

Five really good reasons to use blogs in teaching

*Simon Reigh (Director of Faculty &
Philosophy teacher at The Sixth Form
College, Farnborough)*



(short for 'web log')

A web site on which an individual or group of users record opinions, information, etc. on a regular basis

Why did I use blogs with my students this year?

I was timetabled in a room with computers, and felt guilty about not using them enough.

I was keen to explore how I could use ICT in an interactive way.

I wanted to try and increase the amount of time my students spent writing.

First lesson

Every student sets up a blog on www.tumblr.com

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<http://edublogs.org/>

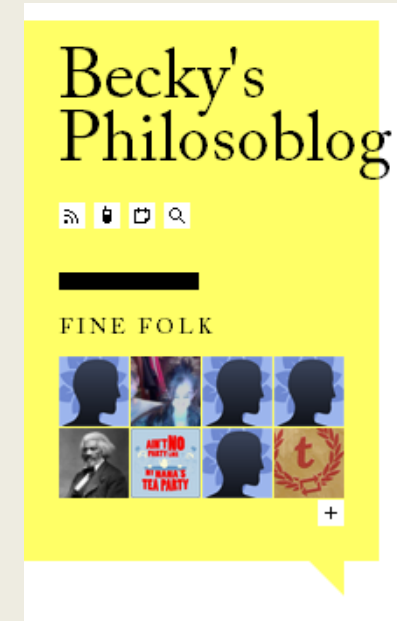
<http://wordpress.com/>

www.blogger.com

Students can personalise their blog



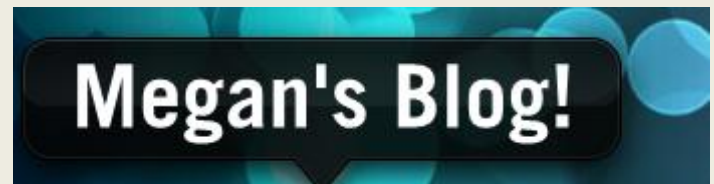
**PHILOSOPHY ACCORDING
TO LIZZIE**



thoughts in colourland



**Dave vs. The
World**



First post: How do you feel about studying philosophy for a second year?

Becky's Philosoblog



FINE FOLK



+

16
SEP

Starting Philosophy..... again.

I had such a good time last year with our class, and made a lot of great friends. This year I'm hoping to do the same thing: meet new people, make new friendships and have fun. I also really like Philosophy, and I know I find something interesting if I start talking about it outside of lessons, and I have been - to family, to friends, usually in debates or arguments.

My only anxiety this year is confusing topics: I usually get there in the end, but if I really don't understand something I'll need to talk it out, or try and look at it completely differently. I know this year is going to be a lot more work than last year, but I'm going to try my best to keep the workload organised.

I think that the strengths of my approach to Philosophy last year was trying to enjoy it as well as just learn from it: this meant that I could have a good time in lessons, whilst still focusing on the subject. I also used the revision booklets a lot, and used simplistic versions of an argument as the foundations to build up a more complicated argument, which helped me get it clearly in my head. I also found it helped to talk out a problem or argument, and *then* try and write it down.

A weakness in my approach to studying Philosophy is my tendency to just try and write down everything I can think of: at the end of last year, I started to plan answers, which helped a lot, but I still think I need to be more selective in my approach.

Last year, the revision booklets really helped me, so if these were available again, this would be great!

8 MONTHS AGO + SHORT URL ∞

Esquire Theme by **Matthew Buchanan**

Social icons by **Tim van Damme**

Selection of comments from the first post

“I hope that I am more confident in class and not as afraid to say what I feel.”

“A weakness in my approach to studying Philosophy is my tendency to just try and write down everything I can think of: at the end of last year, I started to plan answers, which helped a lot, but I still think I need to be more selective in my approach.”

