



SCHOOL

LEADERS

To make connections

To achieve reflection

For the love of language

There is no *one* reason

Why our members blog



Some readers may recall what it was like to collect their daily thoughts in a small bound book secured by a tiny gold key. Sometimes prefaced by “Dear Diary ...”, the sessions could be a sharing of that day’s high points, intelligence gathered, or even hopes for the future. But those musings remained tightly under wraps, destined for viewing only by the author and, occasionally, by a trusted friend or a wily sibling. For those who found their expression in writing, the avenues for sharing their thoughts were limited until the internet became a story-telling gamechanger.

According to Wikipedia, the term ‘blog’ did not appear until the late 1990s, but the roots of blogging can be traced to early bulletin board and newsgroup services that offered a forum where anyone could add their thoughts, ideas, and activities. While many expected that the blog might fade away as social media evolved, blogs have held their own and continue to flourish. These ‘weblogs’ have taken many forms as technology has advanced, with niche blogs, video blogs (vlogs) and podcasts now issued by individuals, businesses, charities, politicians, celebrities, influencers and — of course — educators.

Blogs abound in education; they are a candid platform to share experiences and expertise, and to connect beyond the school, the district, and the province. Many Principals like Chris Wejr (SD35, Langley) have launched blogs as the next generation of the traditional school newsletter. “I used to do a professional blog two or three times a month, to share ideas and explore educational issues,” says Chris. “I then took our school newsletter to a digital format as a weekly blog for parents and staff that included pictures and videos. While I don’t blog professionally anymore since the birth of our third child, I find the weekly school blog provides a window into life at our school and helps to connect classrooms both with each other and with the families at home.”

School blogs are effective for sharing the news of the school or district in a very immediate way, enlivened by associated media. Families can find out how the food drive is going, what the grad parade looked like, and how the custodian’s retirement was celebrated – a personal touch that has been particularly critical during the global pandemic. Principals can also use their blogs as a tool to issue reminders, start conversations, do temperature checks, collect feedback, and address issues.

School leaders who maintain personal blogs do it for a variety of reasons. Ian Landy (SD47, Powell

River) produces a ‘Days of Learning’ blog that counts down the school year by expanding on his daily reflections. In February, Ian’s musings ranged from the legitimacy of comic books as a form of writing to Pink Shirt Day, from an account of his presentation to students on the permanence of the digital footprint to school dress codes, from that ‘Tuesday’ feeling after a long weekend to the role of the clockface in human innovation. Ian includes photos (often featuring his fine ties and bowties of the day), attaches presentation files, and sometimes includes sketch notes from learning sessions.

Judi Poole (SD5, Southeast Kootenay) blogs because she enjoys reflecting on her practice. “I feel it’s important to share with others my findings, inspirations and thought provocations in what I’m reading. I want to share those thoughts with others, whether they are leaders, leaders-to-be, or people who are trying to make an impact,” says Judi. While there is not a main focus to her blog, Judi gravitates to topics of an emergent nature. “At the time, an inspiration may be purely serendipitous, or it will land on my proverbial doorstep due to someone else’s sharing, or it may come from my personal lived experience.”

Carrie Froese (SD39, Vancouver) contributes to her own blog as frequently as she can, and is inspired to grow her professional learning community. Carrie



### Thank you to the bloggers who contributed to this story

Rob Clark SD75

@rclarksd75

Jeff Dartnell SD33

jdartnell.edublogs.org

Carrie Froese SD39

inquire2empower.ca

Ian Landy SD47

technolandy.wordpress.com

Judi Poole SD5

bit.ly/3bWkhmv

Chris Wejr SD35

shortreed.sd35.bc.ca

finds that writing the blog helps her to clarify her own thinking, and adds that, "It's very rewarding when connections made online are strengthened by meeting in person." While education-focused, Carrie's writing has a very personal vibe and her posts can be drawn from a personal experience supplemented by rich researched background to fill out the story, as when she biked to East Georgia Street with her husband to visit Nora Hendrix's house.

