Masters in ICT and Education

UNIT 5251 – Assignment
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Weblogs in Secondary Schools –
A study into the motivations and actual practical learning uses of weblogs within a classroom environment and whether this is a desirable tool to scale up for all students to be able to use.

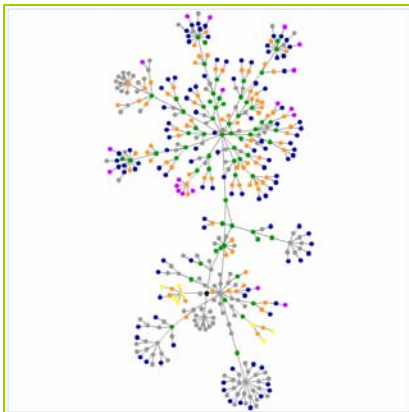Approx 7,500 words (Minus contents, figures, appendix, references etc…)
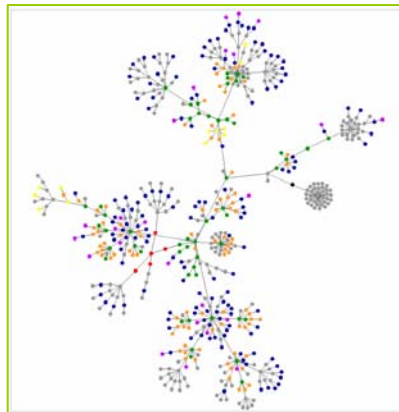

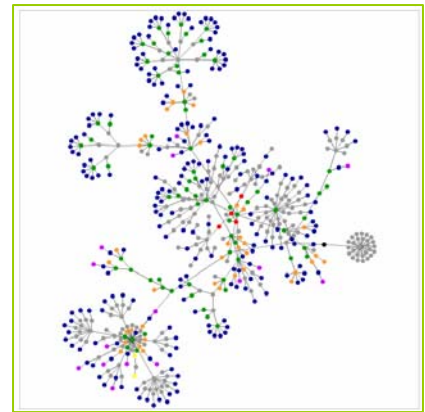*Figure 2 - SevensVsNines*

Figure 3 - CreativICTism

Figure 1 - MA Research ConstructICTism

What do the colors mean?
blue: for links (the A tag)
red: for tables (TABLE, TR and TD tags)
green: for the DIV tag
violet: for images (the IMG tag)
yellow: for forms (FORM, INPUT, TEXTAREA, SELECT and OPTION tags)
orange: for linebreaks and blockquotes (BR, P, and BLOCKQUOTE tags)
black: the HTML tag, the root node
gray: all other tags

(Patterns of Use, Visual Graphs –Developed at http://www.aharef.info/static/htmlgraph/)

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Introduction – Abstract

I will be looking into how I introduced weblogs into my teaching as an example of how ICT change and adoption is managed on a small scale within schools. I will focus on areas that I had to change within my ways of working, organisation and teaching styles and then reflect upon how this could affect a whole school initiative to embed weblog use.

'Weblogs'[i] are one of many new tools that are part of the much discussed *Read/Write*[ii] web. The weblogs rise has been phenomenal with technical advances adding to its easy publishing appeal, leading to recent figures that suggest *'… [o]n average, a new weblog is created every second of every day.'*[1] *(Siffry, 2006)* To some *'…[w]eblogs have become so ubiquitous that for many of us the term is synonymous with 'personal Web site','*[2] (Blood, 2004, pg53) where a tool that once needed coding is now in the hands of any user. The simplest definition of a weblog is *'…a user-generated website where entries are made in journal style and displayed in a reverse chronological order.'*[3] Weblogs are considered to be most importantly *social*, and highlight collaboration and growth of online communities.

The amount of literature that is available both through academic and less respected *'grey'*[iii] research is phenomenal. Interestingly though there is little on secondary education and how weblogs have been implemented practically. This could be due to the inherent difficulties of security and control that figure, within secondary establishments. It could also be that the *time* factor is more pressured, and leads to such technological tools only being used by highly motivated *'…early adopters of computing technology [who] tend to be attracted to the technology for its own sake.'*[4] (Marcinkiewicz, 2000, pg 1) This jump from innovators' usage to uptake by the majority is then often poor due to pressures or lack of a belief that it will have any positive affect. I will look at these issues in more depth when I relate my own iniatives to the school as a whole, although it was important that I was an early innovator so I could easily realise and implement my iniatives:-

'…the early adopters of ICT tended to be people who were technologically confident and competent. Secondly, they tended to operate on a small scale, which enabled them to avoid many of the systemic constraints that act as barriers to larger-scale adoption of ICT.'[5] (Twining et al., pg 70)

From this review I will then describe my motivations for starting to use weblogs in an educational context introducing the following case studies:-

- [Sevens Vs Nines Blog](#) - to publish work for specific KS3 classes promoting cross-curricular/ horizontal integration of ICT.
- [CreativICTism Blog](#) - a human portal for GCSE ICT students, which has grown with two student authors and acts as a virtual extension, a link-log and a learning support mechanism.
- [AS Student Blogs](#)[iv] - individually created for their AS Applied ICT E-Portfolios.
- INSET Training - [*'Blog to Teach'*](#)[v] - to introduce the idea of weblogs and see if any teachers would adopt their use.

These will lead into the wider issues of adopting such a technological tool within the extended classroom. I will reflect on the successes and failures and how I have evaluated these. The review will be qualitative and quantitative, with comments and data collected from a questionnaire review with students and evaluative informal feedback from teachers about the INSET. I will also use technical analysis of the

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[i] The word weblogs is derived from the words *'website'* and '*log'* /diary.
[ii] Terms used to describe the apparent revolution of the *social* web - or *Web 2.0* a term often used by the inventor of the Internet Tim Berners Lee, first discussed by Tim O'Reilly.
[iii] *Grey* research is research from non-academic resources most often associated with websites and more recently weblogs.
[iv] Click on student feeds to access *AS* weblogs within the sidebar Blogroll.
[v] A Moodle creative commons licensed course, held within [CICT](#).

[CreativICTism](#) and [SevenVsNine](#) weblogs, with the use of [Google Analytics](#)[vi] software to show numbers and patterns of use.

Background – EABIS and ICT

International School Culture / Egypt

The base of my research will be within an international school in Cairo, Egypt. The school is private and recently has invested heavily in its ICT infrastructure. However the increase in organisation, support, and resources has not been immediately followed with adoption of ICT within classroom teaching. The ICT department has begun to try and change this uptake by leading the first INSET in using ICT. These are voluntary after school sessions that have received senior management support and been placed within the school ICT policies to support teaching and learning.

Literature Review

I will start this process by looking at the areas of academic research that have written about weblog use both inside and outside education. The literature I have placed into 5 distinct but wide boundaries, reviewing over 44 articles of which I have then chosen those that have most resonance academically or whose authors are important *nodes*[vii] within active *connected* learning communities. Often these authors do publish both types of work. I have also discarded those that are general descriptions of weblogs.

Promoting Conversations… (7)

Some consider the most important aspect of a weblog is that it allows for easy discourse between reader and author using comments. These can be written and posted without any technical knowledge and shown, often directly below what was originally posted. Many academic papers have thoroughly and quantitively researched the amount of comments that particular weblogs receive, suggesting that *'[t]he number of comments per post is perhaps the truest and most diagnostic metric of the nature of communication on a weblog.'*[6] (Krishnamurthy, Gilad Mishne, 2006) Their research suggests that on average from a general sample of weblogs about *'…29% of posts had comments.'* This analysis of comments and how they interlink as *'knowledge flows'* is considered important although it is acknowledged that *'…[m]any people can read a blog and be influenced by it without ever leaving a trace.'*[7] (Anjo Anjewierden et. al, 2006, pg 2)

Some suggest a problem with using weblogs as an **educator** is that it is controlled by the **educator**, and often does not allow knowledge to flow naturally through such a prescribed community. It is obvious that with a classroom weblog the conversation and comments will be mostly between a small and known community within the school, moderated by the teacher.

More practical research pointed to the simple fact that *'…students can log on at any time from any Internet - enabled computer to seek clarification for issues they encounter in their coursework, to discuss topics raised in class.'*[8] (Sarah Horton, 2001) I am interested to observe within the communities I create if the lack of motivation to participate and comment does relate specifically to controlled educational contexts or if an online community takes its rules and norms from the actual classroom itself. If a classroom does not encourage discussion and high level thinking and opinion sharing then will the same be true online:-

'...if there is little exchange in the classroom, there isn't likely to be much online.'[9] (Sarah Horton, 2001)

However it is suggested that if the *real* classroom environment itself might not lend itself to discussion then the flexibility of weblog commenting could allow students that are quiet and unwilling to contribute to *'… find an online discussion area the perfect place to discuss class topics.'*[10] (Sarah Horton, 2001) As with any environment the importance of the activities and how they are conducted is crucial to encourage

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[vi] A web-based analysis for websites; that can show a great deal of bare statistical information about usage.

[vii] These nodes are considered experts within their fields and their words could be considered to be peer reviewed far more than that of certain academic papers. Example expert edubloggers include Stephen Downes, Christopher Sessums, Wesley Fryer and George Siemens to name a few. For review linking to readership please check the **[Dangerously Irrelevant](#)** weblog.

collaboration so that *'...commenting helps foster community.'[11]* (Carolyn Wei, 2003) This is echoed by Downes' article as he looks at practical case studies where *'…[t]he student who usually talks very loud in the classroom, and the student who is very timid have the same writing space to voice their opinion. It puts students in a situation of equity.'[12]* (Downes, Mircille Guay 2004, pg18)

Motivations to Blog… (8)

This literature focuses on why *bloggers*[viii] decide and continue to blog. What are their motivations to spend time posting each day? Are the motivations for bloggers that are posting for personal reasons mirrored by the motivations of bloggers that are professional?

Adaptable to Your Personal Needs

Weblogs are highly adaptable and can be presented and used in many forms. It is generally acknowledged that there are three **main** categories of weblog: *Filter Blog*, *Personal Journal* and *Knowledge Log (K-Log)* [13] *(Menchen, 2005).* Maybe the simple publishing power of these forms might be the motivation for their popularity; *'…it's simple: people read them.'[14]* (Menchen, 2005, pg 14) Only a few years ago the *Internet* did not promote such activities as personal publishing but hid this behind a miasma of technical wizardry.

The Filter Blog is written by an author who trawls the *Internet* for information, and relates their findings back in *'…a log of web surfing pre-digested with commentary for the reader.'* (Blood, 2000, pg 2)[15] A personal journal is a diary placed online, where each new page is a diary entry and posted as the first article on the front-page. The K-log, is one in which the author writes about a specific domain of knowledge giving their viewpoint and eager for a community of discussion to build around this.

These categories are not cemented, as the mix of what happens on a weblog can lead to many different contexts and uses. A widening of categories, could suggest the thoughts of the authors involved: *Blogs to document my life, Blogs as commentary, Blogs as catharsis, Blog as muse, and Blogs as Community Forum.[16]* (Nardi et al., 2004, pg 41) It seems that simply the variety of uses motivates by allowing the user *'…power over the web site,'[17]* (Menchen, 2005, pg 1) and the ability to follow their own ideas to communicate with an audience.

Needing Feedback

Most bloggers want their weblogs to be read, and to know they have been, through feedback. They encourage their readers to comment on posts, to say what they think. A weblog must be able to *pull* readers into their world, both *real* and *virtual*. They would like their weblog to be at least *'…partially interconnected and sporadically conversational.'[18]* (Menchen, Herring et al., 2005, pg 4) Unlike most *CMC*[ix] the act of *'…blogging is the most convenient 'pull' medium where people who want to can 'check in' with the blogger…'*(Menchen, 2005, pg 10), at anytime and on a regular basis. This ease[x] and simplicity with which blogs *pull* in readers may suggest why bloggers are motivated to publish.
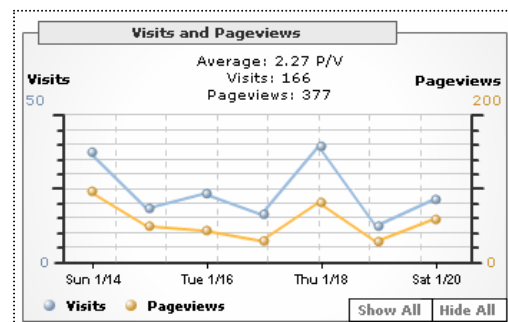
Figure 4 (28/01) – Transparent Visitors

To Communicate with Those Known and Unknown

The motivation to start a community can come from either the need to find and branch out to new people or to continue and improve already existing relationships. The motivation can be seen *'as either intrinsic, that is, started to contact the people on the Internet or extrinsic, to maintain relationships formed elsewhere.' (Menchen, 2005, pg 9)* Students must feel that they are either improving relationships with groups within their local school community, or beyond to the anonymous people surfing the *Internet* that

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[viii] A term used to describe those that actively participate in writing and posting to a weblog.
[ix] CMC- Computer Mediated Communication
[x] This ease continues to increase with the use of RSS feeds and weblog aggregators such as Bloglines.

are interested and come to participate within their work. Sometimes it is difficult to show and explain this to students and so the transparent use of analysis / readership software will help them to see how many people are visiting their weblog.

Social Vs Technological… (6)

I found little research in the area of weblog design and its affect on readership and ability to keep a weblog vibrant and encourage return readers. This is important, as without considered thought within this area a weblog initiative could easily fail as the forced control within a face-to-face classroom situation cannot be translated into a virtual weblog environment.

