

Carolyn Jeziorski  
Cairo American College  
[cjeziorski@cacegypt.org](mailto:cjeziorski@cacegypt.org)

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# HOT Blogging: A Framework for Blogging to Promote *Higher Order Thinking*

Lisa Zawilinski

Blogging is an easy way to begin preparing elementary students for the new literacies of the Internet.

It is Sunday evening. With a steaming cup of English Breakfast tea by her keyboard, Stephanie LeClair (pseudonym) navigates to the blog she recently set up for her classroom. She is curious to see what her fifth-grade students have posted over the weekend.

Stephanie, a dedicated literacy educator, had recently incorporated a response blog into her curriculum. She felt doing so would integrate writing in a way that supported reading. Stephanie posted open-ended prompts to her blog about *The Spiderwick Chronicles* by Holly Black and Tony DiTerlizzi (2003). The prompts invited students to share their responses. In addition to integrating writing to support reading, classroom blogging prepared students for the new literacies of the Internet (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, 2006; Leu et al., 2007).

Not having previously blogged herself, Stephanie began her journey by spending an hour with the school's technology teacher, Ms. Lowe (pseudonym). Ms. Lowe introduced her to *Edublogs*, at edublogs.org, one of the many free blogging sites for educators. By the end of the day, Stephanie had not only started her classroom blog but also started to connect in-school and out-of-school new literacies (Alvermann 2002; Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo, & Vacca, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2002).

The weeks progressed smoothly. Stephanie was posting regularly and her students were commenting on the prompts she posted. Quickly, however, she began to sense student interest waning. Comments were becoming more brief, superficial, and formulaic.

Stephanie was worried about this development. She decided to go to her students, to find out what they could do together to use the blog in more thoughtful ways. Stephanie started an online discussion on the class blog, and her students shared these comments:

"Can I put one of my poems up there?"

"I want to be able to post questions to the blog and have my classmates answer them."

"I really want to write about the book I am reading at home...not just what I think will happen next in *Spiderwick*."

These comments opened up important issues for Stephanie, issues that are essential for all of us to consider as the Internet enters our reading and language arts classrooms.

The purpose of this article is to explore ways in which blogs can support literacy programs, especially to develop higher order thinking (HOT) while reading and writing. First, I will provide an introduction to and a theoretical rationale for blogging. Next, resources and ideas will be shared to help spark possibilities for blogging in an intermediate-grade classroom. Four common types of educational blogs will be presented. Finally, HOT blogging, an instructional framework that uses a blog to develop higher order thinking, will be described.

## What Is a Blog?

A blog, short for weblog, is an easily editable webpage with posts or entries organized in reverse chronological order. Many different formats for blogs are emerging (Mortensen, 2008), and the features that are used depend on both the blogger and the tools provided by the blog host.

Typically, a blog consists of a header and two to three columns. Figure 1 depicts a simple three-column blog. The center column is often home to the most recent post (text entry) by the author. Reader comments (replies or responses to the author's post) on this blog can be found in the right-hand column. Blog comments can often be found immediately under the post to which the comments refer. The newest posts appear first, and all posts include both a title and date. The archive houses older posts and comments. This archive usually appears in the left- or right-hand column. The left-hand column in Figure 1 also includes a blogroll (i.e., links to other blogs or frequently visited websites) organized in list fashion and often by category. In this way, the author and interested readers can visit related blogs from one central location with ease.

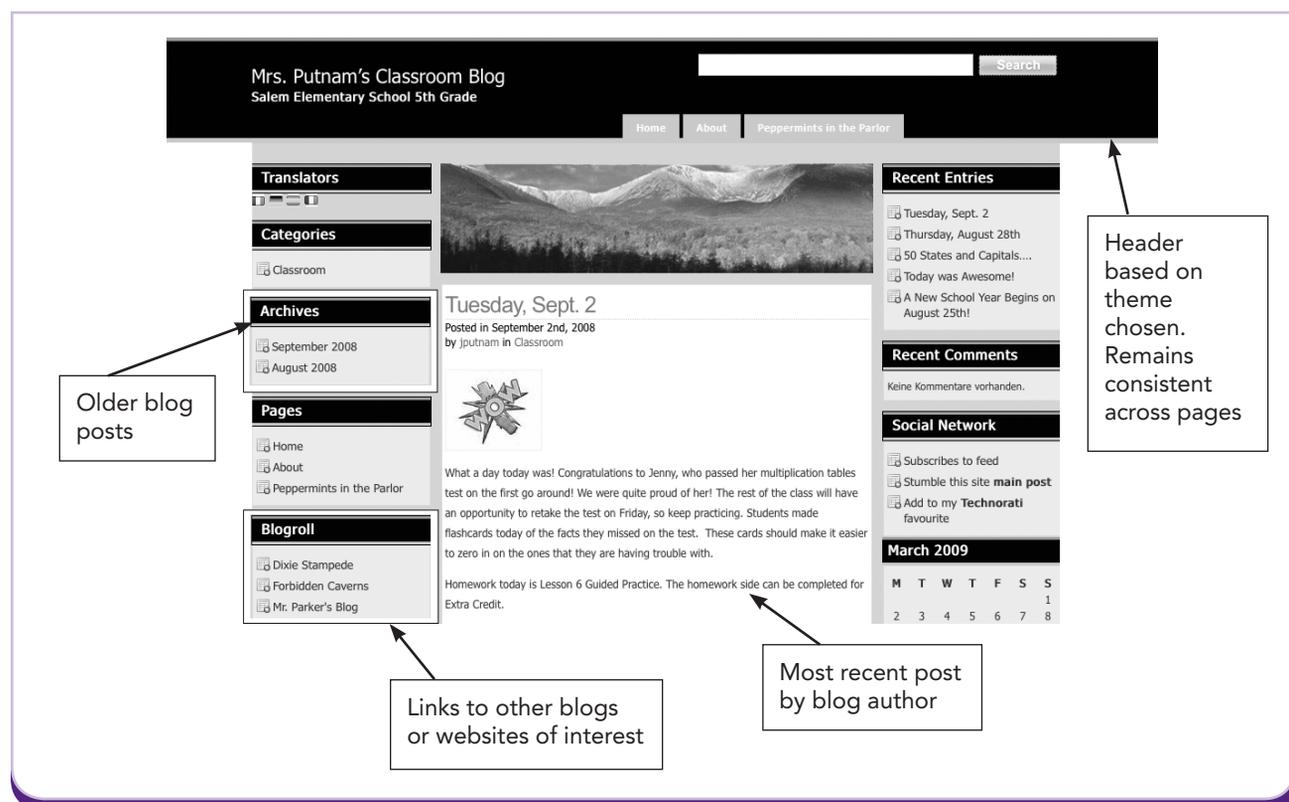
Blogs can have multiple pages. Pages and categories are two additional ways to organize posts and comments on a blog. These areas are similar to file drawers full of folders. Each page/category can hold links or posts related to a specific topic or student. A

teacher may assign a specific page of the blog to a single student. A parent searching for that student's writing would easily locate the writing on that student's page through a list of names in a side column of the blog. Similarly, a category for "artwork" might be created allowing readers to find all student posts across the blog related to artwork. Some additional features that blogs may include are language translators, calendars, and photo viewers. The blog's author, or blogger, determines which features are used.

## Why Bother Blogging: A Theoretical Rationale

The Internet is this generation's defining technology for literacy (Coiro & Dobler, 2007; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004; Leu et al., 2007). It is home to a continuously emerging set of new technologies for literacy such as search engines, e-mail, blogs, wikis, instant messenger, social networking tools, and many others yet to emerge. Each requires new skills and strategies. Schools need to prepare students for

**Figure 1**  
Simple Blog With Common Features



these new literacies by integrating them into the curriculum, and blogs are an easy way to begin.

Some believe that we simply need to place computers in the hands of our students, and they will learn what they need (Negroponte, 2006). Yes, many of our students can develop basic tool use without instruction. We see them on the Internet at home, communicating through instant messenger (Lewis & Fabos, 2005), blogs (Mortensen, 2008), and other online tools (Lenhart & Madden, 2005). One survey has reported that some 12 million adolescents aged 12–17 maintain their own blogs in the United States (Lenhart & Madden, 2005). However, simply using these tools does not predicate effective and efficient use. Howard Reingold (2006) summed it up well by describing our students in this way:

This population is both self-guided and in need of guidance, and although a willingness to learn new media by point-and-click exploration might come naturally to today's student cohort, there's nothing innate about knowing how to apply their skills.... (n.p.)

Furthermore, a blog does not simply develop communication skills. Instead, online communication has become an essential aspect of online reading comprehension (Castek et al., 2007). On the Internet, writing is intrinsically integrated with the reading comprehension process (Castek et al., 2007; Leu et al., 2007). As online readers gather information to solve a problem, they frequently analyze information, critically evaluate, synthesize across multiple texts and communicate with others using instant messaging, e-mail, blogs, wikis, or other communication vehicles (Leu, Kinzer, et al., 2004; Leu et al., 2007). These essential new literacies of online reading comprehension emphasize higher order thinking skills like analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Anderson, 2005; Bloom, 1956; Coiro & Dobler, 2007) and can be practiced through blogging.

Classroom blogs bridge the ever-widening gap between out-of-school literacies and in-school literacies (Alvermann, Huddleston, & Hagood, 2004; Hinchman et al., 2003). Most literacy educators work hard to provide authentic opportunities that attempt to break down those barriers. Broadening the audience for student writing and thinking, providing a space for collaborating outside of the typical classroom discussion, problem solving on the Internet,

and learning to communicate safely—all can be developed within the context of blogs.

