

# EXTENDING THE CLASSROOM ONLINE THROUGH BLOGGING

by  
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As an ICT enthusiast who has undergone several trainings in ICT, most of which were organized and sponsored by the Foundation for Information Technology Education (FIT-ED), I am always looking for ways to integrate ICT in my classes and in the school. I just can't let the students in my classes go and end the school year without any ICT based learning activity. I believe that students today should be exposed more to ICT and ICT integrated learning in conjunction and apart from their usual computer subjects in TLE.

Today, there are a plethora of ICT programs and tools to make ICT integration in the classroom much easier, faster and accessible for both teachers and learners. Among the newest of these online tools is the "web log" or "blogging".

Blog or blogging has become commonplace in the internet. More and more people are getting into blogging either as blog owners themselves or visiting and joining discussions and posting their own comments in other bloggers' blogsite.

What is a Blog? A blog is an abridgement of the term "web log", which is a website, usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other materials such as graphics or video. What makes blogging interesting is its interactivity. It enables visitors to the site to share and post their comments to the blog posts or to other visitors' comments.

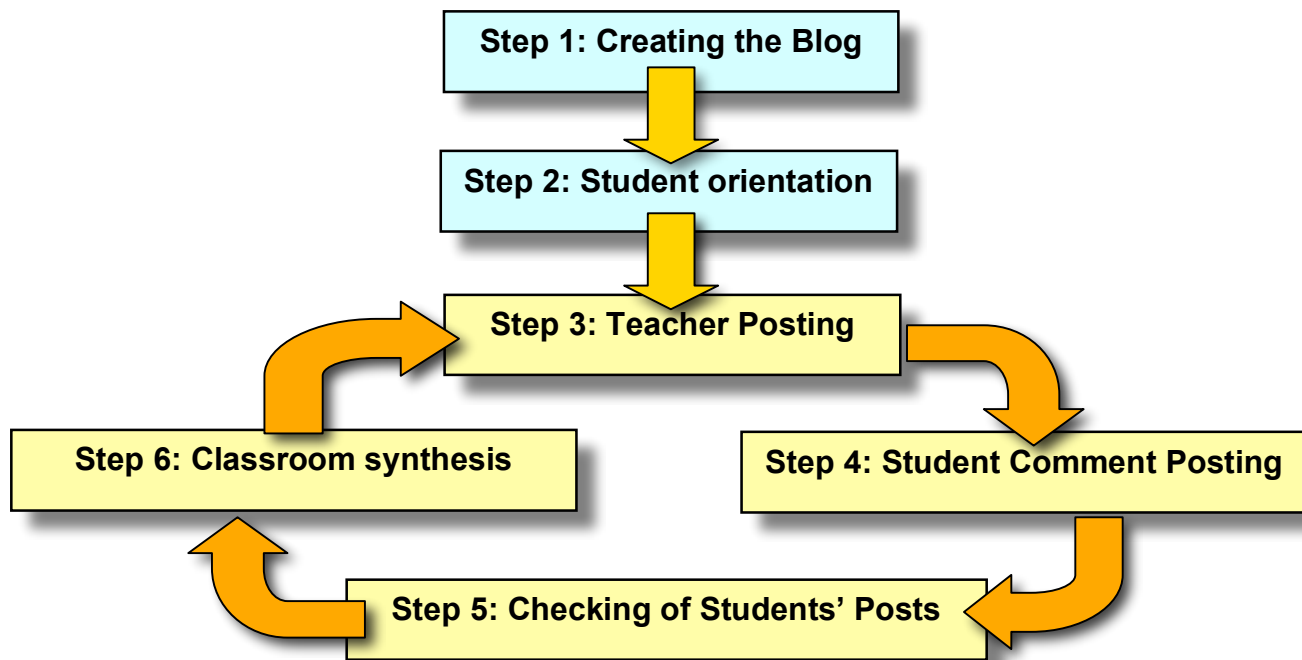
The potential of using blogging as a teaching tool is not left unnoticed that I contemplated on how blog can be incorporated in my teaching. By the time I learned how to build a blog, I set my objectives. The main goal of the blogging project is to virtually extend the classroom and some of the classroom activities in the cyberspace – that is, to do the things that we teachers do in our classrooms online using the interactivity features of the blog. As for the specific objectives, the blog is intended for the following:

1. to encourage student participation in online discussions and collaborations
2. to serve as posting boards for assignments and activities,
3. to serve as bulletin of information and reminders,
4. to serve as class journal of activities, and
5. to serve as online publication of student works and achievements.

In June of the current school year, I created two blogs for the two subjects of the Special Science Curriculum which I was assigned to teach in Manaoag National High School, Division of Pangasinan II. These subjects are Research I for sophomores and Research II for seniors –both are add-on subjects. The sophomore class with two sections has a total number of 69 students. The senior class has only one section comprising of 39 students. This blogging project is ongoing and I intend to maximize the use of this ICT integrated activity in my classes to the end of the school year.

The blogs can be accessed at [www.research-one.blogspot.com](http://www.research-one.blogspot.com) and [www.research-two.blogspot.com](http://www.research-two.blogspot.com).

