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## Benefits of Blogging in a Fourth Grade Classroom

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# Benefits of Blogging in a Fourth Grade Classroom

**Abstract**

The current study examined the impact of using a blog in the classroom and how it affected the literacy skills of fourth grade students. I worked with 25 fourth grade students. The study consisted of observing the students using a blog, analyzing the blog responses the students typed, and using a questionnaire to find out how the students felt about the blog experience. The findings of this study were that blogs increase student motivation, blogs were a social, reflective tool for learning, and using a blog built student familiarity with blogging and technology experience. This study has implications for elementary school teachers as well as for technology language instruction.

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Benefits of Blogging in a Fourth Grade Classroom

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### Abstract

The current study examined the impact of using a blog in the classroom and how it affected the literacy skills of fourth grade students. I worked with 25 fourth grade students. The study consisted of observing the students using a blog, analyzing the blog responses the students typed, and using a questionnaire to find out how the students felt about the blog experience. The findings of this study were that blogs increase student motivation, blogs were a social, reflective tool for learning, and using a blog built student familiarity with blogging and technology experience. This study has implications for elementary school teachers as well as for technology language instruction.

### **Introduction**

The nature of literacy, once considered to encompass only the reading and writing domains, has changed dramatically over the past few decades to include multimodal literacies involving new understandings about culture, language, and the way people learn. Literacy and our understanding of it are constantly evolving as people and cultures change over time. One addition to this idea of literacy is digital literacy. This new literacy has changed the way people communicate all over the world. Teachers are using internet technology to increase the literacy skills of their students in many ways. One of these ways is through the use of a blog (sometimes referred to as a weblog) in literacy instruction. Blogs are used all over the world. Therefore, they are a means of communication by people in countless languages. In an elementary classroom where students are encouraged to use writing mechanics, proper grammar, correct spelling, and share their ideas with others, blogs are a tool teachers can use to connect these principles with digital literacy so that students build their skills in all these academic areas.

By exploring this area, I will gain insight to the benefits blogging has on linking student's background knowledge in printed writing with digital writing. Typing on a computer has become a much more prevalent form of writing (versus pencil and paper) over the past few decades. Using a blog as a writing tool will also give students the opportunity to improve on their typing abilities, a skill that is nearly necessary in today's society.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The framework of literacy, considered by many to encompass only the areas of reading and writing, has greatly transformed since the Era of Conditioned Learning in the 1950's. It now includes multidimensional literacies that contain new understandings about the language, culture and social aspects of the way people learn. The nature of literacy is subject to constant

uncertainty due to the evolution of technology. The nature in which this literacy ability and understandings are taught, reflect the viewpoints of society at the time. These viewpoints are constantly evolving and adapting, just as people do so with their culture.

From the moment they enter the world, humans develop and construct different dimensions of language and understanding of how these dimensions are interrelated with one another. Children learn language in similar ways, for both communicative, functional purposes as well as for social reasons. Kucer (2009) explains that children may initially learn to use these different purposes through non-linguistic means, and then apply these functions to language as they further develop. Thus, language is immediately used with the child by those adults in the discourse community in what Gee (2001) refers to as an individual's primary discourse. Primary discourse is the language that is learned in the home and local community, used everyday, for functional purposes such as communication with family members and socialization. Humans are born with an innate desire to be social and share emotional bonds with others, and are able to facilitate this desire through the learning of language. Children learn and develop their language skills through sounds, sights, and consistent exposure to the speech of others in their primary discourse. Blogging can be a language development tool. In using a blog, a child has the ability to create and be exposed to language written by others. Not only do blogs include written posts, but they also have the potential to contain graphic elements and auditory content that aids in the learning of language.

Learning language is not a conscious decision made by a young child, but rather, a natural process as children are born into a literate world where they are immersed and surrounded by oral language, and where print is abundant as well. According to Gee (2001), "acquisition is a process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models and a

process of trial and error without a process of formal teaching (p. 8).” Literacy acquisition is a universal acquisition. People are immersed and participate in an active, literate society. It’s through these social interactions that they develop a sense of their surroundings. In the context of reading, children use their background knowledge to make connections to the text. The reader as a text participant engages meaning-systems within the discourse. Goodman (2001) refers to these textual experiences where comprehension of written language occurs as literacy events. As children participate in these literacy events, they develop three principles about literacy. They gain understanding about the way meaning is represented (relational principle), the reasons and purposes (functional principle), and organization (linguistic) of and within written language (Goodman). Beyond the use of relevant text, the acquisition of literacy also depends on the role of the teacher, and the continuum of home and school (Kucer, 2009). Explicit and guided instructional introduction to texts and genres that trigger background knowledge within the students therefore motivate them to learn. Motivation to learn is also important in the acquisition process. When students learn that reading and writing has the power to change their views of the world, and to use those literacy skills to see beyond what they already know, they gain a critical perspective to learning. Critical literacy involves having a critical perspective on language, text, and social practices (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Students take more credit for their learning when they use their critical thinking skills to affect meaningful change. They also take greater pride in their writing when the topics they are working with are socially significant. Through critical literacy, literacy instruction gives students the opportunities to critique the discourses that society sets as the “norm” and allows them to develop their literacy skills in a meaningful way.

Similar to literacy, technology is always changing. In this sense, technology parallels literacy (Baron, 2001). For every new technology, a new literacy emerges. These new

technologies engineer our literacy practices. Baron (2001) highlights the stages of literacy technology by addressing how the pencil, telephone, and computer developed into authentic literacy tools. At one time, the pencil was a new technology that people adapted to their lives (Baron, 2001). The evolution of technology is occurring today as people are adapting their lives to computers by using them to communicate, retrieve and store information, carry out recreational activities, and more. Technology is a process and literacy is a human made artifact, and both reveal the cultural values of the present time. Today, people are learning by experiences in new online communities through reading and writing. Online identities are being socially constructed from influences such as popular culture.

Educational technology is nudging literacy instruction beyond the traditional oral and print based materials. Schools have traditionally focused on these print based texts however, children are increasingly becoming exposed to multimodal forms of text and they develop the skills to interpret and analyze that text as well. Computers are creating new opportunities for writing and collaboration across the globe. The internet is constructing bridges for students to communicate with others they may never have the opportunity to do otherwise. By changing the way information is processed, technology is influencing the way people read, write, listen, and communicate. New literacy and technology has created a participatory culture where peer discussion can occur in online blogs, wikis, and social networks. These online literacy tools can be used to record a variety of student responses to any content area. However, they should not be used simply to replicate traditional literacy practices. From a critical perspective, Lankshear and Knobel (2003) define this new social way of creating meaningful content through participation in discourses, many of which are technology based, as new literacies. Teachers have the

responsibility to respond to the nature of literacy in the present day, and understand that the needs of learners must be appropriate for a technical age.

