Theses and Dissertations

2-22-2016

An exploratory investigation of third graders' use of blogs to critically respond to texts

Lisa A. Gilbert
Rowan University, misslgilbert@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://rdw.rowan.edu/etd

Part of the Elementary Education and Teaching Commons

AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF THIRD GRADERS' USE BLOGS TO CRITICALLY RESPOND TO TEXTS

by

Lisa A. Gilbert

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in Reading Education
at
Rowan University
March 1, 2015

Thesis Chair: Valarie Lee, Ed. D.

Dedications

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my parents, Judith and Richard Gilbert, who have supported me through my master's program. I would also like to dedicate this to my former principal, Robert Homer, who instilled in me to always do what is best for my students.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Valarie Lee, who has guided and aided me throughout the thesis process.

Abstract

Lisa A. Gilbert

AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF THIRD GRADERS' USE OF BLOGS TO
CRITICALLY RESPOND TO TEXTS
2015-2016
Valarie Lee, Ed. D.
Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this exploratory investigation was to explore how third grade students critically respond to texts. Students will be required to analyze texts and type their analysis with the implementation of PARCC. I wanted to investigate the change that occurs with students' responses to texts when they compose them electronically rather than with paper and pencil.

I explored the process of how students critically responded to texts through responses on a class blog. Students read two literature passages, two informational passages, and two media texts on the blog before responding to questions based upon the text. I observed how often students referred back to the text, the structure of their response, the amount of text evidence used, their use of conventions, their processes of composing their response, and the length of time students spent on the task. Students received a few points for improvement from me after each response.

Overall, most students attempted to use text evidence. There was little effort by students to use correct conventions, revise, and edit their work. Students who spent minimal time responding composed a response of minimal substance. Those that spent a greater amount of time, interacted with the text more in their response. Overall, the process was a great insight into students' processes when using blogs about texts.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

It is the year 2015. People write constantly – from lists, to notes, and emails. Most do not think about the journey human kind has experienced in the area of writing.

Pointed tools on damp clay tablets, to quills and ink, to fountain pens, and to current computers allowed writers to put their thoughts down for others to read. Yet the change in writing tools had a greater impact than just changing how the writer writes. There was a change in the writing process. This change is still occurring today.

As teachers, our writing instruction is based on students using pencil and paper methods of recording their thoughts. We teach our children how to respond to texts using pencils and paper. Is our teaching applicable to the tools our students are using? Smartphones, iPads, and computers fill their hands. Testing has changed from a paper and pencil based New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) to a computerized Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Are we teaching students how they need to be taught? How does writing about a text change when the writing tools are no longer paper and pencil but a keyboard and a monitor? What happens when third grade students use blogging to critically examine texts?

Scope of the Study

The study investigated the reading responses of third grade students within my classroom. The population included both male and female students. These students

ranged in academic abilities from English language learners to "talented and gifted" students.

The study occurred in class over three weeks based upon computer availability for the group of students involved. Students read literature texts, informational texts, and media texts and responded to text dependent questions. Due to the study occurring near the beginning of the school year, the reading response questions were more basic and less complex than what students would be required to respond to on the PARCC.

Story of the Question

Several years ago, I began to hear talk of the infamous PARCC testing among educators and in educational journals. This new test was a vague concept at first. I was still in the mindset of NJASK and preparing my students to be successful when taking the test. As time progressed, PARCC loomed closer – I heard more and more of how intense PARCC would be for students. I teach according to the Common Core Standards, but the unknown complexity of PARCC was becoming more eminent. The additional change from paper tests to computerized tests was an uncertainty as well.

This past summer, PARCC became a reality. NJASK was finished for good. It was time to begin the era of PARCC. What genres of texts would students be analyzing? What kinds of questions would students be asked? What types of writing would students be required to produce? There was so much unknown about the test. Even after researching on the Internet, I was still left befuddled as to what to expect and how to best prepare my students for success.

At the start of the school year, there was one certainty – students would be taking the new test on computers. My principal set up a computer lab in our school. In addition

to the hour a week each class had access to computers to enhance content area, teachers were required to sign up for an additional hour of computer time. This time was to be used exclusively for PARCC preparation.

I lost an hour of reading instruction each week and gained an hour of PARCC preparation each week. I needed to determine how to best meet my students' needs. I was apprehensive to be losing so much reading instructional time over the course of the school year. I wanted my stents to be successful on PARCC, but I wanted them to receive the best literacy instruction I could give them. With all the uncertainty of PARCC, I knew that my students would be responding to texts electronically. I began to wonder if students would use the same process when responding to a text electronically as they did when responding to a text on paper. Their strengths and weaknesses would be my guide for how to best support them. Since I did not know the impact of technology on their writing process, I needed to observe and analyze how they responded to text electronically and what my students produced when responding to a text electronically. With this data, I would be able to use my hour of PARCC instructional time each week to best meet the needs of my students. Thus, I framed my research question: What happens when third grade students use blogging to critically examine texts?

Statement of the Problem

The year of 2015 is the year of PARCC implementation. PARCC is a new form of assessing students' knowledge. Students will still be assessed based on the Common Core standards. The change is in the process. Rather than a booklet and a pencil, students are given a computer. The technology component adds an unknown certainty to the test. It impacts both students and teachers.

