The digital age poses significant opportunities and challenges for educators. The students in their classrooms often have more advanced computer skills than their teachers and access to information never before imagined. What are the instructional strategies that teachers need to keep pace with the digital age and with students who are more connected to iPods and cell phones than to books and lectures.

Most educators realize the 21st century worker must have the ability to think, solve complex problems, be a self-motivated learner, and adapt quickly yet thoughtfully to rapidly changing environments in order to compete in a globally society. Skills such as global literacy, problem solving, innovation, and inventiveness have become essential in today’s increasingly interconnected world. To better prepare students for a workplace progressively more connected by digitally-based tools, educators seek more effective teaching methods that employ these tools.

Throughout the last few years, blogging has become a way for like minded people to share ideas, thoughts, hopes, and dreams. Blogging is popular with digital age students. Because of this popularity, blogging offers a unique means of effective teaching and richer learning. The idea of “learning to learn” as Thomas Friedman points out becomes obtainable for more educators through this form of instructional practice. This article summarizes some of the key findings from a study of K-12 teachers who are using blogging in their classrooms and how blogging seems to support both student and teacher learning.

In a recent study, "Edublogging: Instruction for the Digital Age Learner," I analyzed the effects of blogging by K-12 students and teachers in the United States. The research showed that edubloggers, teachers who use blogging as a form of collaborative instruction, see increased motivation among students, more positive relationships within the classroom, higher levels of thinking, and deeper understanding of subject matter. Developing this type of instruction also led the teachers toward a more collaborative professional style and increased introspective and reflection on their own practice as they worked to master this new technology.

Edublogging is best described as writing in an electronic journal or diary. Teachers post assignments daily, weekly, or monthly and students respond by accessing the site and writing a comment. Generally, teachers also require students to comment on two or three other students’ thoughts. Due to privacy options included in blogging applications, some edublogs are protected and can only be viewed by the teacher and invited users; others are public and able to be viewed globally. In either format, teachers can act as administrators, retaining control of publishing, editing, or deleting comments. In addition to text, student users may upload graphics or photographs, called avatars, to identify each of their comments. The richness of learning on a blog comes from the sharing of ideas and the building of those ideas into new or more complex thoughts.
Increased Motivation

Since the primary purpose of a blog is effective communication, some teachers use blogs chiefly to communicate lessons and assignments. Others use blogs as a means of providing additional understanding for their students by incorporating online assistance. Most teachers use blogs to build collaborative and collective understanding. Teachers say when students log in to their blog they can see what others have to say about what they have written. By reading others’ responses, students are able to reflect on what they have read and written. As a result, they see students relating the readings and other students’ responses in classroom discussions.

Teachers who are blogging with their students create a classroom climate of collaboration in which students eagerly share ideas and support one another. In creative writing assignments, blogging sparks organic writing workshops where students go beyond “typo” corrections of each other’s work to suggesting ideas for content and writing in depth. In literature assignments, students use blogging to think and interact with works of literature and with their classmates.

More Positive Classroom Relationships

When teachers give students time to write and participate with the rest of the class they enhance positive feelings about learning. Students feel happier in the learning environment when they are making connections with one another. This is true whether that student is sitting in the seat next to them or it is a student sitting in a classroom in another part of the world. One teacher said that blogging is a "tool that fuels interaction between students and their classmates.” Moreover, students become more motivated to do their best when they know that other people will see their work. In addition, teachers state that blogging seems to have an “awakening factor” in the classroom.

It is through blogging and commenting on each other's work that students become more communicative with one another and with the teacher. Working in collaborative groups especially helps ESL students to learn concepts as well as language. Digital communication enables every student, even the most reluctant speaker, to be heard and student confidence rises. Teachers say blogging provides a way for students to reach out and communicate with others, and this helps the shy students. Likewise, it leads to increased understanding between teachers and students. Some teachers say, “We see the thoughts of those students that do not usually speak in class, and we realize blogging has helped to change the way we see the quiet children in class.” Blogging offers inclusion at whatever level is most comfortable for the student or teacher and can be used as such at most grade levels.

Edublogging fosters positive relationships between teachers and students, teachers and parents, and among students within the classroom. It encourages students to construct new knowledge from their own experiences and to become drivers of their own learning. When students feel good about themselves in a classroom, they generally get along with their teacher. Because most students love digital learning, discipline problems are significantly reduced. Teachers say students will do any assignment as long as they are able to do it on the computer. Moreover, both students and parents enjoy the immediacy
of posting assignments, linking to online sites that assist with learning, and conversing continuously with the teacher.

More effective communication within the classroom also increases learning and leads to stronger classroom relationships. Teachers find that students care about their peers’ positive feedback. This adds to a sense of community, and students become active learners. By using the blog they are constantly put into situations where they have to prove themselves right—so they explore the answers on their own and cite where they found it. Teachers reported that students often rise above what is expected of them and now have a much bigger role as tutors for one another. Before blogging there wasn’t an easy way for students to see one another’s work on a regular basis. Students that blog are reading, commenting on, and learning from each other’s work every day.

Higher Levels of Thinking

Several foreign language teachers indicated that through the experience of blogging with students in other countries, foreign language students honed their communication skills and deepened understanding by comparing and contrasting cultural lifestyles. One foreign language edublogger said, “Symbolically my classroom walls came down to allow student voices from across the sea to participate in classroom activities. This expanded my students’ learning and gave deeper meanings to the lessons. They were motivated and could see the connections of what they were learning and how this applies in today's world.”

An edublogging science teacher created a lesson plan requiring students to research the dangers of inhalants and then share this new knowledge with as many people as possible. A group of his students set up a blog site and shared their findings with the world. These students received a global response from a diverse group of people. This experience proved highly motivating and engaging for his students.

Educators who work with special needs students find that blogging and the patience of the computer allow students to develop skills in a way that was previously unknown. Pacing themselves, all students eventually reach the same level of comfort and as a result their writing improves and the quality of thought that goes into their writing expands. In addition, because blogging is a work in progress, students are often learning at different times. They are not limited by classroom schedules and often work on their blog in study hall, before or after school, or at home.

Deeper Understanding of Subject Matter

Edubloggers reported that students experience deeper comprehension of subject matter through blogging when they are able to make sense of what they are learning and develop their own understanding of the subject. Blogging permits students to construct new knowledge from their own experience and lends itself to the idea that students should take control of their learning. As teachers become facilitators of learning, student responsibility rises. Edublogging greatly increases the potential for student success by giving each student the opportunity to learn at their own pace.
A More Collaborative Professional Style of Teaching

An unanticipated discovery from the research showed teachers may even develop new or stronger professional skills as well as gain improved personal understanding. Teachers enjoy this sense of collaboration with students and tend to seek it with other professionals. They also become more insightful with their students, which leads them to become more introspective in regard to their teaching practice. One participant in the study even created multiple blogs in order to fulfill this need to communicate on different levels with multiple individuals.

Just as teachers benefit professionally and personally from communicating with multiple individuals on different levels, so do students. They gain increased motivation, more positive relationships within the classroom, higher levels of thinking, and deeper understanding of subject matter. In addition they gain skill and confidence with 21\textsuperscript{st} century technology. By interacting in a digital learning environment they narrow the gap between their school experience and the 21\textsuperscript{st} century workplace. Edublogging affords each digital age learner an equal opportunity to interact with and become originators of media. Through this differentiated yet connected instruction, students learn to work collaboratively, think creatively, and enhance their critical-thinking abilities—skills students need for the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.