### **Research Question**

Since internet technology is so prevalent in today's society, it is important that children become acquainted with this new literacy by using their knowledge of printed language and adapting it to digital language. This action research project asks, how can the use of an online blog benefit students in an elementary school classroom?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

The following research displays what has been discovered about using blogging in the classroom by professionals in the research field. The exploration into the pedagogical benefits of blogs tends to center around several areas: blogs as a tool to improve literacy skills, blogs as a tool for language development, blogs as a social, reflective tool, and blogs as a motivational tool. I will discuss these areas and the results of the research they present in further detail.

#### **Blogs in Education**

As the internet becomes increasingly prevalent in people's lives, implementing twenty-first century technology in the classroom is a necessary step to take. Teachers are using internet technology to familiarize themselves with new literacies. Definitions of literacy must be widened to include skills with digital technology because children will need the ability to use information technologies in order to function effectively as citizens and workers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Glewa & Bogan, 2007). New forms of media literacies have been argued to offer

unique and potentially rich learning opportunities as they are the result of a dramatic shift in how we are beginning to interact with one another and what we are coming to value (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). New media literacies and tools such as blogging can offer classroom teachers a type of support where student voices can become a more integral part of classroom instruction (Gee, 1996; Luehmann & McBride, 2009). A web log or blog has been classified as an unedited communication and publishing tool that makes online interactive activities simple and accessible (Coulter & Draper, 2006, Simsek, 2009). Presented to the public in 1990 through their use by journalists, technologists, and large media companies, Zawilinski (2009) refers to a blog as “an easily editable webpage with posts or entries organized in reverse chronological order” (p. 650). Blogs can have multiple pages and be categorized in many ways to organize posts and comments. They allow people with little technical knowledge to publish their thoughts, opinions, and emotions online, and share their writing with others (Deng & Yuen, 2010). The timely publishing feature of blogging has attracted many people to this medium (Simsek, 2009). In this way, a blog is considered a computer-mediated communication (CMC) that offers people the chance to write in a context that is connected to real life (Sun, 2010).

### **Blogs as a Tool to Improve Literacy Skills**

The use of educational technology has a long history. Recent developments, such as web-based communication tools, can potentially support instructional practice in education (Ellison & Wu, 2008). The social and technical affordances of blogs can be utilized to meet these learning goals. A growing number of authors see much potential of blogs in the classroom. Blogging is about literacy. To blog is to read and write (Gavran, 2009). “When students are blogging as a class, they are writing in order to read, and reading in order to write” (Zawilinski,

p. 652-654). In tying these two literacy skills together, blogging provides students the opportunity to improve their reading and writing skills.

Growth towards digital literacy involves many steps that have been well researched and documented. As a result of technological advancements in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, digital fluency has become a needed component to any literacy program (Glewa & Bogan, 2007). Current educational initiatives require educators' involvement in students' growth towards literacy. Traditional literacy teaching methods can now include blog technologies. Many schools can now offer students the opportunity to use a blog as a tool to stimulate thought, discussion, and their own personal literacy. Calls for reform emphasize this importance of student-centered pedagogy that engages students in constructing their own understanding through active participation (Luehmann & MacBride, 2009). However, implementing blogs in the curriculum is very challenging even for classroom teachers committed to this pedagogical approach. The increased burdens of standards-based accountability such as those resulting from the "No Child Left Behind" legislation have further exacerbated these challenges (Settlage & Meadows, 2002). New media literacies and tools such as blogging may offer classroom teachers the type of support they are looking for to accomplish their pedagogical goals.

Writing is a critical, lifelong skill students need to acquire. Developing fluency in the writing process has always been a fundamental goal of schools. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2002) indicate that two thirds of the nation's students performed below the proficiency level in writing. Therefore, educators and researchers are trying to find ways for effective writing instruction. In a study by Glewa & Bogan (2007), researchers were interested in the potential of digital technologies in an elementary school classroom. Students were taught how to write complete sentences, paragraphs, and how

punctuation is placed within writing using a keyboard. These fundamentals of word processing needed to be pre-taught so the students could independently post their blog entries. Throughout the six month study, students practiced using their newly acquired knowledge about the writing process using Microsoft Word software (Glewa & Bogan). During this time, students made further requests to learn how to imbed drawings, pictures, and clip art as well as how to improve the display of their writing by changing the font styles and sizes. This same behavior has been observed in other blogging studies as well (Armstrong & Retterer, 2008; Baggetun & Wasson, 2006). Based on the results of post-blog interviews, students realized they had an increased awareness of the impact and quality of their writing due to their experiences with the blog.

Young adolescents grow as writers when they write their blogs, and their technology skills also grow as they manipulate the look of their blogs, update the features they include, and troubleshoot problems (Read, 2006). Adolescent girls have emerged as the largest demographic of bloggers in the United States (Davis, 2010). Davis performed a study to examine girls ages 17 to 21 who had experience blogging for three years or more. Over the years, the girls noticed that the content and style of their blog writing had changed considerably.

Some may argue that traditional writing instruction can be modified to accommodate learners' needs (Glewa & Bogan, 2007; Kelly & Safford, 2009; Simsek, 2009). The demands of local, state, and national assessments leave educators little time to add supplementary activities to their already jam-packed curriculum. Classrooms are ill-equipped to support students in new media literacies given their constraints of time, standardized tests, large class sizes, and a historical culture of individualized accountability (Lewhmann & Frink, 2009). Simsek (2009) addressed this issue by asking the question, is there any difference between the writing performance of students who receive in-class writing instruction and that of those who received

the writing instruction integrated with blogging? In this study, the classroom teacher formed a learner blog that made use of blogging in all stages of the writing process, from drafting, to publishing, to assessment. Using the blogs as a tool for writing allows students to share their writing and in return, ease the feedback process. Students are also able to see the feedback their teacher gives to other students, furthering their understanding of what makes successful writing. If students know what they have written will be read by someone other than their teacher, they will produce more meaningful and authentic text (Simsek). When students write only for their teacher, they may adjust their writing to make it something their teacher wants to hear rather than something that is meaningful to them. Knowing that their published writing will be read by someone other than their teacher may cause students to pay more attention to the content and organization of their writing. Through these aspects of blogging, students develop a sense of ownership, producing positive outcomes in their learning process.