Students need to be prepared to take the assessment, and teachers need to prepare their students. As a teacher, I know what difficulties my students would encounter on the former NJASK when they needed to write using paper and pencil. I did not know if students would face the same obstacles when writing electronically. It is necessary to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of students when composing on computers.

This study's focus in on the process of writing electronically. Students will be examining a text on the computer without the ability to mark the text as they read. Students will then have to respond to a question based on the text. Students will draft their response on the computer through a blog. The data collected on students' processes will show how students respond to texts electronically rather than responding to texts using paper and pencil.

According to research, blogging is a technology that changes the modality that students write. According to Ellison and Wu (2008), students use a less academic voice when constructing writing electronically. They also noted the benefits of commenting on blogs. Students gained insight from reading each other's work and from reading the comments of their peers. The aspect of commenting can yield additional results as well. Students were able to realize the importance of writing to an audience better when blogging according to the findings of McGrail and Davis. Lacina and Griffth (2012) support this claim. They also believe that blogging promotes more ownership with students of their writing. Transitioning from paper-and-pencil writing to electronically writing can impact students' writing.

Researching the impact of technology on the writing process is important to the field of literacy instruction. Technology is becoming a part of our lives and is becoming more prominent in education. This research will illustrate what students' strengths and weaknesses are when responding to texts electronically. The data will help teachers determine how best to use technology and how best to instruct with technology. Thus, students will be more prepared to do their best for electronic assessments such as PARCC.

Statement of the Research Question

With the implementation of PARCC, students will no longer be writing their responses to text. Rather, students will be reading text electronically and responding electronically. I am interested in how the change of format impacts students' responses. After analyzing the impact, I want to use the knowledge that I've gained to reflect on my teaching and to make adjustments in order for my students to be as successful as possible on PARCC. In order to best meet the needs of my students, I want to explore what happens when third grade students use blogging to critically examine texts.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter two is a review of literature focused on both the process of writing and the use of new literacies in the classroom. It examines the uses of new literacies on students' writing, how to implement blogs into classroom practice, the benefits of using new literacies in the classroom, and the detriments of using new literacies in the classroom.

Chapter three focuses on the methodology of the study. It begins by describing how the study occurred. Next, the chapter focuses on the data, both the sources of the data and the results of the data. The chapter then focuses on the context of the study and on the students in the class who participated.

Chapter four reviews and analyzes the data collected prior to the students blogging, collected while the students blogged, and collected after the students blogged. The chapter then examines and discusses the findings of the study.

Chapter five completes the thesis with the conclusions of this study. It describes the implications for teaching and learning as well as the limitations of the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

As technology becomes more readily available to teachers and schools, more research is being conducted about the uses of technology with students. Technology has impacted the process of writing. Many technology based writing such as Twitter and text messages are character based thus encouraging short, concise writing. This style differs from the lengthy development of thoughts and ideas which have previously been encouraged. One new literacy students are encountering are blogs. Blogs are a means of communication and interaction. They have many uses besides being an electronic journal of self-expression. They can be used to communicate news and information with parents and students (Zawilinski, 2009), as an online course management tool, as a discussion forum, as a group blogging tool, as a research tool (Angelaina, 2012), as a resource for a language-based classroom, as a portfolio of student work, as a monitoring tool for student progress, (Istifci, 2011), as an environment for project-based learning (Angelaina, 2012), as a place to share art projects and podcasts (Zawilinski, 2009). Blogs have various uses for both classroom and home use that benefit students.

Many uses of blogs focus specifically on enhancing reading and writing development in students. The use of blogs as a way to teach reading and writing skills is an approach that is developing and changing daily (McGrail and Davis, 2011). According to Istifci, they can be used "to improve writing, reading, listening skills, to improve vocabulary and grammar." She also states that blogs can be "used in teaching paragraph and essay types and how to write them" (2011, p. 214). Students are able to publish their writing on a blog and receive feedback on their writing through a blog. By

using this format for writing instruction, students become more engaged and motivated to write (Lacina and Griffith, 2012). Students are able to plan and formulate their writing at their own pace which allows all students more opportunity to participate (Istifci, 2011). The format of blogs allows students to readily view their writing and responses to their writing in revere chronological order (Luonge and Finetti, 2013). This format assists students in being reflective about themselves as writers and the writing they produce. In addition to developing writing skills, blogs can also develop reading skills. Teachers are able to electronically post a text, and students are able to respond to the text electronically when using a blog for literature responses (Zawilinski, 2009).

Teachers need to research and plan how they will implement blogs into their classroom rather that starting on a whim's notice. They need to first research if blogs are accessible on the school's internet network and investigate whether using blogs is allowed based upon the school's technology policies (Zawilinski, 2009). Teachers then need to explore the different options for blogging. It is important to research all available options and not just the free blogging sites. Many free blogging sites contain advertisements which teachers would not be able to control (Surgeon, 2008). Once a teacher has permission from the school and has selected an appropriate blogging site, the teacher needs to seek permission from parents. Parents should be notified of the specifics of the blogging project (Surgeon, 2008).