“I am quite worried about the essays I will hand in as essay writing is not something I’m that good at! I’m better with pictures, shapes and colours than I am with words :)”



1. Blogs help to personalise learning

- Students reflect on their own learning goals**
- They take more control of their learning**
- They communicate with others about their learning**

Blogging can be one aspect of a student's Personalised Learning Environment e.g. www.symbaloo.com

The image shows the Symbaloo website interface. At the top left is the Symbaloo logo with the tagline "start simple". To the right of the logo are navigation links: "Add a webmix", "Language" (with a flag icon), "Simon" (with a user icon), and "Sign out" (with a close icon). Below the logo is a navigation bar with tabs: "Home Webmix", "Webmix", "News highlights", "Major news", "education", "games/toys", and "Table T". A search bar labeled "Search for tiles" is on the right. Below the navigation bar are buttons for "Edit webmix", "Delete webmix", and "Share".

The main area is a grid of tiles. The tiles include:

- BBC EDUCATION
- guardian.co.uk EDUCATION
- Gmail
- A2 Philosophy
- BLOGGING
- Twitter
- THE INDEPENDENT EDUCATION
- the TES TES FE NEWS
- Google Search
- YouTube
- Gumbl
- Facebook
- Phil Encyclo
- IEP
- BBC
- Grooveshark

A large Google search tile is highlighted in the center of the grid. It contains the text "Internet", "Images", "Maps", "News", "Weather", the Google logo, a search input field, and a "Google search" button.



2. Blogs give a voice to quieter students

Let me introduce you to my Conservative alter-ego. Who just so happens to be a pirate.

Arr, Mill! What's occurring on 'board 'yer pansy boat?! I hear 'ya called her 'Liberalism', but I think she's not worthy of a name. She be just a tub in the ocean of Political Philosophy.

How dare 'yer suggest that tradition is as bad as 'ter scurvy! Have 'yer even had scurvy? 'Yer shiny white pearls be tellin' me 'ya haven't! Tradition be a splendid thing! It keeps law 'an order on 'board 'yer ship! It goes hand-in-hand with inheritance too, which also 'be fine! In fact, I inherited this here 'Conservative' ship from 'me late father Gingerbeard (a distant relative to Blackbeard, don't 'yer



3. Blogs encourage students to be more self-critical

REVISION PLANS

I have made powerpoints in the past for philosophy and psychology. I put pictures on each slide which link to the ideas. I think my hallucinations last year had an image of purple and blue. My other subjects, that posters, diagrams and a slightly dark sense of humour can also make a difference. In Psychology we had a sheet where we could write down what we studied, if they were funny they were more relevant.

I think that I may do some essay questions for my lessons. I find copying down the diagrams for my revision more than likely remember them when it comes to my blog because I find that it can be useful. I will start in easter as I have just got my course work and a mock coming up, which I can't remember a

Posted 1 month ago

7 months ago

Progress.....

I got 81% on the latest test which im really pleased with :) I Feel im slowly begining to understand the work more, now i just need to work on learning key quotes.

I got 9/15 in the essay on the Harm to Others Principle, which is okay although i hoped i would have got slightly higher howevr when writting it i did feel as though i focused too

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Essay feedback

Overall my essay result was poor, yet not unexpected. I could foresee my poor mark and was aware of the poor quality of my essay. The only problem i have; a long running problem i might add; is relating essay title to studied content. Without clear structure of what parts I am to study, I will continue to spout irrelevant content until I feel that I have fulfilled the quota, regardless of whether anything I have written will relate even slightly to the question asked. While the argument may be sound and the conclusion logical; it would be immoral for an examiner to give me marks when i don't answer the question. I relish the opportunity to do it again and using the plan and hopefully learn to look more at

The essay that you handed to me last week

Well the the 'explain' part of the tyranny of the majority essay was good but the rest of it was pretty incoherent. However, although I misunderstood the facts of the first example, and perhaps unclearly expressed my argument (forgetting examples, not approaching things step by step etc), I do think I managed to work through a lot of the criticisms in my head and because I wasn't there for the lesson on it I had the oppotunity to read around the issue a bit more. Of course this may be the reason it came out a bit confused, but I still think it has been helpful to see what does and doesn't work a valid arguments.

Posted 6 months ago



4. Blogs encourage students to write more

Criticism of Functionalism - Qualia

When we include Qualia in discussions of the mind, functionalists seem to meet many problems with their argument. Qualia refers to the qualitative aspect of our mental states, or what something feels like within our mind. In general, the functionalist argument ignores the notion of Qualia and arguably misses out an essential part of the mind.