Contemporary educational standards place great emphasis on empowering students to live in and cope with the fast changing world. This new learning approach should place emphasis on students' active involvement in an authentic situation, and such an approach should facilitate the development of their critical thinking skills such as classifying, comparing, and inferring. When students blog, they are engaging in an authentic writing activity (Simsek, 2009; Glewa and Bogan, 2007; Read, 2006). In a student-centered learning process, there is more student participation and independence required. These activities are important to develop literacy skills because they help students see the value of their learning experiences. The goal of the research conducted by Kai-Ming Li (2010) was to show how blogs can be used to enhance critical thinking skills in student-centered learning activities. The teacher's role was to provide guidance, resources, and support to the students. Over the ten month trial, the data in the study

proved that critical thinking skills were enhanced with the use of blog technology. One important implication Li also gained from the study was that timely feedback is important to the students who posted responses on the blog. Timely feedback allows students to reflect on their learning experiences and refine their thinking skills. According to Li, “a culture of blending the use of technologies in learning should be established at an early stage of learning such as during primary education” (p. 47). A culture that includes technology would allow critical thinking skills to begin developing at an early age.

As a technological, digital learning tool, blogs have proven to be a beneficial supplement to student learning. However, blogging may not independently increase student learning. There needs to be a purpose to using a blog so it can benefit student learning. Blogs have many unique communicative capabilities, however instructors need to know how to capitalize on these capabilities if they want to see positive results in their students’ performance. In terms of engagement, new internet technologies can reinvigorate students whose daily media practices may already involve these technologies like instant messaging, downloading files, and online games. Ellison and Wu (2008) investigated student perceptions of blogging in the classroom regarding how they can be helpful for understanding course content. Integrating these technologies into schoolwork was the motivation Ellison and Wu had in their study. “Writing is central to the act of blogging” (Ellison & Wu, p. 105), and it was hypothesized that students might attend more carefully to online writing opportunities if writing was completed in this format. As a result of the study, it was found that the new experience of blogging was more engaging for students than writing with traditional pencil and paper (Ellison & Wu).

Inserting a blog into the teaching practice can raise many questions and desire to learn more about the use of blogs. Using technology in the classroom is one way to engage students in

their learning. Done from a student-centered perspective, Soares (2008) sought to have a better understanding of students' perceptions of the value of blogs in their learning. The goal of the study was to foster learner autonomy and independence by doing things like uploading songs, publishing written assignments, and including hyperlinks on the blogs without being asked (Soares). As the study continued, it was determined that the students looked forward to receiving messages and commenting orally on what had been posted but would not reply digitally. The students were not highly motivated or as active on the blog as had been anticipated. This study suggests that blogging in education is still an individual venture that comes from one's interest in new technology. Also, the practitioners of the study did not encourage the students to make spontaneous use of the tool by offering some kind of concrete incentive (Soares). Due to these findings it is important to remember that students' level of expertise, interest in technology and understanding of what an educational blog is may vary greatly. Therefore, the teacher or practitioner needs to have knowledge and experience with blogs in order to choose the right platform for their students' needs.

### **Blogs as a Tool for Language Development**

Educators of literacy worldwide share the duty of teaching students to read, then provide them with practice and experience in comprehending what others have written (Tse, Yuen, Loh, Lam, & Ng, 2010). In traditional composition instruction, instructors usually teach sentence structure (Lou, Wu, & Shih, 2010). Students then have to create sentences independently, then connect the sentences, and finally organize them properly into paragraphs to produce a completed composition. While giving students practice in expressing their own thoughts in writing, these same teachers continue to refine the semantics and syntax of the writing that is produced (Tse, Yuen, Loh, Lam, & Ng, 2010). Communication technology is increasingly

available to a wide range of those in society. It is their hope that students will develop these skills and conventions, and then use them to communicate outside of school.

With the growing popularity of computers and the Internet, communication is no longer limited to a traditional face-to-face form of communication. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) provides mutual and multiple ways of communication, and has been widely used in language teaching and learning (Sun, 2010). It increases language exposure and production. Sun (2010) conducted a study in a foreign language classroom that focused on the language development of students learning English as a foreign language. Students tended to produce language that was more complex in their first three blog entries than in their last three blog entries (Sun). These results led to the conclusion that a blogging environment prompts authentic, purposeful language use, and enhances writing proficiency in foreign languages. Language learners need opportunities to produce “output” in order to develop specific language skills (Sun). This output is crucial in promoting language acquisition. Similarly, in a study by Lou, Wu, & Shih (2010), the 40 freshman high school student participants from Taiwan reported that blogging Chinese language composition positively enhanced their writing. In traditional composition instruction, instructors usually teach structure and sentences. Students then have to create sentences on their own, connect these sentences, and finally organize them properly into paragraphs to produce a comprehensive piece of writing. Students need opportunities to recognize how authors express their thoughts and practicing imitating their approach to writing while developing language proficiency. In blogging instruction, the instructor uses blogs as teaching materials to conduct composition instruction. Overall, the students preferred the blogging Chinese language composition instructional model over traditional composition instruction (Lou, Wu, & Shih).

Schools are aware that students are using blogs to meet the educational objectives by using language to communicate with others outside of school. Bartlett-Bragg (2003) found that blogging can be used to positively enhance the teaching and learning of language, and educational researchers are alert to this need in order to investigate the impact of the use of blogs by students in language development (Lou, Wu, & Shih, 2010; Tse, Yuen, Loh, Lam, & Ng, 2010).

From a sociocultural perspective, teachers and students are neither passive recipients of curriculum nor fully independent agents, rather they negotiate what they do and who they are in practice. Armstrong & Retterer (2008) observed the impact different forms of blogging had on communicating in a foreign language. They decided it would be most beneficial to have a community blog and a personal blog with each serving different functions. As a result of the one semester trial, 100% of the students responded that they felt somewhat or much more comfortable writing in Spanish and confident in their ability to manipulate the verb forms in Spanish at the end of the semester by using the blog as a tool for language development (Armstrong & Retterer). The students used a variety of tenses, moods, and vocabulary to express their ideas on the community blog and personal blog. Teachers can be encouraged to learn that writing more frequently, and perhaps more informally, students feel more confident in their ability to write in a foreign language when using a blog as a writing tool.

### **Blogs as a Social, Reflective Tool**

Two important characteristics of the social constructivist view of learning are that the learner is an active agent in constructing his/her own knowledge and that social interaction is important in this process (Boling, 2008, Li, 2010). Learning is therefore a social activity in

which knowledge is actively internalized through conversation and interaction between the learner and a more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978). Students can benefit from social learning because they are able to share ideas, collaborate with one another, and ask questions to promote their understanding of concepts and materials. A blog is a social media that encourages a more interactive role for the user. With this feature, a blog is an excellent platform that allows users to read information, express thoughts and feelings, react on others' works, and volunteer comments or suggestions from others while solving a problem (Baggetun & Wasson, 2006; Li, 2010).