Perhaps, however, the most cogent reason for classroom blogging comes from Mary Kreul, a teacher widely known for her online classroom work, from Richards School in Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin (Leu, Leu, & Coiro, 2004). When asked, “Why should educators take the time to blog?” Ms. Kreul replied,

I think the biggest advantage to blogs is that they provide an authentic audience for student writing and work in general. In the past the teacher was usually the only person who read student work. With a blog, student work can be read by classmates, parents, extended family members, school community members, project partners, classroom teachers, pre-service teachers, and anyone around the world who locates the class blog. (Personal correspondence, December 2008)

## Four Common Types of Blogs Found in Elementary Classrooms

Some of the most common types of blogs being used in schools today are Classroom News Blogs, Mirror Blogs, Showcase Blogs, and Literature Response Blogs. Blogs often incorporate more than one of these primary functions and, given the creative minds of effective teachers and the rapidly changing nature of literacy on the Internet, many more types will emerge.

### Classroom News Blog

Many classroom blogs are used to share news and information with parents and students. Often, this is the first type of blog a teacher will use (Richardson, 2006). Teachers update classroom news blogs on a regular basis, posting homework assignments, providing updates on curriculum for parents, and sharing any other information that could benefit the home–school connection. Examples of a classroom news blog can be found in Table 1.

### Mirror Blogs

Mirror blogs allow bloggers to reflect on their thinking—hence the mirror metaphor. A teacher may post a response about a workshop recently attended, sharing insights gleaned. While reading a new professional book on literacy, a blogger might post quotes or

**Table 1**  
**Classroom News Blog Examples**

Classroom news blogs	URL
Mary Castle's first grade blog	<a href="http://michellesmelter.blogspot.com">michellesmelter.blogspot.com</a>
Mr. Thompson's second grade classroom blog	<a href="http://gcs.infostreamblogs.org/tthompson">gcs.infostreamblogs.org/tthompson</a>
Mary Kreul's 4th grade class	<a href="http://mskreul.edublogs.org">mskreul.edublogs.org</a>
Mr. Monson's grade 5 blog	<a href="http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=59644">classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=59644</a>
TAS grade 3 ESL	<a href="http://grade3esl.blogspot.com/2008/08/welcome-to-20082009-school-year.html">grade3esl.blogspot.com/2008/08/welcome-to-20082009-school-year.html</a>

Note. These blog URLs were correct at the time of publication but could change due to the dynamic nature of the Internet.

compelling new ideas found in the book to a mirror blog. Many teachers are not only posting their own reflective thinking but also include student reflections as well. Student comments of this type might include thoughts about lessons or content learned. Mirror blog examples may be found in Table 2.

### Showcase Blogs

Many teachers use blogs to post student art projects, podcasts (audio clips), and writing in showcase blogs. Of particular interest are the ways in which second language learners can use these spaces to write and respond in their second language in more authentic ways and for more authentic audiences. *Have Fun with English! 2* is an Edublogs award winner where

students from Portugal practice their English. The blog is a combination of student and teacher writing, artwork, and even audio messages from students. Many of the blog posts are student podcasts describing their day with the written text just underneath. Table 3 provides additional examples.

### Literature Response Blogs

Literature response journals are common in elementary classrooms. A literature response blog simply moves this idea online where the teacher may sometimes post a prompt and invite student responses to a text. Using blogs to bridge a familiar “in school” activity with this “out of school” tool provides students with a different medium for literature response

**Table 2**  
**Mirror Blog Examples**

Mirror blogs: teachers	URL
Edublogs Insights	<a href="http://anne.teachesme.com">anne.teachesme.com</a>
The Miss Rumphius Effect	<a href="http://missrumphiuseffect.blogspot.com">missrumphiuseffect.blogspot.com</a>
Cal Teacher Blog	<a href="http://calteacherblog.blogspot.com">calteacherblog.blogspot.com</a>
<b>Mirror blogs: students</b>	
Carol Marits' grade four class	<a href="http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=119124">classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=119124</a>
Brian Crosby's 6th grade class	<a href="http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=65078">classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=65078</a>

Note. These blog URLs were correct at the time of publication but could change due to the dynamic nature of the Internet.

**Table 3**  
**Showcase Blog Examples**

Showcase blogs	URL
Have Fun with English! 2	fwe2.motime.com
Ms. Cassidy's grade one classroom blog	classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=1337

Note. These blog URLs were correct at the time of publication but could change due to the dynamic nature of the Internet.

(Boling, Castek, Zawilinski, Barton, & Nierlich, 2008; Williams, 2005).

An extension of an individual literature response post is a collaborative post. Collaborative blog posts may be especially useful. They require students to negotiate among multiple perspectives about what is most important to share. This type of teamwork is necessary in our global economy (Friedman, 2005; New London Group, 1996) and may serve to increase each student's awareness of effective writing strategies. Examples of literature response blogs are listed in Table 4, and an example of a collaborative response blog entry—from Ms. Kreul's class blog—appears in Figure 2.

## Beginning to Blog

Here is a simple four-step process for beginning the blogging journey:

### Step 1: Explore Examples at a Central Site

Visit two central sites with examples of educational blogs to gather ideas for a classroom blog: *Class*

*Blogmeister* (classblogmeister.com) or *The Edublogs Awards* (edublogawards.com) are good choices. At the former site, hundreds of different teachers have set up their own classroom blogs. At the *Edublogs* site, blogs that have been voted “the best of” in a variety of categories over the past few years can be explored.

### Step 2: Locate Additional Classroom Blogs With a Search Engine

Use a search engine to locate and study frequently visited classroom blogs on the Internet. With Google or Yahoo type the following terms: *blog, classroom, fifth OR 5th grade*. This combination of search terms will locate many fifth-grade blogs. The most frequently visited and linked-to sites will appear on the first few pages of results; these are blogs that other teachers often visit to get new ideas for their own classrooms.

### Step 3: Select a Blog Provider

There are a number of different providers to choose from. Most are free. Creating one class blog for all

**Table 4**  
**Literature Response Blog Examples**

Literature response blogs	URL
Mary Kreul's Class Blog	mskreul.edublogs.org/tag/lit-circles/
Bearup's Bloggers (fourth grade)	classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=128294&id=1225156782
English Corner (sixth grade)	classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=17192

Note. These blog URLs were correct at the time of publication but could change due to the dynamic nature of the Internet.

**Figure 2**  
**Literature Response Blog Post**

**OCTOBER 23, 2007 02:23 PM**

**Pinkie Gladys Gutzman**

By Katie, Susan, Charlie, and Brooks

Do you know a kid named pinkie Gladys Gutzman? We do! We read *June B. Jones is a Beauty Shop Guy* by Barbara Park Illustrated by Denis Brunkus.

In the first chapter, Junie B. decides to change her name. She gets really excited and runs into the kitchen to tell her mom and dad her new name, which is Pinkie Gladys Gutzman. Her first name is from her favorite color. Her second and third name is from her snack lady at school.

You should really read this book because it has a lot of suspense and humor. Barbara Parks writes this book from a perspective of a kindergartner, which makes it a fantastic book to read! This book will give you nothing but laughs out loud. You should really read this book!

We recommend this book to kids K5 with a parent or first through fourth grade without a parent. We really think that you will love this book. Will Junie B. listen to her father and not cut her hair or will she? Pinkie Gladys Gutzman says good-bye~

Posted by marykreul at 02:23 PM in [Book Reviews](#) | [Permalink](#)

Note. Post retrieved from [mskreul.edublogs.org/2007/10/23/pinkie-gladys-gutzman/](http://mskreul.edublogs.org/2007/10/23/pinkie-gladys-gutzman/)

students to post to may be the most efficient way to begin. Once students develop confidence and expertise using the classroom blog, some blog providers offer an option to add individual student blogs, which can also be moderated. Table 5 lists some of the most common providers for classroom blogs. Technology support personnel can help determine if the blog will be accessible in school and whether blogging is consistent with the school's policies. Additionally, check to see that blogging or communicating via the Internet is listed within the school's Acceptable Use Policy. If not, secure parental permission for student blogging.

#### **Step 4: Set Up the Blog**

Visit the website for the blog provider chosen and follow the steps to sign up. Blog owners have many choices. With some blogs, the owner has complete control over viewing, posting, and commenting. A teacher may wish to allow only students with a teacher-assigned password to read and post to the blog. An option to moderate and approve comments before the comments appear may also be of interest. These options and others are clearly explained in video tutorials found at [edublogs.org/videos](http://edublogs.org/videos).

While the steps to starting a blog are basic, please keep in mind that exploring options for classroom blogging and initial blog set-up will take time. With any new tool or curriculum, an initial time investment is typical. However, as familiarity and comfort grow, time demands diminish. Additionally, the extra time is well spent given the new opportunities to develop higher order thinking skills afforded through blogging.

### **HOT Blogging: A Framework for Higher Order Thinking**

HOT blogging develops higher order thinking around the new literacies of online reading comprehension (Castek et al., 2007; Coiro, 2003; Henry, 2006; Leu et al., 2007). The approach consists of the following four recursive steps:

1. Bolster background
2. Prime the pump
3. Continue the conversation
4. Make multiplicity explicit

Each step integrates both traditional reading comprehension skills and the new, higher order

**Table 5**  
**Classroom Blog Service Providers**

Blog provider	Features
Edublogs for teachers edublogs.org	Provides free, ad-free blogs for teachers at no cost. Students may comment if the teacher allows this. Especially helpful video tutorials for initial set up.
Edublogs for students edublogs.org	Provides free, ad-free student blogs at no cost. Each has an independent blog. Recommended for intermediate grade levels and higher.
21 Classes Cooperative Learning www.21classes.com	Provides free, ad-free blogs for teachers and students. Each student blog accessible from main portal. Communicate with all students simultaneously through main portal. Recommended for intermediate grade levels and higher.
ePals SchoolBlog www.epals.com/products/esb	Free to educators. Searchable archives allow past postings to be easily accessed. Design templates include calendars, surveys and classroom-only, parents-only, and public areas.
Landmark's Class Blogmeister classblogmeister.com	Free to educators. Connects teachers to a variety of blogs at different grade levels. Easy to search for blogs by grade bands. Student pages/blogs can be created by teachers.