It is also important for the students to be fully aware of the blogging project and aware of the teacher's expectations when blogging. Lacina and Griffith recommend not introducing students to online blogging in the beginning. They believe that it is important to model and guide students first (2012). Teachers need to devote "several

8

early sessions with students to talking about proper conduct, how to upload a post, and what makes a good blog and comment" (Surgeon, 2008, p. 26). Students may also need to be reminded about internet safety such as not posting personal information on the internet (Morgan, 2014). Using a pseudonym to post on a blog will ensure a measure of safety while also allowing students to explore complex ideas or express themselves honestly (Ellison and Wu, 2008).

It is also important for the blog to be integrated into classroom instruction and not a separate entity (Morgan, 2014). They should be utilized as part of a program that helps to build a writing community of students, teachers, and other educators (Ramaswami, 2008). To help strengthen the writing community, it is important for students to be not just posting on the blog but commenting on posts as well. Therefore, it is important to teach "children how to make comments of substance when blogging" (Lacina and Griffith, 2012, p. 317). Making constructive comments is not an easy process for all students. According to Ellison and Wu (2008), "guidance on constructive criticism would help both the original poster, by providing substantive feedback about their ideas, as well as the commenter, by encouraging them to engage with ideas on a deeper level" (p. 118). Students could also feel more comfortable and confident when commenting on a peer by varying their type of comments. They could add a compliment, make a personal connection, or pose a question to deepen a conversation (Lacina and Grffith, 2012).

Blogging is an authentic activity to develop writing skills. Its benefits to students "depended largely on how a teacher chooses to structure and use the blog." (MacBride, 2010, p. 182). There are various ways to incorporate blogs into instruction.

As Morgan (2014) states, "When used with a well-designed academic plan, blogging can lead students to improve in literacy; pupils frequently become motivated to use clearer, more precise language as a result of writing for a wide audience." (p. 381).

The biggest benefit of blogging for students is the exposure to one of the many new literacies (Zawilinski, 2009). More and more text is published on the Internet, and students are able to learn how to use and be a part of this literary world. Blogs are an easy introduction to the new literary technologies such as search engines, e-mail, wikis, instant messenger, and social networking tools. Each of these literary technologies requires different skills and strategies that should be incorporated into curriculum (Zawilinski, 2009). These skills are important for students, especially those between the ages of eight and eighteen. According to research conducted by Ellison and Wu (2008), these children spend almost six and a half hours a day with media including computers.

Blogs are an authentic learning tool based upon communication (Kitchakarn, 2012. They are also flexible and interactive tools that can be used for efficient instruction (Istifci, 2011). Students are able to feel a sense of ownership by using features such as accessing or linking multimedia and related texts (Kitchakarn, 2012). Students are also able to improve their communication skills (McGrail and Davis, 2011). A blog can srve to unite classrooms when working on a common topic (Boling, Castek, Zawilinski, Barton, and Nierlich, 2008). Students must learn to communicate and collaborate with their peers within their classroom when working together on blog entries and responses. The communication and collaboration can also occur when working across the World Wide Web with classes in different locations. Students use their entries and replies as their form of communication and collaboration. Therefore, blogging becomes more than

just writing digitally. It becomes a medium for students to gain strengths as a writer that are not readily available when writing with paper and pencil within a classroom. Students are able to develop literary processes, improve their critical thinking skills, reflect, question, and deepen social practices (McGrail and Davis, 2011). As MacBride (2010) states, "blogging capitalizes on students' cultural literacies" (p. 182).

As previously mentioned, blogging is a great introduction to new literacies, especially for elementary students. One reason is that they are easy to create and easy to sustain (Kitchakarn, 2012). There are free and inexpensive sites to choose from. Teachers can update blogs from a classroom computer, a home computer, or a smartphone (Clyde, 2005). Blogs are also easy for students to use and locate sections since there are not folders and menus to search through (Istifci, 2011). Also, students who are shy or who are less confident using English could feel more comfortable and confident when blogging (Kitchakarn, 2012).

Another benefit of using blogs as a form of new literacies with elementary students is the extension it offers. Students are able to communicate and participate outside of classroom walls (Angelaina, 2012). Thus, students are able to continue reflecting and continue discussing even after a lesson has ended (MacBride, 2010). According to Ellison and Wu (2008), analytic and critical thinking skills are enhanced through the reflective thinking utilized when blogging. This is partly due to the accessibility of prior writing (MacBride, 2010). It is also due to the ability to comment and communicate with others.

An additional benefit of blogging is the larger audience that is accessible to elementary students (McGrail and Davis, 2011). Blogs make writing easier to share so

11

that students can more readily collaborate and receive feedback on their work (Kitchakarn, 2012). Student writers then "take more ownership of their writing when they know others will read it" (Ramaswami, 2008, p. 24). Students become more motivated to work to their best ability when they know a real audience will experience their writing (MacBride, 2010). The real audience can be composed of their teacher, their peers, and an unknown Internet audience (Ellison and Wu, 2008). Through the process of blogging, students work to connect to their audience. Thus they are able to develop their writing process as well as refine their writer's craft (Lacina and Griffith, 2012). With the increase in accountability due to their audience, students increase the quality of their work (MacBride, 2010).

