

Title: Weblogs in the 1st year of the Management Development Programme: Nature and patterns of student use of Blogs with particular reference to project work and related reflective practice.

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About the Class

The Management Development Programme (MDP) at Strathclyde University Business School (SBS) is a compulsory 3 year programme for all business students involving approx. 500 students each year. The programme embraces: confidence-building; personal effectiveness; management skills, leadership and negotiation; social; ethical and sustainability issues in business; professional values and project management.

It is a mature and innovative programme, which has developed progressively since 1999 and employs a constructivist pedagogy to guide the design of teaching, learning and assessment in meeting employability outcomes. Active and problem based learning is the approach and students work in interdisciplinary teams. Student reflection is seen as a key learning outcome to enhance employability, and reflection is focussed in first year through an assessed 'Learning Diary' process. Teaching, learning and class administration are supported by the MERCURY VLE which has been developed within SBS. Much activity takes place in a custom designed teaching space. There is an academic Manager with overall responsibility for MDP and the teaching team is drawn from across the SBS, and includes staff from Statistics and Modelling Science (STAMS). The teaching staff work collaboratively as year teams, and interact with a range of employers including Proctor and Gamble, Accenture, Ernst Young and Deloitte.

MDP supports the transition into first year within SBS in terms of social and academic engagement. In the first year, social integration is explicitly supported by the programme. There are 48 students in a group, which is sub-divided in teams of 5/6 students. The teams are interdisciplinary although they are all within business disciplines. The groups are led by academic staff from the Business school and STAMS. A P/Time Teaching Assistant works with the academic staff and acts as a facilitator.

As well as the two hour weekly group session, students meet 1 hour a week in a lab session, in which students work on individual numeracy and Excel activities delivered and tested through a custom designed VLE, students work at their own pace and support is provided by two teaching assistants. The main pieces of individual work are numeracy-based, which are delivered and tested through a Virtual Learning Environment developed in Statistics and Modelling Science (STAMS VLE). There is an individual Learning Diary which is completed by each student. The relevance of statistics and IT is demonstrated to students as they seek to resolve real business problems.

Initially the MDP programme focuses on learning how to do team presentations and seeks to develop personal and interpersonal confidence. As the programme develops it progressively increases the amount of academic responsibility and self-regulation of first year students, but exposes students to this in a coordinated and supportive way. As the year proceeds there is a staged progression in terms of the complexity of the academic tasks undertaken by the teams. Assessment in the first semester centres on: a PowerPoint presentation, a forecasting exercise, and a team project. The projects are based on topical themes which cut across all subject areas, are highly accessible in terms of information-gathering, and present a challenge in terms of analysis and presentation of findings. For example the

impact of the smoking ban (2005) and the development of super casinos (2006).

The second semester 'Holiday Project', which is assessed by a report and presentation, requires students to, identify a holiday idea, set up their own organisation, carry out research and undertake financial projections. There is also a competitive element between teams, as the top three go forward to present to senior staff at Deloitte offices with the opportunity to be awarded cash prizes to the value of £500 and a letter of commendation. The students work in their teams throughout the year and their teamworking abilities are thoroughly challenged by the holiday project. This experience also provides students with a rich source of reflective practice and insight which they are required to reflect on in relation to team working.

The 'Holiday Project' is the main focus of this case study and is described in more detail below.

The REAP Weblog Project 2007

Introduction

This report describes and analyzes quantitative and qualitative data from the 1st year students at the MDP during the academic year 2006-2007. About 550 students registered for MDP1 and these were organized into 12 group sessions with teams of 5/6 students in each group.

MDP had from its inception in 1999 embraced many of the learning principles of good teaching, assessment and feedback practice informing the REAP project. The emphasis on student reflection and self management was particularly compatible with the REAP interest in self regulation. In session 2006/7 student teams were allocated a web space facility via the well established local VLE. They could login to this to check on their marks and attendance record, to submit absence reports, to upload files for sharing to their group, and to post weblog messages to their team members. This was a novel development and aligned well with REAP interests.

