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About the Authors



Lisa Parisi is a highly qualified classroom teacher, dual certified in general and special education. Working in the Herricks Union Free School District on Long Island, New York, she has been helping students be successful for more than 25 years. She began blogging with her students in 2007 and has been going strong with technology ever since. Lisa's classroom is run using the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach. She believes that all students can be successful, given the right tools and time. She uses technology to help her students reach their highest potential.

Lisa spends her free time running a Global Awareness Club for students, helping them to see the world in different ways. She also presents at conferences on UDL and project-based learning. And she enjoys teaching classes in her district to help other teachers learn to use technology in their classrooms.

Lisa and her students have won many awards, including the SIGTEL Online Learning award for global projects. Her articles have been published in *Scholastic* magazine, *Tech4Learning* and various online sites. She is an EdTechTalk webcaster and the co-host of a weekly education webcast called Conversations. She blogs for *The Secret Life of Scientists* and *Teaching Tolerance*, as well as in her own blog, *Lisa's Lingo*. She is also a STAR Discovery Educator, a SMART Exemplary Educator, a Glogster ambassador, a Voki ambassador and a Fablevision ambassador. All of these extras help her keep up with technology in the classroom.



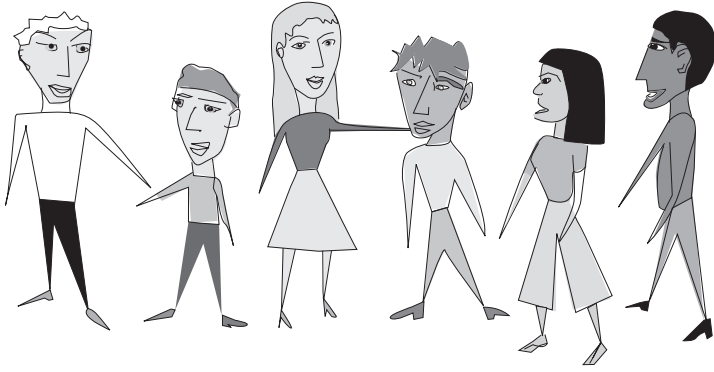
Brian Crosby, a certified upper primary teacher for 30 years, guides the learning in a classroom in Sparks, Nevada. Coming from a background in outdoor education and educational technology, Brian fuses his at-risk students' use of technology with excursions, art, hands-on activities, and a problem-based approach to build their schema of the world, while connecting them to it.

Brian's students are acclaimed for the community service projects they accomplish and he espouses. He believes children are valuable resources, and when they are seen learning while doing important work, society will be more willing to invest in them.

Brian is a community leader and writer for Powerful Learning Practice, an educator professional development company. He also blogs occasionally for the *The Huffington Post* as well as writes his own blog, Learning Is Messy. Brian and his students have won many awards, including an Apple iLife Award for their video "Don't Laugh at Me."

Brian also has created a wiki website to increase the learning at a local animal park, developed an advertising campaign for a non-profit that recycles bicycles and produced award-winning public service announcements about diversity and bullying.

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Introduction

*What we want is to see the child
in pursuit of knowledge, and not
knowledge in pursuit of the child.*

—GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Blogging Hooks Students

"Welcome to blogging!" These words, spoken by the teacher in September, were met with excitement, trepidation and anticipation among a class of year five students.

One student, Monica, put her head on her desk and cried. Monica struggles with writing. She has been a classified special education child with an individualised education program (IEP) since year one, focusing each year on the physical aspect of handwriting and the more difficult skill of putting words together to make cohesive paragraphs. Now in year five, Monica has learned one thing about writing: she hates it. Most of the time, while the rest of the class is writing, Monica is using typical avoidance techniques – she heads to the bathroom, sharpens her pencil over and over, or simply cries. This has worked for her in the past, and she's ready to try it again this year. Blogging, she knows, is just another form of writing, and she is not interested at all.

But in this classroom, she has no choice. So with the teacher's assistance and much complaining, Monica pounds out a short paragraph about her goals for the year. Then her teacher shows her how to copy her paragraph and paste it into her blog. Done. Except the teacher is not finished; she sends out a message to other teachers who blog and asks them to comment on this student's first blog post.

