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The impact of blogs in the classroom: a qualitative analysis of elementary students using blogs to respond to texts

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**THE IMPACT OF BLOGS IN THE CLASSROOM: A QUALITATIVE
ANALYSIS OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS USING BLOGS TO RESPOND TO
TEXTS**

by

Jessica A. Bakan

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education
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For the degree of
Master of Arts in Reading Education
at
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Stephanie Abraham

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Dedications

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the students in my classroom, my friends, and family. Through continued support and motivation, this paper was made possible.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my parents, Karen and Paul, along with my sisters, Jeanette and Janine, for being supportive and inspirational figures through this process and my life. Also, a special thank you to my advisor Stephanie Abraham for continued support and guidance through this process.

Abstract

Jessica Bakan

THE IMPACT OF BLOGS IN THE CLASSROOM: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF
ELEMENTARY STUDENTS USING BLOGS TO RESPOND TO TEXTS
2016-2017

Dr. Stephanie Abraham
Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study was to investigate how students in a fourth grade classroom used blogging when responding to texts. Students were required to write a blog post about the fictional text that they were currently reading. In the posts, I encouraged students to incorporate details and well-developed responses. Students were given freedom to write without a prompt to guide their responses. After the students wrote their initial posts, they had the freedom to read their classmates' entries and comment, developing an online community. Throughout this study, I have analyzed student engagement, motivation, writing skills, quality of responses, and interactions between classmates through the use of the blog. I found that blogs provide a new platform for students to learn from each other, allow students to feel comfortable interacting with their classmates, and motivate them to read texts based on their classmates' suggestions.

Table of Contents

Abstract	v
List of Tables	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Purpose Statement	2
Statement of Research Problem and Question	4
Story of the Question	4
Organization Overview of the Thesis	7
Chapter 2: Literature Review	8
Implementing Blogs in the Classroom	8
Community of Inquiry	11
Motivation, Engagement, and Growth as Writers	13
Conclusions	15
Chapter 3: Context of Study	17
Community	17
School	18
Classroom	18
Students	19
Research Design	20
Procedure of Study	21
Data Collection	24
Data Analysis	25
Chapter 4: Data Analysis	27

Table of Contents (Continued)

Findings	27
Experimental Use of Writing and Voice	28
Making Connections	29
Text Evidence	29
Below Level Reader Posts	30
Grammar and Mechanics	31
Analyzing Student Interaction Through Commenting	31
Feelings Toward the Blog	33
Chapter 5: Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications	36
Conclusions	36
Limitations	37
Implications	38
References	40
Appendix A: Rubric	42
Appendix B: Survey	43
Appendix C: Interview Questions.....	45

List of Tables

Table	Page
Table 1. Student Survey Responses	34

Chapter 1

Introduction

As I entered my fourth year of teaching, I was eager, yet perplexed. As the students filed into my fourth grade classroom on the first day of the year, three teachers, rather than just I, greeted them. This was the first year that I would be working in a classroom with students eligible for special education, and sharing teaching all day, everyday with other teachers. Although this was a new factor in my career, I took it with stride, as I realized it would just give me more experience doing what I love.

Having a different population in my classroom compared to other years did not, however, change my goal for the school year – incorporate more meaningful uses of technology. Lankshear and Knobel (2014) claim that technology should be used in the classroom in a way that allows students to interact with others and build a community. I realized that it was my job to not just use technology to engage students, but rather to use technology to create an online community.

Time passed, and the routines in the classroom were beginning to fall into place. It was October, which was the month that I would be introducing the blog project to the students. The day came, and I shared with the students that they would be able to interact with their classmates by commenting online. “Is it like Facebook and Instagram?” My students questioned, and in a way it was. It was a place that they could share their ideas, and interact together through discussions of those ideas. The students seemed excited as I told them about my study and had them grab their iPads and come to the front of the class. The students all logged in, after having some technical issues for about twenty minutes, and we read my sample post. They were very interested, and I was continually

surprised, since the post had information about reading strategies and how I felt about a book, which was not anything I thought would be too exciting. I then shared their first post assignment. The students just stared. “Did you say we could write about whatever we want, as long as it relates to our book?” My perfectionists that *need* direction continued to raise their hands and ask questions, but I reassured them that this is where they had freedom to express themselves through the blog, and to save the questions for their classmates as they interact online.

We were ready to embark on a new technological adventure in room 133.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to observe and share information about the ways students use blogs to respond to texts and interact with classmates. Often, many teachers are faced with the challenge of incorporating technology into instruction, but are not provided much guidance, other than the tools, such as iPads or Chromebooks. This research and study was important, since it addressed a way to incorporate meaningful technology use in the classroom. After reading a qualitative study conducted by Shirley Pyon (2008) in her third grade classroom, I found that blogs could be a valuable addition. Through reading the blogs, Pyon (2008) saw that students were interacting and sharing methods for solving math problems. Through interviews with her students, she found that the students felt more comfortable to interact through the online format. Her students felt that it was easier to say nice things, and her English Language Learners felt less pressure to engage in discussions with their classmates.

Incorporating blogs into the classroom provides another Discourse in which students interact. It allows them to utilize a tool that allows them to learn from each other,

and develop skills for the 21st century world. Researchers, Angelaina and Jimoyiannis (2012), conducted a study in which blogs were used in a high school classroom with students ranging from ages fourteen to fifteen. The researchers discuss the idea that blogging leads to a Community of Inquiry [CoI], which is an idea developed by Garrison et al. (2000). The CoI focuses on learning through technology in a way that encourages purposeful interactions in an online environment. The CoI outlines three components of creating a meaningful online environment, which includes “the social presence, the teaching presence and the cognitive presence” (Angelaina & Jimoyiannis, 2012, p. 185).

Lacina and Griffith (2013) shared in their study the idea that technology is an integral part of the 21st century children's lives. Through current research, it is clear to see that the use of blogs gave students the opportunity to use technology in a more meaningful and interactive way. Using blogs in any subject area helps develop a community of writers within a classroom. Through blogs students can learn from each other, and develop inquiry learning through their classmates' posts and comments (Lacina & Griffith, 2013)

Angelaina and Jimoyiannis' (2012) and Lacina and Griffith's (2013) research related to the ideas of Paulo Freire (1993). He developed the idea of critical literacy, which encourages students to share information that they know about a topic and learn from each other in way that confronts issues of power. This sharing of information leads to understanding of topics from different points of view through students and teachers sharing in the learning. The use of blogs will allow for the incorporation of critical literacy intertwined with the use of technology.

Through researching, it was clear that not much research with blogs has been conducted in the elementary setting. This research and thesis will address ways that elementary students interact through blogging, and how they will respond to texts. This data analysis will build on the findings of Pyon (2008) and extend the use of blogs during reading instruction. This research will also demonstrate critical literacy and the development of 21st century skills in the elementary classroom.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

The purpose of this study was to see how students respond to texts using blogs. Specifically, I was looking to see if students were more motivated to write, and if through interactions were motivated to read about texts that their classmates shared with them. This study also sought to answer how students interact through commenting. In what ways do students demonstrate their awareness of the audience? How have students shown awareness of proper mechanics? What ways have students demonstrated engagement in writing using the blog?

Story of the Question

As a school that incorporates technology in every classroom through iPads, Chromebooks, and SMARTboards, many administrators were looking for better ways to incorporate technology in the classroom instruction and meet the technology standards provided in the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. Growing up, I have always been intrigued by technology and consider myself technologically literate. Many teachers that I have worked with have turned to me for help with issues they may have been having, and most of the time I have been able to help. This inspired me to help teachers not just with

their own computers, but also with ways that they can incorporate technology into their instruction.

Along with the desire to help my colleagues, a conversation with the superintendent during my first observation as a teacher has continued to stick with me, and inspired this question. I had not used technology in the lesson that he observed, other than my SMARTboard which was only used to project the students' textbook on the screen. Though this was great for students that have trouble focusing and following along, the superintendent made a comment unrelated to my classroom, but was a comment that I continue to think about today. *How can we use the iPads in a meaningful way? My intention for getting them was not to replace paper, but to be used in a way that can only be done with technology.* Ever since that conversation, I have been striving to think of ways that my students' iPads and my SMARTboard were not just expensive notebook paper and white boards. I wanted to answer his question and figure out more meaningful uses for the technology.

With help from my colleague that I have been working with for three years, I have been able to incorporate the use of interactions through technology by using Google Drive, but it still was not as interactive as I would have liked. Finally, I thought there was a light at the end of the tunnel of this technology, searching journey. My district was purchasing Chromebooks for one class in each grade. It would be up to the teacher to become a Google Guru, and create a new curriculum, allowing for most of the schoolwork to be completed using the Chromebooks. Right away I knew I wanted to do it. I knew that I could create a thesis question relating to technology, and this would guarantee one-on-one devices for my students. I quickly when home, downloaded Google

Classroom and began my research. After gathering information, I conveniently read an article by Barone and Wright (2008) for a graduate course. Todd Wright (2008) shared information about how he incorporated technology in the classroom. He shared that it was not easy, but once the year progressed, it would get better. He also shared that it was our job as teachers to prepare of students for the future, and technology was the future. I could not wait to have a classroom like Todd Wright, but the excitement quickly faded as I was faced with the problem of having these Chromebooks and fear of only using them to replace paper. Yes, the students could interact with me and each other, but I was not up for the challenge of completely going paperless, which left me doubtful of being able to answer this question that I had wanted to answer for so long (Barone & Wright, 2008).

As the new school year approached, we were given more iPads this year than before. Also, the gifted students in my room had their own iPads through the program. My principal approached me and asked if it would be beneficial in my classroom if all the students had their own iPad. This was it. My heart jumped, and I immediately shared my ideas for my thesis with him, and he quickly provided me with the extra iPads needed to have a one-on-one iPad room.

With my district following the Danielson evaluation model which emphasizes facilitating a classroom that is student lead through inquiry and questioning, I not only strived to allow students to use technology independently, I wanted them to use it collaboratively and in a way that fosters an environment in which students question and learn from each other. I wanted to be the facilitator in the classroom, and give the students an opportunity to have more dependence on each other and learn from one another, not just me. As Paulo Freire (1993) believed, teachers should not be “banking”

information into students. Students and teachers should share in the learning, and the teacher should encourage learning and collaboration between students. To satisfy the checklists in the Danielson model, and to be involved in a classroom, which follows the beliefs of Freire (1993), I found that blogs would be a way to meet the needs.

In the end, I wanted to incorporate something in the classroom that I could continue to use all year. I wanted something that I could share with administrators and colleagues that would be a valuable need for our district. I wanted to answer something that I had been questioning since my first discussion with my superintendent. Through this study and incorporating blogs in the classroom, I have found a way to meet those wants and needs.

Organization Overview of the Thesis

In chapter two of this paper, relevant literature and current research relating to the topic of blogs and technology used in the classroom is discussed. Although it has been done, it is clear to see not much blogging has been discussed in the elementary classroom. Chapter three contains information about the students involved in the study and the study site. Also shown in this chapter is a description of how data will be collected and analyzed. Chapter four provides information about the data collected in the study. Chapter five summarizes and concludes the findings from the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Living in this time, we have seen both major and rapid changes in our world. The way we interact and communicate has changed, and we now have the ability to talk with anyone instantly through the use of technology. Not only do we have the ability to “talk” with anyone, but also there are new platforms for people in the world to share opinions, knowledge, and ideas for all to see. As technology continues to be part of our everyday lives, it is important for students to become literate in this field. In New Jersey, along with others in the United States, there has been a push for technology immersion in the classroom. Technology standards have been developed, and as teachers, we are faced with the task of incorporating valuable uses of technology into instruction. In this chapter, I review the research on incorporating blogs in the classroom. The first section of this chapter will shed light on ways teachers and researchers have initiated and used blogs in the classroom. The next section provides information about how implementing blogs has led to student inquiry and creating a community of writers. After that, the third section will explain how blogs can lead to student growth, engagement, and motivation in both writing and interacting online.

Implementing Blogs in the Classroom

Before students develop understanding of technology and online tools, teachers must be knowledgeable and aware of practices themselves before implementing the use of New Literacies in their classroom (Lankshear & Knobel, 2014). It is important as with any content area that the teacher must understand the tools and how they can be used. Through workshops, work with colleagues, and even reading teacher written blogs,

teachers can learn about technology and effective ways to implement them into the classroom.

Blogs have been a tool used in classrooms to accommodate this new age of technology. Griffith and Lacina (2012) share how Karen Arrington, veteran teacher and current technology advisor at a Texas elementary school, uses blogging to enhance writing. The study includes upper elementary students, and she shares the importance of continued guidance and explicit instruction when implementing the blog. Griffith and Lacina (2012) discuss Karen's strategies to support her students as they blogged. She began by teaching the students the process of blog writing with paper and pencil, before using the technology. This allowed her to reach her students with a method in which they are used to (paper and pencil), before adding the element of technology. Karen describes the importance of setting clear expectations and ensuring that the students understand objectives. For example, when teaching the students about commenting on other blog posts, she related the idea to "dollar comments" and "penny comments." Students understood that dollars are more valuable than pennies and related that idea to commenting. Her students were encouraged to write "dollar comments." These comments have more substance and allow for more interaction between classmates, which makes the blog posts more valuable than traditional writing assignments. Students are allowed to say they like a post, but they must follow up with an explanation and further analyze the post. Karen continued to interact with her students as the blogging continued in her classroom (Griffith & Lacina, 2012).

Researchers, Angelaina and Jimoyiannis (2012), also discuss how the teacher in their case study made sure the students were prepared to engage in blog writing before

using the actual blog. Students from two different classrooms ranging from ages fourteen to fifteen were immersed in blogs, both educational and not, and they were required to examine the overall themes. The teacher's goal was to analyze student engagement in a blog community. Students were prepared and taught what blogs are, how they are used, and how students can participate in them. The students were encouraged to develop independence through inquiry. The teacher supported the students with technology and monitored the blog, but did not interact with the students directly. As a result of their study, the researchers found that blogging in their classroom allowed for students to reflect individually, while also being able to interact with peers (Angelaina & Jimoyiannis, 2012).

The research shows that teachers implementing blogs in the classroom must set clear expectations. Other researchers commented on the fact blogs are beneficial for students, but that teachers must provide continued guidance that comes from thoughtful planning, which is based on the students' strengths and needs as they write blogs (MacBride & Luehmann, 2008). Also, they must teach students the importance of writing comments with substance, which will support continued questioning and interactions. Discussions of online etiquette must also be provided. It is important for students to understand the rules, expectations, and parameters in which to use their writing in the blogs.

Ellison and Wu (2008) conducted their mixed methods study in an undergraduate course at Midwestern University. This course was designed for junior and senior students that focused on the social impacts of new communication technologies. The researchers stressed the importance of making sure the students understand what a blog is, and how it

will be used for instruction. Ellison and Wu (2008) share that “blogging ... will not independently or autonomously increase student learning” (p.116). From these articles I conclude that teachers must first provide clear instruction and students must understand blogs before they can be used as valuable tools for writing instruction. Although using blogs allows the students to collaborate and interact through the use of technology, it is important to hold the students accountable for their writing, while continuously supporting and encouraging inquiry. As the students progress through using blogs, the teacher can support the continued learning through conferences and interviews with the students.

Community of Inquiry

In recent years, education has moved away from the idea of a teacher being the holder and distributor of knowledge. The current view is for teachers to be a facilitator and allow for the students to develop knowledge and understanding through questioning and peer interaction. This idea and classroom format can be supported with the use of blogs. Angelaina and Jimoyiannis (2012) discuss the Community of Inquiry (CoI), which is a model developed by Garrison et al. (2000) for online learning. The Community of Inquiry focuses on allowing students to learn through discovery, research, and questioning in online environments. This framework was created to:

[U]nderstand, design, support and analyze learning presence in online learning environments. The CoI model assumes that learning occurs within an educational CoI, which is defined as a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in purposeful critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and confirm mutual

understanding. The model identifies three constitutional elements in an e-learning experience, e.g. the social presence, the teaching presence and the cognitive presence. The key idea of CoI framework is that all three elements are necessary for a worthwhile educational experience.

(Angelaina & Jimoyiannis, 2012, p. 185)

Since our society is becoming more technologically driven, the online community is a discourse in which students will continue to interact throughout their lifetimes. Teachers can support growth in understanding the ways to interact through the use of blogs and following the CoI framework.

In a study by Ellison & Wu (2008) conducted in an undergraduate college class focusing on technology and its social impact, they noted that students felt that they have learned more not through their original blog posts, but through reading classmates' posts and comments. Students did not necessarily find the writing of the blog assignment to enhance learning, but they found great benefits in reading other classmates' blog posts and comments. This shows that the craft of writing itself did not seem to be more developed, but the ideas within the other classmates' blog posts have allowed for inquiry and ideas to develop or change. The blogs give the students to opportunity to learn how their classmates' feel about a topic, and it allows them to look at a text or topic critically, by looking through another classmates' eyes. Lacina and Griffith (2012) discuss the importance of technology in the classroom but also comment on the importance of developing a community of writers. To develop this community, writing should be done through interaction with other students, whether writing is done through technology or with pencil and paper (Lacina & Griffith 2012).

The qualitative data from Ellison and Wu (2008) showed that students understood and truly believed in the benefits of the online interaction. Through a survey, the researchers discovered students felt that reading classmates' posts and comments was more helpful than completing the written assignment. Students were able to read others' posts, and see a different side or opinion about the topic of study. Through interviews, students shared, "I liked the fact that we had to comment on others blogs. It's cool to get some feedback on what I've written' and 'I felt it was really cool when one of the people actually cited what I said in my blog on someone else's blog. I think that brought everything together'" (Ellison & Wu, 2008, p. 113). Although it would be ideal for students to have all positive opinions about this online blog community, and development of knowledge, some students' comments demonstrated negative feelings toward the blog. Some students shared that they felt uncomfortable leaving comments on peers' posts, and they were worried about offending their classmates. Also, they worried about receiving negative feedback about their own posts and worried about not receiving feedback at all (Ellison & Wu, 2008). Although there are negative feelings toward the interactions with blogs, the benefits seem to outweigh the negatives. Through clear expectations, and allowing room for imperfections and varying opinions, students can truly benefit from blogs, and its ability to enhance the writing community in the classroom.

Motivation, Engagement, and Growth as Writers

Technology has been known to motivate students. Compared to traditional methods, students are technologically literate, and have demonstrated engagement when using technology. Specifically with the use of blogs, researchers have found that students are motivated to write more consciously when they know classmates are reading and

commenting on their posts. Through McGrail and Davis' study (2011) they found a positive influence of blogs on student writing development. After blogging, students demonstrated consciousness of an audience when writing and understanding of the writing process and craft. The researchers share that students are shown to be motivated to improve grammar and syntax because of the student interaction (McGrail & Davis, 2011). In another study, Lenhart discusses that bloggers tend to become stronger writers both inside and outside of the classroom (Lenhart, 2008).

Manderino and Wickens (2015) discuss the ways that blogs have been a positive addition to seventh grade language arts and social studies teacher, Elsa Glover's classroom. They commented on the idea that the blogs have encouraged her students to inquire information, but also how peers have influenced not only students' awareness of their audience, but the ability to "elaborate and clarify" their thinking through writing (Manderino & Wickens, 2015).

Along with being more conscious about their writing, McGrail and Davis (2011) found that students experimented with different types of writing and different ways of interacting with writing through the use of blogs. They shared that students used humor, expression, and playfulness in their writing (McGrail & Davis, 2011). Since students have more freedom, it can motivate them to experiment, and allow students to delve into different types of writing that they may never have been exposed to. In relation to having freedom when writing, Ellison and Wu (2008) share student comments, in which students responded, "I like the ease of the form of a blog entry, I feel as if I can talk in my own voice, more than I can with a written paper assignment" (p. 112).

Conclusions

Incorporating blogs in the classroom allows teachers to utilize technology with writing instruction and helps build a community of writers. Students are able to work collaboratively in a non-threatening environment. Ellison and Wu (2008) share in their research that students enjoyed the blog assignments since they allowed them to interact with their classmates anonymously, but also on a personal level. As with all instruction, teachers must provide students with clear objectives and set a clear purpose. Students also must understand how to use the blog, and interact through the blog. Based on students' ages, and levels, there are a variety of methods to provide students with the background knowledge necessary to make blogs valuable writing tools.

Teacher researcher Shirley Pyon (2008) has used blogs in her third grade classroom across subject areas. Her study was conducted in her culturally diverse elementary classroom, focusing on the use of blogs during math. She conducted her study to find how blogging encourages discussions about mathematics. Her study yielded positive results. There was a development of an online community, and more cross-gender interactions than in the normal classroom. Also, she mentioned that her English Language Learners were able to write more freely, without worrying about their dialect or fear of pronouncing something incorrectly. Her students shared that they more confident on the computer, and felt more comfortable saying nice things (Pyon, 2008).

As our society continues to change, it is a teacher's job to prepare students as future members and contributors to society. Technology is an essential tool in our lives, and in the students' lives, especially as they continue to journey through our continuously growing technological world. Elementary teacher, Todd Wright (2008), uses technology

in his classroom everyday. He has shared ways he uses technology to help guide his instruction, and how it is a powerful tool to use in the classroom. As Todd Wright (2008) shares his opinion about incorporating technology in the classroom, he reminds readers that it is a teacher's job to prepare their students for the future. Incorporating technology will be a lot of work at first, but he has met technology standards, while seeing increased student engagement (Barone & Wright, 2008, p. 302).

As Lacina and Griffith remind us, "For children of the 21st century, technology is like oxygen – a necessary component of their life" (2013, p. 317). Blogs in the classroom allow for students to use technology in a meaningful and effective way. The blogs allow classrooms to easily develop a community of writers, while also allowing students to interact using 21st century tools. Blogs allow for deeper thinking, critical reading, and inquiry, leading to a more student centered world in the classroom.

Chapter 3

Context of Study

Community

This study took place in a small suburban town in southern New Jersey. According to the 2010 census, the population in the town was 11,888, which was a 2% growth from the 2000 census. The median resident age was 42.9 years. In 2013 the estimated median household income was \$58,414, while the median house value was \$161,374. This same year, 18.9% of residences with income were below the poverty level. The town was 93.4% White, 2.8% Hispanic, 1.3% Asian residents, 1.2% African American residents, 0.2% American Indian residents, and 0.02% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander residents. 0.9% of the population was two or more races. The study site was one of five schools in the town's regional school district. There were a total of three elementary schools separated by grade levels, a middle school that housed sixth to eighth graders, and a high school that housed ninth to twelfth graders. Within the district, there were approximately 1,830 students. Overall, the district employed eight guidance councilors, two ESL teachers, two speech therapists, and one gifted and talented teacher.

The district's mission was to incorporate education and community, while creating a continuously evolving instructional program. To pursue this mission, the district created goals that encourage self-esteem, self-motivation, and life-long learning. Also, they described building a foundation of knowledge and strategies in all curricular areas that utilize communications, technology and creativity as a basis for career and personal development, while demonstrating respect for individuals, races, beliefs, cultures, and values.

School

In the 2013-2014 school year, there were a total of 264 students at the study site, 143 fourth graders and 121 fifth graders. Looking at the racial populations within the school, 0.37% were American Indian/Alaskan Native, 0.76% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.51% were African American, 5.3% were Hispanic, 88.6% were White, and 3.4% were two or more races. Considering the individual gender break down of the students, 133 were male, while 131 were female. The year of the study, there were 25 full-time teachers, six of which are special area teachers, six fourth grade teachers, six fifth grade teachers, five special education teachers and two basic skills teachers. Along with full-time teachers, there were five instructional aides.

The previous year of the study, the school staff worked collaboratively to create a vision statement, which is as follows:

Lakeshore will always be a positive learning environment and safe-haven where ALL students are challenged to their highest potential in order to develop a lifetime love for learning and become valuable citizens in their community and world. (Lakeshore staff, 2015).

Classroom

The classroom was decorated with yellow walls, student displayed work, and educational posters providing information for science, social studies, math, and language arts. Specifically pertaining to language arts, there were posters that provided students with information about important reading strategies, and also interactive bulletin boards. One of which students could share the title and author of the book he or she was reading

and the other allowed students to share something new that he or she learned. There was a library within the classroom that included both fiction and non-fiction texts that ranged from a second grade level to an eighth grade level. The books were organized by author's last name. There were also bins for popular series and authors. Within the books were written grade level equivalences that helped guide students in choosing books appropriate for their reading level. In relation to technology, the classroom was equipped with a SMARTboard and an iPad for each student. Students were encouraged to use flexible seating for most of the day. Students could of worked at their desks, a hexagon table, or on two of the carpets that were in the room. Students tended to work where they feel most comfortable.

Students

In the classroom during the year of the study, there were a total of 23 students. Looking at the racial break down, 20 students were White, one was African American, and two of the students were two or more races. When looking at the academic grouping of the students, six of the students were identified as gifted, three of the students received special education services for language arts and mathematics, and one received special education services for mathematics only. One student was in the process of being tested by the child study team to find whether or not said student was eligible for special education services in language arts only. The remaining twelve students received general education.

In the study, there were twenty voluntary participants, six of which were gifted, while the other fourteen received general language arts education. The students assented to be part of the study, and also provided parental consent. The study consisted of

analyzing student posts, comments, interviews, and a whole class survey about the blog. The students' work featured in the data analysis of the posts, interviews, and comments include Harry, Connor, Jacob, Peter, Austin, Sydney, Jesse, Roy, Sally, and Brenda.

Harry was reading on grade level and a creative writer. He struggled in school with behavior issues, but through working with the guidance counselor and doctors he was having a smooth year in fourth grade. He was interested in playing basketball and creating things with Legos. Connor was reading on grade level and demonstrated creativity when writing, but struggled with simple conventions. He enjoyed playing baseball and was a very caring student who got along with all of his classmates. Jacob was identified as gifted, although he struggled to stay focused and on task. He was interested in video games and watching You Tube videos. Peter was reading above grade level and was very helpful with his classmates. He enjoyed playing baseball, basketball, and football. Austin was also reading above grade level. He enjoyed video games, playing outside, reading, and playing with Legos. Sydney was reading on grade level. She was interested in horseback riding, girl scouts, reading and cheerleading. Jesse was reading on grade level, but writing was below. He enjoyed playing soccer. Roy, Sally, and Brenda were all reading slightly below grade level. Roy enjoyed playing Pokémon, Sally was interested in softball and riding her bike, and Brenda liked to sing and dance.

Research Design

This research was situated as teacher inquiry. It used traditional qualitative data collection methods, such as observation, interviews, and artifact collection. For example, the students' work was analyzed using a rubric that looked for different elements of responding to texts. Also, patterns were found by looking at the different interactions

between students commenting. Quantitative data was also collected in the means of a survey in which the students responded to their feelings about using the blog. After the survey, I looked at the percentage of students that agreed or disagreed with statements provided in the survey.

More official teacher research begins with a question or problem that rises in the classroom. Teacher research is somewhat embedded in the job of an educator. It is a well known and an encouraged practice for teachers to be reflective, and analyze methods that work and do not work in the classroom. Shagoury and Power (2012) discuss that teacher research is grounded in student observation and adjusting the instruction to meet the needs of the students. This is a skill that teachers with successful classrooms possess. Reflection is a critical aspect of the job for a teacher, as each year a classroom is filled with diverse learners that can be very different from previous years. This research is conducted by the actual teacher, through first hand accounts of what is happening in their classroom (Shagoury & Power, 2012).

Analyzing student work samples allowed me to see how the students were using the blog and in which ways they were responding to the texts. Also, I was able to see the ways in which they interacted. The data was in the students' work as to how they used the blog. I used interviews, observations, and the survey to measure their feelings about the blog. Although reading the posts provided valuable information, I wanted to also answer the question of how they felt about using the tool in the class.

Procedure of Study

A qualitative research design was best for this study because of what the study sought to find. I was not measuring growth or analyzing the data numerically. In this

study, I was seeking to answer the question of how students responded to texts using a blog. Also, I looked at the students' interactions, the way they demonstrated awareness of their audience, and their engagement and motivation with the incorporation of the blog. A qualitative research design allowed for an interpretation of the student work, and an open discussion of how they were using the tool in the classroom.

Teacher research was best suited for this study since I, the teacher, was the one working with the participants and implementing the tool and method. Not only did I rely on the students' work, but since I was in the trenches with the students, I could observe their behaviors and actually have discussions about the students, with an in depth understanding of each individual student. I identified a problem, technology integration, in my classroom and school, and I was working on a possible way for one solution.

I decided to focus this study on technology integration in the classroom, since I was given iPads for each student. Our district found importance in the incorporation of technology in the classroom, but also stressed the fact that we must use the technology in a way that does not simply replace paper. It is important for students to be prepared for the future, and our continuously changing world. Technology is a large part of our everyday lives, and I sought to find a valuable and relevant way to use technology in the classroom.

I introduced the students to the study by talking about social media and about the importance of learning from others. We discussed how their classmates could also serve as teachers. I told them that they would be reading and commenting on each other's posts. As I shared this information with the students, a student commented that we will be sharing and discussing, not critiquing their posts or writing, which was my goal exactly.

The students were excited to learn that they will have a platform to share information about the books they are reading, and also to be interacting through commenting, while being encouraged to use their voice in their posts and comments.

On October 24th, I modeled a blog post about A Bad Case of Stripes by David Shannon. Together we shared different things that I included such as my favorite part and a connections that I made, while also incorporating text evidence. After our whole class discussion, the students used pencil and paper to write about the books they were reading. The next day I modeled how to create a “penny comment,” which would be something similar to saying that their post was cool, versus and “dollar comment,” which could say their post was cool followed by an explanation of why. The students then used sticky notes to write comments on their classmates’ posts. I allowed the students to go back and read their posts, as I walked around and conferenced with the students about their posts and comments.

When writing on the actual blog, the students wrote about the fiction texts they were currently reading in small group. These texts include Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing by Judy Blume (1972), Cricket in Times Square by George Selden (1960), and The Lemonade War by Jacqueline Davies (2009). During independent small group time, the students began working on their first post on November 1st, and students continued to complete their posts through November 3rd. I did not check the work as they finished, but encouraged the students to read over their posts, and then share them with the class on the blog. During the same time of day through November 3rd to November 9th, all students in the class commented on another students’ post. Students were instructed to write “dollar comments” on a classmates’ post that was discussing a different book than they were

reading. Once they finished their first comment, they were able to explore the blog and comment on whichever post they choose, even if it was the same text that they were reading. The following week, I conducted interviews with the students and they completed the survey. Both of these activities gave me information about the students' feelings toward using the blog.

Data Collection

I collected data in the form of student work, student comments, interviews, and a survey. The rubric (see Appendix A) addressed the following areas: mechanics and grammar (noun – verb agreement, presence of complete sentences, capitalization, punctuation), experimental uses of writing and voice, demonstrating the awareness of the audience, making connections within the post, and citing the text to further explain the information. When using the rubric, the students were not given a numerical score. The rubric was used to tally how many students included the areas addressed. When focusing on the students' comments, I looked to see if they were responding more deeply than just saying they liked the post. I also looked to see if the students are pulling out information from the original post, and discussing that information in the comments. I wanted to see if the students were making connections, agreeing, disagreeing, and holding meaningful, online discussions.

To collect information about students' motivation and engagement in the activity, the students responded to a survey using Google Forms (See Appendix B). Students responded to the statements below based on a five-point scale, rating from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Finally, I conducted student interviews (See Appendix C). I recorded their feelings toward the blog, along with their interpretation of how it helps them learn more about texts and online interactions.

Data Analysis

Once I collected all of the data, I looked at the students' work first. I began by reading the posts, and I used the rubric to guide my findings. I would simply check yes if their post contained the element on the rubric and occasionally I would write a small comment. The rubric did not give the students a score, but it allowed me to organize and summarize the information in the students' posts. Once I finished reading the students' posts, I looked for patterns to see what kind of information the students included in the post and their overall usage (grammar and mechanics). After I read the students' posts, I read the students' comments, while also using the rubric in the same manner. I looked for patterns in the information included in the comments and which students were interacting with each other.

After analyzing the students' work, I looked at the data from the survey to understand my students' feelings about the blog. The data provided by the survey was in the form of percentages and short answer responses. I looked at the percentages and found which questions yielded more positive results versus negative results. As with the students' work, I looked for patterns in the students' short answer responses. Finally, I listened to the student interviews and took notes on their responses. I compared their responses to each other, and the results from the survey.

My conclusions came from the information the students included in their posts, how they interacted through commenting, and the responses from the interviews and the

survey. This evidence has driven changes and enhancements in the uses of blogs in my classroom.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Over the course of the study, I have been looking at how fourth grade students respond to texts using blogs. For three weeks I collected data, and although there was negative feedback, most of the results from the study were positive. Being mostly a qualitative study, a discussion of the data will be in a narrative format, addressing major findings from the use of blogs. There is numerical data included in the study as a means to analyze students' feelings toward the blog, and how students responded to posed questions. Data was collected through observation and analysis of student work (blog posts and comments), a survey, and interviews with the students. Before implementing the study, one of my focuses was on the students' motivation to write and motivation to pay attention to proper mechanics and grammar since other students would be reading it. After the study was underway, I began seeing much more valuable information that could be answered by the following questions that guided this research: How will students respond to texts through blogs? What ways will students demonstrate an understanding of their audience? How will students demonstrate proper usage and mechanics? How are the students creating in-depth posts about their texts? What will motivate students to write more meaningful responses? How has the students' writing changed over the course of using the blog? How do students interact with other students through technology? In what ways have students demonstrated engagement?

Findings

The first finding from this study involved looking at the students' actual blog posts. They were encouraged to write whatever they wanted about the texts they were

currently reading. I encouraged the students to write freely, but I gave suggestions of what the students could share. The suggestions included talking about connections, their favorite part of the text, or sharing something that they thought was funny in their book. When looking at the posts, I focused on students' experimental use of writing and voice, awareness of their audience, connections made in their posts, text evidence, and proper use of fourth grade grammar and mechanics.

Experimental use of writing and voice. Students in my classroom demonstrated the use of voice in their writing when posting on the blog. The students had parameters, but were allowed freedom when sharing their thoughts about their texts. When analyzing the posts, I found that students experimented with more non-formal writing, and it allowed the reader understand the writer on a deeper level. For example, in part of Harry's post, he was sharing his prediction about the end of his text, The Lemonade War. In doing so, he used words that were informal and words that he would normally say when talking to his classmates. Harry posted, "To be honest I think that Jessie will win just because she knows what she is doing also Evan is not good enough at math than Jessie she's a beast at math." The student included terms such as "beast at math," which is something that he would use when talking to his classmates, which allows the reader to see his voice in his writing. Other students demonstrated voice and humor in their writing when addressing their classmates. Connor began his post by addressing the students with, "Hey peeps," and Jacob wrote, "Top of the morning classmates." From the students' posts, I was able to see that the students incorporated their voice when writing, and also included humor.

Many students in the class incorporated the use of Emojis to further demonstrate their feelings about the topic being discussed. Since students used discourse in which they would use when interacting with peers, the students demonstrated an awareness of their audience.

Making connections. Another aspect of the posts that I looked for were students making connections when talking about their book. This aspect addresses one of my sub-questions about students creating in-depth posts. This was a skill that we were working on in the classroom, and I found that it transferred into their blog posts. Many students easily shared connections to the texts that they were writing about. In part of Peter’s post, he included information about his favorite character. While doing so, he made two text-to-self connections to the character in his book, The Lemonade War, rather than just stating whom his favorite was. Peter wrote, “My favorite Person in the book is Evan. I like Evan the most because I think that he likes sports because in the beginning it says that Evan was laying on his back and he was throwing baseball up and down. I also like Evan because he does not like to be mean to his sister and I do not like being mean to my brother.” Austin was another student that made a connection in their post. In part of Austin’s post, he shared information about a text that reminded him of his book, Cricket in Times Square. Austin stated, “The way Mama Belini treated Chester reminded me of the other book I am reading, Harry Potter and the Soccerer's stone. The Dursleys treated Harry bad, like how Mama Belini threaded Chester.”

Text evidence. Providing text evidence when answering questions about a text is another skill that we have been working on in the classroom. When looking for text evidence in the students’ posts, I found that every student in the class provided text

evidence to support what they were sharing about the books they were reading. When Austin shared his favorite part about Cricket in Times Square in a portion of his post he stated, “My favorite character is Chester he is the cricket. He is really funny because in the text it says chester was dreaming and eating a leaf but when he woke up he was actually eating a 2 dollar bill.” When another student, Sydney, shared information about the book she was reading, The Lemonade War, she discussed her favorite part in a portion of her post. She included, “The part that was really funny was when a 2 year old named Tommy pulled his pants down and peed on the lawn were this girl named Jessie and Megan's lemonade stand was.” In talking with Sydney and Austin, I asked why they included text evidence. Austin mentioned, “I really like my book, so it was easy to just explain what happened in the text.” Sydney responded, “The part was really funny, and I wanted my classmates to know what happened.”

Below level reader posts. Another find when analyzing the posts relates to struggling writers and readers. Jesse, Roy, Sally, and Brenda were students in my room that were approaching fourth grade writing abilities and reading just below grade level. When looking at their posts, though, this would not be evident. The students provided evidence, posed questions to their classmates, and shared their favorite parts of the story. These students also normally struggled to complete work on time, but easily wrote their blog posts in a timely matter (during one sitting – about twenty minutes). From discussions with these students, I shared how proud I was and how great they did. When talking with the students I told them that it seemed like this was easier for them than other writing that we have done this year. I ended my statement with, “Any thoughts?” Jesse shared, “Yeah, it was. I love my book and you said you are not grading it. I wanted

to tell my friends about my book.” Roy mentioned, “I like typing on my keyboard and Fudge is funny in my book.” Sally said, “I was excited to use the blog and talk about my favorite book ever.” Brenda’s similar response included, “I liked not having to answer a question and that we could talk about whatever we wanted. That made it easier. And I like my iPad”

Grammar and mechanics. When initially beginning this study, I felt that the students would be more careful of grammar and mechanical mistakes, but this was not shown through the students’ posts. The grammar and mechanics I looked at were things that I have covered in my classroom up to the time of the posts. I looked for proper spelling of fourth grade words, the use complete sentences (and run-ons), proper capitalization at the beginning of sentences, the correct use of end marks, and subject/verb agreement. After analyzing each post, I found that only four out of twenty students had two or less errors in their writing. Three of twenty had three to five errors, and thirteen of the twenty students had 6 or more. Although many of the students had grammar and mechanic errors, none of the students’ posts were illegible. As I continued to look at the other aspects of the blog, I realized that grammar and mechanics were not an important focus and did not take away from the positive results and use of the blog. I also found that although the students knew that other students would be reading their work, it did not motivate most of them to proof read before posting based on the amount of errors each student had.

Analyzing student interaction through commenting. After looking over the students’ posts, I began to analyze the students’ interactions when using the blogs. I was looking to see if the students’ comments included information from the original post and

if the students made connections. I also found data about which students interacted and how.

All of the students included information from the original post in their comments. As Griffith and Lacina (2012) shared in their research of a teacher, Karen Arrington, who used blogs in her classroom, I discussed the idea of “penny comments” and “dollar comments” with my students. I told the students that dollars are more valuable than pennies, and “dollar comments” would be more valuable to their classmates. Before using the blog in the online format, I followed another suggestion from the teacher in their research by writing a post on a piece of paper and having the students comment on the post using post-it notes. I was able to conference with the students and discuss their strengths and weaknesses when commenting, and it had shown to help all of the students create developed comments. Students not only shared information from the original post, but they also posed questions to the writer. Sydney commented on her classmates’ post by writing, “Hi Austin! I really like your post it makes me want to read *The Cricket in Time Square* it seems like a really good book! That's funny that Chester eaten the \$2 bill!”

Along with including information from the original post, students continuously made connections in their comments. One student commented, “Hey it's me Jacob, your post was awesome I enjoyed reading it a lot I can see that fudge can be a pest. Well I have little sibling like Peter wich are also annoying. So I feel his pain. I heard that fudge is his nickname, I wonder what his real name is? And how old is he? I ask that because if he is 1-3 I expect that he is trouble.” This student also posed questions to the writer, as

did three other students in the class. Making connections to their classmates' posts demonstrates understanding of the writing and an analysis of the post.

When looking at the comments and the different students that were commenting on different posts, I found that students that did not normally interact during lunch, recess, or when picking their own partners for an activity interacted online through commenting. Ten of the students in the class commented on their classmates' posts that they do not normally interact with, and they did so through developed comments. Sally and Peter are two students that do not normally interact during the school day or outside of school. I found that they interacted through commenting in this discussion. "Hi Peter! I think sensory details are important to and my book has a lot of sensory details. In my book there used to be a two year old but now he is three his birthday party was a couple chapters ago and his name is Fuge. My group is on chapter 9 and the book is really good so far. The book you're reading sounds really good I hope I can read it some time." Peter responded to this comment by saying, "Your book sounds interesting. Thank you for commenting on my blog! I also like how you said that you think that it is important to put sensory details in your writing. You should read the book it is awesome. It is funny and the competition is interesting." Not only do these two students not normally interact, but one of the students is a girl, while the other is a boy. After analyzing the comments, I found that nine students interacted across genders. When interviewing Jesse, he discussed how it was easier to say what he wanted to say when he was typing it. He was able to think about it first, and I made him less nervous to talk to people he is not that close with.

Feelings toward the blog. To measure the students' feelings about using the blog in the classroom to respond to texts, I collected the information through a survey that all

twenty students completed using Google Forms and through two separate interviews with Jesse and Sydney.

Using Google Forms, I was able to conduct a survey that allowed the students to anonymously share their feelings about the blog, which is partly presented in Table 1 through percentages.

Table 1

Student Survey Responses

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am excited to write when using the blog.	50%	45%	5%	0%
I am more motivated to write when using the blog.	50%	20%	30%	0%
Using the blog has allowed me to be more focused on responding to texts.	35%	45%	20%	0%
I have read or would like to read a book based off of a classmates' suggestions.	75%	20%	5%	0%
I pay more attention to my writing since I know classmates will see it.	60%	30%	10%	0%
I used well thought out comments when responding to a classmate's post.	75%	25%	0%	0%
I enjoy reading my classmates' blog posts.	80%	20%	0%	0%
I enjoy commenting on my classmates' posts.	60%	35%	5%	0%

This table demonstrates some of the findings that I found through the survey. All of the students agree that they enjoy reading their classmates' posts and that they use well

thought out comments when responding to a classmates' post, which was shown through the comments themselves. This data shows that majority of the students have positive feelings about the blog.