John Dewey (1910), one of the key figures behind the concept of reflection, defined reflection as an “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, p. 6). Not every thought that comes to mind can be labeled as reflective. Reflection requires a meaning-making process that turns new experiences into learning with references to old ones (Deng & Yuen, 2010; Sharma, 2010). Students encounter difficulties engaging in reflection and self-organized learning when they are not given sustained support. Many researchers have chosen to use blogs as an online forum that students may write reflections and instantly receive feedback from peers and instructors (Ducate & Lomika, 2008; Sharma, 2010). Several have found the clearest role of a blog is that of a means for reflecting publicly on a topic (Baggetun & Wasson, 2006; Ellison & Wu, 2008; Davis, 2006). Blogs have emerged as the most viable alternative to engage students in writing and reflection (Sharma, 2010). By their nature and structure, blogs encourage feedback by both readers and writers. In education, they can represent learner spaces that are both social and student owned. This sense of

ownership can be empowering for blog writers because they do not need to be formal, technical samples of writing (Ducate & Lomika, 2008).

Most Americans use their blogs for personal expression to record and reflect on their daily experiences (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Engaging students in reflection should be an important goal for educators. Blogs are a convenient tool for students to journal their learning processes. If used appropriately, this digital literacy has the potential to facilitate reflection and learning (Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup, & Conole, 2008; Sharma, 2010). In addition, blogs support students in recording and revisiting experiences by viewing the progress of their thinking over time. These are important aspects of reflective learning. Professional literature on blogs suggest that writing blogs involves individual engagement with content and personal meaning making (Deng & Yuen, 2010), that blogs are an expression of individual and intimate reflections (Davis, 2010), and that through blogging, blog users position themselves in a contemporary web of collected thoughts, feelings and actions (Baggetun & Wasson, 2006; Davis, 2010; Sharma, 2010). From a social perspective on blogs, it is also suggested that over time, blog authors gravitate toward each other to form networks of conversations to interchange opinions and feedback (Baggetun & Wasson, 2006; Davis, 2010; Thein, Oldakowski, & Sloan, 2010).

In a study by Davis (2010), it was found that blogging allowed a sample of adolescent girls to maintain close ties with their friends from high school. Sixteen of the twenty girls initially began blogging because one or more of their friends from school had a blog and they wanted to participate in a common activity. One participant in particular, Maggie, did not know in her early blogging experience what she wanted to write about, so she looked to her friends for guidance. Following her observations, Maggie shaped her own writing accordingly. Currently, all twenty female adolescents say that interacting with friends on their blog continues to play a

central role in their current blogging practices (Davis). The female participants claimed to use their blogs to engage in the important developmental tasks of identity expression and social interaction. Read (2006) concluded similarly after performing a study on male and female adolescents. Her motive for the study was to figure out what motivated young adolescents to write for themselves. Then insight could be provided into how to design effective writing experiences in school. She found the most common motive for blog writers was for the purpose of communicating with friends and updating their readers on their activities and whereabouts (Davis, 2010). Teachers should take advantage of the social potential of the school context and make school writing more like self-sponsored writing.

Blogs are an appealing reflective tool for teachers to use outside of the classroom as well. They offer an opportunity for interaction outside the walls of a traditional academic setting. Writing, like speaking, is a social act that differs according to the situation in which it occurs (Read, 2006). Teachers are beginning to employ different types of social software, including blogs, into the curriculum. Social software integrates both tools and modes that result in a richer online social environment (Ducate & Lomika, 2008). Educators may be attracted by the interactivity and collaboration features of blogs. Blogs can be a collaborative activity that readers can choose to link, reference, react to, or add information thus shaping the content of the blog while also creating a type of community (Ducate & Lomika, 2008). Ducate and Lomika carried out a study to examine the steps students progress through while reading and writing blogs and how self-expression is characterized in the blogosphere. As a result, students found it interesting to learn about their classmates. Also, when the writing topics presented were personal to the participants, the postings were normally much more unique and candid (Ducate & Lomika).

A key element in helping students understand texts and the messages they deliver, is to teach them strategies for inquiry into the construction of other social and cultural worlds. Thein, Oldakowski, & Sloan (2010) sought to teach the strategies of: immersing, identifying, contextualizing, representing, critiquing, and transforming, by engaging them in a blogging project in which they explored the socially and culturally constructed aspects of their own lived worlds and comparing it to the traditional literary text *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. A unique feature of blogs distinct from other online literacies used in educational settings is that they are public and provide an audience for student writing (Thein, Oldakowski, & Sloan). This quality makes blogs useful spaces for students to be both personally reflective about the perspectives they hold, but also makes them aware of the perspectives of others who may be reading their blogs. Similarly, Cowan (2008) studied the effects of developing and implementing a school-wide blog as a common place for students and teachers to discuss books. It was found that the blog led to increased social discussions about literary works among students from various backgrounds and grade levels (Cowan). Blogs increase “dialogism” in students’ interactions and create the potential to help students question norms, beliefs, and values. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that a blog is a social, reflective tool that can spark conversations among students about the literature they read in school.

The participatory structure of blogging may focus communication patterns so that knowledge-sharing is increasingly student-to-student rather than student-to-instructor. Students may be more invested in their reading and writing if they are doing so for an audience they are familiar with and can relate to on a personal level. Blogging can potentially provide students with a window into peers’ perspectives, a doorway to a global audience, and a mirror through which to reflect on their own thinking and writing (Ellison & Wu, 2008).

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings in these studies, it can be concluded that blogging in the classroom improves literacy skills, develops language, and can be a social, reflective tool for people to use their digital literacy skills. The trend for students to use information technology inside and outside of the classroom should not be ignored. Teachers should plan lessons to refine the language used by students in blogs to further develop literacy development. Parents should also be given support about how to guide students using technology in their homes so that blogging becomes a vehicle for literacy learning and growth.

## **Method**

### **Context**

Research for this study took place in a general education classroom of fourth grade student participants at Newport Elementary School. The students live in a suburb of western New York. The racial makeup of this village suburb is predominately white (96.99%) and the median income is \$53,375. The socioeconomic status of the families in the suburb is middle class. Many families in Newport use their own vehicles to get to school, work, the library, or shopping (grocery, the mall, etc.). In addition, some families are in close enough proximity to walk to these places. For those families who do not own a car, there is RTS bus service (21 Newport) that can take residents downtown and back, and stops at places such as: Newport Village Hall, Monroe Career Center (BOCES), Hall of Justice, and Target.