Problems occur when discussing 'inverted qualia', which is the theory that a person views the colour spectrum as reversed. For example, Jim may see an apple as red, yet Jackie sees the apple as blue but still refers to it as 'red' within language. In a functionalist argument, Jim and Jackie are functioning isomorphically (in the same way) however, there is no way of telling that they are seeing different colours - that the qualitative character of their mental state is missing. This further suggests that the functionalists are missing a vital part in their theory of the mind.

In response to criticisms based upon inverted qualia, functionalists could question the existence of inverted qualia altogether, for it is nothing but an hypothetical circumstance and therefore may not even exist. Functionalists could also argue that qualia is unnecessary and does not need to be included in theories of the mind - function explains the mind adequately enough. Furthermore, if inverted qualia were to exist, both Jim and Jackie would feel the same - regardless of the fact they experience different colours - and therefore there should not be a problem.

A further criticism of functionalism involves 'absent qualia'. Ned Block demonstrates this theory through his Chinese Mind thought experiment. He imagines the population of China to replicate the human brain - the people represent individual neurons with input and output processes, using walkie-talkies to communicate, much like a human brain functions. This 'Chinese Mind' system is therefore functionally isomorphic to the human brain, therefore to a functionalist this constitutes as a mind. However, Block argues that this identical system cannot have qualia like a human mind and therefore, although functionally isomorphic, it is not a mind. We can also refer to 'philosophical zombies' to further highlight this point - Cunnigham argues that as we can logically conceive the possibility of identically functioning beings without thought and consciousness, then it is therefore possible to imagine a system with no qualia at all. The 'absent qualia' criticisms suggest something counter-intuitive about a functionally isomorphic system having the ability to replicate the qualitative character of the human mind.

Firstly, functionalists could argue against all the given examples or thought-experiments, for they are only hypothetical and, 'philosophical zombies' in particular, are not possible. They could further argue that despite the fact that it feels counter-intuitive for those functionally isomorphic systems to have qualia, any system that is identical to the human mind WILL have qualia - our intuitions are not necessarily correct.

Not all functionalists agree with the idea that all functionally isomorphic systems constitute a mind, claiming that machine functionalism is far too liberal. Ellice Sober proposes the idea of teleological functionalism. This shifts the focus from the mind having mathematical functions to the mind having biological functions. Sober argues that organic entities alone can have a mind. These organic entities have developed consciousness and thought through organic evolution. The concept of being able to create a mind 'from scratch' is not possible, therefore technological machines and systems that are arguably functionally isomorphic to the human brain cannot have a mind. Qualia caused a large problem for the functionalist argument, yet Sober's theory of teleological functionalism seems to avoid the issues that derive from machine functionalism.

Problems with Eliminative Materialism

Naturally following the claim that mental states are non-existent, comes arguments against such a counter-intuitive theory. A first obvious objection of Eliminative Materialism is derived through our personal process of introspection - we have the ability to think, know our own thoughts and therefore are 'minded'. To say that the mental states such as our individual beliefs and desires are non-existent would be denying something that seems so central to us as humans. Churchland, an Eliminative Materialist responds through historical analogy. He feels that our 'introspection' is a mistaken observation - much like people of the medieval era were certain they had observed witches. In this way we are relying upon our experiences alone, which in the past have proven to be false. Maslin criticizes Churchland's point - introspection of the human mind cannot be compared to previous beliefs or incorrect theories. There is something entirely different and essential about mental states to mankind. I find it hard to believe that my desires are non-existent.

Using blogs has increased the amount that my students write by 100-200%

The statement itself is a belief and for the EM argument to work this belief must be meaningful. However, if an eliminative materialist argues against the existence of mental states (and they are true) then their own statement can no longer be meaningful. Churchland reveals a flaw in this criticism - the critic has an incorrect concept of what makes a statement meaningful and must alter their definition of what makes something 'meaningful', not to involve mental states. Again using an historical analogy, Churchland points to the medieval belief that to be alive one has a vital spirit within. If someone were to argue that the vital spirit did not exist then a critic could respond that arguing the non-existence of a vital spirit goes against itself, because without one he would be dead anyway. I feel this final criticism of EM is most likely the weakest out of the three, although still has a point. Generally, I struggle to conceive the possibility of not having desires or beliefs. EM also fails to explain what our sensations actually are, if not mental states. It seems risky to build a whole argument of the mind on what neuroscientists have not yet discovered - there is little evidence to support their claims at the present time.

