

Expression and Communication: Blogging in the Adolescent Classroom.

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ABSTRACT

This study looked at how teachers use blogs in the adolescent classroom to build a sense of community and engage students in literacy practices. The participants were fifty-seven college students, ages 18 and 19, in a freshman-writing course at a mid-sized public university in Virginia. The students completed blog assignments for their course, which were printed and analyzed, and filled out a questionnaire about blogging. Observation of online interactions and analysis of the questionnaires suggested that blogging provides students with an easy, available and informal way to express themselves and connect with their classmates. Although, the study was originally focused on how teachers use blogs, the data pointed towards the benefits of student blogging, such as a sense of community. The students enjoyed writing informally about controversial topics and interacting with peers. More research should be done with blogging at different age levels, but the benefits ought to be present in most classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

I've had an online journal since before I ever heard the word "blog", I signed up for my first online journal eleven years ago. I was a thirteen-year-old with the need to get my voice out there, share my thoughts and feelings, and talk about my day. It was exciting because I could write whatever I wanted, people would read it and then let me know what they thought or ask me questions. It was comforting to know that there were people out there who were willing to listen to me and dialogue with me about anything. The writing in my online journal was personal, informal, and fun.

The topic of this study is the use of online resources, such as blogging, in the secondary classroom to motivate and engage students in literacy practices. Literacy encompasses the skills, abilities, and values necessary to communicate within society through reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Gee, 2001; Freebody & Luke, 1990; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Goodman, 2001; Meier, 2003). Literacy practices are inherently social as you interact with people by reading their words, and responding with writing your own. To be truly literate, a person must be able to effectively communicate with and respond to others in a socially acceptable and appropriate way (Gee, 2001).

Blogging is a recently popular form of communication and interaction on the Internet. People who write blogs can express their opinions and ideas in new ways and receive immediate responses and reactions from readers (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). Blogs provide opportunities to read, write, and interact with an audience that is engaged in what you have to say. Incorporating blogs and blogging into the classroom is important because it allows students to express themselves in different ways and formats and to respond immediately to their classmates' writing (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007; Howard-Bender & Mulcahy, 2007; Read & Fisher, 2005). This helps students to become engaged

and motivated in the literacy practices in the classroom by incorporating their out of school reading and writing skills.

According to Valkenberg and Peter (2007) and Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) the Internet is part of the social context for many students as they spend much of their time writing online in chatrooms, instant messages, and blogs. Students do not think that the writing that they do out of school is “writing”, the hated school-based task (Lenhart, et al, 2008). Connecting the reading and writing that students do outside the classroom to their academic writing can show them that writing does not need to be something to hate, it can be enjoyable. Blogging within the classroom allows teachers to build on the skills that students already have and practices that students already participate in.

According to the research already done on this topic, incorporating online resources, such as blogs, into the secondary classroom is a useful educational method and can be used to motivate students and create a sense of community within the classroom (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007; Read & Fisher, 2006; Lenhart, et al., 2008; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Ellison & Wu, 2008). Students can interact with one another and get to know each other through their writing and responses, as well as share their opinions on the topic given to them.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The sociocultural theory of literacy focuses on understanding the cultural context for students' growth, development and learning, with an emphasis on the social world in which learning and literacy are developed (Vygotsky, 1978; Street, 1995; Gee, 1992, 2001). Socioculturalists state that literacy is not an individualized process, but an interactive one affected by the culture that someone comes from and the relationships between the learner and the people surrounding him/her. Children learn language through their cultural upbringing and they acquire literacy by interacting with those around them (Vygotsky, 1978; Street, 1995; Gee, 1992, 2001; Luke & Freebody, 1999). Literacy is a social practice; a student becomes literate by being active in a literate society (Gee, 2001; Freebody & Luke, 1990; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Street, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). Communication and interaction are at the core of literacy. Sociocultural theory is the basis for many other theories, such as new literacies.

As the ways to communicate and interact change over time, so do the literacy needs and skills of students; the new literacies theory addresses this change. Lankshear and Knobel (2007) are at the center of this development and they state that we must look at new literacies in a "historical rather than temporal perspective" (p. 225), in that we are at a historical crossroads between the mechanical and digital technologies. If we were to focus on every new technology as it was created, it would be obsolete by the time we discussed it (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007).