Newport Elementary School is an intermediate school that contained 803 students in grades three, four, and five during the 2009-2010 school year. It has an extremely small

percentage of ethnicity in the make up of its student body and staff. The fourth grade students in the study are all nine or ten years old. According to the school's NYS report card for the 2009-2010 school year, 89% of the students are labeled as "white." In this fourth grade gifted and talented classroom, 24 students are White, while one student is Latino. The fourth grade class is divided among gender, 12 females and 13 males. For most students, they are comfortable coming to school in the sense that they fit in ethnically with the rest of their classmates because they are no different from the overwhelming norm. In many cases of minority students in the school, they may fail in school because their culture does not match what is expected (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Three students in the class are diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and have 504 Plans to accommodate their attention needs. One student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for speech and hearing. This student has a FM system that is used in the classroom to assist in this hearing need.

### **Participants**

17 students from this fourth grade classroom participated in this research study. The students represent a range of skill levels and learning styles within the class. The students were all between the ages of nine and ten years old. Eight of the participants are female and nine are male. Self selected code names are used for each student.

MV reads and writes at grade level. MV has been diagnosed with ADHD and began taking medication this school year to help with focusing and impulsivity.

ER is labeled as gifted and talented. ER enjoys playing sports such as softball and cheerleading. ER can be bossy at times and this interferes with peer relationships.

EM is a responsible, polite, and well mannered student. EM performs at or above level on all assessments and participates in class. EM has a hearing impairment which requires a hearing aid and FM system worn by the teacher. EM sits in the front of the classroom to accommodate this.

MM is a role model classmate who demonstrates leadership in the classroom. MM is labeled gifted and talented and performs exceptionally each day. MM plays hockey and lacrosse outside of the classroom and participates in travel leagues for each of these sports teams.

GA is labeled gifted and talented. GA can be shy and reserved, but is well liked by her peers and is always willing to help others if they need it. GA enjoys knitting and arts and crafts.

DR is the single latino student in the class and has two mothers at home, rather than the traditional mother and father. DR performs at grade level in all areas but is capable of more. DR has difficulty focusing in class and rarely brings in homework assignments on time.

JM is labeled as gifted and talented. JM plays basketball and softball outside of school. JM is extremely well liked by peers, performs well in school, always makes good choices in the classroom.

SC performs at grade level, but struggles with self-confidence. SC will often receive extra math help during lunch to assist in boosting this confidence. SC is always positive, and well liked by others.

AA is labeled as gifted and talented. AA is capable of this academic challenge but requires more practice in mastering concepts than the other gifted and talented students in the class. AA plays hockey and enjoys watching the Buffalo Sabres play on television.

AM is labeled as gifted and talented. AM loves challenges and is always eager to learn more. AM plays baseball year round and is a huge New York Yankees fan.

AS is labeled as gifted and talented in math only. AS plays football and baseball. AS struggles with the organization of his writing, but reads at grade level.

BM performs at or above grade level in all academic areas, however BM tends to daydream during lessons and has trouble focusing in class. BM needs reminders throughout the day to stay on task. If BM becomes overwhelmed, BM can have severe anxiety and shut down, so things need to be broken down into small steps for BM.

LF performs at grade level in all academic areas. LF struggles most with writing. LF has a hard time beginning a writing piece and needs a great deal of prompting. LF loves to read and began reading the Harry Potter series at the end of the school year. LF enjoys playing the piano and drums outside of school.

AY is labeled as gifted and talented. AY favors math considerably and would be happy doing math all school day. AY has trouble staying focused in class and socializes frequently during the day. AY was born in Lebanon and came to the United States at the age of three.

JB performs at grade level in all academic areas. JB is extremely impulsive and has trouble focusing throughout the day. JB's desk is seated separately from the rest of the class. JB enjoys drawing and this activity can help him focus when needed.

BC is labeled as gifted and talented. BC moved to Newport Elementary from Maine in March. BC can have trouble with self-control in unstructured environments such as the lunch room, gym class, and on the school bus.

## **Researcher Stance**

In this study, I played the role of a participant observer. According to Mills (2007), taking on the role of a participant observer involves engaging in activities and observing activities, people, and physical aspects of the study. I was the fourth grade general education teacher for these students from September 2010 until June 2011, and have performed multiple assessments on them which therefore gave me an abundance of background knowledge on the academic skills, abilities, and background knowledge the students brought to the study. As the researcher, I was in the process of completing my Master's Degree in Childhood Literacy at Saint John Fisher College. Prior to that, I earned my Bachelor's Degree at SUNY Geneseo in Elementary and Special Education, and have certifications in each area. I recently received my certification in Early Childhood Education as well.

## **Method**

For the purpose of this study, I created a classroom blog where students commented on an array of prompts. Based on the written responses they made, I determined if blogging improved the students' reflective writing skills. Given the minimal amount of time remaining in the school year, I observed the students on seven separate occasions, for one hour each time. Therefore, I had a total of seven hours of observation and participation time.

At the beginning of the study, I introduced, as a whole group lesson, what a blog is by showing a Brain Pop video. Brain Pop is an animated, engaging approach to trigger student interest in the activity. Students then made up a "codename" that they used to sign their blog entry in order to keep their identities anonymous. Using a laptop cart from the computer lab, which contained 28 laptops, students each signed on to a laptop using the username and

password assigned to them by the school. In addition to this, I had a Smartboard and projector on at the front of the room to give a visual model. Participants opened the Internet Explorer browser and then typed in the website of our class blog. Together, we read the blog post and I will gave the students the opportunity to ask any questions they had before we proceeded to the writing portion. Some days there were pictures attached to the writing prompt, and other days there were links the students could click on to investigate websites and then respond to what they found. After their entry was posted, students will had the opportunity to read their classmates' responses.

### **Quality and Credibility of Research**

It is important to make sure validity and credibility are important concepts to ensure the quality of the work done in this research study. Mills (2007) refers to credibility as “the researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (p. 104). In order to ensure there is credibility in a study, Mills (2007) suggests having triangulation. Triangulation compares a variety of data sources in order to cross check the data. Triangulation will be reached in this study through field notes conducted by the researcher, documents (blog) the students produce, and a questionnaire the students will complete.

Transferability is another element that is essential for research. Transferability refers to a “researchers’ belief that everything they study is context bound that the goal of their work is not to develop ‘truth’ statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people” (Mills, 2007, p. 104). In order to achieve transferability, I made detailed observation notes and encouraged the students to be descriptive in their responses so the data would be distinct, but comparisons could

also be made among blog posts. Also, students developed perspectives and had the opportunity to see the perspectives of others.

