

Staking an educational place in cyberspace

By Carolyn McCabe

A virtual community has been established for local educators who are keen to keep up with universal e-learning trends. Carolyn McCabe pays a visit to this new online neighbourhood.

In 2006 a digital display village for teachers was created by the Victorian Education Channel and the School Library Association of Victoria. This local cyber zone is now open for inspection at <http://globalteacher.org.au>.

In this web space teachers can create their own web logs (blogs) using specially designed, free blogger software. “The *Global Teacher* space is a place where teachers can make websites on their own or with others,” says Channel Manager, Sandy Phillips. “They can use the space to share resources or publish class work, without having specialist technical skills.”



“It’s very easy to join this community,” adds Phillips, “because there are no fees, access is available anytime and anywhere there is internet connection and there are only a few administrative requirements to meet.”

The first requirement is that permission from the school principal is sought. This is important Phillips explains “because teachers might want to publish student work via the site and responsibility for student blogs and posts must remain with local school administration”.

Once the joining tasks have been completed, teachers and teacher-librarians can then set up their own blogging space and/or get involved in any of the learning projects that have already been established on the site. There is also an online mentor to help.

Heather Blakely, a former teacher who has run many international collaborative projects over the past ten years, is the online guide who can help teachers get started. She can be contacted via email to answer questions or provide information.

Blakely has also set up a few VELS-based learning projects in the *Global Teacher* zone that teachers can join. The *Share Bear Exchange* is one example. Here teachers can arrange for a toy travel buddy to visit their school and then later publish details of the visit. For teachers of more senior classes there is *Book Yak* – a place to talk about texts. “You don’t have to join any

of the kick-starter projects, but they are there if you are interested,” says Blakely.

And for those teachers who are not ready to participate in collaborative activities, *Global Teacher* can simply provide useful information about emerging technologies and a place where they check out what their peers are doing in the digital landscape. “The site not only gives teachers access to practical support from Heather if they need, but it also gives practical advice about using online publishing and communicating tools,” explains site co-founder Mary Manning. “It also links to examples of teachers’ ICT-related work,” she adds.

One sample currently showcased is Gail Casey’s digital storytelling blog <<http://digitalstories.globalteacher.org.au>>. Here the Geelong High School teacher gives information about digital story telling, lists resources she uses, reflects on what she’s been doing and links to student digital stories.

For Manning, the work of the *Global Teacher* community members (listed at: <<http://welcome.globalteacher.org.au>>) can provide practical models for other teachers to follow. “These examples are useful in the here and now for those who are looking for information and guidelines about emerging technologies, but they also will provide the basis for future research.”

This research will look at what is created in the *Global Teacher* space and how it is used to influence and direct student learning. A research partnership has been established between Education Channel, SLAV and The University of Melbourne. For the *Global Teacher* co-founders, the research will also provide teachers with opportunities to inform and influence the future directions of educational weblogging.

To find out more about the *Global Teacher* project go to <<http://www.globalteacher.org.au>> or contact Sandy Phillips at: <phillips.sandra.l@edumail.vic.gov.au>

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