The technological aspects of a weblog, in how it is designed and what it can do, have led their *social* uses in engaging communities. The weblog is part of a wave of *'social software'* including *social networks*[xi], *wikis*[xii] and *social-bookmarking*[xiii], that have been driven by the '…*desire for more features that enables conversation and community such as comments, trackbacks, and web feeds.'*[19] (Menchen, 2005, pg 15) The research suggests the success of a weblog, is down to the way the background technology reinforces and makes the social aspects of a community improve[20]. (Wagner et al., 2006)

How these social communities evolve is an intriguing and ultimately selfish process in which the needs of an individual must come first, before participants commit and contribute to any online community. An example is the use of social-bookmarking site del.icio.us showing that if it is *'…is useful for the individual using it, they'll use it.'*[21] (Barnett, 2006) This seems an arbitrary comment, but one which affects all *social* software, and must be part of how the weblog is designed to incorporate tools that add this value:-

'The one major idea behind del.icio.us is that personal value precedes network value. What this means is that if we are to build networks of value, then each person on the network needs to find value for themselves before they can contribute value to the network. In the case of Del.icio.us, people find value saving their personal bookmarks first and foremost. All other usage is secondary.'[22] (Joshua Porter, 2006)

This suggests that not only does the design of a weblog have to *pull* school students rather than force students to take part in a community, but also that a student must first find *value* for themselves and then only from this point will they begin to contribute and continue to return to the environment.

Motivations for Change…

Stakeholders in Iniative

There can never be an isolated initiative within a school environment as many stakeholders are concerned with the learning process of the students including; Senior Management, the Teaching staff, Parents and Students themselves. Even though it was my solo initiative a real motivation for its introduction was cross-pollination of ideas across departments and a more natural discourse with sidelined stakeholders. These stakeholders not only need transparent communication between each other, but must also be able to understand and view the new technologies within a school environment. There are many different reasons these stakeholders consider that technologies should be adopted

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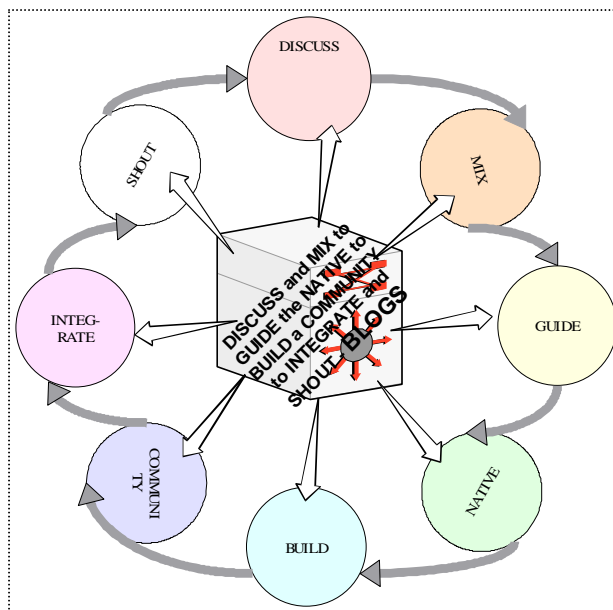
[xi] For example: - MySpace, Facebook and Piczo.
[xii] A wiki is simple a website that can be altered by many people, as so combining the knowledge of the *'wisdom of crowds'. The principle example is still Wikipedia*
[xiii] A term to describe the act of placing bookmarks online, for anyone to share, search and ultimately tag as important. The first and still main social bookmarking site is at http://del.icio.us .

within teaching and learning including: - *'Vocational, Social, Pedagogic, Catalytic, Industrial, Cost Effectiveness, and Special Needs.'[23]* (Hawkridge, 1990)

As one stakeholder and a technology enthusiast I can be seen to be an educator who is *'optimist rhetoric...'[24]* in nature. (Reynolds et al., 2003) That is one that could allow the allure of technology to override sensible analysis and research into how technologies are really affecting the quality of teaching and learning within schools. However it is extremely important I look beyond my personal views and reflect deeply on the success of my case studies analysing how they will impact on the school as a whole. It must be considered analysis that brings the *'optimist rhetoric'* and *'pessimist rhetoric'* (Reynolds et al., 2003) viewpoints together.

(DISCUSS) - Enable Communication with All Stakeholders

The school has ways to link stakeholders together within the school community. Often the measure of success in supporting learning comes from the communication between these stakeholders. The British National Curriculum often compartmentalises departments and sections of a school. Within my current school the pastoral side deals with contacting parents and discussing issues and so often leaves the department teams less able to show what they students are achieving within a department.

The initiative of using a weblog would provide a natural way to communicate what is happening in a positive way. The use of '*…social software could end 'teacher isolation' by building networks within (as well as outside) the school infrastructure between teachers, students, parents, principals, school boards and district personnel.'[25]* (Sessums, 2006) This is a bold statement but one in which I would at least want to begin a process of better communication.

Educational Blogging… (13)

This research was interestingly skewed towards studies within further education or with professional *'edubloggers'[xiv]* discussing and journaling their work. Studies from secondary teachers were sparse, and most of my reviews came from looking at existing studies published online. I have also combined this section with my own motivations *for blogging to learn*. This enabled me to combine the theoretical aspect with what I felt I would and the students could achieve and learn.

(MIX) - Uses and Blending to go beyond the Curriculum

Most research focused on the variety of uses that weblogs can bring to teaching and learning, that mirror those spoken about in my research. What is most interesting is the way that these are then blended within current practices and *real* classroom activity.

Initially two ways can be considered in which weblogs are blended either as a receptive tool to set and deliver interactive assignments or as *'... a directive learning tool to provide students with equal access to important information, to expand students' understanding of specific issues, and to direct students to explore additional material.[26]'* (Glogoff, 2005, pg 2) The idea that the teacher can be a channel *'…to encourage guided discovery and knowledge construction,'* (Glogoff, 2005, pg 2) both inside and outside the classroom is a persuasive one. Especially when most educators today are bound by very restrictive curricula that skim the surface of topics; allowing little flexibility or creativity. If there is a route to motivate and stretch students beyond *'…surface learning'* and '*…towards reflection and deep learning…'[27]* (Bartlett-Bragg, Rosie 2000 and pg 2) it would be important for student development. Students could then to discover and explore concepts in-depth focusing on real world situations:-

'Podcasts and blogs go to a much wider audience than our classrooms, our schools or even our communities. We have observed children focusing their efforts to 'get it right' when they blog or podcast. They are rising to a higher level of performance because they are connecting to the real world.'[28] (Tom Warlock, McCurdy, 2006)

[xiv] A term that refers to all those within education that use a weblog.

Woolgar discusses labels these ideals as *'[t]he more global the more local'* and *'[t]he more virtual the more real,'[29]* (Woolgar, 2002) for showing how the use of virtual environments can impact and promote localised real action and learning.

The students at the school are diligent but because of *cultural issues[xv]* and parental pressure are narrowly exam focused. This focus often leads to little time and thought about bringing a sense of community within class through group collaborative projects and motivational problems to solve that bring fun to a classroom. It could be said that a classroom can become a factory only teaching toward an examination. The weblog initiative aimed to bring some of these ideas and thoughts into the extended classroom and ensure that students would collaborate together through carefully planned activities to provide and share knowledge and ideas to produce an archived knowledge artefact.

A weblog can *'...offer students and teachers a support tool to promote reflective analysis and the emergence of a learning community that goes beyond the school walls.'[30]* (Downes, 2004, pg 14) A weblog may not only allow for a higher level of thought on a particular domain but also reinforce and develop new skills and literacies. In both weblogs this was a primary rationale aiming to show an enthusiasm for technology that would also differentiate and extend high achieving students:-

'...extending contact between instructors and enthusiastic students through a topical blog could provide a practical way to mentor and encourage exceptional students to continue their field of studies.'[31] (Glogoff, 2005)

(GUIDE) - Guiding to Digital Multi-Fluency[xvi]

In the current technological age, research has begun to focus simply on *'what is literacy?'* Is literacy a term to describe the ability to communicate well with other people in a variety of ways or to describe people that are *'…sufficiently capable to participate in our technological society.'[32]* (Harriman, Prestridge, 2005, pg 5)* Have we entered an age where *print* associated literacies are only one of a number of ways we need to understand to live and communicate? Through the nature of using a practical weblog *'...students learn about web page creation, idea sharing, hyper-linking, and the nature of the WWW in an intuitive way.'[33]* (Wagner, 2003) Does a weblog enable learning more than these practical skills?

The new literacy skills are considered essential to students that are leaving a formal educational environment needing to utilise these skills throughout their life. They need to become independent and less reliant on a guide so that *'… the skills they obtain will transfer to environments in which an instructor and evaluation system is not present.'[34]* (Oravec, 2003, pg 226) Sade discusses the role of a teacher as a gardener that maintains a set of technological tools that not only improve the quality of the learning process but enable students to discover, explore and improve their technological literacy:-

'Gardeners are viewed as important roles in the maintenance of a sustainable information ecology, and are described as playing important roles in the maintenance of a sustainable information ecology, and are described as liking to help other people solve problems as well as explore the potential of the technological tools and processes themselves.'[35] (Gavin Sade, 2005, pg 10)

The idea that the *Internet* is growing so vast that it takes a very skilled researcher to find information that is truthful and peer reviewed is beyond discussion. As suggested by a recent presentation:-

 'We are living in exponential times. There are over 2.7 Billion searches performed on Google every month. To whom were these addressed B.G. (Before Google)?'[36] (Fisch / Dyer, 2006)

The way a student is able to find and analyse and then use this information is becoming increasingly complex as *'… [i]t is estimated that 1.5 Exabyte's (1.5 x 10[18]) of unique new information will be generated*

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worldwide this year.   That's estimated to be more than in the previous 5,000 years.'[37] (Fisch, 2006) Therefore a weblog can *'...help to make the Internet more human scale, providing access to a 'human portal' who carefully selects web resources for consideration.'[38]* (Oravec, 2003, pg 231) As other weblog authors we hope to *'…become 'human information routers' for like minded readers.'[39]* (Efimova, et al, 2004, pg 492) Students need to understand that being able to collaborate and connect within networks of human knowledge led by respected experts can lead to better learning and understanding, and ability to find knowledge. Even simple tools like blogrolls can lead students even if *'… occasional readers [to] find trusted 'sources'.'* (Efimova et al., 2004, pg 492)

These skills can be categorised in ways that describe people that are part of online communities as *collectors, creators, editors and distributors.[40]* Ohmuaki discusses in depth these activities suggesting that weblogs can fulfill most of these roles. Students become *'…users and creators of information rather than consumers and receivers of information.'[41]* (Prestridge, 2005, pg 8) In the act of a student reading a post about technology and its advances in 2007, they are already collecting information as the post also links to different sites and weblogs. When a student comments upon this post *(Fig 36)*, they are not only creating but also finding, editing and then distributing that information to the whole of the class or beyond. The remixing of information into small packets of data is a difficult skill to understand needing to be taught carefully so that plagiarism does not become an issue.

Digital literacy has begun to be a topic of discussion within my school, especially with the introduction of an American section which focuses in more detail on literacies like internet research. The weblog CreativICTism and the student e-portfolio weblogs should enable many of these skills to be learnt in an unobtrusive way, and was a major motive behind the original initiative*.*

(NATIVE) - Bridging the digital native / immigrant divide in the school

A further motivation linked to the idea of digital literacy is the misnomer of a *'digital native'* as first described by Prensky:-

'Digital Natives are used to receiving information really fast. They like to parallel process and multi-task. They prefer their graphics before their text rather than the opposite. They prefer random access (like hypertext). They function best when networked. They thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards. They prefer games to "serious" work. (Does any of this sound familiar?)'[42] (Prensky, 2001, pg 1)

It is very important to note that there is still a wide range of abilities and confidence in ICT use from students in secondary schools. Digital Natives exist but they are not one unified cohort of digitally literate students as Prensky would suggest. Maybe due to lack of access at home, parental pressures or simply the bewildering nature of digital literacies, multitasking and collaboration online. The weblog as an anytime, anywhere tool is open for those less confident and native with the use of technologies to access and without peer pressure *play* with the technology learning through a safe environment.

(BUILD) - ConstructioNist Artefact Building

Papert's constructioNist theories of learning suggest that: - *'Constructionism--the N word as opposed to the V word--shares constructivism's connotation of learning as* **["building knowledge structures"]** *irrespective of the circumstances of the learning. It then adds the idea that this happens especially felicitously in a context where the* **[learner is consciously engaged]** *in constructing a* **[public]** *entity, whether it's a sand castle on the beach or a theory of the universe.'[43] (Papert, 1991)* A weblog fulfils these ideals in many ways, although it depends greatly on its construction and use. In fact literally the act of building week by week an archive of knowledge is constructioNist. But also *constructioNist* activities can be seen to take place every time a discussion is begun and comments are made, as long as the flow is adding to their collaborative knowledge and understanding. Glogoff discusses examples of weblogs being used to set interesting real world tasks that are *'...using cognitive scaffolding, a basic tenet of constructivism, students revisit the learning space, build upon prior knowledge, think about what they have learned, and drill deeper for information...'[44]* (Glogoff, 2005)

ConstructioNist online tools that establish the social aspect of learning and building of communities of knowledge can lead to *'... systems of people, practices, values, and technologies in a particular local environment. In information ecologies the spotlight is not on technology, but on human activities that are served by technology.'*[45] (Nardi et al., Gavin Sade, 2005, pg 3) So suggesting that learning is not about transmission of data but setting up a human network and guiding a student in how to travel through this to achieve, learn and solve problems.

(COMMUNITY) - Form a More Cohesive Virtual Community of Practice (9)

Further to research on *comments* other research discusses whether creation of virtual communities using *social* tools actually creates real communities. Most studies focused on '*learning'* communities that have sprung up and are connected around a group of weblogs. Anjewierden[46], Efimova[47] and Merelo-Guerv´os[48] in different papers concentrate on statistical analysis of links between posts and comments as a way of establishing that weblog communities exist. This focuses simply on the fact that *'…community can be defined in terms of who-links-to-who..."*[49](Anjewierden et al., 2006, pg 5) Discussion travels beyond this quantative viewpoint looking at what constitutes *legitimate participation*[50] within a community. It is known that almost as little as '*…1% will actively participate.'*[51](Nielsen, 2006) by commenting, so does this mean that a community does not exist?

