

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' READING SKILLS BY MEANS OF BLOGS

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Abstract: *Reading comprehension refers the level of the students' understanding of a text which the understanding comes from the interaction between the words that are written and how they catch knowledge outside the text. It is one necessary subskill that is defining importance. Reading comprehension skill depends on the knowledge of vocabulary, background knowledge, the ability to recognize words quickly and comfortably on the knowledge of letter-sound agreement and common spelling patterns, the mastership of phonics and word analysis skills, and the development of automatic recognition of many words (Pearson Education, 2010: 3). However, a skill that needs to be fostered over many years is reading with understanding and meaning although students learn the mechanics of reading in the early elementary grades.*

Key words: *blogs, reading comprehension, interaction, information resource, technology, web tools.*

Blogs, one of the Web 2.0 tools, are extensively used in US education. Blogging has changed the role of readers rather than an information resource. Readers are no more passive receivers of the information from the web but come to be creators of the content. As a forceful tool that improves communication, promote critical thinking, and supports collaborative learning, blogs have great ability in education. Instructors need to use education blogs in ways that assist content area in a technically teaching way (Hong, 2008: 33-38). Incidentally, in a socially mobile learning environment, it is no more adequate to utilize online learning and teaching technologies easily for the delivery of content to students.

A digital literacy is adaptable and mobile technologies must be sought collaborative and creative purposes, including the critical assessment and evaluation of information. The educational potentials of blogs are new content development and management technologies that enable an interactive and intercreative assignment among students and between students and teachers.

However, the use of technology in today's society is inescapable. It is everywhere from electrifying workouts (utilizing devices such as the Wii) to real-time video chat (devices such as Skype and FaceTime), to a plethora of activities displayed on a television screen that provide instant feedback and gratification per personal preference through the use of DVR. Technology continues to become more sophisticated and is advancing at a marvelous rate. It has infused itself into our daily lives and has made it clear that it is here to stay. There is no place that you can go to escape the grasp that technology has on our

society. Schools (more specifically the classroom) are no different. It is important for schools to mirror the use of technology in society within the classroom so that students can view their learning environment as relevant to their lives outside of school. “Studies have shown that Internet access motivates many students to read extensively,” states Yang (2009), highlighting the pivotal focus we must begin to place on technology instruction within the school day. Many schools today, especially where funding is limited, have little technology and still make use of the dusty blackboards and chalk as the primary tools for promoting student learning. Walking into a classroom where the chalkboard is the centerpiece is like taking a giant step back in time. The content we try to teach to the students should be relevant to their lives, so why shouldn’t the materials and resources we are using to teach them on be just as state-of-the-art? It’s no wonder students are having a hard time staying motivated, focused, and engaged in their daily routine. We have reached a day where all classrooms must begin to be transformed into 21st Century meccas in which technology takes on an active role in assisting students in becoming thinkers and learners. The internet, as routine as it has become in our daily lives, is at the forefront of technology being rolled out into students’ daily environment. “There is a significant impact on motivation for students that are exposed to and given the opportunity to explore technological advances (including internet) within the classroom.” (Kramarski & Feldman, 2009,), showing that motivation is driven by the desire to be stimulated through technology. Internet and the technology surrounding it has countless opportunities for learning and is extremely popular due to its connectivity at a global level. Ducate and Lomicka (2008) sum up internet classroom uses by stating “to increase opportunities for interaction outside of the traditional classroom, teachers are beginning to employ different types of social software such as blogs, wikis, chat or instant messaging” (p. 9). For the purpose of this study, a focus on educational blogging will guide my research.

A blog, as quoted by Yang (2009), is “an online journal that users can continuously update, in their own words, online”. The focus and purpose of an educational blog is different from a traditional community blog. Poling (2005) defines educational blogging as an “application that allows for enhanced comprehension and communication among students as well as the ability to build deeper understanding across the curriculum” (375-376). Poling describes two key purposes of the educational blog - to act as a platform for further

comprehension and communication, both student-to-student and student-to-teacher. Barone and Wright (2008) suggest that some teachers may identify with past models of literacy as paper and pencil bound; however, new conceptions involve continually changing views of reading and writing, particularly, with the advent of the Internet. According to Boling (2008), when teachers act as moderators and create blogs, they provide students with opportunities to connect safely with real audiences while learning. Boling (2008) argues that this, in turn, can result in increased motivation and

literacy engagement as students read, write, create, and produce for meaningful and authentic purposes. The main question that drives this research project is if blogging can be used to support reading comprehension? The research was collected while working with a group of fifth graders during guided reading instruction. To help me research this question, I conducted a series of assessments using student questionnaires, interviews, observations, and student work samples. My findings showed a measurable gain in student scores on written responses to literature. The work the students completed was thorough and much more developed than their work that they completed prior to utilizing the blog. Likewise, there was an obvious increase in student motivation while blogging. These findings call for teachers to begin to utilize technology as a support to instruction. No longer can educators opt out of integrating technology into their daily routine. We are in an age when we must embrace technology and find ways to expose our students to it as a way to support their learning.

CONCLUSION

After considering all of the implications that my research brings to mind, I am presented with some lasting questions. First, how can blogging be utilized throughout a student's day and in other academic subjects to support their learning? As a teacher, we must continuously search for ways to engage our students in learning that they find meaningful. Having seen the results of this study, I am intrigued to see if these results would be present in other subjects. Would students feel inclined to follow their progress in reading, detailing the steps they take to figure out complex problems? Would reading instruction allow for students to reflect critically while still expressing themselves logically? How would students use a blog in special-area instruction (art, music, physical education, reading, writing and etc)? These are some of the questions that arose while conducting my research. One area that I would like to research more in depth is how blogging supports students global awareness. It would be interesting to see how being connected to a global network opens the door for more critical, worldly conversations instigated by students. Blogging in the classroom is a highly effective way to support reading comprehension. Throughout my research, the theme of student motivation tied to technology use in the classroom was present, due to the authentic nature of technology usage. Outside of the increased motivation, blogging also acts as a springboard for authentic learning as well as helps support the comprehension skills of readers. Teachers continue to search for ways to create memorable and authentic experiences within the classroom as a way to motivate all learners. Blogging provides a positive way to create this experience. This purposeful learning activity that involves student engagement, communication and collaboration with one another, helps support the idea of bringing out of school literacies inside the classroom.

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