Ensuring dependability is also important because it “refers to the stability of data” (Mills, 2011, p. 104). Dependability will occur during the study when information is collected through observations, data analysis, and questionnaire responses. Therefore, three separate forms of information are being considered.

This research study also needed to have confirmability which is “... the neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected” (Mills, 2011, p. 105). Since there was triangulation in the study, there was also confirmability because multiple forms of data were collected.

### **Informed Consent and Protecting the Right of the Participants**

In order to carry out this study, informed consent needed to be collected from the participants in two forms. The first is an assent form that was signed by the student indicating they were willing to participate in the study. The second is a consent form signed by the parent of the student. Consent was needed because all students were under the age of 18, and therefore they were considered a minor. On each of their forms, their rights were stated and both the parent and student had the choice to accept or decline participation. Also, in order to keep the identities of the students anonymous, their names were changed and identifying marks were removed from artifacts. The blog entries have the participants' names replaced with pseudonyms so their confidentiality is assured.

### **Data Collection**

Multiple forms of data were collected throughout the study. Detailed field observation notes were taken while the students were participating in the blog activity (sign on, read the blog, type response, post response, read classmates' response). Each blog comment was used to study the writing skills and reflective nature of the responses. Also, the questionnaire completed by each student gave feedback on how the participants felt about the blog activity. Each of these pieces of data made up the collection for the study.

### **Findings and Discussion**

After analyzing the data collected throughout my research, I found four common themes emerge that are important components to answering the question, how does blogging benefit students in an elementary school classroom? These themes consistently appeared in the data I collected through observations, a student questionnaire, and blog responses the students in my study posted online. The themes also reflect the benefits of blogging in the fourth grade classroom. The themes are the following: increased motivation, student familiarity with blogging and computer skills, and social, reflective tool for learning.

#### **Increased Motivation**

The first theme that emerged from this research study was that blogging increased student motivation to compose written responses. Based on observations, students become less motivated at the end of the school year due to the nice weather and upcoming summer vacation. After making the announcement to the class that they would spend the last two weeks of school blogging on laptops rather than doing traditional pencil and paper writing, the students responded in a positive manner by smiling, asking questions, and expressing excitement. Studies performed by Simsek (2009), Sun (2010), Gavran (2009), Lou, Wu, & Shih (2010), and Read (2006) also

concluded that using technology in the classroom leads to increased student motivation.

Knowing what motivates students to write themselves can give insight into how to design effective writing experiences in school. Using technology to increase student motivation appeared throughout my review of research on blogging in the classroom. This idea was also evident in my own research.

When I observed the classroom during the blogging period, I noticed that my students became increasingly engaged in the activity. In the beginning, I created simple blog posts that required straightforward responses. As the study continued, students commented that they thought it would be fun if more pictures, movies, and games were added. One day, I created a blog post that required the students to browse fifth grade teacher websites in our school to find out more about fifth grade. Students were invested in this topic because they were coming to the end of their fourth grade school year and were excited about what the next year would bring. Based on my observations, I saw that students began asking each other “What teacher do you want for next year?” Conversations emerged as students began to find out about the fifth grade teachers’ interests and backgrounds. Students would share this information with each other and therefore sparked curiosity among others in the classroom to find out more about the teachers on their websites.

At the end of the blogging period, students were asked to fill out a questionnaire that asked many questions about their blogging experience. One question asked how students felt about blogging before we began it in the classroom. A scale from one to ten was used to express this opinion with one expressing extreme dislike and ten expressing they felt “awesome.” Overall, students reported a mean score of 7.8, with a minimum score of two and a maximum score of ten. **These scores** show that the majority of students generally had a very positive

feeling about blogs before the study began with a few who disliked the task. The next question asked how students felt about blogging after the blogging period was over. The same scale was used to measure their opinion. As a result, students reported a mean score of 9.6, with a minimum score of six and a maximum score of ten. The increase in score proves that the elementary classroom of students enjoyed blogging more after they participated in the study because the mean score increased by 1.8 on the scale, and the minimum score also increased from two to a six. Therefore, all students in the class at the least, had neutral feelings about blogging. As the classroom teacher, this tells me that continued use of the blog in the classroom would be accepted by the entire student population and be something they would enjoy doing again.

Another question from the questionnaire that demonstrated increased motivation asked “Should your teacher use blogging in the classroom next year?” Participants could either respond “yes” or “no,” and every participant responded “yes.” Fifteen of the participants responded “yes” because it was fun. Specifically, AA responded “yes” because “It is fun having to go on the laptops” (Student Questionnaire, June 20, 2011). Therefore, one reason blogging is fun for elementary students is simply using a laptop rather than using pencil and paper to write. MM responded “Blogging is fun and helpful you get to see what other people write” (Student Questionnaire, June 20, 2011). Students do not always get to see what each other are writing in the class, so for some, seeing what others are writing is also a component that makes blogging fun. BC responded “It is a learning experience and it is fun” (Student Questionnaire, June 20, 2011). For some students, knowing that they are learning from an activity can motivate them to have fun. It is also evident that blogging is a motivating experience because one participant, GA, used the blog in her free time at home and posted a response on her computer at home. This

student was clearly motivated by the blogging and decided to spend free time at home performing the activity. The last question on the questionnaire asked students to make suggestions or comments. Some comments from students that demonstrate the participants were motivated through blogging include the following:

“This blogging was amazing it is perfect!” AS (Student Interview, June 20, 2011)

“Blogging is one of my favorite things” JB (Student Interview, June 20, 2011)

“You should let us blog for more amount of time” DC (Student Interview, June 20, 2011)

“Try starting the unit earlier in the year to get more posts and comments and do the picture prompt again! It was fun!” BM (Student Interview, June 20, 2011)

These overwhelmingly positive written responses from the questionnaire and verbal responses from observation and conversation made by the students demonstrate that blogging increased motivation and engagement in the classroom. Glewa and Bogan (2007) reported that using technology as the medium for discussion and writing enhances literacy projects because it motivates students to respond, reflect, and share their ideas and feelings. The observations and results of the student questionnaire demonstrate that since students enjoy blogging and express excitement when participating in the activity, their motivation is increased.

### **Student Familiarity with Blogging and Technology Experience**

Another theme that emerged from the research study was that through blogging, students became more familiar with the activity and learned basic computer skills due to the exposure of the technology experience. Throughout the school year, students had used laptops in the classroom to publish writing pieces on Microsoft Word, however use of the internet was minimal. Also, students attend computer class in the computer lab of Newport Elementary on a

rotating schedule that gives them the opportunity to practice typing skills and using applications like Microsoft Powerpoint and Microsoft Word. Therefore, students have some experience using computers inside school, and based on conversation, all participants have a computer at home they can use as well. Zawilinski (2009) argued that many students develop proficient computer tool use at home, on the internet, through instant messenger, blogs, and other online tools. Computer experience is important to note because it can determine student interest in blogging.