There are benefits to the collaboration and relationships produced through blogging. Students are able to teach and support their peers with the concepts being explored (MacBride, 2010). These interactions extend beyond the classroom allowing for a continual and constant support network. No longer is a student learning from just their teacher but from their peers and other audience members outside the classroom. As Ellison and Wu (2008) state, "the participatory and decentralized structure of blogging may discourage the 'sage on the stage' approach to teaching and instead recalibrate communication patterns so that knowledge-sharing is increasingly student-to-student and student-to-instructor" (p. 105). Blogs support student interactions with experts and others outside of classroom walls (MacBride, 2010).

It is important that the teacher plans and makes decisions based on students' needs and strengths regardless of the obstacles they could face when using blogs (MacBride, 2010). To begin with, students could find it stressful and difficult to

remember their password for the blog (Ellison and Wu, 2008). It could also be difficult to incorporate the blog into classroom instruction with limited writing instruction time (McGrail and Davis, 2011).

Another obstacle that teachers need to be aware of is the use of a pseudonym to use when posting. It is important for students to use a pseudonym to ensure online safety, yet having students post under their given name would hold them accountable and have them take ownership of their work (Ellison and Wu, 2008). Also, students generally feel blogging uses less of an academic voice "which could result in less focused writing and editing effort" (Ellison and Wu, 2008 p. 117). In addition, early writers, especially those at the elementary level, tend to focus on their own thoughts rather than on the reader experiencing their writing (McGrail and Davis, 2011). This could create a weakness for students when reading and commenting on their peers.

While blogs "are primarily being used at the secondary and college levels" according to McGrail and Davis (2011), they can be used at the elementary level as well (p. 415). Blogging has been successfully implemented into elementary classrooms. "Today's students possess knowledge about the Internet that we, as teachers, have not acquired" (Boling et al., 2008, p. 506). The skill set that elementary students have should be acknowledged and used as a tool to improve their literacy skill set. Boling et al. were able to observe and analyze various elementary students using blogs to improve their ability to read and write. In their article, Collaborative Literacy: Blogs and Internet Projects, they discussed third graders' blogging responses to their class stuffed animal, Jefferson Bear; fourth graders blogging for their literature discussions; and fourth and fifth graders using their blog to compose persuasive pieces to encourage other elementary

students to visit national parks in the United States (2008). Boling and her colleagues found that students were motivated to revise and edit for their audience of their peers. McGrail and Davis (2011) found in their research an increase of motivation and confidence in elementary students when blogging. They attributed the improvement to the comments left by readers as well as the connections and friendships formed with the readers of their blogs. Boling et al. found an increase in confidence as well. They described how a struggling reader who was experienced with using the Internet was considered an expert in blogging by his peers. The researchers attributed the increase in his literacy engagement and proficiency due to his sense of empowerment felt with his Internet knowledge.

Blogging is one of the multitudes of new literacies that teachers are using as a part of classroom instruction. Ellison and Wu (2008) state, "As is common with a new teaching tool, much of the literature is anecdotal in nature, written by instructors reflecting on their use of blogging, and seeks to outline prescriptive measures to aid other instructors as they begin to implement blogging, such as recommendations about software and implementation strategies" (p. 107). Therefore, as much as it is believed that the benefits of blog out way the obstacles of implementation and use, it is important that further research be conducted on using blogs to enhance reading and writing instruction. Research should be focused on the behaviors exhibited by students when reading and writing electronically.

Chapter 3

Research Design/Methodology

As with the qualitative case study by McGrail and Davis (2011), the research for this study "was to explore how blogging influenced study writing development at the elementary level" (p. 415). A qualitative research study was beneficial for this situation because the focus of the study was on the behaviors of students as well as the writing produced by students. The behaviors examined in my research mirrored those of McGrail and Davis (2011): attitude, content, voice, connections and relationships, thing, and craft. A qualitative data analysis process would assist in identifying areas of strengths and areas of growth for students. The data can then be used by educators to inform instruction. McGrail and Davis (2011) found in their research that students became more mindful of their audience and had a growing sense of confidence and motivation yet continued to compose pieces that "included many spelling and grammatical errors typical of the early stages of writing development" (433). I am interested to discover if my research yields similar or dissimilar results as McGrail and Davis.

The students observed were part of a general education third grade classroom. It was one of three third grade classes in a school in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. The school had a population of about 300 students.

Instruction was based around the Common Core Standards. The students had 50 minutes of writing instruction each day based upon Zane Bloser's *Strategies for Writers* program. Students took part in a writing workshop structure. The students also had 75 minutes of reading instruction each day based upon New Jersey's model curriculum.

Students had a fluency based activity each day, a whole group strategy lesson, small strategy group lessons, and reading conferences each day.

The population of students observed contained ten students. Of these students, five were male, and five were female. Three students were part of the Talented and Gifted program which received an hour and thirty minutes of enrichment each week. Two students received supplemental reading instruction for an hour and thirty minutes. Three students were English Language Learners and received language support five times a week for thirty minutes each session. One student was new to the district this year.

Procedure of Study

For this study, the teacher created a class blog through Kid Blog. The teacher and students discussed what a blog is and correct safety when posting to the internet. Students then created a username and password.

The blog contained six entries. Two entries were literature passages, two entries were informational texts, and two entries were media texts. Each text was on a third grade reading level. Each of the entries also contained a reading response question.

Through the classroom Smartboard, students were shown how to access the blog and the first entry. The teacher recorded observations as the students read the text and constructed their response electronically. Once all students had completed their response, the blog responses were shown on the Smartboard. Students were given time to view their classmates' responses and comment on what they thought made a strong response and what they though made a weak response. Then the teacher identified areas of strength in the responses. Afterward, the teacher reviewed the responses more in depth

and recorded on a post-it a few points for each student to remember when constructing

their reading responses. The students received these personal reminders prior to reading

the second passage and responding to the second response question. Students were

allowed to view their reminders while drafting each response. The process repeated

through six text passages.

Students participating in the study were surveyed prior to using the blog and after

responding to all six reading entries. Students were also interviewed at the conclusion of

the study. The focus of the surveys and the interviews were on students' use and

interactions with computers as well as their perceptions of blogging.

There were several guiding questions used when exploring what happens when third

grade students use blogging to critically examine texts. How do computer skills impact

students' responses? What is the biggest obstacle (ie. time, keyboarding skills, planning,

motivation, frustration) for students when composing reading responses electronically?

How does planning change based on students' needs? The ultimate goal of the

exploratory study and the guiding questions was to discover how to best meet the needs

of students based upon their strengths and weaknesses with electronic reading responses

in preparation of PARCC.

Data Sources

Several sources of data were used in order to gain an array of information. It was

important to gather information about students' ability and if there was any change in

their ability over the course of the study. It was also important to gather information on

students' perceptions of themselves and the task they were asked to perform.

One source of data was pre and post surveys. These surveys included multiple choice questions, open-ended response questions, and several rating scales. The surveys were used to gain insight on students' comfort on computers and comfort with the electronic writing process rather than when writing by hand.

Another source of data was anecdotal notes. These notes were recorded on a chart labeled with each student's code. The teacher recorded observations on students' behaviors and observations of students' work. The anecdotal notes were used to analyze, compare, and contrast behaviors and outcomes.

Lastly, interviews with students were used as an additional source of data. The interview questions were focused on students' preferences when blogging as well as their perceptions of themselves when using the blog. The interviews were used to gain insight on the processes and strategies students were using when blogging.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

The data being analyzed comes from pre and post surveys, interviews with students, observations while students were blogging, and the results of students responding to a text based question on the blog. The data was collected during students' English Language Arts block during the school day. It is assumed that students' ability to respond to a paper-based text will be similar to previous students. The assumption is based on the need for a baseline from which to analyze the electronic responses as well as the similarities in strengths and weaknesses with students from multiple years.

According to the preblogging surveys, most students rated themselves a three out of four in terms of being comfortable using computers. Based upon the school's established rating scale, students feel they are able to use a computer on their own but are not confident in their ability to teach their classmates how to use a computer. Students mostly viewed the technology as an educational tool. Four students use computers for educational activities, five use it for both educational and enjoyment activities, while only one student uses a computer solely for fun. Only one student felt they did not have any area to improve on with computers. Other students believed their area of greatest weakness to be their independence when working on the computer, writing word documents, taking tests on computers, typing, "finding the letter", and "dragging things".

Students took the same survey again after several weeks using the blog to critically respond to texts. Most students still rated themselves a three out of four with their ability to use a computer. However, six students felt they used a computer purely for academic purposes and four thought they used a computer for entertainment and

educational reasons. Many students believed they need to improve at typing while a few

identified their need to be typing faster, "clicking", using the mouse, and not accidently

exiting out of the window.

Students' self-perception of themselves and their analysis of their weaknesses are

conflicting. Students feel confident in their knowledge and ability to use computers. On

the other hand, the students feel lacking in specific computer skills. Based upon the data,

the areas students feel the least confidence in are navigating on a computer and typing on

a computer.

Students were also interviewed after using the blog. Most found the reading

response aspect to be the easiest part of the activity. Most students' responses focused on

reading the text and answering the question. Only one student believed the typing of the

response to be the easiest part. On the other hand, there was a range of response from

students on the most difficult aspect of using blogs to critically respond to texts. Students

felt it was hard to type a response due to there being "a lot of keys on the keyboard" and

the difficulty of "remembering were all the keys are on a keyboard". Others felt it was

hard to answer the question, think "about what you should write", being able to keep on

writing, and using text evidence to support their answers.

Most students focused on the technology aspect of using blogs to critically

respond to texts rather than the writing process. The use of the computer, specifically the

keyboard and the mouse, appears to be an obstacle for students. The kinesthetic and

tactile component of the writing process is a challenge for students. Students also felt it

was difficult to compose their response. This difficulty spanned brainstorming their ideas

to developing their writing with details. In the course of the interview, one student

verbalized that the process of responding to a text based question electronically was more difficult than using paper and pencil. As he put it, "It is not as easy as writing."

