

# The Benefits of Blogging

by Vivien Bailey, Primary E-Learning Adviser, Warwickshire ICTDS

Between the October half term and the Christmas holidays, I had the enviable job of working with teachers and children from Y1 to Y6, piloting the blogging aspect of *Honeycomb*, the new online creativity and collaboration tools from Softease. In brief, these were the key findings of our pilot study:

- Children enjoy blogging.
- Blogging enhances literacy skills.
- Blogging supports learning in many areas.
- Blogging is appropriate across the primary phase.
- Sharing and evaluating blog entries is valuable.
- Blogging enhances home-school links.
- E-safety measures need to be in place.
- The teacher needs to feel in control of the activity.

In this article, I will draw on each of these to demonstrate that blogging is a worthwhile activity (children's enjoyment is not addressed separately as it will hopefully be apparent throughout). Many of the examples could have happened using alternative blogging tools, however, there are some which are specific to the *Honeycomb* product.

## ***Blogging enhances Literacy skills***

Literacy skills were clearly being exercised as children were writing match reports and diary entries with a consideration of genre, were planning and recording interviews and were proof reading and evaluating their work. Many of our children exhibited a keen awareness of audience. Some Y3/4 children put messages on their pages for visitors to their blogs. 'Fun Facts' about Ancient Egypt were very popular as were 'Did you know..?' questions. In a blog entry about the Book of the Dead, the children included a video of their drama work which some of them annotated with instructions for how to play the clip.

## ***Blogging supports learning in other areas***

ICT skills were also being improved although the *Honeycomb* software proved very easy to use. The Y6 children especially got to grips with a range of peripherals in taking responsibility for generating the multi media content for their blog entries. The children also demonstrated a range of 'design' skills on their pages. The *Honeycomb* pages do not have a grid to which objects must lock and so users have got great flexibility over the layout of a page. For the Y1 children, this meant that in excess of 10 objects could be on any one page, some overlapping and others repeated in a rather haphazard way. However, for the Y6 children, this meant that they had the ability to demonstrate a more sophisticated understanding of effective layout. Teachers also reported children learning to work together on blog entries and improving their ability to negotiate.

## ***Blogging is appropriate across the primary phase***

All of the children enjoyed using a range of multi media to personalise their pages. The Y1 children liked watching the videos and listening to the weird space noises that they had selected, but what

they liked most was having their own work on the pages. They recorded their voices and added them to their blog entries and they also used the paint package Splosh to create images of Space. Pictures needed to be uploaded from the PC to the resource area of *Honeycomb* and, with support, the children could do this in school however one child amazed us by creating more pictures at home and uploading them to his resource bank without help!

### ***Sharing and evaluating blog entries is valuable***

Reading and evaluating work done by classmates was a key element of the project in every school and it was acknowledged that the children extended their learning about a topic by reading each others' work. The children really enjoyed adding animated 'stickers' to their friends' pages, however, teachers noted that for *Honeycomb* to meet their needs, a 'comments' facility was necessary to enable them to give quality feedback on work done and facilitate assessment for learning. Parents and students also expressed an interest in being able to do this. The developers have listened to our teachers and 'comments' are now an integral part of the launch product.

### ***Blogging enhances home-school links***

All of our children were encouraged to share their blogs with parents at home as our teachers felt that this was a great way of including parents in their child's learning and had the potential to enhance home-school relations. Feedback from parents was extremely positive. Schools were very conscious of catering for those students without internet access at home and made provision for them during the project.

### ***E-safety measures need to be in place***

E-safety is a key concern in schools and when children are potentially publishing their work to a wide audience this must be taken into consideration. One of the Y6 teachers effectively involved the pupils in checking that their blogs were 'safe' by ensuring that the children had permission for everyone's image to be published, that there were no surnames used and that they had checked that no one was directly identified in videos or pictures.

### ***The teacher needs to feel in control of the activity***

One of the *Honeycomb* features that supports e-safety is the ability for the teacher to decide at what level students can publish, access and comment on work. This means that a child's blog could just be available to their classmates however it also means that there's the potential for a blog to be accessed by the whole *Honeycomb* community. Ultimately, there may also be the possibility of publishing to the internet at the discretion of the teacher.

I think that Web 2.0 tools are very exciting and have great potential in education. There are some good free blogging tools available on the internet, however, I am wary of recommending these to schools as few teachers have the appropriate technical expertise to adapt the tool so that it meets the needs of their primary children. This is where *Honeycomb* comes in. It brings the best of Web 2.0 to the education market, enabling publishing to a wide audience, however it also gives teachers the reassurance of being in control which is essential if blogging is to be successfully adopted.