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Blogging as a Strategy to Support Reading Comprehension Skills

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Blogging as a Strategy to Support Reading Comprehension Skills

Abstract

For the purpose of this study, four students were given access to a blog during guided reading instruction in hopes to answer the question: can blogging be used to support reading comprehension? Through questionnaires, observation, and student work samples, I saw a clear increase in the participants' ability to respond to literature, as well as an increase in their motivation to work through a fiction novel. These findings call for teachers to evolve their instructional practices and make sure they are utilizing the rapidly changing technologies that are available to their students on a daily basis. By incorporating these technologies, students will be able to participate in authentic experiences that build motivation and support their learning.

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Blogging as a Strategy to Support Reading Comprehension Skills

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Abstract

For the purpose of this study, four students were given access to a blog during guided reading instruction in hopes to answer the question: can blogging be used to support reading comprehension? Through questionnaires, observation, and student work samples, I saw a clear increase in the participants' ability to respond to literature, as well as an increase in their motivation to work through a fiction novel. These findings call for teachers to evolve their instructional practices and make sure they are utilizing the rapidly changing technologies that are available to their students on a daily basis. By incorporating these technologies, students will be able to participate in authentic experiences that build motivation and support their learning.

The Effects of Blogging on Reading Comprehension

The use of technology in today's society is inescapable. It is everywhere from electrifying workouts (utilizing devices such as the Wii) to real-time video chat (devices such as Skype and FaceTime), to a plethora of activities displayed on a television screen that provide instant feedback and gratification per personal preference through the use of DVR. Technology continues to become more sophisticated and is advancing at a marvelous rate. It has infused itself into our daily lives and has made it clear that it is here to stay. There is no place that you can go to escape the grasp that technology has on our society. Schools (more specifically the classroom) are no different.

It is important for schools to mirror the use of technology in society within the classroom so that students can view their learning environment as relevant to their lives outside of school. "Studies have shown that Internet access motivates many students to read extensively," states Yang (2009), highlighting the pivotal focus we must begin to place on technology instruction within the school day. Many schools today, especially where funding is limited, have little technology and still make use of the dusty blackboards and chalk as the primary tools for promoting student learning. Walking into a classroom where the chalkboard is the centerpiece is like taking a giant step back in time. The content we try to teach to the students should be relevant to their lives, so why shouldn't the materials and resources we are using to teach them on be just as state-of-the-art? It's no wonder students are having a hard time staying motivated, focused, and engaged in their daily routine.

We have reached a day where all classrooms must begin to be transformed into 21st Century meccas in which technology takes on an active role in assisting students in becoming thinkers and learners. The internet, as routine as it has become in our daily lives, is at the

forefront of technology being rolled out into students' daily environment. "There is a significant impact on motivation for students that are exposed to and given the opportunity to explore technological advances (including internet) within the classroom." (Kramarski & Feldman, 2009,) showing that motivation is driven by the desire to be stimulated through technology. Internet and the technology surrounding it has countless opportunities for learning and is extremely popular due to its connectivity at a global level. Ducate and Lomicka (2008) sum up internet classroom uses by stating "to increase opportunities for interaction outside of the traditional classroom, teachers are beginning to employ different types of social software such as blogs, wikis, chat or instant messaging" (p. 9). For the purpose of this study, a focus on educational blogging will guide my research.

A blog, as quoted by Yang (2009), is "an online journal that users can continuously update, in their own words, online". The focus and purpose of an educational blog is different from a traditional community blog. Poling (2005) defines educational blogging as an "application that allows for enhanced comprehension and communication among students as well as the ability to build deeper understanding across the curriculum" (375-376). Poling describes two key purposes of the educational blog - to act as a platform for further comprehension and communication, both student-to-student and student-to-teacher. Barone and Wright (2008) suggest that some teachers may identify with past models of literacy as paper and pencil bound; however, new conceptions involve continually changing views of reading and writing, particularly, with the advent of the Internet. According to Boling (2008), when teachers act as moderators and create blogs, they provide students with opportunities to connect safely with real audiences while learning. Boling (2008) argues that this, in turn, can result in increased

motivation and literacy engagement as students read, write, create, and produce for meaningful and authentic purposes.

The main question that drives this research project is if blogging can be used to support reading comprehension? The research was collected while working with a group of fifth graders during guided reading instruction. To help me research this question, I conducted a series of assessments using student questionnaires, interviews, observations, and student work samples. My findings showed a measurable gain in student scores on written responses to literature. The work the students completed was thorough and much more developed than their work that they completed prior to utilizing the blog. Likewise, there was an obvious increase in student motivation while blogging. These findings call for teachers to begin to utilize technology as a support to instruction. No longer can educators opt out of integrating technology into their daily routine. We are in an age when we must embrace technology and find ways to expose our students to it as a way to support their learning.

Theoretical Framework

Literacy, simply put, is a cultural practice of language (both oral and written) whose expectations are always changing as it is used for an array of purposes in a variety of discourses. Gee (2001) defines literacy as a social practice that is historically and culturally determined. Literacy has a strong socio-cultural foundation, in which children's development springs from experiences, views, and attitudes they encounter (Goodman & Heath, 1982). Therefore, students should play an active role in their literacy learning experiences. In order to determine how blogging in the classroom can benefit students, it may be helpful to consider how literacy is acquired and language is learned. Socio-cultural Theory and New Literacy Studies are two

theories that offer specific framework pertinent to the research that has been conducted on this topic.

Sociocultural Theory

The idea of building student comprehension through classroom blogs allows students to become active learners as they participate in social practices that integrate 21st Century technology (Aukerman 2007; Meier 2003; Goodman 2001). Since the students are the key in constructing their learning, comprehension instruction can be seen as deeply rooted in the socio-cultural theory. As Barton and Hamilton (1998) suggest, literacy is a social activity that can be found in social interactions among people. Therefore, literacy practices involve all the socializing that is done each day, through both formal and informal interactions with others. This socializing begins in the home with a person's primary discourse, or communication that is culturally based and done with intimates, and is later extended to include secondary discourses, or ways of communicating with non-intimates beyond the home. In the socio-cultural theory, learning is referred to as changing participation over time. Rogoff (1992) breaks down participation into three constituted planes: apprenticeship (the plane of community activity in which adults or teachers facilitate learning by modeling performance during joint participation), guided participation (interpersonal processes happening in daily activities), and participatory appropriation (personal processes in which the child changes through participation as it prepares him or her for comparable activities in the future). As Goodman argues, active participation in a literate society allows students to discover and create those initial literacies that are so important for beginning readers. Consequently, in utilizing the practice of classroom blogging, students are actively engaged in the learning process and, therefore, actively making meaning.

Blogging is one way to communicate in a social context through the medium of technology. According to Larson and Marsh (2005), the practice of blogging in the classroom defines the child as an active member of a constantly changing community of learners in which knowledge constructs and is constructed by a larger cultural system. From this perspective, conceptualizing learning creates a shift from the traditional teacher-centered/student-centered classroom to one that is learning-centered. With a shift to student-centered learning in the classroom, according to Larson and Marsh (2005), learning occurs through participation in social, cultural, and historical contexts that are mediated by instruction. For elementary students who are still developing their uses of language and forming their literacy skills, social interaction is key, as it broadens their perspectives and allows for the sharing and communication of ideas.

New Literacies

In addition to sociocultural theory, New Literacy Studies may also be helpful in answering my research question. NLS argues that literacy learning does not only occur in and out of school, in both formal and informal settings, but also, in everyday interactions among people, as a means for establishing and maintaining social relations (Larson & Marsh, 2005). As more and more individuals use new technologies to communicate, linguistic activities start to become a tool to shape the ways in which we view and use language and literacy. Most important, new literacies, whether intentionally or unintentionally, impact literacy instruction in classrooms (Hagood, Stevens, & Reinking, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Lewis & Finders, 2002). Blogging as described by Cassidy (2008), “provides students with a way to express their thoughts with the entire world” (p. 1). In understanding everyday life, teachers are able to construct meaningful contexts for literacy learning. According to Larson and Marsh (2005), it is critical for teachers to understand NLS in order to obtain a better understanding of their literacy

practices and the literacy practices of their students and families. Teachers must move beyond traditional literacy exercises to include authentic practices connected to broader social and cultural goals in the classroom.

