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## **Web's second phase puts users in control**

The web's shift from a tool of reference to one of collaboration presents teachers with some rich opportunities for e-learning

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Many believe the web has entered a second phase, where new services and software – collectively known as web 2.0 – are transforming the web from a predominantly "read only" medium to one where anyone can publish and share content and easily collaborate with others.

The "new" web is already having an impact in class, as teachers start exploring the potential of blogs, media-sharing services, and other social software, which, although not designed specifically for e-learning, can be used to empower students and create exciting new learning opportunities. These same tools allow teachers to share and discuss innovations more easily and, in turn, spread good practice.

### **A travel weblog**

"Snails are not that bad, they taste like garlic mushrooms when you get them out of the shell," writes Scott on Musselburgh grammar school's Paris-Normandy 2006 web log. For the second year running, teachers and students at the East Lothian comprehensive have published a blog of their annual school trip to France, updated daily, so that parents and the rest of the school can follow them on their travels. As well as reading about the group's progress, visitors to the site can also leave comments – most of them from parents sending messages of encouragement.

Musselburgh's travel weblog is powered by the commercial blogging service TypePad ([typepad.com](http://typepad.com)), and shows how blogging can be used to engage students, parents and the wider school community. See the weblog at <http://mgsonline.blogs.com/paris2006>.

## **Discussing/annotating images**

Flickr ([flickr.com](http://flickr.com)), a web service that has already had various mentions in this journal, makes it very easy to publish and share images, with many possible uses – from being a place where students can publish and discuss digital photography to a way for students to find images relevant to a particular subject for use in their coursework.

It also has a lesser-known feature that has many potential uses for teaching and learning: the ability to add annotations to an image. Once an image has been published on Flickr, users can draw hotspots on the image and then attach a note to those hotspots. Then, whenever a user moves their cursor over any of the hotspots, the annotations appear.

Beth Harris, director of distance learning at the Fashion Institute of Technology, State University of New York, has used Flickr to enable her students to annotate and discuss a series of paintings as part of an online art history course.

"The problem when you teach online is that you can't, for example, point to a part of a painting in the way you would in a face-to-face classroom," she says. "So it occurred to me that I could use Flickr's annotation function to have students engage more directly with the work of art itself."

Students discuss a Robert Campin painting using Flickr at <http://tinyurl.com/rk9uw>.

## **Video blogging**

By combining use of two popular web services, Blogger ([blogger.com](http://blogger.com)) and YouTube ([youtube.com](http://youtube.com)), Pete Fraser, head of media at Long Road sixth form college, Cambridge, has introduced

video blogging (using video instead of text) to his AS media studies students in preparation for the new media technologies component of their exam.

After being given an inspiring talk by the BBC technology pundit, Bill Thompson, on the state of new media, students were asked to research and produce a three-minute video blog entry on a new media technology of their choice – anything from the fashionable social networking website MySpace to MP3 players like the iPod.

"This meant they would not only be researching new media but also using it and, hopefully, get a better grasp of what it is and how it works," says Fraser.

Shot on relatively inexpensive DV camcorders and edited using Apple's iMovie software, each finished production was uploaded and published on the video-sharing website YouTube where it can be viewed and commented on by the wider YouTube community. Students were then required to re-publish their YouTube-hosted video on their own Blogger-based class weblog, a process that involves cutting and pasting a snippet of code from one service to the other.

Fraser says his students were highly motivated to videoblog compared with previous years when they were asked to produce a more traditional presentation: "This time they all did the work and threw themselves into the task with gusto. It was also more enjoyable to teach, and more focused."

Next year, media students at Long Road will be asked to use Blogger to collate all their production research and planning, and to publish "rough cuts" as well as finished work on YouTube. For Fraser, new web services are helping his students become more independent by enabling them to collaborate more effectively outside class. Long Road college's media blogging portal is at: <http://longroadnewmedia.blog.spot.com>.

### **Sharing good practice**

Teachers are using many of these same tools to share their innovative uses of web 2.0 applications and services, and to collaborate with colleagues. Josie Fraser, an educational

technologist and keen blogger

(<http://fraser.typepad.com/edtechuk>), has created an online directory of UK educators who are interested in how weblogs can support learning ([www.camaban.co.uk/wiki](http://www.camaban.co.uk/wiki)). By using wiki software the site lets anyone add their details to the directory or update a previous entry.

Fraser also helped organise the first UK conference covering weblog use in education (<http://incsub.org/edublog/>), which took place earlier this month. "Literacy is undergoing a renaissance, thanks to weblogs, as a new generation of learners are alive to the possibilities of reading, writing and communicating in many different contexts," he says.

Many listed in the "edu-bloggers" directory have also contributed to a recently released (and free to download) e-book, edited by Terry Freedman. Coming of Age: An Introduction to the New Worldwide Web is a practical guide to many web 2.0 phenomena such as weblogs, wikis and podcasting, and is packed full of case studies on how these new tools are being used in education. It can be downloaded at <http://fordlog.com/?p=98>.

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Weblink

Steve O'Hear's weblog ([ohear.net/weblog](http://ohear.net/weblog))