There were several trends that surfaced over the course of a few weeks as students blogged. Most students spent between seven and eighteen minutes reading and responding to each text. Several students spent more than twenty five minutes on a response with one student taking thirty minutes. The majority of students recorded their response by searching for the correct alphabetic key and pressing it with their index finger. Only one student had his fingers on home row and typed using all his digits. Most students could also be observed using the backspace to make corrections rather than inserting their curser at the location they wished to revise or edit. Several stents had difficulty using the mousepad and exited out of the window by accident. As the blogging sessions progressed, more and more students referred back to the text. There were no students who looked back to the text after starting to draft their response in the first blogging session. This was a contrast with the last session were six out of the ten students could be seen scrolling back to the passage at least once.

There were several trends when examining students' responses to the texts. Several students had difficulty focusing their answer on the reading response question. This improved through the blogging process. Students did not use any text evidence to support their answers in the initial responses but this aspect improved as well as students blogged more.

Throughout the process, there were some aspects that students did not improve on. Sentence structure was a common difficulty. This took the form of both fragments and run on sentences. There was also a lack of capitalization. The use of correct case

was most prominent at the beginning of sentences but did occur with characters' names as well. Lastly, punctuation proved to be a difficulty. While there were several instances where punctuation was used incorrectly when using a quote from the text, most errors occurred with a lack of punctuation at the end of sentences.

Chapter 5

Summary

In Chapter one, I discussed the purpose of this research study; that is, to investigate what happens when third grade students use blogging to critically examine texts. Students will be composing more reading responses electronically with the implementation of PARCC. The research study was conducted to discover what students' strengths and weaknesses are during this process in order to best meet their needs. Ten students with a range of academic abilities within one third grade classroom were studied. These students read literature, informational, and media texts on a laptop and answered a reading response question electronically over the course of three weeks.

In Chapter two, prior research on students writing electronically was explored. Researchers have found that by changing the modality of writing from paper and pencil to computers has created many benefits for students. Students are motivated to write, more aware of their audience, and more reflective of their writing. While the majority of research has been conducted on high school and college level students there has been success using blogs with elementary students. Researchers have noticed elementary students to increase the care and attention they give to their readers as well as an increase in confidence and motivation. These young learners often have more knowledge about the Internet than their teachers. The technology skill set that elementary students possess allows them to increase their literacy skill set.

In Chapter three, the procedure of the study was examined. Students were given a survey prior to blogging and given a survey after the blogging. Students were observed reading and responding to two literature texts, two informational texts, and two media

text. These texts, reading response questions, and reading responses were contained on a classroom blog. After each blog entry, the students reviewed their classmates' responses and received personalized reminders to help them improve with future responses. Anecdotal notes were collected while students were blogging and while analyzing the students' responses. Students were interviewed at the conclusion of the study.

In Chapter four, the research is described. According to surveys and interviews, students generally felt comfortable on computers. On the other hand, they felt the most difficult part of blogging would be using the computers. After blogging, some students felt it was hard to answer the question, think "about what you should write", being able to keep on writing, and using text evidence to support their answers. Most students spent between seven and twenty five minutes reading the text and constructing their response. The majority of students typed by searching for the correct alphabetic key and pressing it with their index finger. The responses to the text showed weaknesses with sentence structure, capitalization, and ending punctuation. As students blogged more and more, there were more students who referred back to the text and using text evidence in their responses.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it is important to examine what happens when third grade students use blogging to critically examine texts due to the implementation of PARCC. Researchers have previously found students to be motivated, reflective, and aware of their audience when writing electronically. In this study, students were found to need support with typing, sentence structure, capitalization, end punctuation, and text

evidence. Therefore, teachers need to instruct in these areas in order to best support their students.

Limitations

There were some limitations to this research study. The small population of test subjects, the length of time of the study, and the reading response questions used all impacted the study.

The population for the study was ten students from one classroom. A larger, more diverse population would give stronger results regardless of other variables such as such background, student access to technology, etc. Students from different classrooms and from different schools would have given a broader scope to the study.

The length of time utilized also affected the study. Students read and responded to six texts over the course of two weeks. With a longer time for the study, more passages could have been utilized. More passages would have produced more data to analysis for trends and correlations. A longer time frame would also better illuminate students' ability to compose electronically after initially having to understand the process of using the laptops and blogs to respond to texts.

Lastly, the reading response questions used limited the scope of the study. All of the questions used were similar. While all the questions were text-based, they were not higher order questions based on Bloom's taxonomy. PARCC's reading response questions will require students to write deeper analyses and various genres of writing which this study did not include.

Student population, length of the study, and the level of questions used all limited the research study. By including more students, more time, or more higher-level questions, there would be more reliable data to analyze.

Implications for the Field

The investigation of third graders using blogs to critically respond to texts has several implications for the field of education. The implications are based on targeting reading response instruction for the modern classroom where there is an emphasis on using technology.

The first implication is the continued importance of planning. Students need to organize their thoughts prior to writing – regardless of the means being used to compose their response. Unfortunately, this process is not automatic when using technology to compose their writing electronically. Therefore, prewriting needs to be stressed even more when students are typing rather than using paper and pencil.