One of the principles of NLS is that the impact of new information and communication technologies has changed the nature of literacy and therefore, what needs to be learned (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). New technologies have impacted literacy instruction, as they are becoming more a part of the everyday life and practices of students today. Literacy is constantly evolving, and as it changes, new technologies emerge. According to Lankshear and Knobel (2006), literacies can be defined as socially recognized ways of generating, communicating, and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in discourses. Technology has changed the way individuals generate, communicate, and negotiate meaningful content through use of the Internet, online forums, social networks, Instant Messaging, and email, where they are able to share, read, and write “far more than they would have in more traditional methods.”

Research Question

Given that literacy and learning is a social practice, and current world trends are merging with technological literacies, this action research asks how can blogging in the elementary classroom can be utilized to support reading comprehension?

Review of Literature

Introduction

Educators are excited by the potential for new internet technologies, such as blogs, wikis, and online discussions groups to help rehabilitate student engagement in learning. The inclusion of new technologies may be more intrinsically engaging to today's students whose daily media

practices may include a range of technologies. This section of research shows what others in the professional field have discovered about using blogging and technology in the elementary classroom. This literature review will look at some of the revolving themes found in the research regarding technology in the classroom. The research addressed four main topics: technology and motivation, technology and student engagement, blogging and authentic experience, and blogging as socially-constructed learning.

Technology and Motivation

Research indicates that using technology in the classroom is motivating for students (Read & Fisher, 2006; Levin & Wadmany, 2006; Guha, 2003; Glewa & Bogan, 2007; Baker, Rozendal, & Whitenack, 2009). Levin and Wadmany (2006) interviewed 4th through 6th grade students in Israel on their views on learning, technology, and classroom practice, and found that most students believed technology is a motivating factor in their learning and a positive influence in the classroom. The students viewed technology as a tool to support their learning as well as a medium through which they can negotiate meaning (Levin & Wadmany, 2006). This study is important as it allows students' voices to be heard and considered in regards to their own learning. Levin and Wadmany (2006) also interviewed elementary teachers on their views on learning with technologies and found a similar parallel as teachers expressed that technology is important in teaching and can enhance student capabilities. Similarly, Guha (2003) interviewed elementary teachers on their personal experience and opinions of integrating technology into the classroom and found that most teachers believed technology to be a motivating factor for students in their learning. Both Guha (2003) and Levin and Wadmany (2006) found that teachers play a large role in determining technology use in schools and the classroom and how it is integrated. The amount or type of technology used in the classroom varies by teacher, but both

Guha (2003) and Levin and Wadmany agree that using computers in the classroom is helpful to the learning process and interesting for students. According to Guha “computers have generated children’s interest because they are easy access to a universe of information, can broaden their learning horizons, and develop multicultural awareness” (p. 341). The integration of computers into the classroom gives students the opportunity to begin to build a more growth based mindset that is open to others traditions and cultures.

Read and Fisher (2006) and Huang and Liu (2007) interviewed students who kept their own personal blogs in order to find out more about why students choose to blog and how they use their blogs. Both Read and Fisher (2006) and Huang and Liu (2007) found that one of the main reasons is for communicative purposes, either with friends or with others. Using a blog in the classroom is one way to bring an out-of-school literacy into school and make a connection. Finding something that students enjoy, such as blogging, and making it relevant to their learning at school is certainly a way to motivate students, and as Huang and Liu (2007) explain, students like to share their learning experiences with friends or classmates. Read and Fisher (2006) argue that by learning more about students’ blogs and the kind of writing they are doing outside of school, it is possible to make school writing more like self-sponsored writing. They further explain that one way to do this is to take advantage of the social potential of the school context (Read & Fisher). Students can communicate with each other in their classroom by discussing books and other topics on a blog.

Similarly, Glewa and Bogan (2007) reported that students were motivated to blog and use technology by being able to communicate with peers. They implemented a literacy project where students were able to respond to an authentic issue on a classroom blog. Using the recent hurricane that had occurred in the town where the school was located as a prompt, they

encouraged students to use the classroom blog as a space to share their feelings with one another as an interactive journal (Glewa & Bogan). Glewa and Bogan (2007) reported that using technology as the medium for discussion and writing enhanced the literacy project as it motivated the students to respond, reflect, and share their ideas and feelings. The students were able to communicate with one another in a social context, which was a motivating factor.

Daniels (2004) and Englert, Manalo, and Zhao (2004) studied the motivational effects of computer technology on writing instruction and performance of elementary students and found that technology can help students' writing to improve. Both Daniels (2004) and Englert et al. (2004) reported that in using computer technology, students showed more enthusiasm and excitement to write, wrote longer pieces and more writing pieces in general, and showed increased success on assessments. Daniels (2004) examined the effects of using computer technology in preparation for state assessments for 5th grade students and found that after one year of preparation using computer technology, the percentage of students proficient on the state writing assessment increased from 16.7% to 54.3%. In addition, the percentage of students who were not proficient on the state writing assessment decreased drastically from 83.3% to 45.7% (Daniels). The students' scores show marked improvement. Daniels reported that the students were more interested in studying and practicing their writing on the computer than on paper, and this in turn resulted in spending more time learning and valuing the time spent as well as increased test scores.

In Harlin et. al's (2010) research of three teachers technology proved to positively impact students motivation in the classroom. One teacher put a new twist on a research project by using iMovie to present new information. The technology was new to most of the students and their interest in the project was expressed in the research (Harlin). The teacher in the third grade

classroom in Padak and Potenze-Radis's (2010) classroom also incorporated different text formats. The classroom used authentic learning practices to make their text come alive but made sure to integrate technology as a support to learning. They performed plays that became the scripts for their classroom. They utilized technological advances as a way to organize their experience and present it in a multi-model presentation.

After interviewing elementary students and analyzing responses, Glewa and Bogan (2007), Simsek (2009), and Levin and Wadmany (2006) reported that most students had a favorable response for technology use, understanding its significance in the classroom and how technology can be used as a tool for reading and writing. Because students believe that technology is important in their own learning, they will be more motivated to work when they are able to use it.

Ducate and Lomikca's (2008) study of German and French language students found that, "there were learner-perceived benefits of using blogs: an increased interest and motivation towards the target language due to both interaction and feedback from classmates and teachers" (p. 34). In this same study, a student who rarely spoke out in the classroom wrote a blog that "was truthful, honest and creative and served as an outlet where she could articulate her feelings and problems. Whereas she was not frequent participant in class, she seems to feel more comfortable expressing herself in the blog and finds motivation to add her own opinions" (Ducate and Lomikca, p. 18).

Technology and Student Engagement

Using technology in the classroom is one way to engage students in their learning (Warshcauer, 2007; Lowther, Ross, & Morrison, 2003; Hackbarth, 2004; Baker, 2000). Student engagement is important for understanding and success in and out of the classroom. Both

Warschauer (2007) and Lowther et al. (2003) examined one-to-one laptop classrooms or classrooms where each student is provided with a personal laptop computer for educational use. They were interested in examining the effects of providing intermediate elementary students with all-day access to laptops and how this affected their writing skills. Both Warschauer (2007) and Lowther et al. (2003) reported that using one-to-one laptops is beneficial in promoting literacy skills. Warschauer (2007) found that students learned to access information, manage it, and incorporate it into written and multimedia products, so the benefits are profound on students' computer and literacy skills. On the other hand, Lowther et al. (2003) found that in the students' writing pieces, ideas and content, organization, and style improved, so aspects of the students' writing were strengthened by working on an individual laptop computer every day. Warschauer (2007) and Lowther et al. (2003) argue that using technology, such as laptops in the classroom, helps to engage students in activities which in turn benefits their literacy learning and skills.