'Good conversations begin with listening...[52]*'* (Downes, Ken Smith, 2004, pg 14) and so all forms of participation even if on the periphery of a community whether that is reading, writing, discussing or any other activity have their role to play within the weblog. *'Lurkers'* are as important within this community as any other participants including those that are'…*Filters, amplifiers, convenors, investors, community builders, facilitators'*[53] (Mendizabal, 2006, pg 9) in this virtual but openly public space: -

'In online communities it is known as lurking and rarely considered important, although it is a form of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991), a way of becoming a community member through learning about others in the community.'[54] (*Efimova,* Nonnecke & Preece, 2003, pg 8)

It will be important to measure the impact of my initiative not only to take into account those that are filtering, writing, facilitating the online community but those that are *turning up* to *legitimately participate* in the weblog.

(INTEGRATE) - Horizontal Integration of ICT to Create Independent Problem Solvers

Most ICT within the school is taught as discrete lessons, which serves a function and purpose to enable students to gain different skills related to technology. However this is only part of the responsibility of the school to promote technology as a way to change the way we teach and how students learn. It is important to *'…[f]ocus on learning with technology, not about technology.'* (Abrami, 2000 pg 154)

As such if technology is used as more than just a way of *remediating* the way other media has been used before; then it may have a greater impact on the way students learn. Beyond this if ICT's are used across different subject areas in creative ways, students will learn to *problem solve* and apply their literacies to real life situations in a better way:-

'Students need to encounter information literacy opportunities throughout the curriculum, both vertically (within the major) and horizontally (across the curriculum)...[55]*'(*Lorenzo, 2006, pg 11)

The SevensVsNines weblog is designed to reinforce critical skills across the curriculum, collaborating with the Art and English departments. CreativICTism will promote students, especially those that author or comment on the weblog that they are sharing ideas through using independent research skills. The weblog should be *'... both individualistic and collaborative…'*[56] (Huffaker, 2005, pg 94) Students that are authoring posts, researching for material will act as much as facilitators and *nodes* to learning as the teacher within the extended classroom:-

'…creativity involved in blogging can help maintain the motivation needed by some students to sustain self- directed learning.'[57] (Oravec, 2003, pg 231)

(SHOUT) - Publicise the ICT Department

Publicity and the rationale of ICT use for symbolic reasons, although not as such related to teaching and learning is very important in terms of the private school that I work in. Probably it was my first motivation to publicise the department and myself in the school. The ICT department when I arrived although functioning had not placed itself as a crucial service for all students and teachers alike.

I believe by its very nature ICT must be publicised showing off the many facets of ICT that can impact on teaching and learning. From a purely selfish level the ability to impress peers and so improve my professional status was important. Similarly from the directors' point of view it was a priority to publish and sell the ICT facilities that were being invested in to its prospective parents.

Implementation

This paper will not go into specifics of setting up of my educational weblogs as there are many l tutorials and guides throughout the web. However, I will describe aspects that needed to be put in place, within the school as a whole or technically, so that I could pursue the iniative and optimise weblog use.

Figure 5 - KS3 Weblog...

Safety and Security

Within any school environment the physical and also virtual safety of the students must be of prime importance. With consultation and agreement the Head of School and Pastoral Head suggested two main elements which students and parents had to be involved in legally. One was a [Blogging Policy](#) *(See Appendix)* letter, sent to all parents discussing both the safety issues of using a weblog and also the reasons why the ICT department was investing in the iniative. Secondly there was a campaign both online and within lessons to discuss the problems and issues of online safety. From the above policies, certain rules were set as part of the iniative e.g. the use of first names within the weblog. These were continually reviewed and I will comment upon changes within the conclusion.

KS3 Blog - [Sevens Vs Nines](#)

This weblog was setup at the beginning of the summer term 2006 *(Fig 5)*. It had been noticed that KS3 students often showed a lack of motivation within the subject and ideas had been floated to improve the situation. I decided that the weblog iniative to publish

Figure 6 - GCSE Portal weblog

KS3 students work could improve motivation, promote cross-curricular work and have other effects upon the learning of the students as discussed.
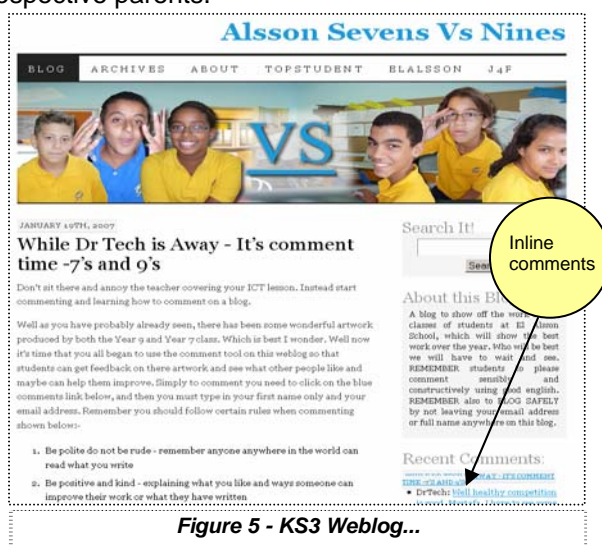
GCSE Blog -[CreativICTism](#)

This was the longest initiative, and one which had improved over time due to my experience as an e-guide and the students understanding of the benefits of weblog use. I had begun using a Moodle VLE[xvii] with the GCSE students but found this system to be very rigid in terms of access and control. I needed an environment that was flexible and quick to publish, one in which there would be a quick turnover of resources and topics so as to *pull* students back to the online environment. After a very brief test using the Google hosted Blogger[xviii] application, the decision due to inflexibility and school filter problems was to host on my own server using the open source engine WordPress along with the SevensVsNines weblog.

Tools, Extensions and Construction

To illustrate the flexibility of weblogs and how the technology links with the *social* to improve communication and conversations, I introduced a variety of tools to develop this ethos. The engine is well supported and very extendible with many free plug-ins[xix] that you can add to improve the community and conversation that was happening within the weblog. Please see the Appendix for a full description including: - *Automatic Countdown, Gabbly Chatbox, Sidebar Comments and Del.icio.us Automatic Post.*

An important decision was to ensure that the theme[xx] for the weblogs would reflect their purpose and so the SevensVsNines was chosen to be very clean and simple so that it was able to show students work without detracting from it, while the GCSE portal *(Fig 6)* was chosen as one that was vibrant, busy and connected.

E-Portfolio Weblogs

The students were demonstrated the use of creating a weblog after they had participated in the CreativICTism weblog. The concept of their *individual* weblogs was explained to them as a diary to show the progress of their work and research for their e-portfolio. They were told their weblog URL, would be placed onto the homepage of their e-portfolio and the examiner would be able to see and examine this weblog as part of the criteria on *'Standard Ways of Working'*[xxi].

Tools, Extensions and Construction

All weblogs were setup using the hosted system at WordPress and were used straight out of the box *(Fig 7)*. Some instruction was given for students to choose a template style, and set up links to each others weblogs with a Blogroll. No further help was given to see how students would then take to using their weblogs within the course environment.

Staff Inset Session

The department as part of a different iniative had pushed for the idea of INSET for the whole school. Eight sessions were agreed to be held after school and placed throughout the year looking at various ways in which ICT can support teaching and learning. The first session was a weblog

Figure 7 - 'AS' students' e-portfolio weblog

[xvii] A Virtual Learning Environment called **CICT**
[xviii] One of the first free online hosted weblogging tools – Google **Blogger**.
[xix] Plug-In describes any piece of code that will improve or enhance the basic platform.
[xx] http://www.findcreditcards.org/pressrow/
[xxi] One of the examination criteria for the AS GCE Applied – Unit 1 - The Information Age EdExcel Course

introduction demonstrating my use and then looking at the technical aspect of creating a weblog.

It was obvious that *'…one off training sessions are not as effective as sustained, integrated approaches to professional development.'[58]* (Sessums, 2006) But as this was an introduction it was stressed that support would continue to be provided to the teachers after the session as either further formal or informal help. The idea was to try and provide what is suggested as the three areas that are needed for *social* software use to flourish within a school environment:-

'Advancing the adoption and use of social software in schools requires the three C's - comfort, confidence, and creativity.'[59] (Sessums, 2006)

However the session due to many teachers lack of confidence was mostly dedicated to the technical side, and by the end of two hours all teachers had set up their own weblog, and posted pictures and words.

Evaluation - Use and Observation

The evaluation falls into a variety of different methods. These are not meant to produce a conclusive account of whether these weblog initiatives were either successful or could be implemented to become an integral part of every teachers' life and rationale of teaching.

Simply through the use of observation, questionnaires and interviews I have shown areas in which my weblog initiative has been successful and how this might or might not translate to the school and other teachers over time. It has been important within my research into using weblogs within the classroom that I have been placed as the central protagonist of the weblog communities that I formed and this is a necessary requirement for any weblog to function well as a learning tool within schools.

SevensVsNines

The two groups of students from Year 7 and 9 that began to use this weblog were allowed initially during ICT class time, to follow work that could be published to the weblog to improve class collaboration and so *'… to strengthen class community."[60]* (Serra, 2004, pg 45)

This community strengthening was then extended outside the class, improving the conversation related to technology and the work they were doing. The conversation I hoped would not only be between me as teacher but also between students using the comment tool and viewing within the sidebar. I was hoping it *'…could serve as a many-to-many social-type typology with an individual student sharing with other students what they have done, and other students giving feedback to that student which in turn creates feedback to a group of students.'[61]* (Buddie, 2005) The Art and English departments then expanded this further to include work published related to both classes, and the students were also involved in producing work within the ICT class that linked with the other subjects including the use of commenting on others artwork and podcasting of news reports. The Art teacher and English teacher are now authors and are beginning to publish posts in a more flexible manner.

CreativICTism

This weblog has grown organically and now has become an integral part of the GCSE courses. The community *feel* has been extended with two student authors and a *reasonably* vibrant commenting community *(Fig 36)*. The use of the weblog has matured in how it is used to *pull* students to the site with the use of many devices such as technology based web-quests and clock countdowns to major hand-in dates. The weblog has for most students become a virtual extension to the classroom and a support system to which they can use a variety of tools to receive help anytime and anywhere.

The weblog is kept current with automatic del.icio.us links posts, students authoring about specific real technology events including a recent trip to Microsoft and the use of a grading system using Google spreadsheets to keep them up to date.

Students discussion of subjects beyond the curriculum has been expanding and the weblog is encouraging *'... students to reflect upon and analyse current interconnections between technology, design and society, and to provide tools to perform these effectively.'*[62] (Gavin Sade, 2005, pg 5) Students however are still unsure of the real world implications of using the weblog, and are disbelieving that their posts are read by anybody outside the class. They *'… don't realise the reach of their blogs or how their blogs fit into a larger network.'*[63] (White, 2006)

This coupled with the problem associated with a portal weblog where *'…[t]he power in this community is firmly in the central bloggers' control,'*[64] (White, 2006) would need to be looked at in detail to improve the communication and students feeling of ownership. Ideas are already in process to link with other schools within Cairo or that use weblogs in a similar way. This was echoed with comment use which will need further guidance within the courses for students to understand their worth, so that conversations happen not only between teacher and student *(Fig 36)*, but between student and student.

E-Portfolio Weblogs

These weblogs were only used sporadically by the class students. Most use was to simply place, as an archive, draft copies of research work linked as .pdf files. The posts simply said there was a link to access their work. There was no thought of audience or trying to create a discussion. The only feedback that happened was from my own comments. The iniatives failure was a direct reflection on the motivations of the student as author to write and post.

The students had the literal power to publish but had no power over what they were publishing: - *'Knowledge that is seen to be controlled from the outside is acquired with reluctance and it brings no joy.'*[65] (Fryer, Csik 2007, pg 134) The way this was setup stopped any value to motivate the students to intrinsically want to post their ideas and thoughts. Their response was mechanical; let us fulfill what our teacher wants us to do. Even when it was discussed this would be part of their grade from the examiner students could not remain motivated to use their weblog over other easier and less time consuming tools to demonstrate their organisation and standard ways of working. This raises how difficult is it for teachers to guide their students to run weblogs, and is an area for further research and case studies to see if it is indeed possible.

Student Interviews –*AS* Applied ICT Year 12

I conducted brief informal interviews with students about blogging for their e-portfolio. As was evident from my observation their weblog use was deemed a failure not exhibiting any of the expected outcomes I had discussed within my initial motivations.

When the students were asked their comments reflected that they knew this was an artificial task that was controlled and would not really utilise the power or the motivational aspects of publishing to the web. It was a case that showed that:-

'Educational tasks are often difficult to mandate from 'on high' while preserving a sense of intrinsic motivation on the part of the learners.'[66] (Fryer, 2007)

Figure 8 - Qu16 GCSE

Usage of Chatbox

	Educational	Never	Fun
Usage of Chatbox	7	10	2
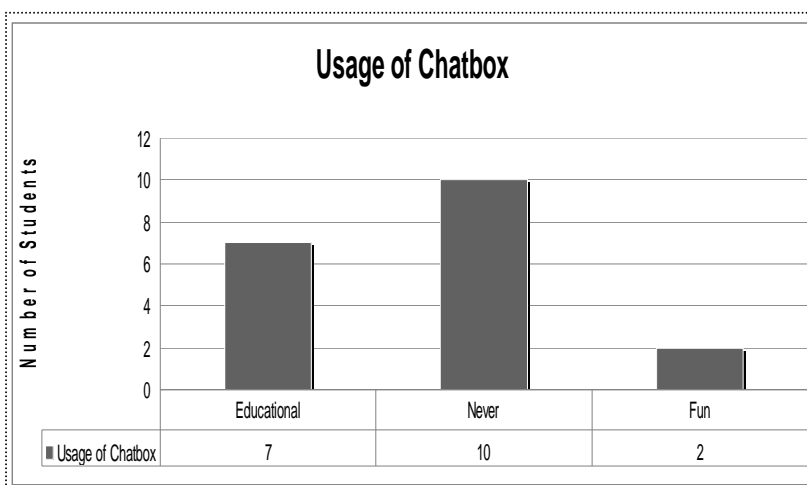
Student Questionnaires – GCSE Year 10 /11 and AS Year 12

The student questionnaires for CreativICTism were administered over one day, for all three year groups. The results were then placed onto spreadsheet workbooks – the data either as a simple *Boolean* answers or a quantitative numbers. Students **voluntarily** completed the questionnaire and were allowed to refuse to take part. However they provide a good sample of the students using the weblogs from a range of viewpoints. No students outside of my classes were asked, and this would be an interesting further area of research as it does seem that the community had grown past the artificial boundaries of my groups.

I have placed the following discussion into the framework of the rationales and motivations I set out for my weblog initiative. Much more analysis could have been done, but is outside the premise of this paper. I am also including comments written by the students in their open-question answers which provide personal pointers to the successes and failures of the weblog initiative.

(DISCUSS)

An interesting dichotomy was found when looking to see if weblog use had improved communications with parents *(Fig 9)*. It was notable that almost 65% of KS3 students had shown the weblog to their parents. Comments suggested that students who were failing to achieve parental levels of expectation had realised how powerful it was to show parents that their work was published. Two students simply said they had shown their published work so that their parents would *'…be proud of me.'* One even suggested that their *'…[m]om visits everyday'.* The opposite was the case for the KS4/5 weblog which is probably due to the nature of student parental relationships at older ages.

It would seem from the *Blogging Policy* form returns that very few parents understood what these weblogs would be doing. This could be address by providing presentations during Parents Days to show how they work and why they are being used so that communication can improve further and maybe to the extent that parents are commenting on posts within the weblog.

Does weblog use improve communcation with stakeholders

	Yes	No	Don't Know
GCSE Parents Seen	4	14	0
KS3 Parents Seen	8	3	2
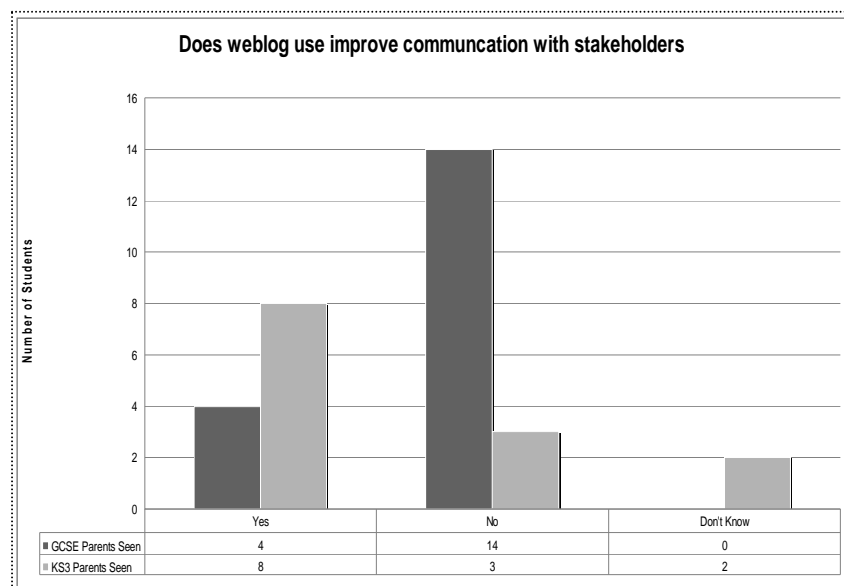
Figure 9 - Qu32 GCSE and Qu10 7Vs9

It was more difficult to diagnose if other stakeholders had taken an interest and participated within either weblog. Mrs. Jo (Art) and Mr. Peter (English) had either written posts or comments but it was noticeable that as with the students the role of the weblog took time to become part of their teaching. The teachers had simply not altered their style of teaching to integrate time for publishing, discussion on weblog use during class and activities that would involve digital literacies and collaboration within their subject. Even though both had come to the weblog training session a further session followed by scheduled support

from myself would be needed, to open up ideas of integrating the weblog pedagogically into their teaching and learning.

Work Published on Blog Vs Visit Popularity

	How Often Do You Visit	Have You Written on The Blog	Have You Had Work Published
■ Yes	11	8	9
■ No	2	3	3
■ Don't Know	3	3	2
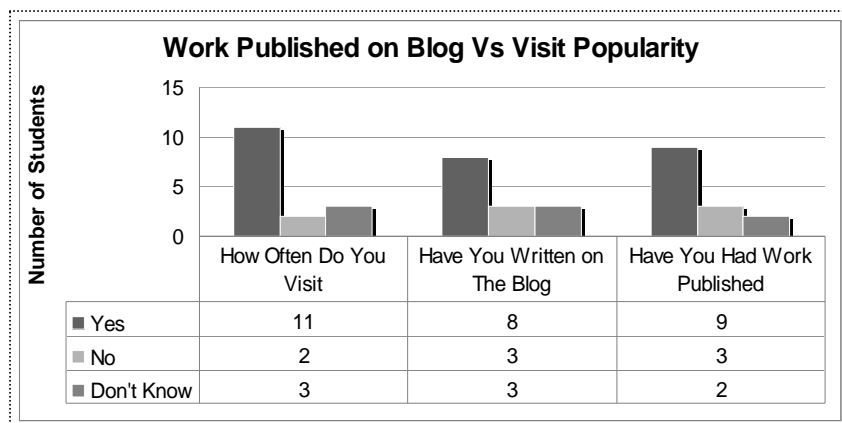
Figure 10 -Qu5 and Qu13 and Qu9

Students as the most important stakeholders in the weblog were found to react in almost selfish ways. Statistics *(Fig 10)* showed that those that had *'work'* placed on the weblog were then much more active in using the weblog. Especially younger students who reacted badly to having no work placed onto the weblog. This characteristic reflects the *del.icio.us* principle that I have discussed earlier and probably is a failing of the SevensVsNines weblog. The failing might also reflect the norms of learning for KS3 groups within the whole school, which often accentuates individual work over collaboration. More research and focus would have to be put into this area if weblog use was to be expanded around the school. CreativICTism however was able to generate this value in many different ways and so was considered more successful.

(MIX)

If the amount of online learning usage and experience by students affects weblog use
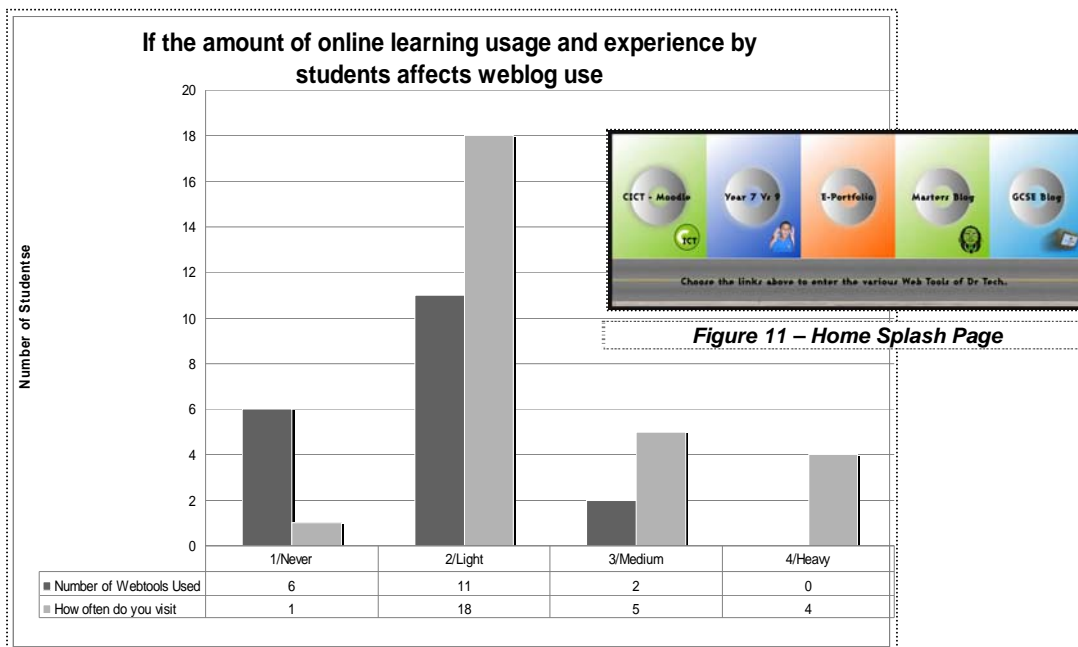
Figure 11 – Home Splash Page

	1/Never	2/Light	3/Medium	4/Heavy
■ Number of Webtools Used	6	11	2	0
■ How often do you visit	1	18	5	4

Figure 12 - Qu25 and Qu5 GCSE

An obvious link was found by those using the *ecology* of online environments that I had introduced *(Fig 12)*. There is evidence to suggest that usage was best from students who not only used the weblog, but other online tools that were connected including the Moodle/CICT environment or the YacaPaca[xxii] assessment tool. Once a home page was designed with links to the different web tools there was also an upturn in cross use as students found it interesting to look at what other students were using. They had begun to understand the value of collaborative online learning as a support mechanism to the face-to-face learning they 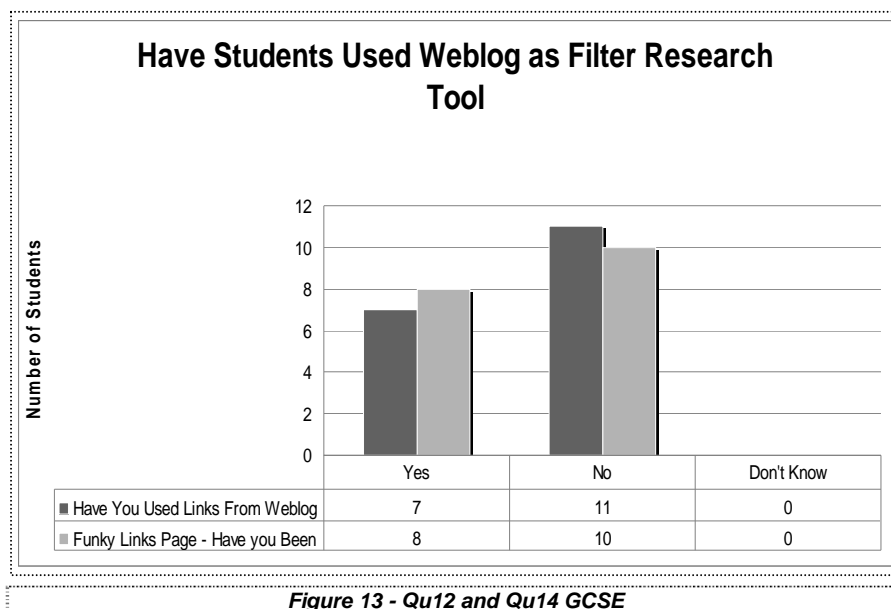were receiving in school. As such the weblogs were an introduction to online learning that *'...can enhance blended learning iniatives - especially in contexts in which students are novices in terms of online learning or where the online components of the instructional mix are highly structured or particularly demanding.'[67]* (Oravec, 2003, pg 1)

(GUIDE)

The results to whether the environment improved and acted as a human filter were mixed. With answers that suggested most students were not using the weblog as a way to find sources of information *(Fig 13)*. This might be due to the way the question was asked, as through informal observation it was obvious how many had used a variety of links to other sites.

Have Students Used Weblog as Filter Research Tool

	Yes	No	Don't Know
■ Have You Used Links From Weblog	7	11	0
■ Funky Links Page - Have you Been	8	10	0

Figure 13 - Qu12 and Qu14 GCSE

Comments made by pupils substantiated this showing that for students the idea of a human filter at first seemed a strange idea; '*After all we have Google, don't we?*' But when asked what was their favourite part of the weblog two students answered the *funky links* sections. One suggested that the Flash MX tutorials she had found through this had helped her greatly as the amount of tutorials she had found on Google was too much and had confused her.

Figure 14 - Outbound Links

I was able to look in more detail at the statistical analysis of the CreativICTism weblog, it became apparent how often the students used the links to *exit* the site and find information *(Fig 14)*. From static links, to links within posts placed specifically to expand the student's horizons beyond the

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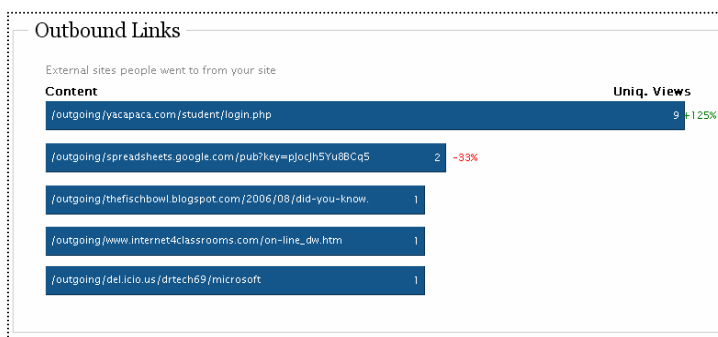
[xxii] Independent online assessment tool – http://www.chalkface.com

curriculum and project work. The del.icio.us automatic posting tool was wonderful for this, enabling me to tag and socially-bookmark websites that would be of interest to students. I was also able to then add notes to these social-bookmarks and know that each day these would be automatically posted. Students also did start to use the weblog to filter their searches and find information regarding recent project works or problems. This was demonstrated many times including when the SketchUp[xxiii] application was introduced as a tool and the students immediately began to look within the weblog and find suitable links in one archived post. In one week that post had over 25 Unique views and was found to be a major exit point for the weblog *(Fig 15)*.

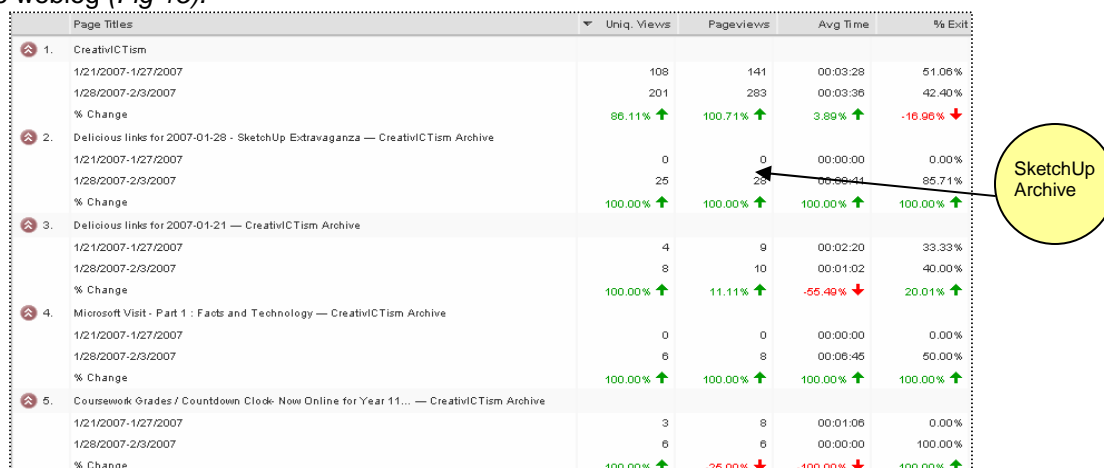|	Page Titles	Uniq. Views	Pageviews	Avg Time	% Exit
1.	CreativICTism				
	1/21/2007-1/27/2007	108	141	00:03:28	51.06%
	1/28/2007-2/3/2007	201	283	00:03:36	42.40%
	% Change	86.11% ↑	100.71% ↑	3.89% ↑	-16.96% ↓
2.	Delicious links for 2007-01-28 - SketchUp Extravaganza — CreativICTism Archive				
	1/21/2007-1/27/2007	0	0	00:00:00	0.00%
	1/28/2007-2/3/2007	25	28	00:00:44	85.71%
	% Change	100.00% ↑	100.00% ↑	100.00% ↑	100.00% ↑
3.	Delicious links for 2007-01-21 — CreativICTism Archive				
	1/21/2007-1/27/2007	4	9	00:02:20	33.33%
	1/28/2007-2/3/2007	8	10	00:01:02	40.00%
	% Change	100.00% ↑	11.11% ↑	-55.49% ↓	20.01% ↑
4.	Microsoft Visit - Part 1 : Facts and Technology — CreativICTism Archive				
	1/21/2007-1/27/2007	0	0	00:00:00	0.00%
	1/28/2007-2/3/2007	6	8	00:06:45	50.00%
	% Change	100.00% ↑	100.00% ↑	100.00% ↑	100.00% ↑
5.	Coursework Grades / Countdown Clock Now Online for Year 11... — CreativICTism Archive				
	1/21/2007-1/27/2007	3	8	00:01:06	0.00%
	1/28/2007-2/3/2007	6	6	00:00:00	100.00%
	% Change	100.00% ↑	-25.00% ↓	-100.00% ↓	100.00% ↑

SketchUp Archive

Figure 15 - Comparison of Content by Title Views, Top 5

The students were and still are unaware of the skills that they are beginning to learn from weblog use. Only one student defined that from the weblog he had learnt; *'Improved English, research skills.'* Students at KS3 were more perceptive suggesting that they had learnt practical skills including: - *editing, html coding, blogging (as a skill in itself) and typing*. This is an area for further study and a more defined way of not only using weblogs but ensuring within the teaching styles and learning that areas such as *digital literacies* are presented and discussed transparently with students.

(NATIVE)

The weblogs differed considerably in how they were used by teachers and students. SevensVsNines featured very little commenting and discussion *(Fig 16)*. This weblog is developing slowly and I believe the students are only beginning to understand the nature of its use. However CreativICTism began to reflect a much more vibrant commenting community, with discussions focused on posts, homework and technical topics *(Fig 18)*.

Comments And Collaboration - 7Vs9

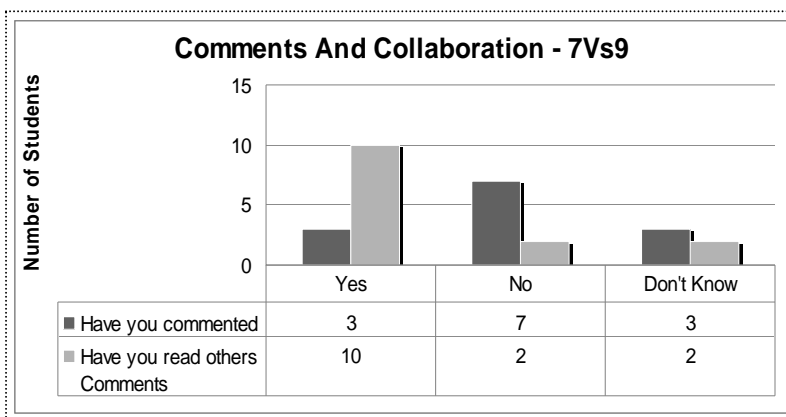|	Yes	No	Don't Know
■ Have you commented	3	7	3
■ Have you read others Comments	10	2	2

Figure 16 - Qu6 – SevensVsNines – Comments Who Needs Them…

The comments that were posted often did revolve around the teacher, but it was interesting the students that chose to use the weblog commenting facility as a tool for help and discussion. One student wrote when discussing the commenting that it is a '*…[v]ery good, mature way of discussing things. The fact that people aren't face to face takes the edge off things and becomes less violent and more rational when it comes to disagreeing.'* This was contrasted with another student's

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[xxiii] Google 3D Computer Aided Design Application

viewpoint saying: - *'No one likes plain reading, prefer class discussion because they are more interesting, intimate and sometimes more vicious…'* This student is very confident within the classroom environment and so is easily able to argue within so called *'vicious'* discussions, but the other does show that maybe without face-to-face personalities involved a more sensible discussion can occur for less confident students.

(BUILD)

By its very nature the students through collaborating, posting, commenting, adding links are continuing to create an incredibly complex knowledge artefact. The weblog uses a system of naming categories and has a search tool so that the artefact can be searched at anytime *(Fig 17)*.

Figure 17 - Archives and Artifacts

The weblog had to use a variety of ideas to promote the building of these categories of knowledge that linked and blended with the face-to-face teaching. These involved web-quests, small competitions amongst other ideas that were introduced into the weblog to follow up on discussions within the classroom. One such discussion was on the idea of *Web 2.0*, which led to a competition to find out which *Web 2.0* sites had been invented by *Kevin*? One such discussion that evolved was on the nature of the Digg news website which uses the wisdom of crowds to diagnose which stories will appear at the top of the page.

(COMMUNITY)

Both weblogs showed that maintaining and establishing online communities takes time, effort and experience. Each weblog is at different stages of maintaining a healthy community, depending on its vibrancy and methods that have been employed *(Fig 28, 29).* It is obvious with weblog use that if the site is not updated regularly, at least once or twice a week, that readership and the
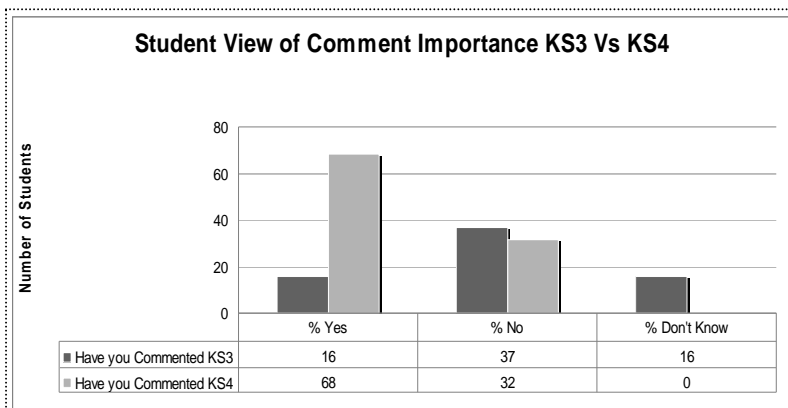

Figure 18 –Comment Importance

student's interest will fall.

The main ways that were used to build community, were through use of: - the _Gabbly Chatbox_, the _Comment Inline Sidebar_ and the use of student authors. Although it was a risk to use a shout-box[xxiv], as this is as such an un-moderated synchronous messaging tool. I felt that this would attract students to the weblog, as all students when asked are always using _MSN Messenger_. If this bred social use first and then promoted educational value then this was worth trying. There was only one incident of misuse, but in most terms this element of trust led to the tool being used extensively. It was initially thought that '_...an exchange in a chat room can be less substantial that in an online discussion area. In fact, for educational purposes a chat room provides few of the benefits of online communication._'[68] (Horton, 2001) However it was observed that most often the shout-box was used for educational discussion, help and support. _(Fig 8)_

Figure 19 - 28/01 – 'Bursty' Activity

Often the weblogs experienced _'bursty'_[69] levels of activity depending on either its blended use within the class and at home, or the levels of conversation that certain topics and posts generated. Students themselves if they had high level usage often said that the use of comments was important _(Fig 20)_. A student suggested that _'Comments on the blog benefit us as they are useful in our study and general information in the world of computing.'_ While another student saw the opposite saying simply _'…they don't help in our work.'_ This student was interesting as she also noted and made reference to the fact that she disliked when the community of the weblog had grown from just one Year 10 group, to three groups including Year 11 and 12. She would prefer to '_…separate each year_
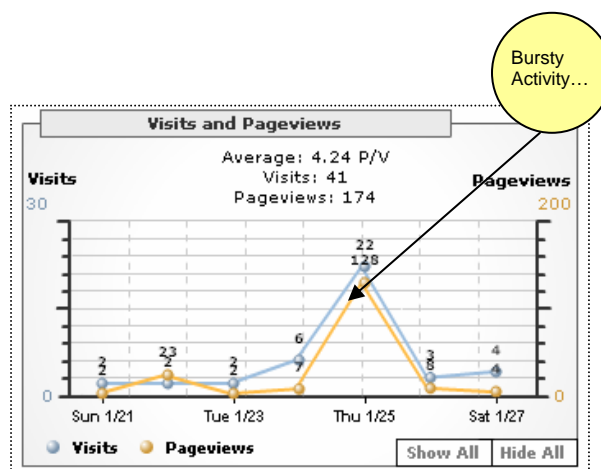

	Never	Light	Medium	Heavy
■ Usage Level	1	18	5	4
■ Agreed Improve Communication	0	2	3	14

Figure 20 - Qu5 and Qu27 GCSE

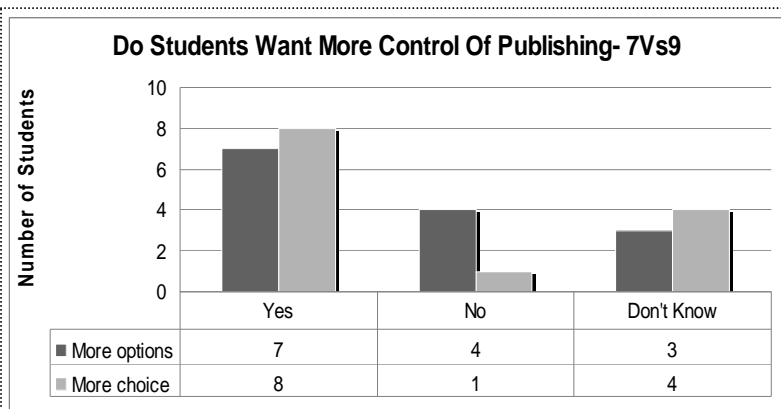|	Yes	No	Don't Know
■ More options	7	4	3
■ More choice	8	1	4

Figure 21 - Qu7 – Control Thoughts…

[xxiv] Term used to describe a _Chatbox_, or messenger tool that is embedded within a website page.

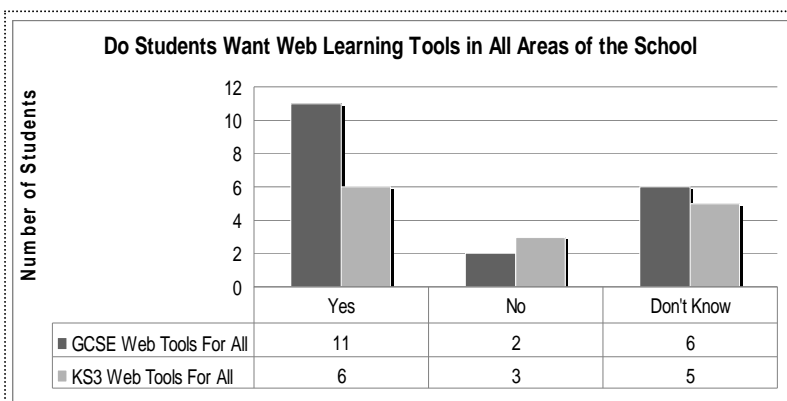*group's info from the other like in the old blog.'*

The student also disliked that power had been passed to two interested students to write posts on the weblog. However most students when asked about the power to publish issue, being under my control, were strongly for more choices and options to control the work published themselves *(Fig 21)*. As Siemens suggests maybe this could improve the impact of students wanting to *participate* in the weblog if they were in control:-

'The space of learning is created and bounded by the educator. Exploration is held within the structure created for the learners. In this model, learners do have a voice (hence a capacity to dialogue), but the voice itself is shaped and influenced according to intentions and interests of the teacher'[70] (Siemens, 2007)

Younger students showed mixed feelings to these ideas as they thought other students could *'…spoil it.'* However most suggested that their should be more students' participation: - *'Because he is showing us that he trusts us…', 'Because the site should be about our work and thoughts', '…personally I would like to read a lot from different perspective.'* This is one area which will need more research, focus and technical thought in ways of moderating multiple authors' posts which could lead to all students being authors with only a few trusted moderators.