Our choice of the weblog as a focus was twofold. Firstly we hoped that it could offer a lens to view team working in practice more directly (something we haven't really had), thereby allowing us to discover more about student experiences of concepts like reflection/regulation in action, as opposed to after the fact in learning diaries etc. Secondly we recognised that weblogs and other social media were developing as significant elements of business communication, and as catalysts for new enterprise and new approaches to organisational management, so it made sense to explore their incorporation in MDP.

Our overall purpose was to use the research findings to guide further development of the course design and teaching practice in MDP.

Proposal

The aim was to investigate the enhancement of student reflection and self-regulation using a class weblog, with particular reference to insights from a major assessed team assignment - 'The Holiday Project' - in relation to an assessed individual reflective activity.

During the second semester, the major assessed task for each student team is to undertake the 'Holiday Project', for which a written report and an oral presentation with power point slide show is required. During the course of the project a number of weekly 'milestone' presentations are required. The Learning Diary is submitted for feedback and marking during second semester.

Main Drivers

The main driver for choosing the blog as a unit of innovation was a desire to explore how this feature can be implemented as a possible tool for use by the students for all team working across all years, and how it can be related to existing student reflective practices such as the 1st year Learning Diary.

Objectives

1. To quantify the number of students using blogs and the nature of use.
 - To establish the frequency of logging on and the use of blogging.
 - To identify the implications for future practice.
2. To engage in qualitative research with students in terms of their use of blogging.
 - To examine how students used blogs and their patterns of activity in relation to their holiday project.
 - To explore students' perceptions of the benefits of their use in relation to Project Mgt skills, effective team working, taking more responsibility, self regulation for their own learning and project management.
3. To identify opportunities for further developments in Session 2007/8
 - Scope for extending use of the weblog.
 - To identify any lessons in relation to the practicalities of introducing the weblog.

Methods

Quantitative

We investigated:

- Weblog activity and use, files uploading.

The number of students using blogs and the nature of their use was analysed in detail from data provided by the diagnostic and monitoring facilities of the Mercury VLE.

Qualitative

We investigated 3 specific dimensions of teamworking which provided the basis for guiding the discussion and considering the responses:

- **Team structures**, such as cohesion and decision-making in relation to: evaluation of the project brief; planning and monitoring progress; leadership; team roles; division of labour; work distribution; activity management, help-seeking and problem-solving.
- **Operational factors** and constraints such as: time management; information seeking, analysis and use; weblog functionality; alternatives to blogging; relationships with tutors.
- **Reflective practices** such as: discussion of improvements to practice; making connections to the Learning diary and MDP course aims and assessments, with particular reference to Employability.



The investigation was conducted via focus groups involving 10 MDP1 teams during April 2007 involving a total of 60 students. Students were representative of the SBS student population including students from all SBS departments. The criteria for selection was primarily those teams who were engaged in using weblogs regularly-labelled 'Bloggers' (5 teams) and those who had used weblogs infrequently or not at all- labelled 'Infrequent Bloggers' (5 teams) to enable us to compare a spectrum of student responses.

Two focus groups were tape recorded and transcribed, the others were facilitated by two project members and detailed notes of the discussion were kept for analysis.

All students participating in the project completed consent forms giving us permission to analyse their weblogs as the system developed is for student access only.

Analysis

We wanted to get a sense of the student experience to complement and illuminate the qualitative analysis of blog use, so analysis is presented in two parts: qualitative and quantitative.

Quantitative Analysis & Findings

The weblog facility had been introduced in 2006/7, with the specific capacity to generate an automatic email from each weblog posting to all members of the team. However we were not prescriptive in its usage so students could regulate the amount and nature of use at their own discretion. Consequently the basic aim of this analysis was to quantify overall weblog and file sharing use. We looked at the records of students' weblog postings, file uploads and logins. We hoped this might help us draw conclusions on how students use the resources available to them, and provide a backdrop for the qualitative analysis of student experiences and perceptions.