Baker (2000) studied how literacy and tool-based technologies can be integrated into an elementary classroom and found that it can happen successfully. In the study, 4th grade students worked on an inquiry-based project with a writing component using computers (Baker). Baker found that the computer provided valuable learning opportunities and gave students access to many sources of information. In addition, the technology used in the project allowed for increased student engagement as students were directly involved in looking up information online and through a multimedia encyclopedia, editing their work on a word processor, and creating a final project through presentation software (Baker). Many different opportunities were created in this assignment, which allowed for accommodating multiple learning styles and personalities. Both Baker and Englert (2004) reported that when using technology in school, individual learning styles and knowledge gaps can be accommodated, which can lead to

increased success and student engagement in the classroom. After interviewing the teacher, Baker (2000) concluded that the reason for student success was directly related to the level of engagement in the project, which was made possible through the technology resources available. On the contrary, Baker found that there were some challenges of using technology in the project, as some students needed more instruction on technology use and referencing skills than others at the onset (Baker, 2000). This affected the direction of her instruction in the beginning of the project.

Similarly, Hackbarth (2004) studied 4th graders' computer literacy skills as a function of access, gender, and race, and found that not all students come to school with the same proficiency or knowledge of technology and Internet access and usage and it is an important factor to consider when designing an appropriate technology plan for your classroom. Both Hackbarth and Baker (2000) argued that this could create a discrepancy in the classroom for teachers who want to bring technology into the classroom, as experience and access outside of school play a role in competence. However, Hackbarth (2004) reported that most students have an affection for using technology regardless of access, gender, or race. Because students enjoy using technology, it is possible to use it with the appropriate accommodations to tap into different learning styles and personalities and increase student engagement.

A students' ability to persist through a task with confidence is based on their connection with the content. In research done by Pitcher et. al (2007) and Fulmer and Frijeters (2011) students were more likely to perceive themselves as successful when connected through the topic by choice or interest. Self-concepts of student in the surveys of Pitcher et. al directly coincided with their choice. Typically, this was based on their ability to utilize a technological base to support their learning. Students that identified themselves as 'poor readers' were found to have a

favorite site that they turned to when they were required to read independently. While conducting supplementary interviews, research proved that when students were engaged in the process of reading utilizing technology, they were more successful. Similarly, Fulmer and Frijeters (2011) found similar connections in the work with students persisting through frustrating tasks. Students were presented with a passage to read and given a survey to align reading with their choice of how they were going to access the text. Some were given the opportunity to read the text in a textbook and others had the opportunity to read the text online where they had the chance to highlight, underline and take notes right on the computer. Those students that received their choice to work with technology were more likely to persist through the task than those who did not. There is a valuable connection between student motivation and their ability to work through the task. In this study, the motivation clearly came from student desire to work with technology (Fulmer & Frijeters). This connection is not surprising knowing that students' feelings' play an important role in their level of motivation (Gambrell, Codling, & Palmer, 1996).

Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) agree that online interactions, especially online journaling, can bring a sense of community to students' lives through the comments, critiques and other responses to their journaling. If this sense of community can be brought into the classroom, then students will feel more likely to participate and openly discuss their opinions and thoughts without fear of ridicule. If teachers can bring students Expression and Communication: out of school literacies into the classroom through use of online resources, then they will find that students are proficient at reading and writing, just in ways that are not always found in the traditional classroom.

Blogging and Authentic Experience

When students blog, they are engaging in an authentic writing activity (Baker, Rozendal, & Whitenack, 2009; Simsek, 2009; Read and Fisher, 2006; Larson, 2009; Glewa and Bogan, 2007). Authentic activities are purposeful in that they help students see the value of their learning experiences. Levin and Wadmany (2006) interviewed students about their views on learning with information technologies and found that students felt that authentic learning experiences were key to their success and understanding. According to Davis and McGrail (2009), when their audience is the whole world, students are motivated to be the best writers they can be. When writing on a blog, students automatically have an audience and it becomes an authentic writing experience.

Baker et al. (2009) conducted a study on audience awareness in a technology-rich classroom by examining a 4th grade class that completed an inquiry project involving a technology-based presentation. This was an authentic activity as students had an audience to discuss and share their findings. For the final presentation, students used various forms of technology as a medium and after sharing, took questions from their audience in an open discussion forum. After interviewing students in the class, Baker et al. found that most students felt they were motivated by having an audience and were encouraged to work harder on their projects and research. Baker et al. reported that “audience members’ comments challenged authors to clarify their intended meanings and these challenges operationalized feedback from an intended audience” (p. 412). In other words, the students challenged one another’s thinking. Furthermore, Baker et al. found that the students’ knowledge of having an audience during the project presentation affected their topic choice for the project as well as their quality of work. The students shared ideas with one another and collaborated during the process. Similarly, Read

and Fisher (2006) and Simsek (2009) examined students' blogs and their perceptions on blogging and found that students work harder to write well on blogs because they have an audience. Baker et al. (2009), Read and Fisher (2006), and Simsek (2009) reported that when writers have a sense of audience it motivates them in their work. On the other hand, Baker et al. (2009) found that it is critical for writers to have a sense of audience in order for them to develop their composition and comprehension skills.

Read and Fisher (2006) and Davis and McGrail (2009) argued that when students have personal blogs, they have created and defined a sense of identity and individualism for themselves. Having an outlet to express themselves is important for self-esteem and also helps the students to see themselves as authors and writers serving an authentic purpose. Read and Fisher (2006) explain that students "make their mark upon the world, and leave their footprints on the sand of the Internet" (p. 5). As students grow as learners and individuals, their writings become stable artifacts of identity and accomplishment from a moment in time (Read & Fisher.). Similarly, Larson (2009) studied 5th grade students who participated in a reading workshop online, through the use of electronic books and an online journal for responses and discussion with peers. The students were able to construct their own responses to the readings and post them online on their blogs. Larson found that the different prompts constructed by the students were authentic as they exercised the students' own voices and allowed the students to have an identity in the classroom. Davis and McGrail (2009), Read and Fisher (2006), and Larson (2009) found that the blogs promoted a sense of identity in the students. It is evident that students' identities were able to come through in their blog writing, which was inherent to their success and enjoyment in the activities.

With the increasing popularity of technology both in and out of the classroom, Karchmer (2001) reports that literacy needs to “no longer consist of solely interacting with the one-dimensional written page” (p. 488). It is through electronic texts, Karchmer states, that students become involved with their learning in a way that helps them create meaning with the words on the page. Similarly, Lue and Kinzer (2000) assert that multimedia information sources are replacing information that was previously presented only in traditional texts and that learners, when they participate in this new realm of authentic information management, are more apt to comprehend bigger meaning.

A study done by Sylvester and Greenidge (2009) furthered the idea that interaction with a text can help create an authentic learning experience. Their study focused on how digital storytelling could be used to help struggling writers in the primary levels. Digital storytelling is a multimedia text that includes both traditional and new literacies and gives writers a chance to experience technological, visual and information literacies (Sylvester & Greenidge). Digital texts can be created and shared through the use of a podcast or blog giving struggling writers confidence in their ability as well as increasing motivation knowing that their writing has an audience of peers (Sylvester & Greenidge). The students that participated in this study showed much more control over their style of writing and were willing to continue to work through the writing process. Likewise, when the digital texts were then given to a few struggling readers, a more diverse discussion was developed surrounding themes, characters actions, and conflict due to a more clear understanding and access to others thought and ideas (Sylvester & Greenidge). A study completed by Kearney and Schuck (2006) further supports this idea of interacting with a text to ensure authenticity. Their study utilized digital video as a way to develop and teach critical literacy skills through current event topics. The students that participated in this study

appreciated the ability to play and experiment with a theme and felt like they had more control over their learning. Most importantly, though, the students felt like their learning was authentic and worthwhile because the digital video allowed the students to gain instant feedback on their work. This way of learning, Kearny and Schuck state, allowed students to develop skills in evaluating their own work as well as ways to critique others work from a critical lens. Students work was developed for a specific audience that, in turn, helped make their work worthwhile and authentic.