The next day, Monica comes into class and reluctantly pulls up her blog. She sees that there are now several comments. Together, the class looks at the comments. One is from New Zealand! Where is New Zealand? Monica grabs an atlas, finds New Zealand, and clicks on the comment's link back to the commenter to learn more about her.

Monica is hooked.

In the same classroom, we have Steve. Steve is at the top of the class. He attends accelerated classes twice a week for enrichment. Steve is used to doing well in school. But the way Steve does well in school is by doing exactly what the teacher asks of him – no more and no less. So when the first blog assignment was given, Steve dutifully completed a perfect essay about his goals for the year. He had an introduction, a clear and focused body paragraph, and a perfect conclusion. His post was not terribly creative or interesting, but he did what was asked.

Next to Steve sits Mario. Mario is not a classified child, nor is he a gifted student. He is an average year five student who loves some assignments and hates others. But Mario always tries his best, no matter what the activity, and he is excited about this new blogging idea. He cheerfully writes his goals for the year, adding his own funny comments into the essay. He posts the essay and waits.

Both Steve and Mario, after seeing Monica's comments, decide to check their own blogs. Mario has quite a few comments. Many other children thought he was funny and told him how much they enjoyed his blog. Mario immediately sets out to write another post, even though it has not been assigned. He is anxious to get more comments. He also navigates to the blogs of his commenters. One child, he discovers, is a girl from Israel. She writes a blog about her favourite video games, and Mario sees that she enjoys the same games as he does. Mario comments on this child's post about a particular game, and thus begins a great year with his new blogging buddy.

Steve, on the other hand, does not find any comments. He notices that there are quite a few students in the class who received comments. In fact, he is watching Mario, who seems to have gotten the most. Steve is intrigued. He is also extremely competitive. He decides to read Mario's blog. He notes that Mario didn't have a conclusion to his post and spelled a few words wrong and that the post is funny. Laugh-out-loud funny. Steve decides to change his post a bit, adding more of himself into the blog entry. He resubmits it and waits for comments.

All three students are now caught up in blogging. And for them, writing will never be the same.



What Is Blogging?

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary* (4th ed., 2006), a *blog* (formerly *web-log*) is “A website containing the writer’s or group of writers’ own experiences, observations, opinions, etc., and often having images and links to other websites.” Simple. But for educational purposes, blogging is so much more than simply a site of chronologically posted writings. It is a place for students to practise their writing and communication skills. It is a place where syntheses of ideas can take place. It is a tool used to encourage demonstration of ideas and learning. It is where students begin to build a global personal learning network (PLN). How can blogging be all that and so much more?

If you are new to the concept of blogging, the first thing to do is to go out and read some blogs! There are blogs on every conceivable topic. Are you a runner? Read some running blogs. Do you like to make pottery? Read pottery blogs. Do you enjoy politics? There are blogs covering every conceivable viewpoint. Next, read some blogs written by educators. Check out some classroom blogs written by students. All of these may be easily found via simple Internet searches. After you’ve read several blogs over a week or two, you will be well versed on what it is to blog. Maybe you’ll even be inspired to post a comment or two!

You’ll see that blogging is simply a form of publishing short posts, usually around a particular topic. Posts are made up of text, links to other content and embedded content such as pictures and videos. The best blog authors post regularly, and good blog authors usually have loyal readers who often comment about the posts. Blog authors often read and comment on other blogs on similar topics, creating a blogging community.

Who Should Blog?

As you may have surmised from the opening vignette, blogging is unparalleled as a tool to keep motivating students to write. In fact, in our many years of teaching, it is the best motivator we have ever experienced. But is blogging for you? Is blogging something your students should be doing? Who benefits from blogging?

Should you be blogging if you teach mainly students from high socioeconomic backgrounds? Should students from high poverty backgrounds be blogging? What about special education or special needs students? How about gifted and talented

students? What role does age play in blogging? Should younger students blog? Older ones?