Here is a diagram of the steps that I followed in implementing the classroom blogging project:



### ***Step 1. Creation of the blog.***

I created the blogs using the free blog hosting of [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com), which is owned by Google. There are lots of free blog hosting websites over the internet but I think and according to online reviews the blog program of Google is one of the most popular and most widely used by bloggers worldwide. One reason for its popularity is the simplicity of its construction and the ease of management. The only requisite in creating a blog in blogger.com is an email account, preferably a g-mail account by Google. An email from other provider would be fine but the blog creation process would be more complicated. I found out that by creating a g-mail account, I got automatically enrolled to blogger.com. All that I needed to do was to go to [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) and signed in with my g-mail address and password. The steps in creating blog were simple

and easy and require no huge knowledge in creating HTML programs. Everything is provided by just following a simple guide and a few easy clicks of the mouse.

### ***Step 2. Students' orientation.***

After the building of the blogs, the next step was the conduct of orientation to my students on the mechanics of using the blog in posting their comments, discussions, reactions, images, pictures and even videos, if there is any. I also discussed with the students some rules regarding the use of improper languages and correct grammar which are also placed in the blog. I also emphasized to them that I included the discussions that they posted in the blog as one of my basis in computing their grade for *class participation*. I made sure that I also cited some relevant DepEd provisions regarding the integration of ICT in education and made them understand that the blogs were made in accordance and compliance with these provisions.

### ***Step 3. Posting of teacher discussions.***

The next step was the posting of teacher discussions which is not a difficult task, as well. The blogger.com program does not require a very complicated system of posting discussions by blog owners. It is easily done within a few steps and accommodates discussions of any length. The blogger program is built in with commands and functions which are similar to creating a Microsoft Word document where in pictures and videos can be embedded.

The posting of the first discussion on the 2 blogs were made on June 10, 2008. To make the posted discussion more appealing to the students, I added pastel colors to

the fonts, changed the font styles, and made sure that they were large enough for the students to easily read. I also inserted a picture related to the discussion. In the ensuing posts, I even hyperlinked some URLs from external sources –and that is also possible with blogger.com. After a few addition and modifications, I clicked the “publish” button and presto! The first blog posting was created. At this time there is already some couple of postings in the two blogs.

***Step 4. Posting of comments (reactions or discussion) by the students.***

For the posting of comments or discussions by the students they just have to type the URL of the blog at the address bar of the internet browser, click enter and just follow the instructions and guideline for posting of comments which I provided in the blogsite. The posting of a student’s comments, reactions or answers is also an easy thing to do. After reading the posted teacher discussion, the student will just have to click “comments” that is located below the posted blog entry. A posting page will be shown on the new window with two columns. A small writing panel or box will appear on the right hand column where the student can type his comments or discussions. After typing his comments, the student will have to type in their name and section in order that the commentor will be identified. After the student has done that, he has to choose an identity by clicking one of the identity button below the comment panel. I suggested to the students to choose the “anonymous” identity to eliminate other posting hassles prior to clicking the “publish” bar button at the bottom.

The posting of reactions by the students were given deadlines in order to be considered for maximum points. I usually allow them a maximum response time of 3 to 5 days. Responses beyond the five-day period incur grade deduction.

I also gave the students some tips on how to maximize the use computers from the internet cafes in order to minimize expenses. These tips are also indicated in the blogsite.

**Step 5. Checking of students' discussions.**

After the period of posting of reactions by the students, I made a list of the students who posted comments. I designed a checklist type of assessment in evaluating the students' responses using the following criteria:

Criteria	R A T I N G			
	Observed (100%)	Mostly Observed (92%)	Partly Observed (85%)	Not Observed (83%)
ACCURATENESS OF IDEAS				
CORRECTNESS OF GRAMMAR				
<b>*Grade: Total of the rating divided by 2</b>				

**Step 6. Classroom synthesis**

After the posting period, an on-classroom synthesis of the students' online discussions is conducted to summarize their ideas and formulate generalization to the discussion.

With this ICT activity, my students are exposed to a new and innovative way of learning which is also a “first” in Manaoag National High School. My observation so far as to the acceptability of the blog by the students is, they are very enthusiastic to the activity. The only problem I see, which hinders the excitement of a few of them, is the financial aspect but this problem could be minimized if the use of the computer lab will be maximized for the activity. At the moment though, this may not be easily possible since students of the Special Science classes have no vacant periods in their daily schedules. They often do the posting in the internet shops a few minutes during lunch break or after dismissal in the afternoon but they mostly do it during weekends. The problems that I personally encountered were not also that big. These are: 1) few interruptions of my internet connections, 2) it is time consuming, and 3) a little increase on our electricity bill. Despite of all these however and looking at the general picture, the problems are very negligible and does not have a big impact to affect the overall project. I recommend that if this activity would be done by other teachers, the problems mentioned above should be considered and undertaken before hand. But above these, I still strongly recommend the use of blogging for teaching.

As a final note, I find blogging as a very appropriate activity for the integration of ICT in the classroom. It is very easy to build, it is not complicated to use by both teacher and students and it has some resemblance to an actual classroom for its interactivity, versatility and functionality –it can be used as bulletin board, display board, media board, and many more. The blogs provide concrete evidence of class participation where students celebrate and share class learning and successes. Parents of the students can even take a look or even place comments in the blog and to have an

actual idea of their children's learning taking place. So far, there is no negative reaction yet coming from the parents or from anyone else who would be able to visit the blogs. Because of that I presumed that there is no opposition to the blogging project. In the schools of other countries, blogging is an ordinary activity and already well-entrenched as an integral part of classroom instructions. I am now considering the thought of using blogging as one of the regular activities in my classes from now on.

So, blogging anyone?