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Blogging and Poetry: Fourth Graders Develop their Higher Order Thinking Skills

Brian J. Carberry

The College at Brockport, bcarberry7@gmail.com

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Blogging and Poetry: Fourth Graders
Develop their Higher Order Thinking Skills

by

Brian J. Carberry

August 2011

A thesis submitted to the
Department of Education and Human Development of
The College at Brockport, State University of New York
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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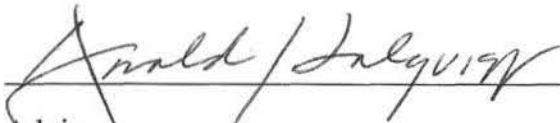
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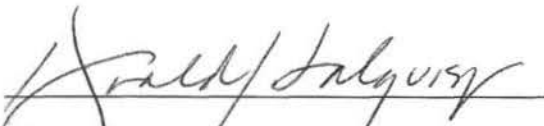
Brian J. Carberry

APPROVED BY:



Advisor

08.16.11
Date



Director, Graduate Programs

08.16.11
Date

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Chapter One: Introduction

My thirteen fourth grade students embody a vast diversity of learning styles, needs and abilities, and they have shown a tremendous growth in their ability to use literal thinking about texts since the beginning of the school year. One of the major foci in our work with reading comprehension has been sequencing with the most important details, while keeping in mind the beginning, middle, and end of texts to support verbal and written summaries. The students' observed growth was very rewarding to the students and me, but I recognized that more teaching and learning needed to be done before the end of the school year.

My students were able to generate questions about what they read across the spectrum of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, a scheme for classifying educational goals, objectives, and standards that allows for enhanced communication and common understandings (Krathwohl, 2002). The Revised Bloom's, discussed by Krathwohl (2002), defines questioning using specific phrases and vocabulary within each of the levels—remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating—to foster higher order thinking in discussion and responses. However, the students labored when formulating responses to questions that required them to use the specific skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating.

When I asked students to use new information to solve problems they were working at the applying level. For example, "What facts would you select to show that Moss was immature at the beginning of the book *Guests*?" Recently, my students

and I read *Guests* (Dorris, 1994) as our shared reading book. The book is about a Native American boy, Moss, who is troubled by the idea that his father has invited strangers to their harvest feast. Moss and Trouble, his female friend, decide to run off into the forest before the feast. Unbeknownst to them, they would encounter new learning that would shape their understanding of the world around them.

When students distinguish between different parts of information in order to form generalizations they are using the skill of analyzing (Hammond, 2007). One example is the question, “What conclusions can you draw about how Moss changed as a result of his adventure into the forest?” I asked students to use their skills of evaluating when I encouraged them to justify their stance or position on a topic. A possible evaluating question is, “What is your opinion of the reasons Moss went into the forest and why do you feel that way?”

As part of his response to a questionnaire (see Appendix A) that I created to determine the students’ abilities to generate and respond to higher order analysis questions about *Guests* (Dorris, 1994), Joe (all student names are pseudonyms) wrote the question, “What do you think the story of *The Beaver and the Muskrat* women was all about?” (see Appendix B for Joe’s responses and questions). *The Beaver and the Muskrat* is a folktale Moss’s mother told him to save him from being chosen as a speaker during the harvest feast. I then asked Joe to trade papers with his partner Bob and respond to Bob’s question, “What was the moral of the beaver story?” I watched as Joe sat puzzled for nearly ten minutes until he was finally able to

muster up the response, “The moral of the beaver story is about the Native American” (see Appendix B for Joe’s response to Bob’s question). As I noticed Joe struggling to respond, I asked him if he understood the question and what a moral is. He told me that “A moral is a theme or lesson,” but he “could not figure out what lesson he was supposed to learn from the folktale.” Like many of my students, Joe was able to generate a question at the analyzing level, but he had difficulty answering a question that required him to use the same skill.

I modeled and practiced the use of higher order thinking skills with my students verbally and in writing on a daily basis. One example I used for modeling the skill of analyzing was when I discussed the themes of *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale* by John Steptoe (1987). I shared my thinking out loud so my students could hear what the process of analyzing themes really sounded like. I stated that:

This book was about two girls, one being boastful, Manyara, and one being grateful, Nyasha. By the end of the book Nyasha was respected by a king, leading her to become the queen of his kingdom even though Manyara believed Nyasha’s kindness was only a sign of weakness. The theme of the text is that it is better to be beautiful on the inside as opposed to the outside. What this means is the outside appearance doesn’t matter as long as we are caring, generous, and loving on the inside like Nyasha.

I then led a shared writing experience in which the students helped me write an analysis of the book, reminding them to discuss themes and reasons to justify our thoughts.

I have found that modeling and explicit teaching of skills, such as analyzing, has not led my students to use higher order thinking skills when responding to literature independently. As a result, I was interested in finding out how teaching a five-week poetry unit focused even more purposefully on the levels of applying, analyzing and evaluating and that combines the writing and responding processes using blogging through our class Web site might better support my students' abilities to comprehend at the applying, analyzing, and evaluating levels. I was interested in using blogging as a means of communication between and among students because it could allow for open-response opportunities where they read and responded to each other based on a chosen topic or idea. I envisioned that the conversation between partners would flow back and forth like an everyday conversation they might have on the telephone. Likewise, I anticipated that blogging would provide more tentative students who are less likely to speak in front of their peers with an opportunity to share their thinking without stressing over how to verbalize their thoughts. I have noticed that several of my students tend to shy away from sharing their thinking because they are nervous that what they say won't make sense. One student has told me before, "I don't like to speak out because I'm scared of what the other kids will think about me." I hoped that blogging would provide this student and others with a

sense of protection, and generate more thoughtful responses and discussion from all students, leading them to think using the skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating.

Significance of the Problem

Fountas and Pinnell (2001) stated that

The first years of school establish the essential foundation of literacy that enables all future literacy achievement. In the intermediate grades, students use this foundation to develop a full, rich, wide-ranging facility. They assume the roles of readers and writers that will serve them throughout their lifetime. (p. 2)

I have come to realize that as a teacher I am a major stakeholder responsible for providing effective instruction in reading and writing that will set my students up for a lifetime of success. If I fail to provide valuable instruction in reading and writing, I will be wasting critical learning opportunities by not maximizing student potential.

One function of reading and writing that is crucial to the success of students is the ability to use the skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating when responding to literature. As discussed by Harvey and Goudvis (2007), strategic readers are constantly thinking as they move through the text: making connections, developing questions, and constructing meaning based on their own experiences. I believe that

teachers need to show students through meaningful instruction that reading is not just about figuring out what is on the page, but that reading is about developing thoughts that will help further their understanding of the material being presented. My thoughts concur with McGregor (2007) who recognizes that meaningful instruction is about the thinking, talking, and learning that occurs while students are interacting with text. If I can teach students to think critically using texts, I can help them connect their learning experiences to real-world situations, setting them up for a lifetime of successful thinking.

There has been a tremendous breakthrough in the use of technology for supporting student literacy learning in the 21st century (Rosen, 2011). As stated by Rosen (2011), "Just as we don't think about the existence of air, kids don't question the existence of media and technology" (p. 13). To me, Rosen is saying that students of the 21st century have grown up with technology as an everyday part of life. Technology and media are not new concepts to fourth graders; both have heavily influenced their lives from the time they were able to view television, listen to music and use computers and other electronic devices. I recognize that if students are stripped the opportunities to use technology to enhance their literacy learning in school, I and other teachers are doing them a major injustice.

Blogging is one way technology is being used by students to develop their higher order thinking skills (Zawilinski, 2009). I agree with Leu, Zawilinski, Castek, Banerjee, Housand, and Liu (2007) who recognize that blogging allows readers and

writers a means to analyze information, critically evaluate, and synthesize across a multitude of texts as they gather information to solve problems. Zawilinski (2009) concurs with Leu et al (2007) in that students deepen their understanding and enrich their own thinking processes when they get the opportunity to share diverse perspectives in blogs. Thus, I was interested in finding out how my students could use blogging to support their use of higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study, then, was to see if and how my fourth grade students used blogging to develop the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating when responding to poetry. The study provided me with insights into how blogging can be used as another avenue for discussing poetry, as opposed to the more conventional approaches of verbal discussion and handwritten responses.

I improved my skills as a researcher due to this study, offering me the ability to conduct reliable and valid future research in order to provide students, teachers, and other school professionals with new best practices and implications for instructing students. One skill I developed is my ability to analyze student work and assessments in order to develop more effective instructional opportunities. Another area in which I improved is my understanding of how to efficiently and effectively

use technology to enhance student learning through authentic teaching and learning opportunities. These opportunities enabled my students to draw on their technology skills while integrating and developing their higher order thinking skills and abilities.

A secondary purpose of this study was to provide other educators with insight into how blogging can develop students' use of higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry. I addressed the following research question through this study: how does blogging influence the higher order thinking skills of fourth graders when responding to poetry?

Study Approach

In this study, I investigated how my students' use of blogging influenced their higher order thinking skills. I conducted this qualitative action-research study in my fourth grade classroom in a suburban school district located in western New York, where I collected and analyzed data on my students to learn new strategies and best practices for teaching them how to use higher order thinking when responding to poetry.

I began the study by administering a pre-assessment and interview to determine my students' abilities and understanding about responding to poetry using higher order thinking. To help my students develop skills in how to comprehend poetry at the levels of applying, analyzing and evaluating, I used a balanced literacy

approach, focusing on reading and writing in a five-week unit of study focusing on poetry as the genre of literature being studied. As part of the study, students responded to poetry through blogging. I analyzed their blogging responses to determine their use of higher order thinking skills. I also used a series of Quick Writes throughout the study to gather written feedback from students about their experiences. I administered a post-assessment at the end of the five-week unit to determine how blogging influenced the students' abilities to use higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry. Finally, I concluded the study by conducting student interviews to see how blogging was supportive in the areas of applying, analyzing, and evaluating.

I assessed all thirteen students in my class to determine their ability to use higher order thinking when responding to poetry. From the thirteen students who were assessed, I chose a purposeful sample of three students with limited higher order thinking skills who differed in gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity to focus on for the case study portion of the action-research study.

Rationale

I conducted this investigation using a qualitative approach because I felt it was necessary for me to develop the most holistic understanding of how blogging could support students in their use of higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry. Students need to be introduced to technology and how it supports their

learning in reading and writing at a young age to prepare them for future learning opportunities (Barone & Wright, 2008). This is a direct result of how our world continues to develop new forms of technology at a rapid pace that are being used to instruct students during the first decade of the 21st century. A few of the many examples of 21st century technologies include social networking, SMART Boards, eBooks, and blogs. Familiarizing students with different forms and uses of technology such as these set them up for a lifetime of success in school and at work.

I chose the three students as participants because I wanted to represent a wide range of learners and abilities, covering factors such as gender, race, and socio-economic status to ensure the findings provide implications for a large population. The participants were members of my fourth grade classroom, which offered me many chances for direct observation during authentic learning opportunities as the investigation progressed. Based on the pre-assessment and interview I used to determine the students' understanding of higher order thinking, the activities I created during the poetry unit were designed to meet the needs of various learning styles to support each student's potential for mastering the unit's objectives. I analyzed the contents of the three students' blog responses to determine what higher order thinking the students used when responding to poetry, as well as administered a post-interview and a series of Quick Writes to get their insight into how blogging supported the use of higher order thinking.

I asked the students to read and respond to poems and each others' responses when blogging, a similar task to what they were asked to do when responding to the book *Guests* (Dorris, 1994). The students began the unit by responding to questions on the blog that I created about poetry we had read in class. Once I instructed the students and they practiced responding to my applying, analyzing, and evaluating questions, I asked them to generate and respond to each other's blog responses and questions. I believed that the act of blogging may enhance the collaborative communication between and among my fourth grade students. It offered them opportunities to gain multiple perspectives about a piece of poetry when analyzing and evaluating the blog entries of peers. Also, the process of blogging enabled students to apply learned higher order thinking skills and vocabulary when developing their own higher order thinking questions about peer writing.

Summary

It remains crucial that teachers prepare students with an understanding of how to use and apply technology to foster higher order thinking when responding to literature (Barone & Wright, 2008). This means I needed to begin the process of introducing and instructing my fourth grade students through the integration of multiple forms of technology, one being blogging, in order to keep them up-to-date and ready for new and current technologies that have recently entered our world or have yet to be invented. I believed that my students were falling behind the learning

curve because I was not integrating technology into my literacy instruction. In order to help my students become life-long learners, I developed an opportunity for students to use the skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating when blogging about poetry.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In order to begin to understand the potential relationships between the use of blogging and my fourth graders' application of higher order thinking when responding to poetry, it was important that I research and describe the literature relevant to these topics. As discussed by Teele (2004), all readers should consider that the most important aspect of reading is understanding what has been read. I believed that blogging could help my fourth graders develop their higher order thinking skills when applying, analyzing, and evaluating poetry.

I have organized this chapter into three broad topics, with relevant literature to support each topic: (1) effective reading and writing instruction in fourth grade with a focus on poetry (2) a description of the applying, analyzing, and evaluating levels of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy and how the levels relate to literacy concepts in reading and writing; and (3) the integration of blogging to support students higher order thinking during reading and writing activities.

Effective Reading and Writing Instruction in Fourth Grade Using Poetry

In this section, I focus on effective reading and writing teaching strategies and how teachers can use poetry as one tool for instructing students to develop the necessary skills to become proficient readers and writers. As discussed by Fountas

and Pinnell (2001), the educator's job is to not only teach students how to read and write, but also learn the many purposes of reading and writing. Routman (2003) agreed with Fountas and Pinnell (2001) when she reasoned that all teachers' reading and writing instruction must engage all learners and move them ahead in their understanding of the reading and writing processes through careful evaluation and reflection. What this shows is that it is imperative that teachers develop a literacy program that fosters a learning environment that will not only teach students the processes of reading and writing, but also helps them develop their understanding of why reading and writing are important and how both will be beneficial to their future success in and out of school.

Gradual Release of Responsibility Model

According to Vygotsky (1978), the zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the place in which a person can perform a task with the support of more capable others. This coincides with Pearson and Gallagher's (1983) theory of gradual release of responsibility model in which teachers respond and react to the specific needs of students within their ZPD to shift the responsibility for learning from the teachers to the students over time using the framework of modeling, guided practice, and independent practice. According to Pearson and Gallagher modeling is when the teacher has all of the responsibility for task completion; guided practice is when the

teacher and students have joint responsibility for completing a task, and independent practice is when the student has all of the responsibility for completing a task.

Johnson's (2006) work builds on that of Pearson and Gallagher's (1983) by identifying one way teachers can increase students' awareness of the reading and writing processes. Johnson (2006) cited many different terms that researchers have used to define the theory of gradual release, and she discussed how each model provides a responsive teaching method that promotes students' success in literacy. One example was from Fountas and Pinnell (2001), who described the steps of Pearson and Gallagher's (1983) theory of gradual release of responsibility model as "show, support, prompt, reinforce, and observe" (p. 9). According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001), show is when the teacher does all of the work and the students watch; support is when the teacher does most of the work and the students join in; prompt is when the teacher asks the students general and specific questions that lead them in the right direction; reinforce is when the students perform the task and are rewarded for their success with praise, and observe is when the teacher watches the students do all of the work independently.

Johnson (2006) developed her idea of the gradual release of responsibility model using the terminology "modeling, scaffolding, prompting, backing off, and reinforcing" (p. 9). Johnson's definitions through each stage in her gradual release model mirror those of Fountas and Pinnell's (2001) that were previously defined. Although the researchers used different terminology to define the most effective way

for instructing students in reading and writing, both models follow Pearson and Gallagher's (1983) gradual release of responsibility theory in that the teacher starts off providing significant amounts of support to students, slowly transferring the responsibility for learning and doing over to the students by the end of the model.

In order to accomplish the goal of teaching all students within their zone of proximal development as laid out by Vygotsky (1978) within the confines of the gradual release of responsibility model presented by Pearson and Gallagher (1983), teachers must instruct students through the use of a balanced literacy program (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001; Harvey and Goudvis, 2007; Johnson, 2006). As described by Johnson (2006), through the lens of Harvey and Goudvis (2007) and Fountas and Pinnell (2001), balance refers to having a balance of who is responsible for reading and writing in the classroom.

The activities through which the gradual release of responsibility for learning occurs within a balanced literacy program are showing and modeling in reading and writing, shared reading and writing, guided reading and writing, and independent reading and writing (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996; Mooney, 1990; Schulman and Payne, 2000). A balanced literacy program provides the support necessary to help all students develop their reading and writing skills because all learners are being instructed within their zone of proximal development.

Showing and Modeling in Reading and Writing

According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001) and Johnson (2006), read-alouds and mini-lessons in reading and writing fall under the categories of showing and modeling respectively within the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Within the frameworks of showing and modeling, the responsibility for completing the task falls solely on the teacher while the students observe his or her modeling (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Johnson (2006) described the modeling stage as the opportunity for teachers to explicitly demonstrate what they want the students to do in reading and writing.

When studying the genre of poetry at this stage of the balanced literacy program, Fountas and Pinnell (2001) believe that the most integral aspect of the instruction involves helping students experience and enjoy the poetry with which they are working. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) discussed how it is the role of the teacher to instill a love for poetry in his or her students at this stage, eventually leading them to develop higher order thinking responses by focusing on themes, author's purpose, and forming opinions about each piece of poetry. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) recognize that teachers can ruin poetry for their students by failing to help them to develop a love for it initially before asking them to use their higher order thinking skills to analyze poems critically.

Shared Reading and Writing

Shared reading and writing are under the same category within a balanced literacy program that teachers can use to effectively instruct students in the processes of reading and writing. Within Johnson's (2006) idea for the theory of gradual release of responsibility, shared reading and writing fall into the scaffolding category, where the teacher shares the responsibility for completing the task with the students before eventually shifting the responsibility over to them. As described by Calkins (2001), shared reading and writing occur when a teacher reads or writes to and with the students having most of the responsibility for completing the task while they are following along with the print in reading and giving ideas for writing, stopping to respond to and discuss the text along the way.

Fountas and Pinnell's (2001) idea of shared reading and writing coincides with Calkins (2001) in that the teacher models the reading and writing process, and asks the students support him or her in formulating a response to something they are studying or reading. Shared reading and writing helps students expand their literacy understanding because they get to practice and share in the responsibility and process of being successful readers and writers (Calkins, 2001; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

One Example of Poetry in a Shared Reading

Calkins (2001) believes that teachers can use poetry as a tool to help their students develop their reading strategies. Calkins (2001) described a situation in which a teacher used poetry during a shared reading activity and found great success. By pointing out that “children develop the identity of being one who” (p. 267) participates in reading during the shared process, Calkins (2001) described how a kindergarten teacher clamored over the sound of Prince Redcloud’s poem *Now* as her kindergarten students attempted to read it on their classroom easel. According to Calkins, the teacher, Theresa Cascavale, stopped the students midway through the first reading and prompted them to read along with her as she read. By the end of the day, they had read the poem twelve times. By the next day, the students were reading the poem creatively in unison as they generated discussion about what they have accomplished after and during each attempt. Cascavale then sent copies of *Now* home with the students and asked them to identify new vocabulary words, draw pictures of what it meant to them, and to find rhyming words. Calkins (2001) observed that the kindergarten students entered the lesson as tentative, confused readers, but by the end of the shared reading experience, they were confident and happy readers who understood how sharing in a reading experience helped develop their understanding of reading as a whole.

Guided Reading and Writing

Guided reading and writing are under the same category within a balanced literacy program that teachers can use to effectively instruct students in the processes of reading and writing. Within Johnson's (2006) idea for the theory of gradual release of responsibility, guided reading and writing are in the prompting category, where the students have most of the responsibility for completing the task with the teacher providing prompts to guide the students through the activities.

According to Tompkins (2008), a reading and writing mini-lesson should be done each day teachers work with poetry prior to having the students complete a task. Tompkins (2008) believes that without a clear mini-lesson, guided reading and writing of poetry would have minimal effect on student growth. Once the teacher has completed the mini-lesson, the teacher can place most of the responsibility for completing a task on the students while the teacher prompts them to further their thinking (Tompkins, 2008). Fountas and Pinnell (2001) believe that the transfer of responsibility from shared to guided reading and writing is a critical stage in developing proficient readers and writers.

Independent Reading and Writing

Likewise, independent reading and writing are in the same category within a balanced literacy program that teachers can use to effectively instruct students in

reading and writing, as well as provides opportunities for students to develop their reading and writing skills through practice. Within Johnson's (2006) idea for the theory of gradual release of responsibility, independent reading and writing are in the backing off category, where the students have all of the responsibility for completing the task with no teacher support. Fountas and Pinnell's (2001) and Johnson's (2006) beliefs on independent practice coincide with Pearson and Gallagher's (1983) in that the students have learned enough about reading and writing skills throughout the scaffolding process to apply what they have learned to complete tasks with no support. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001), students at this point in the balance literacy process should understand that poetry is a rich, concise, skillfully crafted language that "illuminates the art and mystery of language and meaning" (p. 410).