New technologies or "new technical stuff" are only one key aspect of new literacies, the other is "new ethos stuff" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). Lankshear and Knobel (2007) define "new technical stuff" as the new applications on digital-electronic devices, and how these make it easy to create and share multimodal texts quickly and

without much (if any) cost. Examples of “new technical stuff” are machinima animations, music remixes, video/picture mash-ups and blogs, all of which are easy to create and share in the technology-driven Internet-based community.

Being familiar with and incorporating “new technical stuff” is not enough to encourage the development of new literacies, the qualities and values of the new literacies are necessary as well (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). This is where the “new ethos stuff” comes in. Lankshear and Knobel (2007) recognize that the new literacies incorporate contemporary social practices, which are participatory, collaborative and distributed. Everyone can express his/her opinion, ideas, and thoughts through digital technologies such as blogging, fanfiction or Wikipedia. A person does not necessarily have to be an expert in something to discuss it, which is a change from traditional views of information resources (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007).

People also work together to create and interact with multimodal texts using the new digital technologies; this collaboration is an integral part of new literacies. Lankshear and Knobel (2007) also discuss the distributed nature of new literacies, in that people can share their creations with people without having to go through an official publication process, they can “publish” their work and receive feedback immediately. New literacies must be based on the values of collaboration, sharing, and collective intelligence in order to work properly (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). Literacy has always been a social act, but with the introduction of new literacies, people get to work together to create multimodal, multifaceted works and to provide support and advice to each other instantaneously.

The theory of new literacies encompasses the ideas that I will be researching: the use of online resources, such as blogs, in the adolescent classroom. Research indicates

that the Internet provides adolescents with an audience and community of friends with which to share their writing and receive immediate responses (Black, 2005; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005). Blogging provides students with the opportunity to express themselves in a multimodal way (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). It also allows students to respond to and interact with one another as well as collaborating while discussing topics, such as current events. The Internet is part of the social context for many students as they spend much of their time writing online in chatrooms, instant messages, and blogs (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005).

Incorporating blogs into the classroom allow students to connect their out of school writing with their academic writing (Howard-Bender & Mulcahy, 2007; Read & Fisher, 2005). Blogging is a form of “new technical stuff” and also provides opportunities to practice the “new ethos stuff” such as participating, collaborating, and distributing, and thus is an excellent example of what new literacies stand for.

SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE

THE INTERNET: A PROVIDER OF COMMUNITY AND AUDIENCE.

Research indicates that the Internet provides adolescents with an audience and community of friends with which to share their writing and receive immediate responses (Black, 2005; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005). Valkenburg & Peter (2007) researched the reasons why adolescents mainly use online communication, and they found that it was a way for the adolescents to stay connected with current friends and continue to have close friendships. The online community of readers and writers allows adolescents to not only express themselves, but also to communicate with friends and people of similar interests. Black's research (2007) focuses on the online fanfiction community and its ability to help English-language learners acquire English literacy skills and also participate in social interactions with people of similar interests. Fanfiction is comprised of stories written by fans based on other people's creative work, such as TV shows or movies, the members of fanfiction communities are willing to read and critique their fellow fans' work (Black, 2007). This eager audience provides adolescents with someone who is interested in what they have to say and therefore they can express themselves in ways that they may not be able to in regular daily face-to-face interactions.

Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) agree that online interactions, especially online journaling, can bring a sense of community to students' lives through the comments, critiques and other responses to their journaling. If this sense of community can be brought into the classroom, then students will feel more likely to participate and openly discuss their opinions and thoughts without fear of ridicule. If teachers can bring students

out of school literacies into the classroom through use of online resources, then they will find that students are proficient at reading and writing, just in ways that are not always found in the traditional classroom.

BLOGGING AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL.

One way to bring online resources into the classroom is to incorporate blogs, a form of online journal, especially since research indicates that blogs can be useful educational tools that promote critical literacy (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Read & Fisher, 2006; Howard-Bender & Mulcahy, 2007; Ellison & Wu, 2008; Dixon, et al., 2005). Howard-Bender and Mulcahy (2007), along with Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) and Read and Fisher (2006) state that it is important to incorporate students' everyday literacies into the classroom and blogs are a way to do this. Adolescents spend much of their time writing online in chatrooms, instant messages, and blogs. Incorporating blogs into the classroom allow students to connect their out of school writing with their academic writing.