Note. These blog URLs were correct at the time of publication but could change due to the dynamic nature of the Internet.

thinking skills often required during online reading comprehension.

As students read online and off, HOT blogging allows them to share diverse perspectives and exchange information with one another on the Internet. This supports the development of online comprehension and communication skills and creates a collaborative learning community that builds a deeper and broader understanding across the curriculum. HOT blogging provides opportunities for questioning texts, thinking critically about an author's message, and synthesizing across diverse perspectives—all higher order thinking skills.

Traditionally, dialogue journals have proved a useful tool for capturing exchanges that serve to deepen comprehension of text (Atwell, 1998). Moving this instructional practice onto a blog allows us to widen our audience for students, minimize the demands on the classroom teacher, and maximize the comprehension of texts. The four, recursive steps in the HOT blogging framework adapt dialogue journal approaches to the Internet to help students develop rich conversations through both talk and written text.

### ***Bolster the Background***

During this first stage, teachers post activities and questions on the blog designed to build background knowledge about the selection that students are reading. Then, students read online to locate, critically evaluate, synthesize information, and communicate their ideas by posting what they have found to the blog, inviting others to comment.

For example, before reading *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry (1990), blog comments can invite students to locate three sites or other resources that could help their classmates prepare for reading and understanding the book. These resources help all students to build background knowledge and prepare them for reading the text.

Building background knowledge is important because students with greater prior knowledge about a text are in a better position to understand it more deeply (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). All readers use their existing knowledge and a range of cues from the text and the situational context to construct a mental model of meaning from the text (Pressley, 2000; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). Research also suggests that students with greater

prior knowledge remember more, are better able to determine what is important in the text, and use that knowledge to draw inferences from and elaborate on the text to achieve higher levels of comprehension (Afflerbach, 1990; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Once background has been built, students are ready to prime the pump.

### **Prime the Pump**

During prime the pump, blogging can help students think deeply about the background they have built and what they have read in the beginning chapter(s) of the text to share an initial interpretation (Langer & Close, 2001). One approach is to post an invitation to students to share any of the following types of thinking:

- Confusions that may need to be clarified
- First impressions of the characters or story line
- A summary of what has been learned so far
- Connections to themselves, other texts, or the world

A final aspect of prime the pump is to require students to read what others in the class have posted to prepare for a conversation. Instead of having students tell their own thoughts in a small group or class discussion, they should share *other* students' comments from the blog. This approach to starting the conversation holds students accountable for reading and considering their classmates' perspectives right from the start. During the discussion, students should jot notes from the conversation to help them in the next stage of the HOT blogging framework: continue the conversation.

### **Continue the Conversation**

In this stage, students begin to summarize and synthesize understanding across multiple textual units. While thinking about the novel they are reading, the blog posts by other students, and the group/class conversation, students are asked to synthesize what has been shared and learned. Synthesizing is more than simply summarizing though; it involves original thinking (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000) and requires the use of higher order thinking skills (Anderson, 2005; Bloom, 1956). Synthesis can be challenging for both the teacher to teach and the students to practice.

Partially completed outlines or guides can help. The guide in Figure 3, for example, provides a scaffold for students as they begin to synthesize across many pieces of text to craft a new response.

Students should work in pairs while crafting synthesis comments since this can prove especially supportive. With this and during earlier stages in this framework, good models and teacher think-alouds will support the development of better student work.

The synthesis process can occur at any point in the text and can be used multiple times in the course of reading a novel or reading online. Reading through student blog posts with a critical eye will help teachers determine the amount of practice students need with synthesis. The following are questions on which to focus assessments of student blog posts:

- Do the posts include a summary of other students' blog posts or discussion comments?
- Do the posts include any new thinking?
- Are the posts well organized and focused?
- Do the posts reflect inferential thinking that moves beyond simple recall?

### **Make Multiplicity Explicit**

Multiplicity is made explicit by inviting students to read, think, and comment on the classroom blog. Students regularly encounter how differently their classmates think from one another. When different ideas are expressed, students are supported in thinking deeply about diverse beliefs and positions (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). This too, is a type of evaluation or higher order thinking skill, which requires more than simple summaries or retells. Often, this phase may be initiated by a prompt provided by the teacher or by using a comment a student posted previously and asking all students to address that issue. This will draw out the many interpretations that may exist. As students encounter multiple perspectives, they will also see how important it is to support one's perspective. To convince someone with a differing point of view, evidence and clear explanations become necessary.

Crafting a response that includes evidence is not often easy. As with earlier stages in the framework, a teacher think-aloud while constructing a well-supported comment will increase the likelihood of students learning how to support their comments with evidence. Figure 4 shows how a teacher modeled the

**Figure 3**  
**Starting to Synthesize—Synthesis Scaffold**

**Synthesis scaffold—Thinking across text for deeper understanding**

My thoughts	Comments from _____	Comments from _____	Comments from _____
Copy and paste your blog comment here	Copy and paste a classmate's comment here	Copy and paste another classmate's comment here	Jot some notes from your group/class discussion

Ask yourself this, How are my classmates' comments the same or different from mine? In the chart above, circle ideas that are the same as yours. Box the ideas that are new or different. *When reading fiction, categorize these similarities and differences by Characters, Setting, Plot, Problem/solution or Themes:*

Now, take a few minutes to THINK about any NEW ideas you have about the text. You might choose to think about your classmates' comments, and share your thinking about their ideas below:

Finally, combine your writing from the two boxes & paste it below. Voila! You've synthesized across multiple texts!

use of evidence, from both personal experience and from the text, to support the point of view expressed in a blog comment. Students were posting about the book, *How to Eat Fried Worms* by Thomas Rockwell (1973).

Once students post their interpretations with evidence, the cycle of reading begins again.

Students read their classmates' responses, noting which are similar and different and in what ways, and these responses show students how diverse perspectives can further deepen and enrich one's own thinking. Teachers may need to demonstrate how this is possible by thinking aloud. Alternatively, students can return to the synthesis scaffold in Figure 3. The scaffold can focus their thinking on the different opinions classmates have about the issue or event.

## Literacy Teaching and Learning Captured Through the HOT Blogging Framework

The skills and strategies required within the HOT blogging framework support a number of IRA/NCTE (1996) Standards for English Language Arts. Indeed, HOT blogging is an effective way to integrate the standards within a curriculum. When students read webpages and posts on blogs in addition to classroom texts, they “read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world” (p. 19). As students synthesize across websites and blog posts, they “gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and

**Figure 4**  
**A Teacher Demonstrating a Critical Point of View Along With the Use of Evidence During A Blog Post**

Initiating prompt, posted on blog:

"If you were Billy, would you have eaten the fifteen worms? Why or why not?"

1. Restate the question and indicate who posted it.

*Ms. L asked if I would have eaten the 15 worms if I was in Billy's shoes.*

2. State your opinion.

*There is no way I would have eaten 15 worms.*

3. Provide multiple reasons to support your opinion.

*It is sickening. Also, it might make me throw up. Finally, my real friends would never ask me to do that.*

4. Use evidence from the reading selection and include page numbers so that others can refer to you evidence.

*I wonder why Joe didn't stop Billy from doing this (see p. 59). None of my friends would ask me or bet me about something so gross. Your true friends don't make you do things like that.*

Note. Prompt based on the reading of the book *How to Eat Fried Worms* (Rockwell, 1973).

non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience, and [they] use a variety of technological and information resources" (pp. 27–28). While writing for themselves and others they "employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes" (p. 25). When discussing the posts and the variety of perspectives found within, they "apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts" (p. 22). These standards and the HOT Blogging framework require the higher order thinking in which we want all our students to engage.

## Stephanie's Story

One final week remained in the school year. It had gone quickly, as all good years do. Stephanie noticed that only a few loose tea leaves remained in her cup during another reflective Sunday at home. The tealeaves reminded her, somehow, of her students' comments from earlier in the year. Their ideas had prompted many new discoveries about the possibilities blogs hold for literacy learning.

## Showcasing Student Work

"Can I put one of my poems up there?" In response to this student request, Stephanie set up a new page within her classroom blog, called *Our Best*. This was

a place where students could publish their writing and artwork: a showcase for student work. She knew her students would benefit from a broad audience for their work, so she made this area of the blog available to anyone. She was somewhat apprehensive about doing so, but she set the blog's permissions to require her approval before any comments appeared on the blog. She invited students to share the blog address with family and friends, so they could see their "published" pieces and receive comments. She was amazed at how many people provided thoughtful comments. Parents and grandparents, especially, posted many wonderful comments about work that appeared here. The demand from her students to publish their work at *Our Best* made the creative juices flow in their classroom.

## Asking Their Own Questions

"I want to be able to post questions to the blog and have my classmates answer them." This idea reminded Stephanie of a basic principle from reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984, 1989)—that turning over the questioning process to students helped them to question the author better during reading and increased comprehension. Stephanie began setting up individual blogs, within her account. Next, she invited small groups of students, each week, to develop the best higher level question they could for the class from the book the class was reading and post it at one of their individual blogs. The class then

commented at the individual blog, just as they had at Stephanie's blog earlier. This prompted much deeper thinking about the story than even Stephanie might have accomplished.