Benefits of Responding to Poetry in Reading and Writing

Fountas and Pinnell (2001), Calkins (2006), Tompkins (2008), and Harvey and Goudvis (2007) concur that reading and responding to literature, especially poetry, in writing offers many benefits in developing the skills of elementary-aged readers and writers. According to Harvey and Goudvis (2007), reading poetry provides students with multiple opportunities to practice the use of interpretation and inferential thinking due to the multitude of metaphors, similes, images, and other literary devices used within the genre of poetry. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) believe that poetry offers students the opportunity to view the world in new ways, enriches

vocabulary through discovery of new language, develops inferential thinking skills due to the idea that poetry contains puzzles within puzzles, and it captures intense meaning using minimal amounts of words. Once students have captured the essence of responding to poetry verbally, they can then begin to apply learned skills to generate written poems for a purpose, attempting to create images in the readers' mind, explore a vast world of feelings and emotions, and entertain the audience through a range of crafts (Tompkins, 2008).

Through my research of the literature, it has become clearer to me that teachers should use poetry in their classroom to increase the proficiency of all learners, as long as each student is being instructed within his or her zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Poetry is one genre that can be used within a balanced literacy program to help fourth graders develop their higher order thinking skills as readers and writers.

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy and Higher Order Thinking Skills

In this section of the chapter, I explore higher order thinking in the levels of applying, analyzing, and evaluating within Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002). I also explain how these higher order thinking skills relate to students' literacy development in the areas of reading and writing.

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy

To develop understanding of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, clarification in reasoning for the revision of the taxonomy is necessary for teachers to learn the new language within each stage. As interpreted by Krathwohl (2002), "the taxonomy of educational objectives is a framework for classifying statements of what we expect or intend students to learn as a result of instruction" (p. 1). Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, and Krathwohl (1956) first identified a taxonomy as a measurement tool for providing common language about learning goals and objectives. They developed a hierarchy of six intellectual levels, concrete to abstract, that are important to learning (Overbaugh & Schultz, 2011). Starting with concrete thinking and moving to abstract thinking, the levels within the original taxonomy were defined in noun form: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bloom et al., 1956). Redefined by Krathwohl and Anderson (2001), the Revised Taxonomy table is leveled in verb form: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) described the difference between the original framework and revised framework by highlighting that the original framework was developed to be used as one-dimensional, meaning that mastery of each simpler, lower-level category was a prerequisite for moving on to the next one. Further, Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) described the original framework as causing conflict between the noun and verb terminology within the levels because they were both

intermixed within the knowledge dimension. According to Krathwohl (2002), the revised framework is two-dimensional: the noun and verb objectives were formed in separate levels of the taxonomy, the noun being part of the knowledge dimension and verb as part of the cognitive dimension.

To clarify the importance, Krathwohl (2002) discussed how the revised framework is divided into two categories: knowledge and cognitive processes. The knowledge process resembles the original subcategories using nouns from the old framework, while the cognitive process is used in the verb form. As a result, using the revised taxonomy does not call for students to master thinking in one level before moving onto the next. According to Airasian and Miranda (2002), having the two dimensions in the revised framework helps guide the process of stating objectives and planning clearer objectives in instruction and assessments in order to maximize student learning potential.

Higher Order Thinking Skills

To further understanding how the use of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy supports the development of students' reading and writing skills and abilities, the higher order thinking skills (HOTS) within the taxonomy of applying, analyzing and evaluating must be examined. Drawing from Lewis and Smith (1993), Crawford and Brown (2002) agree that HOTS is the process through which people take new information and extend it to achieve a purpose in difficult situations, especially involving the

HOT areas of content, critical, and creative thinking. Within the critical thinking area, are the applying, analyzing and evaluating levels of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy.

According to Raths (2002), rather than just being satisfied with their students remembering details about a topic, teachers can help their students use increasingly complex cognitive processes, such as applying, analyzing, and evaluating to promote their students' use of higher order thinking and learning. Raths (2002) suggested that instead of just remembering or understanding the term, immigrants, students could be asked to analyze concepts such as rights and obligations of immigrants, evaluate proposals for dealing with illegal immigrants or the process of allowing immigrants into our country, or apply what they have learned to develop ideas for handling these situations. Teachers' use of careful questioning and tasks that require critical thinking within Bloom's Revised Taxonomy can further enhance students' learning opportunities and background knowledge.

Hammond (2007) stated that:

Another way to look at higher-order thinking is to look at the reading process in typical terms and then extend the terms one step to reach higher-order thinking. That is, being able to read, being literate, typically means having the ability to decode words and understand their meanings individually and collectively. Being able to read and to comprehend the reading is generally considered thinking and involves "reading the lines" and "reading between the lines." Higher-order

thinking or literacy though, is the next crucial step, often not even thought of in the reading process, that being “reading beyond the lines.” This is so crucial because it is in reading beyond the lines that reading the lines and reading between the lines have their real value.

Hammond (2007) believes that students need to become more aware of the fact that reading is not just decoding, but that it is understanding the message and purpose for the writing that is most significant. Harvey and Goudvis (2007) concur with Hammond (2007) that teachers need to use the language of higher order thinking to help students truly learn how to use and apply skills in order to develop as readers and writers.

In order to “read between the lines,” students must be able to apply, analyze, and evaluate text (Hammond, 2007). According to Anderson and Krathwohl (2002) and Hammond (2007) within the context of Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy, applying occurs when individuals solve problems and carry out procedures by using acquired knowledge and facts. Analyzing occurs when an individual examines and breaks down information into parts using evidence to support inferences and generalizations. Evaluating occurs when an individual presents and defends opinions by making judgments about information based on specific criteria and standards.

Harvey and Goudvis (2007) believe that readers think critically when they use their background knowledge and text clues to draw conclusions, identify themes, predict outcomes, identify the big idea, form opinions, and use what they know to

develop and apply learned skills and ideas, all falling in the levels of applying, analyzing, and evaluating.

To further understanding the importance of using HOTS to develop students' reading and writing skills, Fountas and Pinnell (2001) identified that in order to engage in higher order thinking, students must use schema, background knowledge, and make connections to what they are reading and writing. The authors discussed how making connections enables students to analyze and evaluate text to gain a deeper understanding by identifying how the text fits together. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001), students must be able to use evidence from what they know to support their thinking within the analyzing level and critiquing within the evaluating level. To show the significance of using background knowledge in reading and writing, Fountas and Pinnell (2001) provide the example that the more a person knows about a particular time period in history, the more likely the person is to critically analyze and evaluate his or her new learning, developing the understanding that not all text is true.

Through this review of research, it has become more evident to me that teachers must develop objectives and instruction that fosters more critical learning. In order to do so, they must develop tasks that require students to use the critical thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating as defined within Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002).

How Blogging Supports Higher Order Thinking in Reading and Writing

In this section, I examine how blogging can be used as a tool to help develop students' use of higher order thinking skills in reading and writing. As stated by Rosen (2011), "our children and youth are immersed in technologies that give them opportunities no previous generation has enjoyed" (p. 10). Rosen recognizes that students in the 21st century are engrossed in many forms of technology that offer special learning opportunities that few teachers have even been afforded the opportunity to learn from during their schooling, which shows me that it is imperative that I embrace this new wave of learning to best meet the changing needs of all learners in my classroom.

Before examining how blogging can support the development of students' higher order thinking skills, I need to first identify the importance of technology in instruction. As described by Richardson (2011), the use of technology creates passion and participation, develops problem solving skills, and promotes reflective thinking, collaboration, and creativity, all skills necessary for literacy and personal growth. According to Richardson, social media provides opportunities for students to contribute to the world in meaningful ways by doing real work for real audiences.

Although Richardson (2001) identified many benefits of using technology during instruction, Rotherman and Willingham (2009) highlighted problems teachers may face with technology when they stated, "we don't yet know how to teach self-direction, collaboration, creativity, and innovation the way we know how to teach

long division” (p. 19). Rotherman and Willingham (2009) believe teachers know how to instruct familiar concepts, such as long division, very well, but technology poses difficulties because the same teachers aren’t well educated in how to effectively use technology for instruction. Rotherman and Willingham (2009) clearly identified that more strategies for implementing technology instruction are needed to maximize its benefits.

Technology Used as a Motivating Factor in Reading and Writing

Merisuo-Storm (2006) explored the attitude of 145 fourth grade students (67 boys and 78 girls) in a Finnish comprehensive school, towards reading and writing. She validated the study by identifying a literacy performance decline over the past few years, and called for a study to identify what kinds of texts motivate children to read and write. The results indicated that boys and girls like to read different forms of text. According to Merisuo-Storm, girls found reading books more engaging, whereas boys were more interested in reading online computer texts. She also found that both boys and girls were most interested in writing to a pen friend because it offered a communicative function, which meant they got an opportunity to read and respond in the form of an everyday conversation. She found that if reading and writing had a communicative function, boys and girls became more motivated to read and write because they were familiar with how the language is natural to them. The results showed that boys and girls, especially those between the ages of 10-11, needed

opportunities to discuss texts through an on-going conversation as opposed to one person talking and the other listening.

Merisuo-Storm's findings on how fourth grade boys and girls are more motivated to read and write in the context of a communicative function helps identify a major reason blogging can be used to increase student motivation. The ultimate goal is that the motivation of using technology in reading and writing may lead to the development of higher order thinking skills when instructed using the balanced literacy program previously discussed by Calkins (2001), Fountas and Pinnell (2001), Johnson (2006), and Tompkins (2008).

Zawilinski (2009) visited first, second, third, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms to highlight how blogging can be used to motivate students to read, write, and communicate with each other. Zawilinski (2009) also wanted to determine how blogging is being used by students, as well as to explore ways in which blogs can support literacy programs, especially to develop higher order thinking skills in reading and writing. Zawilinski found that the teachers and students were using blogs to communicate news and information, reflect on student and teacher work, showcasing student projects, and as literature response opportunities. What she found was that the literature response blogs provided a collaborative community for learning where the students had a chance to read and respond to one another. Zawilinski recognized that traditionally handwritten dialogue journals used by teachers, isolated the conversation between an individual student and the teacher.

Zawilinski believes that moving the journals online into blogs allows for a wider audience that will maximize comprehension of texts because students' work could be read and responded to by classmates, parents, family members, school personnel and anyone around the world who enters the blog. The community of learning directly relates to Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist approach which suggests that people learn best in social settings when they have opportunities to learn from one another through conversation. Used in this way, blogging provides a space for collaborating on ideas, problem solving, and learning to communicate with others.

Koumpilova (2011) interviewed an unknown number of high school teachers in Minnesota, and found that their beliefs concurred with the findings of Merisuo-Storm's (2006) and Zawilinski's (2009) studies in that blogging created an atmosphere of collaborative communication through which students can work together to share, teach, and learn new information. One teacher stated that through blogging, "students aren't writing for their teachers alone; their peers are reading and constantly responding" (p. 2). Blogging offered students with the opportunity to learn from a much greater population of stakeholders, ranging from peers to grandparents all over the world and anywhere in between.

Not only can blogging create a collaborative learning environment for readers and writers, it also can help students develop their higher order thinking skills as readers and writers.

Over the course of one month, Boling, Castek, Zawilinski, Barton, and Nierlich (2008) visited one third, one fourth, and one fifth grade classroom in Connecticut to identify some of the new technologies being used by students to create authentic, collaborative writing opportunities. The third and fourth grade participants used laptops to write blog responses to their buddy Jefferson Bear, the host of the classrooms' blog who asked students to share their thoughts and opinions on various class topics. For example, Jefferson Bear asked students to share their experiences and suggestions for how individuals might respond to being teased. What Boling et al. (2008) observed was that blogging gave the third and fourth grade students an opportunity to write about common topics and share their thinking with a wide audience across classrooms and grade levels.

Even more rewarding for Boling et al. (2008) was what they found in the fifth grade classroom. In the fifth grade classroom, blogging offered the students with the opportunity to display and practice critical higher order thinking strategies needed for accomplishing and understanding new tasks when they were reading, responding to, and writing poetry. The fifth grade students worked in groups to respond to short pieces of poetry and text in which they would find a strike (something that stood out) and a wonder (a question) (Boling et al., 2008). Once they had the strike and wonder, the group posted on a blog with an unspecified group of advanced readers who lived over 100 miles away. Both sides would then communicate back and forth on the topics introduced by the fifth grade students. Boling et al. (2008) highlighted their findings by discussing how one struggling reader, who was an experienced Internet

user, increased his literacy engagement and higher order thinking skills because he felt empowered in the process since he was an in-demand expert in the field of blogging. The student was able to lead his group in the learning and teaching of how to post and respond to blogs.

The findings of Boling et al.'s (2008), Koumpilova's (2011), Merisuo-Storm's (2006), and Zawilinski's (2009) studies show that blogging provides students with an engaging, collaborative environment where they have the opportunity to develop the higher order thinking skills necessary when aspiring to become proficient readers and writers.

I believe that blogging not only supports students' comprehension growth, but it also provides them with opportunities to write for a wide audience within an engaging culture of collaboration.

Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed literature that examined effective strategies for reading and writing in fourth grade, including Fountas and Pinnell's (2001) and Johnson's (2006) balanced literacy approach outlined through the lens of Pearson and Gallagher's (1983) gradual release of responsibility model. I have also discussed Bloom's Revised Taxonomy and how it relates to the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating, and clarified the potential benefits blogging has

on developing the critical thinking skills of readers and writers. My study of my fourth graders' use of blogging may add to the current research and address the technology issues identified by Rotherman and Willingham (2009).

Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

I designed this study to investigate the effect blogging had on developing the higher order thinking skills of fourth graders when responding to poetry. I addressed the specific higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing and evaluating within Bloom's Revised Taxonomy as presented by Krathwohl (2002) through the use of a five-week unit focused on poetry. Throughout this study, I paid close attention to how my fourth graders developed their use of the three higher order thinking skills in response to poetry.

Research Question

I explored the question: How does blogging influence the higher order thinking skills of fourth graders when responding to poetry?

Demographics, Participants and Context

School District Demographics

I conducted this research study in my inclusive fourth grade classroom in a rural-suburban district in western New York. There are 5,685 students enrolled in the district. The students' demographics are as follows: 71 percent White, 15 percent Black or African American, 8 percent Asian, 4 percent Latino or Hispanic, and 1

percent American Indian. Nineteen percent of the students are eligible for free lunch and 9 percent are eligible for reduced price lunch. Four percent of the students (209 students) have limited English proficiency. There is a wide range of diversity ethnically, socially, and economically across the students.

School Demographics

I conducted this study in my fourth grade classroom in Herman Elementary School (a pseudonym). The demographic percentages and socioeconomic levels at Herman are very similar to those found throughout the district. There are 474 students enrolled at Herman Elementary School: 74 percent White, 11 percent Black or African American, 9 percent Asian, 5 percent Latino or Hispanic, and 1 percent American Indian. Fifteen percent of the students are eligible for free lunch and 8 percent are eligible for reduced price lunch. The median household income in the area is \$55,509.00. The median value of homes in the district is \$171,288.00. Ten percent of children live in single parent household. Three percent of children (16 students) are limited English proficient. The average class size is sixteen. Three of the 35 teachers have less than four years of teaching experience. Three percent of the teachers have a master's degree plus thirty hours or a doctoral degree. The school is in good standing with Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on the No Child Left Behind Act and does not receive Title 1 Part A funding.

Participants

My fourth grade classroom consisted of 13 students, seven boys and six girls, where three students had special needs. Five boys and five girls were Caucasian, two boys were African-American, and one girl was American Indian. One girl was from an upper-income family, four boys and three girls were from middle-income families, and three boys and two girls were from lower-income families. Three boys and three girls lived in single-parent homes, whereas four boys and three girls lived in two-parent homes.

I invited three students to participate in the study, one boy and two girls, all between the ages of nine to ten, that have limited ability to respond to poetry using higher order thinking skills. Table 4.1 lists the participants' demographic information. I have used pseudonyms in order to ensure confidentiality.

Table 4.1: Demographics of Case Study Students

| Student | Alex | Heather | Amy |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Gender | Male | Female | Female |
| Race | African-American | Caucasian | Caucasian |
| Socio-economic Status | Middle-class | Lower-class | Middle-class |
| Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) | No | Yes | No |
| Family Structure | Single-parent home (two mothers) | Single-parent home | Two-parent home |
| ELA Academic Ability | At grade level | Below grade level | At grade level |

The two female students were Caucasian and the boy was African-American. One of the Caucasian participants, one girl, was from a low-income family and two, one boy and one girl, were from middle-income families. One of female participants was from a single-parent home, one boy was from a home with two mothers, and the other girl was from a two-parent home. One of the female participants received special education services for disabilities with speech and language development.

Classroom Environment

My classroom community was a very positive environment where the students were engrossed in learning during all aspects of literacy. I provided them with opportunities for discourse, partner-work, social interaction, and scaffolded instruction based on individualized student needs in the areas of reading and writing. My students took part in a balanced literacy program in an environment that was surrounded with books and writing from all genres and modes. Students took part in modeled, shared, guided, and independent reading and writing activities on a daily basis. I modeled the responsibilities for learning when using a skill new to my students. The purpose was to show the students how to perform a new, desired skill. The students and I engaged in shared learning when we shared the responsibility during reading and writing activities, with me taking the lead role. The students took the lead role during guided learning by doing the work with some support from me. The students were engaged in independent learning when I placed all of the

responsibility for applying a new, learned skill on the students, having them do the work with no support from me (Tompkins, 2009).

The class schedule consisted of a 1 hour and 45 minute English Language Arts block. I individualized instruction and assessment. During writing workshop, my students completed genre study work using their writer's notebook while I conducted individual conferences during the independent work time. Writing workshop consisted of a thirty minute block of time: five minutes for a mini-lesson, twenty minutes for independent work time, and five minutes for share-out. For example, I might have asked students to complete an expository writing piece comparing and contrasting two birds of prey.

I designated thirty minutes for writing workshop and the rest for reading workshop. During reading workshop, I asked students to participate in a twenty-five minute guided reading lesson, twenty-five minutes of shared reading, and twenty-five minutes of independent reading.

In our classroom, we had three computer stations, one personal laptop, an LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) projector, overhead projector, access to an ELMO (Electronic Visual Evidence Projector) and access to a TV/DVD player. Each of the technologies above are used to model and teach lessons, brainstorm ideas, and display student work and exemplars prior to and after completing tasks.

During the five week study, I used the shared reading portion of my reading workshop to provide students with the opportunity to respond to poetry using their higher order thinking skills while blogging.

My Positionality as the Researcher

I am currently in my fourth year of teaching, the last three of which have been at Herman Elementary. I am dually certified in childhood and special education, grades 1-6 and am currently pursuing a master's degree in childhood literacy. I completed my undergraduate studies at SUNY Geneseo and am pursuing my master's degree at The College at Brockport, SUNY.

I am a middle-class, Caucasian male who has taught general and special education in third, fourth, and fifth grade over the course of four years. I concur with Vygotsky (1962) who believed that students learn best through social interaction. I believe students need chances to communicate ideas with one another, which provides them with opportunities to refine and develop their thinking. I create a classroom environment that fosters and promotes Vygotsky's (1962) social constructivist views.

I believe that technology must be used in the classroom to help develop well-rounded learners who are prepared for future experiences. Our world, especially in education, is changing at such a rapid pace due to the technological gains that are

being made. In order to help keep students up to speed, I feel technology should be used frequently in the classroom in order to help students develop their reading and writing skills and abilities. Prior to conducting this study, I have had my students use computers and software to create brochures, PowerPoint slideshows, type writing projects, and to do Webquests, but I have never given them the opportunity to blog and then read and respond to one another's thinking.

Likewise, I believe that Bloom's Revised Taxonomy should be used by teachers when developing questions in order to elicit and generate students' higher order thinking skills. Prior to this study, I have used vocabulary from Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) but have never used Bloom's Revised Taxonomy by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) because I was unaware it existed until I conducted the research for my study. I believed incorporating Bloom's Revised Taxonomy with blogging would ignite students' passion for learning and enhance their understanding of critical thinking skills when responding to poetry, leading to growth in their abilities to use higher order thinking skills in all walks of life.

I chose to use my own students for this study because of issues related to familiarity, accessibility, and my pre-existing positive rapport with them. I maintained confidentiality of the participants through the use of pseudonyms.

Data Collection

I used several data collection techniques to investigate the influences blogging had on fourth graders use of higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry. I gathered information over a time period of five weeks using pre and post-assessments, Quick Writes, a five-week poetry unit of study with blogging reports, and student interviews.