The answer is that blogging is for everyone!

How do you manage blogging if you have only a few computers in your classroom? What if your students have access to computers at home but not much at school? Or maybe your students don't have access to the Internet at home, but they all do at school. Should they still be blogging? Maybe you only teach a single subject, such as maths or science or social studies or PE. Should your students be blogging? Yes! We will show you how blogging can work in all these situations.

Naturally, students working on writing skills should blog. If your students need to practise usage or punctuation or word choice skills, then they should blog. And reading fits well. So if your students are working on reading comprehension and writing about what they've read, then they should be blogging. But if you also believe it is important that your students learn to be critical thinkers, well versed in the ethics and safety issues of living and learning in a digital world, then you want them to be blogging. If developing your students' ability to communicate effectively with other students, adults and experts from around the world is important, then they should be blogging. If you want your students to be able to tap into the networked information and learning environments available online 24/7, then they should be blogging. In other words, all of your students should be blogging.

What Makes Blogging Great?

Even if you have little experience with blogs, you probably know that they involve writing. And if all that blogs were good for was motivating students to write more and to be more thoughtful, thorough editors – *that alone* would be enough to recommend blogging in the classroom.

But blogging involves so much more. Blogs are published to the world. The world is invited to start a conversation about each blog post and give feedback, encouraging the blogger to read the blogs of the commenters and give them feedback in return. So blogging involves writing, but also reading. Blogging can be used in every curricular area. Students can explain their learning, thinking, or understanding in maths or reading or social studies or science – or any curriculum area

or topic you can think of. Students can comment on current events, write creative pieces, letters and poetry. The list is endless.

The upshot is that your students should be blogging.

There are two main ideas you will read about repeatedly in this book.

1. Blogging is not an “add-on”.
2. Blogging involves becoming part of an online community that must be respected as such.

These ideas are both so important to the understanding of blogging in the classroom that they come up often in our discussions of using the tool. So let's start with a brief discussion here.

Most of us in education are faced with continually growing curricula. We are constantly asked to teach more and more, prepare for more and more tests, and cover more and more content without anything being taken away. The reasons for this are simple – the world is expanding in its content; therefore, more content must be taught in order for our children to be ready to succeed. Additionally, we are faced with an ever increasing number of dropouts and non-literate adults. Governments, in an effort to change this situation, turn to assessment as a tool to assure a better education for all. This translates to more assessments being handed to educators, which means more time spent preparing students for these specific tests.

Test preparation time plus ever more content equals less time for “extras”. That is why it is important for you to understand and embrace the idea that blogging is not just one more “add-on”. We will show you many ways to change the way you think about working within and assessing your curriculum and to incorporate blogging into what you're already doing.

The second idea, that blogging involves becoming part of an online community that is to be respected at all times, is a valuable principle for us to embrace in the 21st century. More and more of our future contact with others will take place online. When our students graduate, they will most likely enter vocations where contact with others online, nearby and across the world, is a regular part of their days. We must teach children how to use online tools to help them be successful in the future.

As responsible educators, we often worry about safety issues when it comes to students being online. And safety is very important. In a later chapter, we will discuss specific safety rules we cover in our classes. But beyond the safety issue is the issue of good digital citizenship – we want our students to learn to be respectful, considerate and specific in language when participating in life online. These are skills we often teach for students dealing with each other within classrooms. Now it is time to make the person on the other end of a blog real for our students, so they understand that respect and responsibility reach past the walls of the classroom and pertain to any other people they might come into contact with, whether face to face or online. So throughout this book, you will find lesson ideas and content emphasising respectful contact among students.

We hope that this book will help you begin to make a change in your classroom. We can no longer sit by, waiting for the administration or government to tell us how and when to use educational technology. We can make changes one classroom at a time. And blogging is a tool that can help us move toward that change. It is an engaging educational communication tool that easily spans subject areas and is useful for all ages. The fact that you are reading a book about blogging shows that you are open to changing learning tools you and your students use and willing to change how learning in your classroom happens. Welcome to blogging and to a wonderful new world of education for the world as it is now and will be in the future.