### Posting About Outside Reading

"I really want to write about the book I am reading at home...Not just what I think will happen next in *Spiderwick*." Stephanie smiled as she remembered this comment. On their individual blogs, students were encouraged to post about their interests and outside reading. A number of students quickly started sharing their outside reading experiences at their blogs. Others would visit these posts to gather ideas for new books to read and new online resources that provided extensive information about the book and the author. This, as much as anything, convinced Stephanie that blogging was changing the social practices around literacy in her classroom.

### HOT Blogging Reflections

Stephanie thought, too, about her use of HOT blogging this year. Her use of this framework provided an important structure to increase higher order thinking in the books her students read. It was clearly visible. She thought this might have come from the increased use of online resources that students were reading as she frequently used the bolster the background and prime the pump steps at repeated points during the reading of a selection. As students gathered and shared online information about the topic, they had to synthesize across sources including classmates' posts. This seemed to make them think more deeply about the story selection they were reading. This was especially evident when she compared her students' initial blog posts to the ones at the end of the year.

Yes, it had been a very good year. Stephanie put on another pot of tea.

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*Zawilinski is a doctoral student at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, USA; e-mail lisa.zawilinski@uconn.edu.*

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### The Influence of Classroom Blogging on Elementary Student Writing

Ewa McGrail<sup>a</sup> & Anne Davis<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA

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# The Influence of Classroom Blogging on Elementary Student Writing

Ewa McGrail and Anne Davis

*Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia*

Blogs in classrooms represent a new approach to teaching writing that is developing and changing daily. Although some scholarly literature explores the use of blogs in educational settings, the blogs are primarily being used at the secondary and college levels. The purpose of this qualitative case study research was to explore how blogging influenced student writing development at the elementary level. Fifth-graders' pre- and post-blogging project writing samples, as well as other student blog posts, were the primary data. A qualitative data analysis process was applied to explore the following areas of interest in student writing: attitude, content, voice, connections and relationships, thinking, and craft. The findings indicate that student bloggers became mindful of and connected to the audience, exercised agency in a community of bloggers, and learned to take ownership of the writing process and the writer's craft. Refraining from putting a heavy focus on corrected writing conventions during this formative time of writing development enabled students to concentrate on writing, which they filled with opinions, humor, expression, and playfulness as they learned to rethink their concepts of writing and its meaning in their lives.

**Keywords:** writing, technology, literacy, education, blogging

The use of blogs in classrooms represents a new approach to teaching writing that is developing and changing daily. When they are focused on student writing growth, blogs can bring different dynamics into the classroom as writing becomes public, participatory, and continually developing (Boling, 2008; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Penrod, 2007). The scholarly literature exploring the use of blogs in educational settings is primarily directed at their use in secondary school and college (Boling, 2008; Williams & Jacobs, 2004). Studies have supported the value of blogs for reflection (Ray & Hocutt, 2006), classroom dialogue (Khourey-Brown, 2005), and social networking (Efimova & de Moor, 2005). However, there is less research on the efficacy of blogs in writing development at the elementary school level (Glewa & Bogan, 2007), even though studies have been published recognizing their effectiveness for writing in other disciplines (Dieu, 2004; Hogg, Lomicky, & Hossain, 2008). The purpose of this research was to explore how blogging influenced student writing development at the elementary school level. This article describes the findings from this exploration and includes recommendations for writing pedagogy.

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Address correspondence to Ewa McGrail, Associate Professor of Language and Literacy, College of Education, Georgia State University, 30 Pryor Street, Atlanta, GA 30303. E-mail: emcgrail@gsu.edu

## BLOGGING AS WRITING LITERACY FOR SCHOOLS

Blogging brings outside school literacy practices into the classroom (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005) and has the potential to become a literacy, not a technology, issue in schools (Leu, 2005). This is true because such technology “capitalize[s] on the strengths of authentic writing, the power of the writing process, and the engagement of collaborative writing” (Boling, Castek, Zawilinski, Barton, & Nierlich, 2008, p. 504).

Blogs also can facilitate literacy development through storytelling and dialogue, because their format encourages self-expression and recounting of personal events to the blogger community in nonverbal formats (Huffaker, 2005). Viewed in this way, blogging is about communication and interaction. Because much of this conversation in the school context is grounded in the curriculum and about critical thinking in student learning, it also needs to be seen as an academic practice, which is different from blogging for merely personal purposes (Boling, 2008).

Much of personal blogging is about sharing items of interest, news, and personal information (Williams & Jacobs, 2004). Although sharing news and personal insight are important to academic blogging, like Williams and Jacobs (2004), we believe that there is much more to it when adopted for classroom practice. Academic blogging provides a space for modeling and developing the literacy processes, critical thinking, reflection, questioning, and social practices engendered by this communicative technology (Merchant, 2005).

Most importantly, it offers a place for writers to develop and refine their ideas. Davies and Merchant (2007) described this process as the “discussion of ideas in embryo” (p. 170). Viewed in this way, blog writing is also a place to develop and nourish a community of writers who keep their readers in mind (Davis & McGrail, 2009). This is fostered by the unique collaborations and relationships that academic blogging enables (Miller & Shepherd, 2004).

## WRITING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

Process-oriented writing researchers and educators, such as Donald Graves (1983), Lucy Calkins (1994), and Ralph Fletcher (2000), suggest that young writers learn to write by writing, that young writers need to understand their writing processes to develop strategies for monitoring and improving their own writing, and that writing development occurs over time.

Research also suggests that young writers need to learn to comprehend and use, to their benefit, the reader-writer relationship and audience expectations as they make meaning for their readers (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). An awareness of the audience can correlate to the quality of writing (Corden, 2007). Barritt and Kroll (1978) argued that good writers have a very clear picture of the audience and write for it, whereas poor writers lack such awareness, which leads them to focus on the self, losing other peoples’ points of view. We know that writing is as much an individualistic process as a social one (Vygotsky, 1978). The latter process is an artifact of collaborative knowledge creation (Bruffee, 1984). Writers write for others, and they need their readers’ feedback to continue to refine their ideas and craft.

Although conceived in reaction to traditional product-oriented rhetoric (Crowley, 1996), the process-oriented epistemologies of writing and writing development (Dorn & Soffos, 2001) do not negate the importance of the product: the outcome of the writing itself. Rather, they bring a balance to the product-centered pedagogies that tend to overemphasize the teaching of grammar

and style at the cost of content and idea development. Effective writing instruction gives attention to idea development and content (Graves, 1983) and creates opportunities for authentic writing tasks and interaction with a real audience (MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2005).

Although educators and classroom teachers endorse many of the findings from this research, they often struggle to implement them in their elementary classrooms. The obstacles are many and diverse. Standardized testing associated with the No Child Left Behind Act and its emphasis on reading, rather than writing or literacy, pushes teachers into a culture of formulaic writing (Kixmiller, 2004). It also deemphasizes process-oriented authentic writing activities, including brainstorming, conferencing with others, and multiple revisions (Applebee & Langer, 2009). In a recent study of writing instruction in the elementary classroom, the trend of “nonprocess writing activities” leading to “one-draft products created with limited teacher assistance and no expectation for revising, editing, or publishing” (Billen, 2010, p. 2) was still evident among the teachers who favored product-oriented pedagogy in eight school districts.

Additionally, in a national survey on teaching writing, Grades 4, 5, and 6, elementary teachers reported lack of preparation for teaching writing in teacher education programs (Gilbert & Graham, 2010). Teachers in this survey also worried about being able to teach writing for only 15 minutes a day and that their students have only 25 minutes a day for composing paragraph-long texts. Understandably, under such time constraints, there is not really much room left for teaching metacognitive thinking about writing and idea development (Kixmiller, 2004).

Looking at it from yet another perspective, acquiring audience awareness, especially the ability to anticipate the readers’ interpretation of the writer’s text, is a particularly challenging cognitive process to developing writers (Beal, 1996; Kellogg, 2008). Writers at this early stage in writing development tend to focus on their own thoughts rather than on how their writing reads, or more importantly, how it would appear to their readers (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Kellogg, 2008).

Interventions that prompt young writers to imagine the reader’s point of view can help young writers to learn to revise their writing with their readers in mind (Hollaway & McCutchen, 2004). Such interventions are necessary, but often difficult to execute with the teacher serving as the primary audience/reader in the typical classroom environment. The blogging platform can aid elementary teachers in securing access to the larger audience for their young writers. If carefully planned, it also can provide young writers with the opportunity to write for an extended period about ideas of interest to them and to their readers. The readers, in turn, might serve as an external intervention that indicates to the developing writers the areas that need improvement, and teaches them the ways the readers make sense of their writing (Torrance, 2007).

## METHOD

### Purpose

The current qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) was developed to address the following broad research question: What happens when 5th-graders blog and converse about literacies in class and beyond? In particular, the researchers sought to examine the influence of blogging in supporting writing and literacy development. Participants also were asked to reflect

on themselves as writers, publishers, readers, and learners, and on how blogging helped them to advance these literacies.

Because the study examined an activity of blogging among 5th-graders and was bounded by a single classroom context and a time frame of one academic year (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2000), the authors selected a case study approach as the research design. The purpose was not theory advancement but rather an interest in blogging as an instructional intervention and its influence on writing and literacy development at the elementary school level.

Another reason for using the case study method was the exploratory nature of this research, as reflected in the above-mentioned question: What happens when 5th-graders blog and converse about literacies in class and beyond? Researchers find case studies appropriate for an initial investigation such as ours (Yin, 1994).

Case study methodologists, such as Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), Creswell (2007), or Yin (2009), also recommended multiple data sources for the triangulation of the findings in case studies. Student and teacher interviews, as well as classroom observations, served this purpose in the current work. Student interviews engaged student bloggers in individualized talk about the expectations, purposes, and audiences they were honing through participation in the blogging research. Observation, on the other hand, afforded opportunities to watch the blogging experience unfold and examine the ways it shaped students' writing and literacy development.

Teacher interviews helped to situate student blogger experiences, and the learning processes accompanying them, in the context of the curriculum coverage in our research classroom, students' existing prior knowledge on writing and literacy processes, classroom dynamics, and future goals for literacy development for this group of children. Yin (2009) regarded these data collection techniques as strengths of the case study method: "the case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations" (p. 11). As such, we used interviews and observations as member checks (Creswell, 2003) to corroborate the themes that emerged in student writing in the study.

### Participants and Setting

The students who participated in this study were 5th-grade elementary students, including nine girls and seven boys. The ethnic breakout was six Hispanic students, nine White students, and one Black student. One was a special education student, one was an English language learner (ELL), and two were in the gifted program. Almost one-half had previously attended an ELL class but were no longer being pulled out of class for the intensive help.

According to the classroom teacher, students were, for the most part, on grade level. They interacted well with each other and were receptive to trying new things. The teacher found them strong in the language arts area, with writing requiring closer attention. She also noted that the students' critical thinking skills were very low and attributed this to the culture of testing and assessments that required low-level types of knowledge. Table 1 is a summary of the individual student bloggers' ethnic backgrounds.

The study took place in a Title I elementary school located in the far northern portion of a southern state. At the time of the study, the school housed 680, students with 81% considered

TABLE 1  
Student Bloggers' Ethnic Background

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>
Anni	Hispanic
Dulce Maria	Hispanic
Eddie	Black
Johnny	White
Leslie	White
Lindsey	White
Mary	White
Mia	Hispanic
Michael	White
MV	Hispanic
TK	White
Victoria	White
Emmy	White
Cena	Hispanic
Tina	White
Rosalina	Hispanic

economically disadvantaged. Four hundred of the 680 (58.8%) students were Hispanic, who accounted for 36% of the student population identified and served in the ELL program. The rest of the student population was 16.5% African American, 21.3% White, and 3.1% multiracial. In 2008, the school received recognition for academic achievement in reading, math, and English language arts.

### The Blogging Project, Researchers' Roles, and Other Participants

Two researchers—a university professor and a university information systems training specialist—designed this blogging project. The training specialist was a former elementary school teacher who had created various blogging projects in the research site where she had previously taught before coming to the university. The goal at the school was to introduce elementary teachers to blogging and how it could be used to improve writing.

Her job at the university was to assist professors and university students in using technology across the curriculum. At the university, the two researchers made a connection via blogging on the web. The university professor noted the excitement and learning that was occurring on the elementary student blogs and wanted to share this purposeful use of technology and pedagogy with her classes of teachers. The previous year, the elementary teachers in the training specialist's former school had expressed interest in blogging with a whole class. Prior to this time, the blogging had been done with a select group of students pulled from various 4th- or 5th-grade classrooms. In particular, one 5th-grade teacher had expressed interest in using some of her language arts class time to explore blogging with her entire class while learning from the training specialist's previous blogging experiences with small groups of children. The university researcher and a university information systems training specialist, who assumed the researcher roles as well, began

the planning of a yearlong study in which one member of the research team provided instruction that involved the use of blogging for literacy development purposes. The researcher, who was the training specialist and former teacher, is referenced as *the blogging teacher* throughout this article. The blogging teacher led the instruction on how to use blogging for literacy development purposes to help students think, write, and converse about their class curriculum and learning. She also was mentoring the classroom teacher and the school's instructional technology specialist about blogging. The blogging sessions for the class of 5th-graders in the current study were collaboratively planned with the regular classroom teacher; this step was taken to ensure that the blogging experience was integrated seamlessly into the existing curriculum, with writing being the priority.

The university professor provided informal feedback to student blogger writers and interviewed them on their blogging experiences. Two formal student interviews were administered, one in the beginning of the school year and one at the end of the school year. This researcher also observed classroom blogging sessions and interviewed the teachers a total of three times: the beginning, middle, and end of the year. Both researchers conducted informal conversations with individual or small groups that were recorded during the actual blogging sessions. In addition, the blogging teacher met with different students in groups of five or six at other times during the last few months for a total of seven times. Discussions centered on what they were experiencing and learning from blogging. Graduate students from the professor's courses served as commenters and mentors to student bloggers throughout the blogging project. They offered advice, asked questions, and shared writing tips and resources with student bloggers. Other commenters were retired teachers, one from Ohio and one from Scotland, who had participated in previous blogging projects conducted by the blogging teacher; a middle-school class of student bloggers from Canada, who communicated through commenting and making posts on their own blogs; and a math class of high school students from Canada who communicated through a video session on Gizmo (an online repository of math and science simulations). Other comments emerged from the larger blogging community, including even Harley, a dog with a kid-friendly personality, who also "blogged." This "dog blogger" was created by the participating retired teacher from Ohio.

Prior to this project, the class curriculum focused on the review of the 4th-grade basics in sentence structure, nouns, and verbs, as well as fictional story writing. For the duration of the blogging project, the class met in a language arts block period once a week for 4 hours in a computer lab, with a total of 32 blogging class sessions conducted in one academic year.

Typepad software was used for this project for two reasons: (1) access to unlimited accounts for educational use at the researchers' university and (2) the ability to monitor student activity on their blogs and to invite students to engage in conversations about safe and responsible blogging in cases of inappropriate comments or behaviors observed in blog posts/comments. Students designed and personalized their individual blogs. They also had access to the class blog, which was maintained by the blogging teacher.

## THE BLOGGING TEACHER'S WRITING PEDAGOGY

At the very beginning of the project, the blogging teacher introduced student bloggers to blogging through a webquest activity that familiarized them with the following aspects of blogging:

questioning, thinking, writing, collaborating, reflecting, commenting, linking, and proofreading. The blogging teacher provided safety tips and guidelines using a class wiki. The wiki introduced the students to the sociocultural practices of a blogger community (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Penrod, 2007) and to the concept of responsible blogging. Central to this learning were the following roles and traits of responsible blogging, which student bloggers in this project were expected to meet:

- Accepting the challenge of blogging and striving to do their best
- Understanding the conventions of public writing
- Giving credit to others' words by linking and quoting
- Respecting others by developing the ability to write responsibly
- Understanding the power of communication with a larger audience
- Developing their own unique voice and not being afraid to take risks
- Celebrating their own and their peers' successes
- Recognizing the contributions of their readers.

In addition to these initial activities, the blogging teacher created a class blog to scaffold student blogger writing development (Dorn & Soffos, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978) and to model communicating with a larger audience. Typically, the blogging class started with a discussion around the posts on the class blog. These posts centered on the activity for the day, and they provided reinforcement of certain aspects of writing/blogging from previous sessions. Examples of writing foci in class blog posts included using descriptive words to make writing come alive and/or using linking words to make writing sequential, developing vocabulary, or offering tips on sustaining dialogue with the audience.

Strong pieces of blogger writing were discussed and celebrated. There were many conversations about what student bloggers had learned, how they could improve, and what could be done to bring their voices to the forefront. This helped student bloggers to brainstorm ideas and content for their new posts and responses to earlier posts. Each class ended with goal setting for the next session, and homework was assigned to support these goals.

Other interactive web-based components were incorporated into the blogging sessions. Examples would be podcasts with peers and readers, Skype and Gizmo conversations with classes in Canada, and a Google Maps display of places where respondents resided, including student blogger annotations about these places. Connections were made locally and globally, with student bloggers actively participating in forging these connections.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The primary sources of the data for the current work were the pre- and post-blogging project writing samples as well as blog posts throughout the project that centered around the process of blogging. As previously mentioned, additional data included two interviews with students: one at the beginning and one at the end of the project. We conducted three teacher interviews with each teacher: one at the beginning, one at the midpoint, and one at the end of the project. We also videotaped all class blogging sessions, for a total of 30 meetings, which served as observation documentation. The video documentation of class sessions helped us to describe in the

current work the project, the activities in which the students participated, and the pedagogy the blogging teacher practiced throughout the project. Student and teacher interviews served as member checks (Creswell, 2003).

To describe the attributes of student writing, a general qualitative approach to data analysis (Creswell, 2003) was applied. Merriam (1998) recommended such a method to qualitative case studies in the field of education. This analysis was iterative and began with developing a coding scheme with major codes (domains) and their descriptors that emerged across student bloggers' writing. It was a focused analysis, for it zeroed in on specific aspects of student writing, which included the following domains: attitude, content, voice, connections and relationships, thinking, and craft. Although the major domains were grounded in the traditional literature on writing and writing development (Calkins, 1994; Elbow, 1997; Graves, 1983), some supporting categories with specific domains were heavily informed by the emerging literature on blogging (Davies & Merchant, 2007; Penrod, 2007; Williams & Jacobs, 2004) and newer literacies studies (Boling et al., 2008; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Leu, 2005). The latter body of literature allowed adding the categories that were emerging as new or important to blog writing specifically. Examples of such categories were social networking or hyperlinking. Table 2 provides an overview of the coding scheme for this study that consists of the main domains, supportive categories, and their descriptors. Although this coding scheme served as an analytical framework for the data analysis in this work, the blogging and newer literacies studies provided theoretical grounding for this framework.

The two researchers for the blogging project coded student pre- and post-blogging writing samples first, individually, using the above-mentioned analytical framework (see Table 3 for an example of coding). The researchers analyzed the teachers' and students' interviews to member check the emerging themes in student writing. They also reviewed videotaped class sessions to provide them with the information about the project implementation in the classroom, describe the specific activities used in the project, and capture the blogging teacher's pedagogy. The researchers used NVivo software (Ozkan, 2004) for coding and storing data throughout the research project.

To establish intercoder reliability (Creswell, 2003), the researchers compared their individual coding and discussed points of difference and similarity in their coding. Some adjustments were made to the original coding framework that helped to refine the domains and their descriptors. The revised coding framework then guided the researchers' recoding of the student writing data. Concurrent with the second round of coding by individual researchers, analysis memos were developed. These memos included summative statements about the specific domains present in each sample of student blogger writing (see appendix for a sample of such analysis).

Finally, individual researcher memos and writing samples were reanalyzed using the revised coding framework to determine the themes in this work. We chose these themes as the format for reporting the results from this analysis, a practice associated with reporting the results from a single program case study, which is a blogging activity in this work (Creswell, 2007). The themes included (1) becoming mindful of and connected to the audience, (2) exercising agency in a community of bloggers, and (3) taking ownership of the writing process and the writer's craft. Although we discuss them separately in the current work, the themes inform and complement each other.

TABLE 2  
Domain Definitions for the Analysis of Pre–Post Student Writing Samples

<i>Domain</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Attitude	Motivation	Demonstrates a desire to write and communicate with others
	Excitement	Expresses feelings of anticipation and joy
	Confidence	Demonstrates self-belief as a writer/reader/thinker, etc.; finds composing easy
Content	Interests/emotions	Shares with the audience passions, experiences, and feelings
	Concepts/ideas	Generates ideas, opinions, concepts, and thoughts
	Research	Seeks information from various sources (print and/or nonprint)
	Analysis/synthesis	Takes disparate concepts and ideas and compares/contrasts them in a coherent manner.
Voice	Point of view	Takes a stance with respect to the content and ideas discussed
	Skills/literacies	Makes connections to reading, writing, speaking, listening, and other aspects of English language arts
	Empowered	Feels confident and capable
Connections/Relationships with audience/peers	Reflective	Thinks back and evaluates one’s ideas and writing
	Questioning/inquiring	Asks questions, invites the reader/audience to consider other issues/points/ideas, confronts others’ perspectives
	Intended readers	Has the intended audience in mind, speaks directly to them and engages them in a conversation/dialogue
Thinking	Networking	Seeks support, dialogue with feedback givers and blogging community, or makes friends with other writers
	Peers	Addresses other peer/group writers on similar assignments
	Critical	Engages in the process of evaluating one’s own and other people’s thinking and ideas to arrive at an objective conclusion
Craft	Creative	Thinks and communicates in original and innovative ways using figurative language, such as analogies, metaphors, or idioms
	. . . Ahead	Plans for future dialogue and interaction with the reader
	Vocabulary	Uses bigger and richer words
	Elaboration	Develops, explains, or illustrates ideas and thinking
	Transition/linking	Uses a variety of connecting words and phrases
Mechanics	Sentence structure	Moves beyond the subject verb and object sentence structure
	Organization	Writes in a clear, purposeful, and sequential way
	Mechanics	Spells and punctuates accurately

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TABLE 3  
Coding: Domain Checklist for Analyzing Pre–Post Writing Samples

<i>Rosalinda</i>				
<i>Domain</i>		<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Attitude	Motivation	x	x	Demonstrates a desire to write and communicate with others
	Excitement	x	x	Expresses feelings of anticipation and joy
	Confidence	x	x	Demonstrates self-belief as a writer/reader/thinker etc./ finds composing easy
	Interests/emotions		x	Shares with the audience passions, experiences, and feelings
Content	Concepts/ideas			Generates ideas, opinions, concepts, and thoughts
	Research			Seeks information from various sources (print and/or nonprint)
	Analysis/synthesis		x	Takes disparate concepts and ideas and compares/contrasts them in a coherent manner.
	Point of view			Takes a stance with respect to the content and ideas discussed
	Skills/literacies	x	x	Makes connections to reading, writing, speaking, listening, and other aspects of English language arts
Voice	Empowered		x	Feels confident and capable
	Reflective		x	Thinks back and evaluates one's ideas and writing
	Questioning/inquiring			Asks questions, invites the reader/audience to consider other issues/points/ideas, confronts others' perspectives
Connections/relationships with audience/peers	Intended readers		x	Has the intended audience in mind, speaks directly to them and engages them in a conversation/dialogue
	Networking		x	Seeks support, dialogue with feedback givers, blogging community, or makes friends with other writers
	Peers			Addresses other peer/group writers on similar assignments
Thinking	Critical		x	Engages in the process of evaluating one's own and other people's thinking and ideas to arrive at an objective conclusion
	Creative			Thinks and communicates in original and innovative ways using figurative language such as analogies, metaphors, or idioms
	. . . Ahead			Plans for future dialogue and interaction with the reader
Craft	Vocabulary		x	Uses bigger and richer words
	Elaboration	x	x	Develops, explains, or illustrates ideas and thinking
	Transition/linking		x	Uses a variety of connecting words and phrases

(Continued)

TABLE 3  
(Continued)

<i>Rosalinda</i>			
<i>Domain</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Sentence structure		x	Moves beyond the subject verb and object sentence structure
Organization		x	Writes in a clear, purposeful, and sequential way
Mechanics			Spells and punctuates accurately

## FINDINGS

### Becoming Mindful of and Connected to the Audience

Student bloggers in the current study began the year with a weak sense of the audience. In their prewriting samples, the audience was seen as an abstract concept and, as such, was given little attention. As a result, the writing they composed was directed to no one in particular. Tina's excerpt illustrates this kind of detached writing. It reads like a list of disjointed ideas and lacks a narrative structure and associative thinking, deficiencies typical in writing of young children (Newkirk, 1987).

I think I'm a great writer and I think I am a good reader. I enjoy writing alot. I also enjoy reading alot. I think it will help me alot about my reading and writing skills. I've always wanted to be a student blogger. I think it should help me in a few spots I'm not very good in. I'm sure I'll improve a lot.  
[Note: Spelling in all student excerpts is quoted as in the original student writing.]

This example indicates yet another common feature in many of early student writings in this research. It is self-centered (Moffett, 1989), as it focuses primarily on the bloggers' own needs as learners and writers, and it does not consider the needs of readers.

If there was any audience under consideration in our bloggers' early writing, it was the teacher. The teacher was, however, invoked mainly as an evaluator of their work. This was true when student bloggers mentioned grades or made plans for improving literacy skills. Such a perception of teacher as reader was visible, for example, in Johnny's writing: "I think blogging will really help me in the areas of communicating, spelling, and neatness" or in Emmy's writing as well: "I think blogging will help me get ideas of how I need to fix my writing and how I can improve it." Repeated phrases about the craft of writing in these statements were what these bloggers had previously heard from their teachers and what they had internalized as part of their grammars of schooling (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Unfortunately, because such phrases often did not have any relevant connections to their own ideas, they did not make much sense in their writing either. Eddie's initial post on blogging reflected such incoherent prose: "Then my skills in writing will improve then disimprove."

Active engagement with the audience through the commenting feature in the current study helped our student bloggers to realize that out there was an audience other than the teacher and

that they, as writers, were in a relationship with this audience. The classroom teacher concurred with this finding in her interview with the researcher: “I also think they learned that it is a big world out there, and they are an important part of that. They can read and write to others about things that interest them.” Active engagement also filtered in through other blog postings that were shared with students. One example is the following post on a blog called “Possibilities Abound.” It came from Lani, one of the retired teachers who commented frequently on the student blogs:

The Blogicians had just finished their first blogged photo stories. Can you imagine being in 5th grade and reading that wonderfully warm, encouraging challenge to improve your writing? And the teacher’s creativity abounds as she provides each student with a podcast of their story so they can hear their writing!! No bubbles to fill, or red marks to read—encouraging excellence and the joy of writing and suggesting they can help each other. Now that’s an environment in which I’d like to learn!

This audience was viewed as real people and, for many of these bloggers, as friends, too. This participatory relationship with the audience was apparent as Mia shared the feeling of connectedness and social interaction in an end-of-the-year post, titled “My farewells buddies”:

Hi and bye everybody this is MIA an almost 6th grader. I’m here to tell Lani, Toni, Ms. C, A April, and every one else who as been commenting in my blog. Ya’ll are so special to me. It is so hard to leave behind some thing you love so much.

GOOD-YBE FOR NOW MY FRIENDS

As Mia did, other student bloggers connected with their audience members, showing interest in where they lived, what they did, and why they blogged. They shared a great deal about themselves, too. To illustrate, Anni’s post, “My Passion,” describes her love of monkeys,

My passion would have to be about monkeys. They are cute, cuddly, and smart. I hope that when I grow up I can work with monkeys at a zoo. They are funny because on T.V. like animal planet they do thinks like flips and when they make noises it is funny. It does not matter what kind they are, but I am scared of one Gorillas!!! My most favorite monkey is the Orangutan.

This reflection resulted in a personal response from an Australian commenter. She shared with Anni not only her passion for monkeys but also some facts from her personal life, such as getting married at a zoo, studying animals, and completing a project on chimpanzees in graduate school.

As those personal relationships continued to develop, the student bloggers in our research addressed their audience with care and attention. These feelings were often reflected in advice that they had for their readers on various matters. For instance, when Cena learned that eating junk food was not healthy, he immediately shared this lesson with his readers, instructing them in a very direct manner: “You need to eat less of all that sweets fat and calories. You can eat that but not all that much. . . . If you have any of that food don’t eat it at once.”

As student bloggers came to know their audience better, a sense of community and belonging emerged. The back-and-forth comments stimulated the conversations and nourished active participation within this community. Mary’s exchange with Ashley, another student blogger from Canada, reflected such participation:

Ashley, your answers are just terrific! ☺ Thanks for the proofreading tips. “Your favorite thing about blogging is writing.” That is really neat, because it just so happens that is my favorite thing! I disagree with #3, where you said “it depends whether you feel like typing” because I never ever feel like not typing! ☺ I defiantly, agree with #4, where you said “blogging is a good experience” I also think that blogging gives you important experiences. Blogging is a happy place☺. Guess which question I did. ☺ Everyone deserves a shot at it. Your opinions are awesome!

In this exchange, Mary’s voice was powerful and readers could see the dynamic relationship between the two student bloggers. In another dialogue, Victoria engaged her readers through her questions on her post, “Up! Goes Our Population”:

The Genus Bureau’s Population Clock hit the number 300,000,000 at 7:46 am in October 2006. . . . The U.S. is the 3rd country that has the most population of people in the world. Our population in the U.S. has grown so much in the couple of years. Can you believe that there are more than 3 million people just in the United States of America? Do you think it is a good thing that our population is growing so fast? Why or why not?

Because of such active engagement with the audience, and the nourishing element they discovered in that community, student bloggers in our research began to feel empowered and motivated. This is how Emmy summarized this empowering and unique relationship with the readers in her interview with the researcher. In it, she shared how uplifting it was to have commenters making suggestions about writing and even created an analogy about how it made her feel:

They had good suggestions. They were very encouraging. It is kind of good to have someone ask you, “How would you do that?” And they would be looking up to you even though they may be older than you. But, if they give good suggestions, they are very encouraging, and it felt like they were looking up to you then. For some reason, it just feels really good to you. Cause, I know too, a little boy and girl, and they just look up to me whenever I am at my church and they say, “Pick me up. Pick me up.” Or they are like, “Carry me here,” and they never want to leave me. Then, it is like you never want to leave them, either.

An interview with Johnny reflected the same sentiment about the ways the readers’ support and constructive feedback made him feel motivated and empowered as a writer and learner:

I have electrifying ideas. I get a lot of help. I am able to come up with ideas quickly, and I type fast enough to what somebody sent. I am able to do that. Just so they get down the questions, when they come back, they just have to answer. My favorite commenter said, “He’s indeed a blogger, too, if I can give him some pointers.” He’s asking me a lot of stuff, because he was new and he wanted me to answer. That was really nice. That makes me feel like I wasn’t new [to blogging] anymore. It made me feel like I have been here for a long time.

In her interview with the researcher, the classroom teacher, too, agreed with these students’ comments about their growth in confidence and agency levels as a result of the blogging experience. The teacher elaborated:

I think my students are much more independent and confident after blogging. They learned how to do things that many other students never get exposure to, and I think they felt special. Also, since they were given some freedom during the process and were able to express themselves outside the box at times, this was motivating and increased their independence.

The classroom teacher also believed that blogging helped her students to see writing as an authentic and empowering activity, rather than seeing it as a school thing. She reflected:

Overall, I think they learned that writing is not simply a task they do in the school classroom, and that it doesn't always have to be in an essay format. They learned that writing is a way to express themselves and that they have important things to say.

### Exercising Agency in the Community of Bloggers

As previously mentioned, at the beginning of this research, many students felt confident as writers, but their writing was mainly for the teacher, lacking authenticity and content. Over time, student bloggers' sense of agency burgeoned, particularly at the end of our research. It took many forms and shapes, too. For example, it was manifested in growing levels of confidence and motivation as student bloggers received more and more comments and forged new connections and friendships with their readers. Dulce Maria's post, "My thank you comment," reflected her confidence in the ability to improve her writing, due to the constructive feedback she received on her stories from readers, and her motivation to work even harder. She wrote:

**mY THANK YOU COMMENT**[emphasis in the original post]

I'm thanking to everybody who comment me and I'm so glad people really did. The first person I'm thanking to is Lani you said alot of nice comments and I'm glad you liked my story's. Did you know your were the first person to blog me? The next person was really special to me and her name is Ms. Best. I think you tried your best in everything too and I'm very glad your glad to be a Latino. I'm Latino and I'm very happy about my culture too. . .

Blogging also boosted students' confidence. For example MV was shy and, in his initial writing response, found writing in general to be "hard," even though he believed that he was good at "com[ing] up with good ideas out of nowhere." MV explained a change in him as a result of the blogging activity:

Blogging also helps you if you're a shy person because you have to open up and you can talk to people around the world and they can give you suggestions. Blogging is also an inspire to me because you make people think and you can be blether with people.

Johnny wrote the following quotes on his mind map about blogging, in which he conveys confidence and authority in his opinions and the learning process:

In blogging I am in the driver's seat.

When you are blogging with a grou [sic] you are like a family of minds trying to clean the house of blogging.

In blogging no one runs circles around other people. We are equal in brain power.

When I blog I hit the jackpot with words.

Johnny's and other students' learning to exercise such levels of agency in this study was possible only because the classroom teacher was willing to relinquish some of her power to her students. The teacher acknowledged in her interview with the researcher that it was not an easy task, but found it to be beneficial to her students' growth as writers:

I learned that I can take a backseat sometimes and just let the students do things on their own. I had to learn that this is ok, and it will make student learning better in the end. Also, I felt more confident in trying new things even though I wasn't always in control.

In her interview with the researcher, Emmy commented on how the ability to write on self-selected topics for some blog posts filled her with a sense of freedom and enjoyment, which she compared to having "a new life." Emmy clarified this experience in these words:

We can pretty much write about anything, if we have the option to. It lets me get most of my feelings out, but it feels like I have a second life, which I pretty much do, with blogging. And it lets me start a new day and start the new life for that day, and being able to float away in my mind, and just be free with it, and try to have fun with it.

Increased confidence and motivation levels encouraged many student bloggers to take risks and to explore new subject areas in their writing. For example, Eddie's fascination with the language of math led him to explore a Canadian teacher's high school blog and motivated him to learn some of the material his students were studying. Eddie exclaimed, "The stuff that his student's learn make me want to learn more. I cant wait to get in high school!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Student attempts to take a stance with respect to the content and ideas discussed was also indicative of their empowerment as writers and learners. For example, Mary's passionate post about recycling was peppered with strong positions on the reasons why people should recycle. In it, she proclaimed that "Responsibility is the key." Mary explained:

I strongly feel that all elementary schools in my county should have a recycling program. **You** [emphasis in the original post] should help out with recycling. You would be helping the environment. The recycling program will improve the quality of the city and school environment.

Many comments were made in response to her post. Although Mary agreed with most suggestions, she did challenge one. Michael suggested, "Perhaps you could write a persuasive letter to convince the county officials that recycling would be an important program to implement in all the elementary schools." Mary turned the tables with this response, "I have a recycling program. Why don't you make one at your school?" She did not reject the idea itself but opened the invitation to him and others as well. One might conclude that Mary was learning to write responsibly and proactively in a public setting and that she was not afraid of taking ownership of such writing.

In the same vein, Rosalinda and Emmy demonstrated assertiveness as they communicated their opinions on selected issues. Rosalinda called for compassion and action from her readers in situations that required intervention, or as she put it, "If you see somebody in trouble, help them, because in the future when you are in trouble somebody will help you." Emmy, on the other hand, disapproved of dirty bathrooms, and called for a change in this behavior from the public: "Dirty bathrooms ewe!!! Amanda has said it and so have I. Dirty bathrooms GALORE! I don't want my children there."

A similar sense of self-agency allowed Johnny to question priorities in learning when he posted about his passions, music and guitar, and Lani complimented him but finished with one question: "Shouldn't a man such as yourself, with such a passion for his instrument spell it correctly?" In his response to this challenge, Johnny defended his stance: "I know but i always get it mixed up with the spelling of my instrument. But i can play it does that matter better then

the spelling it?" Lani acknowledged his talent being more important but went on to give a reason he might consider for correct spelling:

I think I was thinking on down the road, when perhaps you might want to market your musical skill or your band. . . . Don't you think that spelling guitar correctly might be awfully important then, especially in terms of possible income for you?

These and similar experiences of bloggers' agency in our research precipitated emerging changes in the writer's process they used for composing on their own blogs. These changes are presented next.

### Taking Ownership of the Writing Process and the Writer's Craft

As mentioned earlier, at the beginning of this research, student writing lacked connection to the real audience because it was addressed to the teacher as the sole reader. Alternatively, having access to an audience through blogging motivated students to write for and engage this audience. This was true for Mia, whose work began as teacher-oriented writing: "[blogging] eill help me to be a better reader and writer. it will also help me on useing my keyboard right." Eventually, Mia transformed her writing once she acknowledged the readers and invited them to join the conversation. It became purposeful and more complex with elaboration, transition, and organization. She was also playful with the language and used a metaphor of a traveler to illustrate her writing journey, as demonstrated in this post:

I see myself as a reader by reading other people blogs and picking out important sentences. I also see myself as a reader when I'm making a new post I put myself in the reader shoes. I make sure that my reader won't get bored after he/she is finish. Also I make sure after they finish reading the post, that they understand it.

Both awareness of the real audience, and a special connection to them, encouraged questions about the writer's craft, as shown in Michael's post to Randy, another student blogger from Canada:

Randy, those are some long answers. How do you stretch your answer so far? I keep my very short. But you inspire me. I think my replies should be 5 sentences long. Do you think that is OK? When I read the Q & A then I was amazed. When I heard I was supposed to make this post I got straight to work.

Johnny's post, "The End is Here," also shows writing that was written specifically with the reader in mind. Johnny speaks directly to them as he reflects on his learning of the comma usage in his blog writing. Additionally, he strives to convince them in a playful way to start blogging too:

Blogging has been a great experience and a fun time I have had hard times (hardly) and fun times (more then you can imagine). But what gets me every time is periods. I myself think I have improved you tell me. Have I improved or was blogging a waste of time (just kidding). I hope you can blog and have half the fun I have had. Blogging has been fun for me I hope this paper has convinced you to start blogging. Trust me it is alot of fun and excitement.

As they began to believe in themselves and the power of the written word, the student bloggers' voices became more powerful too. For example, Victoria, who became captivated by the power of commenting, wrote:

One thing I enjoy doing in blogging is commenting! I like commenting to other people because you get a chance to see what others are writing about and tell them why you like their writing! And I also like getting comments because you can learn what you can do better on by other readers!

In this posting, Victoria's voice was clear, engaging, and personal, and she used direct language to that effect. Her voice was particularly strong and playful in this imaginary exchange that she engaged with her readers: "If we blog in schools I guarantee you that students will improve in reading and writing. And you practice a lot! As everyone says practice makes perfect!"

Likewise, Mia's voice became direct, playful, engaging, and even instructional, as when she queried her readers about the use of the six traits of writing in their writing, trying to convince them about their importance in the following post:

How many times have you use the six traits of writing. A lot, a little, or all the time. Don't say never because whether you notice or not you are using your Six traits of writing even if you are not writing. Well, the six traits of writing . . .

Like Michael, Tina was learning how to use idioms and other figurative language in her attempts to make writing come alive for her readers, as reflected in this exclamation, "The best comment I've ever gotten snatch my socks right off my feet and I got it from a very wonderful friend named Lani on my post 'Fun thing I learned' well here you go." Eddie, on the other hand, wanted his readers to see how blogging had improved reading and writing skills in this post, which he titled, "The End of My Blogging Year:"

Here is what I would tell them that blogging is a way to make new friends. You can also excell your reading and writing skills. You can write stories about what you want to. We can discuss without really being in the same place at the same time. You can express yourself in a fun way. You can also learn how to do different types of writing like persuasive, narrative, and poetry. You learn better sequence and how to group paragraphs together better. It makes you feel like you have freedom of speech. We have a better chance of going to 6th grade because of our improved reading and writing skills. We don't have to write on paper to express how we feel.

This experimentation with language, as exemplified in the posts above, often resulted in less clear or polished writing, yet it was more engaging to the reader. This is because these bloggers were taking steps to rich, engaged, and creative writing. This writing was obviously in the emerging stage.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In the current study, student bloggers developed a new understanding and appreciation of the audience. Initially, their primary audience under consideration was the teacher, confirming the evidence from previous research (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975; Cowie, 1984; MacArthur et al., 2005). The teacher as reader was also seen as "the arbiter of correctness, standard usage, and proper form, the ultimate and only reader" (Garret, 2009). Such a perception

of the teacher reader was evident when student bloggers mentioned grades and made plans for improving certain literacy skills in their initial responses.

Student awareness and understanding of the audience changed dramatically in this research, however, because they developed a dynamic relationship, and, in many cases, friendships with their readers, through the blogging experience. The audience was no longer an abstract concept to these bloggers, as often it is in many classrooms (Walker, 2005). The audience they blogged with were real people, with whom they shared interests and passions, and with whom they were learning about blogging and different subject matter.

The members of the audience also played an active role in this research. They were a transforming audience (Hartley, 2007) in that they influenced the bloggers' ideas, thinking, and writing. They also encouraged student bloggers to revise their writing to be more effective. At the same time, the active and participatory components of blogging in this research invited student bloggers to express and support their own ideas and opinions in a public forum (Mortensen & Walker, 2002). This resulted in blurring the traditional concepts of the reader/writer relationship and writing purposes and spaces (Merchant, 2008). As bloggers, these students were learning to write in the readerly way, by attending to their readers' needs and interests. In a similar fashion, as readers of posts from the audience, these student bloggers were learning to interpret their posts in the writerly way (Swenson, Young, McGrail, Rozema, & Whitin, 2006), looking for ideas to comment on and questions and issues to which they could respond. Understanding the complexity of this new relationship and the authorial positioning of the reader and writer is critical to writing and writing instruction in today's world.

The blogging teacher in this research understood how to orchestrate such interactions in her classroom. She knew how to use the blogging technology not only to tap into the students' desire to write, but also in deciding how to develop activities and solutions to foster their growth as writers and communicators with the larger audience within the blogging community. This knowledge subsequently nurtured these bloggers' growth as writers and communicators.

Student bloggers in this research also became empowered and motivated learners. They acted as agents of their ideas that "inform[ed], change[ed], and shape[ed]" their blogger community thinking (Schneider & Evans, 2008, p. 1). They became confident and were willing to share with their readers their passions, interests, and opinions on various topics. As words and language began to have authentic meaning for them and resonated with their readers, the students began to feel ownership for their learning, ideas, and writing process (Cowie, 1984). They were also making plans to improve their writing, setting personally relevant agendas for themselves as writers and what they wished for their audiences to know. This process increased students' self-agency in mastering the writing skills, thanks to the support these bloggers received from the blogging community at large and from the teachers who reached out to this community.

The blogging community in the current study was developed within and beyond the classroom, and it was planned with ongoing classroom dialogue with the students about their writing process. The teachers in this research facilitated such community development but were only one of many voices within it (Walker, 2005). Such collaboration required the blogging teacher to shift from a traditional pedagogy to a participatory pedagogy (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robinson, & Weigel, 2006). Within this new pedagogy, the teacher fulfilled the traditional roles of a teacher in a classroom as an insider who recruited and guided the blogging community in the learning process, as well as the new role as an outsider who left comments on student blogs

(Davies & Merchant, 2007). Further research needs to focus on ways to recruit and empower a blogging audience to be part of the blogging learning community. Teachers also will need professional development in support of such participatory pedagogy.

In terms of the writing craft, student bloggers' active engagement with the audience supported their cognitive growth as writers as they began to move away from self-centered writing. After Moffett's (1968) theory of cognitive development, Blau (1983) called this process "decentering" (p. 300), which is associated with the writer's ability to reflect upon writing and adjust/rework it with the readers in mind. The student bloggers also explored various ways to invoke and speak directly to their readers, who were no longer only teachers. As a result, their writer voices developed distinctive features, becoming engaging and personal, filled with opinions, humor, expression, and playfulness. They enjoyed experimenting with ideas in ways that had not occurred to them in the past. Writing suddenly had a purpose and meaning other than to please the teacher or to earn a grade (Penrod, 2007).

It needs to be noted that the students' writing was not perfect, for it included many spelling and grammatical errors typical of the early stages of writing development. The teachers and respondents to student writing in this research kept their comments on grammar, spelling, and style to the necessary minimum, keeping the focus on helping these bloggers communicate their ideas to their readers. This withholding of the red pen on the respondents' part provided, in turn, an ideal space for these student bloggers to engage in a "discussion of ideas in embryo" (Davies & Merchant, 2007, p. 170). Although writing within such a context became "interacting—dialogue, intimacy, and risk-[taking]" (Whithaus, 2005, p. 84)—the formative assessment that accompanied it strengthened dialogue about ideas with the authentic audience (Whithaus, 2005).

Such an approach to writing and its formative assessment in this work "give meaning to the act of writing and help students to develop new habits of thought about writing and its role in their lives" (Clark, 2010, p. 28). At the same time, federally or state-mandated standardized testing has had the effect of reducing the definition of what good writing entails (Herrington, Hodgson, & Moran, 2009), and of narrowing the definition of how it should be evaluated (Genishi & Dyson, 2009).

On the other hand, blogging, as practiced in the current study, represented a new kind of space for learning that connected the traditional classroom experience to opportunities for discussion, exchange of passions, teaching others, and learning from others, beyond the classroom. As a result, writing assumed a completely new meaning for these students. Such a meaning-making process would have been hard to replicate in the study if the teacher had been the main reader of their work. It was not just a matter of transferring classroom writing into digital spaces, either. Rather, it was writing in a new way that fostered, among student bloggers, a strong desire to write to communicate well, and it was writing whereby the audience and students coconstructed the nature of this active written communication. Although this change might happen in any classroom, particularly when the teacher chooses to employ the writer's workshop approach to writing instruction, how frequent are moments in a typical school context that allow students to communicate with readers across the globe in the way the bloggers in this project did? Thus, blogging presents a worthwhile enhancement to typical and well-established ways of teaching writing. It is not a replacement for classroom writing instruction, yet we must pursue it if we wish our students to become motivated and effective writers online and offline, now and in the future, in the classroom and beyond it. A carefully planned blogging experience allows us to re-imagine a place where such pedagogy can be practiced.

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## APPENDIX EXAMPLE OF A RESEARCHER ANALYSIS SHEET

Student: Anni

Post-the Blogging Project Writing Sample #1

May 17, 2007

How do you see yourself as a reader or writer?

How do you think blogging will help you in these areas?

I think I wasn't as good as writing as I am now because then I couldn't even understand my own writing, but now I write faster without making as many mistakes. I've also got better in reading because sometimes the bloggers ask me what words mean, and if I do not pronounce it right then I won't ever find out what it means. I've been reading so good that I get more challenging books from the teachers library although I have trouble with the word I keep reading.

Blogging has really helped because when I have trouble with the words they give me I tell them that I don't know that word and on their next blog they tell me what it means and how to pronounce it. And in my writing they tell: this does not make sense, or you can change these words around. I am really glad that I joined blogging.

**Researcher analysis:**

There is a stronger, more empowered voice. She is very reflective as she critiques her own writing progress. She compares and contrasts it. She does content analysis and synthesis. She uses more complex structures, writes in a clearer and more purposeful way but makes more mechanical errors than in her earlier writing because she is elaborating more. Her relationship with the audience is more dynamic and tangible. She cites their conversation back to the reader. She understands the value of networking and blogger community support.