There were 536 students, who completed the class, divided into 12 groups in 2006/7. These incorporate students from different course in the SBS first year:

Accounting (ACC), Hotel and Hospitality Management (HHM), BA Strathclyde Business School (SBS) and International Business with Modern Languages (IBML). We found that students uploaded files but did not make an excessive use of blogging. The number of logins is related to blogs, comments and files since students need to log into their account in order to do any of the above. From 539 blogs that were added in total, only 51 received comments; which indicates that students use blogs mainly to inform their team members of their progress or notify them of an uploaded file and not to discuss ideas online.

135 students used blogs while only 42 commented on an existing blog; with six the maximum number of comments per student and eight the maximum number of comments per blog. The blog that received 8 comments was added 3 minutes after the same student uploaded a word document and five minutes later the first comment had been added. In fact many blogs appear a few minutes after a file has been uploaded by the same student. The table below classifies the blogs according to the number of comments received, i.e. 488 blogs received no comment.

<i>Zero</i>	<i>One</i>	<i>Two</i>	<i>Three</i>	<i>Four</i>	<i>Five</i>	<i>Six</i>	<i>Seven</i>	<i>Eight</i>
488	30	15	4	1	0	0	0	1

The majority of the students (336) uploaded files with the maximum number of shared files per student being 48. All students logged in their MDP account at least six times while one student logged 287 times; corresponds to more than once per day. There is a positive correlation between each student's number of blogs, comments and files. This suggests that the more blogs a student posts the more likely he/she is to comment on one, and the more likely he/she is to upload a file, or vice versa.



	<i>Blogs</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Files</i>
Blogs	1.00	0.40	0.33
Comments	0.40	1.00	0.26
Files	0.33	0.26	1.00

Implications

Based on the above analysis it is clear that use of the blog resource was varied across the class, and that uploading files seemed to predominate over use to share comments. Consequently there are questions which require to be considered:

- How blogs are introduced to all student groups to increase usage?
- How best to encourage and support all students?
- What can be done to encourage students to include comments, and to analyze/discuss uploaded files, and to start to engage in more critical discussion online?

The next section explores student perceptions of the value of the weblog in relation to team project working.

Qualitative Analysis & Findings

We were concerned to explore three interrelated aspects of team working which might be enhanced by blog use, thereby increasing the potential benefit of the team projects to student learning. The aspects are:

- Operational factors
- Team structures
- Reflective practice

We chose these factors for their relative transparency in relation to discussion of team working. We devised a cue sheet with a breakdown of each aspect, which we used to guide the focused discussions, and the breakdown is given below. In practice this structuring of the discussion worked well, and we did not have to make any major changes to the framework as the discussions progressed.

The following material is organised under each aspect in turn, and selected to offer a rich picture of the variety of student experience and perspective, and to locate blog use in the team working/reflective practice contexts of each of the groups who took part.

Items are clustered under the aspect where the predominant focus of the student view resides, however there are overlaps between aspects given the complex interrelations of operations, team practice and reflection presented in the student contributions.

Our commentaries and labelling are designed to differentiate positive/negative perceptions, and to identify student suggestions for future development of blogging in MDP.

To ensure anonymity teams are referred to by number. Teams are differentiated by 'Blogger' or 'Infrequent Blogger' status and identified by student team number.

The following selections are drawn from: our notes of focus group discussion, transcriptions of recorded focus group discussion, and blog print outs for each student team.

Operational factors

The main facilitators of and constraints on team working and project completion such as:

- Weblog functionality;
- Time management;
- Information seeking, analysis and use;
- Alternatives to blogging;
- Relationships with tutors.

In relation to operational factors clear advantages were reported by all the teams using weblogs regularly. The following points from the focus groups relate blogging positively to key aspects of MDP/Holiday Project work: report writing; oral presentations; general workload/time management. There are also references to team dynamics, and suggestions to enhance the blog contribution by detailed introductory training.