Adolescents should be allowed to write in alternative styles and formats, which may motivate them to enjoy writing in school more (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Read & Fisher, 2006). Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) do not think that students should be forced to write online journals for classes, but that providing students with the opportunities to write in alternative styles could motivate them. Read and Fisher (2006) suggest that if blogs cannot be brought into the classroom, then the teacher can provide students with blog-like opportunities: writing frequent, short, rough-draft quality pieces, allowing immediate peer response and allowing student-choice of the topic or format of the piece.

These opportunities allow students to express themselves in different ways and to enjoy writing both in and out of the classroom.

Ellison and Wu (2008) agree that blogging is a useful academic tool, but that students need to be provided with explicit guidance on how to define their positions, reflect on others' writing and how to use the digital technology in an effective manner. Teachers need to know how to use blogs effectively in order to provide instruction about the use of blogs to their students, so that blogging in the classroom is not just a fun activity, but also as an outlet for creativity and critical literacy. According to Ellison and Wu (2008), an important aspect of the blogging process that students need to be instructed on is responding respectfully to what others have said instead of just reacting instantly. This interaction is a pivotal part of the blogging process and online interactions in general; it is a way for people to receive immediate responses to their writing.

PERSONAL WRITING AS MOTIVATION.

A key aspect to blogging outside and inside of the classroom is personal expression and communication, which is a main motivation for adolescents to write according to research (Read & Fisher, 2006; Lenhart, et al., 2008; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005). Lenhart, et al (2008) found that adolescents have embraced written communication with their peers in many different forms, including social network websites, e-mails, instant messaging, texting, and blogging. The adolescents do not see this communication as "real" writing because they are writing for personal reasons (Lenhart, et al, 2008; Read & Fisher, 2006). Read and Fisher (2006) agree that adolescents are inherently motivated to write for their own reasons, and that teachers should try to tap into this motivations in order to inspire students to write. Providing

students with the choice of alternative formats can also be a motivation for them to write more in class (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005).

Personal writing is natural to students and school writing becomes unnatural when they are forced to write in a specific format on a specific topic, therefore varying the writing format can help them to express themselves in new ways that they enjoy (Read & Fisher, 2006; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005). Lenhart et al (2008) also found that adolescents are motivated to write by relevant topics, an interested audience and writing creatively. Blogging within the classroom can provide adolescents with all of these motivations through their choice in topics and formats, a respectful audience of their peers willing to provide them with respectful and useful responses to their writing, and the freedom to express themselves creatively.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Existing research indicates that incorporating online resources, such as blogs, into the secondary classroom is a useful educational method and can be used to motivate students and create a sense of community within the classroom (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007; Read & Fisher, 2006; Lenhart, et al., 2008; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Ellison & Wu, 2008). New literacies focuses on the use of new technologies, and the qualities and values of this new “technical stuff” such as collaboration and participation, which are integral to the blogging process (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). As such, this research asks, how can teachers of adolescents incorporate online resources, such as blogs, in the classroom to create a sense of classroom community and to engage students in literacy practices in and out of school?

METHODS

In order to answer the above stated question, the research involved qualitative methods including collection of documents (students' blogs), journaling, and questionnaires given to the students and teacher about the blogging experience. Details of the research protocol follow.

Context.

This study looked at the class blogs for a required freshman writing course at a medium-sized public university in Virginia. I selected this site because many blogs for high school classes were not interactive, and thus not useful for the study. I knew that the professor of this course was incorporating blogging into her coursework and that as a friend of mine, she would be willing to let me observe the usage of blogs in her classroom. Although this is a college class, it was appropriate to look at because the students are only one year out of high school and the method is appropriate for high school students.

Participants.

The participants were the fifty-six students and the professor of required freshman writing courses at a medium-sized public university in Virginia. The students ranged in aged from eighteen to nineteen years old.

Consent.

Introduction letters (Appendix A) and Informed consent forms (Appendix B) were mailed to the students and professor and returned to me by mail.

Data Collection.

Artifacts- The students' blogs and comments on their blogs were printed, time-stamped, and organized based on the class they were in. I focused on the writing that the students did and their interactions with one another.

