

Using a blog to encourage journalism students to engage in critical reflection

Jonathan Hewett J.C.Hewett@city.ac.uk
Associate Director of Newspaper Journalism



Blog for critical reflection

- Rationale: needs and relevance
- **Context: education, journalism, online...**
- **Project: student blog**
- **Results: what happened in practice**
- **Pointers: options; what next time?**

Rationale: needs

- From review of curriculum and ICT use
- Programme and module specs
- **Critical reflection (and all that...)**
- **Media convergence in journalism**
- **Other pressures and priorities**

Critical reflection needed

“reflect critically on the practice of journalism”

“critically evaluate issues in contemporary journalism”

“synthesise information from a range of sources”

“manage the implications of complex ethical dilemmas”

Where's the critical reflection?

- **More implicit than explicit?**
- **Assessment?**
- **Relevance?**
- **Modularised?**
- **Integration of theory and practice?**

Why online?

- **Relevance for journalism**
- **Educational context**
 - E-Learning
 - E-Portfolios (PDPs, lifelong learning...)
 - Pedagogical framework
 - Pressures of numbers, timetable, £££
- **Encourage ‘thinking digitally’?**

Blog learning benefits *claimed*

- **Reflection and analysis**
 - in-built feedback system (comments)
 - contextualised learning (links)
- **Forum for critical thinking**
 - points 'published' and queried/discussed
- **Collaborative, student-centred**
- **Active learning, higher-order thinking**

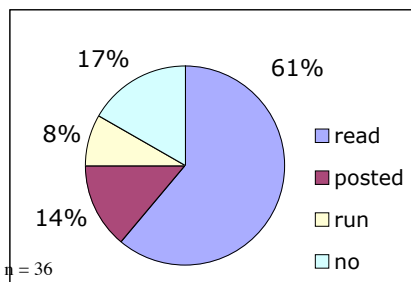
Ferdig & Trammel, 2004

-- (Social) constructivist approach?

Practical priorities

- **IT access and support**
- **Cost**
- **Time required**
- **Staff input**
- **Ease of use – familiarity**
- **Relevance**

Students are familiar with blogs



“A blogging space for journalism students to reflect on and discuss their practical work and issues in journalism”

- **Single blog**
- **All students able to contribute**
- **Newspaper Journalism Masters / Diploma**
- **Pilot, then full**



What to blog about – 1

- ✓ **Your experience(s) as a journalist, primarily in your practical work**
 - ▶ *how it went, frustrations and successes;*
 - ▶ *how it relates to points raised in teaching sessions;*
 - ▶ *tips and suggestions;*
 - ▶ *what you have learned.*

What to blog about – 2

- ✓ **Published articles (or broadcasts etc), particularly to highlight points relevant to what you are learning and putting in to practice**
 - ▶ *eg intros, structure, accuracy, style, use of quotes, attribution, sources, headlines, use of visuals, other elements of content, different types of news story, news features, profiles...*
 - ▶ *Particularly useful to focus on what you find effective or not, and -- importantly -- why and how the reporter/writer/sub-editor/publication has achieved this (or failed to).*
 - ▶ *Possibly linking this to your own experience, too.*

What to blog about – 3

✓ **Contemporary developments in journalism**

- ▶ not simply to note these but to reflect critically on them, get beneath the surface, make connections etc.

Assessment

- **Min. 7 items** (posts and/or comments)
- **Length is less important than relevance**
- **Where possible, they should 'add value'**
- *“This is where critical reflection comes in; critical not (necessarily!) in the sense of criticising/ disapproving but in the sense of reviewing, analysing and evaluating; 'unpacking' assumptions; challenging yourself and others; making connections, particularly with your own experience/work/ideas; and so on.”*
- **cover a range of topics**

The blog in figures

Pilot (7 weeks + 1)

- 14 students contributed
- 69 posts/comments in total
- range of 3–16 per student

Full-scale (11 weeks + 1)

- 45 students contributed
- 399 posts/comments (+ 39)
- range of 1–40 per student

Main areas of blog posts

- **Practical experiences** (eg interviewing)
- **Published articles etc** (plus links)
- **Contemporary issues in journalism**
- **Moaning, mutual support, ideas**
- **Feed in from outside events**
- **Cross-course discussion**
- **Follow-up from in-class / assignments etc**
- **Useful feedback for me!**

Students' experience of the blog

From survey of students' experiences:

- **Very few technical problems**
- **Useful and had learned from it**
- **More tutor input**
- **Preference for continuing blog, but not assessed**

Worst things about the blog

- **Assessment: quota for posts / comments, topics specified**
- **Some posts too long**
- **Not enough dialogue / interaction**
- **Some people write rubbish**
– using it for their egos?

Best things about the blog

- *continuing discussions from the day, having time to reflect on issues*
- *useful for sharing practical information*
- *setting up dialogue between students*
- *encouraging critical thinking*

More best things...

- *It's catapulted me into the modern age. And I quite liked it!*
- *Idea exchange forum --> collaborative support = learning from each other*
- *You can ask fellow students for advice/reassurance*

Other spin-offs

- *Students started (or revived) own blogs*
- *Contributor to *The Guardian* arts blog*
- *'Diary of a journalism postgrad'*
- *Students' online newspapers*
- *Intro to online tools (RSS, del.icio.us etc)*
- *Online / multimedia jobs*

Possible changes for next time

- *Tutor role – more input?*
- *Assessment*
- *Encourage reluctant contributors*
- *Greater integration across programme*
- *Journalism blogs*
- *! Privacy and plagiarism ?*
- *More links and multimedia content*
- *Individual blogs with RSS feeds?*

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Using a blog to encourage critical reflection

June 26, 2007

Posted by Jonathan Hewett in : [Research, blogging, WJEC, Online, student experience, Academic, Education, elearning, journalism education](#) , [trackback](#) , [edit post](#)

This is the theme of my presentation to a Best Practices In Teaching workshop at the World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC).

The project has involved using a blog not for publishing students' journalistic work but for reflecting on their practical Journalism — primarily as a tool for enhancing their learning.

Some notes on my presentation are available here as a PDF — intended particularly for those at the WJEC teaching workshop. I'd be particularly interested in having your comments, whether you came to the WJEC session or not — please add them below.

search

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Journalism, teaching and learning, related research and more... from the perspective of a journalism educator

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