The problem of hard consciousness...

Chalmers first outlined the problems with consciousness, separating 'easy' problems with 'hard' problems. Easy problems can be explained in terms of the neural mechanisms of one's mind, the development of cognitive science allows us to understand such things as our ability to react to external stimuli or how we retain information. However, problems with 'hard' consciousness cannot be understood in the same way - the concept of a subjective experience and the particular feeling of that experience cannot be known through scientific studies of our mental activity. Problems with the hard consciousness do not involve our cognitive abilities and functions or the performance of our functions; if we explain these functions the problem of conscious experience still remains. It is possible to imagine living in a world of 'philosophical zombies', a world in which we function without consciousness and purely on stimuli. However, a problem of consciousness is presented - why do we have conscious thought alongside the brain activity? Chalmers refers to an explanatory gap between the functions of our mind and our subjective experiences. Certain materialist theories may well explain how our mind reacts but this explanatory gap suggests that our conscious experience is separate to the physical workings of our mind.

Intentionality is one feature of consciousness that arguably resists reduction. Intentionality refers to the directedness of mind - a reason for particular thought and what it is about. Searle's thought experiment of 'Chinese Room' highlights our intentionality. A man within a room can how to arrange Chinese symbols and communicate with local insee speakers outside of the room. However, the man does not speak language himself and therefore his thoughts are directed elsewhere, give the fact he can respond to the Chinese speakers. Again, Putnam's sight experiment of the 'Twin Earth' highlights the same problem. If we refer to imagine identical earths - the only difference being the molecular nature of the water. The inhabitants of both earths refer to water in the same way; however they are really directing their thoughts at different things. Reducing this to functions ignores the directedness of our mind. As, arguably intentionality resists reduction.

Qualia is another feature of consciousness which seems to resist reduction. Nagel's paper 'What is it like to be a bat?' highlights the issue - in short, we may be able to examine or imagine how another organism functions but we could never possibly conceive the same thing as a bat. For example, we know that bats perceive the world through sonar and frequency levels, yet we fail to experience this ourselves. Reductive theories all have problems when the issue of qualia is brought up. Nagel, however, does not argue that physicalism is false but we cannot yet know what the physical events are which cause qualia or this conscious experience.

Jackson argues highlights the problems with reductive accounts of consciousness differently. He considers Mary - a woman confined to a black and white room, fully educated and understanding of all the physical facts of science - including neurophysiology. However, when she is let out and experiences colour herself, she learns what it is like to actually see 'red'. It is not highlighting Mary's inability to imagine a colour - she previously did not know what it was like. If our mental states could all be explained physically and she know all the causal facts of our brain, the fact that she had learnt the colour through her own experience highlights the problem of attempting to reduce qualia. Even if all the physical facts of the mental are known to us, we cannot learn about experiences in the same way, thus the problem of hard consciousness.

I Think
Therefore
I BLOG

5. Blogs are brilliant for consolidating learning

“I like using the blogs as by writing them it makes you think about what you do and don't understand. So you can realise what you need to work on...”

“I really like the use of blogging to summarise what we've learnt. Having something to look back on refreshes my thoughts about a topic as it helps me remember the frame of mind I was in and therefore the ideas we were looking at.”

“I find it is really useful to look at other student's thoughts and ideas when we answer questions, as you can browse between them all which helps with my notes, and will help with revision.”

Reading the most recent post on each blog is easy via the DASHBOARD

The image shows a screenshot of the Tumblr dashboard interface. At the top, the Tumblr logo is on the left, and navigation links for 'Dashboard', 'Explore', 'Goodies', and 'Account' are in the center. A search bar is on the right. Below the navigation, there is a row of icons for creating content: Text, Photo, Quote, Link, Chat, Audio, and Video. To the right of this is a 'Following 29 people' section. Below that is a profile for 'A2 Philosophy with' with a dropdown arrow. The main content area shows a list of posts. The first post is from 'philosophicalnonsense' with the title 'Philosophy of mind conclusion...' and a paragraph of text. The second post is from 'timscourland' with the title 'Final thoughts on mind' and a paragraph of text. The third post is from 'augustyoungone' with the title 'How I'm feeling about Political Philosophy'. On the right side, there is a 'Tracked Tags' section with 'Explore Tumblr' and a 'Radar' section with a vertical image of a person's face.