'Blogger' Team 1

All participants identified that use of blogs helped with the management of the report-writing process, *'I don't know what I would have done without it'*. They felt that it helped with group cohesion and they were able to edit, proof read and prepare presentations.

'Blogger' Team 2

They used weblogs early on in semester 1, the facility helped with the first presentation. Their use became *'a team habit and easy to use'* and they used it over the Easter break to work on their Holiday project.

'Blogger' Team 3

They used weblogs right from the start *'weblogs were a crucial tool, free and efficient and made life easier, cut down on email and MSN twice a day.'* They felt that being able to have their powerpoint on file was very helpful and they became more confident and took more interest in the report.

'Blogger' Team 4

There was a greater emphasis overall on information sharing and drafts of questionnaires and making use of weblogging in a wider capacity.

In the Focus group they reported that *'They had used weblogs and shared files, they identified the advantages of providing .a record of all files and ability to monitor the process .Also in the preparation of the presentation, it was a professional way to manage the process. It was used in semesters 1 and 2.'*

'Blogger' Team 5

Operational factors time management, information seeking and analysis were reported to be all well developed in their project management. In the Focus group they identified *'we are converts to weblogs'*, they posted individual work, uploaded files, highlighted the advantages of all information being available for everyone, leading to being more organised. They commented on the facility being easier to use than email and at a practical level it is cheaper than text messaging.

Interestingly this team were in the selected three teams who presented to Deloitte, their Holiday project report and presentation were of a particularly high standard.

The next cluster report some teams who have not used the blog, and some who have used it but display less positive responses. They report a need for greater support in their use of the facility.

'Infrequent Blogger' Team 1

They usually used email, texts, uploading files and regular discussion in the class. They suggested that weblogs should be introduced at the start of the semester

**'Infrequent Blogger' Team 2**

They identified that they met regularly face to face usually twice a week and used text messaging to arrange meetings. They were unsure about how to use the weblog facility.

'Infrequent Blogger' Team 3

They used emails and text messaging to meet up. They suggested that the use of weblogs should be introduced at the start of the semester.

'Infrequent Blogger' Team 4

No use was made of weblogs they used mobile phones, text messaging and emails none of the team members used social media eg Myspace, Bebo etc .One team member stated 'If we had started it, it would have been better, it was not sold to us.'

'Infrequent Blogger' Team 5

They had been told about the weblog however it was not fully explained so they did not use it similarly they suggested its introduction earlier.

Team structures

The main dynamics and control issues in creating cohesion and facilitating decision-making in relation to:

- Evaluation of the project brief;
- Planning and monitoring progress;
- Leadership;
- Team roles;
- Division of labour;
- Work distribution;
- Activity management,
- Help-seeking and problem-solving.

Variations in team structures emerged through discussion of weblog activity e.g. emergence of leaders, shifts in leadership responsibility and students reflecting on their roles in the team, their individual strengths and weaknesses. Discussion of the weblogs enabled student to clarify that their roles became more transparent. Through reflective discussion students were able to analyse their behaviours, actions and contributions and also more specifically the division of labour which was often based on subject specialisms, expertise or interests. Team cohesiveness and accountability were recognised as being important for effective team working and seen as contributing to obtaining a good mark in the holiday project.

Simple divisions between positive/less positive responses are not as clear in relation to this aspect. It seems more helpful to regard each team in terms of its individual development trajectory, and to relate blogging to that process.

'Blogger' Team 1

Team management especially planning, monitoring, work distribution and time management were the main uses. An individual adopting a leadership role emerged at an early stage and this is reflected in the number of weblog postings 35 compared with other team members (8-18) postings. All team members engaged in the activities however more responsibility was taken by the self imposed leader.