The second implication is the continued importance of a strong introduction, supporting details and text evidence, as well as a strong conclusion. These components of good writing are included less when composing electronically. Students tend to focus on concisely answering the question. There was little reference to the text they had read. Writing through electronic communication such as texting and Twitter has an emphasis on character usage. It is important to help students realize that this form of electronic communication does not require a brief response. Rather, blogging a response to a text requires all the components of a written response to a text.

The last implication is the necessity of technology skills. There was a lack of capitalization and a lot of corrections were made using the backspace to delete everything rather than making the correction where needed. Technology impeded students from using conventions correctly and revising and editing easily. Students could focus more on the analysis of the text and formulating a well written response if they had better technology skills.

New literacies and new testing practices have impacted the field of education. From this investigation, planning still has to be emphasized as part of the writing process, writing has to be well-developed rather than concise, and technology skills need to be supported.

References

Boling, E., Castek, J., Zawilinski, L., Barton, K., & Nierlich, T. (2008). Collaborative Literacy: Blogs and Internet Projects. *The Reading Teacher, 61*(6), 504-506.

Clyde, L. (2005). Educational Blogging. *Teacher Librarian, 32*(3), 43-45.

Ellison, N, & Wu, Y. (2008). Blogging in the Classroom: A Preliminary Exploration of Student Attitudes and Impact on Comprehension. *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia, 17*(1), 99-122.

Istifci, I. (2011). Opinions of Elementary Level EFL Learners on the Use of Weblogs. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 12*(1), 212-222.

Jimoyiannis, A., & Angelaina, S. (2012). Towards an Analysis Framework for Investigating Students' Engagement and Learning in Educational Blogs. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 28*, 222-234.

Kitchakarn, O. (2012). Using Blogs to Improve Students' Summary Writing Abilities. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 13*(4), 209-219.

Lacina, J., & Griffith, R. (2012). Blogging as a Means of Crafting Writing. *The Reading Teacher, 66*(4), 316-320.

Luongo, N., & Finetti, M. (2013). Let's Pre-Blog!: Using Blogs as Prewriting Tools in Elementary Classrooms. *The Ohio Reading Teacher, 43*(1), 25-28.

MacBride, R., & Luehmann, A. (2008). Capitalizing on Emerging Technologies: A Case Study of Classroom Blogging. *School Science and Mathematics, 108*(5), 173-183.

McGrail, E., & Davis, A. (2011). The Influence of Classroom Blogging on Elementary Student Writing. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 25*(4), 415-437.

Morgan, H. (Ed.). (2014). Focus on Technology: Taking Advantage of Web 2.0 Technologies: Classroom Blogging Basics. *Childhood Education, 90*(5), 379-381.

Ramaswami, R. (2008). The Prose (and a Few Cons, Too) of Blogging. *T.H.E. Journal, 35*(11), 21-25.

Sturgeon, J. (2008). Five Don'ts of Classroom Blogging. *T.H.E. Journal, 35*(2), 26-30.

Zawilinski, L. (2009). HOT Blogging: A Framework for Blogging to Promote Higher Order Thinking. *The Reading Teacher, 62*(8), 650-661.

Appendix A

Pre/Post Critical Blogging Survey

Code: _____

Pre/Post Critical Blogging Survey

1. How often do you use the computer?
   - less than 1 hour a week
   - 1 to 3 hours a week
   - 4 to 6 hours a week
   - 7 to 10 hours a week
   - more than 10 hours a week

2. What do you do on the computer?

3. Do you use the computer more at home or at school?
   - home
   - school

4. How comfortable are you using computer?

5. What do you like doing most on the computer?

6. What do you like doing the least on the computer?

7. How knowledgeable are you using a computer?

8. What are you the best at on the computer?

9. What do you feel you need to get better at on the computer?

Appendix B

Texts

Golden Fish
from Teaching and Tapas

Long ago, there lived an old man and a woman. They lived in an old hut made of logs. It was a simple home because they never had much extra money, but they were very happy living there. The old man caught fish in his net and the old woman cooked them.

One day, the old man went fishing as he always did. He fished all day and caught nothing. He got tired and wanted to give up. He threw his net for the last time and began to pull. He caught something very heavy. He finally wrestled the net up onshore. Inside, he found a beautiful golden fish. The old man took the fish in his hands. The golden fish looked at him and spoke. It said, "Throw me back into the sea and I will grant you a wish."

The old man threw the fish back into the sea. The fish looked at him again and waited for the man to make his wish. The old man could not think of a single thing he wanted because he was already happy. He went back to his small hut. His wife was angry that he did not bring any fish. He told her the story about the golden fish. She demanded him to go back to find the fish and ask for a newer and bigger house.

The fish appeared and granted his wish. He went back to the hut which was now a big, fancy house. His wife was excited, but she demanded he go back again and ask the fish for a mountain of money. He went back to the fish. The fish again granted his wish. The old man went back to his fancy house and found a giant pile of money waiting for him.

This time, his wife wanted servants. The old man did not want to keep asking for more, but he obeyed his wife. This time, the fish did not come. Instead, a dark storm appeared. The old man went back and saw his old hut. His wife was in old clothes. He became happy. They began to live again as they used to live. His wife never wanted more than what she had again.

Why was the old man happy at the end of the story?

