

**Active Learning Blogs.** Blogs can be used very effectively for active learning (as can wikis, but that’s for another column!). Two critical features of blogging promote active learning: built-in access to a wider audience than the traditional student-teacher relationship provides and the potential for collaboration and feedback from others. Classroom teachers have been the leaders in using blogs for active learning, but there is no reason why media specialists cannot jump into this arena with equal fervor. On his blog ([http://www.weblogged.com/best\\_practices](http://www.weblogged.com/best_practices)), Will Richardson maintains a running list of blogs that demonstrate the potential for active learning using this medium. Among others, he links to Canadian math teacher Darren Kuropatwa’s class blogs (see <http://pc20s.blogspot.com/> for one of his current offerings). Kuropatwa has students serve as scribes for each day’s activities, posting notes from the day as well as relevant formulas, activities, and visuals. He also requires students to post a reflection about where they are in their learning at least once before each test. One student recently posted the following insightful commentary:

And to Mr. K, I’d just like to say something upon my behalf and it is the complete truth. When we first started this thing I thought it was a complete waste of time, especially since I don’t have a computer at home and I would

have to spend extra time finding a computer that I could use. But at the end of the year I realize that the blog is for every student that has ever looked down at their paper and said “what the heck (i know how dumb it sounds) am i doing.” The blog is something you can resort to when you need help, or need someone to explain something to you.

Media specialists and teachers who create active learning blogs must build in mechanisms that protect the privacy of student contributors and the integrity of the blog. Blog commenting (and even reading) can be made “members only” and confidential information such as grades can be shared in other ways.

### Closing Thoughts

One of the unique attributes of blogging is that it can transmit a sense of voice. Do not miss the opportunity to share more than the (potentially boring) facts about your services. One excellent example of how voice and personality are transmitted, yet a sense of professionalism is maintained, is the Northfield Mount Hermon School Library’s “Reading Room” blog (<http://nmhlibrary.typepad.com>). My favorite feature is their periodic “Library Lounge Lizard of the Week,” a candid photo of students at work (or play) in the library. The link in the sidebar to the photo-tale “Hoggers Visit the Library” is not to be missed. My guess is that this library is a very welcoming place in person as well as online.

Blogging and other social networking services such as MySpace.com and Facebook.com serve as important vehicles of self-expression, communication, and information exchange for teens. This is our chance to join the party and put our own spin on things. The blogosphere is big enough for everyone.