

# School blogs: A direct line to the quiet kids in class

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Every day, school students are required to answer questions, solve problems and work in groups. This kind of upfront engagement is challenging for shy students, who are now using blogs to have their voices heard in the classroom.

Jane Hunter, a lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Western Sydney, says many teachers are using blogs (or weblogs) to make responding to class work more accessible for all [students](#).

"Blogs are powerful tools that enable students to be actively engaged in their learning long after they have left the classroom," says Ms. Hunter.

"When teachers encourage students to discuss classroom content online, they provide a space where information and resources can be instantly disseminated and where students can become involved in discussions at their own pace."

Ms. Hunter was formerly a senior officer in the Connected Classrooms Program in the NSW Department of Education and Training (Community). The program is responsible for the development of blogED: a blogging technology that is being utilized by large numbers of students and teachers in both primary and [secondary schools](#).

"School students today are extremely comfortable with new technologies and are well-versed at expressing themselves creatively online by uploading their written work, videos, podcasts and digital stories," says

Ms. Hunter.

"When teachers incorporate these technologies into classroom learning, they create a supportive digital space where even the quietest students feel comfortable sharing their views in a range of modes, without any fear of embarrassment or ridicule."

Victor Davidson, a teacher librarian at Birrong Girls' High School in south-western Sydney, participated in a trial of blogED in 2009 and has since developed hundreds of these online learning spaces for his students.

In his longest-running site, 'Fantasy Fan Fiction', students from years 7 to 9 regularly submit their own creative writing and reviews of their favourite books and contribute to ardent debates around, for example, the literary value of Harry Potter versus Twilight.

"Through the blogs we have created a culture of critical engagement and constructivist learning, and it is the quiet kids who are really blossoming," says Mr. Davidson.

"Some of our brightest and most articulate students, who often shy away from face-to-face conversations, have developed an active and dynamic presence online. Through the blogs, they have been able to reveal their unique personalities and ideas, and give the teachers a foundation for developing rapport with them in the classroom."

Mr. Davidson is passionate about the benefits of blogging and has passed-on this knowledge and enthusiasm to other teachers at Birrong Girls', including English teacher and year 7 coordinator Livia Pazin.

"I am now using the blog technology to create collaborative learning communities as well as electronic meeting places for students," says Ms.

Pazin.

"For example, as year 7 coordinator I have set-up a blog to help students make an effective transition into high school. They can log-on and start conversing with their peers, share ideas, find common ground, and even establish new friendships."

Ms. Pazin says blogs allow for the creation of networks where every student - irrespective of their culture, intelligence or social status - can become more deeply involved in the school community.

"Posting on a blog requires contributors to engage in positive and respectful interchanges that are free of negative personal comments or put-downs. There is no hierarchy in this online environment; all of the contributions have equal weight and there is no fear of judgement or intimidation."

Ms. Hunter says blogED is an ideal tool for integrating curriculum content into school subjects.

"This learning tool operates within NSWDET's intranet, which restricts access to those who have a login. [Blogs](#) that are selected to be 'public' are carefully moderated by the teacher," says Ms. Hunter.

"Students can be guided to particular sites to extend their understanding of what is covered in class, and the settings on blogED allow student posts about what they might be learning to be both 'public' and 'private'."

Provided by University of Western Sydney

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