Questionnaires- Questionnaires were mailed to the students (Appendix C) and professor (Appendix D) about the blogging experience. The results of these questionnaires were not anonymous to me because I mailed and e-mailed with the participants, and therefore I was able to compare their blogs to their opinions about blogging. The student questionnaires contained six questions and space for the participants to add any other information or thoughts on the topic of blogging. The professor questionnaire contained nine questions and space for additional thoughts or information about blogging.

Journaling- A study of blogging would not seem right without some journaling on my part, so I kept a personal journal in which I discussed my findings and reflected on the research process as well as what I found. This journal provided me with the opportunity to gather my thoughts and findings in one place.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This study was planned for a high school classroom using blogs, but through research, it was discovered that many high school teachers use blogs only as replacement classroom websites. They post homework assignments and the daily agenda, but there is no interaction with the students. This does not allow the students the opportunities to experience the different ways to write and use information through the Internet resources. Using a blog as a classroom website or essentially an Internet-based whiteboard barely scratches the surface of the uses of a blog. There is no interaction, no multimodal sharing of information and ideas, and the teacher is the only one using the blog.

EASE AND AVAILABILITY

As more and more people gain access to the Internet and various technologies, there has been a shift in society to more technology-based interaction. The Internet is part of the social context for many students as they spend their time writing online in chatrooms, instant messages, and blogs (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005). Johanna, a student, explained that the Internet is “the quickest and easiest form of communication for college students”. With the prevalence of technology, this form of communication is available to almost everyone, including students of every grade level. The students interviewed saw this as a great benefit while participating in the blogging assignments.

Students indicated that blogs are accessible to most people, and are easy to set up and use. Lana, a participant in the study, stated that “the Internet is a popular place and convenient for all users. It also saves paper and resources”. Many of the students

explained that it was possible to work on the assignments anywhere and therefore they “were able to exchange ideas and engage in conversation easily and at a personal computer on our own time” as explained by Alyson, another participant. This accessibility makes blogging an assignment that students view as easy and informal, and therefore not associated with the “boring” academic writing that they usually have to do for class. The assignments that Professor James created could be completed anywhere at anytime before the deadline and the students indicated that they enjoyed the convenience and informality.

Research indicates that it is important to incorporate students’ everyday literacies into the classroom and blogging is one of the ways to do so (Howard-Bender & Mulcahy, 2007; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Read & Fisher, 2006). Adolescents spend much of their time communicating with their friends online, and therefore blogging taps into this extracurricular writing. Students do not think that the writing that they do out of school is “writing”, the hated school-based task (Lenhart, et al, 2008). Professor James stated that she is “a firm believer that our computer world needs to be present in our academic world Excluding the net/other resources online would be ignoring a huge part of our students’ everyday operation”. Connecting the reading and writing that students do outside the classroom to their academic writing can show them that writing does not need to be something to hate, it can be enjoyable.

COMMUNICATION, INTERACTION, AND CLASSROOM COMMUNITY.

The data indicate that the participants found blogging to be an effective way of interacting and forming community within the classroom. One student described blogging as a “cool way to see what others think about things” while another said that

“it’s helpful to see how other students responded”. These opinions were echoed in most of the student questionnaires. The students not only enjoyed seeing what other people thought and were writing about, but they also enjoyed the fact that they could interact with one another.

Research indicates that blogging is a useful educational tool that can be used to motivate students and create a sense of community within the classroom (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007; Read & Fisher, 2006; Lenhart, et al., 2008). When asked if she thought that blogging helps to create a sense of community within the classroom, Professor James stated “I see it in comment exchanges that don’t always stick to the prompt topic; I love seeing students interact beyond the assignments because I know it will help cement the intimacy of our class conversations”.

An example of this sense of community within blog comments is when the students were writing about the controversial topic of legalizing marijuana. Someone from outside of the class responded to Lana’s blog entry in a nasty way, and Jodie defended her by saying that the responder could have disagreed with evidence instead of just attacking Lana. Jodie also supported Lana by saying “I think you have a good argument for your side”. This shows the connections that have been made within the class, which are an integral part of blogging. When asked about the benefits of blogging in the classroom, Jodie stated, “I do enjoy it [blogging] because you get to know your classmates better on a personal level and I feel like we are closer because of that”.