The other part of the survey that I conducted allowed for the students to respond with short answers. The first short answer question required the students to share what they liked about the blog. One student shared, "I liked commenting without actually talking to the person." Many students also shared that they liked the commenting aspect whether it was providing comments or receiving them. Other students shared, "I like that we can see how people think," and "you get to share your feelings about a book you are reading."

Through the survey, I was also able to learn about students' negative feelings toward the use of the blog. The next short answer question allowed for the students to share things that they did not like about using the blog. Fifteen students said that there was nothing about the blog that they disliked. Five other students shared concerns about using the blog. One student shared, "I sometimes get nervous because other people see mine and I think their going to say mine was terrible." Other students shared their dislike of the technology and glitches that come along with it, while another student did not like getting few or no comments on their post.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications

Conclusions

Using blogs in the fourth grade classroom was a way to incorporate the use of technology, and allowed students to interact using a new discourse. Although proper grammar and mechanics were not demonstrated in many of the posts, the students used the blog to share information about texts that they were reading by discussing their favorite characters, favorite parts, and funny parts. Many did so by experimenting with writing and incorporating voice, demonstrating awareness of their audience, making connections to their texts, and providing text evidence. Although the students developed in depth posts and comments, many did not, however, use proper grammar and mechanics.

Students interacted while using the blog by developing well thought out comments on their classmates' posts. Students made connections to the posts, included information from the original posts, interacted with students that they do not interact with normally, and many female and male students interacted with each other.

The students demonstrated positive feelings about using the blog. Most of the class was excited to write when using the blog, more motivated to write when using the blog, felt that the blog has allowed them to be more focused on responding to texts, used well thought out comments and enjoyed reading on the blog. Also, all of the students, except one, had read or would like to read a book based off of what they read on the blog.

Blog writing has allowed the students to utilize a New Literacy in the classroom. As Lankshear and Knobel (2007) discuss, a New Literacy not only includes the

“technical stuff,” but it also includes the “ethos stuff.” The “technical stuff” refers to the ability to use the technology such as the iPads and the Kidblog website. The “ethos stuff” refers to participating using the tools and working collaboratively. As seen in this study, the use of blogs in the classroom addresses both components of New Literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007).

Limitations

Although much valuable information was found through the qualitative analysis of using blogs in the classroom, limitations from study still exist. For three hours during the day, students that received special education shared our classroom. Since the students were not in the classroom during the language arts time, they were unable to participate in the study, and share in the use of the blog when responding to texts. Because of this, I was unable to see how these specific students would use the blog, and thus limiting my study to only general education and gifted students.

Another limitation of this study was time. Since the study was conducted over a few short weeks, I was unable to measure the students’ ability to grow as blog writers through different posts. Also, I was unable to analyze the difference between how students respond to fiction versus nonfiction texts. Using the blog over a longer period of time would provide this information, along with information about students’ feelings toward the blog if it were a regularly used tool.

Implications

Crochran and Lytle (2009) share the importance of teacher research, and how it can influence effective and relevant change within schools and with student learning. The close relationship between the researcher, the subjects, and the question, contribute to the

valuable results of studies. Crochran and Lytle (2009) continue to describe the significance of teacher research, since the teachers are the closest to the daily work in the classroom (Crochran & Lytle 2009).

Through this study, many new ideas have emerged when thinking about using the blog in the classroom. Since I have found many positive results during language arts instruction, using the blog during different subject areas could also yield positive results. Students could share in discussions about social studies topics and vocabulary. By using it in social studies, it could lead to critical literacy. For example, students could read about an event in history but from different points of view. The students can share their findings on the blog, and read other students' findings and have a discussion about what they have learned. I have already used the blog during math and science. In math, I posed a question and allowed the students to answer and explain how they found the answer. They were also able to comment on other students' answers and look at ways other students approached the problem. In science, the students worked in groups and posted a discussion about the ways Earth's surface can change. After the students posted their findings, they were able to read their classmates' and develop a deeper understanding of the content.

Through this study, I have learned that blogs are versatile and allow for students to interact on a new platform. They are a valuable tool for instruction across many subject areas and give students to freedom to express their thoughts, and think about what they want to share before they say it. Formal teacher inquiry has allowed me to truly analyze a new method of instruction in my classroom and incorporate a tool, which enhances

student interaction and learning, and leads to student preparation as future members of society.

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Appendix A

Rubric

Student Posts				
Mechanical/Grammar usage	0-2 errors	3-5 errors	6 or more errors	Illegible
Experiment with writing/voice	Yes	No	Comments:	
Demonstrates awareness of audience	Yes	No	Comments:	
Connections made	Yes	No	Comments:	
Text evidence present	Yes	No	Comments:	
Comments				
Information from posts included in comment	Yes	No	Comments:	
Connections made to text discussed in post	Yes	No	Comments:	
Interacting across genders	Yes	No	Comments:	
Students interacting that do not commonly interact	Yes	No	Comments:	

Appendix B

Survey

QUESTIONS

RESPONSES

20

I am excited to write when using the blog. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Other...

I am more motivated to write when using the blog. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Other...

Using the blog has allowed me to be more focused on responding to texts. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Other...

I have read or would like to read a book based off of classmates' suggestions. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Other...

I pay more attention to my writing since I know classmates will see it. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Other...

I used well thought out comments when responding to a classmate's post. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Other...

I enjoy reading my classmates' blog posts. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Stronglydisagree

I enjoy commenting on my classmates' posts. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Share things that you liked about using the *

Short answer text

Share things that you did not like about using the

Long answer text

Would you like to use the blog to interact during different subject areas? If yes, which subjects? *

Short answer text

Appendix C

Interview Questions

- Did you feel more motivated to write when you were using the blog?
- Do you feel more comfortable talking to people online than in person?
- How did you feel when students commented on your post?
- What did you like about the blog?
- What don't you like about the blog?
- Do you feel that you have learned how to be a blog writer?