One area of my research where computer experience stood out as a major theme was found in the student questionnaire. One question asked, “What is one thing you enjoyed about blogging?” Eight students responded they enjoyed blogging because it involved typing. Some specific responses include:

“I enjoyed typeing every day because I love to type. Also I could type whatever went in my head.” ER(Student Interview, June 20, 2011) and

“I enjoyed being able to type and I enjoyed being able to use pictures and other stuff we got to write about.” JM (Student Interview, June 20, 2011)

Based on these responses, the change from using pencil and paper to a keyboard in order to compose written words is a part of the blogging experience the students enjoyed. Typing is a form of digital literacy that Gavran (2007) found develops a culture of expression and communication in a virtual space. Students learned how to use the computer and internet to create web responses, and according to Gavran, that “is much more than merely being able to use the computer,” (Gavran, pg. 318).

Students also expressed that blogging made it easier to write:

“I could let my mind flow” SC (Student Interview, June 20, 2011)

“It is kind of like talking online” BM (Student Interview, June 20, 2011)

“I can write ANYTHING” CW (Student Interview, June 20, 2011)

“I enjoyed all of the websites and questions it was like an interview” MM (Student Interview, June 20, 2011)

These students expressed different ways that blogging made it easier to write. SC often finds it difficult to compose traditional writing and often uses graphic organizers to organize and gather ideas before composing a written draft. BM made the connection of written and spoken language, and found that made it easier to write. CW prefers free writing during typical writing workshop time in the classroom and blogging provides this for him in an online format. MM found it was easier to write on the blog because it was like answering questions in an interview where there are no wrong answers.

The blogging experience exposed students to the process of finding locations on the internet by typing in a URL and then following the routine of responding to a new blog post. On the first day of the study, it took nearly ten minutes to show students how to access the blog. Through observation, it was evident that by just the second day students were becoming independent with the process and needed little assistance. They opened the internet browser, typed in the blog website, and began reading the blog post for the day without asking for help or needing a reminder. By the fifth day, not a single student needed help finding the blog and responding to the post. By not asking for help, the students in the class demonstrated that they were more familiar with the blogging experience and learned how to access the blog independently.

Based on the student blog responses over the blogging period, it was evident that as students became more familiar with the blog, their responses became longer in length. On the first day, there were a total of ten pages of blog responses. By the last day, there were a total of

nineteen pages of blog responses. Therefore, over the course of the study, the responses written by the students got longer which is most likely due to their familiarity with the task. This increase in the length of student writing through the use of a blog was also researched in a study by Armstrong & Retterer (2008) who found that students wrote for a longer period of time and produced longer texts due to the use of blogs. By writing more, students are therefore also building on their writing skills. One question on the student questionnaire asked “How do you think blogging helped you build your writing skills?” Students expressed that blogging assisted with their spelling skills, “When you type the word. If it’s wrong it underlines it” BC (Student Interview, June 20, 2011). This response demonstrates that blogging helps students monitor their writing and provides a tool which they can use to self correct their spelling errors. Due to the computer experience, this participant learned how to correct their spelling similarly to how spelling is corrected on publishing tools such as Microsoft Word. Another student expressed that blogging improved typing speed, “It (blogging) made me type faster and write better,” MK (Student Interview, June 20, 2011). This student noticed that blogging assisted in building typing skills after participating in the activity over several days. Other students reported that blogging improved their writing stamina, “I think that’s the most I’ve ever typed,” AM (Student Interview, June 20, 2011). Through this experience, blogging is a way for students to bring in an out of school form of literacy into the classroom and build their knowledge of technology by experimenting with the web format (Baggetun & Wasson, 2006).

### **Social, Reflective Tool for Learning**

The third theme that appeared in my research was when students write on a blog, they are engaging in a social, reflective reading and writing process. Studies by Ducate & Lomika

(2008), Baggutun & Wasson (2006), Sharma (2010), Davis (2010), Deng & Yuen (2010), and Boling (2008) all found that implementing blogs support student reflection, expression, social interaction, and reflective dialogue. After performing my own research on the topic, I came to the same conclusion that blogs are a forum that can be used to express opinions and support reflection.

An area of my research in which reflection was evidently clear was through student blog responses. Many of the posts asked the students to reflect on an experience they previously had. The first post asked the students what their favorite part of field days was. Field days occurred the previous day of school, so it was an event that was still clear in their minds. Also, it was open ended, so students could choose any part of the day. On the student questionnaire, six participants expressed that that was their favorite post to respond to because it was a fun school event and it was easy because there were many things they could write about that happened during Field Days. The most popular post (eight students responded it was their favorite post) asked the students to write a letter to next year's fourth grade student, telling them about what they will learn, what their teacher is like, and what to do/ what not to do in fourth grade. Writing a letter to next year's fourth grade student was the last post and involved the students to think critically on the whole school year and decide what information would be important to include. Based on the questionnaire, these are the reasons students enjoyed that post:

“because I got to reflect on what I learned this year and got to tell people about this year.” JM (Student Interview, June 20, 2011) and

“It was my favorite because it was easy because I just had to look back on the year.” ER (Student Interview, June 20, 2011) and

“Well it’s very cool to talk to a kid who’s a grade behind you from a electronic note.” JB  
(Student Interview, June 20, 2011).

These students took pride in providing information that could help others. The process of reflecting on the school year, then composing a blog response that would benefit students was an online writing activity that was worthwhile to JM, ER, and JB.

Engaging students in reflection is an important goal of educators (Ducate & Lomika, 2008). Through online blogging, students situate themselves in an environment where they can share their thoughts and feelings (Sharma, 2010). Sharma (2010), found that over time, authors of blogs gravitate towards each other to create conversations in order to exchange opinions and feedback. In writing to next year’s fourth grade students, the participants of the study were providing their opinions and offering feedback to benefit those who would be reading their blog post.

Another way I found students were able to be social and reflective in the blog process was that students gained insight into others’ thoughts when they were creating their responses. Davis (2010) says that friends are a primary motivator for blogging and blogs expose insight to students about themselves and others. On the student questionnaire, BM expressed that the reason the picture prompt was his favorite was “Because it was a picture that was funny to me, so I made my post from pieces of other posts in my words” (Student Interview, June 20, 2011). Since the two main features of blogs are interactivity and collaboration, students are able to synthesize what they read on the blog and create a student- owned written response. (Ducate & Lomika, 2008) Also on the questionnaire, the most popular reason students enjoyed blogging was because they were able to read others’ comments (six students). Reading each others’ comments

provided the students with an opportunity to read multiple viewpoints, and gain insight into others' opinions.

Another response the students had on the questionnaire that showed blogging was a social, reflective tool was the answers they gave to how blogging helped build writing skills:

“It helped me see what other people were thinking about,” SC (Student Interview, June 20, 2011) and

“I think that I got more words to use by looking at other people's writing,” DC (Student Interview, June 20, 2011) and

“I think blogging is a great way to see different points of view,” GA (Student Interview, June 20, 2011).

Each of these responses demonstrates that the students were not only writing response but reading the responses of their classmates as well. As they read the responses, these students reflected on what was written by others and used it to benefit their writing skills. SC gathered ideas from others, DC used the vocabulary of his classmates then used them for his word choice, and GA enjoyed that a blog allowed her to be exposed to the points of view of her classmates.

Blogging encourages conversation, and therefore students are writing for an active audience (Deng & Yuen, 2010). Based on these responses, students were aware of the reflective conversations that were taking place on the class blog. They noticed that their classmates had different points of views and used each other's writing to benefit their own writing.

By writing on a blog, students have an authentic audience that can read their writing. It is a space where they can freely write what they want. In the classroom, all blog responses were

accessible to one another and through the use of their codename, the identity of the student was kept private so they would feel comfortable writing whatever they wanted to say. Based on the data, students took advantage of the opportunity to share ideas by viewing each others' work. Therefore, writing on a blog can be used to support learning, but also can be used to support social relations (Baggetun & Wasson, 2006).

### **Implications**

The results of this research suggest several implications for me as an educator. The students of this generation are embedded in technology long before they enter the classroom. Therefore, using technology in the classroom benefits students because it allows them to use the skills and experiences they are already familiar with. Blogging in the classroom is one way technology can be effectively integrated into the curriculum. My findings reveal that students are more motivated to compose written responses when they are using an online blog. Literature has also suggested when students are motivated, the amount of learning increases (Sun, 2010). Motivation is an important element in all classrooms, but more especially in elementary classrooms where school is still a new experience for students. Keeping them engaged by introducing them to new forms of reading and writing will enhance their desire to learn more about the changing world around them. Teachers need to provide these opportunities for their diverse learners. These opportunities require a variety of blog topics, prompts, and free response choices as well as knowing student's interests. Then, teachers must infuse those interests into the blog so the motivation is maintained. One way I will provide my students this opportunity is to create a classroom blog at the beginning of the school year and extend it until the end of the school year. I will allow them to use it not only to write responses for school, but to use it as a tool to communicate with their peers. Based on my questionnaire and observations, reading what

others wrote on the blog was one aspect that motivated the students in my study. This form of authentic writing will increase student's desire to write more inside and outside the classroom.

Another implication I found in my research is that students became more familiar with technology based activities as a result of this study. Being exposed to technology based tools is important for twenty first century students because they will inevitably need these skills in the future. Having basic computer skills such as typing on a keyboard and navigating the internet are imperative, and for students who do not have access to computers at home, school is where these skills need to be taught. Writing on a classroom blog allows students to practice these skills as well as build their writing skills. Responding on a blog still requires students to use capitalization and punctuation, use a variety of vocabulary, and organize their writing in a sequential fashion. As the classroom teacher during this study, I looked for these traits of writing in the blog responses just as I looked for them in the traditional paper and pencil responses my students made throughout the school year. By implementing blogs at the beginning of the school year, students have more time to become familiar with the blogging experience and therefore build complex computer skills.

Lastly, blogging in an elementary classroom provides an opportunity for students to be reflective in their reading and writing. This was evident in my own study as well as several research studies (Ducate & Lomika, 2008; Sharma, 2010). The public nature of a blog allows users to read what other people have written and responded to. In the case of this classroom study, students were able to read each others' responses and in some cases this helped them to create or build on their own blog response. Elementary school students are still building on their social skills and based on my observations, blogs are a useful way for students to do this. By creating the codenames in the study, students' identities were still kept private so they would feel

comfortable writing their responses, therefore keeping them as authentic as possible. Sharing published writing is part of the writing process and one part that many students look forward to doing. In using a blog, students are sharing each time they submit a response. Also, teachers rarely have time to fit “reflections” into their already packed curriculum. After students become familiar using a blog, it is an activity they can do that only requires a few minutes of time.

As a teacher, I want to make sure that what I am teaching will ultimately help my students increase their knowledge and improve their skills in all academic areas. Research has stated that using computers in the classroom promotes literacy skills (Simsek, 2009; Luehmann & McBride, 2009; Soares, 2008; Li, 2010). I would like to see if blogging in the classroom makes a significant change in students’ writing abilities. Continued use throughout the school year would require skill-based lessons and plenty of modeling. The blogs used in the study were short response questions that required little to no explanation and/or pre-teaching. If a teacher is going to invest a significant amount of time using blogs in the classroom, it would be important to see how experienced teachers use blogs to improve writing skills.

Time is one factor in this study that impacted how I viewed the blog experience. With increased state and national standards, as well as the standardized tests students are required to take each year, it is difficult to find time in the school day to fit in any additional material. Students use traditional paper and pencil to provide answers on tests and some teachers may argue that using computers to publish writing is not a worthwhile activity, especially since teachers will become accountable for their students’ performance on these tests in the near future. In this study, students were all at or above grade level in their reading and writing abilities. Also, at the time of the study, students had already taken their state assessments for the

year. Therefore, as their classroom teacher, I did not feel using the blog at the time of the study would hinder their academic performance.

After analyzing my findings and implications of research, I am still left with a few unanswered questions about blogging in an elementary classroom. Students in this study were in fourth grade and therefore have the basic background knowledge of spelling and writing conventions. For students in the primary elementary grades who are still learning standard print and phonics rules, could they benefit from using a blog in the classroom? Typing reflective responses requires higher order thinking skills and basic computer skills that students who are six to eight years old may not have mastered yet. Are there other technology based tools that could be brought into those classrooms that would serve the same purpose but be more appropriate for primary elementary students?

### **Conclusion**

Blogging in the classroom is extremely beneficial for elementary school students. Using technology in the classroom increases motivation, allows students to become familiar with the technology experience, and is a social, reflective tool for learning. Students in elementary school will continue to face the ever changing world of technology and need opportunities to build on their knowledge and practice those skills. Teachers should begin preparing students early on as they gain experience and technology progresses because it will be easier for them to adapt to new technologies. Using a blog in the classroom is a motivating tool that teachers can use to provide this rich experience.

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