Throughout the six blog assignments, students shared personal connections and information with one another including feelings about the war in Iraq and family serving their country and other opinions that they may not have shared in normal classroom interactions.

Another aspect of interaction that blogging provides is the opportunity to respond to what people have written and share your analysis or evaluation of what they have said. The students agree that blogging is a good way to communicate with your peers, and allows a venue for debate and discussion. According to Lankshear and Knobel (2007), people who write blogs can express their opinion and ideas in new ways and receive immediate responses and reactions from readers. Charles, a student, stated that blogging “is a very good idea because it is like writing/peer evaluation all in one.” Through their comments, students can evaluate their peers writing as well as reacting to their opinions and the information that they wrote about. Blogging provides students with almost instant feedback from their classmates and professor, and a location for further discussion and debate beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION.

Students enjoy that blogging provides them with the freedom to say what they want without the fear of being penalized. Professor James chose to have the blogs be a participation grade, so that the students didn’t need to worry specifically about their grammar and spelling and thus could write freely. She encourages her students to write their personal thoughts and opinions on the assigned topics to be shared with their classmates. While filling out a questionnaire, Tim stated that blogging “was a beneficial experience in the sense that I was able to voice my own opinions about an issue without being penalized for it”. Students often feel that they must censor themselves in order to make the teacher happy, but with blogging, the writing is personal, so that they can write their true opinions about the topic. This is important, especially when the topic under discussion is controversial. Students need to feel that their opinions will not only be read,

but also accepted by their classmates and professors. Research has shown that many adolescents write regularly to communicate with their peers using online social networks, chatrooms, instant messages, and blogs, yet they do not see these practices as “real” writing because they are writing for personal reasons (Lenhart, et al, 2008; Read & Fisher, 2006). Incorporating blogs in the classroom can encourage students to enjoy the act of writing because it is personal, informal, and they are free to express themselves.

Professor James stated that she “found that more students usually appreciate the informal, relaxed setting of a blog to gain “easy” credit and practice putting their opinions into words”. Although three of the students stated that blogs were pointless because they were so easy, Taylor stated that she liked blogging because it keeps her “thinking and writing”. The “easiness” of the assignments helps to solidify the idea that the writing they are doing is not the academic writing that they are accustomed to, it is personal, informal, and fun. Many of the students mentioned the fact that the writing is informal and “more lax than a paper” and thus more enjoyable to them.

Another benefit of blogging that was mentioned by the participants in the study is that “it helps many students engage in class discussions if they are too shy to speak out in class” and that blogging “helps us to communicate things we may not be able to vocalized (shy people)”. Students sometimes feel embarrassed or self-conscious when speaking in class, if they are allowed to blog about what was discussed in class, it is just them and their computer, and they are free to express themselves without fear of judgment.

Grammar, spelling, and mechanics are important to written communication, but if a student doesn’t feel that they can express themselves freely, what is the point of the communication? Professor James does not grade the students’ blogs on their mechanics,

but on their participation, while looking at the content of their blogs. Providing students with opportunities to write informally and in alternative formats is a strategy that teachers can use to motivate students to write (Read & Fisher, 2006; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005). Blogging in the classroom provides this alternative format and opportunity for informal writing in order to keep students motivated and enjoying writing in class.

IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Currently most high school teachers only use blogs as static websites, but within the college community, professors have found ways to work around that. Professor James posts topic assignments at the beginning of the week and students have the rest of the week to write an informal response and react in comments to their classmates. This allows the students to participate in the blogging process and interact with their professor as well as their peers. Using blogs in a more dynamic way encourages students to participate in literacy practices on a regular basis.

Creating a community within the classroom is an integral part of helping students feel comfortable enough to express themselves (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005). When students feel personal connections with their classmates and teacher, they are more willing to share their feelings, participate in classroom discussions and connect to the material they are studying. Blogging provides students with the opportunity to interact with their classmates in and out of the classroom. Blogging can be used at any grade level to improve the sense of community the students feel. Being able to read what their peers are saying, respond to them and receive responses to what they write removes the alienating feeling of writing assignments. They get to know what their peers think about the topics under discussion and receive instant feedback on what they write. By reading

their students' blogs, teachers are able to learn more about their students as well as learning along with them through their discussion and debate on the topics at hand.

