

A Blog in my Classroom and my Classroom on a Blog!

by Richard Lawton, Los Angeles, CA

For many, the terms “blogger” and “blogging” conjure up images of people with more than their share to say and too much time on their hands. But blogging, if used correctly, can be an excellent way to extend the music classroom. When you see students for 30 or 45 minutes once or twice a week, it is difficult to ensure lasting understanding, no matter how imaginative your classroom instruction. To extend instruction, music teachers have to get creative, and having a web presence is a way of reaching students in the cyber-world they increasingly inhabit. It can also be a vehicle for collaborating with colleagues who, thanks to laptops, smart boards, and school websites, may actually be easier to interact with electronically.

A blog (a contraction of the word *weblog*) is an easy way to establish such a presence. It's a simple interactive website, the descendant of the electronic bulletin board. In 1998 there were only a handful, but that number has increased exponentially ever since.ⁱ Today nobody knows for sure how many blogs exist in what is collectively known as the blogosphere, but it's certainly in the hundreds of millions.ⁱⁱ There are filtering blogs, which collect and organize information from around the web; and journal blogs, where the blogger shares his or her world in the form of diary-like, time-stamped posts. All blogs permit the posting of text messages and image files such as JPEGs, and can be used to connect to other places on the web via a hyperlink.

A blog differs from a standard website in several ways. First, blogs are extremely easy to use. Setting up a website requires software and at least some understanding of web design, a dedicated domain, and hosting, all of which cost money. Once the website is up, even the smallest changes require republishing the entire site. By contrast, blogs are hosted by blog publishing services that provide you with a range of design templates and a domain address. Thereafter, new material can be posted and responded to by anyone you designate at anytime - and all of it is free.

To become a blogger the first thing you need to do is choose a blog publishing service. The largest and best known are [Blogger](#) (since 2003, a subsidiary of Google) and [WordPress](#). Others include [Tumblr](#), [Weebly](#), [Xanga](#), and [Wix](#). Which one you use will largely be a matter of style, although you may also wish to check with your school's website administrator to see if your school has an account with one in particular.

Once a blog is up and running (a process that literally takes minutes) you will have a place where you can post homework reminders, pictures of student work or a diary of classroom activities - a great way to keep track of what you've taught. The addition of two more things will make your *edublog* a fully functional teaching tool. The first is an account at a video sharing website -- a place where you upload and store videos that can, in turn, be posted on your blog by means of an embedding code. By far the best

known video sharing website is [Youtube](#). Youtube is often blocked by school districts because of content restrictions, but fortunately, there are other video sharing sites including [Teachertube](#) and [Vimeo](#), which are usually easier to access. You will also need an audio file sharing service to store music tracks. Audio files are smaller than video files and, as a result, load faster -- something to consider if your school has a slow WIFI connection. As with video sharing there are a range of providers -- [SoundCloud](#), [YourListen](#), [Hipcast](#) -- but unlike video sharing, there is usually a minimal cost.

Like any new teaching practice, blogging has a learning curve (though no more so than a new textbook and considerably less than a musical instrument). Blogging is not hassle free, but for those willing to persevere, there is no end to the applications:

- Provide your students with individualized recorder practice opportunities: Make a recording of yourself playing the material, perhaps to a click track, and post the audio along with a scan of the sheet music suitable for downloading (as an image file, no PDFs).
- Share today's classroom improvisation with parents: Have the kids do an extra take "for picture," (provided you have proper parental permissions for web video) upload it to your video sharing account and embed it into your blog.
- Give the kids access at home to the PowerPoint presentation you used in class: PowerPoint and other slide presentation software can be converted to Quicktime movies, which can be uploaded and embedded.

Furthermore, speedy, efficient, productive communication does not have to be limited to the members of your immediate school family. Last year on my music blog I began to notice that other schools in other parts of the world were viewing some of our material. Initially I was concerned -- Hey, that's ours! -- but my thinking quickly evolved. My students and I were hanging out on our street corner in cyberspace and some passersby liked what we were doing well enough to stop and sing along. So, this year I plan to reach out to those other schools. Maybe these impromptu web jams are the basis for a real musical relationship.

ⁱ Blood, Rebecca (2000). "Weblogs: A History And Perspective." http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html. Accessed 7/26/2013

ⁱⁱ (2013). Buzz in the Blogosphere: Millions More Bloggers and Blog Readers. *Neilsen Newswire*. <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/newswire/2012/buzz-in-the-blogosphere-millions-more-bloggers-and-blog-readers.html>. Accessed 7/28/2013

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