Glewa and Bogan's (2007) study showed how blogs can be used for authentic purposes by promoting children's literacy skills. They designed a project where students responded to a current event on a class blog, after a hurricane had hit their Florida town and devastated areas nearby. The elementary students were able to reflect on their experiences, discuss feelings, ask questions, and share similarities and differences that they had because of the natural disaster. The blog was an authentic way to get the students talking about a real event that they had all experienced by opening the doors for communication (Glewa & Bogan). Similarly, Read and Fisher (2006) found that when students kept a blog, they were able to keep a record of memories and events in their lives. Both Glewa and Bogan (2007) and Read and Fisher (2006) agreed that having a blog is one way to keep an archive or portfolio of students' experiences as documented through writing.

After examining classrooms where technology was being integrated and blogging is being used, Baker et al. (2009), Read and Fisher (2006), Larson (2009), and Glewa and Bogan (2007) found that authentic learning can take place. Because students are connected with an audience, able to discuss real issues, and can have a sense of identity, they are able to see the authentic

purpose and value in the activities they are doing, which in turn promotes active learning, motivation, and enjoyment.

Blogging in the classroom is seen as a “highly effective means of communication that creates a variety of authentic writing experiences for students and teachers,” according to Mullen and Wedwick (2008, p. 69). An example of online journals being used to create a purposeful and authentic student voice is that of the first grade class of Gavran. Gavran (2009) states that:

. . . the process of learning gains a new quality because it is not imposed from the outside, but rather the desire to learn originates from the pupil’s internal motivation because they want to learn something and write something to publish their findings on their journals (p. 317).

Blogging allows for students to feel excitement in expressing their thoughts and feelings to an audience that they converse with everyday. Likewise, students have the opportunity to control the direction their learning takes.

Blogging and Socially Constructed Learning

Davis and McGrail (2009), Cowan (2008), Larson (2009), and Read and Fisher (2006) found that blogging promotes socially constructed learning. Students can strongly benefit from social learning as they are able to collaborate with one another, share ideas, and ask questions to promote their understanding of concepts and materials. Learning is a social and collaborative process. According to Davis and McGrail (2009), blogs are designed for readers to leave comments, and they also can be linked to other blogs. These features encourage and promote social networking and community building (Davis & McGrail, 2009). Cowan (2008) studied the effects of developing and implementing a school-wide blog on student interaction and community. She used the blog as a common place for both students and teachers to discuss

books and other topics (Cowan). Cowan found that the blog led to increased social interactions with students of different groups and grade levels as discussion occurred about literary works. In addition, the school-wide blog helped to create a sense of community and connection between teachers and students. Both Davis and McGrail (2009) and Cowan (2008) argue that blogging can spark conversation and build a learning community.

Similarly, Larson (2009) studied how reader response can be transformed using the New Literacies such as blogging and online learning communities. In the 5th grade class that was examined, students read e-books on laptops and responded to the literature in electronic journals. Larson (2009) found that socially constructed learning was promoted through the increased student engagement initiated by the activity. Both Larson (2009) and Cowan (2008) allowed the students to construct their own prompts on the blog by thinking of questions to pose or ideas to discuss with peers. The student-constructed prompts promoted independence and responsibility in the activity. Larson (2009) and Cowan (2008) reported that the student-constructed prompts were helpful in motivating the students, and as a result, the learning that took place was student-directed and socially based. On the other hand, Larson found that some students needed guidance in learning about literacy from one another, as social learning does not come naturally to all students. As the New Literacies become increasingly dependent on social learning strategies, it is important to consider that socially-skilled learners will be at an advantage, while more independent learners may struggle and need more help along the way (Larson).

Williams and Jacobs (2004) explore the potential of blogs as learning spaces for students and point to their potential as a transformational technology for teaching and learning. Blogs can assist students in becoming regular readers and/or writers, thus hone both interpretive and presentational skills. Kadjer and Bull (2004) argue that blogs have contributed to “a resurgence

in journaling, through their accessibility, their audience, and their immediacy” (p. 33) . Blogs can facilitate knowledge sharing, reflection, and debate, (Williams & Jacobs, 2004) and act as a vehicle for self expression and self empowerment (Blood, 2002). Godwin-Jones (2006) acknowledges that:

blogs by their nature and page structure encourage feedback and represent both a reading and a writing activity. In the best of cases, this kind of online writing stimulates debate, furthers critical analysis, and encourages articulation of ideas and opinions. (p. 10-11).

Like Godwin-Jones, Oravec (2002) suggests that blogs can enhance critical thinking, literacy, and promote the use of the Internet as a research tool. Blogs can also help people to become more thoughtful and critical observers of the world around them (Blood, 2002) and, due to their simplicity technically speaking, offer an attractive medium for promoting literacy skills.

Godwin- Jones (2006) discusses how literacy skills take shape in a non-traditional classroom environment:

The development of multiple literacies is needed in an environment in which there are no clear boundaries between text and other media. . . . There is a clear social dimension to electronic literacy; reading and writing on-line are often collaborative activities. As educators we not only need to facilitate literacy skills in this new environment, we also need to be creating language learning media or applications which mirror the kind of online world students experience – student-centred with collaborative opportunities, allowing plenty of space for creative and reflective processes. (p. 13).

It is evident that when a student has the ability to take control of their learning, they formulate an experience that is personalized to their specific learning needs.

Oravec (2003) refers to blogs as a “middle space” situated somewhere between online and traditional classroom settings. Blogs in education can represent learner spaces that are both social and student-owned. This sense of ownership can be empowering for blog writers (students) in that, as suggested by Kadjer and Bull (2003), blogs are “engaging, rich writing space that requires no technical knowledge of HTML, while offering access to an instant publishing press”(p.33). Their simplicity, ease, interactivity, and social benefits make blogs a conducive environment for social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). Students interact as readers and writers as they co-construct their own learning, thus social interaction becomes necessary to second language learning. Through their interactions, students can develop camaraderie or even a sense of belonging to a community of readers or writers (Murray & Hourigan, 2006).

After studying six students’ personal blogs, Read and Fisher (2006) found that blogging is done for social purposes. Each of the six students reported that the reason they choose to blog is to communicate with others, and get feedback and comments from peers on occurrences in their daily lives (Read & Fisher). This interest can be used in the classroom when students have the opportunity to do their writing on a blog and edit and critique each other’s work online. According to Read and Fisher getting response from peers in response groups created by blogs give students a faster turnaround and validation from their social equals, which is especially helpful for students’ confidence and understanding of feedback. Students need to develop relationships with one another, and using a blog is one way to promote this desire for relationships within the class, especially from peers outside of the close-knit social circle. Similarly, Glewa and Bogan (2007) found that using a blog in the classroom makes learning a social process, which is beneficial for all. Both Glewa and Bogan and Read and Fisher (2006)

reported that the schools play a role in determining how to design learning to best meet the needs of their students, and using a blog is one way to promote literacy skills with digital fluency and social learning.

Crawford (2007) completed a study on an adult Masters' course where students participated in weekly podcasts that required them to communicate their thinking via chat rooms based around aspects of technology. Being an online course, students from all over the globe were able to explain their thinking and participate in the community of online learning. They were able to receive instant feedback from classmates and the chat log helped provide a communication outlet with a community that they would otherwise have never gotten the chance to experience. This forum provided an authentic experience that instigated inquiry and learning.

Students that engage in blogging, paired with other technological outlets, have given positive feedback when used as a blended approach to learning (Cooper, Dale, & Spencer, 2009). Podcasts that were used in place of traditional lectures, paired with interactive real-time blogging were positively reviewed by students offering an outlet for communication and questioning without breaking up the direct lesson. Among common opinions regarding this style of learning was feeling a sense of collaboration between students. Moreover, having the ability to access, learn from, and analyze other student's work also gave students a sense of collaboration (Keengwe, Pearson, & Smart, 2009).