Getting students to enjoy writing is an integral part of an English Language Arts curriculum. It may not always work, but it should definitely be a goal. Students, at any grade level, should be provided with the opportunity to write what they think and feel without censoring themselves, because this will help them find their voice and also experience the benefits of true expression. The participants of the study felt that blogging was "easy to do" and therefore it didn't feel like the academic writing that they may struggle with. Students should also be allowed to write in various formats and lengths of writing, this helps to motivate them to write freely and more often. Blogging in and out of the classroom can provide them with these opportunities.

Bloggging within the classroom allows teachers to build on the skills that students have already obtained and the literacy practices that they already participate in. Most adolescents spend much of their time participating in online forms of communication (Valkenberg & Peter, 2007). The availability of computers and Internet access makes blogging an excellent way to extend student learning and class discussion out of the classroom. The students can communicate with their classmates while in the comfort of their own homes or the library. With the proper guidance from the instructor or teacher, students at any grade level could partake in blogging. Proper guidance includes instruction on how to blog, and how to respond appropriately to their peers' writing. If students do not have computers at home, trips to the computer lab or library could be arranged so that the students can write about the topic and respond to their classmates in real time. If they do have Internet access at home, they can participate in discussions at any time.

Even though they know that their classmates and teacher will see what they have written, the anonymity that typing allows them can help them “speak” freely without fear of interruption. If the sense of community that blogging can provide is not present within the classroom, it can be found outside of the classroom and give everyone a chance to speak up.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research should be done with blogging at every grade level, including middle school, high school, and even elementary school to see how the technology can be used with different aged students. Blogging can be used as a reflective personal journal, a place to write about the books you’ve read, or as a place to develop critical literacy skills. More research should be done to observe the various uses and forms blogging can take. This should also include researching different ways in which students can be held accountable for their blogging assignments. Looking into whether or not teachers should grade based on participation and content, or looking into the mechanics of writing as well would also be interesting. Research should also be done about blogging within all the content areas to see how it could be applicable in social studies, science, and math. Although blogging seems to be a mostly English Language Arts or literacy practice, it could be applied in any subject.

Bloggng can also extend the length of time that a discussion can take. Sometimes there just isn’t enough time in a class session for everyone to have a chance to express everything that they want to, especially if the topic is controversial. If the teacher brings up an interesting topic, but doesn’t have the time to hear from everyone, the students can use their class blogs to comment or participate even though they couldn’t in class. It would be interesting to research this use for blogging in and out of the classroom.

LIMITATIONS.

This study was limited by the long distance nature of the project; the students were in Virginia, I was in New York, which limited the interaction between participants and researcher. The blogs were obviously available online, so I could read what the students had written about the topics and to one another in comments, but I was unable to observe their classroom interactions and discussions. Due to the limited time of the study, I was unable to have the students fill out a follow-up questionnaire after the initial pre-blogging questionnaire. This would have provided more information about how the students reacted to the blog assignments and interactions. This study was also limited in that the original focus was supposed to be blogging in the middle or high school classroom, and although college freshmen are adolescents, the results may have varied at the appropriate grade level.

CONCLUSION

Originally, this study was going to look at how teachers of adolescents can incorporate blogs to foster a sense of community in the classroom and engage students in literacy practices in and out of school. The focus was meant to be high school classrooms, but due to the fact that many high school teachers use blogs as a replacement static classroom website, it was not worthwhile. Instead, the research turned to a freshmen college writing class as a place to focus on. Throughout the research, it was evident that the benefits and positive student reactions to blogging outweighed any drawbacks or negativity. Students found blogging to be an easy way to express themselves freely and interact with and connect to their peers outside of the classroom.

It is important in this technological age for educators and institutions to keep up with the times. Schools need to provide students with multimodal, interactive, and technological opportunities to engage and motivate them. Students spend much of their time participating in online interactions, reading and writing without complaining about it, and developing their literacy skills on their own without even realizing it. If teachers can bring these outside literacy skills and practices into the classroom, then the students will feel like their education is applicable to them and will be engaged in reading, writing and communicating. Blogs can be used in any classroom, any subject area, and with any grade level to encourage students to write on a regular basis and to create a sense of community within the classroom.

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APPENDIX A

1/23/09

Dear Participant,

Thank you very much for choosing to participate in my research study about blogging in the classroom.