Pre and Post Assessments

I administered the same assessment as a pre-test and post-test (see Appendix C) and analyzed each student's response in terms of the content to assess their initial application of higher order thinking skills and what effectiveness, if any, blogging had on their use of higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry. The pre and post-assessment consisted of Ralph Fletcher's (2005) poem *A Writing Kind of Day* and an open-ended written response. The results of the pre-test revealed my students' abilities to respond to poetry using higher order thinking skills. I gave the pre-assessment to each student individually and collected the student's responses to the poem. The students and I did not discuss the poem or their response to it throughout the study. At the end of the five week study, I re-administered the same assignment to determine how and if at all my students' abilities to respond to poetry using higher order thinking skills changed as a result of the blogging activities.

Quick Writes

I also collected data using a series of Quick Writes based on questions I created throughout the study as a way to check in and get a sense of my students' immediate thoughts about their experiences with blogging. The first Quick Write (see Appendix D) was related to the students' use of the Internet, blogging, and their thoughts of how blogging could be used to help them comprehend poetry. As the study continued, I asked them specific and direct prompts related to how blogging can and has helped them develop the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating, as well as how their understanding of evidence and the three levels of higher order thinking have grown (see Appendixes E and F). The Quick Write data provided information about their progress and understanding of blogging and its support in developing higher order thinking as the study developed.

Unit of Study Blog Reports

I designed a five-week poetry unit of study through which I provided explicit teaching and learning opportunities for responding to poetry using the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating. I used a selection of poems from Ralph Fletcher's (2005) book *A Writing Kind of Day: Poems for Young Poets* to provide students with authentic opportunities for responding to poetry using higher order thinking skills. As part of the unit, the students responded to poetry through blogging, as well as developed questions and responses to each other's blog posts.

To determine the level of their responses and questioning, I looked for specific vocabulary within their blog discussions using the higher order thinking rubric (see Appendix G). Within the applying stage, I looked for the following words: questions, choose, chose, examples, evidence, facts, and identify. Within the analysis stage, I looked for the following words: analyze, compare, contrast, theme, inference, and conclusion. Within the evaluation stage, I looked for the following vocabulary: criticize, defend, determine, evaluate, justify, recommend, agree, disagree, explain, opinion, support, and prove (Hammond, 2007). I used the context of the question to determine which stage of higher order thinking the question fell into.

Student Interviews

I conducted an initial interview (see Appendix H) with each of the case study students at the beginning of the five week study that included questions about blogging, poetry, and the applying, analyzing, and evaluating stages of higher order thinking. I conducted a second interview (see Appendix I) at the end of the study to determine if and how the process was or was not supportive in helping them develop their higher order thinking skills and their understanding of poetry. During the interview, I asked the student how the blogging process influenced his or her writing abilities in general, which allowed me to receive direct feedback from each student about his or her experiences.

Data Analysis

I used several data analysis techniques to investigate the influences blogging had on the three case study students' use higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry. I analyzed data over a time period of five weeks.

Pre and Post-Assessments

I analyzed each student's response in terms of the content to assess the students' use of higher order thinking skills in the areas of applying, analyzing, and evaluating. I looked for key vocabulary I previously discussed in the Unit of Study section under Data Collection. Within the applying stage, I looked for the following words: questions, choose, chose, examples, evidence, facts, and identify. Within the analysis stage, I looked for the following words: analyze, compare, contrast, theme, inference, and conclusion. Within the evaluation stage, I looked for the following vocabulary: criticize, defend, determine, evaluate, justify, recommend, agree, disagree, explain, opinion, support, and prove (Hammond, 2007). After reviewing the students' work, I compared the results from the pre and post assessments (see Appendix C) and determined there was growth in their ability to use higher order thinking when responding to poetry.

Quick Writes

I looked for patterns and themes while I read and reread each student's Quick Write responses and identified growth and expansion of his or her understanding of how blogging supported the development of higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry. By the end of the study, the students identified how blogging gave them new ideas and thoughts because it allowed them to communicate back and forth with classmates. The students described how when they got confused about a poem they could look at the other blogs to help develop their thinking.

Unit of Study

I analyzed blog responses bi-weekly using the rubric (see Appendix G) to determine if and how my instruction lead to student growth and development. While reviewing the responses, I documented specific vocabulary used in each level of higher order thinking and evidence given to support the students' responses to poetry. I noticed the students struggled using evidence to support their thinking at first, but by the end of the study they were referencing several examples from the text to justify their thinking.

Student Interviews

I transcribed each of the three student interviews verbatim. I read and reread each interview with the intent of identifying how each student perceived and understood his or her experiences, and to determine growth and expansion in student's understanding of how blogging supported the development of higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry. All of the students said they enjoyed blogging and it helped them become better thinkers, describing how they used other students' responses to develop their understanding.

Procedures

I began the data collection process in early May 2011 and continued until the middle of June 2011.

Week One

During week one, I administered a pre-assessment to determine the students' abilities to respond to poetry using higher order thinking skills (see Appendix C). I analyzed each student's response in terms of the content to determine their use of higher order thinking skills. Once I completed the pre-assessment, I gave a Quick Write (see Appendix D) and conducted an interview (see Appendix H) with each

student in my class to determine the students' understanding of blogging, Internet use, and higher order thinking.

During day one (5/9/11) and two (5/10/11) as I completed these domains of data collection and realized that the students were unfamiliar or confused about blogging and the applying, analyzing, and evaluating levels of higher order thinking, I developed a unit instructing students on what blogging is, how to blog, and what the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating were and how to use them when responding to poetry.

On the third day (5/11/11), I introduced students to blogging and how to generate blogs. The students were able to grasp these concepts rather quickly. Once I did so, I defined the concept of applying by modeling questioning using a shared reading approach with Ralph Fletcher's (2005) poem *Writer's Notebook* (see Appendix J). The question was "What examples can you find to show that Ralph Fletcher is coming up with ideas to write in his writer's notebook?" We created a chart and adapted the definition of applying from Hammond (2007) to read "finding examples and facts to prove something, as well as generating questions about the text" because Hammond's definition would have been confusing for elementary aged students due to the amount of higher order vocabulary he used. On the chart, we also discussed the vocabulary used within the applying stage: questions, choose, chose, examples, evidence, facts, and identify.

After that, I modeled how to generate an applying question about Fletcher's (2005) poem *Writer's Notebook*. My question was "What question would you ask Ralph Fletcher in an interview about the poem "Writer's Notebook?" Why?" I proceeded to give the students an opportunity to read and respond to my question. Upon reading their responses, I realized that the students were able to answer the applying question, but had difficulty using relevant and accurate evidence from the poem to support their thinking. One example to show their struggle was from Tay when she wrote (5/12/11) "The question I would ask Ralph Fletcher in a interview about the poem is I wonder why you are talking about the hundredaire, thououndaire, and pennyaire?" As a result, I instructed students how to include accurate and relevant evidence in order to support their responses.

As a class, we went back into Fletcher's (2005) poem *Writer's Notebook* and reviewed Alex's blog (5/13/11) "i think it is there family members because Ralph fletcher said i gave baby julia two pennies and he said that every time i look at her little bald head it reminds him of planet earth" to show the students an example of how Alex used irrelevant evidence to support his answer. We then logged into the blog as a class using the LCD Projector and revised Alex's use of evidence to show how using relevant evidence from the text can strengthen a response. We revised Alex's response by writing "I think it is there family members because Ralph Fletcher wrote about his brother Tom, Dad, and Julia. He was able to describe them with details such as pennyaires and thousandaires, showing he knew a lot about them."

After writing this post, we discussed how the evidence used in our revised post was much clearer and more relevant in supporting the answer.

Week Two

During the first day of week two (5/17/11), I posted Fletcher's (2005) poem *Memory Loss* (see Appendix K) and answered my analyzing question "What is Ralph Fletcher's message in this poem?" with the class using the shared reading and writing approach. The message of this poem is that losing your memory causes you to become confused, but your family can show they love you by sticking by your side and helping you remember. Although this was an analyzing question and I had not instructed the analyzing level of higher order thinking yet, the students needed to understand Fletcher's message in order to answer my modeled applying question of "What elements of the poem would you change to make Ralph Fletcher's message clearer?" Again, the students were able to answer my applying question but struggled developing their own questions and using relevant evidence to support their thinking. This was shown by Bob's response "I would make it clearer by putting a stanza how she felt about losing her memory."

As a result, I decided I needed to do more instruction to help the students be successful writing questions and understanding the applying, analyzing, and evaluating levels of higher order thinking before I could expect them to understand how to use relevant evidence to support their responses.

During the second (5/19/11) and third (5/20/11) days, I modeled an applying question using *Memory Loss* and had students read and respond to another classmate's blog post. This is the point when the students began to understand how to develop an applying question about poetry. The students worked writing and responding to each other's posts about this poem. I used the rubric (see Appendix G) to assess student learning and noticed that they truly understood how to write an applying question.

Week Three

During the first day (5/23/11) of week three, I taught the students what analyzing meant by adding the definition of analyzing adapted from Hammond (2007) "examining or breaking down information into part to draw conclusions" to our classroom chart. Next, I modeled in a shared reading and writing approach using Fletcher's (2005) poem *Pinball* (see Appendix L), focusing on the key vocabulary I previously discussed in the Unit of Study section under Data Collection. After discussing the poem, I modeled writing and answering an analyzing question asking students to "Infer how Fletcher feels about middle school." The students were able to answer this question, with some being successful in using evidence from the text and background knowledge to support their response. Nila responded by writing (5/23/11) "I think Ralph Fletcher feels about middle school is that it is hard because of rules, teachers, ideas, and assignments. I know that because sometimes assignments are

hard for me. That is why middle school is hard for Ralph Fletcher.” I believed their success in using evidence was due to the fact that students were more familiar with inferring because we had done lessons prior to this study about how to infer.

For the next two days (5/24/11 and 5/25/11), I asked the students to analyze Fletcher’s (2005) poem *Bill of Sale* (see Appendix M). They did an excellent job writing and responding to analyzing questions, while showing improvement in their abilities to use relevant evidence to support their thinking. I prompted “Describe Ralph Fletcher’s attitude in this poem, remembering to support your thinking with relevant evidence from the text and write an analyzing question for your classmates using any of the following words in it (analyze, compare, contrast, theme, infer, drawing conclusions, feelings, author’s purpose).” Callie used evidence to support her thinking and developed an analyzing question using the word compare by responding “In this poem, it sounds like Ralph Fletcher didn’t like how slavery was in the 1800s. I think this because he described a girl being sold like an animal to the person who would give the most money for her. Also, Ralph Fletcher pictured himself as Lydia (the girl) in the same position as her he was asking himself if he were sold, “How could he go on with his life? Compare you self to Ralph Fletcher, do you feel the same as Fletcher about slavery? If you don’t, why do you feel that way?”

When some students were confused about my question or other students’ questions, I asked them to read or reread each other’s blogging responses to help generate ideas. Bob directly responded to another student by writing “Heather I think

when he said i cant go on with my life he meant that it would always be haunting him like he would never forget it.I know that because when i see somthing sad i usaully rember it and it said in the poem he imagined Lydia getting sold like a animal.So he Never forgot about her and so he cant go on about his life.” The students were able to simultaneously use the higher order thinking skills of applying and analyzing levels to formulate thoughtful responses while tying in evidence to support their thinking. This is when I realized they were beginning to grasp the concepts of applying and analyzing and the importance of using evidence to validate their responses.

The same day (5/25/11), I administered the second student Quick Write (see Appendix E) and determined that the students were able to define the applying and analyzing stages of higher order thinking, as well as describe that evidence is used to support thinking when writing. I decided it was the logical time to further my instruction of higher order thinking by moving the focus to evaluating during the next lesson.

Week Four

During the first day (5/26/11) of week four of the unit, I taught the students the definition of evaluating adapted from Hammond’s (2007) definition of “presenting and defending opinions about what you read.” I added the definition to our classroom chart. Next, I modeled in a shared reading and writing approach using Fletcher’s (2005) poem *Bill of Sale* (see Appendix M), focusing on the key

vocabulary for the skill of evaluating. I modeled how to develop an opinion about who I would recommend this poem to and how to justify my thinking using evidence from the text. The students were very engaged in the process and seemed to really enjoy helping me look for evidence to support my opinion once they understood the concept.

The next day (5/27/11), I had the students evaluate Fletcher's (2005) poem *Beanstalk Poem* (see Appendix N) by answering my question "In your opinion, why did Ralph Fletcher write this poem? Justify your opinion using evidence from the text." After analyzing Tay's response "I think Ralph Fletcher wrote this poem to teach us to always be trustworthy and do your own work or you won't learn anything, and you will get in a lot of trouble like Ralph did" and Aaron's response "I think Ralph Fletcher wrote this poem because he wanted to teach people when you write a poem make it your own poem and don't copy someone else's," I realized the students were able to formulate opinions, but once again struggled using relevant evidence to justify their thinking. The next day (5/31/11) I decided to model using a shared reading and writing approach on how to formulate an opinion about why Fletcher wrote this poem and used evidence to support my opinion.

For the next two days (5/31/11 and 6/1/11), instead of having the students revisit a poem we had already worked on, I decided to introduce Fletcher's (2005) poem *She Wrote Me a Love Poem* (see Appendix O). The students were asked to respond to "Do you agree or disagree with the way Ralph Fletcher compared his

experience with the girl to what his cat did? Why or why not?" and "What kind of person would you recommend this poem to? Why?" From there, the students' abilities to use higher order thinking had shown much improvement. They analyzed the text by breaking information down, evaluated by forming and justifying opinions, applied new learning by developing questions and using evidence to support their thinking, and used each others' responses to develop their thinking. To show this, Callie responded "I agree with the way Ralph Fletcher compared his experience with a girl to what his cat did. I think this because I thought both situations were exactly the same because Fletcher's first impression that he got from both his his cat and the girl was that they were so gentle and sweet. Then they both turned on him, the girl gave the poem that Fletcher thought was made specially for him, to another guy which must have made Fletcher's heart sink. Fletcher thought his cat was as gentle as a soft breeze until he went out side and saw the cat she caught. In conclusion, the girl and the cat turned on him in this poem," Sally wrote "I would recemend this poem to someone that has lost something very close to them, or someone who called someone smething there not," and Tay commented "I agree with Sally, I would also recommend this poem to someone who lost something very close to them. For example, I agree because Fletcher had a crush and as soon as he found out that his crush gave the same poem to another kid (Jamison lee)it made him jealous and it broke his heart!" I think the growth in use of evidence to support student' thinking was due to the oppportunity for students to read and respond to one another's work.

For the next three days (6/2/11, 6/3/11, & 6/6/11), the students read each others' blog responses and responded to Fletcher's poem (2005) *Squished Squirrel* (see Appendix P). I asked the students to use a mix of the applying, analyzing, and evaluating levels of higher order thinking by answering the questions "What is the theme of this poem? How do you know?" and "What do you think about Ralph Fletcher's writing craft (style)? Why?" There was a wide range of responses, showing that the students were able to apply what they learned throughout this unit. Responses displaying a wide range of thinking across the applying, analyzing, and evaluating stages included Callie's comment of "I think the theme of this poem is to be your own person because Fletcher's teacher said he couldn't write about a squished squirrel but by the end of the poem, he'd already written about a squished squirrel. Also the theme is to let your imagination go wild because in poems or in anything, you can write about anything you want just like Fletcher did," Tay's remark that "I think the theme is that you can do anything if you are up to it and to just follow your heart! I picked this theme because Fletcher wants to write a poem about Squished Squirrels, his teacher was telling him that he couldn't write the poem and said it was true. But look, now Fletcher does have a poem published about Squished Squirrels. Ralph Fletcher proved his teacher wrong because Fletcher followed his heart," and Roy's response that "I like the style of Ralph Fletcher's poems because he always writes about what happens around him. I wonder if he writes poems about random things." These responses showed that the students understood the importance of using evidence to

support their thinking when responding at the applying, analyzing, and evaluating stages of higher order thinking.

Week Five

During the first day (6/8/11) I administered a post-assessment (see Appendix C) to determine the students' abilities to respond to poetry using higher order thinking. I analyzed each student's response in terms of the content to determine growth in their ability to use higher order thinking when responding to poetry. The next two days respectively (6/9/11 & 6/10/11), I gave a final Quick Write (see Appendix F) and post-interview (see Appendix I) and determined the students gained new understandings about blogging and how it can be used to develop their higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry. A common theme I identified in the students' final Quick Write and post-interview was that blogging allowed the students to learn more about poetry because they were able to read and respond to each other.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

There are several qualitative research practices I used throughout this study to ensure that my research design was valid. They included: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, referential adequacy, dependability, and utility.

I designed the study to take place over five weeks, a process that enabled prolonged engagement for me as the researcher and for students as participants. During the five week period I engaged in ongoing and persistent observations of students and the work that they generated through the assessments, Quick Writes and blogging responses. I was able to triangulate the various data sources—student interviews, quick writes, pre and post-assessments and the students' blog posts—to create the richest and most comprehensive picture of the students' experience.

I incorporated referential adequacy into the study as I used the language of the students' to represent their perspectives and understandings of the topics under investigation.

The findings of the study are dependable because I described in detail each of my reasons for the research processes I chose, defining all educational vocabulary as a way to avoid misinterpretation and confusion.

Finally, the findings of my study demonstrate utility because they provided implications for best practices in teaching and learning in the context of a fourth grade classroom.

Limitations

Limitations to this study's findings are the researcher effect, the poetry unit was linguistically based, and my own positionality as a researcher.

One limitation was the result of researcher effect. This is where my students may have initially altered their behavior during the first two weeks because they knew they were participating in the study. I believed that after the first two weeks the students forgot I was conducting a study. These alterations may not have provided accurate findings during the beginning of the study.

A second limitation was that all of the data sources, aside from my observations, were linguistically based. Students were only asked to display their thinking in writing in their blog entries. Typing may have limited what some of the students were able to produce or include in their entries.

Finally, my positionality as a researcher can be viewed as a limitation to this study. This is due to the fact that I had never experienced blogging personally or as a teacher prior to conducting this study. Likewise, I had never instructed a unit using blogging to develop the higher order thinking skills of fourth graders when responding to poetry. These limitations should be considered when reviewing this study.

Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of this study was to gather information regarding how blogging helped fourth graders develop their use of higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating when responding to poetry.

Throughout the study, I sought to answer the following research question: How does blogging influence the higher order thinking skills of fourth graders when responding to poetry?

Each of the three fourth grade case study students provided unique insight into how the activity of blogging helped develop their ability to respond to poetry using the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating. I worked with three fourth grade students in my classroom at Herman Elementary, a rural-suburban district in western New York.

In this chapter, I present the three students' individual case studies, and then compare and contrast the case study findings using a cross case analysis.

Case Studies

Amy

Amy is a ten year old, fourth grade, Caucasian female who resides in a two-parent home. She comes from a middle-class family and does not receive any services

for special education. Amy is at grade level in her English Language Arts academic abilities. At the beginning of the study, Amy was very eager to study poetry and blog.

Pre-Assessment Activity

Prior to conducting the interview and initial Quick Write about blogging and Internet use, I wanted to gain insight into Amy's ability to use the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing and evaluating. To do so, I used Ralph Fletcher's (2005) poem *A Writing Kind of Day* and the open-ended prompt "Read and respond to the following poem." (see Appendix C). Amy responded to the prompt by writing "The person talking is writing about a baby being born. I know this because the poem says it gathers strength and says Ma was my first word."

I analyzed Amy's response in terms of the content to assess her initial application of higher order thinking skills. She did not develop any questions that fostered higher order thinking.

At the analysis level, Amy showed some use of inferring by talking about how babies "gather strength and say Ma as their first word." What she was confused about is how "babies being born" do not talk right away, showing some misunderstanding about the poem's theme and the author's intent.

At the evaluating level, Amy's opinions were supported with a few examples and reasons, but her examples were not detailed and thorough. Amy wrote "I know this because the poem says it gathers strength and says Ma was my first word."

Amy used some evidence to support her thinking, but failed to use many pieces of evidence to do so. Amy wrote for her evidence "I know this because the poem says it gathers strength and says Ma was my first word."

From the pre-assessment activity conducted on May 9, 2011, I learned that Amy understood that good readers and writers use evidence to support their thinking, but that she remained confused about Fletcher's purpose for writing the poem.

Initial Interview

During the interview I conducted on May 10, 2011, I wanted to gain insight into Amy's understanding of poetry and her thinking about the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating.

When I asked her for a definition of poetry and why people read poetry, Amy defined it as "something can be learned from poetry." She explained that she was a "good reader" by stating "because I can try to infer about what they're talking about," but she was unable to connect her understanding of inferring to higher order thinking.

When asked her about the applying level of higher order thinking, Amy commented that "if you want to do a job someone has to interview you or write

something about the job.” Amy made a connection to what she understood as a definition of applying, but had misconceptions about its meaning in relation to higher order thinking. Amy said “I don’t know” when I asked to define analyzing and evaluating, but indicated that good readers “infer” to gain understanding, which showed me that Amy was able to make the connection that inferring was one skill good reader’s use when analyzing text.