Overac (2002) suggests that participating in web-based communication forums encourages students to be analytical and critical to both their own and other's perspectives. In addition, Overac stated how such communication can open up barriers that may once have been too intimidating to approach due to the personal or critical nature of the context. Likewise, Blood (2002) found the bloggers, by virtue of simply writing down whatever was on their mind, were

confronted by their own thinking and opinions. Blood argued that “daily blogging boosted student confidence in literacy skills as well as social skills, knowing that a community of 100 or 20 or 3 people had access to a public record of their thoughts” (p. 230). With their classmates as their audience, students began to gain confidence about their views on the world and were excited to interpret perspectives presented by their classmates.

In addition to the social aspect of blogs, they also serve as a space for micropublishing, where sharing, collaboration, responsibility, and ownership are key features. Murray and Hourigan (2006) indicate the importance of self-expression “in a place where the learner/Blogger develops deeply personalised content” (p. 158). Blogs allow users to engage in the instantaneous act of micropublishing, leave comments, archive previous posts, share hyperlinks, images and even audio with others, paving the way for “students to be more thoughtful (in content and structure) if they know they are writing for a real audience” (Godwin-Jones, 2003, p. 13). Whereas maintaining a web page can be technically challenging, blogging removes those technical issues (Martindale & Wiley, 2005) and allows the writer to focus on content. All of these features of blogs highlight the many attributes that that make them beneficial for use in educational contexts.

After examining student blogs and interviewing students, Read and Fisher (2006), Cowan (2008), Glewa and Bogan (2007), and Larson (2009) found that blogging promotes socially constructed learning and sparks conversation between students which can be related back to school or academic purposes.

Conclusion

A common theme found in all of these areas is that blogging and technology use can be beneficial for student learning by promoting literacy skills while being interesting for students.

Using this background knowledge about student blogging and technology use in the classroom has informed my own practice and how I will set up my research to examine these areas.

Methods

Context

This action research project was conducted in a rural elementary school in Western New York. The district is located in Red County, has 22% of students receiving free or reduced lunch, 9% of students are identified as having special needs, and has a high attendance rate. The Global Elementary School is one of three elementary schools within the district and is located in the center of town. According to the New York State Report Card, the school houses grades Pre-K through six, with an enrollment of 974 students and an average class size of 21 students. The average attendance rate for this school is 95%. Of the 974 students enrolled in this school, 127 (13%) are eligible for free lunch and 88 (9%) are eligible for reduced price lunch. Global Elementary is a predominately Caucasian school, with 905 (93%) of students fitting this classification. Of the other 69 students, 27 students (3%) are Hispanic or Latino, 25 students (3%) are Multiracial, eight students (1%) are African American, and 8 students (1%) are Asian or Native Hawaiian. Global Elementary has a strong parent-teacher organization, a student council, band, chorus and multiple opportunities for book clubs and after-school activities. The school also offers an extended academic day with a variety of tutoring sessions provided by Sylvan Learning Center.

Specifically, the research sessions were conducted in a blended classroom during guided reading sessions. There are 24 students in the classroom, with only four students participating in this study. Of the 24 kids, twelve are male and twelve are female. The classroom displays little

diversity with all students (families) reporting race as “caucasian.” Eight students (25%) receive free lunch while three more students (12%) receive a reduced lunch price.

Being a blended classroom, there was a general education teacher and a special education teacher present at all times. The classroom consisted of nine students with Individualized Education Plans and one student has a 1:1 aide. While working with the group of four students, the other students in the classroom were participating in other guided reading activities and independent practice. Each session lasted approximately 20 minutes, meeting daily over a period of four weeks

Participants

John (pseudonym) is a fifth grader at Global Elementary. He is a Caucasian male student that loves to read mysteries and play with Legos. He just turned 10 years old and is a social individual that likes to hang out with his friends and play sports. He is on the local football and lacrosse team. John has an older sister that is currently in an education program. John’s mother states that he has the academic ability to do very well in school but often lacks the stamina to work through longer assignments. John was recently assessed using the DRA-1 and he is currently reading slightly below grade level. John’s score placed him, instructionally, at 40NF.

Jacob (pseudonym) is a fifth grader at Global Elementary. He is a Caucasian male student and is highly motivated by the use of technology. He is turning 10 at the end of December. He works very hard to impress adults when they are watching him directly but can lose this motivation when he is working independently. Jacob plays on the same lacrosse team as John and they have been friends for a few years. Jacob is high achieving in math but has stated his dislike for reading is mostly due to his lack of finding a “good book.” Jacob is the only child in

his family. Jacob was recently assessed using the DRA-1 and he is currently reading slightly below grade level. Jacob's score placed him, instructionally, at 40NF.

Jen (pseudonym) is a fifth grader at Global Elementary. She is a Caucasian female student who loves to read about animals. Jen is very soft-spoken and struggles to find her voice within a larger group. She has a lot of things to add to a conversation but lacks the risk-taking skills that are needed when working within a group. Jen is 10 years old and has two sisters that both go to the local high school. Jen's parents are divorced and she visits her father on the weekends. She states that she loves to read at home much more than she does at school because at home she can get comfortable and "lost in her book." Jen loves to ride horses and uses this as a motivation for a lot of her writing. Jen was recently assessed using the DRA-1 and she is currently reading slightly below grade level. Jen's score placed her, instructionally, at 40NF.

Jeb (pseudonym) is a fifth grader at Global Elementary. He is a Caucasian male student who loves reading non-fiction texts. Specifically, Jeb enjoys reading about the government, technology and cars. He is always asking for magazines and websites where we can learn about new inventions or laws. When observing him, though, he seems to fixate on the pictures and seldom can he tell you very specific details from the text. Jeb is 10 years old and in new to the district as of September. Jeb is one of four children and has moved several times within the last few years. Jeb was recently assessed using the DRA-1 and he is currently reading slightly below grade level. Jeb's score placed him, instructionally, at 40NF.

Researcher Stance

As a researcher and classroom teacher of the students in this study, I served as what Mills (2007) calls an active participant observer. An active participant observer, as Mills states (2007), is one that is actively engaged in observing the outcomes of one's teaching practice. I had

worked with the students who participated in this study since September 2012 and was the one who implemented and observed the outcomes of different aspects of the blogging. In conjunction with conducting the research needed for this study, I am working to obtain a Master's Degree in Literacy Education at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York. I currently hold a teaching certificate in Childhood Education and a certificate in Instruction of Students with Disabilities. I am currently in my second year of teaching at the school where this research will take place and came into the school with two years of prior experience from another district.

Method

During this study, I observed my students entries to their Reader's Response Blogs and the comments they posted on each other's readers' blogs over the duration of a text. I explored students' Readers' Blogs for evidence of engagement and interaction between peers. I did this by looking at the quantity and quality of posts each day by each participant. I looked for the relation between students based on their posts and the themes they discuss within each. Then, I added discussion pages where students could post comments or questions about specific themes and events within the story. I observed the activity on the blogs and compared it to that of prior student reader responses when no blog was used. I compared the engagement level by looking at the amount of conversational comments posted, authenticity of the assignment, and interaction between the students based on the number of threads they posted on. Finally, I administered a student questionnaire (see Appendix A) that helped me determine the students' enjoyment and value they felt the blogs had on their learning experience.

Quality and Credibility of Research

The quality and credibility in the process of this research is very important. Mills (2007) states that the credibility is the researcher's ability to take into account the complexities that arise

during the study and deal with patterns that are not easily explained. To provide credibility for this study, I triangulated my information by collecting data from a variety of sources. The data sources I used include observation data (experience), a questionnaire (enquire), and artifacts for analysis in the form of blogging (examination). Triangulation was used, which Mills (2011) argues provided credibility through enabling comparison of data for cross-checking data.

I also ensured transferability in my research. Transferability is defined as the researchers' belief that everything that study is context bound as not to develop statements that can be generalized to larger groups (Mills, 2011). This action research study took place in a fifth grade classroom where all students have access to iPads with internet access within their home. Therefore, the findings may not be transferable to all students because not all students have access to computer and the internet outside of the school setting. Also, this study's population is relatively small, being 4 students, and consideration should be taken when transferring the findings to substantially larger populations. In my study, I collected detailed descriptive data that was specific to the study. This allowed for comparisons to be made among different contexts.

It is also important to ensure dependability in my research practice. Dependability refers to the stability of the data (Mills, 2011). To address issues related to the dependability within my study, I overlapped my method of data collection using questionnaires after reviewing the student's Blogs to compare findings and to assist in my understanding of students' viewpoints. Also, the readers' blogs that I chose to examine were recorded on my personal wiki and can be accessed if need be (Mills, 2011). Another way to ensure dependability is through the use of an "audit trail," (p. 105) which, according to Mills (2007), refers to having an external auditor examine the processes of data collection during the study. During this process, I worked with a critical colleague who examined my process of data collection, analysis and interpretation.

Lastly, confirmability of the data, which Mills (2011) defines as neutral and objective data, is ensured by the practice of triangulation. Being the teacher and questionnaire developer, I made sure that all background information was clear when considering the formulation of questions and responses. I compared the variety of data sources and different methods that I used to cross-check the data.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants

Before beginning my data collection, I made sure to collect informed consent and protect the rights of my participants. In my study, I worked with four participating students and made sure to provide each student with an assent form. The purpose of this form was to inform my participants and their families of the study they were about to participate in as well as give an opportunity for the parents to give permission. Upon receiving a signature from each parent, I was able to go ahead with the initial process of collecting data. I informed each parent that, for this study, all names would be changed to pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Likewise, I made it clear that no identifying marks would be available on the artifacts that were to be collected from the participants. Confidentiality was also guaranteed to protect the rights of the students.

Data Collection

I used three forms of data collection within this study. One form of data collection was a student questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) is to understand the students' perceptions regarding the benefits of different aspects of blogging within their classroom instruction and their reader response. The questions were written so that the students could express their opinions freely. The students had the option of completing a web-version or a paper version to express their opinions. The participants were able to access and complete the

questionnaire within 30 minutes directly on their iPad within their scheduled guided reading group.

Another form of data collection included samples of students' individual blog posts that were printed from the classroom blogging page. Throughout the duration of the study, each participant was responsible for posting a response to the prompt given during their independent reading time after we had met and read a section from our novel. The students were allowed to discuss further prompts or thoughts through individual posts that were not connected to the threads that include a question. Students were assessed based on their inclusion of specific traits. The traits I was looking for included the following: date of entry, genre of book, title and author of book and a descriptive summary. Some extension activities were also included on the blog to push the student's thinking. The summaries the students posted were required to include: characters, major events read about, and a prediction with text-based evidence to support the prediction, skills we had worked on throughout the school year.

The third form of data collection included observations made regarding the individual posts created outside of the prompts given to the students (discussion page). I observed both the quantity and quality of their posts.

Data Analysis

Multiple steps were taken to analyze the data I collected from my research. First, I transcribed all of my observation notes and student interviews and made several copies of the data. I read through all of my field notes to recall significant events that happened during the four weeks of this study. The next step I took in analyzing my data was to examine the student blog posts used during the research study. I accessed the classroom blog on the Internet and explored the site that students used to begin to gather additional background information. I examined the

participants' blogs in depth, focusing on their updated posts and compared it to the responses they had prior to utilizing the blog. I created a rubric (see Appendix B) using five aspects of writing: summary, character development, metacognition strategies, text based evidence and mechanics. I will assess each blog post using the rubric.

After I collected all of my data, I began to organize it into categories. Reading through the field notes and looking over the blogs, I categorized my data based upon common themes that I found. As I began reading through my data to code it, I noticed common threads appearing through all of my sources that had been consistent with the literature that I had previously reviewed.

Findings and Discussion

After careful examination and analysis of the data collected throughout my research, a few themes emerged. These themes were found consistently throughout the data and demonstrate the benefits of blogging in reading instruction. The themes include the following: blogging stimulates an increase in student motivation, blogging strengthens reading skills, and blogging creates an authentic learning experience.

Blogging Stimulates an Increase in Student Motivation

The first major theme that emerged from my research was that using blogs in the classroom resulted in increased motivation for the students involved. This theme was evident throughout multiple aspects of my research, appearing in both the student interviews as well as in the observation of students while working.

When I observed the students working during guided reading instruction where they had the opportunity to use their blogs, the students appeared to be engaged in their work and were quiet and focused. Table 1 displays the "time on task" for one participant, Jacob (pseudonym),

before introducing the blog as well as their time on task during the four weeks of research conducted.

Table 1

Time On Task - Jacob (pseudonym)

Date	10.10.12*	10.16.12	10.24.12	11.1.12
Mini-lesson	x	x	x	x
Transition(s)	-	x	x	x
Guided Reading	x	x	x	x
Independent Reading	-	x	-	x
Response	-	x	x	x

Note. * denotes observation prior to introduction of blog

x denotes on task greater than 1/2 of time allotted; - denotes time on task less than 1/2

Prior to introducing the blog, I observed student time on task during guided reading instruction. I was focusing on how quickly they transitioned and how long they spent completing a response. I work with these students on a daily basis and know how quickly they can lose focus during reading instruction, specifically during transitions. I then began to observe the students once had the opportunity to respond using a blog. They quickly turned to their iPads and started responding. Based on Table 1, you can see a clear level of ‘time on task’ once the student had the opportunity to use the blog during guided reading instruction. Generally, the students remained fairly quiet and engaged for the entire work session once they had the blog as an option during guided reading instruction. Likewise, most of the conversations that the students were having

were focused around technical questions that they may have had when they were working through their blogging. There were a few group sessions when the students even asked to extend their reading time because they “wanted to go back in and comment on some of their friends blogs” (Student observation, October 18, 2012). Baker (2000), in a study done surrounding student engagement when presented with technology, concluded that student success was directly related to the level of engagement in a project which was made possible through technology. The previous method of instruction during the students guided reading time was not supported by technology, hence, the lower level of student engagement. Seldom did the students ever remain on task the entire reading block, let alone ask for extended time to complete an activity.

After interviewing the participants, it was clear to me that the students were motivated by the blogging project that was set up during their reading instruction. All of the participants reported that they liked using the blog in school. One student participant, Jacob (pseudonym), stated during a follow-up interview that, “having the blog made it easier for me to get out my thoughts because I wasn’t always worried about how much I had to write or words were spelled. All that I had to think about was the questions I was asked” (Student Interview, November 1, 2012). Another participant, Jen (pseudonym) similarly stated, “the blog made me excited for reading group because I was excited to see what my classmates thought of my responses” (Student Interview, November 1, 2012). Based on both student’s reflections, there seems to be a direct connection between their motivation and the use of a blog during instruction. In a study done on student interest in technology, Hackbarth (2004) found that most students have an affection for technology use regardless of their individual background. Jeb stated during an interview session that, “he liked using the blog because of the many great ideas that came from

doing it in class and from their classmates” (Student Interview, November 2, 2012).

Additionally, he made me aware of all of the work he does outside of class on the blog, “going back through and making sure that my answers make sense, something that I normally wouldn’t have done on an old reader response” (Student Interview, November 2, 2012). Jacob had a similar response when he stated, “We started using the blog and it has made reading a little bit more fun because we get to talk with other kids about what it is that we are reading and since we are all asking questions, it is okay if there is a part that I do not know. I can just post it on the blog” (Student interview, November 1, 2012). Based on Jacob’s response, you can see a clear increase in motivation, one that is fostered by a decrease in anxiety when trying to work through a difficult assignment. He makes it clear that the blog is a space that he feels comfortable posting questions for others to answer, opening a new thread of discussion. Jen made a similar comment when she stated, “blogging has even made reading at home better because I use it at home now too. I use it to help me in following along with different parts of my book so I don’t forget the next day” (Student interview, November 2, 2012). Jen’s comments show a clear excitement for blogging, for she has a place to update her thinking and return to when she needs help recalling important facts/details. The ability to post outside of the classrooms has given Jen the opportunity to support her own learning, at her own pace, individualized to support her needs. Jeb also reported that he had been using the blog at home to have conversations about the book we were reading during guided reading. He stated that “it was a good place to turn while he was working through his reading homework” (Student Interview, November 2, 2012). Jeb’s reading homework was often incomplete or done haphazardly prior to this study. His comment regarding his ability to now complete work at home shows a clear increase in motivation to complete his schoolwork. Glewa and Bogan (2007) reported that using technology as the medium for

discussion and writing enhances literacy projects as it motivates students to respond, reflect and share their ideas and feelings. The interviews and observations I made of my students demonstrate that because students enjoyed blogging and were excited to participate in work that was beyond what the other students were working on, clearly showing an increase in their motivation.

Blogging Strengthens Reading Skills

Another theme that arose from my research was that reading skills were strengthened through the use of a blog. An increase in student's reading skills was found in the student interviews and teacher observations. Most predominantly, though, the effects of blogging on student comprehension was seen when I analyzed and assessed student blog postings.

Each week, the participants were required to complete a reader response based on the novel they were working through. Their response was scored based on a teacher-generated rubric that had been developed prior to the start of the school year but that had been utilized each week since September, 2012 (see Appendix B). Four samples of blog postings for each of the four participants were assessed using the teacher-generated rubric. Students were allowed to post as little or as much as they wanted regarding prompts posted throughout the week. I chose their assigned weekly reader response to score and examine in hopes to find similar trends. The aspects of their response that were assessed on the rubric include summary, character development, metacognition strategies, text based evidence and mechanics. I assessed a blog sample each week in order to make a comparison based on their prior work and their growth over time while using the blog.

Table 2 showcases the work of all four participants prior to the introduction of a blog during our guided reading instruction. The students were assigned to create a reader's response

based on a short text that we read during class. Their response was scored based on the teacher created rubric (Appendix B).

Table 2

Student Reader Response Pre-Assessment

Students	Jeb	Jacob	Jen	John
Summary	1	1	1	1
Character Development	0	0	1	.5
Metacognition Strategies	1	1	1	1
Text-based Evidence	1.5	1.5	1	1.5
Mechanics	.5	1	1	1

Note. Maximum possible score on each section is 2 points; 10 possible points on reader response. Upon first glance, the table indicates that there was a clear need to focus instruction on students' use of mechanics in writing, as well as support their text summary, character development and use of metacognition strategies while reading. The students had a solid handle on using text based evidence in their writing prior to the introduction of the reader's blog. Looking at Table 3, though, which details the scores of the student's reader response constructed on the blog after two weeks of daily use of the blog, a general increase in reading skills begins to emerge.

Table 3

Student Reader Response While Blogging, week 2

Students	Jeb	Jacob	Jen	John
Summary	1	1	2	1
Character Development	.5	1	1	1
Metacognition Strategies	1	1	1.5	1.5
Text-based Evidence	1.5	1.5	1	1.5
Mechanics	1	1.5	1	1.5

Note. Maximum possible score on each section is 2 points; 10 possible points on reader response

The data in Table 3 shows the growth students were beginning to make after two weeks of using the blog while working through their novel. There are notable gains in all categories, but the biggest gains falling in the categories of ‘mechanics’ and ‘character development.’ All of the participants gained a point(s) in ‘character development.’ When asked what changed in their writing, John (pseudonym) stated, “Because I could go back to prior threads, I was able to easier recall how my character was changing as the book was going on” (Observation, October 19, 2012). Having the blog to support their thinking allowed the students a place to find information to support their thinking. Yang (2009) supports this idea that students are able to recall information when supported by a blog. The students of this study use their prior communication as a source of information in their reader responses.

By the end of my research, the student's reader responses had become more thorough and detail-based, with a strong attention to grammar rules. Table 4 shows the scores of each participant's final reader's response following four weeks of guided reading instruction supported by a blog.

Table 4

Student Reader Response While Blogging, week 4

Students	Jeb	Jacob	Jen	John
Summary	2	2	2	2
Character Development	1.5	1	2	2
Metacognition Strategies	1.5	1	1.5	1.5
Text-based Evidence	1.5	1	1	1.5
Mechanics	2	1	1.5	2

Note. Maximum possible score on each section is 2 points; 10 possible points on reader response

The data in Table 4 shows that all students had a solid understanding of how to construct a summary. Their summaries followed a clear structure and utilized a strong amount of evidence from within the text to support their thinking. Likewise, the students paid close attention to detail, editing their work to make sure all grammar rules were followed. Knowing that there is a global audience for each assignment they complete, the participants were motivated to produce their highest quality work when it came to posting on the blog. They often went back in to the blog, outside of guided reading time, to correct errors a classmate had pointed out to them.

Overac (2002) supports the idea that participating in web-based communication forums encourages students to be analytical of others, as well as themselves, and build off of prior thinking. The participants in the study proved this as they evaluated their work each day, revised prior postings, and suggested future topics within the blog.

In my analysis, I found that students' text-based answers and summaries were the areas that improved the most throughout this research. Of all the areas that were assessed, these two areas stood out as having major gains within most of the participants,

Blogging Creates and Authentic Learning Experience

A third theme that arose from my research was that when students wrote on the blog, they were engaged in an authentic learning experience. Authenticity stood out as a major theme throughout all of my research but it was most noticeable in student interviews and teacher observation. It was easy to see when I observed my students working with the blogs that one of the major benefits was the authentic audience blogging creates. Through blogging, students are aware that others will be viewing their writing and having an audience allows the choice a chance to express their view. Blogging allows student's work to be put on a stage for the whole world to see and it was clear during observations that students were keen to editing their work so that it was of the highest quality. John had stated that he was "excited by the fact that kids in other classes and other schools were able to see the work that they were doing and he hoped that they would like the things that he and his classmates were saying. Hopefully they will learn from it too like we are" (Student interview, November 1, 2012). John's comment shows that the students recognized their role as bloggers being in charge of an authentic audience and purpose. John is excited about the global nature of blogging, knowing that more than just his peers or the teacher will see his work. Research done by Crawford (2007) supports this ideas that working

with an online web-program provides learners with a communication outlet, connecting them with a community that they would otherwise have never gotten to experience. Through the blog, John has the opportunity to teach others about new topics and critique his own thinking and understanding.

While interviewing the students, it was clear that they were not only aware of their audience, but they enjoyed the social activity of blogging as well. When asked about reading reflections prior to this study, all participants made it clear that writing about their reading inhibits them because they have to stop in the middle of a page just to take down notes. One participant, Jen (pseudonym), stated that, “reading is supposed to be looking through a book and getting information. When I have to stop and write it down, it makes me not want to pick up the book again and I lose my thoughts” (Student Questionnaire). The student’s response showcases a clear lack of motivation due to the lack of authentic work they are working through. Surprisingly, though, the participants mindset changed in regards to responding to their reading as they went along with a text. Jen explained, “I would rather write things out on a blog because I have the opportunity to look up unknown words or information but can also have a conversation with my classmates at different times throughout the book. Some readers are slower or faster and this allows us to read at our own pace and still have real conversations” (Student interview, November 2, 2012). Jen shows a distinct difference in opinion regarding responding to reading once the blog was introduced. Once introduced, Jen saw a purpose to responding to reading as she worked through a text and found motivation in the opportunity to work at her own pace. Read and Fisher (2006) agree that when students work at their own pace and have control over what their learning looks like, they feel confident that they will succeed.

Each participant was required to communicate on the blog daily. They would have to respond to a thread that I updated daily, regarding specific themes and events that happened within the story. They, in turn, would then have to respond to 2 classmates posts each day, totaling ten responses each week. Table 5 displays the total number of new thread posts created each week throughout the study as well as the number of responses received.

Table 5

Total Number of Blog Threads and Response Posts

Week	1	2	3	4
New Threads	5	7	14	19
Response Posts	38	45	67	123

Note. Week 4 included posts from 2 other students in the class that had read the book earlier in the school year.

Based on the blog response count, the average number of posts by each kid was 68 a week. The students seemed to view blogging as a social activity and an extension to the conversations that we were having in class. Since this is an activity that they are already participating in through the use of Facebook, Skype, Oovoo and text messaging, students began to feel like this was just another means to express their feelings and thoughts. John (pseudonym) stated, “I started replying to Jeb’s posts on my cell phone at home because it would show up in my email and I really wanted to respond to what he was saying. It didn’t even feel like homework” (Student Interview, November 2, 2012). Zawilinski (2009) argued that many students develop proficient computer tool use at home, on the Internet through instant messaging

and online tools. Blogging in the classroom is a way to bring an out-of-school- literacy into school and it is authentic as it is something similar to what children this age would typically do.