(INTEGRATE and SHOUT)

The cross curricular use of the weblogs was sporadic and demanded a great deal of time and effort from myself as innovator. Teachers were reluctant to take a larger role within the weblog development for a variety of reasons including lack of confidence, time and above all the understanding as to how this would improve the teaching and learning within their class. One teacher even said he would like to do more, but his Head of Department was adamant that he kept up with the Scheme of Work along with all other teachers in the department.

Do Students Want Web Learning Tools in All Areas of the School

	Yes	No	Don't Know
GCSE Web Tools For All	11	2	6
KS3 Web Tools For All	6	3	5

Figure 22 - Qu26 and Qu20

Students were much more positive, within all Key Stages showing that they would like weblog use and online tools to increase across all areas of the school. This is a very general question, but I hope one that suggests the positive outlook that students have given to these initiatives *(Fig 22)*.

Conclusions

Individual Implementation of Technology

In conclusion these iniatives into the use of weblogs have opened up many possibilities and learning opportunities for students and me as a teacher. The use of the weblog has made significant impact on how I teach within the groups that are using a weblog. The real world is coming into the classroom, and the issues that surround technology are becoming part of what the students think about on top of narrow curriculum, office application learning and standardised Schemes of Work:-

'We are exposing students to a variety of opportunities in ICT that they will be gaining generic skills that could serve them well in later life. However, the reality is that in the majority of schools, variety means Microsoft and generic ICT skills mean the application of Microsoft skills.'[71] (Oravec, Peter Ford, 2002, pg 228)

What has contributed to the success of the weblogs apart from the lackluster student weblog for their e-portfolios has been a combination of: - personal commitment; my knowledge and confidence with hardware and software; that I was the owner of the initiative; that I was able as Head of Department to be flexible with the Schemes of Work and the teaching of groups and that I devoted considerable time after school and in the evenings to e-moderation and posting.

Interestingly the original literature showed enthusiasm for research into weblog communities, and ideas of human networks that build virtually. However often authors thought that building a blended *'community of practice'* around one blog does not have validity. I believe that **our** weblogs have shown that there is considerable value to this type of weblog that has controlled levels of trust and freedom enabling considerable leaning opportunities and *digital literacy* practice.

However does the fact that an individual iniative that was relatively successful mean that it will translate to the whole school or am I being consumed by *'...the 'dazzling light' (Graham) and utopianism that accompanies new technologies.'[72]* (Gavin Sade, 2005, pg2)

Whole School Implementation of Technology – INSET Feedback

'Time limitations and the plethora of demands on teacher time would most likely be at the top of the list.'[73] (Wesley Fryer, 2006)

After the initial INSET it was obvious there was enthusiasm for the use of weblogs within teaching. It was apparent though that this sessions' premise had failed to impact and associate the technical side with the pedagogical.

Teachers at the school have been introduced into many new ways of using ICT with online assessment, VLE's and more over the last two years. The reason could be that the weblog training might not have led to any adoption within their teaching and learning due to these ideas and their *'...pedagogical practices [are] being swamped by new technologies.'[74]* (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003, pg 1) So the initial enthusiasm could be seen to dissipate rapidly when the use of weblogs was checked a few weeks later *(Fig 24)*.

Teachers at the school have only recently been receiving levels of ICT resources and support that can enable
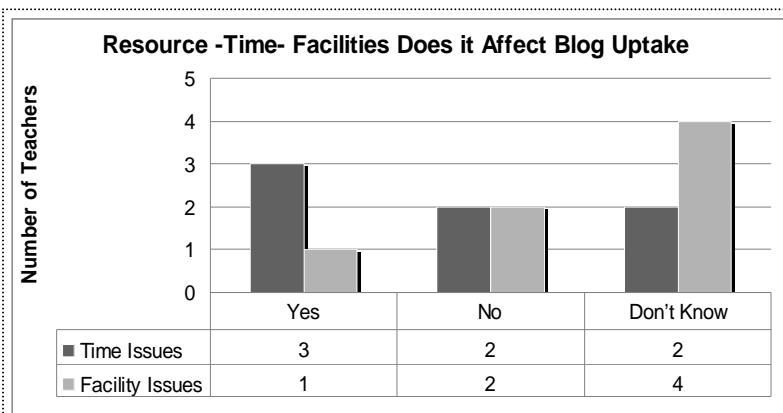
Resource -Time- Facilities Does it Affect Blog Uptake

	Yes	No	Don't Know
■ Time Issues	3	2	2
■ Facility Issues	1	2	4

Figure 23 - Feedback from Teachers INSET

Want to Start a Weblog Vs Actually Doing It?

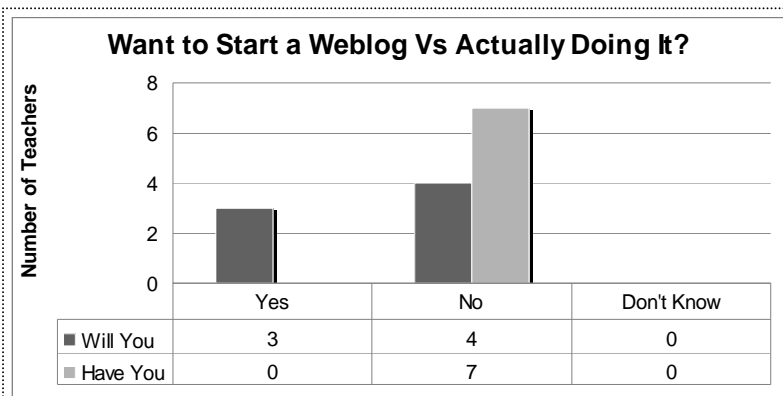|	Yes	No	Don't Know
■ Will You	3	4	0
■ Have You	0	7	0

Figure 24 - Feedback from Teachers INSET

them to begin to integrate ICT into their lessons. Until this year: - Internet access was unpredictable; there was no open-access room; there was no Wi-Fi access, no Library research facilities or even overhead projectors. With the sudden introduction of all of these resources this *'...cautious uptake,'*[75] (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003, pg 1) was completely understandable.

The teachers that came voluntarily to the INSET featured almost all departments around the school including Maths, Languages and English. However the individual teachers' responses differed greatly from the departmental responses towards using ICT within classrooms. Particularly few Heads of Department had come to the training and so as such there was no framework for bringing weblogs into department's schemes of learning. Again the misunderstanding of what weblogs may bring to a classroom in terms of *digital literacy* would suggest that further pedagogical training and ideas need to happen first so that departments can then go beyond the idea that technologies are another add-on or way of *remediating* other media. Specifically departments will need to receive ideas and training to open up the possibilities and remove misunderstandings:-

'…the subject sub-culture co-opts and colonises the computer, which becomes 'just another tool.'[76] (Ruthven et al., 2003, pg8)

The Future of Weblogs

Do weblogs have a future in secondary schools? I believe so from the responses that I received from students and how it has contributed to their teaching and learning. Will it be an integral tool and way of teaching for all teachers? I would imagine in the short term this will not happen until teaching and learning moves beyond the narrow compartmentalised curriculum and the way of teaching reflects a more open style where *digital literacies* are taken as important:-

'…underlying ethos is at odds with the construction of ICT as a cross-curricular 'tool' and a vocational 'key skill.'[77] (Tearle P, 2004)

Weblogs are not only flexible in themselves, but they are one tool in a plethora of social tools that can now be used within education. Teachers need the support, time, and training in a collaborative environment that gives teachers the security to *play* and try out educational iniatives with ICT. Technologies also need to be transparent as such easy to use and appear relevant to their domain. At this moment in time, the weblogs I designed and moderated to achieve the community of practice I was aiming for were definitely not easy enough for a novice to use. For my small iniative to become successful it must become part of a whole framework of school development, where ICT is not only looked at as a discrete subject but becomes blended into all areas of the curriculum. This might need a complete change in how subjects are taught and learnt within the NC and GCSE examinations:-

'Even when many of the new teachers are digital natives, which is no guarantee that they will change (technophobic) pattern(s). A lot of teaching is people replicating what was done to/with them. And many students have kind of silos of knowledge. They know how to use some programs well, and how to socialise or play, but they don't 'seem to make some of the connections. Plus, in education and in our society, we have to move from seeing computer work as technical to seeing it as communicative. That is the value of Web 2.0' (Joan Vinall-Cox, Sessums, Cultural implications of Social Software)

Finally as suggested the roles of these types of online tools can add to the already high workload of teachers. The anytime, anywhere nature means that a teacher might end up with little time off, and no compensation for this. The legal and safety side of such tools I must also mention as within an International School in Egypt the level of flexibility was much higher. Educators might find that if the rules of using such social tools are not part of a supported system of education but are controlled through restrictive intranets they will lose out on a important *real world* educational opportunity that Downes aptly describes as:-

'The process of reading online, engaging a community, and reflecting it online is a process of bringing life into learning.'[78] (Downes, 2004, pg 14)
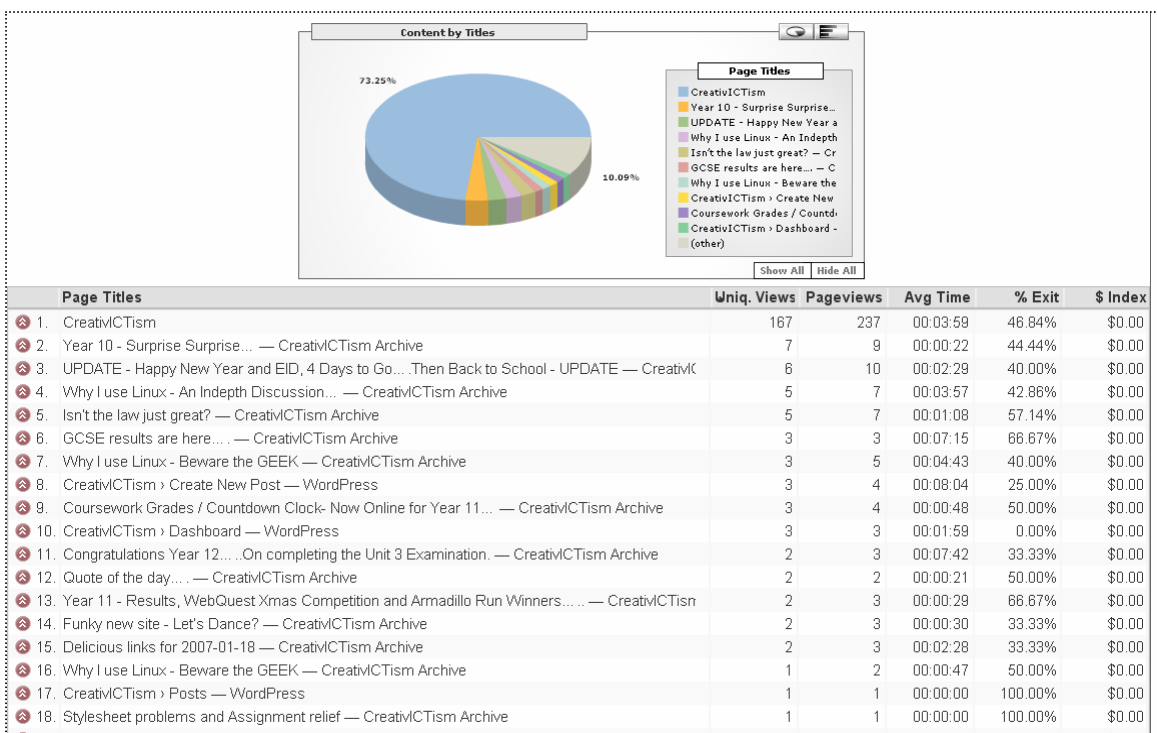
Appendix

Google Analytics Analysis

	Page Titles	Uniq. Views	Pageviews	Avg Time	% Exit	$ Index
1.	CreativICTism	167	237	00:03:59	46.84%	$0.00
2.	Year 10 - Surprise Surprise... — CreativICTism Archive	7	9	00:00:22	44.44%	$0.00
3.	UPDATE - Happy New Year and EID, 4 Days to Go... .Then Back to School - UPDATE — CreativIC	6	10	00:02:29	40.00%	$0.00
4.	Why I use Linux - An Indepth Discussion... — CreativICTism Archive	5	7	00:03:57	42.86%	$0.00
5.	Isn't the law just great? — CreativICTism Archive	5	7	00:01:08	57.14%	$0.00
6.	GCSE results are here.... — CreativICTism Archive	3	3	00:07:15	66.67%	$0.00
7.	Why I use Linux - Beware the GEEK — CreativICTism Archive	3	5	00:04:43	40.00%	$0.00
8.	CreativICTism › Create New Post — WordPress	3	4	00:08:04	25.00%	$0.00
9.	Coursework Grades / Countdown Clock- Now Online for Year 11... — CreativICTism Archive	3	4	00:00:48	50.00%	$0.00
10.	CreativICTism › Dashboard — WordPress	3	3	00:01:59	0.00%	$0.00
11.	Congratulations Year 12.....On completing the Unit 3 Examination. — CreativICTism Archive	2	3	00:07:42	33.33%	$0.00
12.	Quote of the day.... — CreativICTism Archive	2	2	00:00:21	50.00%	$0.00
13.	Year 11 - Results, WebQuest Xmas Competition and Armadillo Run Winners..... — CreativICTism	2	3	00:00:29	66.67%	$0.00
14.	Funky new site - Let's Dance? — CreativICTism Archive	2	3	00:00:30	33.33%	$0.00
15.	Delicious links for 2007-01-18 — CreativICTism Archive	2	3	00:02:28	33.33%	$0.00
16.	Why I use Linux - Beware the GEEK — CreativICTism Archive	1	2	00:00:47	50.00%	$0.00
17.	CreativICTism › Posts — WordPress	1	1	00:00:00	100.00%	$0.00
18.	Stylesheet problems and Assignment relief — CreativICTism Archive	1	1	00:00:00	100.00%	$0.00

