

## Reflecting on Reflections (or, how I met the BLOG)

Lara Ervin  
IISME fellow, Intel Corporation  
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Toto, I am, sooooo, not in Kansas anymore. Though this operates like a peer group, and “sounds” like a peer group, I hear keys clicking and Disney music instead of voices... Welcome to THE BLOG.

Several times this summer people commented about blogging about blogging (and how the auto dictionaries still don't recognize the word “blog”). This was my first experience with blogging and after the initial shock, I found it quite fun. I have always loved words, loved to write (mostly sappy poetry and the occasional page from a novel that never ends) and loved, most of all, to READ. The problem has always been that I really don't like non-fiction. When High School English teachers and travel magazines required/recommended journals, I heaved a heavy sigh and dragged my pen along the page until the “minimum” requirements were met. It was always most difficult not to throw in a dragon, lion or horrific plane crash into my journal about “getting to school this morning” or “what I did this summer”.

Why, then, did I select the blog option this summer? In addition to reading, I am also a techno-junkie. Last night we went to return an FM transmitter for our Zen Jukeboxes (yes, we have one for each member of the house, two have 40 gigs almost full of tunes) and nearly left the store with a new computer, a DVD player for the car, and one of those cool refrigerators that talk to you. (We didn't, we just bought a 160 GB portable

drive for the husband's laptop) I figured, why not try this blogging out. If it didn't work out, I could dash off one of the many ETP's that I create every summer here.

To my great surprise, I really like the blog. I like it so much, that my cubicle mate, Kiran, from SFUSD and I are going to use PBS' Frontline streaming clips and blogs to have our kids communicate across the bay. Perhaps from there, the world... (muahahahaha)

Why am I a blog convert?

According to the National Staff Development Council, excellent professional development is "not a one-shot workshop" but is "sustained and ongoing" with reflection as a key component of the experience. Our blog this summer not only encouraged me to participate through the social aspect of a *shared* blog but also had the subtle peer pressure of other fellows posting and commenting on each other's ideas. It also became a resource for sharing ideas, links, commonalities and frustrations. The blog helped me clarify ideas and feelings about my teaching I didn't even realize I was experiencing.

Unhappy people sometimes experience some major denial. For the past two years, I have been working really hard in an academy setting. The blog this summer served as a reminder that the world outside my academy group can be very different from what I was experiencing inside. I felt supported and happy in the blog for the first time in a long time and think the fellows in here were a major source of that support. I went in to

talk to my principal about various topics for the upcoming year, and he (wisely) suggested I honestly evaluate some of my feelings about my current role at MHS. He also offered me an opportunity to leave the academy if I wanted to in order to focus on my “voice” in professional development. When I talked to my husband about this, he indicated that while it was my decision, he thought I would be happier. Then at dinner my 12 year old step son also mentioned that he would agree with everyone else, perhaps I would be better off out of the academy.

So, being me, I picked up a book about happiness at work by the Dalai Lama. (the answer is always in a book!) When I read the book and really thought about the person and teacher I had been last year, I realized that the people living around me were right. I have been incredibly unhappy. I called my principal this morning and requested the change. Without the bloggers, Shari, John, Chuck, Tara and Kiran my cube-buddy I would not have learned the valuable lessons of powerful blogs. Being open to looking at and after myself instead of others is a very very difficult thing for me. If I hadn't had what I felt was such a strong group (though I never really told them about my troubles, just being there was an immense help) I may have never come to these realizations.

Blogging is powerful. It builds community, it encourages “risk taking” and “critical thinking” as per NBC standards. It has truly been one of the most powerful experiences I have ever had in my life. The people are AWESOME, the resource was invaluable and my life has changed because of it. All of my experiences this summer with learning about technology and ways to create real innovation in the classroom have

led me to commit to podcasting, online classes to support the in-class times, united streaming and Intel's Thinking Tools. However, I think blogging is going to be my strongest commitment of all, I have realized how powerful it can be as a teaching tool, a community building environment and a transformative experience, even for those of us that "never liked journaling". As I am always looking for ways to create accountability and help students internalize history, the blog looks like a great solution... it worked for me!

Music: Please, Please, Please Let Me Get What I Want (The Smiths, Louder Than Bombs)

Mood: Bittersweet

Tags: Keep Coming Back, It Works!