Weblogs: Supporting the creation of learning networks in the technology classroom

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Introduction
This research aims to demonstrate that weblogs have the potential to be valuable learning tools that support both reflective practice and collaborative learning. An initial study was performed involving a group of technology students in a third-level institution. This study examined the use of weblogs as a tool to support their learning, in addition to using traditional teaching methods and WebCT. Although this research is still in its early stages, initial results have been promising.

Results
Initial results from the pilot study have been promising. In the questionnaire administered at the end of the study, 90% of students found the weblog was easy to set up and 100% of students found the weblog was easy to use. Students were also asked if they thought weblogs should be used in other subjects on their course (besides the Networking & Communications subject). Chart 1 below indicates which subjects students felt weblogs could be incorporated into.

Conclusions
The aim of this pilot study was to gather students’ initial impressions of weblogs, and gain some insight into how weblogs could be utilized in technology courses in third-level institutions. Preliminary findings show that students found weblogs both easy to use and easy to set up. Students felt that weblogs could be a useful research tool, and that using weblogs to peer-review other students’ work was helpful to them. Several students commented that the reviews they gave each other were not critical enough; this may suggest that students should be provided with critical-thinking skills training before beginning the peer-review process.

Overall, initial feedback from the students is positive; they readily engaged with the new technology and were enthusiastic about its use. The next phase of the research will analyse the content of weblog posts. Also, as the sample size was limited in the initial study, it is planned to conduct a further study on a larger scale.

Literature cited