The following quotes from Blogger Team 1 weblog files demonstrate these activities especially the leadership role:

'just a wee reminder of everything we discussed yesterday at our team meeting. We agreed that everyone would carry out the tasks as follows 17 November 2006 20.39
'just a reminder I need everyone's documents by tomorrow at the latest 18 November 21.45

Casino project *'I have uploaded the report now but it's not quite finished! I have done most of it but there's no way I can do it all on my own!'* 30 November 2006 22.23

There is recognition within the team of the contribution which she has made. *'I vote that X gets the smallest easiest bit of the next project cause she has done a load for this one.'* 3 December 2006 21:37

Another working on the Holiday project recognising his responsibilities to the team *'I think I owe the group so I can do this bit, but if u have any stuff for it sure post it up.'* 18 February:21:15

The leader is reluctant to let go *'Everyone has to do their fair share and it's not fair on me to leave this one to me again as well!!'* 21 April 2007:22:22

Other members trying to assist *'Rightly X calm yourself, delegate some of this work. I have done the activities bit ...'* 22 April 2007 15:25

In the Focus group discussion the team made reference to the self-appointed leader 'she thrives on power', they recognised that she got stressed in semester 2 and they all pulled their weight. They communicated that felt they all worked well together.

'Blogger' Team 2

Similarly the emphasis focussed on team structures, work distribution, activity management, time management and information seeking. There was a different pattern of activity with 2 members posting 19 and 16 weblogs and others not engaging to the same extent 2, 4, and 9.

They felt they worked well together as a team:

'Its been a gd year we got there in the endlol!! We should pass MDP we deserve2-we were a gd team even if we did leave things a little late!' 27 April 16:45

In the Focus group they identified that they were a cohesive group although recognising that one member had tended to be the leader *'she made sure everything was completed on time'*

'Blogger' Team 3

Team structures featured prominently team building and regulation, the leadership role emerged and this was evidenced in the posting of 27 weblogs by the leader others 17-4). There was a lot of activity posting weblogs especially over the Easter vacation period which would normally be unexpected for 1st year students. The leader maintained a strong commitment to the project task, assuming team responsibility and monitoring performance even when ill! *'Sorry folks but I won't be in today-think I have caught something, going to the hospital later on.....so you can check out the final draft of the presentation and make any suggestions. If theres anything urgent u need 2 know give me a call or a text ...sorry guys.'* 17 April 2007 07:47

In Focus group discussion they identified themselves as a 'good group' well organised with all contributing.

'Blogger' Team 4

This team use the weblogs to plan and monitor progress and allocate tasks as in previous groups a leader emerged who organised the tasks 22 weblog postings (others 16,1,&3). In the Focus groups they identified that they were a highly motivated team and cooperative, extremely well organised as the leader had organised the tasks and were seeking a high mark for their project

'Blogger' Team 5

Predominantly Accounting students (4 out of 6), all team members participated in the use of weblogs for team planning and monitoring, clarification of roles and problem solving. There appeared to be overall more equity in relation to individual contributions (postings ranging from 14-7) with only one student posting 3. They were a high performing team who were selected for the Deloitte presentation, the weblogs below are those posted on being notified of selection.



'can't believe we did YEY!!!!22 May 15.57

'woo we got 75% for our last essay!! N 70% for the presentation !!! we really do rule

!! 22 May 207 15:58

In the Focus group they identified they were a cohesive group, well organised and allocated tasks on peoples strengths.

The following groups are 'Infrequent bloggers'.

In Team 1 Team members were predominantly hotel and hospitality management students, 2 weblogs were posted by one team member they allocated tasks in their team in the group sessions.

Four weblogs were posted by one student who suggested the benefits of using it for a survey however no weblog postings were made by other team members. (Team 2)

1 weblog posting was made by 4 out of 5 students which focusing on a draft questionnaire. In the Focus groups they identified that their approach was to discuss tasks in the class and allocate them to team members. (Team 3)

Team 4 did not use weblogs, the team admitted that they were not particularly well organised although they tended to allocate tasks on specialisms e.g. finance student would manage any financial elements of the research/report.