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philosophicalnonsense: reply reblog

Philosophy of mind conclusion...

Having completed philosophy of mind, I feel as though I am really prepared for this essay in the exam. The summary lesson on Tuesday was really useful in focusing my revision and showing the links between the topics, which will also help me with essay structure. Also as it is the most recent topic it is probably my strongest.

timscourland: notes reply reblog

Final thoughts on mind

Ummm I think I have all the notes and forgotten understanding that should leave me in good stead for the pre exam revision. In the exam I just hope I understand what the questions asks and when I express me own ideas, not to merge concepts to much...

augustyoungone: reply reblog

How I'm feeling about Political Philosophy


Other things you can do with blogs...

...add images, weblinks, videos, etc

Becky's
Philosoblog

10
DEC

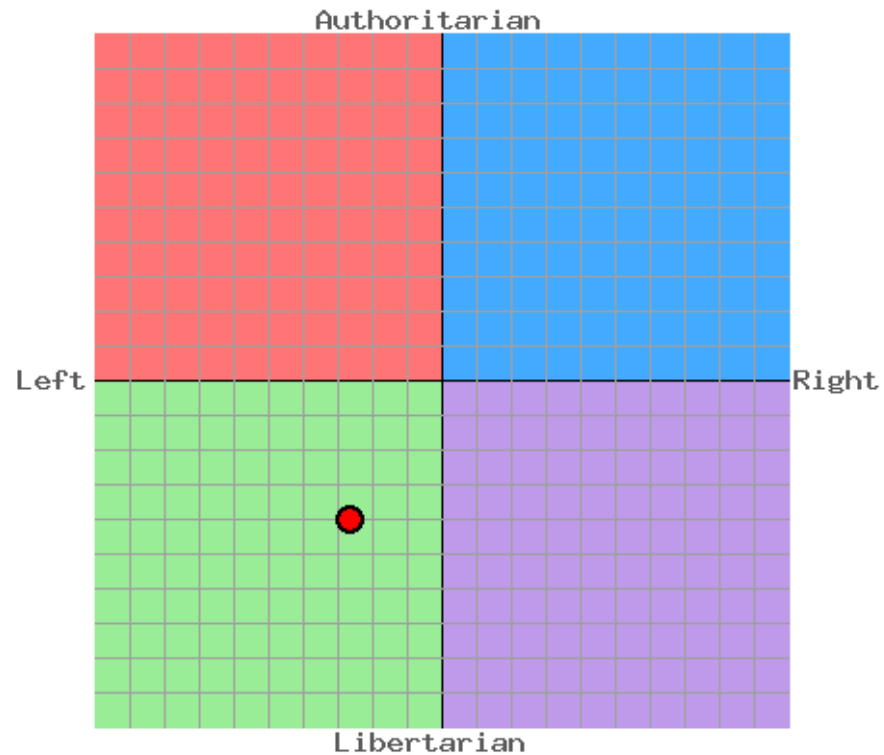
FINE FOLK



+



mm. This is pretty much where I figured I'd be (yes I am psychic)... I guess this means I'm kind of for regulating business but not super-regulator-nator, and also fairly liberal but again not going bonkers there. I'd like to think I'd be a bit more liberal than that, but hey, that's the way the cookie crumbles and all that...



Esquire Theme by **Matthew Buchanan**
Social icons by **Tim van Damme**

5 MONTHS AGO + SHORT URL ∞

...get students interacting with students in other classes/colleges/countries



(students can post comments on other blogs)

...share your own blog with students

Customize Dashboard

A2 Philosophy with Simon



Term 2, Week 13

Check your email for a message from me.

Given my absence this week you need to ensure that you stay up to date with your independent learning. By the end of the week you should have:

1. Read the rest of the eliminative materialism booklet and blogged an entry outlining and discussing the criticisms of EM.
2. Read the consciousness booklet (booklet 6) and blogged an entry on the hard problem of consciousness (to include discussion of Chalmers, Nagel and Jackson).

Over Easter you need to:

1. Continue with your political philosophy/Mill revision
2. Read the JUST WAR booklet and completed the questions - available on Moodle if you haven't picked it up from College.

If you have any questions, please email me. I will be checking my email over Easter.



Term 2, Week 12

We finished off functionalism, and you wrote about some of the criticisms of this theory of mind in your blog. This now means that in your blog (and with other blogs written by those in your class) you should be able to put together a complete essay in response to a question such as "Assess functionalism". You are strongly recommended to do this - it will help you when you come to revise.

We started looking at Eliminative Materialism towards the end of the week, a position that many of you were immediately sceptical of, but by the end of the lesson you felt that the theory was strong!

Next week we will finish EM off and start to look in more general terms at the idea of consciousness.

About me



★ Ask me anything

People I follow





1 WEEK AGO

1. Explain the conceptual problem with interactionist substance dualism.

The conceptual problem is that it is difficult to conceive of something physical causing some non-physical; the two substances are so entirely different we can't really comprehend a connection between the two. There are two assumptions as to why or how this happens: that causation must always be local (*I don't really understand what this means*) and that whenever causation takes place, some property of the cause must be transmitted to the effect. But because physical body and non-physical mind share no properties then it leaves an impossibility that there can be any causal transactions between them.

2. Explain the empirical problem with interactionist substance dualism.

The empirical problem arises from what we know in science about causation - the causal closure of the physical world. This means that all physical events have physical causes. Since causal closure is true and mind-body interaction does occur then substance dualism must be false. A non-physical mind cannot cause your physical body to act because then it seems that some physical energy was generated from nowhere.

3. Discuss whether these problems can be solved.

The idea of causation always being local was rejected by the Newtonian theory of gravitation. (Don't have much to say on this because I don't know what it means by 'local'). The claim that any causal transaction transmits properties does not express a conceptual truth. There are scientific counterexamples to prove this: motion in the body can be produced by a cause which does not involve motion.

Hume decided that there are no a priori constraints on what can cause what, leaving a possibility for body to cause mind or mind to cause body.

4. Explain Leibniz' attempt to solve the problem of mind-body causation.

Leibniz denied mental causation. There is no problem with the interaction between the mind and body because they never interact. His view is that at the time of creation, mind and body were perfectly synchronized by God so that they perform at the same time and so may appear to interact but in fact there is no causal relationship between the two.

5. Explain Malebranche's occasionalism.

Malebranche also claimed that mind and body never interact, instead God intervenes by taking messages from one to the other (occasionalism).

...cover
work

...have a class blog

Students could take it in turns to type up what has been learnt each lesson

...collaborative work with colleagues/teachers from other Colleges

+ Follow [Dashboard](#)

Using blogs with sixth form students

Why did I decide to use blogs with students?

In the past few years I have been fortunate to be timetabled in a room with 20 computers, but have felt guilty about not using them enough. Sure, I used them to get students researching things on the internet and preparing Powerpoint presentations, but I wanted a way of using ICT to *really* enhance student learning in my subject (A level Philosophy). I've known about blogging for a long time, but never thought about how it could be used in teaching.

I had also been reflecting on the amount of time my students spent *writing* in lessons (as opposed to listening to me, reading or discussing things as a class). I'd always seen essays (completed at home) as the time when students would get stuck into writing. Given that they are assessed in the exam solely on their ability to write philosophical essays, it was (slowly) dawning on me that this was probably a weakness.

Now that I am using blogs during lessons my students spend much more time thinking about the topics we are covering, and writing about them. In recording their thoughts or explaining ideas in their blogs, they are thinking much more carefully about what we are covering. As a result of using blogs, many more opportunities have been given to each student to test out their understanding with me in class, rather than wait for me to feedback to them on the essays they write at home.

There are plenty more reasons why I think blogs can have value in teaching, and I will share these in this blog.

Now that I use blogs, the focus of my teaching has changed (and I now feel less guilty about being timetabled in a computer room!).