A Very Talented Lizard
from Teaching and Tapas

A lizard called a Basilisk lizard lives in the rainforests of South America. This is a great place for them to live because there is a lot of tasty food. Basilisk lizards consume plants, insects, snakes, and birds for food. But they have to watch out because other animals will eat them too!

Basilisk lizards are very talented. This means that they can do things that help them stay safe and live longer. For example, they are good at climbing trees. They can climb trees to get away from other animals. Some animals want to eat them! Basilisk lizards have green skin so they can hide behind leaves. This helps keep them safe and secure from birds that want to gobble them up.

Another neat trick of the Basilisk lizards is that they can run across water! If a Basilisk lizard is scared, it will stand up on its back legs and run. They can stay on top of the water because they move so fast and they have special feet. Also, they have skin between their toes called webbing. This webbing helps them stay floating on top of the water because their toes are stuck together like a flipper! Sometimes they can run up to 15 feet across the water. This helps them stay alive!

A Basilisk lizard is a great swimmer. It can also get away from danger by swimming under water. These lizards can hold their breath for up to 30 minutes. This means they can stay under water until the danger is gone. But they need to be careful because if a fish finds them, then it might eat them as a tasty treat!

Why is it important for Basilisk lizards to be able to run across water and to be able to swim well?

Going Batty: Using Sound to Navigate

Scholastic, (1995). *The Magic School Bus: Going Batty.* [Full Video]. Available from http://www.discoveryeducation.com/

How do bats use sound when flying?

The Fox and the Crane
from Teaching and Tapas

A fox and a crane were best friends. The fox decided to treat the crane to dinner, so the fox went over to the crane's house to invite him. The crane was very happy and he agreed to come.

The next day, the crane was thrilled to arrive at the fox's house for a delicious dinner. The fox's kitchen smelled incredible and the table was set up and decorated nicely. He served mashed potatoes and smeared them on a plate. The fox told the crane to start eating. The crane pounded and pounded his beak but missed the food. Meanwhile, the fox licked and licked his plate, eating every last bite. When the fox saw that the crane had not eaten anything, he said, "Please eat. I spent a long time making this food. If you do not eat it, my feelings will be hurt."

The crane still could not eat any of the food, but thanked the fox anyway. Before leaving, the crane invited the fox over to his house for dinner the next night.

The next day, the fox came to the crane's house. The crane spent the day preparing a delicious soup. The crane put the soup in a bottle with a small neck opening at the top. He put the soup on the table and asked the fox to eat. The fox began to swirl around the jug. He tried all different sides. He sniffed it. He licked it. But he could not get the food. His head did not fit in the bottle. Meanwhile, the crane was able eat every last bite of his meal. The crane insisted that the fox eat his food. But the fox just kept getting hungrier.

Then the crane smiled and said, "Now do you understand why I did not eat my dinner at your house last night?"

What was the lesson the fox learned? How did he learn the lesson?

The World's Largest Bird
from Teaching and Tapas

Ostriches are the largest birds in the world! They have long, skinny legs, and long necks. They can be up to nine feet tall. Males have big bodies that are black and white. Females are typically a grey color. Ostriches live about 40-45 years.

They are very swift runners. They can run as fast as 30-60 miles per hour. That's as fast as a car! They are the fastest two-legged animal. Even though they have wings, they cannot fly. Their wings are used for balance and to shade babies. Ostriches prefer open lands like deserts. They originally came from the savannas of central Africa. But now they have moved to southern Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia.

Ostriches do not actually stick their heads in the sand. This fake myth was formed because ostriches hide by laying their bodies flat on the ground. From far away you can only see their bodies. During the winter, ostriches normally stay alone, or in pairs. In spring, they travel in groups of 5 to 100. When attacked, they can kick with strong legs. When the females lay eggs, they all lay them in one communal nest shared by everyone. All of the females keep the eggs warm during the day. The males keep them warm during the night.

Typically, ostriches eat seeds, grass, and flowers. Because they have beaks, and not teeth, they will swallow pebbles. This grinds up the food in their gizzard. This is a thick part of the stomach that smashes food. Since ostriches live in deserts, they can go a few days without water. They store up water, and get water from plants they eat. Ostriches cannot sweat. When it is very hot, they breathe quickly and pant to keep cool, like dogs.

So have you learned something new about the world's largest bird?

Why is it important for ostriches to be in groups during the spring?

African Safari: The African Pygmy Hedgehog

SCETV, (2010). *Riverbanks Zoo and Garden Roundup: African Safari.* [Full Video]. Available from http://www.discoveryeducation.com/

How do African pygmy hedgehogs protect themselves?

Data Recording Sheet

Critically Blogging

Date: _____

Participant	Behaviors	Results
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		

Appendix D

Interview Questionnaire

Code: _____

Student Critical Blogging Interview

1. What is the same when writing about two texts and when blogging?

2. What is different when writing about two texts and when blogging?

3. Do you prefer to write about texts or to blog?

4. What do you like about blogging?

5. What don't you like about blogging?

6. What is the hardest part about blogging?

7. What is the easiest part about blogging?

8. How are you as a blogger?

9. What are you thinking about when blogging?