There were no weblog postings for Team 5. They admitted that team working had not been very effective in semester 1. In the second semester they knew one another better, discussed views and allocation of tasks face to face however they did highlight the difficulties of meeting outwith the group sessions. They recognised that the use of weblogs would have been helpful.

Reflective Practices

Earlier work with the whole class in 1st semester had demonstrated that the incoming students had notions of reflective practice which are consistent with commonly held views amongst professionals, for example they understood reflection as learning from mistakes, learning from others, and also had concepts of reflection developing over time through cycles of experience and discussion. With this in mind we organised our framing of discussion of reflection in terms of:

- Discussion of improvements to practice;
- Making connections to the Learning diary and MDP course aims and assessments.
- Making particular reference to Employability.

Students responses tended to focus on more practical and concrete issues eg Several teams highlighted the importance of the value they gave to lecturer/tutor informal feedback in the group sessions throughout the year. However it required probing questions to ascertain their views on the potential of the weblog as a reflective tool, and more generally as a business development. This suggests that staff intervention to scaffold student thinking is needed in order to increase the likelihood of more in-depth reflections on how the weblog files can be used as:

- A record of the sequence of actions and interrelations with leadership roles, operational issues, project management etc. to form a resource to support reflection.
- A spur to greater awareness of their particular skills, strengths and contributions to the team project.
- A source of insight into sharing and transfer of subject knowledge between members from different backgrounds.

- A focus for reflection on the development of Employability.

A striking feature was that none of the students had considered the significance of blogging beyond the practical demands of the project. For example when asked about possible applications to business functions such as marketing, or general business communication all indicated that this was a novel idea. This has implications for further development of blogging, and social media generally, in MDP given our perception that the social media are increasingly important to a number of business settings and functions.

However a number of students identified the potential value of blogging in 2nd/3rd year MDP, when they anticipated having less time and opportunity to meet in teams. This is a valid insight given the current organisation of those years, and is a positive indication of developing reflective thinking by the students. In addition a number of students pointed out benefits they could gain from blogging in other classes, which did not formally require blogging but involved a certain level of collaborative activity.

The following comments from the two transcribed Focus Groups identify how weblogs were used or could be developed.

Blogger Team 2 when discussing the use of weblog for reflection a student identified that it could be useful *'I suppose it is a central bank of like your history in the class'*

Other views on why it is helpful revealed the following comments,

'Well, I would say a blog is a central piece of all your work.'

'It's good for communicating with your team members and keeping in touch.'

'To see what each person's doing and update it and make sure you're not repeating, like two people are doing the same thing.'

'To help each other out you need to have the sort of information that you've got. Its good for compiling the reports and the presentations.'

Blogging Team 5

'We just kind of got more and more used to using it and then it just became like, not more automatic, but you'd be working on it.'

'Its just like you could go away and do your own thing. Like ...I said no I'll need to meet up with you or whatever and then together you can just go away and do your own thing and put it on and then meet up again in class and go through it.'

'The weblog was just a way seeing how you were getting on or keeping up on planning.'

We will conclude the qualitative discussion with a quote from a student in Blogging Team 1 who summarised the benefits of the weblog as follows:

'Another important factor was the use of weblogs as we used this frequently to contact each other as not only was it saving us money on text messages but it also allowed all of the team members to see everyone's views and opinions, this allowed for less favouritism so to speak and I generally believe that our team would not have been able to function as well as it did without this tool of the weblog. Communication is such an important part of team work that without this tool we would have been lost and not have come as close friend's as we have.'

Overall the students presented a picture of having developed a sense of their own agency/responsibility, albeit to varying degrees. They also evidenced a flexible, and context sensitive capacity to blend various information sources and tools for accessing information, communicating and completing tasks. For example they indicated a strong sense of 'appropriate use' by describing how they used live meetings for idea generation/decision making, weblog for communicating and keeping everybody up to speed, text messaging/MSN for last minute communications, when closeness to deadlines precluded other options.

Conclusion

The blog played a part, for the groups which made good use of it at least, in making their self regulation processes and practices transparent. Transparency may be seen as a necessary condition of self/group feedback on comprehension and performance, which would influence subsequent behaviour. Given the relatively limited use of blogging in 2006/7, and the fact that the opportunity for supported reflection was concentrated in the focus group discussions, there is clearly scope to develop blogging more fully as a useful element of the MDP course design in 2007/8.

As a consequence of the project we can now identify self-regulation more closely with reflection, using the blog as a focus. Student reflections on team process/ experience based on blog records can highlight their growing sense of having to manage/how to manage interpersonal relations, different degrees of commitment, practical tasks, communications etc. This will enhance our use of the concept of reflection in MDP by providing an additional channel for communicating with students, and providing feedback on these complex learning experiences.

We can now extract from the weblog project elements of a process for using blogs as a means of gaining insight/giving feedback to students about team working, which could be developed in 2007/8. This can be developed as a framework for tutors to use, perhaps including a pro-forma or other device which students could use themselves to self/peer reflect. To that extent our initial desire to develop blogging as lens to gain more direct access to team processes, and thereby increase our capacity to provide feedback and foster reflection, has been met.

Points we would wish to emphasise in this process include:

- Self-regulation expressed in terms of team building. For example the student comments about early difficulties giving way to better relationships, more sensitive interpersonal conduct e.g. a sort of 'storming, forming, norming and performing' model being played out over the 2 semesters.
- Regulation via sub-grouping and manipulation of roles - shifting leadership, division of labour by agreed strengths and weaknesses.
- The regulation of communication, control and challenge we noted e.g. the subtle use of language to issue reminders to each other about outstanding work - "can anybody remember" forms as opposed to 'you haven't done your work!' expressions. They also evidenced growth in confidence in criticising each other - peer regulation, and group criticism/cohesion e.g 'We Suck!'.
- Allied to this is the way the groups developed there own vocabulary of team working by having to create headings/categories in the weblog entries e.g. 'Who's doing what'. 'blonde moment'.
- Also worth noting their awareness of how MDP works to 'bring everything together', and opinions about managing the class e.g. the blogs may be better in Y2/3 when there are less opportunities to meet live; evidence of growing capacity to self-regulate learning by appreciating/anticipating how classes change over time.

Our initial thinking would be to develop the process over the two semesters of session 2007/8. In semester 1 the emphasis would be on introducing students to the benefits of blogging for team working, and ensuring that all students were familiar and comfortable with the operation of the weblog facility. This will require creation of some specific teaching activities and learning exercises.



In semester 2 we would want to be able to introduce a stronger element of scaffolding of the reflective process, and we would want to do this progressively as part of the Holiday Project.

In both semesters we will need to develop suitable activities to upscale the weblog for years 2/3, bearing in mind that the 2006/7 first year cohort will have had an introduction, and some experience of its use.

Future Plans for MDP 2007/8

1. Presenting REAP findings to all MDP Teaching Team Away Day in September 2007 to initiate the process of developing more sophisticated approach to blogging, team working and reflection.
2. Introduce all MDP students in years 1-3 to weblogs in the first weeks of MDP including MDP3 students on international and European exchanges.
3. Tutors to encourage all students to use weblogs to assist effective team working in project work.
4. Develop more use of comments and critical perspectives in the use of blogs.
5. Develop these skills as contributing to students self regulation
6. Use weblogs as a tool in further developing reflective skills.

Next steps

Having attended a Blogs/social media forum in London in June 2007, the use of blogging in organisations was identified as increasingly important especially in relation to working with employees and user groups. We will build on this through work with a range of employers to engage in research in their use of weblogs in organisations especially in effective project management skills.

We are presenting a paper on the Weblog project at the 5th *International Conference on Researching Work and Learning Conference*, December 2007, Universities of the Western Cape and Cape Town, South Africa.