My name is Suzanne Hally and I am a graduate student at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, NY. I am working towards my Master's degree in Literacy Education and this research study is my final thesis project or Capstone.

I chose to look at how online resources, such as blogging can be used in the classroom and found out about Professor Harness's use of them in her courses and decided to observe them.

All of my observation/interaction with you will be online or by snail mail—reading your blog assignments/comments and asking a few questions in questionnaire form.

In the study, your name will be replaced with a pseudonym to protect your identity and the focus on my study will be the instructional aspects of using blogs. When answering questions or participating in the study in anyway, please be honest and thorough, as there are no wrong answers.

If at anytime throughout the study, you wish to contact me, I have provided my e-mail address and cell phone number.

Thank you again for your time.

Suzanne Hally
suzi42@gmail.com
(585) 747-8517

Please read and sign the included consent forms and fill out the included survey and return one copy of the consent form and the survey in the pre-addressed and stamped envelope provided.

APPENDIX B

St. John Fisher College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM (for use with adults)

Title of study: ***How teachers of adolescents can use online resources, such as blogging, in the secondary classroom to motivate and engage students in literacy practices.***

Name(s) of researcher(s): ***Suzanne Hally***

Faculty Supervisor: **Gloria E. Jacobs, Assistant Professor, Literacy**

Contact for further information: suzi42@gmail.com or (585) 747-8517

Purpose of study: ***To observe the use of blogs within the classroom. I will be sending out one or two questionnaires, and perhaps some follow up questions through e-mail throughout the time of the study. I will be reading the blog assignments/comments that you post for this course.***

This study has been approved by John Fisher College.

Place of study: ***The Internet—specifically the blogs for Professor Harness’s courses.***
Length of participation: ***January-March, 2009***

Risks and benefits: **This study presents no risks to you. The benefits are the opportunity for improved teaching.**

Your name and the location of the research will be changed in order to protect your anonymity. All data will be kept in a locked location and accessible only to the researcher.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

Print name (Participant)
Date

Signature

Print name (Investigator)
Date

Signature

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 385-8034 or the Wellness Center at 385-8280 for appropriate referrals.

APPENDIX C

Pre-Blogging Questionnaire.

Demographic information (This information is for the researcher's use only, your personal information will not be reported with the results of your questionnaire, your name will be changed in the published study)

Name (*First only*):

E-mail Address:

Username on Blog website:

Age:

Gender:

Questions.

In your own words, define blogging or blogs:

Do you have a personal blog?

Have you ever blogged for a class before? What was that experience like? Did you enjoy it? Why or why not?

Do you think the Internet or online resources should/could have a place in the classroom (elementary, secondary, college-level)? Why or why not?

How often do you use computers/the Internet for communication purposes?

More than once a day. Once a day. 5-6 times a week.
4-5 times a week. 2-3 times a week. Once a week.

What forms of Internet communication do you use on a regular basis?
(*Circle all that apply*).

Blog. IM (Instant Messaging). E-mail. IRC.
Facebook. Myspace. Twitter.

Use the back of this page for any other comments about blogging in the classroom.

APPENDIX D.

Professor Questionnaire.

Demographic information (This information is for the researcher's use only, your personal information will not be reported with the results of your questionnaire, your name will be changed in the published study)

Name:
E-mail Address:
Username on Blog website:
Age:
Gender:

Questions.

In your own words, define blogging or blogs:

Do you have a personal blog?

What was the experience of having students blog in your class previously like? Did you enjoy it? Why or why not? What seemed to be your students' reactions to it?

Do you think the Internet or online resources should/could have a place in the classroom (elementary, secondary, college-level)? Why or why not?

How often do you use computers/the Internet for communication purposes?

More than once a day. Once a day. 5-6 times a week.
4-5 times a week. 2-3 times a week. Once a week.

What forms of Internet communication do you use on a regular basis?
(Circle all that apply).

Blog. IM (Instant Messaging). E-mail. IRC.
Facebook. Myspace. Twitter.

How did you decide to incorporate blogging in your coursework for your students?

What do you hope your students will gain from participating in blogging in your class?

Do you feel that blogging/commenting on each other's work helps to create a sense of community within your classroom? Why or why not?

Feel free to add any other comments about blogging (in our out of the classroom) on the back of the page: