"Blogging in the Classroom"
Workshop

What is this workshop about?
This workshop is designed for teachers in Lapeer Community Schools to learn about the utilization of Web 2.0 technologies in the classroom. One form of technology that will be the primary focus of this workshop is blogs. The workshop will begin with this online survey sent via email:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qN1sGiZX5bNx6bT4LTNhGw_3d_3d

Approximately two weeks later, while teachers are meeting at a district scheduled professional development in-service, I will present and explain what Web 2.0 is, how to use it, and why it is useful for today's classrooms. The workshop will also include a tutorial session for teachers on how to create a blog for their classroom.

What is the educational need for such a thing?
There are a lot of reasons to introduce and incorporate Web 2.0 technology into today's classrooms. But first, before we can incorporate technology into our classrooms, we need to make sure teachers know what they are doing!

In such a large district, there is a wide range of ages and experiences among our staff. These generational differences can be seen in so many areas, but especially in the field of technology. Marc Prensky coined the terms "Digital Natives" and "Digital Immigrants" to note the main differences between people's experiences with technology. As a digital native, I understand how our students learn, and can share this understanding with my older peers.

Prensky also emphasizes the need to adjust the educational system to fit the needs of today's students. He notes, "Our students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach." (Marc Prensky, Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants ©2001).

Some have come to describe today's generation of students as the "Net Generation." In a book called "Growing Up Digital" author Don Tapscott describes some of the characteristics of this generation. He says
> "Net Geners value freedom and choice in everything they do. They
> love to customize and personalize. They scrutinize everything. They
> demand integrity and openness, including when deciding what to buy

and where to work. They want entertainment and play in their work and education, as well as their social life. They love to collaborate. They expect everything to happen fast. And they expect constant innovation."

A tool like a classroom blog can fit these characteristics. Blogs provide collaboration, freedom and choice.
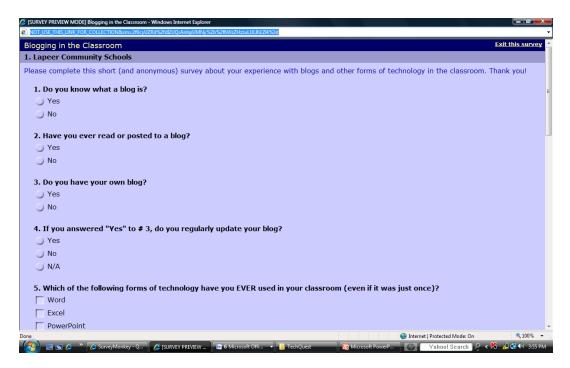
I believe that one reason this workshop could be successful is that I am the one leading it. In an article called "Teacher Quality: Teachers Teaching Teachers" from Rethinking Schools Online, a study among teachers in Portland about effective professional development programs shows the importance of teacher led PD. The article says

> "When high school language arts teachers in Portland were asked by the Professional Development Committee — a group founded by the school district and the Portland Association of Teachers — which professional development programs had the greatest impact on their students' learning, they overwhelmingly named the Portland Writing Project, the Summer Literacy Curriculum Camp, and the Professional Development Days — which were all led by classroom teachers."
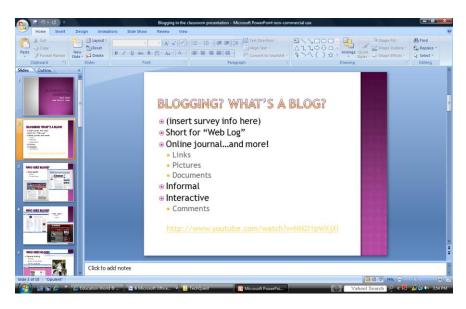
As a peer, I am seen as an equal to my colleagues. I have noticed at past inservices led by "outsiders" that some of the people I teach with do not get engaged. They are not as attentive to people they do not know. An article for administrators called "Teachers Teaching Teachers: Professional Development That Works" Education-World.com also supports this. It says "If you're not capitalizing on the expertise of members of your school's teaching team, your staff is missing out on the most effective professional development around. It's professional development tailored to your school's culture and needs."

My strategy

The survey that is sent out prior to the workshop itself is done through a web program called Survey Monkey. This program provides a way to gather data quickly and easily. It is also done anonymously, as to alleviate any anxiety some people may have about sharing their technology knowledge, or lack thereof.

To teach my colleagues about Web 2.0 and blogging, I will use a PowerPoint presentation. The workshop and tutorial will likely take place in a computer lab that has an LCD projector.

I will also walk teachers through the process of creating a blog using EduBlogs. I believe doing this will make it a lot easier for people to learn how to create a blog. I also believe that having them create their blogs during the workshop will make teachers much more likely to actually use a classroom blog.

Connection to the four common places

Student- teacher-created blogs can provide a forum for student discussion (since it's recorded on the web, it can be referred to in the future) or a collection of ideas for the classroom or any issue. Many students may not feel comfortable talking in front of their peers during class, so a blog provides a less confrontational/nerve-wracking environment.

Teacher-(as mentioned above) a blog can provide for a record of class discussions and ideas. It can also be a place for teachers to post class announcements, links to assignments, and updates on classroom activities.

Subject Matter-blogs can be utilized in any subject area. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students can use blogs for a variety of reasons.

Context-The context of my project is a teacher professional development session where teachers and administrators can learn how to utilize web pages and blogging in their own setting.

Evaluation

In order to know if my "Blogging in the Classroom" workshop was effective, I will need to do some follow up with my peers. First of all, I have a pre-assessment survey that I'll email to the staff for them to complete at their leisure, but within a reasonable period of time. Since teachers will be creating their blogs during the workshop, I'll have them submit their blog address to me, which I will then put the RSS feed for them on my Netvibes page. This way I can keep up with how they are using their blogs once the workshop is over (if they are even using it at all).

One issue I anticipate is apathy. Some people just are not into technology and do not care to use it or learn new things. I also anticipate technical difficulties that I may not be able to deal with. I myself am relatively new to blogging and definitely do not know all there is to know about it or about the EduBlogs site.

Another important thing to keep in mind is how important it is going to be for me to maintain and update a blog for my classroom. I would be hypocritical not to! I have a tendency to set somewhat lofty goals for myself and my classroom and not follow through as I originally intended.

One thing I may need to consider is to do a workshop like this after learning more about blogs and successfully utilizing one in my classroom. That way I will be better equipped to properly instruct and demonstrate this technology.

More to come later…
I plan on developing a written set of instructions so teachers can refer back to it when working on their blogs later on. I also want to expand the presentation to include examples of how I used my blog in my classroom. I will also share my reflection on what worked and what did not. I believe this will make the workshop more effective for other teachers to see how useful a blog is firsthand.