When I asked her “How do good writers support their ideas and thinking?” Amy showed confusion about the importance of supporting her ideas in writing by describing it as “looking back in the text and thinking about what they know.” Here, Amy unknowingly defined inferring, where readers and writers use text clues and background knowledge to help them draw conclusions.

When I asked “How do you use computers and technology at school to help you read and write?” at the end of the interview, Amy identified that computers and technology help her become a better reader and writer because she can “look things up and learn. You can learn on Brain Pop.”

Upon completion of the analyzing the initial interview, I found that Amy had a sense of how good readers and writers use inferring to understand text, but was unable to define the skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating (5/10/11).

Initial Quick Write

I used the initial Quick Write to gain insight into Amy's understanding of why people use the Internet and what she knew about blogging. Similar to her response in the initial interview, Amy wrote that people use the Internet to "play games or find out things." This showed me that Amy realized that the Internet can be used to learn new information. In response to the question about blogging, Amy wrote that "blogging is where you talk to other people on the computer." Here, Amy was able to identify that blogging was a form of communication (5/10/11).

Blogging Responses from May 12, 2011-May 25, 2011

After introducing my students to blogging by discussing how it was communicating back and forth on the computer through writing, the first poem we responded to was Fletcher's (2005) *Writer's Notebook* (see Appendix J), which is about how readers could get ideas for writing anywhere when thinking about what to include in their writer's notebook. The students and I started off by focusing on the applying level of higher order thinking. After I defined applying as "finding examples and facts to prove something, as well as generating questions about the text," (5/12/11) I posted the terms: questions, choose, chose, examples, evidence, facts, and identify on a classroom chart for the students to use when writing and identifying applying questions.

I then proceeded to model for the students how to answer the applying question of “What examples can you find to show that Ralph Fletcher is coming up with ideas to write in his writer’s notebook?” We first discussed how using evidence was crucial when developing a thorough response to poetry. We defined evidence as “using details from the text to support thinking” (5/12/11).

I wrote on the classroom blog:

I think Ralph Fletcher is coming up with ideas to write in his writer’s notebook because he is discussing how his family members were hundredaires, pennyaires, and thousandaires. After he discussed these facts, Fletcher said he wrote them in his ‘writer’s notebook to maybe write a poem later on.’ This shows that he plans on using his ideas to help him write at some other time (5/12/11).

Upon completion of my response, we highlighted, as a class, the applying vocabulary I used within my post. The class identified that I used “facts” in my response. We also discussed how I used evidence from the text by quoting Fletcher’s words when providing an example to clarify my thinking.

The following day (5/13/11), I posted the applying question “What question would you ask Ralph Fletcher in an interview about the poem *Writer’s Notebook* and why?” to identify if my students were able to generate questions and use evidence to support their thinking, both skills within the applying level of higher order thinking. Amy responded to this question as “in your family, is baby Julia very precious to

you? I am wondering this because you talked about her the most through out the poem. What is the main idea of this poem?” Amy was able to generate a question about the text that required her to use evidence in her response. Similar to Amy’s response in the pre-assessment, she was able to use evidence when supporting her thinking, but did not elaborate by using direct examples from the text to make her thinking clearer.

After the students had an opportunity to answer my previous question, we had a class discussion about the importance of reading and responding to each other’s work. We clarified that blogging is similar to book clubs in that it is an activity that can be used to discuss texts. We identified that the only difference was that blogging was done using computers, writing and the Internet (5/13/11).

Later that same day (5/13/11), Amy responded to another classmate’s post of “Give one word to describe the narrator in this poem and why.” Amy wrote “One word I would use to describe Fletcher is having an imagination. I would use this word to describe him because a hundredaire and a pennyaire are not real. He used a millionaire to come up with these ideas.” Amy’s response indicated that she has improved her ability to use direct evidence from the text to support her response, a very crucial higher order thinking skill. I believed Amy was successful at using evidence to support her thinking because we discussed its importance, as well as she may have read Tay’s blog in response to Callie’s question. Callie questioned “I would ask him why he described Baby Julia more than anyone else he included in the

poem.” (5/13/11). Tay responded by blogging “Callie, I was wondering that too. Because Ralph Fletcher talks about baby Julia in the two middle stanzas, also he made baby Julia a pennyaire like when he made his brother Tom a hundredaire and when his dad's a thousandaire,” (5/13/11) where Amy recognized that Tay used direct evidence from the poem to support her thinking.

After a three day weekend (5/17/11), we reviewed the definition and vocabulary for applying before I posted Fletcher’s (2005) poem *Memory Loss* (see Appendix K), a poem in which Fletcher describes how his grandmother is losing her memory and his mother helps her remember when she gets confused. After discussing the message of the poem as a class, I asked the students to generate an applying question and describe what elements of the poem they would choose to change to make Fletcher’s message clearer. We discussed his message as a class because we had not yet worked with the concept of themes within the analyzing level of higher order thinking.

Amy responded to my prompt stating:

One element of the poem I would choose to change to make Ralph Fletcher’s message clearer is in the second stanza. It says ‘Losing your memory is losing yourself.’ That was kind of confusing to me. I think it means that when you lose your memory you don’t know what happened so you lose yourself.

She also wrote the question, “What do you think it means when it says ‘She steps from word to word until suddenly she stops in the middle disoriented. Should she go back or keep going?’ Use evidence to explain your thinking.” Both Amy’s question and response indicated she understood how to write a question that involved the skill of applying and how to use evidence to support her thinking. She used the word “evidence” in her question and provided quotes from the text to explain her thoughts.

To clarify understanding, the next day (5/18/11) I had the students go back into the blog and respond to Ray’s post about helping grandma remember what she was talking about.

Amy responded by stating:

I agree with Ray because when it says ‘she stops in the middle disoriented, should she go back or keep going?’ That means Grandma is confused on what she was going to say. Also I think that Ralph’s mom is going to help grandma think of what she was going to say.

In her response, Amy demonstrated her understanding that responses become clearer when evidence from the text is used to support thinking.

The first day of the following week (5/23/11) I defined the concept of analyzing, which I adapted from Hammond (2007), as “examining or breaking down information into parts to draw conclusions” for the students and added the definition to our classroom chart. Next, I used Fletcher’s (2005) poem *Pinball* (see Appendix

L), to verbally define for the class the key vocabulary within the analyzing stage: analyze, compare, contrast, theme, attitude, inference, and conclusion (Hammond, 2007).

As a class, we read and discussed the poem *Pinball* verbally answering the prompt "Infer how Ralph Fletcher feels about middle school. Make sure you tie in evidence and background knowledge to support your thinking." The students were already familiar with how to make an inference due to the prior ten lessons during the month long unit earlier in the school year, but were unclear that when they inferred they were actually analyzing text as well. I felt Amy's inability to make this connection, as described in her initial interview, would be a good learning opportunity for all students.

After the students and I discussed how in the poem Fletcher reveals that he did not like middle school because he felt like a pinball bouncing around the halls and being told what to do by many different people, I had the students analyze the poem adding any other insights.

Amy wrote:

I think Ralph Fletcher feels like middle school is a place where teachers can boss him around. In other words, he doesn't like middle school. For example, when it says "10 highest scorers but you'll never find my name on that list." I think it means that he needed a little extra help in school by some of his teachers to get a good report card. I

know this because maybe someone in our school needs a little extra help in school to get good grades. They might feel mad too because they have to do a lot of extra work.

Amy's response indicated that she knew how to make an inference by breaking down the text to draw a conclusion, while remembering to tie in background knowledge and direct evidence from the text to support her thinking. Amy failed to use the vocabulary we discussed when doing so.

We continued analyzing poetry for two more days (5/24/11-5/25/11) using Fletcher's (2005) poem *Bill of Sale* (see Appendix M), in which he describes how he read a poem about Lydia, a female slave, and imagined being her while questioning how something like this could happen in our country. I asked the students to "Describe Ralph Fletcher's attitude in this poem, remembering to support your thinking with relevant evidence from the text," as well as write an analyzing question for their classmates using any of the vocabulary from our classroom chart.

Amy responded:

I think Ralph Fletcher's attitude in this poem is that he feels bad for the slave girl. I think he feels bad because he has a home and everything and the slave girl barely has anything to wear. such as shoes. For example, if i saw a slave sleeping on the ground or something than i would be sad or i would feel bad for the slave. If i was a slave i would probobaly feel the same way as Lyndia.

At this point, Amy was able to analyze the poem by formulating a conclusion about Fletcher's attitude and supported it using direct evidence from the text. Like Fletcher did, Amy put herself in Lydia's shoes by describing how she would be "sad" if she had to be a slave like Lydia. Amy was able to make a connection to Fletcher's purpose for writing the poem, to evoke emotion from his reader about the horrors of slavery. Amy's question was "do you think Ralph Fletcher can get Lyndia out of his mind? Use evidence to support your thinking." Amy was able to develop a question that used the word "evidence," a vocabulary word we focused on within the applying stage of higher order thinking. Amy's question asked her peers to generate an opinion, something we had yet to cover as part of the evaluating level of higher order thinking but seemed like a natural transitioning point from the analyzing to evaluating stage.

Second Quick Write

On May 25, 2011, I asked Amy to complete a second Quick Write (see Appendix F) to gain insight into her growth in understanding of blogging, her understanding for the importance of using evidence in writing, and to determine how she understood the applying and analyzing levels of higher order thinking.

In her initial Quick Write response on (5/10/11), Amy described blogging as "when you talk to other people on the computer about different things," but in her response in the second Quick Write (5/25/11) she furthered her previous

understanding stating “Blogging is when you can talk to other people on the computer about different things. For example, you could blog about poems.” Her response showed me she had extended her thinking about blogging by describing how she could blog about poetry, but had yet to identify that conversations are how we learn from each other. Through her explanation of blogging, Amy used an example to support and clarify her thinking, something she learned to do through instruction and practice of the applying and analyzing stages of higher order thinking.

When I asked Amy to describe her understanding of what evidence is and why it is used when responding to literature, she wrote “evidence is when you use your background knowledge and connect it to the text to explain your thinking.” This was a clear indication of her growth from her response to the question during the initial interview (5/10/11) where she thought evidence is where “you think about the book and what you know.”

Amy defined the applying level as “when you find examples and facts to prove something” and the analyzing level as “when you break information apart to draw a conclusion.” Her responses indicated that she realized applying could mean more than just trying to get a job. Likewise, her understanding of analyzing grew from “I don’t know” (Initial Quick Write, 5/10/11) to the response just described. Amy understood that applying is when she used evidence from the text to support her thinking and analyzing is when you look through the text to come up with a big idea about what the author’s message is.

Amy's responses indicated that she was making gains in her understanding of blogging, evidence, applying, and analyzing as a result of the daily poetry activities, but continued to think literally as opposed to abstractly when making connections to the text.

Blogging Responses from May 26, 2011-June 6, 2011

During the first day (5/26/11) of week four of the poetry unit, I shared the definition of evaluating, which I adapted from Hammond (2007) as "presenting and defending opinions about what you read" and added it to the classroom chart. I used Fletcher's (2005) poem *Bill of Sale* (see Appendix M) in a shared reading and writing lesson to model for the students how we could comprehend the same text at many different levels of higher order thinking. During the lesson we verbally defined and discussed the key vocabulary within the evaluating stage: criticize, defend, determine, evaluate, justify, recommend, agree, disagree, explain, opinion, support, and prove (Hammond, 2007).

After introducing the definition and vocabulary for evaluating, I modeled developing and defending an opinion about who I would recommend this poem to by writing:

I would recommend this poem to someone who was not thankful for what they have. I would recommend it to this type of person because

after reading about the difficulties Lydia lived through, I realized that I should not take the freedom and things I have for granted.

We went on to discuss several other types of people we would recommend this poem to, including someone who is learning about slavery because the poem showed the harshness of slavery.

At this point I felt it was time for the students to practice forming opinions and defending them using evidence from the text since the students were able to verbally formulate and defend their opinions about recommendations for reading the poem *Bill of Sale* (see Appendix M).

After reading aloud Fletcher's (2005) poem *Beanstalk Poem* (see Appendix N) three times together, a piece in which he talks about how he got caught cheating from his friend in school, I asked the students to respond to the question "In your opinion, why did Ralph Fletcher write this poem? Justify your opinion using evidence from the text" (5/27/11).

Amy's initial response was:

i think Ralph Fletcher wrote this poem to teach you that you should never copy another persons writing or what they did. i think this because if you copy someone than you could get in trouble for it. Also, Ralph got in trouble for cheating off of someone.

After analyzing Amy's and the other students' responses over Memorial Day weekend, I realized that the students could form opinions, but did not use evidence to defend their opinions. Due to this, I decided to model defending an opinion by revising Amy's initial response with the class using the class blog (5/31/11).

I wrote on my computer connected to the LCD projector as the students read along:

I think Ralph Fletcher wrote this poem to teach you that you should never copy another person's writing or what they did. In the poem, Fletcher tried getting an A+ on his poem by copying another student's work. He never thought he would get caught, but when he did, he received a bad grade. I think he got a bad grade because the poem said he came crashing down with his beanstalk when his teacher found out he cheated. I learned you should always be trustworthy.

Instead of having the students respond to my entry, I posted Fletcher's (2005) poem *She Wrote Me a Love Poem* (see Appendix O), in which he writes about a girl who broke his heart, and asked them to answer the questions "Do you agree or disagree with the way Ralph Fletcher compared his experience with the girl to what his cat did? Why or why not? and What kind of person would you recommend this poem to? Why?"

In her entry (5/31/11), Amy wrote:

I agree with Fletcher because when the girl showed the love poem to Jamison Lee, Fletcher felt mad. I think he felt mad because she gave the poem to him first. For example, if someone gave me something, and then gave the same thing to another person I would also feel angry. When Fletcher found out that his cat killed a mouse, he probably felt like that mouse. He felt like that mouse because the mouse got killed, and that's how his feelings felt, killed. I would give this poem to someone that is not peaceful.

Amy formed an opinion and defended it using evidence from the text when responding to the first question by agreeing with Fletcher, but failed to defend her opinion for who she would recommend the poem to when responding to the second question. She used the applying, analyzing, and evaluating stages simultaneously by forming an opinion, making a connection between how the mouse felt when he got killed by the cat and Fletcher's feelings, and used evidence from the text to support her thinking.

The following day (6/1/11), I pointed out to Amy that she did a fabulous job justifying her opinion to the first question by using evidence from the text, but that she failed to do so when identifying who she would recommend this poem to and why. I believed that reviewing Amy's blog and discussing its strengths and weaknesses with the class provided an authentic learning opportunity for how to read, think about, and respond to someone else's thinking.

After the discussion, Amy went back into the blog and wrote:

I agree with Sally because I would also recommend this poem to someone who lost something very close. Fletcher lost something very close because the girl that gave him a love poem went to another boy and gave the same one to him. For example, if I lost something very close to me such as my friend, than I would be very sad too. That is who I would recommend this poem to.

Without being prompted to do so, Amy read other posts about the same question and used them to help develop her understanding of the poem and her response to the second question. Amy's response indicated to me that she understood how blogging, both reading and writing, helped her develop higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry.

Our final poem I used on the blog was Fletcher's (2005) *Squished Squirrel* poem (see Appendix P), about how Fletcher's teacher told him he could not write a poem about a squished squirrel, but all along that is what he was doing. For this blog entry (6/2/11), I asked the students to apply, analyze, and evaluate simultaneously, something they had been doing all along unbeknownst to them. We discussed how they analyzed the text by breaking information down, evaluated by forming and justifying opinions, applied new learning by developing questions and using evidence to support their thinking, and used each others' responses to develop their own thinking. I asked the students to respond to the questions "What is the theme of this

poem? How do you know? and What do you think about Ralph Fletcher's writing craft(style)? Why?" (6/2/11).

Amy wrote:

I think the theme of this poem is that you can do anything if you try your best. Don't worry about if anyone tells you that you can't, just do what you think. Fletcher did what he felt because he wrote about the squished squirrel, which he wanted to write about. I love the way Fletcher writes his poems. When I see his poems, I feel like I'm meeting him. I feel this way because he talks about his life and his family. I know this because he talks about things that could really happen. Fletcher uses symbolism a lot in his poems which describes different things. That is why I love his poems.

Amy's response indicated growth in her ability to apply, analyze, and evaluate text. She used the word theme, provided evidence to support her thinking, and used schema to justify her thinking. Amy used evidence to support her thinking by describing the theme of "you can do anything if you try your best," using the fact that Fletcher wrote a poem about a squished squirrel even though his teacher said he would not be able to. She used schema to justify her thinking about why she liked his poems because he writes about "things that could really happen." Amy used the word symbolism in her response to describe why she liked Fletcher's poems. I believe she recalled this term from a lesson we had done earlier in the year using Harry Chapin's

(1974) song *Cats in the Cradle* to identify how he used symbolism to describe his son's life.

Although Amy did not have a chance to read and respond to others' posts about *Squished Squirrel*, her response indicated that she understood how to respond using higher order thinking because she was able to form an opinion, draw a conclusion about the theme of the poem, and use evidence to support her thinking.

Second Interview

During the second interview, which I conducted on June 8, 2011, I wanted to gain insight into Amy's new understanding of poetry and the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating, as well as how her use of blogging may have helped her develop these skills.

When I asked for a definition of poetry and why people read poetry, Amy again identified that "something can be learned from poetry," a response she gave in her initial interview (5/10/11), but furthered her response by saying that "you can learn themes, teach something, and grab ideas and write them in many styles, just like Ralph Fletcher." Amy's response indicated that she had internalized and applied some of the higher order thinking she used throughout the unit of study. She used the vocabulary word "theme" and stated how she could apply what she learned in the poems *Writer's Notebook* (see Appendix J) and *Squished Squirrel* (see Appendix P)

to her own writing, in that she can write about anything in any way she wants to. She also indicated that *Squished Squirrel* was now her favorite poem because it showed how she could write about anything.

In response to the question “Do you think you are a good reader and why?” she explained that she was a good reader “because I can evaluate the text by coming up with and defending my opinions.” Now, Amy was making the connection between what she knew about being a good reader and how evaluating text through developing and defending opinions is one skill good reader’s use.

Instead of defining applying in relation to getting a job, Amy expanded her understanding of applying by describing it as “finding examples and facts to prove something.” Amy had developed a new understanding about applying, realizing it has more than one meaning. Amy now defined analyzing as “breaking information apart to draw conclusions” and evaluating as “defending your opinions using examples,” both clearer definitions from her previous answers of “I don’t know.” She not only could define these words here, but was also able to apply them to her blogs as previously indicated.

Amy showed growth in her understanding about the importance of using evidence in writing by describing it as “finding examples from the poem to make their writing more clear.” This was a much clearer description of evidence than what she provided in her initial interview of “looking back in the text and thinking about what they know” (5/10/11).

Amy identified that computers and technology helped her become a better reader and writer because she “can blog about different stuff with my classmates and I learn from them too.” She went on to describe how blogging helped her “think more because I used a lot more evidence to think of the theme of the poem and look at other people’s to see if I agree or disagree with them.”

Amy’s responses indicated to me that she was able to make connections between what good readers and writers do and how those processes relate to the use of higher order thinking skills. Her responses also revealed that she understood that the main function of blogging is to learn from one another and that part of what can be learned and improved are the higher order thinking skills instructed throughout the unit on poetry blogging.

Final Quick Write

I used the final Quick Write (6/9/11) to gain insight into Amy’s growth in understanding of evaluating and how blogging can and did help her become a better thinker when responding to poetry.

During the initial interview (5/10/11), Amy responded “I don’t know” when I asked her to define evaluating. In response to the question on the final Quick Write she wrote, “When you are evaluating, you have to defend your opinion using evidence from the text.” Not only could Amy define evaluating, but she also applied

this learning when she discussed how she would recommend *She Wrote Me a Love Poem* (see Appendix O) to a person “who lost something very close.”

When I asked her to describe how blogging can and has helped her, Amy wrote “Blogging can and has helped me become a better thinker because I can use the text to help me find out different things or I can look at my classmates’ thinking and agree or disagree with them.”

In her responses to the final Quick Write, Amy showed that she understood that people blog to learn from one another through discussion.

Post-Assessment Activity

On June 10, 2011, I re-administered Ralph Fletcher’s (2005) poem *A Writing Kind of Day* (see Appendix C) using the open-ended prompt of “Read and respond to the following poem” to determine the growth Amy made in her ability to use the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating when responding to poetry.

As in her first response (5/9/11), Amy still believed a baby was being born, but this time her response was much clearer and more detailed.

She wrote:

I think a baby is being born in this poem. I think this because when it says 'Ma was my first word' it meant that when a baby is born that might be their first word. My mom told me before that Ma was my first word so that's why I think it's a baby. Also, because when it says 'and gathers strength' I think the baby is becoming stronger and growing. It also talked about 'where it all began.' I think he means it all began when he was a baby.

She continued her response by writing the question "Do you agree with Fletcher when he compares writing to a baby being born? Use evidence in your answer." I analyzed Amy's response in terms of the content to assess her growth in the application of higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry.

Amy was able to generate an evaluating question that would foster higher order thinking to answer.

At the analysis level, Amy's response showed some use of inferring by using schema and text evidence to support her thinking. She inferred Fletcher's purpose by writing "I think a baby is being born in this poem. I think this because when it says 'Ma was my first word' it meant that when a baby is born that might be their first word. My mom told me before that Ma was my first word so that's why I think it's a baby."

At the evaluating level, Amy's opinions were supported with three detailed reasons for thinking it was about a baby being born. Amy was able to formulate and defend her opinion.

Amy used many pieces of evidence from the text to support her thinking. Overall, she was able to support her thinking when only being provided a general prompt, rather than specific prompts. Amy showed that she was critically evaluating and analyzing the text with little to no support.

Even though Amy misunderstood Ralph Fletcher's purpose for writing the poem, she was able to formulate and defend her own thoughts. Amy's response indicated to me that she understood evidence is crucial when developing and justifying an opinion.

Summary

Throughout this study, Amy developed her understanding of how blogging can be used as a tool to communicate and learn from other students. This was highlighted in her final Quick Write (6/9/11) when she discussed that "Blogging can and has helped me become a better thinker because I can use the text to help me find out different things or I can look at my classmates thinking and agree or disagree with them." This growth was also evidenced in several of her Blogging Responses where she responded to other student's blogs.

Amy also had a better understanding of evidence and how it can be used as she indicated in her second interview (6/8/11) when she commented that evidence is “finding examples from the poem to make their writing more clear.” As previously indicated, Amy was able to apply this learning several times throughout the unit by providing evidence to support her thinking.

She became more aware that good readers use the skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating, as opposed to her initial interview (5/10/11) thoughts of “because I can try to infer about what they’re talking about.” As indicated in the second Quick Write (5/25/11) and final Quick Write (6/9/11), Amy was able to define the applying, analyzing, and evaluating stages of higher order thinking. She displayed her understanding of these stages throughout the entire unit of study by inferring themes, developing and justifying opinions, and supporting her thinking using direct evidence from the poems and her background knowledge.

Heather

Heather is a ten year old, fourth grade, Caucasian female who resides in a single-parent home. She comes from a lower-class family and receives services for special education. In the classroom, Heather receives a consultant teacher four times a week for thirty minutes and speech and language services two times a week for thirty minutes. Heather is below grade level in her English Language Arts academic

abilities. At the beginning of the study, Heather was very eager to study poetry and blog.

Pre-Assessment Activity

Prior to conducting the interview and initial Quick Write about blogging and Internet use, I wanted to gain insight into Heather's ability to use the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating. To do so, I used Ralph Fletcher's (2005) poem *A Writing Kind of Day* and the open-ended prompt "Read and respond to the following poem" (see Appendix C). Heather responded to the prompt by writing "The poem is talking about on a raining day you can write and you can write all day."

I analyzed Heather's response in terms of the content to assess her initial application of the higher order thinking skills. She did not develop any questions that fostered higher order thinking.

At the analysis level, Heather showed some use of inferring by talking about how "on a raining day you can write and you can write all day." She was attempting to describe that rainy days give you the opportunity to write all day, but used little evidence to support her inference.

At the evaluating level, Heather supported her opinion that "you can write all day" by writing how it was a "raining day." Heather used little to no relevant

evidence to support her opinion nor did she use evidence throughout her response to support her thinking.

From the pre-assessment activity conducted on May 9, 2011, I learned that Heather had little understanding of how to respond to poetry using higher order thinking skills or how to use evidence to support her thinking.

Initial Interview

During the interview I conducted on May 10, 2011, I wanted to gain insight into Heather's understanding of poetry and her thinking related to the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating.

When I asked her for a definition of poetry and why people read poetry, Heather said "it can tell about something and it's fun to read." She explained that she was a good reader by stating "if I help myself think about the story or article," showing that she understood good readers think about what they are reading.

When I asked her about the applying and evaluating levels of higher order thinking, Heather commented that "I don't know." Heather said "like sequencing or what the story was about" when I asked her to define analyzing. Here, Heather confused sequencing and analyzing.

When I asked her "How do good writers support their ideas and thinking?" Heather showed confusion about the importance of supporting her ideas in writing by

describing “graphic organizer. Stopping if they know what they read and see if they understand what they read.” Here, Heather defined comprehension, where readers and writers think about what they are reading and writing to see if their understanding and message are clear.

When I asked her “How do you use computers and technology at school to help you read and write?” Heather identified that computers and technology help her become a better reader and writer because she can “look things up.”

Upon completion of analyzing the initial interview, I found that Heather was unable to accurately define the skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating, yet understood that technology and computers can be used to find information (5/10/11).

Initial Quick Write

I used the initial Quick Write (see Appendix D) to gain insight into Heather’s understanding of why people use the Internet and what she knew about blogging. Similar to her response in the initial interview, Heather wrote that people use the Internet to “maybe look things up or even play a game. Also how people use the Internet is to look up trips if you are going on vacation.” This showed me that Heather realized that the Internet can be used to learn new information, possibly because she had some prior knowledge where her family planned a trip using the Internet. In response to the question about blogging, Heather wrote that “blogging is I

think you talk to people online instead of in person.” Here, Heather was able to identify that blogging was a form of communication used on computers (5/10/11).

Blogging Responses from May 12, 2011-May 25, 2011

After introducing my students to blogging by discussing how it was communicating back and forth on the computer through writing, the first poem we responded to was Fletcher’s (2005) *Writer’s Notebook* (see Appendix J), which is about how readers could get ideas for writing anywhere when thinking about what to include in their writer’s notebook. The students and I started off by focusing on the applying level of higher order thinking. After I defined applying as “finding examples and facts to prove something, as well as generating questions about the text,” (5/12/11) I posted the terms: questions, choose, chose, examples, evidence, facts, and identify on a classroom chart for the students to use when writing and identifying applying questions.

I then proceeded to model for the students how to answer the applying question of “What examples can you find to show that Ralph Fletcher is coming up with ideas to write in his writer’s notebook?” We first discussed how using evidence was crucial when developing a thorough response to poetry. We defined evidence as “using details from the text to support thinking” (5/12/11).

I wrote on the classroom blog:

I think Ralph Fletcher is coming up with ideas to write in his writer's notebook because he is discussing how his family members were hundredaires, pennyaires, and thousandaires. After he discussed these facts, Fletcher said he wrote them in his 'writer's notebook to maybe write a poem later on.' This shows that he plans on using his ideas to help him write at some other time (5/12/11).

Upon completion of my response, we highlighted as a class the applying vocabulary I used within my blogging post. The class identified that I used "facts" in my response. We also discussed how I used evidence from the text by quoting Fletcher's words when providing an example to clarify my thinking.

The following day (5/13/11), I posted the applying question "What question would you ask Ralph Fletcher in an interview about the poem *Writer's Notebook* and why?" to identify if my students were able to generate questions and use evidence to support their thinking, both skills within the applying level of higher order thinking. Heather responded "How does writing ideas in your writing notebook help you write poems later on?" Heather was able to generate a question about the text, but did not answer why she chose to ask this question. Similar to Heather's response in the pre-assessment, she failed to use evidence when supporting her thinking.

After the students had an opportunity to answer my previous question, we had a class discussion about the importance of reading and responding to each other's work. We clarified that blogging is similar to book clubs in that it is an activity that

can be used to discuss texts. We identified that the only difference was that blogging was done using computers, writing and the Internet (5/13/11).

After a three day weekend (5/17/11), we reviewed the definition and vocabulary for applying before I posted Fletcher's (2005) poem *Memory Loss* (see Appendix K), a poem in which Fletcher describes how his grandmother is losing her memory and his mother helps her remember when she gets confused. After discussing the message of the poem as a class, I asked the students to generate an applying question and describe what elements of the poem they would choose to change to make Fletcher's message clearer. We discussed his message as a class because we had not yet worked with the concept of themes within the analyzing level of higher order thinking.

Heather responded to my prompt stating:

one element i would change to make Ralph Fletcher's message more clearer is when it said she steps from word to word until suddenly he could of said some like when she steps from word to word until suddenly she says something that might make it more clearer.

She also wrote the question, "Why do you think Ralph described crossing a river when Grandma was talking. Use evidence to help." Heather's question indicated she understood how to write a question that involved the skill of applying. Her response showed that she attempted to use evidence by including the example "steps from word to word until suddenly" to support her thinking. Heather was then able to

provide an alternative for clarifying the poem by writing “he could of said some like when she steps from word to word until suddenly she says something that might make it more clearer.” At this point, Heather used the word “evidence” in her question, provided one detail from the text to explain her thoughts, and suggested an alternative to make the poem clearer.

To clarify the students’ understanding of *Memory Loss* the next day (5/18/11), I had the students go back into the blog and respond to Ray’s post about helping grandma remember what she was talking about.

Heather responded by stating:

I think when it said mom takes Grandma to the other side that really means when mom was talking to Grandma, Grandma really does not remember what she was saying so that means she is loosing her memory. So mom tries to help her get her memory back. that's what i think it means when mom takes Gradma to the other side. That’s what mom is really doing.

In her response, Heather demonstrated her understanding that responses become clearer when evidence from the text is used to support thinking. This also showed Heather that reading and responding to Ray’s blog helped her clarify her thinking and understanding in a more descriptive way.

The first day of the following week (5/23/11) I defined the concept of analyzing, which I adapted from Hammond (2007), as “examining or breaking down information into parts to draw conclusions” for the students and added the definition to our classroom chart. Next, I used Fletcher’s (2005) poem *Pinball* (see Appendix L), to verbally define the key vocabulary within the analyzing stage: analyze, compare, contrast, theme, attitude, inference, and conclusion (Hammond, 2007).

As a class, we read and discussed the poem *Pinball* (see Appendix L) answering the prompt “Infer how Ralph Fletcher feels about middle school. Make sure you tie in evidence and background knowledge to support your thinking.” The students were already familiar with how to make an inference due to the prior ten lessons during the month long unit earlier in the school year, but were unclear that when they inferred they were actually analyzing text as well.

After the students and I discussed how Fletcher reveals that he did not like middle school because he felt like a pinball bouncing around the halls and being told what to do by many different people, I had the students analyze the poem adding any other insights.

Heather wrote:

I infer Ralph Fletcher feels about middle school is that he rushes. For example when it said he was rolling though halls, binked and bonked, smacked and spun, whirled and twirled by rules teachers, ideas ,assignments. I think he was connecting to a pinball game because he

was going all around the school. I also think Ralph Fletcher feels about middle school is that it might seem to him that it was not fun. I once felt the same way like when i had to do a tun of things and was going crazy about it.

Heather's response indicated that she knew how to make an inference by breaking down the text to draw a conclusion, while remembering to tie in background knowledge and direct evidence from the text to support her thinking. She answered the analyzing question that was asked and defended her thinking using several pieces of evidence from the text. Heather failed to use the analyzing vocabulary we discussed when doing so.

We continued analyzing poetry for two more days (5/24/11-5/25/11) using Fletcher's (2005) poem *Bill of Sale* (see Appendix M), in which he describes how he read a poem about Lydia, a female slave, and imagined being her while questioning how something like this could happen in our country. I asked the students to "Describe Ralph Fletcher's attitude in this poem, remembering to support your thinking with relevant evidence from the text," as well as write an analyzing question for their classmates using any of the vocabulary from our classroom chart.

Heather wrote:

I think Ralph Fletcher's attitude in this poem is that he might be feeling sad for this girl Lydia Wells. For example when it said i kept picturing lydia the same age as me, her bare feet in the dirt. I rememberd my

class and i reading a book called meet addy. I kid of reminds me of this girl Lydia Wells. This is what think Ralph Fletchers attitude is in the poem.

At this point, Heather was able to analyze the poem by formulating a conclusion about Fletcher's attitude and supported it using direct evidence from the text. Heather was able to make a connection to another book we read in class, but did not use evidence to support her thinking. Heather's questions were "What is the major theme for the poem *Bill Of Sale*? What is the author's purpose in the poem *Bill Of Sale*? Infer what Lydia Wells is feeling in the poem? What do you think it means when it says How can i go on with my life?" Heather developed questions that used the words "theme" and "infer," both vocabulary words we focused on within the analyzing stage of higher order thinking. In her questions, Heather asked her peers to draw conclusions about the poem, showing she understood how to generate an analyzing question.

Second Quick Write

On May 25, 2011, I asked Heather to complete a second Quick Write (see Appendix F) to gain insight into her growth in understanding of blogging, her understanding of the importance of using evidence in writing, and to determine how she understood the applying and analyzing levels of higher order thinking.

In her initial Quick Write response on (5/10/11), Heather described blogging as “blogging is I think you talk to people online instead of in person.” In her response in the second Quick Write (5/25/11) she furthered her previous understanding stating “Blogging is when you go on the Internet. You do writing and you write questions and answer other people’s questions. It’s mostly about poetry.” Her response showed me she had extended her thinking about blogging by describing how she could blog about poetry and identified that you read and respond to other people’s thoughts and questions in blogs. Through her explanation of blogging, Heather used the example of poetry to support and clarify her thinking, something she learned to do through instruction and practice of the applying and analyzing stages of higher order thinking.

When I asked Heather to describe her understanding of what evidence is and why it is used when responding to literature, she responded “evidence is when you use important details from the text. You also have to make sure you use correct details from the text to help support your answer.” This was a clear indication of her growth from her response to the question during the initial interview (5/10/11) where she thought evidence was “graphic organizer. Stopping if they know what they read and see if they understand what they read.”

Heather defined the applying level as “when you use examples and facts to prove something” and the analyzing level as “when you break the text apart.” Her response indicated that she realized applying connects to evidence in that she used facts to support her thinking. Likewise, her understanding of analyzing grew from

“like sequencing or what the story was about” (Initial Quick Write, 5/10/11) to the response just described. Heather understood that analyzing is when she breaks down the text into parts.

Heather’s responses indicated that she made gains in her understanding of blogging, evidence, applying, and analyzing as a result of the daily poetry activities.

Blogging Responses from May 26, 2011-June 6, 2011

During the first day (5/26/11) of week four of the poetry unit, I shared the definition of evaluating, which I adapted from Hammond (2007), as “presenting and defending opinions about what you read” and added it to the classroom chart. I used Fletcher’s (2005) poem *Bill of Sale* (see Appendix M) in a shared reading and writing lesson to model how we could comprehend the same text at many different levels of higher order thinking. During the lesson we defined and discussed the key vocabulary within the evaluating stage: criticize, defend, determine, evaluate, justify, recommend, agree, disagree, explain, opinion, support, and prove (Hammond, 2007).

After introducing the definition and vocabulary for evaluating, I modeled developing and defending an opinion about who I would recommend this poem to.

I wrote:

I would recommend this poem to someone who was not thankful for what they have. I would recommend it to this type of person because

after reading about the difficulties Lydia lived through, I realized that I should not take the freedom and things I have for granted.

We went on to discuss several other types of people we would recommend this poem to, including someone who is learning about slavery because the poem showed how harsh slavery was.

At this point I felt it was time for the students to practice forming opinions and defending them using evidence from the text since the students were able to verbally formulate and defend their opinions about recommendations for reading the poem *Bill of Sale* (see Appendix M).

After reading aloud Fletcher's (2005) poem *Beanstalk Poem* (see Appendix N) three times together, a piece in which he talks about how he got caught cheating from his friend in school, I asked the students respond to the question "In your opinion, why did Ralph Fletcher write this poem? Justify your opinion using evidence from the text" (5/27/11).

Heather responded:

My opinion, i think Ralph Fltcher wrote this poem to teach a lesson about not cheating of someones paper. I think this because it said but i didn't figure my teacher would find out i copied the poem from someone else and my beanstalk would cut down. I think that means that if you cheat of someone elses paper your beanstalk will fall down,

Also when it said an A+ grade. I had planned out if he cheats of someone else's paper he might not get a very present grade. This is why I think Ralph Fletcher wrote this poem.

After analyzing Heather's and other students' responses over Memorial Day weekend, I realized that Heather and three other students were able to form an opinion and defend it using several pieces of evidence from the text. I believed the students would benefit from more work in developing and defending an opinion before continuing on. Due to this, I decided it was important to model defending an opinion by revising Amy's initial response (5/27/11) as written in the Amy's results section titled Blogging Responses from May 26, 2011-June 6, 2011.

I wrote on my computer connected to the LCD projector as the students read along (5/31/11):

I think Ralph Fletcher wrote this poem to teach you that you should never copy another person's writing or what they did. In the poem, Fletcher tried getting an A+ on his poem by copying another student's work. He never thought he would get caught, but when he did, he received a bad grade. I think he got a bad grade because the poem said he came crashing down with his beanstalk when his teacher found out he cheated. I learned you should always be trustworthy.

Instead of having the students respond to my entry, I posted Fletcher's (2005) poem *She Wrote Me a Love Poem* (see Appendix O), in which he writes about a girl

who broke his heart, and asked them to answer the questions “Do you agree or disagree with the way Ralph Fletcher compared his experience with the girl to what his cat did? Why or why not? and What kind of person would you recommend this poem to? Why?”

In her entry (5/31/11), Heather wrote:

I agree with Ralph Fletcher. I agree with Ralph Fletcher because in the poem when the girl wrote the poem to Fletcher it said whenever you smile at me i feel tiny hot air balloons rising inside my heart, and then when it said ralph found out she had gave Jamison lee the same poem the next stanza says so i guess my balloons popped that compared to the girl. When it says It's like my cat Cleopatra when he was purring on his lap like a sybol of world peace until i go out side and find the mouse she had killed. I sounds like to me the cat was not so peaceful after all. The cat compared to the girl because the girl broke Fletchers heart and she killed the mouse. Both were hurt. I would recommend this poem to people that are not trustworthy and people that break their hearts. I would also recommend this poem to people that are not peaceful.

Heather formed an opinion and defended it using evidence from the text when responding to the first question by agreeing with Fletcher, but failed to defend her

opinion for who she would recommend the poem to when responding to the second question. She used the applying, analyzing, and evaluating stages simultaneously by forming an opinion, making a connection between how the mouse felt when he got killed by the cat and Fletcher's feelings, and used evidence from the text to support her thinking.

The following day (6/1/11), I pointed out that Amy did a fabulous job justifying her opinion, like Heather, to the first question by using evidence from the text, but failed to do so when identifying who she would recommend this poem to and why. I believed that reviewing Amy's blog and discussing its strengths and weaknesses with the class provided an authentic learning opportunity for everyone on how to read, think about, and respond to someone else's thinking.

After our discussion, Heather went back into the blog and wrote:

I would recommend this poem to someone that is trustworthy. Maby someone like one of your friends that are trustworthy. I would also recommend this poem to somebody that is peaceful. Somebody that is peaceful like a family member and/or cousin.

Heather answered the recommendation question without providing reasons for who she would recommend this poem to, but did give a few examples of what types of people she thought would benefit from reading this poem.

Our final poem I used on the blog was Fletcher's (2005) *Squished Squirrel* poem (see Appendix P), a poem about how Fletcher's teacher told him he could not write a poem about a squished squirrel, but all along that is what he was doing. For this blog entry (6/2/11), I asked the students to apply, analyze, and evaluate simultaneously, something they had been doing all along unbeknownst to them. We discussed how they analyzed the text by breaking information down, evaluated by forming and justifying opinions, applied new learning by developing questions and using evidence to support their thinking, and used each others' responses to develop their own thinking. I asked the students to respond to the questions "What is the theme of this poem? How do you know? and What do you think about Ralph Fletcher's writing craft(style)? Why?" (6/2/11).

Heather was absent on June 3, 2011, but upon returning to school after the weekend she responded (6/6/11):

I think the theme of this poem is you can do or write about anything you want even if someone tells you ,you can just go on. That's what Ralph Fletcher did he went on about the squirrel. I think the writers craft(style) in the poem is he uses alot of details. He also uses alot of symbolisum in the poems he writes. I think this because when i read his poems it feels like I am talking to him. Lastly, why I think this is the craft because he is always very descriptive in the poems he writes. This is why i love the poems Ralph Fletcher write's.

Heather's responses indicated her growth in her ability to apply, analyze, and evaluate text. She used the word "theme" and provided evidence to support her thinking. Heather used evidence to support her thinking by describing the theme of "you can do or write about anything you want even if someone tells you, you can just go on. That's what Ralph Fletcher did he went on about the squirrel." Heather used the fact that Fletcher wrote a poem about a squished squirrel even though his teacher said he would not be able to. Like Amy, Heather used the word symbolism in her response to describe why she liked Fletcher's poems. Heather's post was after Amy's blog, leading me to believe she may have read Amy's response (6/2/11) prior to posting her own entry (6/6/11).

Heather's response indicated that she understood how to respond using higher order thinking because she was able to form an opinion, draw a conclusion about the theme of the poem, and use evidence to support her thinking. Her response also indicated that she understood the value of reading other students' posts prior to generating her own.

Second Interview

During the second interview, which I conducted on June 8, 2011, I wanted to gain insight into Heather's new understanding of poetry and the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating, as well as how her use of blogging may have helped her develop these skills.

When I asked for a definition of poetry and why people read poetry, Heather identified that people “learn from poetry,” a growth from her response she gave in her initial interview (5/10/11) that “it can tell about something and it’s fun to read.” She also indicated that *Squished Squirrel* (see Appendix P) was now her favorite poem because “Ralph Fletcher stood up for himself.” This showed that Heather was able to understand the theme from this poem and used the theme to justify her opinion, something she learned to do within the evaluating stage of higher order thinking.

In response to the question “Do you think you are a good reader and why?” she explained that she was a “good reader” because “I use what I know to help me read and answer questions and think about the theme.” Now, Heather was able to provide a much clearer description of how she is a good reader by connecting good reading to analyzing the text through looking for themes. This was significant growth from her initial response (5/10/11) of “if I help myself think about the story or article.”

Instead of “I don’t know” when asked about applying in her initial interview (5/10/11), Heather expanded her understanding of applying by describing it as (6/8/11) “use facts and examples to answer questions and evidence to support your answer.” Heather defined analyzing as “you draw conclusions by breaking the text apart” and evaluating as “use opinions with reasons,” both clearer definitions from her previous answers of “like sequencing or what the story was about” and “I don’t

know.” She not only could define these words here, but was also able to apply them to her blogs as previously indicated.

Heather showed growth in her understanding about the importance of using evidence in writing by describing it as “using evidence, facts, and details.” This was a much clearer description of evidence than what she provided in her initial interview of “graphic organizer. Stopping if they know what they read and see if they understand what they read” (5/10/11).

Heather identified that computers and technology helped her become a better reader and writer because she can “blog about things with her friends.” She went on to describe that blogging helped her “use each other’s blogs to help get the idea of a poem. I could use some of their blogs to help.”

Heather’s responses indicated to me that she now understood good readers and writers use evidence to support their thinking and help them respond to questions. Her responses also revealed that she understood that the main function of blogging is to learn from one another by using what each other write to generate responses.

Final Quick Write

I used the final Quick Write (6/9/11) to gain further insight into Heather’s growth in understanding of evaluating and how blogging can and did help her become a better thinker when responding to poetry.

During the initial interview (5/10/11), Heather responded “I don’t know” when I asked her what evaluating was. In response to the question on the final Quick Write she wrote, “The evaluating level of higher order thinking is when you defend your opinion with evidence.” Heather was able to clearly identify what readers do when evaluating poetry.

When I asked her to describe how blogging can and has helped her, Heather wrote “Blogging can help me become a better thinker because I use what I know to answer questions and understand the text. Blogging has helped me become a better thinker when responding to poetry because I can learn from other people and what they wrote and think.”

Through the final Quick Write, Heather showed she understood that people blog to learn from one another through discussion.

Post-Assessment Activity

On June 10, 2011, I re-administered Ralph Fletcher’s (2005) poem *A Writing Kind of Day* (see Appendix C) using the open-ended prompt of “Read and respond to the following poem” to determine the growth Heather made in her ability to use the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating when responding to poetry.

Heather wrote:

I think it means when it said “As if the word swam back to where it all began.” I think that means all the way back to kindergarden because that’s when you learn to read and write. What does a trembling feeling that ripples out mean? I can infer that when it said each word hits the page like a drop in a puddle. I can infer that when it’s raining it hits a puddle it’s just like writing a word on a piece of paper.

I analyzed Heather’s response in terms of the content to assess her growth in the application of higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry.

Heather was able to generate an analyzing question that would foster higher order thinking to answer.

At the analysis level, Heather’s response showed use of inferring by using schema and text evidence to support her thinking. She wrote “I think it means when it said ‘As if the word swam back to where it all began.’ I think that means all the way back to kindergarden because that’s when you learn to read and write.” Heather also analyzed Fletcher’s use of symbolism in the poem by writing “I can infer that when it said each word hits the page like a drop in a puddle. I can infer that when it’s raining it hits a puddle it’s just like writing a word on a piece of paper.”

At the evaluating level, Heather’s opinions were each supported with one detail from the poem. Heather was able to formulate and defend her opinions about words being like a “raindrop” and Fletcher’s reading and writing beginning in “kindergarten.”

Heather used two pieces of evidence from the text to support her thinking. Overall, she was able to support her thinking when only being provided a general prompt, rather than specific prompts. Heather showed she was critically evaluating and analyzing the text with little to no support.

Heather's response indicated to me that she understood that evidence is crucial when developing and justifying her opinion, as well as when analyzing the text through inferring.

Summary

Throughout this study, Heather developed her understanding of how blogging can be used as a tool to communicate and learn from other students. This was highlighted in her final Quick Write (6/9/11) when she discussed that "Blogging can help me become a better thinker because I use what I know to answer questions and understand the text. Blogging has helped me become a better thinker when responding to poetry because I can learn from other people and what they wrote and think." This growth was also evidenced in Heather's Blogging Response (6/6/11) where she responded to Amy's use of symbolism (6/2/11) when describing Fletcher's craft.

Heather also had a better understanding of evidence and how it can be used as she indicated in her second interview (6/8/11) when she commented that good writers

support their ideas and thinking by “using evidence, facts, and details.” As previously indicated, Heather was able to apply this learning several times throughout the unit by providing evidence to support her thinking.

She became more aware that good readers use the skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating to comprehend poetry as discussed in her second interview (6/8/11) by saying “good readers think about the theme,” as opposed to her initial interview (5/10/11) thoughts of “if I help myself think about the story or article.” As indicated in the second Quick Write (5/25/11) and final Quick Write (6/9/11), Heather was able to define the applying, analyzing, and evaluating stages of higher order thinking. She displayed her understanding of these stages throughout the entire unit of study by inferring themes, developing and justifying opinions, and supporting her thinking using evidence from the poems and her background knowledge.

Alex

Alex is a ten year old, fourth grade, African-American male who has two separated mothers and resides in a single-parent home. He comes from a middle-class family and does not receive services for special education. Alex is at grade level in his English Language Arts academic abilities. At the beginning of the study, Alex was very eager to study poetry and blog.

Pre-Assessment Activity

Prior to conducting the interview and initial Quick Write about blogging and Internet use, I wanted to gain insight into Alex's ability to use the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing and evaluating. To do so, I used Ralph Fletcher's (2005) poem *A Writing Kind of Day* (see Appendix C) and the open-ended prompt "Read and respond to the following poem." Alex responded to the prompt by writing "Ralph Fletcher is talking about rain and talking about writing at the same time. He is writing about writing but using things you would do in the rain to write about writing."

I analyzed Alex's response in terms of the content to assess his initial application of higher order thinking skills. He did not develop any questions that fostered higher order thinking.

At the analysis level, Alex showed some use of inferring by identifying part of the theme when he wrote "He is writing about writing but using things you would do in the rain to write about writing." It appears that he was attempting to describe that Fletcher was using rain and the rainy day to help him write, but used little evidence to support his inference.

At the evaluating level, Alex supported his opinion that "Ralph Fletcher is talking about rain and talking about writing at the same time" by saying "he is writing about writing but using things you would do in the rain to write about writing." Alex used little to no relevant evidence to support his opinion.

Alex used little to no direct evidence throughout his response to support his thinking.

From the pre-assessment activity conducted on May 9, 2011, I learned that Alex had little understanding of how to respond to poetry using higher order thinking, as well as was unclear on how to use relevant and direct evidence to support his thinking.

Initial Interview

During the interview I conducted on May 10, 2011, I wanted to gain insight into Alex's understanding of poetry and his thinking about the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating.

When I asked him for a definition of poetry and why people read poetry, Alex explained that "you can learn something from it." He explained that he was a good reader by stating "because I can go to higher levels in reading every time," showing he thought that being a good reader meant he was at a higher Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark reading level, the system we use at Herman Elementary to assess students' reading ability.

When I asked him about the applying, analyzing, and evaluating levels of higher order thinking, Alex commented "I don't know" for all three.

When I asked him “How do good writers support their ideas and thinking?” Alex showed confusion about the importance of supporting his ideas in writing by describing it as “They, um, write notes before they start writing and write the title of the story before they write all their paragraphs.” Here, Alex tied in his background knowledge and experiences as a writer as he defined the draft stage of the writing process, where writers write notes prior to beginning a draft, but showed confusion about what it actually means to support ideas and thinking in writing.

When I asked him “How do you use computers and technology at school to help you read and write?” at the end of the interview, Alex identified that computers and technology help him become a better reader and writer because he can “go on a website, print out paper and write, and read articles on Wikipedia.” Alex showed that he understood he could look information up using the Internet and use computers to generate writing.

Upon completion of analyzing the pre-interview, I found that Alex was unable to accurately define the skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating, yet understood that technology and computers could be used to find information (5/10/11).

Initial Quick Write

I used the initial Quick Write to gain insight into Alex's understanding of why people use the Internet and what he knew about blogging. Alex wrote that "People use the computer in lots of ways. one was is that they use it to play games and talk on websites. they also use it to learn stuff and listen to music." Alex realized the Internet could be used to learn new information, have conversations, and for leisure activities. In response to the question about blogging, Alex wrote "I don't know about blogging." Alex was able to identify that computers were used to talk on websites, but most likely did not connect that blogging was similar to his current understanding because he had never been introduced to blogging before (5/10/11).

Blogging Responses from May 12, 2011-May 25, 2011

After introducing my students to blogging by discussing how it was communicating back and forth on the computer through writing, the first poem we responded to was Fletcher's (2005) *Writer's Notebook* (see Appendix J), which is about how you can get ideas for writing anywhere when thinking about what to include in your writer's notebook. The students and I started off by focusing on the applying level of higher order thinking. After I defined applying as "finding examples and facts to prove something, as well as generating questions about the text," (5/12/11) I posted the terms: questions, choose, chose, examples, evidence, facts, and

identify on a classroom chart for the students to use when writing and identifying applying questions.

I then proceeded to model for the students how to answer the applying question of “What examples can you find to show that Ralph Fletcher is coming up with ideas to write in his writer’s notebook?” We first discussed how using evidence was crucial when developing a thorough response to poetry. We defined evidence as “using details from the text to support thinking” (5/12/11).

I modeled on the classroom blog writing:

I think Ralph Fletcher is coming up with ideas to write in his writer’s notebook because he is discussing how his family members were hundredaires, pennyaires, and thousandaires. After he discussed these facts, Fletcher said he wrote them in his ‘writer’s notebook to maybe write a poem later on.’ This shows that he plans on using his ideas to help him write at some other time (5/12/11).

Upon completion of my response, we highlighted as a class the applying vocabulary I used within my blogging post. The class identified that I used “facts” in my response. We also discussed how I used evidence from the text by quoting Fletcher’s words when providing an example to clarify my thinking.

The following day (5/13/11), I posted the applying question “What question would you ask Ralph Fletcher in an interview about the poem *Writer’s Notebook* and

why?" to identify if my students were able to generate questions and use evidence to support their thinking, both skills within the applying level of higher order thinking. Instead of responding to this question directly, Alex responded to Mark's post of "Are the people in the poem really your family or did you just make them up? I want to know this because when you say "my" it looks like its really your family" by writing "mark its alex i think it is there family members because Ralph fletcher said i gave baby julia two pennies and he said that every time i look at her little bald head it reminds him of planet earth." Alex responded to another student's post, showing he valued and understood the importance of having a conversation within the blog prior to be instructed on the benefits of communicating back and forth with others. Alex used two pieces of direct evidence to support his thinking, which demonstrated clear growth from the pre-assessment.

After the students had an opportunity to answer my previous question, we had a class discussion about the importance of reading and responding to each other's work. We clarified that blogging is similar to book clubs in that it is an activity that can be used to discuss texts. We identified that the only difference was that blogging was done using computers, writing and the Internet (5/13/11).

After a three day weekend (5/17/11), we reviewed the definition and vocabulary for applying before I posted Fletcher's (2005) poem *Memory Loss* (see Appendix K), a poem in which Fletcher describes how his grandmother is losing her memory and his mother helps her remember when she gets confused. After

discussing the message of the poem as a class, I asked the students to generate an applying question and describe what elements of the poem they would choose to change to make Fletcher's message clearer. We discussed his message as a class because we had not yet worked with the concept of themes within the analyzing level of higher order thinking.

Alex responded:

I think ralph fletcher could have made his message clearer by describing his mom taking his grandma to the other side to make it sound more sad and make the "other side" more like heaven but still make the other side seem like a happy place.

He also wrote the question, "How do you think it feels to loose your memmory and why?" Alex's question indicated he understood how to write a question that involved the skill of applying. His response showed that he used evidence by including the example "other side" to support his thinking. Alex then was able to provide an alternative for clarifying the poem by writing "taking his grandma to the other side to make it sound more sad and make the "other side" more like heaven but still make the other side seem like a happy place." At this point, Alex analyzed the poem by inferring that grandma was on her way to "heaven," connecting to how heaven is a happy place and that's how it should be for Fletcher's grandma. Although this was very clever inferring, the poem was not about his grandma dying and going to heaven.

To clarify the students' understanding of *Memory Loss* the next day (5/18/11), I had the students go back into the blog and respond to Ray's post about helping grandma remember what she was talking about.

Alex responded:

i think when mom takes grandma by her hand and helps her to the other side i think mom is helping grandma remember what she was saying because she was talking and she has memory lost. Grandma is getting stuck in the middle of what she's saying so mom will help her finish what she's saying.

In his response, Alex showed that his understanding could be refined and extended by reading and responding to another student's post.

The first day of the following week (5/23/11) I defined the concept of analyzing, which I adapted from Hammond (2007), as "examining or breaking down information into parts to draw conclusions" for the students and added the definition to our classroom chart. Next, I used Fletcher's (2005) poem *Pinball* (see Appendix L), to verbally define as a class the key vocabulary within the analyzing stage: analyze, compare, contrast, theme, attitude, inference, and conclusion (Hammond, 2007).

As a class, we read and discussed the poem *Pinball* (see Appendix L) answering the prompt "Infer how Ralph Fletcher feels about middle school. Make

sure you tie in evidence and background knowledge to support your thinking.” The students were already familiar with how to make an inference due to the prior ten lessons during the month long unit earlier in the school year, but were unclear that when they inferred they were actually analyzing text as well.

After the students and I discussed how Fletcher reveals that he did not like middle school because he felt like a pinball bouncing around the halls and being told what to do by many different people, I had the students analyze the poem adding any other insights.

Alex wrote:

I think ralph fletcher feels horrible about midle school because he got rolled though the halls and binked and bonked,smacked and spun,whirled and twirled. i know that because lots of times that would happen to me for exsample i was being dismissed from school and people were running and they keep pushing me and i felt horrible and mad.

Alex’s response indicated that he knew how to make an inference by breaking down the text to draw a conclusion, while remembering to tie in background knowledge and direct evidence from the text to support his thinking. Alex failed to use the vocabulary we discussed when doing so.

We continued analyzing poetry for two more days (5/24/11-5/25/11) using Fletcher's (2005) poem *Bill of Sale* (see Appendix M), in which he describes how he read a poem about Lydia, a female slave, and imagined being her while questioning how something like this could happen in our country. I asked the students to "Describe Ralph Fletcher's attitude in this poem, remembering to support your thinking with relevant evidence from the text," as well as write an analyzing question for their classmates using any of the vocabulary from our classroom chart.

Alex's response was:

I think ralph fletcher's attitude in this poem is that he is feeling bad for the girl because it said how could this ever happen like he was satified and he keep on picturing her as the same age he was with her bare feet in the dirt and standing in the sun sold like a animale

Alex was able to analyze the poem by formulating a conclusion about Fletcher's attitude and supported it using direct evidence from the text. Alex's question was "what do you think the theme of this poem is?" Alex was able to develop a question that used the word "theme," a vocabulary word we focused on within the analyzing stage of higher order thinking.

Second Quick Write

On May 25, 2011, I asked Alex to complete a second Quick Write (see Appendix F) to gain insight into his growth in understanding of blogging, his understanding for the importance of using evidence in writing, and to determine how he understood the applying and analyzing levels of higher order thinking.

In his initial Quick Write response on (5/10/11), Alex described blogging as “I don’t know about blogging,” but in his response in the second Quick Write (5/25/11) he furthered his previous understanding stating “I know that you talk back and forth about stuff and have a discussion.” His response showed me he not only understood what blogging was, but was able to apply his new learning by responding to others’ posts as indicated in the previous Blogging Response section.

When I asked Alex to describe his understanding of what evidence is and why it is used when responding to literature, he responded by writing “Evidence is details to support your writing and you use it to respond to literature because you use it to support your writing.” This was a clear indication of his growth from his response to the question during the initial interview (5/10/11) where he thought evidence was “um, write notes before they start writing and write the title of the story before they write all their paragraphs.”

Alex defined the applying level as “finding examples and facts to prove it” and the analyzing level as “examine or break information into parts to draw conclusions.” His response indicated that he realized applying connects to evidence

in that he used facts to support his thinking. Likewise, his understanding of analyzing grew from “I don’t know” (Initial Quick Write, 5/10/11) to the response just described. Alex understood that analyzing is when he breaks down the text into parts to come up with a conclusion.

Alex’s responses indicated that he made gains in his understanding of blogging, evidence, applying, and analyzing as a result of the daily poetry activities. He used direct evidence from the text to support his thinking, a stark contrast from the general references he made during the pre-assessment to clarify his thinking.

Blogging Responses from May 26, 2011-June 6, 2011

During the first day (5/26/11) of week four of the poetry unit, I shared the definition of evaluating, which I adapted from Hammond (2007), as “presenting and defending opinions about what you read” and added it to the classroom chart. I used Fletcher’s (2005) poem *Bill of Sale* (see Appendix M) in a shared reading and writing lesson to model for the students how we could comprehend the same text at many different levels of higher order thinking. During the lesson we verbally defined and discussed the key vocabulary within the evaluating stage: criticize, defend, determine, evaluate, justify, recommend, agree, disagree, explain, opinion, support, and prove (Hammond, 2007).

After introducing the definition and vocabulary for evaluating, I modeled developing and defending an opinion about who I would recommend this poem to.

I wrote:

I would recommend this poem to someone who was not thankful for what they have. I would recommend it to this type of person because after reading about the difficulties Lydia lived through, I realized that I should not take the freedom and things I have for granted.

We went on to discuss several other types of people we would recommend this poem to, including someone who is learning about slavery because the poem showed how harsh slavery was.

At this point I felt it was time for the students to practice forming opinions and defending them using evidence from the text since the students were able to verbally formulate and defend their opinions about recommendations for reading the poem *Bill of Sale* (see Appendix M).

After reading aloud Fletcher's (2005) poem *Beanstalk Poem* (see Appendix N) three times together, a piece in which he talks about how he got caught cheating from his friend in school, I asked the students respond to the question "In your opinion, why did Ralph Fletcher write this poem? Justify your opinion using evidence from the text" (5/27/11).

Alex responded to Amy's post:

i think Ralph Fletcher wrote this poem to teach you that you should never copy another persons writing or what they did. i think this because if you copy someone than you could get in trouble for it. Also, Ralph got in trouble for cheating off of someone.

by writing "i agree with you amy because he copyed of someone else and he got in trouble for doing that because he wants us to learn not to copy people or you will get in trouble and i think he feels bad about doing it."

After analyzing Alex's and other students' responses over Memorial Day weekend, I realized that Alex responded to Amy's thinking without being prompted to do so, showing he had truly internalized the benefit of reading other students' posts before making his own. Alex also discussed the theme of the poem by describing how Fletcher "wants us to learn not to copy people or you will get in trouble." Alex started to infer Fletcher's feelings by writing "i think he feels bad about doing it," but did not include evidence or background knowledge to support his thinking. Although Alex analyzed and evaluated the text, he did not use direct evidence to support his thinking. As a result, I believed more work was needed in the area of developing and defending an opinion before continuing on. Due to this, I decided it was important to model defending an opinion by revising Amy's initial response (5/27/11) as written in the Amy's results section titled Blogging Responses from May 26, 2011-June 6, 2011.

I wrote on my computer connected to the LCD projector as the students read along (5/31/11):

I think Ralph Fletcher wrote this poem to teach you that you should never copy another person's writing or what they did. In the poem, Fletcher tried getting an A+ on his poem by copying another student's work. He never thought he would get caught, but when he did, he received a bad grade. I think he got a bad grade because the poem said he came crashing down with his beanstalk when his teacher found out he cheated. I learned you should always be trustworthy.

Instead of having the students respond to my entry, I posted Fletcher's (2005) poem *She Wrote Me a Love Poem* (see Appendix O), in which he writes about a girl who broke his heart, and asked them to answer the questions "Do you agree or disagree with the way Ralph Fletcher compared his experience with the girl to what his cat did? Why or why not?; and What kind of person would you recommend this poem to? Why?"

In his entry (5/31/11), Alex wrote:

I agree with the way ralph fletcher compared his experience with the girl to what his cat did because he liked her and then he was sad because she gave the same poem to another boy (Jamison lee) and he felt sad and i would feel sad to and mad. I would recamend this to some one who got there heart broken because if they read this poem they would know how ralph fletcher feels.

Alex formed an opinion by agreeing with Fletcher, but failed to use evidence to justify his thinking. Alex formed and defended his opinion for who he would recommend the poem to when responding to the second question, but used little specific evidence to validate his thinking.

The following day (6/1/11), I pointed out that Amy did a fabulous job justifying her opinion to the first question by using evidence from the text, but failed to do so when identifying who she would recommend this poem to and why. I believed that reviewing Amy's blog and discussing its strengths and weaknesses with the class provided an authentic learning opportunity for everyone on how to read, think about, and respond to someone else's thinking. Alex did not have an opportunity to revise his initial response after reviewing Amy's blog as a class.

Our final poem used on the blog was Fletcher's (2005) *Squished Squirrel* poem (see Appendix P), about how Fletcher's teacher told him he could not write a poem about a squished squirrel, but all along that is what he was doing. For this blog entry (6/2/11), I asked the students to apply, analyze, and evaluate simultaneously, something they had been doing all along unbeknownst to them. We discussed how they analyzed the text by breaking information down, evaluated by forming and justifying opinions, applied new learning by developing questions and using evidence to support their thinking, and used each others' responses to develop their own thinking. I asked the students to respond to the questions "What is the theme of this poem? How do you know?"; and What do you think about Ralph Fletcher's writing

craft(style)? Why?” (6/2/11). Like Heather, Alex was absent on June 3, 2011, but upon returning to school after the weekend he responded (6/6/11) “I think the theme of this poem is that you write anything you want to because his teacher said you cant write about a dead squirrel but all along he was writing about a dead squirrel the whole poem.” Alex’s response included his opinion and the analyzing word “theme,” as well as the direct evidence “his teacher said you cant write about a dead squirrel” to justify his thinking. This was clear growth from Alex’s previous post where he did not use evidence to justify his thinking. Alex did not respond to the second question about author’s craft because he ran out of time.

Alex’s response indicated that he understood how to use higher order thinking because he was able to form an opinion, draw a conclusion about the theme of the poem, and use evidence to support his ideas.

Second Interview

During the second interview, which I conducted on June 8, 2011, I wanted to gain insight into Alex’s new understanding of poetry and the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating, as well as how his use of blogging may have helped him develop these skills.

When I asked for a definition of poetry and why people read poetry, Alex identified that “Poetry is something you can learn stuff from. I read it so I can learn

stuff and even improve on what I've already learned," a growth from his response he gave in his initial interview (5/10/11) that "you can learn something from it." Alex was able to verbalize that he could improve his thinking about poetry by reading it, but did not reference blogging as a tool for doing so. I believed that he meant he could improve his learning by reading and responding to other students' work since he did that several times throughout the unit on poetry blogging.

He also indicated that *Squished Squirrel* (see Appendix P) was now his favorite poem because "his teacher told him he couldn't write a poem about a squished squirrel but all along he was." This showed that Alex was able to understand the theme from this poem and used the theme to justify his opinion, something he learned to do within the evaluating stage of higher order thinking.

In response to the question "Do you think you are a good reader and why?" he explained that he was a good reader "because I read fluently and learn when I read." Now, Alex was able to provide a much clearer description of how he is a good reader by connecting good reading to learning. This was significant growth from his initial response (5/10/11) of "because I can go to higher levels in reading every time."

Instead of "I don't know" when asked about applying in his initial interview (5/10/11), Alex expanded his understanding of applying by describing it as (6/8/11) "when you find facts and prove something." Alex defined analyzing as "breaking information apart to come up with something" and evaluating as "defending your opinion using facts," all clearer definitions from his previous answers of "I don't

know.” He not only could define these words here, but was able to apply his new learning within his blogs.

Alex showed growth in his understanding about the importance of using evidence in writing by describing it as “using evidence in your writing from the text.” This was a much clearer description of evidence than what he provided in his initial interview (5/10/11) of “They, um, write notes before they start writing and write the title of the story before they write all their paragraphs.”

Alex identified that computers and technology helped him become a better reader and writer because he could “blog and go on Brain Pop.” He went on to describe that blogging helped him by “listening to other people’s blogging and writing comments about the poems.”

Alex’s responses indicated to me that he now understood good readers and writers use evidence to support their thinking and help them respond to questions. His responses also revealed he understood that the main function of blogging is to learn from one another by using what each other write to foster thinking.

Final Quick Write

I used the final Quick Write (6/9/11) to gain insight into Alex’s growth in understanding of evaluating and how blogging can and did help him become a better thinker when responding to poetry.

During the initial interview (5/10/11), Alex responded “I don’t know” when asked what evaluating was. In response to the question on the final Quick Write he wrote “it is defending opinions about what you read.” Alex was able to clearly identify what readers do when evaluating poetry.

When asked to describe how blogging can and has helped him, Alex wrote “it can help you by thinking about someone’s question and thinking about someone’s comment and yours. it has helped me become a better thinker by answering others questions and writing details that are actually in the poem. ”

Through the final Quick Write, Alex showed he understood that people blog to learn from one another through discussion. He also described how blogging helped him use evidence to support his thinking, a skill at the applying level of higher order thinking.

Post-Assessment Activity

On June 10, 2011, I re-administered Ralph Fletcher’s (2005) poem *A Writing Kind of Day* (see Appendix C) using the open-ended prompt of “Read and respond to the following poem” to determine the growth Alex made in his ability to use the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating when responding to poetry.

Alex wrote:

I think he wrote this poem to say that a rainy day is a good day to write a poem and get ideas because it said it's raining today, a writing kind of day. He also wrote different things about rain and writing like each word on the page is like a drop in a puddle. what do you think the theme of this poem is?

I analyzed Alex's response in terms of the content to assess his growth in the application of higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry.

Alex was able to generate an analyzing question that would foster higher order thinking to answer by using the word "theme" in his response.

At the analysis level, Alex's response showed some use of inferring by determining Fletcher's purpose for writing. He used several pieces of evidence to justify his response, but did not connect his thinking to schema in order to clarify his thoughts.

At the evaluating level, Alex supported his opinion with two details from the poem. Alex was able to formulate and defend his opinion by using the examples of "each word on the page is like a drop in a puddle" and "it said it's raining today, a writing kind of day."

Alex used two pieces of evidence from the text to support his thinking. Overall, he was able to support his thinking when only being provided a general

prompt, rather than specific prompts. Alex showed he was critically evaluating and analyzing the text with little to no support.

Alex's response indicated to me that he understood that evidence is crucial when developing and justifying his opinion and analyzing the text.

Summary

Throughout this study, Alex developed his understanding of how blogging can be used as a tool to communicate and learn from other students. This was highlighted in his final Quick Write (6/9/11) when he discussed that "it can help you by thinking about someone's question and thinking about someone's comment and yours. it has helped me become a better thinker by answering others questions and writing details that are actually in the poem."

Alex had a better understanding of evidence and how it can be used as he indicated in his second interview (6/8/11) when he commented that good writers support their ideas and thinking by "using evidence in your writing from the text." Alex also indicated growth in his understanding for the importance of evidence in his final Quick Write (6/9/11) when he wrote blogging helped him by "writing details that are actually in the poem." Alex was able to apply this learning several times throughout the unit by providing evidence to support his thinking.

As indicated in his Blogging Responses, Alex became more aware that good readers use the skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating to comprehend poetry. Within the second Quick Write (5/25/11) and final Quick Write (6/9/11), Alex was able to define the applying, analyzing, and evaluating stages of higher order thinking, something he was unable to do at the beginning of the unit on poetry blogging. He displayed his understanding of these stages throughout the entire unit of study by inferring themes, developing and justifying opinions, and supporting his thinking using evidence from the poems and background knowledge.

Cross Case Analysis

Looking across the three case studies reveals similarities and differences among and between the students' use and understanding of higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry through blogging. In the sections that follow I compare and contrast the students' performances on pre and post assessments, their responses to the Quick Writes, their blog posts and their answers to the interview questions.

Pre-Assessment Activity

I designed the pre-assessment activity (see Appendix C) to gain insight into the students' initial abilities to use the higher order thinking skills of applying,

analyzing and evaluating when responding to poetry. I analyzed each student's response in terms of the content to assess his or her initial application of higher order thinking skills.

None of the students developed a question that fostered higher order thinking, one of the goals at the applying level of higher order thinking.

Each student attempted to analyze the poem by inferring, but used little to no evidence or background knowledge to support his or her thinking.

Each student evaluated the poem by developing an opinion but used little or no evidence to justify his or her thinking.

From the results of the pre-assessment activity conducted on May 9, 2011, I learned that each student needed support with applying, analyzing, and evaluating poetry, as well as using evidence to support his or her thinking.

Initial Interview

During the initial interview (see Appendix H) I conducted on May 10, 2011, I wanted to gain insight into each student's understanding of poetry and the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating.

From their responses, I determined that each student understood that something could be learned by reading poetry, but differed in his or her understanding

of what a good reader is. Amy and Heather felt that they were good readers because they think about the text while reading, where Alex believed he was a good reader because he goes to “higher reading levels.”

All three of the students either did not know about or had misunderstood the concepts of applying, analyzing, and evaluating. Most of the responses were “I don’t know.” Amy connected applying to trying to get a job and Heather believed analyzing was sequencing a story. This showed me that none of the students had any prior experiences working with the applying, analyzing, and evaluating levels of higher order thinking.

Similarly, none of the students were able to describe that good writers support their thinking and ideas using evidence, but did connect to prior experiences when formulating a response. They showed confusion about supporting their thinking in the pre-assessment when they were unable to use evidence and details to support their thinking.

All three of the students were able to identify that computers and technology helped them learn to read and write because they could look things up, implying they understood that information could be obtained through the use of the Internet. This also showed the students understood that computers and the Internet could be used for the developing the literacy aspects of viewing, reading, listening, and writing.

After analyzing the students’ responses to the pre-interview questions, I found that they understood that technology and computers could be used to find

information, learn, and develop literacy skills, but were not able to define applying, analyzing and evaluating.

Initial Quick Write

From the students' responses to the initial Quick Write (see Appendix D) I conducted on May 10, 2011, I wanted to gain insight into each student's understanding of why people use the Internet and what he and she knew about blogging.

Each student wrote that the Internet was used to look things up and play games. Alex identified that the Internet could be used to "talk on websites."

Amy and Heather identified that blogging is when people talk on the computer instead of in person, where Alex did not know what blogging was.

The results of the initial Quick Write indicated that the students understood the Internet could be used as a communicative function, but needed support to make the connection between the Internet and blogging.

Blogging Responses from May 12, 2011-May 25, 2011

During the first two weeks of the poetry unit on blogging, the students responded to Ralph Fletcher's poems *Writer's Notebook* (see Appendix J), *Memory*

Loss (see Appendix K), *Pinball* (see Appendix L), and *Bill of Sale* (see Appendix M). I asked the students to use the skills of applying through developing questions and using evidence to support their thinking and analyzing by inferring themes. I also instructed them about the value of reading and responding to other students' blogs.

Within the applying stage of higher order thinking, Amy and Heather were able to develop an applying question by using the word "evidence" within their response. Alex was able to develop an applying question, but his differed from Amy's and Heather's because he did not use the instructed vocabulary within the applying stage of higher order thinking when prompted to do so. Even though he did not use any of the applying vocabulary, Alex asked his classmates to explain why they would feel the way they would if they lost their memory. All three students then were able to develop applying questions.

Each student developed responses that included evidence to support his or her thinking, and used direct evidence from the text by either quoting Fletcher directly or using some of his words to describe his or her thoughts about the questions being asked. The students' response indicated significant growth from their pre-assessment and initial interview responses where each of the students was unclear as to how good writers support their ideas and thinking.

Within the analyzing stage of higher order thinking, each student was able to make an inference about a poem and support his or her thinking using evidence from the text. Each student also remembered to use background knowledge to help develop

his or her inference. Alex and Heather developed analyzing questions that included the words “theme” or “infer” when asking peers to identify Ralph Fletcher’s message. Amy did not develop an analyzing question, but did ask peers to form an opinion and defend it using evidence, skills needed within the evaluating stage of higher order thinking.

All three students read and responded to their peers’ posts within the first two weeks of the unit. Alex was the first student to respond to someone else’s post without being prompted to do so. Heather and Amy responded to other’s posts once I provided instruction on the importance for doing so. Each student was able to clarify his or her thinking and became better at using evidence to support his or her ideas as a result of reading and responding to blogs.

The students’ various responses during the first two weeks of the unit indicated that all three made large gains in their understanding of how to write applying and analyzing questions, use evidence to support their thinking, make inferences, and the value of reading and responding to their peers’ posts.

Second Quick Write

On May 25, 2011, I asked each student to complete a second Quick Write (see Appendix F) to gain insight and understanding of how each was perceiving blogging,

the importance of using evidence in writing, and to determine how each understood the higher order thinking skills of applying and analyzing.

The results of the second Quick Write indicated that each student expanded his or her understanding of blogging. Amy and Heather initially knew that blogging was talking to other people on the computer but now were able to provide examples of different things they could do on blogs. These included responding to poetry, writing, and answering questions. Initially, Alex did not know what blogging was, but at this point he understood that blogging was where “you talk back and forth about stuff and have a discussion.” This indicated that all three grew from their previous understanding about blogging.

The results of the second Quick Write also indicated that each student expanded his or her understanding of evidence. Each of the students was able to identify that evidence involves using details from the text used to support writing, something none of them were able to explain during the initial interview (see Appendix H).

All three students were able to define the higher order thinking skills of applying and analyzing in their second Quick Write. Each of them knew that applying was when they used facts and examples to prove their thinking and analyzing was when they broke the text apart to draw a conclusion. This indicated significant growth from their initial responses of “I don’t know” and Amy’s previous understanding that applying had only one meaning.

Blogging Responses from May 26, 2011-June 6, 2011

During the final two weeks of the poetry unit on blogging, the students responded to Ralph Fletcher's poems *Bill of Sale* (see Appendix M), *Beanstalk Poem* (see Appendix N), *She Wrote Me a Love Poem* (see Appendix O), and *Squished Squirrel Poem* (see Appendix P). I asked each student to use the skill of evaluating to form and justify his or her opinions using evidence from the poems, as well as to read and respond to other students' blog posts to further develop his or her thinking.

After instructing the students on the higher order thinking skill of evaluating and giving them an opportunity to develop and justify an opinion, I determined that all of the students were able to form an opinion, but of the three case study students only Heather was able to justify their opinions using relevant evidence from the text. It was clear to me that I needed to reteach how to justify an opinion. I decided to revise one of Amy's blog entries with the class. This process reiterated to the students that reading and responding to other students' thoughts provided great value in supporting the development of their thinking.

After my reteaching, Heather and Alex developed their understanding of how to justify an opinion. When responding to *Squished Squirrel Poem* (see Appendix P), each student developed an opinion about the poem and supported it using direct evidence from the text. Each student quoted Ralph Fletcher's words as he or she developed his or her response. This indicated clear growth in all three students' understandings and abilities to justify their opinion using evidence from the text.

Second Interview

During the second interview (see Appendix I), which I conducted on June 8, 2011, I wanted to gain insight into each student's new understanding of poetry and the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating, as well as how he or she was using blogging to develop these skills.

Each student was able to further develop his or her understanding of poetry and why people read it. During the initial interview, all three students identified that something can be learned from poetry. During the second interview the three students discussed how poetry could help them learn themes and improve upon their thinking. To prove his or her new understanding, each student described how his or her new favorite poem was *Squished Squirrel Poem* (see Appendix P), because it showed how the reader could write about anything no matter what anyone says. Here, each student used the theme of the poem to justify why it was his or her favorite, showing how he or she used higher order thinking to develop and defend his or her opinion.

During the initial interview (see Appendix H), all three students were unclear about how to define the skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating. During the second interview, each student was able to define each of the three levels. The students' blog entries proved that not only could they define each of the levels, but could also use and apply what they learned in their poetry responses.

All three of the students were able to tie in prior experiences unrelated to using evidence and details when asked to identify how good writers support their

ideas and thinking during the initial interview, but by the end of the study each student explained that good writers support his or her thinking using evidence and details from the poem.

All three students described that blogging helped them use applying, analyzing, and evaluating skills when responding to poetry by giving them the opportunity to read, respond, and learn about other students' thoughts prior to making their own comment on a public poem.

The results of the second interview indicated that each student developed a clearer and deeper understanding of what good readers and writers do, as well as how blogging developed and supported his or her understanding for the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating.

Final Quick Write

I used the students' responses to final Quick Write (6/9/11) to gain insight into their understanding of the skill of evaluating and how blogging can and did help them become a better thinker when responding to poetry.

All three students were able to describe that evaluating text involves defending an opinion by using evidence to support their thinking. This showed major growth compared to when the students said "I don't know" after being asked to define evaluating during the initial interview (5/10/11). Each student was not only able to

define evaluating, but also applied his or her new learning as displayed in the blog posts from May 26 through June 6, 2011.

All three students were very similar in their description of how blogging can and did help them become better readers and writers. Each student's response indicated that blogging helped him or her because it gave him or her an opportunity to read, learn, and respond to other classmates' thinking. This indicated immense growth, from Alex's initial response of (5/10/11) "I don't know about blogging" and Amy's and Heather's understanding that blogging is talking on the computer, to the ability to learn through blogging.

Post-Assessment Activity

On June 10, 2011, I re-administered Ralph Fletcher's (2005) poem *A Writing Kind of Day* (see Appendix C) using the open-ended prompt of "Read and respond to the following poem." to determine the growth each student made in his or her ability to use the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating when responding to poetry.

All three students developed a question in their response, indicating growth in their ability at the applying level of higher order thinking. Alex and Heather generated analyzing questions, where Amy created an evaluating question. This showed the students knew how to ask a question that required critical thinking to

answer, major growth from the pre-assessment (5/9/11) where no questions were asked.

Similar to the pre-assessment, all three students were able to analyze the poem through inferring. The growth from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment was indicated in each student's ability to use evidence to support his or her thinking. Further growth was indicated by Amy and Heather when they connected their thinking to background knowledge in order to create a more critical response. Alex and Amy inferred Fletcher's purpose for the poem, where Heather analyzed Fletcher's craft through his use of symbolism. This indicated that the students were able to analyze Fletcher's poem in more than one way.

Similar to the results of the pre-assessment, all three students were able to evaluate the poem by developing an opinion. Again, the growth from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment was indicated in each student's ability to use evidence to justify his or her thinking.

Summary

The cross case analysis is intended to reflect the similarities and differences among and between the students over the course of the study. There were many similarities among the students' use of higher order thinking skills when responding to poetry and with the understanding of how blogging developed each student as a

reader and writer. For example, each student was able to develop opinions and justify their thinking using evidence from the text.

There were also differences among the students when using the skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating. For example, Alex and Amy analyzed the text during the post-assessment by inferring Fletcher's purpose for writing, whereas Heather analyzed the poem by thinking about Fletcher's use of symbolism.

I believe the variations in thinking are a result of each student's unique thought process and his or her background and experiences. I have realized that blogging helped each student develop his or her higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating when responding to poetry.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to gather information regarding how blogging helped my fourth graders develop their use of the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating when responding to poetry.

Throughout the study, I sought to answer the following research question:
How does blogging influence the higher order thinking skills of fourth graders when responding to poetry?

Developing the case studies of Amy, Heather, and Alex provided me with unique insights into how the activity of blogging helped them develop their ability to read, interpret and respond to the poetry of Ralph Fletcher using the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating.

In this chapter, I present the conclusions of my research efforts and the implications the research holds for student learning and my teaching. I also share several recommendations for future research and conclude with my final thoughts of how people learn best by working with others.

Conclusions

I can make several conclusions as a result of conducting this study of how blogging influenced the higher order thinking skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating when responding to poetry.

Blogging Helped Students Develop Complex Cognitive Processes

I designed this study to develop the students' abilities to apply, analyze, and evaluate poetry. Each of the case study students increased his or her abilities to use these skills when responding to poetry through blogging. According to Raths (2002), rather than just being satisfied with their students remembering details about a topic, teachers can help their students use increasingly complex cognitive processes, such as applying, analyzing, and evaluating to promote their students' use of higher order thinking and learning. I observed marked growth in the students' understanding of higher order thinking as a result of their participation in this study, because like Raths described, I fostered the use of complex cognitive processes when I asked the students to blog about poetry.

During the study, the students critically applied, analyzed, and evaluated Ralph Fletcher's (2005) poetry in their blogging responses from May 12, 2011 to June 6, 2011 by inferring themes, forming opinions, and developing questions. Similarly, the students used these skills to enhance their comprehension from the pre-assessment (5/9/11) to the post-assessment (6/10/11), showing that complex cognitive processes were used as a result of blogging about poetry.

Blogging Helped Students Use Evidence to Support Higher Order Thinking

According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001), students must be able to use evidence from what they know and have learned to support their thinking within the analyzing and evaluating levels. I designed this study to help my students develop their' abilities to use evidence to support their thinking when formulating a response. Each of the case study students increased his or her abilities to justify his or her thinking with evidence when responding to poetry.

During the initial interview (5/10/11), each of the students was unclear as to how good writers support his or her thinking. By the second interview (6/8/11), each of the students was able to describe that good writers use evidence and details to support his or her thinking.

Each of the students grew in his or her abilities to use evidence when responding to poetry through the blog entries. None of the students used relevant evidence to support their thinking during the pre-assessment (5/9/11), but during the post-assessment (6/10/11) each of the students used several examples from the text to support his or her opinions and inferences.

Likewise, each of the students grew in his or her abilities to use evidence to support his or her thinking during the blogging responses from May 12, 2011 to June 6, 2011.

One example of evidence use was displayed by Heather when she wrote (5/23/11):

I infer Ralph Fletcher feels about middle school is that he rushes. For example when it said he was rolling through halls, binked and bonked, smacked and spun, whirled and twirled by rules teachers, ideas, assignments. I think he was connecting to a pinball game because he was going all around the school. I also think Ralph Fletcher feels about middle school is that it might seem to him that it was not fun. I once felt the same way like when I had to do a ton of things and was going crazy about it.

This is a clear indication of how Heather used several examples from the text, as well as her background knowledge, to support her thinking.

Blogging Helped Students Use Technology to Support and Develop Their Reading and Writing Abilities

As described by Richardson (2011), the use of technology creates passion and participation, develops problem solving skills, and promotes reflective thinking, collaboration, and creativity, all skills necessary for literacy and personal growth. I designed this study to help students develop their abilities to use technology, specifically blogging, and to support their literacy growth in reading and writing.

Each of my students grew in their understanding of blogging and how it can be used to develop his or her ability to respond to poetry using higher order thinking.

During the initial Quick Write (5/10/11), Amy and Heather understood that blogging was talking to others on the computer, where Alex had no idea what blogging was. At this point, Amy and Heather were unclear that blogging could be used as a tool to develop their ability to respond to poetry using higher order thinking.

During the final Quick Write (6/9/11), each of the students was able to describe how blogging helped them develop their higher order thinking skills because they were able to read and respond to other students' thinking prior to writing their own response. This was highlighted by Alex when he wrote "it can help you by thinking about someone's question and thinking about someone's comment and yours. it has helped me become a better thinker by answering others questions and writing details that are actually in the poem."

Amy and Heather wrote a similar response to Alex, indicating that all three made gains in their understanding of how blogging can support their abilities to consider their peers' perspectives and think more deeply while engaging in reading and writing activities.

Implications for Student Learning

The following are implications I found that could be used to enhance student learning in the areas of reading, writing, and viewing as a result of blogging.

Blogging Helped Students Develop Reading, Writing, and Viewing Skills

My research findings could enhance students' abilities to use blogging as a tool to develop the literacy skills of reading, writing, and viewing because it may allow students to read, respond, and type their thoughts using a motivational, informal format. This coincides with Zawilinski's (2009) belief that blogging develops the reading and writing skills of students because it creates a collaborative community for learning where each students' thoughts are valued.

Blogging gives students the opportunity to use a new tool to develop their literacy skills. The relevance of blogging was unfamiliar to the case study students at the beginning of the study as indicated during the initial Quick Write (5/10/11). By the studies' end, each student was able to independently use blogs to foster their literacy growth. They were reading and responding to poetry in writing on blogs, leading to the observed growth in the literacy skills of reading, writing, and viewing and understanding of what a good reader and writer is and does as indicated in the second interview (6/8/11).

*Discussions Support Students' Development of Higher Order Thinking Skills
Needed to be Proficient Readers and Writers*

The findings of Boling et al.'s (2008), Koumpilova's (2011), Merisuo-Storm's (2006), and Zawilinski's (2009) studies show that blogging provides students with an engaging, collaborative environment where they have the opportunity to develop the higher order thinking skills necessary when aspiring to become proficient readers and writers. The findings from my study indicate that the students' understanding that the discussions in which they participated in fostered higher order thinking because they had opportunities to read, think about, and respond to their peers' work.

As the students discussed during the second interview (6/8/11), they were each able to identify that blogging gave them an avenue for discussing poetry with classmates, ultimately leading to growth in their thinking and understanding of texts. This was also shown in the blogging responses when each of the students directly read and responded to another student. One example was in response to *Writer's Notebook* (see Appendix J) when Alex responded to Mark's post of "Are the people in the poem really your family or did you just make them up? I want to know this because when you say "my" it looks like its really your family" by writing "mark its alex i think it is there family members because Ralph fletcher said i gave baby julia two pennies and he said that every time i look at her little bald head it reminds him of planet earth." Here, Alex used evidence to support his thinking in response to Mark's

post, showing he understood the value of using evidence to justify his opinion when discussing poetry with a classmate.

Blogging about Poetry Created an Authentic Public Forum for Learning

Boling et al. (2008) found that blogging gave third and fourth grade students an opportunity to write about common topics and share their thinking with a wide audience across classrooms and grade levels. Similarly, my study provided students with authentic learning opportunities because they had the experience of formulating a personal response to poetry and had the chance to share their thinking with a public audience of their peers and family members.

During an informal discussion with Callie (6/2/11) after she completed a response to Fletcher's (2005) *Squished Squirrel* poem (see Appendix P), she remarked with a huge smile on her face "I can't wait to go home and show my mom all the writing we did on the blog today." Here, Callie validated the fact that blogging provided her with an opportunity to share her learning and thinking with people outside of school, as well as those at school.

Implications for My Teaching

The following are implications I found that could be used to enhance my teaching, as well as provide educators, parents, and all other school personnel with reasons for instructing students with blogs.

Blogging Provides a Tool for Instructing Higher Order Thinking Skills

This study provided me a new tool, blogging, for instructing higher order thinking that I can use with my students. A lot of times, I am scrambling to find ways to increase my students' higher order thinking skills. I can feel the level of my students' engagement and motivation for learning decrease when I use a similar style of instruction too many times. For example, I have noticed some of my students became disengaged when they were asked to read and respond to a prompt on a worksheet. Blogging has given me another avenue for developing the literacy skills of reading, writing, and viewing because the students were motivated to learn and were engaged in the process. It also gave me an opportunity to instruct, model, and guide their thinking through scaffolding until the students were independent bloggers who developed their thinking at their own rate. As a result of reading my students' blog entries, I learned that students truly do learn best through Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist approach, where they take part in authentic learning opportunities by interacting with one another. I will use this new learning to develop

lessons and units with a focus on incorporating Vygotsky's approach to learning through social interaction because I know it develops the literacy skills of students.

Blogging Provides Authentic Learning and Teaching Experiences

Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist approach suggests that people learn best in social settings when they have opportunities to learn from one another through conversation. Used in this way, blogging provides a space for collaborating on ideas, problem solving, and learning to communicate with others.

This study provided me with an authentic learning experience to witness social constructivism in action as I watched my students to respond to one another using informal conversations. My students were able to independently generate and display their thinking in writing and respond to whatever posts they wanted, as opposed to being told who and what to respond to.

One example of this authentic learning experience was indicated by Mark in his final Quick Write (6/9/11) when he wrote "Blogging has helped me become a better thinker when responding to poetry because I can help and talk to other people about what the poem is about." He was describing how he had the opportunity to think about peer blogs to foster his thinking and enhance his understanding of poetry.

Blogging Develops 21st Century Literacy Skills

As indicated by Rotherman and Willingham (2009) and Rosen (2011), students of the 21st century have had access to digital media since birth. The 21st century requires students to learn through the means of computers, SMART boards, and other technologies (Rosen, 2011). Blogging has allowed the students to develop their reading, writing, and viewing skills when using digital media as opposed to just developing these skills using traditional tangible texts.

I have noticed that my students are engaged and motivated by digital media. My students begged each day to blog once we got started working on the unit. This increased motivation for learning by my students calls for me to integrate more technology into my instruction to ensure they receive the literacy skills necessary to be successful in a rapidly changing technological world. In order to truly prepare my students for the future in school and beyond, I need to stay current with how to use new technologies in my classroom to foster literacy learning. Due to my work with this study, I can now use blogging to provide my future students with new opportunities for literacy learning.

Blogging is a New Approach to Instructing Reading and Writing about Poetry

Fountas and Pinnell (2001), Calkins (2006), Tompkins (2008), and Harvey and Goudvis (2007) concur that reading and responding to literature, especially

poetry, in writing offers many benefits in developing the literacy skills of elementary-aged readers and writers. Prior to conducting this study, I had noticed that some of my students found poetry to be extremely stressful and difficult to read and understand. One student in particular, Joe, admitted to me at the beginning of the study that he “hated poetry because nothing makes sense.” At first, he was hesitant to participate because he thought other kids might “laugh at his writing” since it was published on the blog. After convincing him that blogging would be very exciting and not to worry about the poetry because we were going to learn from each other, Joe reluctantly agreed. By the end, the first thing Joe said to me each morning after “Hello” was “What poems can we blog about today?” I realized that blogging not only helped Joe get over his fear of writing for his peers, but it also created a genuine interest in him for reading and writing about poetry. Because of Joe, I will remember to use blogging as one approach with future students to help alleviate some of the stress that reading and writing about poetry may create.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following are questions and recommendations for future research that I believe could create a more complete understanding of how technology influences the development of students’ higher order thinking skills.

How Does Blogging Develop the Higher Order Thinking Skill of Creating when Responding to Poetry?

As indicated by Krathwohl (2002), creating is the highest level of thinking within Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. As defined by Hammond (2007), creating is "compiling information together in a different way by combining elements in a new pattern or proposing alternative solutions." According to Hammond (2007), students within the creating level of higher order thinking could be asked to invent something, modify current work, and design new investigations.

A future researcher or I could examine if and how blogging develops the higher order thinking skill of creating when responding to poetry. Students could generate their own poetry where they develop poems with themes and crafts that can be read and responded to.

What other 21st Century Technologies Can Be Used to Help Students Develop Higher Order Thinking Skills?

As indicated by Barone and Wright (2008), students need to be introduced to new technologies to prepare them for future learning opportunities since our world is changing at such a rapid pace. A few of the many examples of 21st century technologies that could be researched in regards to developing higher order thinking skills include social networking, SMART Boards, and eBooks. Familiarizing students

with different forms and uses of technology such as these set them up for a lifetime of success in school and at work.

How Does Blogging Help Students Develop the Higher Order Thinking Skills of Applying, Analyzing, and Evaluating when Responding to Multiple Genres of Writing?

In this study I only used the genre of poetry to determine how blogging developed higher order thinking skills. Future researchers or I could use several different genres to determine if blogging had the same effect on higher order thinking as it did with responding to poetry. Some of the genres of writing that could be responded to include: expository, narrative, journal, and persuasive. Researching the response to more genres could provide a more holistic understanding of how blogging influences the development of higher order thinking when responding to a vast range of literature.

Final Thoughts

It remains crucial that teachers prepare students with an understanding of how to use and apply technology to foster higher order thinking when responding to literature (Barone & Wright, 2008). I needed to begin the process of introducing and instructing my fourth grade students through the integration of multiple forms of

technology, one being blogging, in order to help keep them up-to-date and ready for new and current technologies that have recently entered our world or have yet to be invented. I believed that my students were falling behind the learning curve because I was not integrating technology into my literacy instruction. In order to help my students become life-long learners, I developed what I believed was an authentic opportunity for them to use the skills of applying, analyzing, and evaluating when blogging about poetry. This opened the door to new technologies that could be used to enhance their development as life-long learners, as well as a tool for educators to use when instructing students about higher order thinking.

As a result of this study, the students and I have found that learning to read and write can be fun and exciting as long as we are willing to use the tools and people around us to help develop as readers, writers, and thinkers. The students also realized that there are multiple ways of applying, analyzing, and evaluating text, specifically poetry.

Prior to the study, Joe struggled to formulate a response to Bob's question involving the moral from the story *The Beaver and the Muskrat* within the novel *Guests* (Dorris, 1994). Here, Joe was asked to respond to the question with no teacher support and without the opportunity to discuss the text with classmates. Had I provided Joe with the opportunity to discuss the text through Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist approach prior to being asked to respond, he may have been able to come up with a more critical response to Bob's question. Blogging could have

provided Joe the support needed within his Zone of Proximal Development to develop a thoughtful response (Vygotsky, 1978). The students and I now understand that our best resource when it comes to learning to read and write is each other.

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Appendix A: First Partner Literature Response

Guests by Michael Dorris

Name: Joe

Date: 2/11/11

1. What do you think Grandfather meant when he told Moss "Moss, you are all of us?"

Response: I think Grandfather meant that you like everyone one of us.

2. Why did Grandfather say "it will be a wonderful thing for us all to discover" when Moss asked what he should be as a man?

Response: I think Grandfather said that because of his trip in the woods.

3. Write a question or two for a classmate to answer.

Response : What do you think the story of "The Beaver and the Muskrat Women was all about?:"

Name of partner: Bob

Respond to the question(s) above (Bob's response to Joe's question above)

Response: I think it means that you get everything and check everything before you go.

Appendix B: Second Partner Literature Response

Guests by Michael Dorris

Name: Bob

Date: 2/11/11

1. What do you think Grandfather meant when he told Moss "Moss, you are all of us?"

Response: I think Grandfather meant that he is a Native American like his family, and that all Native Americans are similar.

2. Why did Grandfather say "it will be a wonderful thing for us all to discover" when Moss asked what he should be as a man?

Response: I think that Grandfather said that because he thought that it would be a wonderful thing to know.

3. Write a question or two for a classmate to answer.

Response : What was the moral of the beaver story?

Name of partner: Joe

Respond to the question(s) above (Bob's response to Joe's question above)

Response: The moral of the beaver story is about the Native American.

Appendix C: Pre and Post Assessment

Name: _____

Date: _____

Directions: Read and respond to the following poem.

A Writing Kind of Day

It is raining today,
a writing kind of day.
Each word hits the page
like a drop in a puddle,
creating a tiny circle
of trembling feeling
that ripples out
and gathers strength
ringing towards the stars.

Then it hit me,
Ma was my first word.
As if the word swam back
to where it all began.

-Ralph Fletcher

Appendix D: Initial Student Quick Write

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Describe what you know about how and why people use the Internet.

2. Describe what you know about blogging.

Appendix E: Second Student Quick Write

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Describe what you know about blogging.

2. Describe what evidence is and why you use it when responding to literature.

3. Describe the applying and analyzing levels of higher order thinking.

Appendix F: Final Student Quick Write

Name: _____

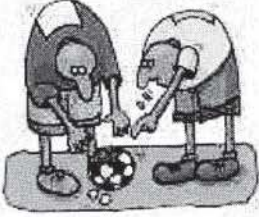
Date: _____

1. Describe the evaluating level of higher order thinking.

2. Describe how blogging **can** help you become a better thinker when responding to poetry.

3. Describe how blogging **has** helped you become a better thinker when responding to poetry.

Appendix G: Rubric for Higher Order Thinking Evaluation

|  | Level One | Level Two | Level Three |
|---|---|--|---|
| APPLYING | Develop questions about poems that do not foster higher level thinking; Does little to no responding to others' questions | Develop some questions about poems that foster higher level thinking; Attempts to respond to others' questions | Develop many questions about poems that foster higher level thinking; Responds to others questions with thorough explanations |
| ANALYZING | Response shows minimal use of inferring; fails to identify themes | Response shows some use of inferring; identifies minor themes | Response shows a high use of inferring; identifies major themes, connecting to real-life situations |
| EVALUATING | Opinions have little or no support | Opinions are supported with a few examples and reasons | Opinions are supported thoroughly with reasons and detailed explanations |
| EVIDENCE | Uses little to no evidence to support thinking | Uses some evidence to support thinking | Uses many pieces of evidence to support thinking |

Appendix H: Initial Interview Questions

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. How do you define poetry?
2. Why do you read poetry?
3. What is your favorite poem?
4. Why do you write poetry?
5. Tell me about a poem you wrote recently.
6. Do you think you are a good reader? Why?
7. Do you think you are a good writer? Why?
8. What do good readers do to help them comprehend poetry?
9. What does application (applying) mean?
10. What does analyzing text mean?
11. What does evaluating text mean?
12. How do good writers support their ideas and thinking?
13. How do you use computers and technology at school to help you read and write?

Appendix I: Second Interview Questions

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. How do you define poetry?
2. Why do you read poetry?
3. What is your favorite poem?
4. Why do you write poetry?
5. Tell me about a poem you wrote recently.
6. Do you think you are a good reader? Why?
7. Do you think you are a good writer? Why?
8. What do good readers do to help them comprehend poetry?
9. What does application (applying) mean?
10. What does analyzing text mean?
11. What does evaluating text mean?
12. How do good writers support their ideas and thinking?
13. How do you use computers and technology at school to help you read and write?
14. How did blogging help you use applying, analyzing, and evaluating skills when responding to poetry?

Appendix J: Writer's Notebook

Writer's Notebook

My brother Tom says he's a hundredaire
with two hundred fifty dollars
in his bank account.

Dad's a thousandaire.
I gave baby Julia two pennies
so now she's a pennyaire.

When I look at Julia
her little bald head
reminds me of the planet Earth.

I put that in my writer's notebook
to maybe write a poem later on;
it feels like money in the bank.

-Ralph Fletcher

Appendix K: Memory Loss

Memory Loss

It's not like losing a wallet,
or even your best friend.

Losing your memory is
losing yourself.

Each sentence Grandma speaks
makes me think of crossing a river.

She steps from word to word
until suddenly

she stops in the middle, disoriented.
Should she go back or keep going?

Mom takes Grandma by the hand
and helps her safely to the other side.

-Ralph Fletcher

Appendix L: Pinball

Pinball

Stuck in a pinball game
(a.k.a. middle school),
rolling through halls,
binked and bonked,
smacked and spun,
whirled and twirled
by rules, teachers,
ideas, assignments.

When the game is over
the machine flashes

10 HIGHEST SCORERS

but you'll never find
my name on that list.

-Ralph Fletcher

Appendix M: Bill of Sale

Bill of Sale

We read a poem
about a bill of sale
for a slave girl
named Lydia Wells.

She was sold for \$133
on July 18, 1858, to a man
named Samuel Rothrock.

Coming home on the bus
I kept picturing Lydia,
the same age as me,
her bare feet in the dirt,
standing in the hot sun,
sold like an animal
to the highest bidder.

In a country like America
how could this ever happen?
How can I go on with my life?

-Ralph Fletcher

Appendix N: Beanstalk Poem

Beanstalk Poem

I had a happily-ever-after
fairy-tale kind of plan.
I would toss a few words
onto some empty paper
and grow a magic poem
mighty as a beanstalk
that I would climb
to fetch the golden
egg: an A+ grade.
I had it planned out
but I didn't figure
my teacher
would find out
I copied the poem
from someone else
and my beanstalk
would get cut down
and I'd come
crashing
down
with
it.

-Ralph Fletcher

Appendix O: She Wrote Me a Love Poem

She Wrote Me a Love Poem

She wrote me a love poem:

*Whenever you smile at me
I feel tiny hot air balloons
rising inside my heart.*

It made me feel awesome
until a week later I found out

she gave the same exact poem
to a kid named Jamison Lee

so I guess my balloons popped.
It's like my cat Cleopatra

sweetly purring on my lap
like a symbol of world peace

until I go outside to find
the mouse she killed.

-Ralph Fletcher

Appendix P: Squished Squirrel Poem

Squished Squirrel Poem

I wanted to write about
a squished squirrel
I saw on the road
near my house last week.

You can't write a poem
about a squished squirrel,
my teacher said to me.
I mean, you just can't do it.

Pick a sunrise or an eagle
or a dolphin, he suggested.
Pick something noble
to lift the human spirit.

I tried. I really did. But I kept
coming back to that squirrel.
Did his wife send him out
to fetch some food or something?

There was blood and guts
but here's what really got me:
he had pretty dark eyes
and they glistened still.

You can't write a poem
about a squished squirrel,
my teacher insisted,
but I don't think that's true.

-Ralph Fletcher