Figure 25 - 22/01 KS4 Students Navigating the Web for Research

	Page Titles	Uniq. Views	Pageviews	Avg Time	% Exit
1.	Alsson Sevens Vs Nines	19	26	00:01:06	46.15%
2.	Alsson Sevens Vs Nines » Blog Archive » Year 7's First Glimpse...	2	2	00:00:21	50.00%
3.	Alsson Sevens Vs Nines » Just for Fun...	2	2	00:01:17	0.00%
4.	Alsson Sevens Vs Nines » Year 7	2	6	00:00:44	16.67%
5.	Alsson Sevens Vs Nines » UserOnline	2	2	00:08:43	0.00%
6.	Alsson Sevens Vs Nines » Blog Archive » English and ICT Collaborate#comment-23	2	2	00:01:53	0.00%
7.	Alsson Sevens Vs Nines » El Alsson Information and News	1	2	00:00:31	0.00%
8.	Alsson Sevens Vs Nines » Blog Archive » Action Action Action....	1	1	00:00:00	100.00%
9.	Alsson Sevens Vs Nines » El Alsson Information and News	1	1	00:00:16	0.00%
10.	Alsson Sevens Vs Nines » Blog Archive » International Day 2006!	1	1	00:00:55	0.00%
	Totals:	37	49	00:01:24	30.61%

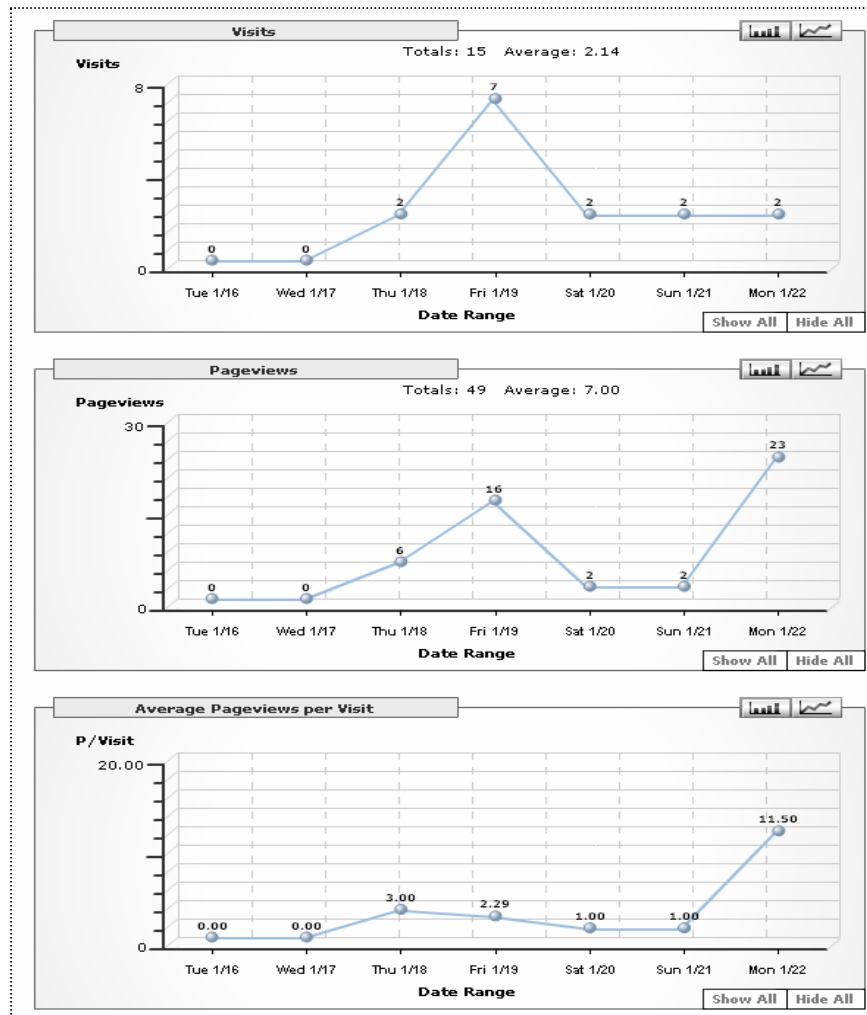*Figure 26 - 23/01 KS3 Students Navigating the Web for Research*

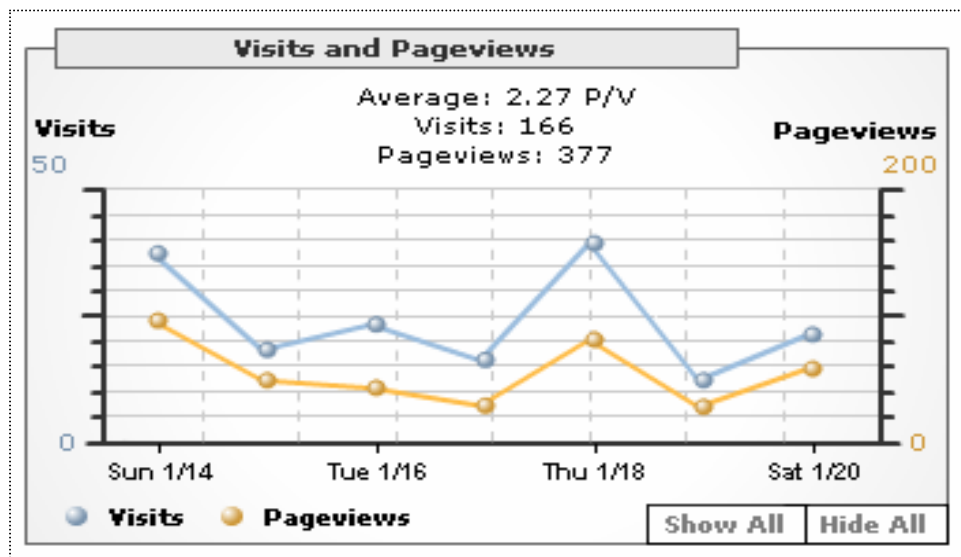*Figure 28 -23/01 – Changing Readership History SevensVsNines*

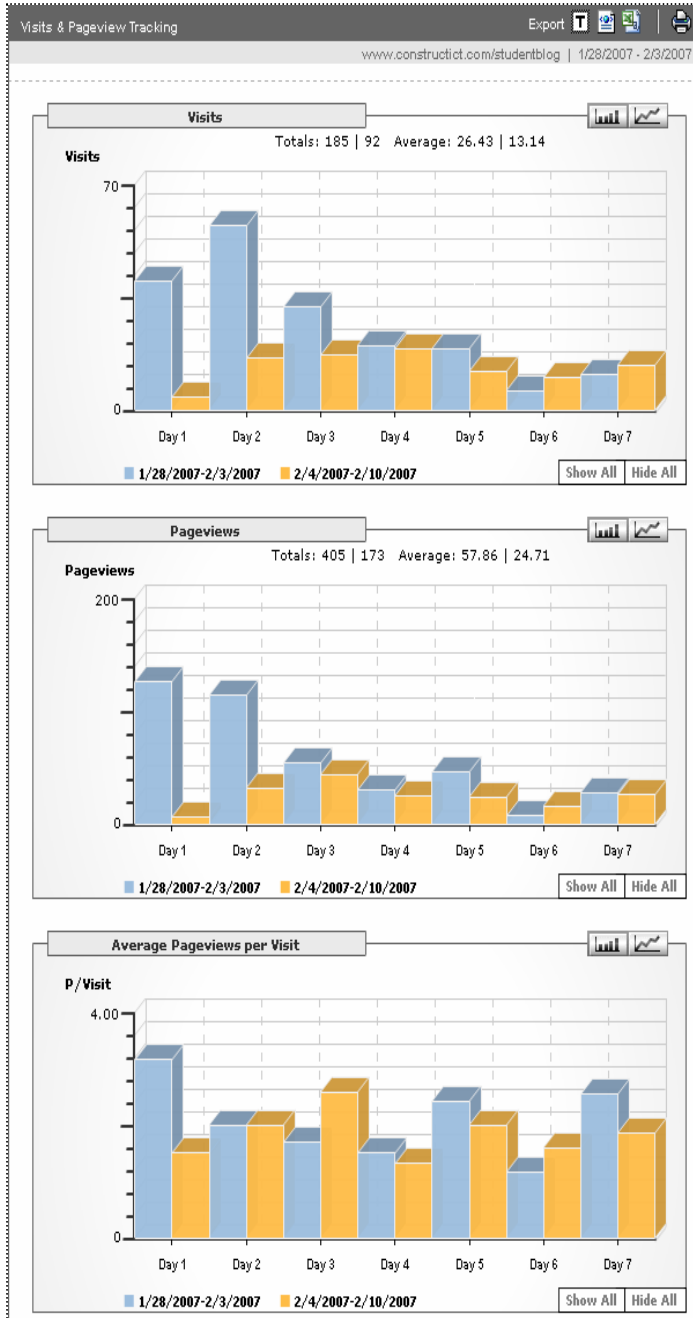
Figure 27 - 28/01 – A Vibrant Weblog Showing Visits

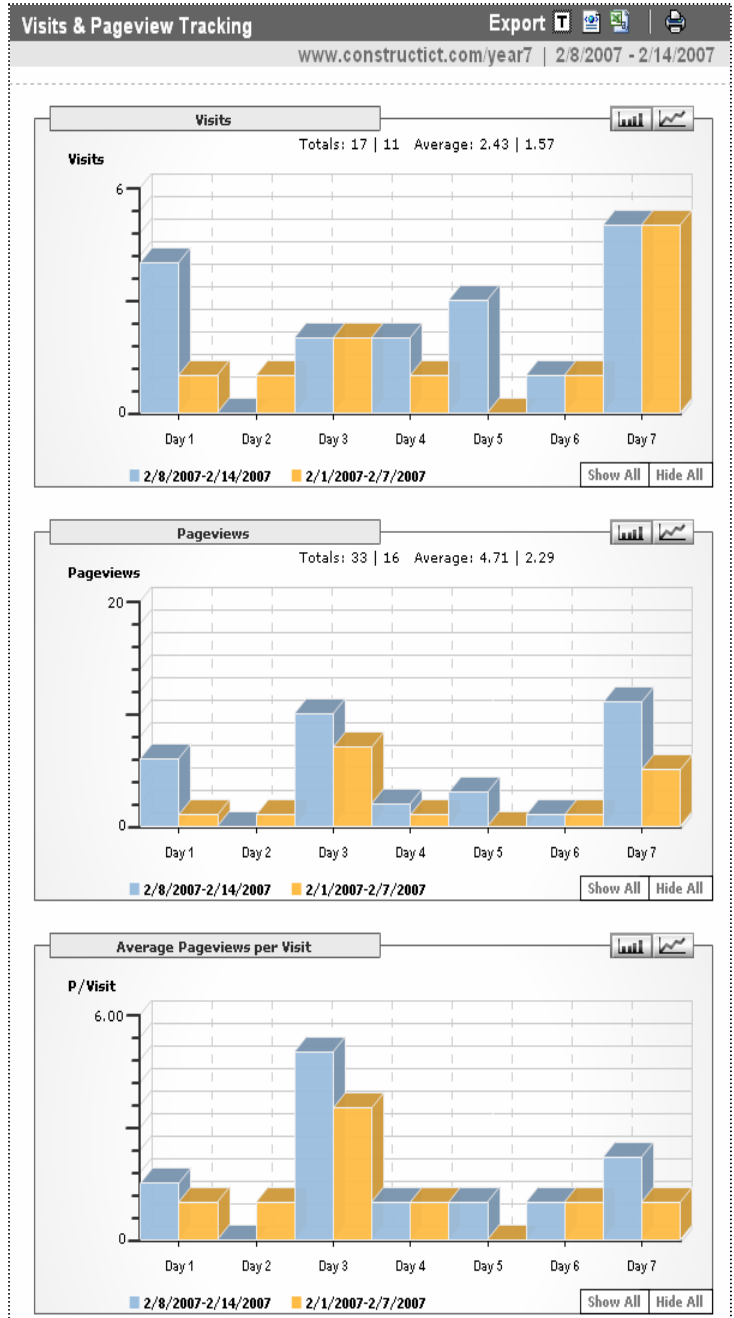Figure 30 - 14/10 - Comparison of Visitors Over Two Weeks CreativICTism

Figure 29 - Comparison of Visits and Views - SevensVsNines

Comments and Discussions Evidence Page

Transcript from 2006-12-04 10:49:39.0 to 2006-12-04 10:51:37.0

4 Dec, 10:49:39 PST> **Dr Tech**: depends is it in kilgrams?

4 Dec, 10:49:44 PST> **Dr Tech**: Sorry kilograms

4 Dec, 10:49:47 PST> **ahmed**: yes

4 Dec, 10:50:21 PST> **ahmed**: in kg

4 Dec, 10:50:21 PST> **Dr Tech**: So weights will be whole numbers like 153

4 Dec, 10:50:37 PST> **ahmed**: alphanumeric or integer

4 Dec, 10:50:47 PST> **Dr Tech**: Then it is simply a 'INTEGER'

4 Dec, 10:50:55 PST> **ahmed**: thanx

4 Dec, 10:51:28 PST> **Dr Tech**: ....remember you should never put the scale of something in the same cell as a number.....otherwise you cannot maniupulate the data....

4 Dec, 10:51:37 PST> **Dr Tech**: Not a problem...is it going okay

Figure 31 - Bloglines Gabbly RSS Feed – Educational Discussion

Dr Tech Returns...and WHO IS KEVIN???:

Ahmed T: kevin rose of www.digg.com
drtech: Well done....yes it was Kevin Rose of www.digg.com fame. A wonderful news website for technology, in which everyone votes on...
Sherif: How easy Mr. Alan? That guy is Kevin Rose of Digg, really good idea he had......
Ahmed A.: Don't you mean **** him? It's Kevin ****, founder of ****, (Dr Tech : Well Done Ahmed I think that took...

Figure 32 -Knowledge Building through Webquests

Recent Comments:

FROM OUR FAVOURITE YEAR 9 AUTHOR...:
- DrTech: Keep the art work coming...Mrs Jo. There has been some great stuff so far....I think 9D will be making some...
- Mrs Jo: 9D I'm very impressed with your art work and your ICT skills. Zeyad Emara I particulary like your description, which...