School leaders may also blog so that they can hone their own writing skills. Jeff Dartnell (SD33, Chilliwack) started out by posting on a weekly or monthly basis, but has moved to a regular daily practice. He has a goal of advancing his education by pursuing an EdD or PhD, and the exercise is keeping him writing on a consistent basis. "I belong to Ozan Varol's Inner Circle," says Jeff, "This group has helped me to focus my goals, and provides me with a sounding board for my writing and ideas." *See Jeff's sidebar story on his own writing inspiration on the following page.*

Rob Clark (SD75, Mission) has followed a different path to establish an online presence and to share his thoughts, ideas, and the lessons of the day. For the past three years, Rob has actively posted on social media several times each week using thoughtful and engaging videos and photos. "In my past conversations with a number of Principals, there was a collective concern expressed about posting *anything* on social media. At the time, there had been negative press and stories about schools, staff, and admin teams, and it felt like that was dominating social media sites," says Rob. "When other leaders shared posts, they were met with negativity and they abandoned those efforts quite quickly. Then, it snowed. It snowed a lot. I created my first 'snow day' video, and took a chance by sharing it on social media. It was well received

by the majority of people but there were still some negative comments. So, I made a second video. And a third video. Those videos evolved from fun and silly to serious as I began to tell the story of my school, my experience as a Principal, and my experience as a father. Over the past few years I have received an outpouring of support from my community and other communities around the province as I share the character and values I would like to see in my students. Some posts are celebrations, some are lessons, some are pleas, and some are just for fun."

What keeps a blogger blogging, while carrying a school leader's workload? For Chris, it's clearly about sharing the positives. "The 'Good Things to Talk About' always nudges me to make sure I am in classrooms and sharing the positives that are happening at our school. Each Sunday night is a chance for me to be grateful for the incredible educators at Shortreed. I try to share one thing about each classroom at least every couple of weeks in the blog. Last year, we had student reporters helping me, but with the cohort model we have had to press pause on that for now." Judi notes that the reflection on her practice keeps her engaged. "I enjoy writing, and if others are interested in being an audience to these 'wonders' and 'ponders', I hope that it can inspire and lead them to query the 'why' of what they do." And Rob returns to those threads of connection, and creating conversations. "I continue along this path because of the support I have received. I have been contacted by parents, teachers, administrators, and trustees in different communities in B.C. and in Alberta, thanking me for being honest, transparent, and vulnerable as a school Principal. It has been an honour, and a humbling experience."



Life is about routines. We wake up the same time of the day, we have the same routines at work, we do the same things during our spare time, and so forth. These routines make our lives less complicated and easier to manage, but these routines also inhibit our ability to aspire to new things, to accomplish certain tasks, and to grow as individuals. As more time passes, we look back and wonder "Where has the time gone" and sometimes a sense of frustration and dissatisfaction sets in as some of our goals and aspirations have not been accomplished and might never be met.

The COVID-19 pandemic made our routine-filled lives even more obvious. During the pandemic, many people started filling up their spare time by bingeing Netflix, watching old re-runs, and spending more time with their family (one of the few positives of the pandemic). But during the pandemic, the days turned into weeks and weeks into months. Time seemed to be just passing us by as we waited for the end of the pandemic. For myself, the pandemic revealed how fast time was flying by and how many of my goals, dreams, and aspirations had not been met.

With this realization I sought to make some changes that would create opportunities for change, growth, and inspiration in my life. The first thing I did was join the Inner Circle. This is an online platform where "people come together to network, collaborate, and stress test their big ideas". Ozan Varol, creator of the Inner Circle and author of *Think Like A Rocket Scientist*, defines it as group of people "drawn to those who carve their own path — the misfits, rebels, and troublemakers". There are approximately 250 people who belong to the Inner Circle and you can

contribute as much or as little to the group talks, the weekly monthly online webinar, and various other platform posts, discussions, and learning sessions.

What have I gotten from the Inner Circle? It's a place where I feel "encouraged and supported to take big — sometimes terrifying — leaps forward in my life". How has the Inner Circle impacted myself, my dreams and my aspirations? Some of my long-term goals are writing a book and undertaking a EdD or PhD. The Inner Circle members, who have a wealth of knowledge and life experiences, are supportive and encouraging. They have provided numerous resources, podcasts and more, that are helping me work towards my goals. I have also started to read more scholarly articles and educationally based books. I rejuvenated my blog and have been writing more using a 15-Minute Ninja Writing format. This format was proposed by a member of the Inner Circle to help me establish a daily writing routine. I have also started to learn to play the ukulele. I have been practicing for about an hour a night for about two months now. I am no Jake Shimabkuro but I am getting better and I haven't quit. *If you don't know who Jake Shimabkuro is, Google him – amazing!!!*

The changes I have made in my life have allowed me to free myself from my routine-filled existence. I am now more focussed and I am working towards a number of different goals every day. Joining the Inner Circle has also allowed me the opportunity to become part of something bigger than myself. The Inner Circle has become "my new group of misfits, rebels, and troublemakers" that are working together to "carve their own path" in this crazy world.