Posted 1 week ago



Using blogs with my A level Philosophy students has changed the focus of my teaching and improved the support that I give to students. This blog records my thoughts on the value of blogs in education. Please feel free to leave comments, and add any ideas of your own.

Ask me anything

Have you got any comments?

My blog All of Tumblr

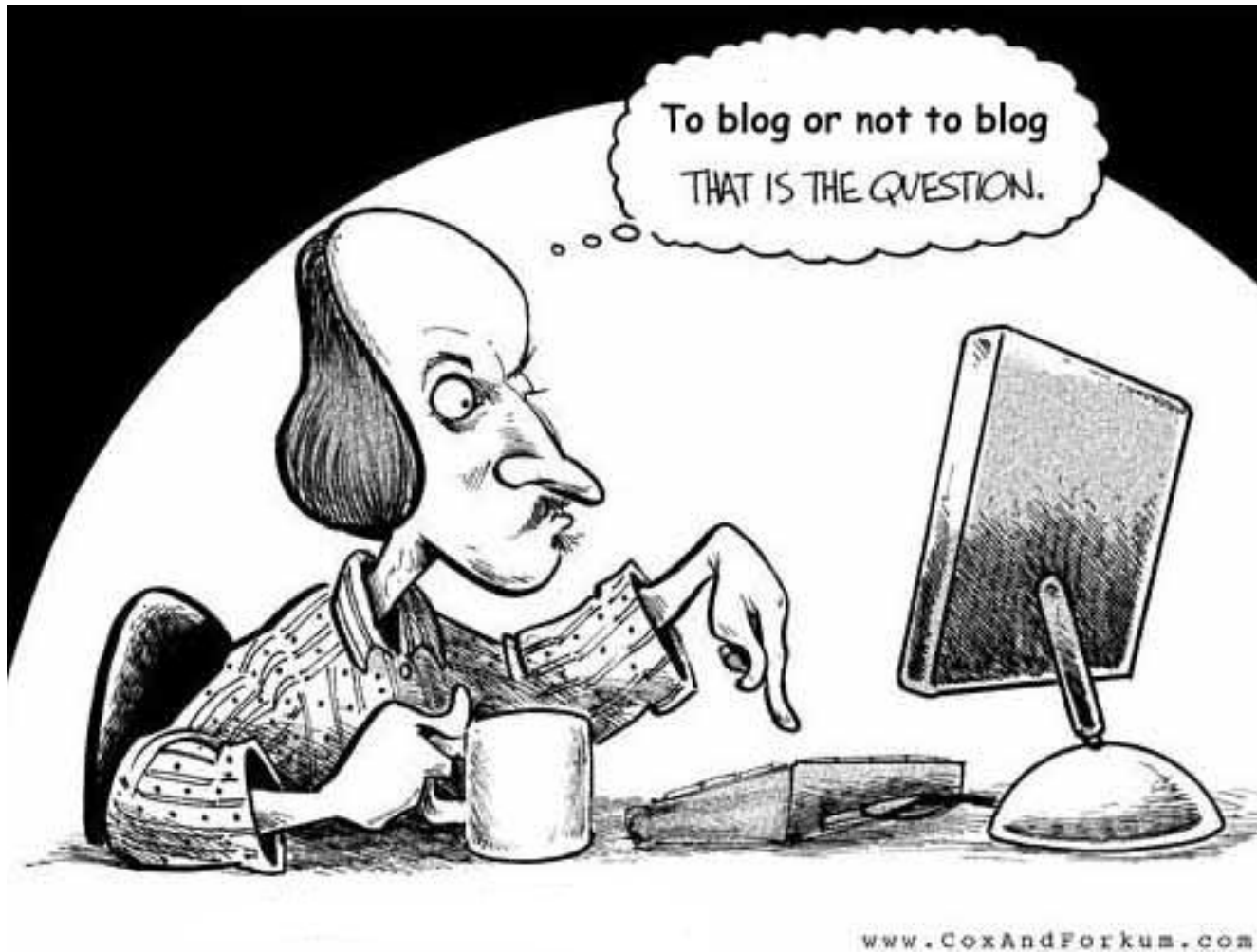
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Could you use blogs in your subject?

If you have used blogs in teaching and want to share your experience with others, please consider adding a comment to my **BLOGS IN TEACHING** blog

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