WHILE DR TECH IS AWAY - IT'S COMMENT TIME -7'S AND 9'S:
- DrTech: Well healthy competition is good, Mostafa. I hope to see some excellent art. English and ICT work posted to the...
- Mostafa: I think that our Year 9 group is much more mature than the Year 7. So just don't tire yourself...

ENGLISH AND ICT COLLABORATE:
- Dr Tech: Superb podcasts which really reflect the idea of being a news reporter - Well Done. We are still waiting on...

INTERNATIONAL DAY 2006!:
- Dr Tech: Well Done Zeyad, it is obvious you have worked hard not only to produce an interesting report of the day...

YEAR 7 SPELLING:
- amina: I think all of the presentations are very nice and exciting!!!

Figure 33 - SevensVsNines Sporadic Discussion

Recent Comments:
Delicious links for 2007-01-21:

drtech: Malak you might like to be a little more specific...which Year 11 notes, which course......????? And if you waited I...
malak: MR ALAAAANNN!!!! i need ur help.....can u tell me which site to go to for the year 11 notes!! really important reply...
Ahmed A.: Sorry, Dr. Tech. Old news.

Why I use Linux - An Indepth Discussion...:

drtech: Hmmm...this might be interesting to Ubuntu fans......http://ubuntustudio.org/

Isn't the law just great?:

drtech: You need to use some html tagging e.g. Text to be displayed or use the link button in the wysiwyg...
Ahmed A.: Ah see. It didn't appear in my comment either. it should have read. "Both (the tag) and (the other tag)...
Ahmed A.: I put in quote tags but they didn't work. Both and didn't work.

Figure 34 –Discussions and Support on CreativICTism

Plug-In List

CreativICTism

- Countdown Plug-in[xxv] - counted down the time to a date specified. This was to give the students deadlines in which they could always follow and see every time they went online.

- [Gabbly](#)[xxvi] Chatbox - allowed synchronous messaging, used experimentally to see if the *social* side of providing a tool similar to messenger would appeal and whether students would feel the chat tool was useful to discuss educational topics that they were having problems with.

- Feedburner RSS Widgets[xxvii] - showed RSS feeds to sites chosen including my [del.icio.us bookmarks](#) to guide research.

- Google Spreadsheets[xxviii] – embedded [dynamic grade sheets for GCSE students'](#) project work for checking of grades anytime, anywhere.

- Magpie RSS Syndication[xxix] – showed dynamically updated links from my [del.icio.us](#) tagged bookmarks related to subject domains. Year 12 students were already using del.icio.us so had some idea of its use.

- Blogroll from Bloglines Aggregation[xxx] - used to show a list of weblogs that are relevant to the weblogs' domain of knowledge and students study. This Blogroll was also used to link to the AS e-portfolio blogs.

[xxv] http://dev.wp-plugins.org/wiki/CountdownTimer
[xxvi] Synchronous messaging tool that can easily be embedded into a weblog, and has RSS feed capabilities which meant I could always monitor the conversation - http://gabbly.com/
[xxvii] http://www.feedburner.com/fb/a/publishers/headlineanimator;jsessionid=AA9013CB600B1DADC6E4C247698C18D1.fb1
[xxviii] [http://okc.spreadsheets.google.com/ccc?id=o01220526723062925094.528499706238658474.18370736968780041619.2189118562297444761](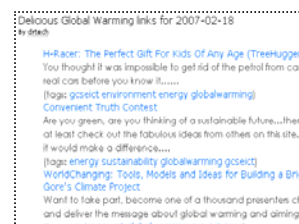http://okc.spreadsheets.google.com/ccc?id=o01220526723062925094.528499706238658474.18370736968780041619.2189118562297444761)
[xxix] http://www.howtoforge.com/rss_syndication_magpieRSS
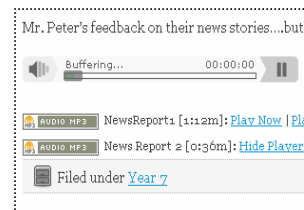[xxx] http://www.bloglines.com/help/share

- Del.icio.us Automatic Post[xxxi] – placed any sites tagged as a new post once a day to the weblog. It also allowed me to add notes and descriptions of sites found and how they might be useful.
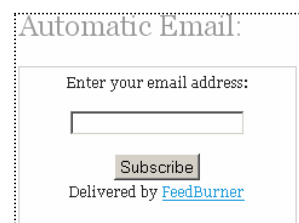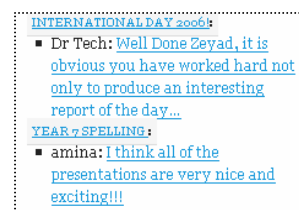

SevensVsNines

- Podcast Plug-in[xxxii] - so that students could not only publish words and pictures, but also use audio to comment upon their work.

- Feedburner Plug-in[xxxiii] - allowed participants to type in their email addresses and receive updates as an email (also used in CreativICTism.)

- Comments in Sidebar Plug-in[xxxiv] - promoted the use of commenting with each visible on the front page of the weblog (also used in CreativICTism.) This innovation was only added about three months ago and the upturn of commenting was considerable.

- User Online[xxxv] - showed who else and how many users were online at the time.

[xxxi] http://dotnet.org.za/armand/archive/2006/11/24/DailyLinkBlog.aspx
[xxxii] http://www.mightyseek.com/category/podpress/
[xxxiii] http://www.feedburner.com/fb/a/publishers/fbemail;jsessionid=299571ED6C2ED35D2D0579AA3D135668.fb1
[xxxiv] http://freepressblog.org/wordpress-plugins-2/wordpress-recent-comments-plugin-widget/
[xxxv] http://www.lesterchan.net/wordpress/readme/wp-useronline.html

Questionnaire Sample 1 – INSET Feedback

INSET ICT – Feedback Form

2 weeks after the confusing event...

Hi there as every good INSET should have some sort of feedback, so should mine I suppose. I have left it for a period of 2 weeks so that you can digest, use or most appropriately forget weblogs and their uses.

Please can you quickly tick the boxes and add any written feedback to the bottom of the sheet

		Yes	No	Comments
i.	Was the session useful and informative?			
ii.	Will you be using Weblogs for teaching within your classes?			
iii.	Have you returned to try and setup a weblog with 'edu-blogs'?			
iv.	Have you connected to the Moodle Learning Course for further materials related to weblogs?			
v.	Have you forgotten login details for the above course?			
vi.	Would you like there to be a follow up session to look more closely and develop your skills further with weblog use?			
vii.	Was the session difficult to understand and specifically was it too technical?			
viii.	Would you come to another ICT Inset?			
ix.	Do you think the use of ICT and weblogs with your class would be to time consuming?			
x.	Do you think that El Alsson's ICT facilities will be conducive to use of ICT /Weblogs in your teaching?			
xi.	Any further comments that might be relevant:-			

Thanks,
Alan.

Questionnaire Sample 2 – KS3 Weblog Feedback

ict – student feedback on year 0 and 9 - WebLog

Hi there, well you have been *blogging* and *podcasting* for over a term now. Some of you have written posts, some of you have podcasted (recorded audio) and some of you have had pictures in posts and some of you might have even commented on different posts – criticising or sharing information. What do you think? Do you think it is a waste of your and Dr Tech's time? Do you think it is interesting and fun? Do you think things could be improved? Well Dr Tech would like to here your *truthful* comments – so we can improve how *we* use our weblog in your lessons.

You will need to put a cross across the box [X] like this, and add a comment if you would like in the last column.

Example question......	Yes	~~No~~	Comment here....blah blah blah...		
Questions here...read carefully...	Remember to cross through the box you agree with in this column...				Add Comments In This column...
1) Do you think the class weblog Seven Vs Nines is fun?	Yes	No	Why?		
2) Have you podcasted (produced an audio broadcast)? 3) Please explain what you did and what you recorded?	Yes	No	*Please listen to our audio podcasts about international Amino and Abdallo.*		Why?
4) Have you listened to anybody's podcasts? If so which and was it good?	Yes	No	Why?		
5) How many times do you visit the blog in a week?	Never	Once	Twice	On Occasion	All the time...

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12) Has a picture or photo of your work been posted to the weblog? If so say what…	Yes	No	Add comments here:
13) Have you ever written and posted onto the blog in a browser? (e.g. sat with Dr Tech while doing so…)	Yes	No	Add comments here:
14) Should your teacher allow the students in the class more options to write actually into the weblog? If so how and what?	Yes	No	Add comments here:
15) Should your teacher allow you to decide what things are actually posted to the weblog e.g. different subjects and topics?	Yes	No	Add comments here:
16) What is your favourite part of the weblog? Have you checked out the other pages to see what is on them?			My favourite section is_____
17) Have you subscribed to the weblog and so now get posts as emails?	Yes	No	Enter your email address: [ ] Subscribe Delivered by FeedBurner
18) If yes to the above question – is this an easier way to receive the weblog information?	Yes	No	Add comments here:
19) Is the weblog just a complete waste of your time?	Yes	No	Why?
20) Should El Alsson School make sure that all students can have access to these types of online tools?	Yes	No	Why?

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Questionnaire Sample 3 – KS4/5 Weblog Feedback

Name: _____

Class:_____

i.C.t.-student feedback on

year 00/00/02 -weblog

Hi there, well you have been viewing the GCSE weblog, commenting and reading for up to a year or so by now depending in which year group you are in. Some of you have written posts, some of you have podcasted (recorded audio) and some of you have had pictures in posts and some of you might have even commented on different posts – criticising or sharing information. What do you think. Do you think it is a waste of your and Dr Tech's time? Do you think it is interesting and fun? Do you think things could be improved? Well Dr Tech would like to here your truthful comments – so we can improve how we use our weblog for the ICT classes.

You will need to put a cross across the box like this, and add a comment if you would like in the last column.

Questions here…read carefully…	Remember to cross through the box you agree with in this column…					Add Comments In This column…
1) Do you like the weblog for your class?	It's Okay..	It's Fab…	No I hate it…			
2) Have you podcasted (produced an audio broadcast)? 3) Please write in the comments if Podcasting is a good thing to use?	Yes	No				
4) Have you listened to any podcasts? If so what was it?	Some times	Once	Never			
5) How often do you visit in a week?	Never	Once	Twice	When I have to…	More than that…everyday….	
6) Have you ever commented – that means added your own words to a post?	Never	Once	Twice	When I have to…	More than that…everyday….	

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7)	Do you read other students comments? Have they ever helped you, explain what was in their comments…?	Yes	No		
8)	Do you find the weblog confusing in design? If so comment on what you might change?	Yes	No	A little…	
9)	Look at the following comments and discussion about technology– do you like to discuss things this way. Do you think that this adds an extra way to share information, as well as class discussion? Please explain what you think about this in the comments column…				Add Comment only:-

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16) If you have chatted – say what you remember discussing and if it has helped you in your schoolwork?	Add comments only:			
17) What is your favourite part of the weblog?	My favourite section is_____ _____			
18) Have you subscribed to the weblog and so now get posts as emails?	Yes	No	Enter your email address: [ ] [Subscribe] Delivered by FeedBurner	
19) If yes to the above question – is this an easier way to receive the weblog information?	Yes	No	Add comments here:	
20) Is the weblog just a complete waste of your time?	Yes	No	I don't care…	
21) Do you think that the weblog should have links to embedded coursework marks (like the Google spreadsheet) so that everybody can see them? 22) If not please add comment, why not?	Yes	No		Add comments here:
23) Can you write down any *skills* that you have learnt from using, commenting, writing …etc with the weblog?	For example can you now write things in short format so they can be read easily on the web, have you learnt how to speak clearly so your podcasts can be heard?….You tell me what you skills you have learnt if any?			
24) Do you think all the information on the sidebar in the right hand-side of the weblog is useful? If so comment on what your favourite tool /information is and why?	Yes	No	Countdown Clock is Ticking: Final Hand In Year 11 - OF all Coursework…this includes weekends and holidays.: In 65 days, 6 hours, 7 minutes	

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FEEDBACK

El Alsson School 'Blogging' Policy

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Over the next year, your child will have the opportunity to share his/her work on the Internet. This is a wonderful opportunity for the children and will enable them to receive feedback from other children who are publishing their work on the Internet. Publishing work to a real audience rather than just a teacher improves student writing. You will also be able to see your child's work on the Internet. I invite you to see this work online at the weblog: - www.constructict.com/year7

Our classes will be publishing student work in a variety of ways, including the following:
a.. Writing
b.. Hand-drawn or computer-generated images
c.. Voice recordings
Web publication offers your child a unique learning opportunity and has the following benefits:
a.. Makes class work engaging and exciting
b.. Allows them to receive feedback from other students and teachers outside of their class.
c.. Enables students to practice and refine their communication skills

YOUR CHILD'S PRIVACY

Your child's privacy will be protected. Full student names will not be displayed online. Students are instructed not to share any personal information. Before your child can publish, we will need to receive the signed permission form below. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at my email address aperkins@alsson.com. I further recognise that the blog is considered a virtual extension of our classroom, and therefore all El Alsson British International School Rules and Regulations apply.

I am aware that violation of any of these rules may Administration.

About this Blog:

A blog to show off the work of two classes of students at El Alsson School, which will show the best work over the year. Who will be best we will have to wait and see. REMEMBER students to please comment sensibly and constructively using good english. REMEMBER also to BLOG SAFELY by not leaving your email address or full name anywhere on this blog.

(Print Name)   _____

(Student Signature)   _____

(Parent Signature)   _____

(Date)   _____

Return to your child's ICT teacher   _____
Please circle yes or no below.

Yes No I allow my child to realize the benefits of publishing their writing and audio on the classroom teacher supervised web site.
Yes No I allow my child's photograph to appear on the web.
Yes No I allow my child's first name to be used on the Internet when identifying his/her work.
Yes No I would rather my child used a "pretend" name when publishing their work on the Internet.

Thank you for your support. As we develop our weblog, you can check on our progress at www.constructict.com/year7

Permission Disclaimer from Students…

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