Implications

The findings of my research suggest several implications for me as a teacher. First, it is clear that blogging within reading instruction can be beneficial in supporting students comprehension. Using blogs to support comprehension has proven to be an effective and meaningful means of learning for my students. My findings demonstrate to me that the use of a classroom blog would certainly be a valuable asset to my classroom and my curriculum. In future use of classroom blogs, I will be sure to include time to work with my students on introducing them to the blog and making sure they understand how to use it properly. As Read and Fisher (2006) argue, it is possible to make school more authentic when students have a purpose for reading and writing. I have learned through my research, interviews, and examination of student blogs that an authentic learning experience allows an opportunity for students to write for purposes that are relevant and meaningful.

Another implication of my research is that the use of classroom blogs is motivating for students. As both the literature and my findings suggest, when students find motivation with their learning, their excitement and engagement in their learning will increase (Daniels, 2004). Through student interviews and classroom observations, as well as recent research on the topic, I have learned that student enjoy using a classroom blog because they are given the opportunity to communicate with their peers in a social context while still working through an assignment. Read and Fisher (2006) state that students choose blogging for a communicative purpose. After my study was complete, the interviews with my participants supported the fact that they enjoyed communicating with one another over the blogs and it helped foster positive relationships with

their peers. I believe that it is important for teachers to create authentic experiences, such as one that includes blog discussions, to create engaged and meaningful learning. Authentic experiences foster one type of learning that will help increase student motivation.

A third implication of my research is that students' reading comprehension can improve through the use of blogging within a text. Yang (2009) states that technologies should not take the place of instruction but, more likely, support instruction for students. My findings show that certain aspects of comprehension increased over the length of my study when the blog was utilized in conjunction with instruction. This information is important to me as a teacher because it reaffirms that blogging is not only an enjoyable activity for students, but it also helps strengthen literacy skills. As a teacher, I want to make sure that what I am teaching will help to increase my students' knowledge and therefore improve their skill levels in all academic areas.

Given what I have learned from recent literature such as Warschauer's (2007) study and Read and Fisher's (2006) study as well as my own research on the topic, I will be certain to find ways to integrate social learning into my classroom. I will build learning experiences that promote authenticity, social-based engagement and room for strengthening and revising students' own literacy skills. It is critical that teachers continue to recognize ways to support students' skills in the authentic and meaningful ways that a blog does.

Conclusion

The main question that guided this research project was if blogging can be used to support reading comprehension? Technologies have a history of acting as a supporting tool within the classroom. The theoretical framework of this study focused on students natural ability to participate in their own learning by incorporating new literacies into daily instruction. My findings showed a measurable gain in student scores on written responses to literature when

advanced technologies and blogging were integrated. The work the students completed was thorough and much more developed than their work that they completed prior to utilizing the blog. Likewise, there was an obvious increase in student motivation while blogging. These findings call for teachers to begin to utilize technology as a support to instruction.

Unfortunately, there are a few limitations to my research. Most notably, the time allotted to conduct research in practice was minimal, which limited the amount observation and any further opportunities to work towards supporting further literacy skills. If I were to do this research again, I would have liked to have more time to allow for the opportunity to develop target skills that the individual students need more support with. I was able to see growth but know, that with more time, I would see a gain in all reading skills. If I had more time, I would also have the opportunity to explore other ways to incorporate blogging into reading instruction as well as a variety of blogging styles that might have worked better for my specific learners. The blog site used in this study was basic and didn't allow for outside links or sites to be connected to threads. This limited the participants ability to connect/extend their learning without having to leave the blogging site. Secondly, due to the nature of this study, the ability to connect to the blog outside of the school day may also have hindered any further discussions, posts, or thoughts that students may have been inclined to post. If I were to do this research again, I would make sure that my students had complete internet access at all times of their day, not knowing when they were reading, and wanting them to have access to the blog as a way to support their thinking. During this study, there were a few missed opportunities to connect threads and thoughts on the blog due to loss of internet connectivity.

After considering all of the implications that my research brings to mind, I am presented with some lasting questions. First, how can blogging be utilized throughout a student's day and

in other academic subjects to support their learning? As a teacher, we must continuously search for ways to engage our students in learning that they find meaningful. Having seen the results of this study, I am intrigued to see if these results would be present in other subjects. Would students feel inclined to follow their progress in math, detailing the steps they take to figure out complex problems? Would science instruction allow for students to reflect critically while still expressing themselves logically? How would students use a blog in special-area instruction (art, music, physical education, etc)? These are some of the questions that arose while conducting my research. One area that I would like to research more in depth is how blogging supports students global awareness. It would be interesting to see how being connected to a global network opens the door for more critical, worldly conversations instigated by students.

Blogging in the classroom is a highly effective way to support reading comprehension. Throughout my research, the theme of student motivation tied to technology use in the classroom was present, due to the authentic nature of technology usage. Outside of the increased motivation, blogging also acts as a springboard for authentic learning as well as helps support the comprehension skills of readers. Teachers continue to search for ways to create memorable and authentic experiences within the classroom as a way to motivate all learners. Blogging provides a positive way to create this experience. This purposeful learning activity that involves student engagement, communication and collaboration with one another, helps support the idea of bringing out of school literacies inside the classroom.

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Appendix A

Name: _____

Student Questionnaire

1. What is your favorite subject? Why is it your favorite subject?
2. What is your least favorite subject? Why is it your least favorite subject?
3. If you could change one thing about your least favorite subject, what would it be?
4. What is your favorite topic to read about?
5. What is your favorite topic to write about?
6. What is your favorite thing to do outside of school?
7. When you do your homework, which of the following do you have on in the background:

music **television** **video game** **computer** **phone**

8. How long, on average, do you think you spend on the computer/telephone?
9. Have you ever used a blog? What/why did you use it?
10. Having the iPads in the classroom helps me learn (true/false). Explain your answer.
11. To what extent do you use the computer/iPad for your homework?
12. Read the following scenarios and circle the best answer to fit your situation:

	Always true			Never true
a. I read over my work before I turn it in.	1	2	3	4
b. I try my best on every assignment I do.	1	2	3	4
c. When I submit an assignment, I am proud of my work.	1	2	3	4
d. The computer makes me more excited to learn.	1	2	3	4

Appendix B

Name:

Date:

Assignment:

Comprehension Rubric

Strategy	0	1	2	Comments
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summary does not follow path of story - Lacks transitions - Details are not present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summary highlights a few major events of the text - Transitions are present but lack differentiation - A few details are exposed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summary highlights the major events of the text. -Transitions are frequent and differentiated. -Many details are included to support the path of events 	
Character Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of character trait - No evidence from the text provided to support character trait 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One character trait is examined - One piece of evidence is used from the text to support the character trait 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two or more character traits are examined -One piece of evidence is used to support the character trait - Character trait showcases change within the text 	
Metacognition Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attempt to explain metacognition skills used while reading but misguide the reader -Fail to focus in on strategies that supported their thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -One metacognition strategy present that begins to explain student thinking -Student begins to explain how this strategy helped them understand the story but lacks necessary detail. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Two or more strategies present that explain the students thinking while reading -Strategies are supported with text-evidence that explains how this helped them while reading 	
Text-based Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Little to no evidence taken directly from the text - Little to no use of direct quotes or sentence starters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One piece of evidence is used to support thinking - One/two direct quotes have been pulled from the text but lack interpretation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two or more pieces of evidence are used to support thinking - Two or more direct quotes have been pulled from the text are supported by student interpretation 	
Mechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No evidence of editing work for proper grammar/punctuation with errors present that inhibit general understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of editing work for proper grammar/punctuation with some errors present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little to no errors present with punctuation and grammar presenting a smooth presentation 	

Score: _____

Comments: