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Focus and Rationale

Through my Personal Learning Network, I have recently been connected to many resources that address the use of student blogs in the classroom as a method of response, assessment and reflection. Over time, these blogs become a digital portfolio of sorts, chronicling student growth throughout the school year. Furthermore, the nature of this technology creates an authentic audience for student work. Students can share their work with readers from around the world, and are also able to comment on their peers' work.

The potential use of blogs in the classroom has taken personal significance to me as I am facing extremely large class sizes next year – 32 fourth grade students in my classroom! After reading about The Inspired Classroom Model (<http://inspiredclassrooms.wikispaces.com/About+Inspired+Classrooms>), I began to envision using blogs to engage students in independent work so I am still able to work with small groups of students despite large class sizes. In order for this model to be successful in my classroom, students must be independently motivated and engaged in the blogging task so I can focus my attention on small group instruction.

I regularly utilize Readers Workshop activities in my classroom. During a traditional Readers Workshop, students read a text, respond to literature in a journal, hold face-to-face conversations to discuss the literature, and complete an extension project in response to the text. These tasks can easily be adapted to an online blogging environment in which students respond to prompts and complete text-related tasks through blog entries, discuss literature by reading and commenting on each other's blog posts, and use technology to produce projects that are then published to blogs. As I consider having my students create and manage their own blogs, this leads me to wonder – **Will the use of student-managed blogs for response, discussion, assessment, and reflection within a 4th grade “virtual” Reader’s Workshop engage and motivate students more than traditional paper and pencil reading response activities and face-to-face literature discussions?**

This research question would be significant to many stakeholders. Teachers and administrators who are looking for instructional methods that enable them to connect with 21st century learners will find this work very significant because understanding how students will respond to the use of blogs in the classroom can help justify the transition to using this technology. Students today communicate and learn

in very different ways than in the past. As a result, they desire to be taught in ways that are relevant to their world. Therefore, I also believe that students themselves would find this question significant, as it can help those who are in charge of determining how they are taught better understand what is relevant to their generation. Lastly, parents and members of the community who are concerned with the quality of education that young people receive would be concerned with this question. Many parents and members of the community desire to know how the teaching strategies being used prepare students for future success. Because motivation and engagement in learning experiences are the building blocks of academic success, parents would certainly find it significant that educators are working to uncover and utilize teaching methods that truly produce higher levels of motivation, engagement and involvement in the classroom.

The audience for my research would primarily be fellow teachers. I work at a charter school in Atlanta, which allows us some freedoms in how we structure our school year. At my school, students are given one early-release day per month so teachers can spend the afternoon engaging in professional learning experiences. During the 2011-2012 school year, the focus of this professional learning will be on technology integration. These monthly trainings would be an ideal time to share work related to this research question. Similarly, this work could be shared at professional conferences, such as the Georgia Educational Technology Conference. Given that a key component of successful blogging experiences is the involvement of an authentic audience who reads and comments on student posts, I also feel it is crucial to share this work with parents. Keeping parents up to date on the effects and rationale behind blogging is an important part of achieving the “buy-in” from the parent community that is necessary for effective student blogging. Parent conferences and “Meet the Teacher” nights would be an ideal time to share this information with parents.

As I work to learn more about this topic through a literature review, I will be looking for high-quality academic articles from professional organizations, such as Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning (MACUL), Classroom 2.0, and Edutopia. Scholarly research from other professionals who studied this topic will also be an important part of my literature review. I will access these resources through Michigan State University’s search engines – mainly ProQuest, ERIC, and Education Full Text through Wilson Web. Because my research question focuses on the use of technology in education, I will look for articles and research from technology-related organizations, such as *Leading & Learning with Technology*, published by the International Society for Technology in Education. Also, given that my research question relates to the use of technology specifically in reading instruction, I will utilize several journals published by the International Reading Association, including *The Reading Teacher* and *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. As I search for resources, I will be looking for a variety of perspectives about student motivation, engagement, and involvement and the use of blogging technology in education.

Literature Review

Introduction

Technology integration is a crucial component of any 21st century classroom. In order to be effective, this technology integration must be based on research-driven best-practices. This research study aims to learn more about the use of blogs for response, discussion, assessment, and reflection within a 4th grade Readers Workshop in place of traditional paper and pencil reading response activities and face-to-face literature discussions. More specifically, the focus of this study is on learning if the use of student-managed blogs during a “virtual” Readers Workshop will engage and motivate students more than traditional Readers Workshop instructional methods.

Perspectives

A review of literature on the topic of blogging in education revealed several recurring ideas related to the benefits of using this technology. One recurring idea is that the nature of blogs enables readers to have an authentic audience of readers. Researchers have suggested the motivating effect of this authentic audience (Ellison & Wu, 2008; Handsfield, Dean, & Cielocha, 2009). Some have even reported that students were increasingly motivated to learn spelling and grammar so their posts would attract more comments (Davis and McGrail, 2009). Davis and McGrail (2009) explained, “When their audience is the whole world, students are motivated to be the best writers they can” (p. 74). Furthermore, through this authentic audience, global connections are formed as students blog with individuals from around the world. Blogs “...provide students with opportunities to connect safely with real audiences while learning about different communities and cultures. This, in turn, can result in increased motivation and literacy engagement as students read, write, create, and produce for meaningful and authentic purposes” (Boling, Castek, Zawilinski, Barton, & Nierlich, 2008, p. 505).

Read (2006) presented an interesting perspective on student motivation for blogging, suggesting that adolescents meet their basic needs for relatedness through this technology. Communicating with friends and strangers and having the audience recognize them through comments meets their need to connect with others. Yet Ellison and Wu (2008) reported a risk of this same commenting feature of blogs. Their research found that potential for negative feedback made some students uncomfortable, and often a lack of commenting feedback on blog posts resulted in hurt feelings.

Many studies have shown the use of blogs results in engagement and excitement from students. In comparative studies between blogging assignments and traditional paper assignments, student interviews revealed that blogging assignments were more engaging (Ellison & Wu, 2008). Research has also shown the quality of reading responses on blogs to be superior to reading responses in handwritten journals (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006). Students showed more interest in blogging assignments as well. In

one interview, a student responded, “It isn’t boring – something different from pencil and paper” (Kajder, Bull, & Van Noy, 2004, p. 34). Modest success was observed in one study attempting to link motivation and blogging, with 65% of university students reporting that the use of blogs motivates them to write for class (Brooks, Nichols & Priebe, 2004). Similarly, in one third grade class, a blogging intervention produced significantly higher motivation scores for all students, and even more so for students who struggled with reading comprehension and small motor skills (Swanson & Legutko, 2008).

Other studies have been done to compare virtual literature discussions to face-to-face discussions. These studies identified many advantages to the use of blogs. One key feature is that blogs do not allow for interruption. Full class discussions are often dominated by a few students but studies showed virtual literature circles to have more equal participation. Research found that knowing their voices will be heard motivated students (Bowers-Campbell, 2011; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Larson, 2009). Bowers-Campbell (2011) eloquently described blogs as a way to “honor the voices of students with diverse ideas, communication styles, and confidence levels while developing authentic reading experiences” (p. 566).

Some research has examined what it is about blogs that motivates students. Brooks, Nichols and Priebe (2004), found that university students were more motivated by blogging for personal and expressive uses. The use of blogs to write about their own emotions and lives appealed to them and fueled their engagement with the genre. Even in the elementary classroom, aesthetic and experiential reading prompts elicited longer responses because of their connection to self (Larson, 2009).

However, not all researchers found increased motivation with blogs. In an experiment with open-ended blogging in his college-level writing classroom, Krause (2004) witnessed uneven participation. Student posts were short and often consisted of text that was cut and paste from another online source. Students did not engage in a discussion with each other, which diminished the collaborative potential of blogging technology. Krause argues that utilizing an email listserv is a more productive way to facilitate online discussions.

Another recurring idea in blogging research is the idea that this technology allows discussion to continue outside of the classroom, meaning students write more often (Selingo, 2004). However, Selingo’s *New York Times* article also challenged this idea, explaining that an analysis of the time stamps on blogs revealed that blogs were most heavily used only during school hours. Critics wonder if blogs truly interest students in writing if students do not engage in using the blog when not required to do so by their teacher.

Another issue that many research studies noted is the informal language use that is prevalent on blogs (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Selingo, 2004) Ellison and Wu (2008) even went so far as to wonder if

informal language use indicated a less thoughtful writing experience. Still others reported that it is the reduced formality of blogs that motivated and encouraged students to post (Du & Wagner, 2007). There are a variety of perspectives on the sort of publishing that should be done on blogs – is it more effective for students to only publish finished and edited work to their blogs, or should more free-flowing writing be allowed with a focus on content? (Selingo, 2004).

Pedagogy

Many researchers agree that planning, structure, and guidance are crucial when implementing blogging educational practices (Ellison & Wu, 2004; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Kajder, Bull, & Van Noy, 2004). Similarly, Davis & McGrail (2009) described the importance of “purposeful and orchestrated” learning activities that allow for student choice. Krause (2004), who openly reported the blogging failures he experienced in his classroom, explained that some of the failure could have been attributed to the open-ended nature of the assignment. His students articulated that they desired structure and direction when blogging. In other studies, similar feedback was received, indicating that students desired guidance on how to review and critique the work of their peers (Ellison & Wu, 2008). Krause described his belief that blogging would be a more valuable educational practice if the teacher offers prompts, due dates, and requirements to read and respond to classmates.

Several teachers used modeling to support the use of blogs in their classroom. Teachers showed examples of quality responses so students were aware of expectations (Larson, 2009; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006). Grisham and Wolsey (2006) found that when teachers used scaffolding for blogging assignments, students produced better responses. Davis and McGrail (2009) also suggested using comment starters to improve the quality of student comments as they reflected on and discussed each other’s work.

Research shows that commenting is a key component of educational blogging. Brooks, Nichols and Priebe (2004) reported that when using blogs in the “notebook genre” – that is, using the blog as a place to publish longer texts that are focused on educational content rather than daily life – commenting was crucial for student motivation. Students have a natural motivation to communicate. Read (2006) recommended that teachers take advantage of this motivation and allow students to communicate with each other using blogs. Davis and McGrail’s (2009) case studies revealed teachers planning ahead by building a blogging community of commenters who were committed to reading and responding to student work. This helped to ensure students experienced validation of their ideas during the blogging experience.

Socially constructed learning is a pedagogy that is often addressed in blogging research. This theory claims that community is the motivation and reason for learning. Without the community that

students work with to share and build knowledge, the knowledge they attain is meaningless. Several studies found that traditional teacher-centered discussion methods in which the teacher posed a question, students responded, and the teacher evaluated the response did not allow for the social construction of knowledge. Blogging, on the other hand, allowed students to build knowledge through the sharing and discussion of ideas (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006). Du and Wagner's (2007) research confirmed that educators should support, rather than direct, learning so students can construct knowledge. Bowers-Campbell (2011) added to this assertion, explaining that collaboration involved in socially constructed learning leads to increased motivation.

Larson (2008) described a best-practice methodology that can easily be adapted to a virtual environment. Reading Workshop is composed of reading a fiction or nonfiction text, responding to literature in a journal, holding conversations to discuss the literature, and completing an extension project in response to the text. Larson recommended integrating blogs to combat some of the limitations of face-to-face Reading Workshop. Swanson & Legutko (2008) also used blogging tools to help students respond to guided reading prompts. Student-to-student feedback was encouraged to promote discussion about the texts. Allowing students to use a variety of technologies, such as podcasting or PowerPoint, to create literature extension projects further enhanced the Reading Workshop. These creations were then posted to blogs to share with readers (Boling, Castek, Zawilinski, Barton, & Nierlich, 2008).

Assessment

In the studies I reviewed, I did not find any true experimental designs. This is understandable, considering the difficulty of enacting a true experimental design within an educational setting. The experimental designs were quasi-experimental, not using randomized groups. In these studies, researchers directly manipulated the conditions experienced by a control group and a test group, and then gathered various types of data to compare the two groups.

The collection of qualitative data was extremely common in these exploratory studies related to educational blogging. This data included detailed field notes, classroom observations, digital voice recordings, written reflections, and documents and artifacts. Individual interviews were conducted in nearly every research study (Larson 2009; Bowers-Campbell, 2011, Davis & McGrail, 2009; Handsfield, Dean, & Cielocha, 2009). Interviews were most often unstructured to allow the researcher to follow areas of interest with particular students.

Surveys were also often used. Open-ended surveys were most common, allowing participants to respond freely rather than limiting responses to a select few options. (Brooks, Nichols & Priebe, 2004; Ellison & Wu, 2008) Kajder, Bull, and Van Noy (2004) utilized a survey instrument designed to measure student perceptions of blogging. In most studies, initial and exit surveys were used because this allowed

for comparison and helped researchers study the effects of a blogging intervention (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Brooks, Nichols & Priebe, 2004). Researchers like Brooks, Nichols & Priebe (2004) used coding to analyze the results of open-ended surveys.

Coding was also used to look for patterns in transcript data (Larson, 2008). Grisham & Wolsey (2006) used a transcript analysis in which they searched for certain predetermined indicators. These indicators were then ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 to quantify their significance in the blogging response. Bowers-Campbell (2011) utilized a grounded framework approach when she completed a line-by-line coding of discussion posts using codes and categories that were generated from the discussions themselves.

Although researchers like Du & Wagner (2007) conducted their observations without interference, Read (2006) actually conducted a case study in which she read and participated in the blogs of six adolescent students. She then conducted email interviews with the bloggers to learn more about their motivations for blogging. She used the data she collected to profile each blogger based on their blog content, blog format, motivation for blogging, frequency of comments, and frequency of blog posts.

Quantitative data was used more infrequently, generally with surveys that used a Likert scale to rate participant responses. Swanson and Legutko (2008) used this method to assess motivation scores before and after the implementation of a blogging intervention. Du and Wagner (2007) compared the blog performance and coursework performance of university students to their final exam performance, which required the use of quantitative figures. They also collected numerical data by analyzing student work. Data was collected in terms of number of student blog posts and length of blog posts. Researchers used this data to draw conclusions about student engagement, suggesting that a more engaged student would participate more often and contribute longer blog posts.

Larson (2009) employed a mixed-method design. She used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to describe the use of blogs in a fifth grade classroom. She stated that her statistical analysis of the frequency, length, and type of blog posts did not tell the whole story, so qualitative data was needed. Larson supplemented her numerical data with information gathered from interviews to reveal more about student interest in blogging assignments, explaining that qualitative methodologies “provide expressive, narrative description within a natural setting” (p. 639). Her research suggests that the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data provides further insight and depth into the research question.

Conclusion

Reviewing literature on the topic of blogging has made it clear that the effectiveness of a blogging intervention is very much dependent on how the technology is used in the classroom. The conditions

under which the technology is used play a large role in how it affects student outcomes. This literature review provided a wide variety of examples of how blogs have been used in the classroom. It became clear to me that the more structured the program, the more effective the learning experience was for students. Several researchers noted specific recommendations for educators who plan to utilize blogging in the classroom. The one recurring message they shared was that careful planning, guidance, and structure is necessary (Ellison & Wu, 2004; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Kajder, Bull, & Van Noy, 2004; Davis & McGrail, 2009). Krause's (2004) experiences echo the need for structure – he viewed his open-ended blogging experiment as a complete failure. As I consider my research question, I am more aware of the importance of specificity in describing the blogging intervention utilized in my study.

The work of other professionals has also highlighted the strengths of qualitative methodologies in social science research. The detail and depth of response that many researchers achieved in their studies provided a great deal of insight into why particular students had positive blogging experiences and why others did not. As Larson (2009) articulated in her article, this insight could not have been achieved with quantitative data alone. While I had always planned, and still plan, to collect both quantitative and qualitative data as a part of my research study, I have a renewed appreciation for the value of qualitative data and the information it provides.

Research Design

Research Question

This research study aims to answer the question: Will the use of student-managed blogs for response, discussion, assessment, and reflection within a 4th grade “virtual” Reader’s Workshop engage and motivate students more than traditional paper and pencil reading response activities and face-to-face literature discussions?

Procedures

This study will be conducted in the classroom of one 4th grade teacher in Sandy Springs, Georgia, located just outside of Atlanta. This is a diverse school, with an overall student body that is approximately 37% black, 36% Hispanic, 25% white and 3% Asian. 58% of students are economically disadvantaged and 24% are English language learners. The teacher instructs two 90-minute Reading classes each day. Each is a heterogeneous class, made up of students who are classified as below-level, on-level, and advanced readers. Each class also includes students who have qualified for gifted services.

In the past, this teacher has regularly implemented traditional Reader’s Workshop activities, which includes the reading of selected texts, reflection on the text through pencil and paper writing

activities, face-to-face discussions about the text, and extension projects to assess understanding of the text. During this year-long longitudinal study, students will be introduced to a “virtual” Reader’s Workshop, in which response, reflection, discussion, and assessment activities take place on their own, student-managed blogs. Student blogs will be open to the public, accessible to anyone with an Internet connection. For safety, students write under designated usernames rather than their real names, and all posts and comments will be approved by the teacher before they are posted.

During the 2011 – 2012 school year, a blogging intervention will be imposed as student reading groups alternate between a traditional Reader’s Workshop and a virtual Reader’s Workshop for each text that they read throughout the year. The teacher will introduce and model each type of Reader’s Workshop in a similar manner, by modeling reading response, reflection and discussion skills through mini-lessons. For each type of Reader’s Workshop, expectations will be clear and the assignments will be carefully structured. Students will be given specific prompts to respond to and they will also be assigned a rotating set of “roles” within their reading groups. These roles will require students to focus on various reading skills such as summarizing, vocabulary-building, questioning, connecting, and inferring. Students then share their findings with their reading group. For both types of Reader’s Workshop, the teacher will also make it clear that students have opportunities to go above and beyond minimum expectations, such as by reading and connecting to additional texts or by writing additional journal or blog entries.

A focus will remain on keeping the content and activities similar for both the traditional Reader’s Workshop and the virtual Reader’s workshop, yet there are a few key differences between the two types of Reader’s Workshop. First is the venue for sharing work. In the traditional style, all activities involve face-to-face discussions and pencil-and-paper activities, and in the virtual style, all discussion activities will take place on and be published to the students’ blogs. The second key difference is how the teacher provides feedback. For the traditional Reader’s Workshop sessions, the teacher will provide students with feedback on their progress through written comments on assignments, as well as verbal commentary during discussions. For the virtual Reader’s Workshop sessions, the teacher will supplement traditional written and verbal feedback with comments published to student blogs. The third and final key difference is the available audience. During traditional Reader’s Workshop, the students’ audience for their work is made up of the teacher and their classmates. During the virtual Reader’s Workshop, this audience is expanded to a global scale. The teacher will have arranged for a community of commenters, including students’ parents, members of the community, and other students and teachers from around the country and world, to regularly add comments to students’ blogs.

Prior research in the area of educational blogging has revealed that more structured blogging programs have resulted in more effective learning experiences for students. For this reason, the procedures for implementation of a blogging program in this study are very clear, specific, and structured. Also, previous studies showed that modeling the technology for students was important in order to equip

them with the skills needed to use blogs independently. In order to prepare students to utilize blogs during virtual Reader's Workshops, these procedures include the modeling of blogs before students begin to use the technology. This helps ensure that students are able to actually use the technology so quality data about their motivation and engagement can be collected. Researchers also noted that a key characteristic of blogging is the global audience. This particular study utilizes open blogs to allow for a wide audience. The teacher arranges for a community of commenters to ensure that students experience this important global audience when using blogs in the classroom.

Assessments

At the beginning of the study, students will first take a pretest in which they describe their motivation and engagement in Reading and in traditional Reader's Workshop. Students will rank their opinions and attitudes using a 5-point Likert scale. At the end of the study, students will take a posttest in which they describe their motivation and engagement in Reading, traditional Reader's Workshop, and virtual Reader's Workshop. Again, students will rank their opinions and attitudes using a 5-point Likert scale. A comparison of the data gathered from the pretest and the posttest will provide clear information about students' self-evaluation of their own motivation and engagement with both types of Reader's Workshop. This data is a vital in answering the research question posed, as student perceptions of learning experiences are the cornerstone of achieving the intrinsic motivation that we strive for in education.

Additional quantitative data will be collected by analyzing student work. As students complete both traditional Reader's Workshop and virtual Reader's Workshop assignments, data will be collected on the number of assignments they complete. The number of contributions made by each student will also be tallied during both face-to-face discussions and blog discussions. This data will be collected with the assumption that a more motivated and engaged student would be more likely to participate more frequently, which would be indicated by the number of completed assignments and the number of contributions to discussions. Furthermore, a more motivated and engaged student would be more likely to contribute longer and more developed assignments. This can be assessed by collecting a word count of students' written responses and reflections during both types of Reader's Workshop. By comparing the data for traditional Reader's Workshop and virtual Reader's Workshop, patterns in motivation and engagement can be identified.

Previous research has highlighted the importance of collecting various types of data when investigating the use of blogs in the classroom because a variety of information provides further insight and depth into the phenomena. For this reason, this quantitative data will be supplemented with qualitative data in the form of in-depth interviews, written documents, and field notes collected from direct observation. Unstructured interviews will be based on a general script to allow the researcher to follow

areas of interest or significance with particular students. The open-ended interview questions will allow participants to respond freely and elaborate on their ideas, unlike the structured and limited survey responses, thus providing more information about student's perceptions of their motivation and engagement. This data will complement the survey data and will allow the interviewer to further investigate areas of interest based on other observational data gathered during the course of the study. The qualitative data that is collected will be analyzed for patterns to paint a clear picture of the happenings in the classroom and the students' engagement and interest with blogging tasks.

Design Rationale

This mixed-method research study is well-suited to collect quality data about this research question. Mixed-method research combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a more complete set of data. By collecting qualitative and quantitative data at the same time, as is done in this triangulation design, the strengths and weaknesses of each method offset each other. The result is superior and more credible than if only qualitative or only quantitative methods were utilized.

For example, one might argue that experimental research would be the strongest design because it would allow for causal relationships to be identified. However, a true experimental design is extremely difficult to achieve within an educational setting because randomization of groups is nearly impossible without disrupting entire classes. Furthermore, when randomized groups are created, an artificial environment is created that intrudes on the natural context of the classroom. This, in turn, reduces external validity. Quasi-experimental design, in which randomization is not used, still presents limitations because the creation of a control group would bring up ethical issues as it would involve completely denying certain students the blogging intervention that is believed to be beneficial to motivation and engagement.

Still others may suggest using a qualitative, interactive design by conducting a case study that examines the use of blogs within a single classroom, as has often been done in past research. However, a case study simply reports what was observed and does not allow any control on the part of the researcher. If specific experiences with response, discussion, assessment, and reflection within the context of both a traditional and a virtual Reader's Workshop are not planned, it would be difficult to gather enough data to make comparisons between the two. By planning a research design that includes a specific blogging intervention, the two scenarios can be more easily compared to identify patterns and draw conclusions.

Clearly, the variety of methods utilized in a mixed-method design like this one provides for a rich, deep understanding of how the use of blogs in a virtual Reader's Workshop impacts student motivation and engagement. Through this design, we are able to examine the effects of the blog intervention within

the natural context of the classroom, which makes it easier for generalizations to be made. At the same time, we are able to implement and control a specific intervention and make comparisons to draw conclusions. In short, this method gives us greater credibility in our findings.

A study like this one is not without threats to its external validity. There are, however, aspects of this study that work to minimize these threats. Any longitudinal study has the threat of maturity as students naturally grow and mature over time. In this study, this threat is minimized by alternating the use of virtual and traditional Reader's Workshop throughout the year rather than completing traditional Reader's Workshop for several weeks or months, followed by virtual Reader's Workshop for several weeks or months. This procedure allows the data for both groups to be gathered throughout the year and minimizes the effect that student maturation might potentially have on their motivation and engagement levels. Also, by studying just one school year rather than a longer study of several years, we gather a great deal of data, but minimize experimental mortality. The longer the study takes, the more likely it is that students may move between school years and negatively affect the collection of data.

A major strength of this research design is that the unit of analysis is the individual student within one study group. This allows us to clearly see the effect of the blogging intervention on student motivation. By studying the individual students in **one** group, rather than within a control group and a treatment group, we are able to compare the exact same students. Students are extremely different and naturally have different levels of motivation when it comes to school work. By comparing each particular student's motivation and participation levels with and without a blogging intervention, we help ensure that naturally different motivation levels do not account for any differing levels of motivation that are observed.

It is important to note that the use of blogs for response, discussion, assessment, and reflection during a virtual Readers Workshop does require more writing and reading than a traditional Readers Workshop. While a traditional Readers Workshop does include paper-and-pencil response tasks that require students to share their thoughts through writing, blogs have a wider audience than these traditional writing tasks. This increases the need for students to communicate their ideas clearly and effectively when writing on a blog. Furthermore, in a virtual Readers Workshop, face-to-face discussions are replaced with a discussion format that requires students to first read and understand their classmates' ideas, then respond through writing. These skills may certainly be a challenge for 4th grade students, but they do not negatively affect the design of this study. Blogs require more reading and writing than traditional Readers Workshop tasks, but traditional Readers Workshop lacks the asynchronous nature of blogs. Unlike a face-to-face discussion, which requires instant response, blogs provide students with more time to work through, process, and reflect on reading and writing tasks at a pace that is appropriate to their current skill level. The challenge of communicating their thoughts in a new way is balanced by the extra time students are given to complete this task. By challenging students with these advanced reading

and writing tasks, students are given an opportunity to develop crucial 21st century literacy skills that they will utilize throughout their lives.

Appendix I

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

This article consists of a series of collective vignettes from five elementary classrooms throughout the United States as they utilized blogging and collaborative Internet projects to meet learning goals. Specific examples of each technology use are described, accompanied by samples of student work, comments, and teacher reflections. In exploring the largely positive experiences of each teacher, readers take away suggestions for successful technology integration. For example, one teacher found success asking her students to blog about a “strike” (something they found interesting) and a “wonder” (something they are still questioning) after reading a selection from their novel. Another teacher described his positive experiences including audio recordings on classroom blogs to allow for a variety of forms of response. Still other educators fostered global connections through blogs and collaborative Internet projects by having their classroom connect and discuss ideas with a classroom in a different part of the world. Through the use of these projects, teachers explained that they witnessed increased motivation, both to write and to edit their work, when students were engaging with a real audience through their blogs.

Bowers-Campbell, J. (2011). Taking it out of class: Exploring virtual literature circles. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 54*(8), 557 – 567.

Joy Bowers-Campbell’s research seeks to examine what happens when literature circles are moved from the classroom into an online, “cyberspace” environment. In preparation to lead productive literature circles in their own classrooms, three groups of students engaged in online literature circles for two weeks of a four-week graduate level literacy class. Bowers-Campbell collected data to learn how the integration of technology into the literature circle affected reading responses. Qualitative research methods were used as Bowers-Campbell collected field notes and observations, conducted individual interviews, and analyzed transcripts of discussion posts with line-by-line coding. Codes were generated from the discussions themselves, making this a grounded framework approach. The article describes the rationale behind traditional literature circles in the classroom. Research shows that talking about texts and constructed ideas collaboratively made students more likely to engage in reading, increased motivation, and resulted in deeper understanding. The author also describes the problems with traditional literature circles. Some observational data showed conversations were at times stiff and forced, students gave each other answers instead of discussing texts, and productive conversations only took place while the teacher was observing the group. Findings indicated that online threaded conversations overcame many of these problems with traditional literature circles. Rather than forced conversations, students actively participated in the online conversations, and their posts demonstrated that they were engaged in the reading process. Students worked to validate the ideas of their group members. Interview data demonstrated the value of asynchronous message boards over synchronous online communications like chat rooms. Student responses indicated that students enjoyed having time to organize their thoughts

before posting a response and enjoyed revisiting the message boards after they had time to think about the ideas presented. Students also expressed that they enjoyed not having to worry about interruption or competing to be heard. Bowers-Campbell's report is balanced, as she also reflected on possible limitations of virtual literature circles. She addressed public concerns that online discussion boards may isolate students, making them unable to connect in face-to-face settings. She also discussed an instance in her study where one member of a group did not have equal commitment to the group, which negatively affected the rest of the students.

Brooks, K., Nichols, C., & Priebe, S. (2004). Remediation, genre, and motivation: Key concepts for teaching with weblogs. In L.J. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman (Eds.), *Into the blogosphere: Rhetoric, community, and culture of weblogs*. Retrieved July 21, 2011, from http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/remediation_genre.html

In this essay, Brooks, Nichols and Priebe describe the importance of relating to student-driven motives and desires if educators wish blogging experiences to truly support student writing. For this reason, they designed a research study to determine which blogging genres engage and motivate students to contribute to personal or class blogs. In introducing blogs to their undergraduate and graduate writing classes at North Dakota State University, they expected to find mixed reactions from students. The real focus of the study was to find out what motivated some students to blog, and what barriers prevented other students from blogging. Researchers used survey data from initial and exit surveys. These surveys consisted of open-ended questions and responses were later coded into categories. Three blog genres were presented – *journals*, which consist of short entries about daily life, *notebooks*, which contain longer entries that are more content-focused, and *filter blogs*, which focus on sharing links and organizing content. Survey data indicated that first year students were more interested in personal and expressive uses of blogs rather than academic uses. Like first year students, upper level and graduate students also preferred personal and expressive uses, but they were able to see potential in the academic uses of blogs. When introduced to blogging class assignments, most students were tentative. In fact, the survey revealed that most lower-level students had never heard of blogs before. The top three motivations for journaling were emotional value, to record one's life, and intellectual value. 65% in one test group and 60% in another test group indicated that they were motivated by weblogs to write for class. The researchers consider this a modest success. Researchers touch on the importance of commenting in the blogging community when they explained that the notebook blogs were viewed as a much more motivating genre in communities where entries received a lot of comments.

Davis, A.P., & McGrail, E. (2009). The joy of blogging. *Educational Leadership*, 66(6), 74 – 77.

This article describes researcher Ewa McGrail's work as she assisted with a blogging project in Anne P. Davis' fifth grade classroom in suburban Georgia. Blogs were used for students to talk about their personal learning, both in class and outside the classroom walls. McGrail and Davis shared their experiences and used samples of student work and anecdotal stories to illustrate their key points. The

article focuses on the positive aspects of blogging. Mainly, these professionals found students eager to write on their blogs throughout the year. Students were especially motivated by the comment feature and enjoyed seeing feedback on their writing. Davis and McGrail also found students more motivated to learn spelling and grammar in hopes that their posts would attract more comments. The article details the specific strategies used for successfully implementing a blog project within the classroom, including the importance of building respect within the community, allowing students to explore blogs before creating their own, free-writing before posting, and providing students with “comment starters” to improve the quality of their comments. The article emphasizes the connection between blogging success and building a community of commenters who are committed to reading and commenting on student work.

Du, H.S., & Wagner, C. (2007). Learning with weblogs: Enhancing cognitive and social knowledge construction. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 50(1), 1 – 16.

Du and Wagner’s field study examined the impact of weblog use on the individual learning of 31 business education students at the university senior level. Learning logs are a teaching practice in which students write about their learning and understanding. These logs are typically only shared between the student and the instructor, however moving them online gave students a wider audience, enabling collaborative learning. In the learning logs, students reflected on their learning, the articles they read, shared their opinions, and linked to other materials of interest. The pedagogical goal was for the instructor to support student learning instead of directing it. Researchers conducted an empirical analysis of 279 posts and compared these results to coursework performance and final exam performance. Du and Wagner hypothesized that the effort to construct knowledge would be greater through the use of blogs. Data was collected by observing, recording, and analyzing teaching and learning activities without interference. Data included number of posts, number of references to the work of others, and grading based on richness, evidence of thoughtful responses, support for observations, relevance, and technical sophistication. Researchers also counted the number of individual key concepts that were discussed by each student. Although the sample size was small and a very specific situation, Du and Wagner reported some interesting findings. They discovered that weblog performance was a significant predictor of final exam performance. On the other hand, coursework performance was not a significant predictor of final exam performance. Du and Wagner suggested several possibilities for these findings. The informal nature of blog postings encouraged students to post. Students were also able to read other students’ blogs and compare their own writing to that work. This provided natural examples of success and failure, which increased effort without pressure from the teacher.

Ellison, N.B., & Wu, Y. (2008). Blogging in the classroom: A preliminary exploration of student attitudes and impact on comprehension. *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia*, 17(1), 99 – 122.

Because students use technology for an average of 6.5 hours a day, Ellison and Wu suggest that young people demonstrate that they are intrinsically motivated to use technology. The authors express a desire

to transfer this intrinsic motivation to academic uses of blogs, explaining that blogging technology is similar to the media that students utilize in their daily lives. In this paper, Ellison and Wu describe their exploratory investigation of 52 college students' academic use of blogging to determine which characteristics of blogs students perceive to be most helpful. In this study, students completed six writing assignments – three in paper form and three in blog form. Students were then administered a survey instrument of perceptions to gauge their experiences. The results found both positive and negative perceptions of blogging. Students expressed that they desired more guidance as they reviewed and critiqued each other's work. Instructors were concerned that blogging encouraged a less formal style of writing, and worried that this indicated that students were engaging in a less thoughtful writing experience. Many students also revealed emotional concerns – the potential for negative feedback through comments made them uncomfortable, and a lack of comments hurt other students' feelings. However, data also revealed that students found reading other blogs most helpful to understanding. Students' comments indicated that they found blogging engaging in a way that the traditional papers were not. Students also reported enthusiasm about the commenting and interaction they experienced through their blogs.

Grisham, D.L. & Wolsey, T.D. (2006). Recentring the middle school classroom as a vibrant learning community: Students, literacy and technology intersect. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 49(8), 648 – 660.

Based on the premise that community is a key motivation for learning, since without the community we share and build knowledge with, knowledge is meaningless, Grisham and Wolsey studied the use of threaded discussion to discuss literature in three 8th grade classroom communities in Southern California. Students were working-class and came from very diverse backgrounds, including a large percentage of English Language Learners. The authors deemed traditional discussion methods in which the teacher initiates a question, waits for a response, and then evaluates that response to be teacher-centered and therefore do not allow knowledge to be socially constructed. Grisham and Wolsey examined students' threaded discussions and completed a transcript analysis that ranked indicators on a scale of 1 to 5. Students were also surveyed and interviewed. Findings included both positive and negative responses to the discussion boards. 73% of students preferred typing their thoughts rather than writing them by hand. In comparing the quality of online posts to paper journal responses, the quality of online posts was much better. Grisham and Wolsey focus on the importance of the asynchronous nature of discussion boards, because it allowed time for deeper thinking about concepts. Researchers found that most students were not using academic language in the discussions. Several students reported on surveys and in interviews that they did not like the message boards because they forgot their passwords, or did not have enough time on the computers. Some students spent a great deal of time formatting their posts with colors, fonts, and smiley faces, rather than focusing on knowledge construction. It is important to note that while data shows the use of message boards motivated many students, not all students were motivated by this technology. One reported reason was lack of keyboarding skills. Grisham and Wolsey include specific

recommendations to educators in their article. They emphasize the importance of planning and structure when implementing a virtual learning community. They also describe how scaffolding from the teacher produced better responses, and recommend that teachers model tasks by providing examples of quantity and quality of responses that are expected.

Handsfield, L.J., Dean, T.R., & Cielocha, K.M. (2009). Becoming critical consumers and producers of text: Teaching literacy with Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(1), 40 – 50.

This article seeks to describe both the affordances and limitations of the use of two specific Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 technologies during literacy instruction – an online comic creator, and reading response blogs. The research takes place within a very unique classroom setting, with only eight students, all of which are male, Spanish-speaking, English language learners. Three of these eight students also have learning disabilities or speech concerns. During their two year study, researchers collected audio and video samples from the classroom, observational field notes, and data from interviews with the students and their teacher. Researchers looked for patterns and themes by conducting a constant comparative analysis of audio and video transcripts. The article provides detailed examples and photographic evidence to support claims. After realizing students in her class were simply using their reading response binders to record what they thought their teacher wanted to hear, teacher Kristin Cielocha replaced these binders with blogs. In using blogs for reader response, students became more careful writers. Students had time to think and craft responses, which also improved the quality of their writing. Students commented on each other's work, and researchers observed that these requests for details or more information motivated students to write more. Both the positive aspects and the challenges of blogging are addressed. One notable challenge was that at points, some students began to fall back into the trend of typical paper and pencil assignments. For example, some students responded only to the teacher and not to each other. In explaining this observation, authors cite research that claims educational blogs are too similar to traditional paper-and-pencil school assignments, so students resorted to their traditional school interactions. Authors are careful to offer possible solutions to the limitations that they identify – one possible solution to this issue is for students to write blogs to a wider audience, rather than just their classmates and teacher to create a more authentic writing experience.

Kajder, S., Bull, G., & Van Noy, E. (2004). A space for “writing without writing”. *Leading and Learning with Technology*, 31(6), 32 – 35.

Kajder, Bull and Van Noy's article shares a collection of field notes that describe how teachers are using blogs in the classroom. Students in Van Noy's 7th grade English/Language Arts students from Charlottesville, Virginia used blogs as personal journals. After their first posts, students then took an exit survey with open-ended responses to help guide their teacher's decisions in continuing with the use of blogs for educational purposes. Data indicated positive overall response. Students described blogs as more interesting than pencil and paper tasks, explained that they wrote more because of the speed of

typing, and felt that they experienced less “writer’s block” when using blogs. Teachers enjoyed their ability to provide prompt feedback to students using the blog’s commenting feature. The article goes on to describe useful steps for implementing blogging projects, emphasizing that detailed and careful planning is essential to manage and design compelling blog activities.

Krause, S.D. (2004). When blogging goes bad: A cautionary tale about blogs, email lists, discussion, and interaction. *Kairos*, 9. Retrieved from <http://english.ttu.edu/kairos/9.1/index.html>

Steven Krause presents a unique perspective in this praxis. In this piece, he relates a failed experience in blogging with his graduate seminar students. Driven by the desire to foster interactive and natural writing among his students, he attempted to use blogs to create a space where students “would just want to write”. The creation of blogs was presented to his students as an experiment with the new technology. Students were not given any specific requirements as far as number or frequency of postings. Instead, Krause expressed his desire for the blogs to be open-ended, and introduced them as a place for discussion and interaction among peers. Throughout the semester, Krause witnessed uneven student participation. When students did post blog entries, they were short, consisted of lists of links, or text that was cut and paste from another source. He did not see students reference each other’s posts or exchange ideas. Krause admitted that this failure might be traced to the open-ended nature of the assignment. His students even articulated their need for structure and direction, explaining that the project was too vague, leading him to conclude that blogging would be a better experience with specific prompts, due dates, and requirements. Still, Krause ends his paper detailing the benefits of facilitating discussion through an email listserv rather than blogs. He explained that his students were more comfortable with the email listserv, and opted to use this technology when discussion occurred in his class.

Larson, L.C. (2008). Electronic reading workshop: Beyond books with new literacies and instructional technologies. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 52(2), 121 – 131.

This article begins by describing the typical reading workshop methodology. Instructors first select fiction and nonfiction texts, then after reading, students write in literature response journals. Literature conversations are used to discuss the texts in small groups, and finally students engage in an extension project that uses art, technology, music, or research to respond to the text. Acknowledging the strengths of this system, Larson also describes some limitations – students are often off-task or unprepared, which can lead to unproductive discussions. Larson recognizes the importance of integrating technology into the 21st century classroom, so in her paper she proposes the transition to an Electronic Reading Workshop (ERW). She tested the effectiveness of ERW in a Language Arts methods course with 22 pre-service teachers. First, the ERW replaced traditional books with e-books. Students then created literature response journals using Microsoft word and the instructor responded to students using the track changes feature. While this study used Microsoft word for journaling, Larson also addresses the possibility of using

blogs to engage in the journaling process. Online, asynchronous discussion boards were used to facilitate small group discussion about the texts, and finally, students created technology-based extension projects using podcasting programs, PowerPoint, and other relevant technologies. Larson analyzed the transcripts, student work, and interviews to determine student response to ERW. The use of e-books received mixed reviews. Many students did not like reading from a computer screen. Overall, students still preferred traditional books, but had a positive experience reading an e-book. Students also reported that they felt the online discussions lack of body language and expression made it difficult to interpret tone, and therefore difficult to understand ideas at times. However, students had a positive response overall, indicating that they enjoyed online discussions because it allowed for additional response time when constructing their posts. They felt it was easier to stay on topic during virtual discussions, and felt that the message board was a safe environment to share their thoughts and ideas. Larson enhances the article with excerpts from student message boards and interviews, as well as screenshots of student projects to illustrate the depth of the work they produced. In the end, students reported that this experience as a pre-service teacher was a good way to prepare them to integrate this instructional practice into their own classroom.

Larson, L.C. (2009). Reader response meets new literacies: Empowering readers in online learning communities. *The Reading Teacher*, 62(8), 638 – 648.

This article shares the results of a case study done in a 5th grade classroom. Rather than engaging in traditional reading workshop activities, students read e-books and responded to prompts about the texts through online message boards. Larson utilized qualitative methodologies, including field notes, voice recordings, interviews, and written reflections collected from students. Prompts were collected and coded by category. She also conducted a statistical analysis of the frequency and length of message board posts, but was careful to note that these statistics do not relate the whole story. One notable example was a student who posted very few times on the class message board. Further analysis through interviews revealed that this student felt frustrated by the message boards because of his unfamiliarity with typing skills. Findings of Larson's research revealed overall excitement and engagement among the students as they communicated online. Field notes describe students being motivated to read comments from their peers. Students showed a desire to take on leadership roles within online message board community and began posing prompts of their own. Aesthetic and experiential prompts received the most posts, while cognitive posts were described as "boring" and "like worksheets". Larson hypothesized that this is because the aesthetic and experiential genres of writing allowed students to make connections to themselves and therefore write about what they knew best – their own life and experiences. Key benefits of online literature discussions include that all students are heard without interruption and students have extra thinking time before responding, but negative aspects of safety and informality of language used on message boards are also discussed in the article. Larson provides recommendations for educators

wanting to create online learning communities, including modeling lessons, sample handouts, and links to helpful lessons to teach about message board etiquette.

Read, S. (2006). Tapping into students' motivation: Lessons from young adolescents' blogs. *Voices from the Middle*, 14(2), 38 – 46.

Sylvia Read sought to figure out what motivated adolescents to write for themselves in hopes that this would provide insight into how educators might motivate students to write in school. She examined literature, then read and participated in the blogs of young adolescents. Read analyzed the blogs of six adolescent students, age 13 to 18, and conducted email interviews with each. Based on the results, she profiled each blogger by their blog content, blog format, motivation for blogging, frequency of comments on blog, and frequency of blog posts. Read suggests that adolescents meet some of their basic needs by blogging. According to Maslow's hierarchy of Needs, humans need relatedness and growth. She found that adolescents' self-described motivations for blogging included communicating with friends and strangers and getting comments on their writing. Both of these motivations meet relatedness needs. Read also suggests that as adolescents improve their technology skills by formatting their blogs with special fonts, backgrounds, and other features, they improve their technology skills over time, which meets their growth needs. Read extends her findings to an educational application, recommending that teachers make school writing more like self-sponsored writing, because school writing is "an unnatural act". She explains that students have a natural desire to communicate with each other, and educators should take advantage of this desire by offering authentic writing opportunities, such as blogging. She concludes that blogs allow for the more frequent, shorter writing with less emphasis on correctness that appeals to adolescents. Read also emphasizes the importance of giving students choice in their writing, as well as the relevance of quick feedback on blogs, which validates students' thoughts.

Selingo, J. (2004, Aug 19). In the classroom, web logs are the new bulletin boards. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/19/technology/in-the-classroom-web-logs-are-the-new-bulletin-boards.html?src=pm>

This article from The New York Times opens with anecdotal descriptions of how teachers have used blogs as a forum for student work. Examples from multiple subject areas and grade levels are presented, and teachers provide accounts of their experiences using blogs with students. The article then proceeds to present a balanced view of both sides of the blogging issue. Positive aspects of blogging are discussed, such as the ease of use for teachers, the ability for students to receive quick feedback on their work, and the global connections that have been created through the commenting feature on blogs. During interviews, teachers described the increased effort they have seen from students when blogging was integrated into the curriculum. Some even suggest that blogs encouraged students to write more often and allowed learning and discussion to continue outside of the classroom. However, the article then describes an analysis of the time stamps on web logs, which revealed that blogs were most heavily used only during school hours. Teachers describe trying to continue the use of blogs during the summer and

report that they were disappointed with the results. The author leaves readers with the question – do blogs really interest students in writing if students do not engage in using the blog when their teacher does not require them to do so?

Swanson, K.N., & Legutko, R.S. (2008). The effect of book blogging on the motivation of 3rd-grade students. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/61832005?accountid=12598>

Swanson and Legutko's research centers on their hypothesis that the feedback and social exchange that takes place on blogs would cause increased motivation in third grade students. This experimental study took place in a rural Pennsylvania school where students all came from the lower-middle class and were 100% Caucasian. For six weeks, students responded to reading response prompts in a traditional paper and pencil manner by recording their responses on index cards. These responses were scored with a reading rubric. Students then completed six weeks of responding to reading prompts on blogs. Pre-service teachers responded to student posts, and student-to-student feedback was also encouraged. Researchers administered a pretest and a posttest to measure motivation scores on a Likert scale. Results revealed that the book blog intervention had a slightly higher motivation score in all students. It is also notable that students who struggled with small motor deficits and reading comprehension showed more significant increases in motivation scores after the book blog intervention was administered. Researchers hypothesize that this may be because typing replaced writing by hand, students had more time to contemplate and complete the assignment, and by reading their classmates' posts, students were provided models of appropriate responses. The authors note that care must be taken when generalizing the results of this study because of the unique population of students who received the book blog intervention.