

BLOGGING ABOUT BOOKS: WRITING, READING, AND THINKING IN A
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CLASSROOM

A Dissertation
presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2007

The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the

dissertation entitled

**BLOGGING ABOUT BOOKS: WRITING, READING, AND THINKING IN A
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CLASSROOM**

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a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation study is dedicated to my husband and family. Aaron encouraged and supported me while I went back to school. I appreciate his sense of humor and his words of wisdom.

My parents, Kelly and Louise, always had faith that I could accomplish anything I wanted to. I remember a fateful evening a few years ago in their family room as I discussed with them about going back to school. They told me that the four years would pass whatever I did. I knew from that conversation that I did not want to look back after four years and think, “I should have gone back to school.”

I am especially proud of this accomplishment when I think about my grandparents who lived a large part of their lives without running water and driving horses instead of cars. I think about my mother’s parents who took their family in a Model A to California to pick fruit for the summers, and I think about my father’s parents renting a farm and ploughing fields behind their horses. I think about my parents who grew up in a time where college was not automatic, and even the best students were not always encouraged to go to school. In these aspects, pursuing and obtaining this degree is important to, not only me, but to my family.

I’m the youngest, and I know that has influenced all of my accomplishments as well. My brother, Doug, and my sister, Lori, are my best friends. Since I was little, they let me tag along, and they still do.

This is also dedicated to Amy and John Lannin who let me live in their basement for over a year. I can never repay such a generous gift of hospitality and friendship. I hope Justin and Elizabeth remember the many games of two-square we played in the

morning before school. Thanks for letting me be a part of your family. I loved it, and I still miss all of you.

Ever since I begin this I've heard over and over the statistics of the people who finish the coursework and never finish the dissertation. I can see how it can happen. It would be so easy. Writing the dissertation is mostly lonely work. I thought that it was because I was in Springfield, but after talking to Amy I think feeling a bit isolated may be the nature of writing a dissertation. But, as I struggled and fought with this damn book, I knew that I was learning so much. There have been these moments in my life where I could feel my mind changing in some way. I think the first time I recall was working on my master's degree, and reading quite a bit of rhetorical theory. The second time was while I was teaching. I was reading a lot and trying to find new ways to make my classroom work, and I had this feeling of the whole world opening before my eyes. Everything seemed like potential. I felt that way as I completed the coursework. The coursework at Mizzou was wonderful. I loved my classes, and the people I took the classes with. I remember leaving Columbia, going back to school the next day, and trying something new. There was never enough time to try everything new I had learned.

As I sat alone, searching for a place where I thought the writing would come, a few lessons stuck out for me. I just needed to write. It didn't matter what I wrote I just needed to write. And when I got to the meat of this project, when it became really important, the breaking point, I would just sit and freewrite for awhile. For some reason, at some point, this seemed like an extravagance, to write with no purpose, but that is the thing that pulled me through. Writing whether I felt like it or not, was important, but the only way I could do that is if I freewrote first.

The dissertation made me feel like maybe I could be a professor. Now, as I read journal articles, and books, I see an entirely new perspective that was invisible to me before. I know what methodology means. I know what a qualitative study is. I think I could give advice on data analysis. The learning involved in the creation of this document was like none I experienced before. But, I could not have even dreamed four years ago that this could be accomplished. In fact, I wouldn't allow myself to think about writing a dissertation, and that was in part thanks to Dr. Fox's advice that I needed to take the course work and see what became of it.

In four years, I have done things I never thought I could. Five years ago, I wanted to go to conferences, but I did not even know how to. No one else I knew was going, and I was not even sure how to get money from the school. Now, I get to help people write their proposals, and I am in a position to give them money through the writing project to support their work.

Writing a dissertation was a consuming experience. It was constantly on my mind. I could not have finished it faster, but I could have taken longer. I am still processing what went on during the dissertation study. As I wrote the dissertation, I shared with Aaron that all of our classrooms should have this final component. Isn't this the ultimate authentic assessment? Students take a lot of classes and learn from a lot of great teachers, and then it's time to synthesize it in a manner that is relevant to the students' interests.

Dr. Fox introduced me to Csikszentmihalyi's ideas on "flow experiences." There has to be the right balance of difficulty and the ability to succeed. In order for a flow experience to occur, there has to be feedback and goals, and people lose track of time. When I think of my time at Mizzou, the experience feels, simultaneously, like the longest

and shortest four years. The experience feels like a blur, and I, for much of that four years, was in a zone. I look back on it now, and I wonder how I did it. I know that I made the smart decision, and I remember that moment in my parents' living room, the fireplace warming the room, and their advice, and I am so glad I listened to them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Four years ago, I could not have imagined where course work and the ensuing dissertation would lead. I remember thinking that I was supposed to know my dissertation topic from the beginning of my course work. Dr. Fox explained that I needed to take classes and see where they led, and he was right.

I took that advice to heart, and I went into my course work open to the possibilities. Looking back, I never could have planned the inspiration and journey of this study. When I read this study, I see the influences of the professors that I took classes from. I wrote a paper tracing the influences of writing workshop in Dr. Robinson's History of Literacy class. Dr. Gilles's Talk in the Curriculum class influenced this study. I wrote about blogging because of experiences in Dr. Strickland's Theory and Practice of Composition and Rhetoric of Emotion. I was able to write the methodology section and plan the study because of Dr. Baker's Qualitative classes.

I am fortunate to know and work with my advisor, Roy Fox. I learned so much through the books he asked me to read, and the papers he asked me to write, and through the conversations we had. I always felt very blessed to have Dr. Fox as an advisor. As I wrote the dissertation and as he provided me feedback, I continued learned even more about writing and about how I want to be as a professor of English Education.

I feel blessed to have been a student of the people in this department. I am very proud to be a graduate of a doctoral program in the Learning, Teaching, & Curriculum department at the University of Missouri. I have worked with professors who are some of the best in their field, and who are kind people that care for their students. I learned so much from my time in Townsend Hall.

In my life, I have fortunate to be surrounded by these very supportive people who are my friends. I have to thank Carolyn and Jack Hembree who supported me and encouraged me as I wrote the dissertation. Thanks to my friends, Julie Sheerman and Linda Trinh Moser, who read excerpts and responded and offered supportive words and feedback when I needed it most.

This book is dedicated to Barb, and teachers like her, who are not afraid of trying something new. She motivates, encourages, supports, and loves her students. Her students love her for years to come. She is also a friend and person who encouraged me as I returned to school, and I will always cherish her friendship, guidance, and support, and the offering of a classroom, trying something that few teachers in her area had tried before.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to investigate how blogging as a reader response tool influences students' writing, response to literature, and thinking. From October 2006 through January 2007, thirty students in a ninth grade, English I Honors class, used the blog to post responses to literature. The data suggests that students can sustain appropriate and beneficial online conversations with minimal prompts from the teacher. Using open coding and categories from Hillocks (1980) and Odell (1999) student writing on the blog was analyzed for writing, specifically fluency and voice, levels of comprehension, and thinking. The data suggests that students' fluency, voice, and confidence increased. Students valued collaboration and felt that the blog created community. Students generated their own responses to the literature and made text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections. Students moved toward higher levels of comprehension. In addition, students demonstrated a variety of verbal and visual thinking strategies. Overall, the data suggest that students can sustain appropriate and beneficial online conversations with minimal prompts from the teacher.

A number of pedagogical recommendations are included. Recommendations include using the categories for analysis used in this paper to assess students' writing on the blog, as well as to assess their own writing.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Our job is not to teach students how to write, but to teach them how to teach themselves to write. –Donald Murray, Write to Learn

In the last ten years, I have spent many hours reading and responding to writing and wondering what it means to be a writing teacher. The idea of teaching students to teach themselves how to write has influenced my thinking more than any other idea. This dissertation deals with a new era for writing instruction. Not only do we need to teach students how to teach themselves to write, we now have to teach students to teach themselves to write using computers.

Learning how to write on computers has evolved. We began with exploring word processing. When the Internet came along, people began creating web pages. In 1999, I wrote my master's thesis on the use of discussion boards and chat rooms in a first-year composition course. Thinking about how computers might influence our writing and discussions of writing ignited my thinking, and I found myself often wondering how technology influences teaching and learning. Even though my interests are in this realm, I am not a computer wizard. I do not know how to write HTML. I do not have any special tech savviness, nor am I a person who believes technology is the answer to all problems. I approach its entrance into our lives with cynicism and amazement.

Throughout my undergraduate years, I did not have email. I had heard of Yahoo, but no one had become rich on their stock options yet. When I researched papers for a British literature class during my senior year of college, in 1996, I used note cards and the Interlibrary Loan System. By 1999, I used email frequently, and I completed research for my papers on the Internet. While I had clicked many times on text underlined in blue, for

the first time, I learned the term “hypertext.” This led to the research for my thesis in which I inquired about students’ perspectives of discussion boards and chat rooms as part of a first-year composition course. Eight years later, students are just as likely to have blog or online journal instead of an email account, and in this dissertation, I inquire about a blog in a ninth grade communication arts class at a high school in the Midwest.

Blogs, an abbreviation of web logs, are essentially web pages which allow users to easily create online postings which appear chronologically on the page. Rebecca Blood, author of *The Weblog Handbook* (2002) and “Rebecca’s Pocket,” a blog she’s maintained since the late 90s, outlines four types of blogs: blogs, notebook blogs, filter blogs, and collaborative blogs. “Blogs” are short, personal posts that focus on the blogger’s life. “Notebook” blog posts consist of longer entries, usually edited, with links secondary to the content of the post. “Filter blogs” are posts with links and commentary that the blogger has “filtered” as she surfs the internet. A “collaborative” blog is shared by a group of people.

Downes (2004) describes blog posts as “short, informal, sometimes controversial, and sometimes deeply personal, no matter what topic they approach” (p. 18). The blog discussed in this study is a collaborative blog with mostly “blog” posts and “notebook” posts. Each post is written by an individual, but a class of thirty shares one “collaborative” blog.

How is writing on paper different than writing on a blog? Neil Postman (1986) in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* attempts to explain the history and implications of media in our culture. Although this book was written before the introduction of blogging or even the Internet, his ideas have implications for any new type of media that our culture

adopts: “the form in which ideas are expressed affects what those ideas will be” (p. 31), and describes the changes new technology brings:

Anyone even slightly familiar with the history of communications knows that every new technology for thinking involves a trade-off. It giveth and taketh away, although not quite in equal measure. Media change does not necessarily result in equilibrium. It sometimes creates more than it destroys. Sometimes, it is the other way around. We must be careful in praising or condemning because the future may hold surprises for us. (p. 29)

Blogging, like emailing, instant messaging, and music downloading has become part of kindergarten through college students’ technological repertoire. This study attempts to figure out how this new online tool affects the content and thinking of students who now publish writing on a daily basis outside of school. While 78% of students use the Internet, most students feel that schools do not use the Internet effectively (Levin, Arafah, Rainie, & Lenhart, 2002). Ninety-nine percent of classrooms have a computer in the room, but only half of teachers use computers in class, and of those 50% that do use computers, most teachers use them for word processing or spreadsheet activities (U.S. Department, 2002).

How This Study Began

In 2004, I tripped over the word “blogging” as I researched a paper focused on the use of computer-mediated communication in secondary classes as a way to improve literacy. With a bit more research, I found a free website for educators (<http://edublogs.net>), and I created my own blog. I planned on using the blog to write

reflections and notes about a multicultural literature class I was taking that summer. I vowed to post my writing to the blog every day. Like diaries and journals before, I lost interest fairly quickly, only blogging four times that summer and seldom returning to that page.

I quickly forgot the blog until the following spring when I took a course focusing on the theory and practice of composition with Dr. Donna Strickland in the English department at the University of Missouri-Columbia. As part of the coursework, the class was required to post to two blogs: a class blog and a personal blog. The class blog would be a place for the students to reflect on the readings and ask questions.

Dr. Strickland had recently become interested in blogging. She was a blog enthusiast, and she read academic blogs in the area of rhetoric and composition. I quickly saw the value of posting journal-like, exploratory writing to a public space where students could comment to each other. The students in the class posted entries to the collaborative blog and posted comments to each others' entries; the only person who read my individual blog was Dr. Strickland. I read my classmates' individual blogs, which was not required. Most of us posted infrequently on the individual blog, and the posts were usually unrelated to the class. As I have learned more about blogs, the reason for this phenomenon has more to do with audience than lack of motivation. The students in the class only saw the professor, Dr. Strickland, as an audience, and I am not sure we knew what to write on the individual blog. The individual blog lacked collaboration, discussion, and connections that occurred on the class collaborative blog. By the end of the class, I still was not blogging consistently on my individual blog (<http://writingteacher.blogspot.com>), but I began reading blogs. I read Dr. Strickland's

posts (<http://porquoipas.blogspot.com/>) which were commentaries about topics in rhetoric and composition theory, and she usually hyperlinked her posts to other academics discussing the same topics. The ability to hyperlink her posts to the thinking and writing of her peers in other parts of the country was exciting because of the potential to connect ideas. In *Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (1997), Landow offers insight into the history of hypertext and its applications. Vannevar Bush in 1945 outlined the idea of memex, the forerunner to the Internet, and what he described as a “a mechanically linked information-retrieval machine[s] to help scholars and decision makers faced with what was already becoming an explosion of information” (p. 7). Blogging in the new millennia allows users to write, share, and connect their ideas to the ideas of other sources.

I enrolled in a second rhetoric course taught by Dr. Strickland in the spring of 2005. In this class, we shared one collaborative blog; students posted responses to the readings and commented on each other’s posts. I still had the original individual blog that I created for Dr. Strickland’s first class, and I began posting more consistently. The writing on my individual blog focused on the reading and teaching I was doing. At the same time, I was reading Louise Rosenblatt’s *Literature as Exploration* (1938) and thinking about blogging as a way for students to share aesthetic responses to literature, to write more, to link ideas, and to converse with each other.

I shared my blog and my thinking with Mrs. Jones, a former colleague at the high school where I had taught, and I discussed with her concerning what blogging might look like in a high school classroom. With my help, in November 2005 at the end of the semester, she started a blog for her ninth grade communication arts class. The blog she

created was not a focal point of her class. Mrs. Jones had not blogged before, and she asked only that students post about what they were reading.

Research Problem and Rationale

Why is blogging in a communication arts class important? Simply, a teacher should look for what motivates students. What are the students in our classrooms doing? Are they going home and watching television? Possibly. Are they downloading music and writing on MySpace or Facebook? Studies like these are important in that they help educators understand what engages students and what literacies have a purpose and value in their lives (Alvermann & Heron, 2001; Bean, Bean, & Bean, 1999; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Knobel, 1999). The research problem is rooted in Postman's (1986) and McLuhan's (1962) idea that form affects content; thus, the question becomes: How do adolescents engage with in-school digital literacies such as blogging? Studying students' in-class blogging will inform educators of ways teachers and students can use blogs in a classroom. This study will help explain how students navigate blogging as a medium for literature discussion; obstacles teachers and students may encounter as they integrate this tool into the classroom; and in a larger realm, understand the writing, response, and thinking practices of students who use blogs as part of a class.

Leu and Kinzer (2003) suggest teachers may become perceived as insignificant if they do not tap into new literacies evolving from online technologies. According to the study, "Teen Content Creators and Consumers" by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Lenhart & Madden, 2005), 19% of online teens keep a blog and 38% read blogs. Fifty-seven percent of online teens create content for the Internet; 33% of online teens share their own creations online. According to the Pew study, "Bloggers: A Portrait of the Internet's New Storytellers" (Lenhart & Fox, 2006), bloggers are a young diverse group, equally split between men and women. Bloggers blog for creative expression and to share

personal experiences, and although bloggers view their work “as a personal pursuit” (p. ii), blogs are public web pages. The Pew studies (2005, 2006) show students’ out-of-school online activity and online literacies are abundant. Some teachers are beginning to introduce blogs into classrooms (Read, 2006; Richardson, 2003; Weiler, 2003). The amount of online reading and writing students complete outside of school may prepare them for the global work force more than traditional in-school literacies (Knobel, 2000; Leu & Kinzer, 2003). Hart-Davidson et al. (2005) describe the new demands for teachers:

They [teachers in schools] must be prepared not only to work with students and their new literacies in productive ways, but also to modify current curricula to account for students who spend as much time reading the text of coded simulations or visual arguments as they do the pages of novels. (p. 183)

Guzzetti and Gamboa’s (2005) research on adolescent girls’ personal online journals suggests future studies could help researchers and educators to understand what digital literacies will “mean to be a reader and writer in the 21st century” and learn more about “motivating practices for today’s adolescents in a digital world” (p. 202). It is important that teachers consider students’ out-of-school writing. What teachers learn may provide motivating activities for their classroom. Online communicative technologies such as blogs can engage students’ literacy practices learned outside the classroom, thus expanding students’ and teachers understanding of what counts as text (Bean et al., 1999; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Heath, 1983; Leu & Kinzer, 2003).

Classroom teachers face two important issues: relevance and motivation. First, is the curriculum and instruction relevant to students in a global workplace, and second, is

the curriculum and instruction motivating? Right now, teachers and administrators may not realize the amount students write on a daily basis.

Bill Gates (2005), co-founder and chairman of Microsoft, champions the idea of integrating technology to increase the relevance of high school curriculum. Gates presses Congress and the public through editorials encouraging a redesign of high schools through a focus on the “basic building blocks” of rigor, relevance, and relationships. Gates has made secondary education one of his philanthropic focuses, urging Congress to increase funding for education and using his own money to open Microsoft-backed schools focusing on a technology-based liberal arts education [On February 27, 2007, Gates’ High Tech High School in Redmond City, California, closed on the same day his editorial in the *Washington Post* demanded better schools (Vance, 2007).]

Gates’ corporate branding of schools raises many questions, although the point he makes about relevance in high school curriculum is valid. Schools have changed little in fifty years. Many classrooms are designed for students to sit in straight rows, facing forward, as a teacher lectures. As we know, rote memorization and linear thinking were important in the industrial age, but what do students need to know in the digital age? Is the communication arts classroom relevant to students? Are we preparing students for these new literacy events? Can we ignore the out-of-school literacies of students and continue our traditional teaching practices? As these new technologies become part of students’ personal lives, we need to explore what blogs “giveth” and what they “taketh.”

Pioneers in the field of literacy and composition are discussing the importance of understanding how students use these new literacies. Shirley Brice Heath in “Crawling on the Bones of What We Know,” in an interview with Suzanne Powers (2002), brought up

questions she believes teachers should ask of their students: “How do they [students] spend their discretionary time? What are they doing? What’s available for kids? How are they using oral and written language and other symbol systems in that space of time?” (p. 85-86). Janet Emig, composition scholar and author of the seminal work *The Composing Processes of Twelfth-Graders*, describes in the November 2006 *Council Chronicle* her happiness about the progress of writing instruction in schools, but she acknowledges a gap in teacher understanding of what computers do for writing:

I am struck by the feeling that teachers don’t seem to understand the revolution that the computer represents . . . by teachers not knowing how much students are writing. These kids are writing as much outside of school as some of our Victorian writers did! . . . [W]e have yet to connect what is done inside schools with the fantastic interest that kids express in writing on their own.

(Baumann, 2006)

Both of these accomplished researchers insist that classroom teachers look beyond literacy research to see what computers do for classrooms and writing instruction.

Besides literacy theorists, composition theorists, and literacy researchers, blogging is in the news. Nussbaum’s (2004) article in the *New York Times* profiles teen bloggers, the frequency of their blogging, and the introspective nature of their writing. A recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2007) describes the blogging practices of educators who use blogging as a way to vent frustration and share opinions. Both the *Times* article and the *Chronicle* article share the theme of blogging as catharsis.

Time Magazine's cover for December 18, 2006, "How to Build a Student for the 21st Century," focuses on the contradiction between the organization of today's public schools and the needs of students in a global society. Wallis and Steptoe's (2006) article in the issue, "How to Bring Our Schools Out of the 20th Century," includes an example of an assignment in which the student memorizes the rivers in South America. The mother of the student told her daughter to tell the teacher that was a silly assignment. The daughter could Google the information. [The mother happened to be the Dean of Stanford's School of Education.] Although the teacher's perspective is not included in this article, there is an argument that students need to be taught information literacy skills in a climate where so much information is available and it becomes more important to find and analyze information rather than memorize it. The article suggests that critical thinking in terms of finding and evaluating information becomes a more important skill than memorization.

A survey of 6300 students at 63 colleges, universities, community colleges, and high school seniors by the Educational Testing Service (cited in the *Times* article but also disseminated through NCTE Inbox) reports few students show informational literacy *skills*. In terms of evaluating websites, only 49% of students could identify a credible website using criteria outlined in the text. Thirty-five percent of students could narrow a broad search on the Internet. In a slide show, 80% of students included "irrelevant points with relevant points." On the positive side, students could categorize emails, select the best question to clarify an assignment, and understand that .edu and .gov sites are more credible than .com sites. Both the article and the report suggest the importance of

students' ability to discriminate between and find information in an age where information abounds. Schools can help fill the information and media literacy skill gap.

Many articles on blogging focus on the controversy, specifically, the danger of "online predators" and some bloggers' tendencies to share incriminating information (e.g. pictures of themselves drunk). In October 2005, a New Jersey Catholic School's principal requested students delete their personal blog or risk expulsion (Gomez, 2005).

Beyond the controversies, I want to return to Emig who wondered how writing teachers can incorporate technology and how teachers are changing as they meet students who write frequently for themselves. By not incorporating out-of-school literacies such as blogging, do writing teachers miss an opportunity to offer relevant learning opportunities for students? If we do not incorporate and acknowledge the types of writing students do out of school, do we miss an opportunity to tap into improving writing and thinking in our English classroom?

Questions for the Study

Building on Guzzetti and Gamboa's (2005) question from their study of adolescent girls' out-of-school literacy with personal blogs, this study asks the following overall question: How do adolescents engage with in-school digital literacies?

My specific research questions follow:

1. What does blogging mean for students' writing?
2. What does blogging mean for students' responses to literature?
3. What does blogging mean for students' thinking?

Theoretical Framework

The following section outlines several theories that informed my thinking as I researched and completed the study. Four areas guided my thinking: social learning theory, reader response theory, writing as thinking, and changing views and definitions of literacy.

Social Learning Theory

From the beginning, blogging was exciting for me because of the opportunity it offers for people to connect and collaborate. Social interaction has always been an important part of the classes that I teach since I realized when students with frequent opportunities to talk and share writing learned more and were more engaged. Like most teachers with a very full workload and with only a cursory knowledge of Vygotsky, I did not realize that the talk that occurred in my classroom was related to Vygotsky's (1978) idea that social interaction—teacher to student or student to student—helps students learn. Through this social interaction, especially when a student is paired with a peer, or capable adult, with more knowledge or skills, students enter the “Zone of Proximal Development” (ZPD), an area where students maximize learning through collaboration with a more knowledgeable peer. Vygotsky's research focuses on young children in face-to-face interaction, but the implications of his work can also be applied to social interaction on the Internet. His ideas were a lens that framed my conceptual thinking about blogs.

Through further research, I discovered the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) who use Vygotsky's work to frame their idea of situated learning, legitimate peripheral participation, and communities of practice. Lave and Wenger study occupations

involving traditional apprenticeships, such as meat cutters, midwives, and tailors; less knowledgeable people, apprentices, are paired with experts for a period until the less knowledgeable person learns the skills, behaviors, and culture of that job. Situated learning theory works well as a conceptual lens because the theory takes into consideration the identity building occurring as people become a part of a new community—“identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another” (p. 53).

Knowledge and learning is reciprocal as students and the teacher bring different expertise to this rich social interaction. This group becomes a “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991). More importantly, situated learning values the context of the learning instead of learning out-of-context. If we use Lave and Wenger’s (1991) of the apprenticeship model, situated learning occurs when an experienced meat cutter mentors the apprentice. The apprentice meat cutter learns through watching and hands-on practice. An example of learning out of context would be if the inexperienced meat cutter learns the trade through reading a textbook in a classroom without benefit of hands-on experience.

Reader Response Theory

Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory outlined in *Literature as Exploration* (1938) and *The Reader, The Text, The Poem* (1978) is highly influential to the study. In a sense, reader response theory invites readers into a community of readers. Reader response theory values the perceptions of readers and the experiences they bring as they read and connect personally to a text. In her seminal work, Rosenblatt (1938) explains that readers can evaluate the same text differently based on purpose, personal experience, and the situation. She suggests that aesthetic reading experiences need to be integral part of a curriculum. Most students are asked by teachers to respond to literature using an efferent stance, responding with the purpose of carrying away information from non-fiction, fiction, and poetry (Rosenblatt, 1938, p. 2-3). The aesthetic reading Rosenblatt espouses "places the experienced meaning in the full light of awareness and involves the selective process of creating a work of art" (1978, p. 75). A reader response classroom as described by Rosenblatt should have "an atmosphere of informal friendly exchange . . . where the student should feel free to reveal emotions and to make judgments" (p. 1938, 67).

For Rosenblatt (1938, 1978), enjoyment and involvement in reading occur when students respond to texts on a personal level, and thinking occurs through imagic and verbal responses. She writes that "spontaneous response should be the first step toward increasingly mature primary reactions" (1938, p. 71). The idea of "spontaneous response" fits with the next theory that framed the study—the idea that writing, specifically expressive writing, assists in thinking.

Expressive Writing or Writing and Thinking

James Britton et al. (1975), in his seminal study of writing instruction, outlines three functions of writing: transactional writing, expressive writing, and poetic writing. Expressive writing is used when “we frame the tentative first drafts of new ideas; and the mode in which, in times of family or national crisis, we talk with our own people and attempt to work our way towards some kind of resolution” (p. 82). Students have many experiences with transactional writing and few experiences with expressive writing (p. 165). Types of transactional writing would include writing used to test what students know or writing to inform. Britton et al. describes expressive language in writing as “thinking aloud on paper”; a “diary entry that attempts to record and explore the writer’s feelings, mood, opinions, preoccupations of the moment”; and “personal letters to friends . . .” (p. 89). Depending on the type of post (see Blood’s definitions, 2002), blogs offer students opportunities to inform, advise, persuade, think aloud, record, and explore. When writing “meets the demands of some kind of participation in the world’s affairs, the nearer will it approach the transactional end of the scale” (p. 83). Britton et al. describes this move from expressive to transactional as a move “from an intimate to a more public audience” (p. 83).

In addition, the expressive, spontaneous, and exploratory writing on the blog is consistent with Peter Elbow’s (2000) idea of freewriting as a way to ignore audience and focus on thinking. Freewriting occurs when students use writing to think. Elbow suggests freewriting improves thinking, voice, energy, and presence (p. 87). One reason for this improvement, according to Elbow, is that freewriting generates a dialogue between the writer and the words. For many students, writing is merely transcription—“I will put the

words in my head down on paper.” Freewriting forces the writer to create a dialogue between the words in her head. The writer begins to connect thinking and writing thereby negotiating words on paper and beginning a dialogue between inner speech, thinking, and writing.

Another way to create a dialogue between the writer and the words is through journal writing, a genre in which writers are encouraged to think and reflect. Several articles on blogging compare blogs to journals (Downes, 2004; Fernheimer & Nelson, 2005; Kajder & Bull, 2004). Fulwiler’s (1987) *The Journal Book*, outlines language characteristics, cognitive characteristics, and cognitive activities associated with journal writing. Journals feature colloquial diction, first person pronouns, informal punctuation, rhythms of everyday speech, and experimentation. Cognitively, journals offer students a place to observe, question, speculate, digress, synthesize, and revise. According to Fulwiler, journals should be chronological and should have frequent, lengthy, and self-sponsored entries.

New Literacies

The third idea guiding my thinking is the idea of “multiliteracies” and “new literacies.” “Literacy” has never been a stagnant term. As culture changes, literacy changes. “Multiliteracies,” the more theoretical of the two terms, was coined by The New London Group, comprised of literacy researchers who met in 1994 to discuss technology’s impact of literacy practices:

The notion of Multiliteracies supplements traditional literacy pedagogy by addressing these two related aspects of textual multiplicity. What we might term ‘mere literacy’ remains centred

on language only, and usually on a singular national form of language at that, being conceived as a stable system based on rules such as mastering sound-letter correspondence Multiliteracies also create a different kind of pedagogy: one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 3)

The result of the 1994 meeting and the exploration of thinking on the topic of “multiliteracies” was the book *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Future* (2000). The authors attempt to answer the question: “What constitutes appropriate literacy teaching in the context of the ever more critical factors of local diversity and global connectedness?” (Cope & Kalantzis, p. 3).

Two main arguments of The New London Group are important to the results and recommendations of this study. The first argument is that “Meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal—in which written-linguistic modes of meaning are part and parcel of visual, audio, and spatial patterns of meaning” (p. 5). The second argument is that in an increasing global and connected world, one language is not enough: “Effective citizenship and productive work now require that we interact differently using multiple languages, multiple Englishes, and communication patterns that more frequently cross cultural, community, and national boundaries” (p. 6). “Multiliteracies” constitutes a framework for thinking about how globalization and technology influence our literate practices. For teachers this can only mean an expansion of earlier views of what it means

to be literate. Therefore, teachers may be selling students short by simply assigning a paper—a one-dimensional, one-modality assignment.

The second term important to this study is “New Literacy Studies” (NLS) which focuses on a discussion of pedagogical practices and “new literacies” incorporated in classrooms. Brian Street (2005), a literacy researcher, writes, “NLS represents a shift in perspective on the study and acquisition of literacy, from the dominant cognitive model, with its emphasis on reading, to a broader understanding of literacy practices in their social and cultural contexts” (p. 417). NLS is an ethnographic approach focusing on researching everyday literacy practices and describing how they link to specific educational contexts.

Leu and Kinzer (2003) explain how new literacy studies fit within several theoretical frameworks including critical literacies, media literacy, and multiliteracies. They suggest that new literacies “encompass all of these views.” They outline ten principles of their theoretical framework for new literacies:

1. The Internet and other ICTs [Information and Communications Technologies] are central technologies for literacy within a global community in an information age.
2. The Internet and other ICTs require new literacies to fully access their potential.
3. New literacies are deictic.
4. The relationship between literacy and technology is transactional.
5. New literacies are multiple in nature.
6. Critical literacies are central to the new literacies.

7. New forms of strategic knowledge are central to the new literacies.
8. Speed counts in important ways within the new literacies.
9. Learning often is socially constructed within new literacies.
10. Teachers become more important, though their role changes, within new literacy classrooms. (p. 1589)

“Multiliteracies” is much more theoretical and globally focused than New Literacies, which focus on pedagogical practices, so I mostly focus on the latter. Both theories consider how technology influences and expands definitions of “literacy.” New Literacies focuses more specifically on the pedagogical practices that incorporate technology. A New Literacies approach sees technology as a relevant and motivating practice that creates curriculum that Applebee (1996) would call “knowledge-in-context.” New Literacy studies identify with a socio-cultural perspective (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Leu & Kinzer, 2003).

New literacy studies also can be linked to any research in language learning. For example, in Shirley Brice Heath’s (1983) seminal ethnographic research of two communities in the Piedmont region of the Carolinas, she found that the literacies students learned at home were not always valued. This same idea has implications for research with technology tools such as blogging. Do teachers value student out-of-school literacies? Knobel’s (2001) study describes a young man failing at in-school literacies, but successful in creating advertisements and brochures for his father’s business. Really this boils down to, are we teaching students what they need to know?

Procedures

I approach this research as a qualitative case study which I will discuss further in Chapter Three. Researchers use case study for prolonged engagement in specific contexts. According to Yin (2003), “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). The “contextual conditions” of this study are important. I look specifically at blogs used in a ninth grade in unprompted literature discussion. The classroom context and the phenomenon of blogging are intertwined. Dyson and Genishi’s (2005) *On the Case* focuses on case study in literacy settings: “Everyday teaching and learning are complex social happenings, and understanding them as such is the grand purpose of qualitative case studies” (p. 9). Researchers using case study in literacy settings try to uncover the complex intersections both socially and technologically through studying at online journals, blogs, and the social ramifications of these online communicative tools. Guzzetti & Gamboa (2005) suggest research could help “gain insights for forming interconnected purposes that draw on relevant and motivating practices for today’s adolescents in a digital world” (p. 202). Labbo & Reinking (1999) support case studies focused on individual students, teachers, and classrooms:

Research needs to be aimed at studying the process of changes brought about purposefully or incidentally by encounters with technology at the level of individual teachers, students, classrooms, and schools. In this regard, research investigating the processes by which technology becomes or does not become integrated with the

curriculum and instructional environment may be more immediately useful and less transitory than research aimed primarily at determining effectiveness of specific applications or models of implementation. (p. 34)

My goals parallel Labbo and Reinking for the fact that I focus on the individual teachers, students, and classrooms, and how blogging becomes part of the communication arts curriculum in a ninth grade class.

The Pilot Study

A pilot study from January 2006 to May 2006 continued to stoke my interest in what blogs mean for a classroom literature discussion. The pilot study provided a place to experiment with ideas for the blog, and to get to know the teacher and the culture of her classroom. For example, students in three separate classes shared one collaborative blog. While it was exciting to see the number of posts and the connections students made with students across classrooms, the 1500 archived posts were unwieldy for both students and teachers. During this time, data collection included field notes from the observation, the archived posts, twelve individual student interviews, and two classroom discussions.

Incorporating innovations in the classroom creates its own set of unique challenges. This feels especially true for teachers who explore introducing technology tools such as blogs. The glitches associated with incorporating laptops into the classroom became apparent from the first day. For example, although the mobile laptops with wireless capability are state of the art, the electrical outlets are not. The following description comes from my field notes:

On the first day of my observations, I got to school at about 8:15. I checked into the office. When I walked up to Mrs. Jones' room on the

second floor of the school, there were two students in her room. Teachers have mentees who assist them and she had borrowed two from other teachers to help her get the mobile computer lab set up during first block. She had changed the layout of the room. The desks were pentagonal, and she had put them together into two separate long tables that would fit about 12 students apiece. There was another small table for four students parallel to the windows. A laptop sat at each chair and a surge protector/power cord sat in the middle of the table. Three power cords sat on each table. The laptops were plugged into these and the power cords were plugged into the wall. An overhead project was set up in the front. Mrs. Jones had borrowed a laptop from the business teacher. She had a projector set up, but it wasn't working. She called the librarian and had a student pick up a projector. This was one of many calls to the library, office, and janitor.

The morning felt chaotic. I remembered in my former teaching experience when I would bring the mobile laptops into the room. It was always a lot of work. Setting up was an ordeal that took a lot of energy.

When the kids came in to the class, they seemed excited. "Ooh, where do you sit?"

Mrs. Jones replied, "Well, this is different, just have a seat."

"I don't know my password."

Another student replied, "Weren't you supposed to figure that out?"

The students needed to have their library password to be able to log onto the computers. Mrs. Jones had told me that the day before she had told the students they needed their library password and email information to be able to get on to the computer.

A student brought in a drink—"Can I have a quick sip?"

"No food, no drinks. I don't want to see anything on the table. We need to talk about the laptops before anything else."

I sat in the southeast corner of the room with a pile of bean bags behind me. Students had to push themselves around me. Students didn't really want to sit by me but they had to. In the beginning, I didn't think that I would be talking to any students. I wanted to be as unobtrusive as possible. That didn't last long. When she began the class with freewriting, a student next to me asked, "How do we get to Word?" I showed her.

By 9:55 a.m., every outlet in the room was broken. We moved computers in all different configurations, even using a hall outlet. Nothing worked. She called the tech guy. He was busy. She called the custodian. We thought we needed to reset the outlet. Half of the room's computers worked and the other half didn't. After Mrs. Jones and her student helper looked around for awhile, I got up to help the student helper look for the problem. We finally discovered that the wall socket wasn't working. The power was out. We tried a socket across the room, one outside in the hall, until finally the student worker plugged in the mobile computer lab across the hall in another teacher's room.

This worked for a while until the power went out again. The janitor had to come up and reset the power. The entire time this happened some kids typed, others sat because they couldn't log on, and most talked about stuff unrelated to class.

These observations portray the events that teachers may face when introducing new technological tools to the class. In addition, teachers may face interference from administrators, questions from parents, and questions about the academic value of blogging. After this experience, many teachers might have given up; instead, Mrs. Jones learned how to re-set the breaker. This day helped me understand my role. I could not sit quietly. I could not ignore students who asked questions. The first weeks were difficult as the students and the teacher learned to organize a wired classroom, but three weeks later, the teacher and students formed a routine. The first block class came in and set up the laptops, and fourth block put them away.

Several problems occurred at the beginning of the semester. Many students did not have email addresses, and even though computers were in the classroom, some students seemed embarrassed to ask for help in creating an email account. Another problem was that "Hotmail" accounts were blocked by the school server. Yahoo accounts were also blocked but student ingenuity and perseverance quickly led to the discovery

that if they tried to get on Yahoo at least three times, the system seemed to “give up,” and they could sign in.

Students used the blog to post their thinking as they read *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The next text on the schedule was *Romeo and Juliet* which was finished by March. After students finished reading the play, they created groups of four to eight and created blogs to discuss their self-selected books under the direction of the teacher. While offering students the opportunity to choose their own groups and discuss those books sounds like a good idea, there was one problem. Groups were not required to set a reading schedule. Since each person in the group read at a different pace, students were afraid to read the blog or post because a main plot element might be revealed by another student. Students often used the phrase “spoiler alert” to warn readers if they revealed pivotal information in a post. Students invited to one of these blogs might post only eight times before the book was finished. Each time students read a new book, they created a new blog. By the end of the semester, there were over 1500 blog posts (not including comments) and more than 20 separate blogs. By May, I posted tentative conclusions to the students’ blog for a member check. Students posted to the blog comments about the tentative conclusions.

The semester of the pilot study proved influential in developing this dissertation study. For example, sharing one class blog with three classes became unwieldy, so the next semester, each class had a separate blog. The pilot study also helped to identify important mini-lessons and expectations that were important to share with students before blogging ever began. The pilot study experience furthered my understanding of the teacher’s approach and the students’ expectations as they entered their freshman year at Hillsdale High School.

Methodological Limitations of the Pilot Study

There were several limitations to the pilot study. Few secondary teachers use blogging in their class. Mrs. Jones, a friend and former colleague, was excited to participate and wanted to use blogs with her English honors classes. I was concerned about studying the class of someone I knew. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the problems of using someone the researcher knows. I have had to work through the problems they outline. It was difficult to be a friend and a researcher. Conversations that included “friend-talk” and “research-talk” were frustrating; every time I talked to her I felt like I should be taking notes. Before the research, we talked more frequently. Once the research began, I chose to talk to her at appointed times and tried to let her know whether it was a research conversation or a friend conversation. But finding someone to incorporate blogging to this extent would have been impossible without Mrs. Jones. She jumped into blogging with enthusiasm as an expert teacher and a novice in technology.

Another aspect of the pilot study which could be viewed as a limitation is the fact that the students were in an English I Honors class. Most of these students were already engaged and motivated by school activities, and all of the students I spoke to felt that grades were important to them. Many students I spoke to in face-to-face interviews were shy, and it was hard for them to articulate their reading and writing processes on the blog. Thinking metacognitively was not a common practice for them; many of the students had never been asked to describe their reading and writing experiences.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One outlines the inspiration for the research, the significance of the study, the theoretical orientation, and the organization of the chapter. Chapter Two describes the literature review of the areas important to the understanding of this study. Chapter Three describes the methodology of the study and the procedures I used for data collection. Chapter Four includes the results based on the data analysis and my research questions. Chapter Five outlines recommendations for future studies and implications of the research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature reflects three areas of research which influence this study: research on writing, specifically expressive writing, fluency, and voice; responding to literature, oral, written, and digital; research on writing, specifically, fluency and thinking; research on thinking; and research on New Literacies. This chapter allows me to share the research and readings that have influenced my thinking during this study. My main question for this study has been: How do adolescents engage with in-school digital literacies? My specific research questions follow:

1. What does blogging mean for students' writing?
2. What does blogging mean for students' responses to literature?
3. What does blogging mean for students' thinking?

I begin by discussing research in response to literature, because the main work of the blog consists of students responding to the literature they read. Response to literature can occur in various forms. For example, students can respond verbally to literature in literature study groups, or students can respond to literature in writing. In the past, those responses were written in pencil or pen. For many classrooms, written work is shared in small groups and/or with the teacher. Another way to share thinking and writing has emerged. Posting writing on a blog allows students to easily view the writing of everyone in their class. Instead of turning in written responses only to the teacher, students posted responses that the entire class could read, and anyone who found the site could read.

One of the main themes of the literature review in this section is that students have knowledge to bring to the text, and that their aesthetic responses are valuable. Rosenblatt's work brought to light the importance of aesthetic responses to literature.

These initial, emotional responses are important and are sometimes ignored in favor of answering questions about the “facts” of a text (Rosenblatt, 2005).

In this study, the teacher did not provide weekly prompts for the students to answer; students guided the literature discussion. In an online discussion, Thompson found that she dominated the discussion, contributing 40% of the entries and 60% of the lines. In addition, each entry was longer than the last: “As they [students] began to lose interest, it fell to the instructor to keep things rolling: hence, her dominance in messages” (as cited in Hill Duin & Hansen, 1994, p. 104-105).

I saw the influence of the teacher’s posts at the beginning of the blog study. When Mrs. Jones responded to a student’s blog post, no one commented after her. Her comment effectively ended the discussion. Mrs. Jones kept a separate individual blog in which she discussed the goals and events for the day. On the students’ blog, she posted a few times in the beginning. I noticed that few students responded to her posts. As I analyzed her posts, I realized that there were over ten questions in one post. In an attempt to help students to continue to be engaged, teachers can unintentionally dominate the conversation. In addition to including a disproportionate amount of questions in her blog posts, when she commented to a student’s post, no one commented after her. Once she commented, the “conversation” was over.

I shared what I noticed with Mrs. Jones. We discussed how students seemed to quit commenting after she commented. I asked her if she would see what happened if she did not post to their blog. She agreed. She rarely posted to their blog posts, and more frequently commented. She was a voracious reader of the blog. Many times she described the amount of time she spent reading the blog. She appreciated the ease of accessing

student writing so easily from home. She posted each day to her own blog, and she discussed the students' blog posts to initiate in-class discussion.

Another important area of research explores what blogging means for student writing. Two areas, composition theory and recent research on how teachers and researchers incorporate blogging into their classrooms, create a foundation that can help us understand what blogging means for students' writing. Also, research on thinking, and the limitations involved in incorporating new literacies are described in this chapter. In later chapters, I will explain how this literature connects to the results of the research.

Responding to Literature

As I explained in Chapter One, reader response theory was particularly important to this study. Rosenblatt was influenced by I.A. Richards (1929). He found that students' personal responses got in the way of their interpretation of poetry. Rosenblatt (1938) used his findings as a starting point for her own thinking and looked more closely at what these personal interpretations meant for reader response. She described a transaction between a reader and a text based on what the reader brings to the reading.

Rosenblatt saw student response along an efferent-aesthetic continuum. She found teachers primarily asked students for efferent responses. In an efferent response, students are expected to "carry away" information from the text. Aesthetic response consists of an initial, emotional response. She argued that students "lived-through experience" with the text was more important than the details students could "carry away."

What was new about her work was that readers transacted with the text and constructed meaning based on their previous experiences. What she proposed was quite

different than the New Critical approach. Anderson and Rubano (1991) describe New Criticism in relation to reader response:

A dominant force in literary thinking for the last half-century, the New Criticism puts a premium on finding the ‘objective,’ authoritative meaning of the text. In addition, the moralistic tradition in literature study that preceded New Criticism never really left the classroom, leaving the legacy of students searching the text for the moral of the narrative, usually articulated as a ‘theme’ statement. (p. 2)

In contrast, Rosenblatt saw that responses to literature are influenced based on the background knowledge they bring to the text. She saw response to literature along a continuum from efferent to aesthetic. She found that student responses were mostly efferent, meaning that when they read they focused on information they could take away from the text. Aesthetic response focused on how particular students experienced texts.

Rosenblatt followed this work with *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1978). While the earlier book detailed her theory, the 1978 book describes practices that help teachers include reader response in their classrooms. She describes these activities as a result of years observing students response to literature.

Anderson and Rubano’s (1991) work is useful in two ways. First, they review relevant theory related to a reader response approach. Second, they provide descriptions of classroom practices in four areas of response: articulated, poetic, imagic, and unarticulated response. They follow theory with examples of classroom practices that

teachers can incorporate into their classrooms. Anderson and Rubano describe aesthetic response in terms of cognition. The authors cite Vygotsky and Britton's research, specifically, that "social context is essential to learning, and aesthetic learning is a crucial aspect of language and cognitive development" (p. 5). Aesthetic and efferent responses are necessary, though aesthetic response is mostly ignored. Their classroom practices provide a variety of exercises designed to incorporate reader response activities. Blau takes a slightly different approach.

Blau (2003) describes how he teaches literature as a "literature workshop." He recorded workshops that he presented to teachers and includes the transcripts of those sessions followed by further explanation and analysis of the thinking behind the lessons. Blau describes how he is influenced by reader response theorists. In his introduction, he explains how teachers of composition have been process-oriented in their approach, yet teachers of literature are product-oriented (p. 3). He combines Rosenblatt's transactional theory with a critical theory approach. The workshop approach focuses on metacognition, or thinking about one's own thinking (p. 13). Blau ends the book with a chapter called "What Do Students Need to Learn?" The chapter defines "performative literacy," in which students become "autonomous, engaged readers of difficult literary texts at any level of education" (p. 210). He outlines these seven traits of performative literacy:

1. capacity for sustained, focused attention
2. willingness to suspend closure
3. willingness to take risks
4. tolerance for failure
5. tolerance for ambiguity, paradox, and uncertainty

6. intellectual generosity and fallibilism
7. metacognitive awareness (p. 210)

The traits Blau describes reflect an underlying theme. The traits of performative literacy focus on problems rather than answers. He values the fact that students will, and need, to experience dissonance and confusion with the text. Blau does not focus on students' knowing interpretations or "answers" to literature. He does help lead them through aesthetic to more critical responses to literature they read. Blau did worry that reader response hinder students from consider "cultural practices" of others. Responses focused solely on students' experiences, might preclude students from considering literature from a more critical perspective.

Blau's concern that reader response theory may not help students consider issues outside of their own experience is not a new one. Appleman (2000), in *Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents*, shares the same concern, and outlines literary theory approaches that could be incorporated into a secondary classroom. She describes reader response as a lens that considers all interpretations as "correct." Rosenblatt does not say this. The purpose of the response, the stance, and the text all influence the quality of the response. Rosenblatt sees reader response as a starting point into more critical approaches. Appleman submits that critical literary theory is ignored as much, if not more, than reader response theory. She describes activities that teachers could use to incorporate a variety of lenses that could support students' use of a variety of literary lenses. She describes how Marxism, feminism, and postmodern literary theory can be taught, and she provides handouts and engaging lessons.

The works related to reader response were highly influential to the theoretical framework of this study. In order for the blog to work well, students had to guide the thinking and writing. If the teacher consistently provided prompts that resulted in efferent responses, the blog would not be collaborative. It would be a place for students to post responses the teacher would read instead of a place where students would discuss with each other.

In addition to Rosenblatt (1938, 1978), works related to how students respond to literature in literature discussion groups were equally important. The following theorists enact Rosenblatt's transactional theory by allowing students to discuss and focus on what they know.

Talk and Response to Literature

Barnes (1992), in *From Communication to Curriculum*, details the importance of expressive, or exploratory talk, in the classroom. Barnes believes students learn through opportunities for exploratory talk, which is "marked by frequent hesitations, rephrasings, false starts, and changes in direction" (p. 28). Exploratory talk may include times when students "recode" knowledge or retell through verbalizing (p. 24). This re-telling might seem like unnecessary summarizing for teachers, but in fact, it is knowledge-building for a student. For example, Barnes describes four eleven year-old girls who discuss a poem without an adult present. The adult left no explicit directions on how students should talk about the poem. Barnes summarizes the results of the experiment: "The more a learner controls his own language strategies, and the more he is enabled to think aloud, the more he can take responsibility for formulating explanatory hypotheses and evaluating them" (p. 29). As he observed and analyzed student language, he found students helped each

other to understand and explain their thinking. Oftentimes, we think that people who speak clearly without “mistakes” are articulate and “know their stuff,” but Barnes found differently. Students who were tentative in their language and who had more opportunity to use tentativeness in language had “the greatest power over language” (p. 69).

Along with exploratory talk, Barnes identifies audience as important in language development as well: “Children’s ability to use language develops more readily when they talk or write about a topic that matters to them for an audience with whom they want to communicate” (p. 3). Like Rosenblatt, Barnes believes students’ background knowledge and initial response needs to be included into learning experiences: “If learning is to shape and influence students’ future lives, the new ideas and experiences must be integrated into personal networks of meaning that are heavily imbued with feeling and purpose” (p. 4). This linking of distant ideas and ownership is especially important because, “some school learning makes little or no connection with students’ concerns, and is quickly forgotten.” This means that learning has to be relevant, and it has to mean something to the student. Curriculum cannot be based solely on the teacher. If curriculum is meaningful, the students as well as the teacher come together to “enact” it (p. 14).

Barnes’s (1969), “Language in the Secondary Classroom,” found little exploratory talk in the classrooms he studied. In fact, none of the teachers in the study asked “an open question not calling for reasoning.” Teachers would ask questions that appear to be open-ended, but, in fact, there was one answer that the teacher was looking for. He describes these questions as “pseudo-questions” (p. 34). Barnes offers an example from a religious education course. The teacher asked “How did they get the water from

the well?” The word “how” signals that the question is open-ended. One student offered an answer based on the text, but it was not the answer the teacher wanted. In fact, the answer the teacher was looking for was “in a pitcher.” The first student began by explaining how the water was lifted rather than what it was lifted in. The question is a pseudo-question because the teacher had a specific answer in mind when he asked and only accepts the answer in his mind, although the students’ answers were all plausible and “correct” in terms of the text.

In the essay, “Talking to Learn,” Britton (1969) provides a transcription of four 16 year-old girls who were not provided explicit directions and a transcript of four 11 year-old girls provided specific directions. He asks the reader to identify the differences. The transcript of the 16 year-olds who were not given explicit directions included long and detailed turns from each student. The transcript of the group of 11 year-olds provided with directions shows brief answers in response to the questions provides. In addition, the responses are general and vague. In response to the 16 year-old girls who were not supplied with direction, he writes: “I want to illustrate . . . the slow evolution that is one of the forms learning may take—and the need to give the process time. The circularity of much of the discussion will be clear. It moves on, certainly, with little hesitation and very little back-tracking . . .” (p. 91). In summary, the students without explicit directions had a richer and more in-depth conversation than the students with explicit directions. Overall, Barnes describes the expressiveness of the students who were not provided with explicit directions:

The language remains ‘expressive’ throughout, in the sense that it is relaxed, self-presenting, self-revealing, addressed to a few

intimate companions; in the sense that it moves easily from general comment to narration of particular experiences and back again; in the special sense that in making comments the speakers do not aim at accurate, explicit reference. (p. 96)

Britton describes what S. I. Hayakawa (1991), from *Language in Thought and Action*, describes as moving up and down the ladder of abstraction—from general to specific. The lack of directions did not negatively affect the conversation; in fact, the movement from general to specific reflects the students' thinking.

Wells (1986) believes writing is important in collaborative talk because it leaves a record, a place where students re-read, change their thinking, and critically read: "Thus by writing, reading, and rewriting, and by discussing one's text with others, one can work on one's own thinking in a conscious and deliberate manner" (p. 254). He concludes that if teachers "facilitate each individual's construction of knowledge through literate thinking and collaborative talk in the context of student-chosen topics of enquiry, all learners will be empowered, whatever the background from which they come" (p. 271). This idea is important because in a reader response classroom students will have choice in topics. He argues that teacher's can help students construct knowledge through talk and self-selected topics. Through these experiences, students can become experience a sense of agency.

In the following section, I review literature related to literature discussion in elementary, middle, and secondary classrooms. I used these categories merely to organize the material. The research, regardless of the grade-level it may be written for, is important to this study.

Elementary and Middle

While the researchers and theorists in the previous section support how talk is helpful to learning, Peterson and Eeds were one of the first to describe how to implement literature discussion groups in a class. In *Grand Conversations: Literature Groups in Action*, Peterson and Eeds (1990) provide an overview and a philosophy for setting up student-led literature discussion groups. The authors encourage teachers to share “real” books with students and to allow students share what they read with one another. They describe how to incorporate discussions of literary elements, not as a focus, but as occurring when students have questions related to those elements. This book provides teachers with ideas for setting up an authentic environment for sharing ideas about books.

Almasi, O’Flahavan, and Arya (2001) look at effective and less effective peer discussions: “Understanding factors that contribute to successful (and less successful) peer discussions will enable teachers and researchers to design effective instruction for students so they may enjoy the cognitive, social, affective, and cultural benefits derived from participating in them” (p. 99). They saw peer discussion as socially and cognitively important yet rare. The researchers study fourth graders and six classroom teachers, and find that effective discussion groups changed topics more frequently (p. 107) or returned to an old topic (p. 108). The discussion group members sustained topics in the discussion by linking, embedding, and returning to topics (p. 108). The researchers also defined “metatalk” as an important characteristic in more effective discussions.

For example, Möller (2002) explores issues of social justice in literature study groups. She and her research partner inserted themselves into student conversations. They hoped to guide students and create an awareness of social justice issues that might not

have been addressed otherwise. She recommends teachers support literature discussion by offering “open spaces for students to share;” provide encouragement, and clarify unfamiliar information. Möller cites Spiegel (1998): “Students need teacher demonstration, instruction, and support to break out of socialized patterns, such as I-R-E (initiate, respond, evaluate) patterns and their own racist beliefs or discriminatory stereotypes” (p. 476). For Möller’s study, the teacher’s participation in the group assisted students in important ways. She evaluated whether the students needed her, and the article describes the ways in which she participated. Möller helped students “open spaces” for students to share. She encouraged students. She asked them to clarify, and she comforted them when students shared painful experiences. Möller’s results are important in Chapter Five. While students in the dissertation study were able to sustain literature discussions, in Chapter Five, I suggest that the teacher may be able to help the student address issues, such as social justice, that may be ignored by students in a pure reader response classroom or in completely student-led discussion.

Evans (2002) focuses on students’ perceptions of literature discussion in a fifth-grade class, finding that students clearly understand characteristics of effective discussions. Respect, task structure, good books, and the gender makeup of groups were all aspects of literature discussion that influenced students’ perceptions of effective discussions.

Short et al. (1999) look at literature discussion groups that include teachers and groups led by students in a multi-age class of nine to eleven-year olds. According to the authors, teachers can take on several roles in a literature discussion: facilitator, participant, mediator, and active listener. In student-led literature groups, the researchers

find students used get-going strategies (such as stating what they liked about a book), focused talk back to the book when they got “off-track,” and discussed significant issues.

Evans, Alvermann, and Anders (1998) explore gender roles in literature discussion groups in a fifth-grade class. The researchers hoped to use literature discussion groups to democratize the classroom, but power struggles took place between genders within the groups. An important point to glean from this research is that students can take on stereo-typed roles in the literature discussion group. For example, male students teased female students. The researchers wondered if the students understood the purpose of the discussion, and the importance that the teacher placed on the discussion. The researchers find that discussion groups need to have established norms and purposes, and teachers need to guide students in learning how to collaborate. Much of the research reviewed in this section emphasizes the importance of building community, and I wonder if that would have helped this particular discussion. They also find that promoting reflection among the students would also be beneficial.

Gilles (1990), in “Collaborative Learning Strategies,” describes literature discussion groups in a seventh grade class for learning disabled readers. She found that students talked about the text in their literature discussion group, showed metacognitive thinking about their own reading processes, connected the texts to their own lives, and helped students socially. The opportunity to talk in class also helped students to also talk about social and personal issues and helped more students feel a part of the peer group (p. 64). Gilles identified student perceptions of the literature discussion group and found students rated it as one of their favorite activities. For the students who did not “like” it, they still rated it as an activity that benefited them.

Haneda and Wells (2000) make an explicit connection between conversations and writing in first, third, and eighth grade classrooms. They also explore how technology changes the traditional views of writing as “monologic” and talk as “dialogic:”

Traditionally, writing has been thought of as monologic and conversation as dialogic. However with the advent of email and electronic discussion groups, this perception is changing, as more and more people carry on sustained discussions in writing with people they never meet face to face. An important question therefore, is how this potential of writing as a medium for collaborative knowledge building can be exploited in the classroom. (p. 445)

In addition to the importance of dialogue and its contribution to building knowledge, Haneda and Wells identify the importance of “an audience beyond the teacher and the possibility for further writing response” (p. 439). This “collaborative talk” must meet two conditions: student ownership is respected by the teacher, and teachers “kidwatch” in order to pay attention to the needs of the learner based on these observations. Haneda and Wells focus on combining writing and conversation is important as I lead into research in the area of writing and in the area of new literacies.

Understanding the contexts of face-to-face literature discussions is important to this study. Even though this study focuses on online discussions, there are far fewer examples of studies related to online literature discussion. Studies related to face-to-face discussions can be generalized and assist in helping to understand teacher and student roles in literature discussions.

Johnston (2004), in *Choice Words*, explores how teachers' language use can increase student agency and assist with reading and writing instruction. He writes that agency is a "belief that the environment can be affected, the belief that one has what it takes to affect it, and the understanding that that is what literacy is about" (p. 39). He points out that "few classrooms in the United States entertain or encourage conflicting viewpoints" (p. 69). Through an exchange of viewpoints, either orally or in writing, students became more aware of different perspectives. Johnston took this to mean that students valued different perspectives. Helping students see the value of different perspectives "requires engaging in open activities—ones that do not have a single-path to a single solution and that allow students multiple points of entry—that require us to articulate our thinking" (p. 75). Thus, discussion and collaborative talk lead to comprehension as well.

High School and College

Townsend and Pace (2005) look at two different classroom discussions of *Hamlet*. In a community college classroom, the teacher offered closed questions, which can be answered in a word or a short phrase. He usually answered his own questions. In the eleventh grade class, the teacher expressed hesitancy and characteristics of exploratory talk in her responses to students. Students in this class were more active in the class discussion and used more exploratory talk themselves. Most interesting, the phrase "I think," meant something different in each class. In the community classroom, "*I think*," was stated in an authoritative manner, placing the teacher as the expert. In the high school class, the teacher wondered with the students, emphasizing the second word with "*I think*." The hesitancy in the teacher's talk transferred to the students' talk. Students took

longer turns and more students participated. Townsend and Pace see exploratory classroom talk as an entry into students thinking more critically about the literature. In addition, other factors influencing the quality of conversations included 1) class size; 2) environment (more active participation occurred in the class with that sat in the half circle; and 3) a complicated and challenging text (p. 601).

Goldblatt and Smith (1995) study student perceptions of discussion in a first-year composition class that used both whole group and book “clubs” to discuss plays read in class. They describe four students within the class, and they use interviews and writings to explore the students’ perspectives of effective discussion. Students’ participation in a group was sometimes complicated. For example, Angela, an African-American student the researchers identified as a “listener,” valued the group, but “did not value herself as a member of the group” (p. 334). Dan, another member of the group, saw discussions as important but teacher-focused and product-focused. Students’ roles and their backgrounds influenced definitions of “good discussion.” In a related study, Connolly and Smith (2002) found that teacher and student expectations and understandings of “good discussion” can differ. They recommend students spend more time reflecting on their participation in class discussion.

Hillocks (1980), while not focusing on literature discussion groups, does outline a hierarchy of comprehension levels found in students discussion of literature. He suggests that teachers can use the hierarchy to formulate questions that move beyond the literal. He describes two general categories—literal and inferential. The sub-categories of both literal and inferential questions are listed in Table 1:

Table 1: Hillocks's (1980) Hierachy of Skills in the Comprehension of Literature

<p>Literal Level of Comprehension</p> <p>Basic Stated Information: extremely important, repeated, and prominent</p> <p>Key Detail: Important to the twists and turns of the plot; bear causal relationship to the plot</p> <p>Stated Relationship: The reader must locate the relationship which is said to exist between at least two pieces of information (two characters, two events, a character and an event, etc.)</p> <p>Inferential Level of Comprehension</p> <p>Simple Implied Relationships: Similar to stated relationships except the answers are not stated explicitly in the text.</p> <p>Complex Implied Relationships: Inferred from many different pieces of information involving a large number of details. The reader must identify the details, discern whatever patterns exist among them, and then draw the appropriate inference.</p> <p>Author's Generalization: Goes beyond character to imply what the story means about human nature; corresponds to theme but more deeply than teachers typically consider it. The difference between complex implied relationships and author's generalization is the fact that CIR depends on the text, while Author's Generalization moves beyond the text.</p> <p>Structural Generalization: The reader identifies and explains how parts work together to achieve certain effects.</p>
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The intent of Hillocks' work was that these levels could be used to create a hierarchy of questions related to levels of comprehension. He found that if students could not answer lower level questions, then they could not answer questions past that level: "Before students can deal with the abstractions which structural analysis involves, they must be able to deal with the literal and inferential content of the work."

Of course, we can identify students with higher levels of comprehension if they can answer questions that require increasing levels of inference. For example, a "simple implied relationship" and a "complex implied relationship" can be differentiated in terms of proximity. If a student responds to a text and is able to infer a relationship from two

details that lie in close proximity in the text, she shows evidence of understanding the text at the simple implied relationship level. If a student is able to synthesize details from different parts of the text, not in close proximity, then she is able to comprehend the text at the complex implied relationship level. The highest levels of comprehension, according to Hillocks, are author's generalization and structural generalization. Both of these levels move away from the text. When students consider how the text relates to human nature and ideas beyond the text, they comprehend and respond at the author's generalization level. When students address or consider how the author structured a text, then they understand at the level of structural generalization. The higher levels of understanding are more general and move beyond the text. Lower levels of comprehension are more specific and focus on literal levels of comprehension.

Hillocks describes how teachers may ask only lower-level questions, or they may ask higher level questions without moving along the hierarchy to ensure students can understand at the lower levels first. When students cannot answer a question, the teacher may begin to answer his or her own question. According to Hillocks, this will create "a pattern which discourages student participation" (p. 59).

New Literacies and Response to Literature

The previous section reviews literature related to face-to-face discussion. This section explore literature discussion using online tools such as instant messaging, emailing, or blogging that students would use to discuss literature. The following articles are organized by grade level: middle, high school, and higher education.

Middle School

Albright, Purohit, & Walsh, (2002) in “Louise Rosenblatt Seeks QTAZNBOI@AOL.COM for LTR: Using Chat Rooms in Interdisciplinary Middle School Classrooms,” discuss very little about reader response. The researchers asked eighth grade students to discuss assigned books in a chat room while they were home. The students set up the times and places. They printed their chats and turned them into the teacher. The authors were not sure how to evaluate the students’ work. In the chat room discussions, students took on the role of teacher. A student would ask a question, another student responded, and the first student evaluated the answer. The chat room names students used were questionable, and the researchers realized they had “colonized” a purely out of school literacy and made it a school literacy.

Kajder & Bull with Van Noy (2004) describe Van Noy’s use of a blog in a seventh grade communication arts class. Students reported that they wrote more “because of the speed and ease of typing. They also appreciated that they could receive feedback from the teacher more quickly and more frequently than normal. The opportunity for students to share was important, “something students appeared to hunger for within their posts.” One concern the authors share is that students wished they had more internet access. Only a few computers in her classroom had internet access, so students would write their blog posts, save them on a word processing program, and then post later, which takes away from the spontaneous writing and publication available through a blog.

High School

In September 2007, *English Journal* published the “New Literacies” issue. This particular issue looked at film, podcasting, MOO’s, e-texts, and digital video production.

English's (2007), "Finding a Voice in a Threaded Discussion Group: Talking about Literature Online," uses online discussions in her high school English class. She found the online discussions helpful for silent students. She created three prompts related to the literature students read, and students chose which prompt to answer online. She also mentions that basic writing students might write only two lines, while her Honors classes wrote "well-developed responses."

Gillespie (2006), in *English Journal*, describes how she teaches *The Outsiders* to her seventh grade class. One aspect of her approach includes using a blog. Students post questions and answers to the class. She finds that the students find the blog motivating because everyone participates and the students talk with each other, not just the teacher. She asked for students' feedback about the blog, and one student reported that the blog slowed the literature discussion. Gillespie then explains that she required students to type their blog posts in a word processing program, edit the post, and run spell check. While this is perfectly reasonable to expect students to edit and spell check their writing. By focusing on the surface errors of the post, she turns the blog post into a more transactional form of writing. Aesthetic responses may be ignored because students begin to focus on correctness rather than the response. I cannot help but wonder what the purpose of the blog post is—to explore ideas or to share transactional writing. I am not suggesting that students are not required to write correctly. I am suggesting that as teachers we need to think about the purposes of our assignments. Is the goal exploratory thinking and writing or transactional thinking and writing?

Flanagan (2005), in an article for the *Council Chronicle*, a publication of the National Council of Teachers of English, describes a few classroom teachers and

librarians who incorporate blogging into their classrooms. She briefly reports on how blogging helps students write for an audience. In addition, NCTE lists educational bloggers on its site as well (<http://www.ncte.org/about/issues/slate/124721.htm>).

Borsheim (2004) discusses an email partnership and literature discussion about *To Kill a Mockingbird* between her ninth grade class and a group of pre-service teachers in a university adolescent literature class. She found the traditional class discussion and the email discussion to be virtually the same except for one important difference: “[B]ecause the impetus for these conversations came from someone other than a teacher, from somewhere other than their classroom, the experience was more appealing, and the motivation to participate was much higher” (61). For Borsheim, a virtual literature discussion improves students’ intrinsic motivation over the traditional class discussion.

Weiler (2003), a teacher from Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, in a column in *English Journal*, describes how students in his creative writing classes post to the blog and comment on each other’s work. He finds that students are familiar with the interface. Students can publish their writing to a wide audience, students can participate equally, and discussions can move in new directions more easily.

Richardson (2003) discusses his use of blogs in his journalism and English classes. Students read and responded to *The Secret Life of Bees*. He found some students more willing to respond via the blog, and he used the blog as a way for students to “display and discuss their artistic interpretations of their work” (p. 40). Sue Monk Kidd, the author, visited and participated on the blog as students discussed her book. Students liked using the technology, and the online discussion made it possible for the author to

“join” the discussion. Monk Kidd was not actively participating in the entire discussion, but she did read and respond to the blog as a whole.

This initial entrée into blogging inspired Richardson to begin his own blog, “Weblogged: The Read/Write Classroom.” Eventually, Richardson wrote *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms* (2006) which describes the tools mentioned in the title, and explains ways to incorporate these into classrooms.

While these secondary teachers incorporate blogging into their classrooms, in terms of writing instruction, transactional writing is emphasized. While these teachers are some of the first to incorporate and share their thinking about blogging in a classroom, I fear that blogging may appear to the uninitiated as a “gimmick.” None of these articles focus on the students’ writing. They focus more on the teachers’ process in incorporating blogs.

Adult Learners

Beeghly (2005) created electronic literature discussion groups with a graduate level literacy course using the platform, Blackboard. In all aspects of the course, she made the decisions. She assigned small literature groups, she assigned the book they would read, and she assigned how many times they posted. She did not, though, contribute much prompting. She finds that students felt the electronic discussion improved their understanding. Students had more time to organize their thoughts before posting. Students appreciated that they could not be interrupted online or the topic could not be changed so quickly that they would lose their opportunity to “speak.” She finds that of all of the benefits, “being able to read, reflect, and respond in one’s own time did more to meet individual needs than anything else” (p. 18).

Kajder & Bull (2003) and Bull, Bull, & Kajder (2003), in *Learning and Leading Technology*, write an overview of the blogs used by students in a pre-service educational technology course to discuss media literacy texts. They found students connect current events to their own writing and began to feel more like writers because of their experience with the blog.

Hay and Hanson (1999) ask adult readers, academics and librarians at a university to use a MOO and literature circle roles to discuss three books. MOO's are a virtual environment organized by "rooms" and used most often in distance learning environments. Users create "rooms" for different topics on the site. The posts are not archived or chronological. The chat rooms are synchronous. Although students use a virtual environment, the article focuses on students' perceptions of literature circle roles. Hay and Hanson find that "adult readers have a 'natural' preference for at least one of Daniels' roles." Participants felt like the roles "extended the way they read," but in cases, some roles were extremely frustrating. For example, one student described how the role of "Vocab Enricher" inhibited their reading. H/she explains how, instead of focusing on the reading h/she focused on finding "hard words" to include on the vocabulary list. The researchers find that roles helped readers to adopt new perspectives. Some roles required more time and preparation, and roles encouraged re-reading and metacognitive abilities.

Writing

Britton et al. (1975) began an extensive research study in 1965 with the goal of discovering students' writing processes. In order to analyze the data from the writing they observed in secondary schools, they created three categories, or functions, of writing:

transactional, expressive, and poetic. The researchers described expressive writing as “important as a mode of learning for any stage” and as “thinking aloud on paper.” This type of writing is writer-centered, although a reader could understand it (p. 88).

Transactional writing is informational, or “language to get things done” (p. 88). Poetic writing functions as “language as a medium for art” and is arranged into a pattern for a particular effect. In contrast, expressive writing would have no formal arrangement.

The findings of their research show that most writing assignments asked students for transactional writing. Even though transactional was the mode for most of the writing, the amount of transactional writing increased as the students’ moved into the upper grades. Poetic writing was the second type of writing, far behind transactional, and expressive writing was the least frequently assigned writing, although Britton et al. describe expressive writing as the best mode for learning:

Not only is it the mode in which we approach and relate to each other in speech, but it is also the mode in which, generally speaking, we frame the tentative first drafts of new ideas; and the mode in which, in times of family or national crisis, we talk with our own people and attempt to work our way towards some kind of resolution” (p. 82).

Inspired by Britton’s work, Emig (1971) studied the composing processes of twelfth-graders. She sat with students as they composed aloud and found students rarely revised (p. 68) and focused almost exclusively on the sentence-level (p. 84). The students made self-critical comments as they composed aloud, and they had little, if any, “aesthetic vocabulary” (p. 86). Her main findings include the following:

1. Teachers set rigid parameters for acceptable writing behaviors (p. 93).
2. Writing is a limited and limiting experience in schools (p. 97).
3. Teachers do not write, so when they teach writing, they truncate the writing process (p. 98).
4. The teaching of writing is too abstract (p. 99).

By 1977, Emig wrote one of the first articles discussing writing to learn. Her premise was that talking and listening are the first tiers of learning with reading and writing lagging behind. In the article, she argues for writing to be considered as a mode of learning. Writing is “the fullest possible functioning of the brain” (p.125). In addition, writing slows down thinking and assists with learning.

As I explained in Chapter One, Emig, in an interview with *The Council Chronicle* (2005), wonders about what teachers will do with the writing that the students are doing outside of class:

I am struck by the feeling that teachers don't seem to understand the revolution that the computer represents . . . by teachers not knowing how much students are writing. These kids are writing as much outside of school as some of our Victorian writers did! . . .

[W]e have yet to connect what is done inside schools with the fantastic interest that kids express in writing on their own.

(Bauman, 2006)

Peter Elbow is another important researcher who views writing as a way to think and learn. In *Writing Without Teachers* (1973) and “Toward a Phenomenology of

Freewriting” (1991), Elbow describes his freewriting pedagogy and identifies freewriting as a social act (p. 120). Elbow was influenced by Ira Progoff’s (1992) *At a Journal Workshop*. Progoff used writing in therapy, and his patients sit together and write without sharing. Progoff found that the act of writing, even without sharing, was therapeutic. Progoff’s influence can be seen throughout Elbow’s work, but in Elbow’s “A Map in Terms of Audience and Response,” (2000) he describes the importance of a variety of writing and audiences, including writing without sharing (private freewriting) and writing with sharing (public freewriting). Sharing public freewriting, according to Elbow, “teaches the pleasure of getting more voice in writing” and “students are often more willing to read something out loud if they’ve just freewritten quickly than if they’ve worked hard revising it” (p. 121).

In “The Shifting Relationships Between Speech and Writing” (1985), Elbow compares and contrasts speech and writing, describing characteristics of speech that should be fostered in writing (p. 157). For example, he declares that speech is spontaneous and writing should be, too. Speech is usually social and writing is usually solitary, but he explains how writing can be social, too. If students share immediately after writing something, they have the experience of writing for a particular audience and context. In speech, there is a reply to what is said, and in writing there is usually an evaluative comment on how it was written. Students can reply to writing the same way they would reply in speech—replying to *what* is said rather than evaluating and criticizing *how* it was written. He suggests “stressing the ways in which writing naturally functions as an invitation to future writing or a reply to previous writing—which is how most writing in the world actually occurs” (p. 158). This source is important because it

focuses on the social nature of writing and how writing should be more like speech—in which what is being said is more important than how it is said. Focusing on ideas first is only the beginning of the writing process though. As writers, we can begin writing expressively. This focus on ideas, writing to learn, and writing to think will assist writers in transforming expressive writing into transactional writing. Although turning expressive writing into more formal and revised prose is not the focus of Elbow's work. For Elbow, the goal of freewriting is not to turn the writing into a polished piece. He uses freewriting to unblock ideas. Freewriting might never turn into a polished piece, but it is a starting point for thinking. For teachers of writing, it will be necessary to teach students the purposes of expressive writing, transactional, and poetic writing.

Elbow's (1985) work delineates some aspects of speech that are important to improving writing. He identifies similarities between "great" writing and speech: "The best writing has voice: the life and rhythms of speech" (p. 159). Voice in writing does not come without training: "Unless we actively train our students to speak onto paper, they will write the kind of dead, limp, nominalized prose we hate—or say we hate" (p. 159). The question becomes how do we help students to speak on paper? Not only can "speaking on paper" help students with voice, but excellent writing, according to Elbow, "conveys some kind of involvement with the audience though sometimes a quiet non-obtrusive involvement." Not only is an audience and the environment important, but Elbow explains that writing has "this quality of being somehow a piece of two-way communication, not one-way—of seeming to be an invitation to the audience to respond, or even seeming to be a reply to what the audience had earlier thought or said" (p. 159).

Elbow suggests freewriting improves voice, but he and others also explain how freewriting promotes thinking. Hammond (1991), in “Using Focused Freewriting,” describes how freewriting helps writers view argument and complexity, and develop structure. Writers move from “first thoughts to new insights.” She connects these ideas to John Dewey’s (1910) in *How We Think*. Dewey believes that “the first stage of thinking is ‘perplexity, confusion, or doubt.’ Without that, he says, it is ‘futile’ to ask someone to think” (p. 89). This idea contradicts the continued dominance of transactional forms of writing. To clarify, there has to be a balance between expressive and transactional forms of writing. Freewriting is born of “perplexity, confusion, and doubt.” Instead of pushing “messy” thinking to the side, we need to begin viewing it as a beginning. Like the process of writing, the process of thinking begins in a very messy manner, through time, thinking, and writing, our writing and thinking becomes more polished, and ready for an audience, thus, we have transactional writing. Expressive writing is a starting place, not a place where we want students to stay for all time. If we begin with expressive writing, students may be better able to understand and use transactional and poetic writing. I will discuss Rosenblatt in more depth later, but I have to make the same connection with her work. She sees aesthetic response as the starting point for response to literature. She also explains that through aesthetic response students can more easily be led to more critical judgments.

Through expressive writing, writers can build voice. When the goal is ideas and thinking aloud in writing, we can move closer to capturing our writing voices. Elbow (1994) describes five related areas of voice: audible voice, dramatic voice, recognizable or distinctive voice, voice with authority, and resonant voice or presence. In this essay,

Elbow describes voice as part of speech. Novice writers may write like they hear their own speech. They may use exaggerated punctuation or grammar to capture that sound. Many times, Elbow points out, teachers “correct” the usage, and teach students how to take voice out of their writing.

Writing and Blogging

Several articles compare blogs to other forms of writing traditionally used in writing and literature courses. For example, blogging is frequently compared to journaling, albeit a more public form than a personal journal or the daily journal that might be turned in to a teacher for evaluation. Downes (2004) believes blogs move beyond journals or diaries because of the blogs “capacity to link to new and useful resources” and the potential for students to “publish” (p. 18). In the article, Downes describes five ways to use blogs in education:

1. To post assignments, notices, readings, and exercises;
2. to link to resources on the Internet;
3. to organize in-class discussions;
4. to organize class seminars and provide summaries of readings; and
5. to write their own student blogs as part of a course grade.

This article provides some important questions when considering if blogging “works” in classroom. He mentions educators who have reservations about the impact of blogging on classrooms. One professor explained that “[Presenters/professors] may be using blogging software, students are using the blogging software, but I’m not convinced that using the software is the same as blogging. For example, does posting writing prompts for students constitute blogging?” Surprisingly, Will Richardson, who has situated himself as the guru

of educational blogging with his popular blog and book, shares his doubt: “No matter how much we want to spout off about the wonders of audience and readership, students who are asked to blog are blogging for an audience of one, the teacher” (p. 16). Blogs are frequently celebrated for the offering students a wider audience than the teacher.

Richardson believes that students will continue to write for the teacher. While I understand his point, the teacher’s approach influences students’ perspective of audience. If teachers provide questions and ask for mostly efferent responses, then students will write for the teacher.

Ellison & Wu (2006) from Michigan State University posted an online presentation in which they share results of an unpublished 2005 pilot study exploring the benefits of blogging over traditional paper-based assignments. Half of the students completed the papers in the traditional manner and half of the students posted papers to a blog each had created. The introduction of blogs in the class was motivating, and students enjoyed the commenting feature and feedback from peers.

Fernheimer & Nelson (2005) align blogging with journaling and freewriting and consider it a genre. The authors include a description of a course in which they created a blog and offer suggestions for teachers who want to blog in a writing class. Their recommendation: use one central blog instead of asking each student to create their own individual blog.

Lowe, from Purdue University, and Williams (2004), from Arizona State University, describe how they use blogs so students can create and post reader response entries, related articles, double-entry journals or research responses, personal

explorations, and off-topic blogs/journals. The authors spend a lot of time discussing journal writing and how the public nature and audience of blogging motivates students.

Brooks, Nichols, and Priebe (2004) use Marshall and Eric McLuhan's idea of the "law of retrieval," that "old media and familiar genres end up as the content of new media to foreground their teaching and research. They see blogging as "not a radically new way of writing, but a repurposing of familiar (we hoped) print genres." In their study they collected data and responses to open-ended questions over two semesters (fall 2002 and spring 2003). They asked students what genre was closest to the blog. Most students said "journals." Using Blood's (2002) definitions, they asked students which "genre" of blogs they liked to write. Sixty-three percent preferred to use the blog as a journal, as opposed to a filter or notebook-type blog. They conclude that the notebook genre would work better for a community blog (their students created individual blogs). Few students found filter blogs (where students search the internet, filter, and report information), and they recommend that teachers would need to realize the "complexity of this task." They explain that "filter blogs" require motivation, interest, and basic knowledge, including information literacy skills.

The above articles encourage the use of blogs in classrooms. In contrast, Krause has some reservations. He incorporated blogging into a graduate-level rhetoric and technology course. In an article in 2004, he describes his "bad" blogging experiences when he used the tool in a graduate seminar for the first time. He did not consider how blogging might impact the traditional assignment. He explains that in future "experiments" with blogging, he would look for a site that handles collaborative writing better. He also would have been more specific about the assignments, including how

frequently students should post. In subsequent “blog experiments,” he used the blogs to have students post about the readings and discuss books through response to teacher-generated prompts.

Again in 2005, in an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Krause more thoroughly describes his failures with blogs in higher education, explaining three lessons that he learned in his “limited experience”: 1) people blog because they want to have an audience; 2) blogs do not help people interact; 3) and blogs work best for publishing individual finished works. He finds blogs to be beneficial as a place to “keep” journal writing. In practical terms, he did not have to carry around student journals when they each created a blog. He seemed to use the blog as a place to house more transactional types of writing.

Like the concerns Downes (2004) and Krause (2005) share, many scholars write about how blogging might fail as a classroom tool if educators use it too narrowly. Lankshear and Knobel (2003), at an American Educational Research Association conference presentation, shared the following: “[S]chool blogs typically present themselves as earnest attempts to meld new technology use, student interest and school work in ways that risk ‘killing’ the medium by reducing its potential scope and vitality to menial school tasks in which students seemingly lack any genuine purpose.” Lankshear and Knobel believe students should work with “significant problems” and use the blog as an audit trail of research,” and as a place to think metacognitively about the research process.

Similar to Knobel and Lankshear (2003), Mortensen and Walker (2002), doctoral candidates and university teachers, describe their personal experiences and uses of blogs

as a professional tool for research and reflection, especially when linking texts together. Linking, according to the authors, represents thinking. For the researchers, linking, or connecting information on the web is research: “For researchers who are studying online phenomenon, the weblog is perfectly suited to this work of connecting dispersed discoveries, at the same time as a weblog allows us to share this found information, and to participate in discussions about it” (p. 265). In terms of writing, the “instant publication encourages spontaneous writing rather than carefully thought out arguments. Being allowed to write spontaneously releases us of the expectation that our writing must be perfect and polished” (p. 266). In addition, the chronological nature of the blog could possible “encourage a different way of structuring thought [that] can enable us to see differently” (p. 267). These two researchers explore how they use it, but do not describe future implications or findings.

Thinking

Ong (1982), in *Orality and Literacy*, describes the transition from an oral tradition, or pre-literate society, to a literate society. This transition changed how we think. Instead of memorizing long passages, we began to depend more on pen and paper. This shift changed how we think. Ong explains that we have reached a “secondary orality:”

Like primary orality, secondary orality has generated a strong group sense, for listening to spoken words forms hearers into a group, a true audience, just as reading written or printed texts turns individuals in on themselves. But secondary orality generates a

sense for groups immeasurably larger than those of primary oral culture. (p. 136)

Ong writes, “a written text is basically unresponsive” (p. 79), but I am not sure that is true anymore. Blogs, chat rooms, and text messaging mesh words with almost instant response. For Ong, “writing is always a kind of imitation talking” (p. 102).

For Vygotsky (1978), language development is influenced by social interaction. Students of varying abilities can learn from each other. We see this specifically in his theory of the “zone of proximal development.” Students’ development is at the level of the more capable peer he or she is working with. Simply, we can move to higher levels of thinking through working with someone with a higher development level. A good example might be a dissertation advisor and his or her graduate student.

Csikszentmihalyi, in *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (1996), studied artists, athletes, religious mystics, scientist, and average people who all described their enjoyable experiences, or “flow,” according to nine main characteristics: For the people that Csikszentmihalyi studied, “It was clear from talking to them that what kept them motivated was the quality of experience they felt when they were involved with the activity.” People did not find flow in relaxation; they found flow in activities involve[ing] painful, risky, difficult activities that stretched the person’s capacity and involved an element of novelty and discovery (110). For people experiencing “flow,” time seemed to fly by. Clear goals, immediate feedback, and a balance between challenges and skills helped people to move toward a “flow” state. Most importantly, the activity became “autotelic:” as people’s skills increase, the activity became enjoyable for its own sake.

Hayakawa's (1991), *Language in Thought and Action*, explains principles related to General Semantics. I will focus on the ladder of abstraction. He uses the visual image of a ladder to recognize movement from low, bottom rung of the ladder to high, top rung of the ladder. The bottom rung of the ladder represents Bessie the cow at a molecular level, the next rung is Bessie as the object; the third rung is "Bessie," the name that we give the cow. The fourth rung is the word "cow" becomes a bit more abstract—we lump all cows into one category. The fifth rung represents "livestock," the cow is abstract to another level, lumped into the category of all four-legged farm creatures. The sixth rung is yet another abstraction, further generalizing Bessie the cow into the category of "farm asset;" on the seventh rung she is "asset," until finally at the highest rung she represents "wealth"—all of the characteristics of the original object and the verbal name we gave her, "Bessie," are gone. "Bessie" as "wealth" is unrecognizable because her characteristics have been generalized, or abstracted. This idea is important because it represents a way of thinking about language, thinking, and communication. Ideally, in writing and thinking, we move up and down the ladder of abstraction, like an agile monkey—moving from general to specific and specific to general.

Hillocks' (1980) hierarchy and Odell's (1999) categories for evaluating thinking are merely variations of hierarchies such as Hayakawa's, and all of these hierarchies have a common thread—better thinking, writing, and understanding occur when students move among the levels. Thus, as I read the blog, I look for posts that include more than one of the categories.

Hayakawa's work is widely known for his idea of "the map is not the territory; the symbol is not the thing symbolized; the word is not the thing" (p. 19). Simply, the

word that we use to label an object may not identify or do justice to the object. For example, propaganda is used to encourage young men and women to join the military. Propaganda is successful because the images, music, and media represent the word “war” to people as an opportunity for world travel or an exciting job opportunity. The military sells masculinity, toughness, and patriotism, but the “map” of war that the military sells with exciting images, music, and stories does not fit the territory—the actual experience of living and working in Iraq is vastly different than the images and music provided by the military to represent war. So, in the students’ writing, I looked for examples where their map did not fit their territory, where the word was not the thing.

Another principle of general semantics is “non-allness,” and this idea became the code “allness.” When students wrote that “everyone,” “everything,” and “everybody” believes or thinks something, I would write in the margin “allness.” “Allness” limits thinking. Because of “allness” thinking students may not be open to a multi-valued orientation that considers gradations or degrees of thinking. Instead, they may focus on a two-valued orientation or either/or thinking

Paivio’s (1986) dual coding theory also influenced early coding. In their blog posts, students incorporated images pulled from Google Image searches and relating those images to the written content of their post. Paivio’s work identifies two types of thinking processes: one related to visual thinking and one related to verbal thinking. Using dual coding theory was a way to understand how visual thinking might be a part of blog posts; possibly students were using both cognitive processes. Because of the student posts with link to images, “visual thinking” became one of the codes that I used.

Thinking occurs through verbal and visual thinking processes. John-Steiner (1997), in *Notebooks of the Mind*, completed a qualitative study of the thinking of creative individuals across disciplines. Through interviews and autobiography, John-Steiner outlines several areas that influenced thinking. Most important to this study are her chapters on “visual thinking” and “verbal thinking.” For many creative thinkers, visual thinking is an important part of their thinking process. Some researchers, such as Arnheim (1969), even believe that visual thinking precedes verbal thinking: “No thought processes seem to exist that cannot be found to operate, at least in principle, in perception. Visual perception is visual thinking” (p. 14). Arnheim argues that visual thinking precedes, and is superior to, verbal thinking.

John-Steiner (1997) does not spend time exploring that particular question. Through interviews with the artist, Ben Shahn, she describes his final product as a “visual grammar of composition.” She goes on to explain, “In linking separate elements into an integrated whole, visual composition is a relational process that is akin to the grammar of verbal sentences” (p. 102). According to John-Steiner, since there is no single visual language (unlike our verbal language), images may promote discovery. John-Steiner, in paraphrasing J.C. Gowan’s work, explains that we need “to pull or focus the thinker’s attention to visual processes which, he [Gowan] too, considers critical in creativity” (p. 87). Steiner describes how images function as metaphors with “aesthetic and emotional appeal.” Most importantly, she describes how thinkers work with images to expand their thinking:

[P]roductive thinkers use their stubborn patience to work with these images to go beyond the representational function of visual

thought. They find new thoughts hidden as metaphors in their reflections, as did the young Einstein while riding his wave; these images lead them to new generative syntheses. (p. 109)

Students in this dissertation incorporated into their posts images they found from Google Image, a database of images with Google's trademark searching feature. John-Steiner works with accomplished thinkers, but, as you will see in Chapter Four, student used the images to dig deeper into their thinking. Fox (1996) explains that "images influence how we make sense of the world" and that "image products and language products are equally important" (p. xi-xii).

John-Steiner (1997), in her chapter on verbal thinking, describes how some of the great thinkers she studied wrote "telegraphically," almost a verbal form of inner speech which is not easily transcribed by others. One of the most important ideas in this chapter comes at the end, as she summarizes:

Creative thinking is that search for meaning which encompasses rapid bursts of ideas embedded in the sustained thought activities of the thinker. There is a continuing interaction between generative thought, which is often condensed, fluctuating, and unstable, and communicated thought, which is expanded and organized for maximum impact. Such a process of dissolving, of placing a thought into its verbal and social context, is required in turning thoughts outward. It is through making explicit not only what is new inside one's own mind, but also what is the implicit

background of ideas, knowledge, and beliefs that novelty and insight arises. (p. 129)

John-Steiner articulated the thinking processes of a great many creative thinkers. In fact, the people she interviewed may not have even understood the process of their thinking until asked. Beyond identifying common experiences among the thinkers, John-Steiner also shows the value of creating an awareness of our thinking by talking about the process of our thinking.

Odell (1999) views writing as a mirror into thinking. He outlines thinking strategies that can be identified in a writer's work. He recommends asking students to analyze the thinking in their own work. At this point, I also think it is important to mention Blau's (1991) resistance to teach "thinking skills" because the "teaching of such skills may presuppose either that some students don't know how to think or that thinking represents behavior that can be defined by the observance of any set of predetermined procedures" (p. 287). While Odell outlines thinking strategies that can be seen in a writer's work, I do not believe that he suggests thinking needs to be taught. More precisely, he believes that

In order to construct meaning, one has to be able to explore, imagine, analyze, speculate, observe—in short, to think. If this ability to think is essential for effective writing, an assessment of a student's writing should give us some insight into the thinking reflected in that writing. (p. 7)

In practice, if teachers pause for a moment and look closely at student writing, we can identify thinking and see a "glimpse of the mind at work." He outlines

questions to begin to uncover thinking in writing. Odell's work is especially important to this study, because I used his categories to analyze and code thinking in students' responses to literature on the blog. He suggests the following categories and questions:

Dissonance:

Students point out or overlook problems, ambiguities, ironies, questions, uncertainties, or conflicts

Selecting:

Students include or exclude observations, "facts," personal experiences, feelings, and memories

Encoding/Representing:

Students use different kinds of language to articulate their ideas, feelings, perceptions, and memories.

Drawing on prior knowledge:

Students explicitly refer to things they already know in order to understand something new

Seeing relationships:

Students mention cause-effect relationships, time, if ... then, similarity, and differences in their writing.

Considering different perspectives:

Students consider ways in which other people might perceive, interpret or respond to a given idea, fact, or experience

Odell's work traverses writing and thinking and has great potential in terms of viewing writing as a way to assist thinking and learning.

Limitations of New Literacies

An article in *USA Today* describes clashes between schools and social networking. A student was expelled for making sexually explicit comments about a teacher on MySpace. A student was kicked off the volleyball team for criticizing an art teacher. A cheerleader in Texas was kicked off the squad for derogatory comments made

about cheerleaders on her blog. Although these comments were posted outside of school, the school reprimanded students for these out-of-school comments (Gomez, 2006).

A principal at a Catholic high school in New Jersey ordered that all students delete their MySpace pages or risk expulsion. The same article describes how students do not realize that the contents of their posts will remain for years to come unless they delete it (Barack, 2005). But, when a student posts a comment to someone else's site, they usually do not have the ability to delete those types of comments. A middle school student in California posted a threat about another student on MySpace. The student was expelled, and twenty students who visited the site to view the posting were expelled ("School," 2006). The issues related to these students' actions occurred on MySpace, a social networking site as opposed to the academic blogging described in this article. Mrs. Jones used Blogger which allows the administrator of the site to choose an option where all comments are sent to the administrator who then approves the comment. Mrs. Jones did not use this option, and situations like those described above did not occur in her classroom, but issues of free speech could occur.

The examples described above are some of the most important reasons why communicative tools like blogging should be used and discussed in school. Just like television, we cannot tell students to not use these tools. We can provide them with the knowledge to analyze and make rhetorical decisions. A report from the Education Testing System (Appel, 2006) finds that students do not have adequate information literacy skills. The report states that only 52% of students can determine the trustworthiness of a site; 40% searched using multiple terms when searching for information; and 44% were able to identify the sentence that "captured the demands of the assignment." The results of this

report show that students need to improve their information literacy skills. In contrast to this need, in 2006, Virginia passed a law requiring schools to teach students about internet safety and online predators (“Virginia,” 2006). Virginia missed the point. By improving information literacy skills and providing students with media literacy and critical literacy lessons, by providing more experiences with computers and the internet at school, we probably have a better chance of educating students rather than scaring them. Simple, we want students to have experiences with language, in face-to-face discussion, with pencil and paper, and on computers. Legislators and many administrators focus on protecting students from online predators and also keeping students from using the internet.

In 2006, the Republican representative of Pennsylvania presented and found support for House Bill 5319, Deleting Online Predators’ Act (DOPA). Although the bill was not passed, it is important to mention and consider the ramifications of such a bill. The results of the bill would have been to take away free and high-quality Internet information and access from students and library users.

Under DOPA legislation, if a school or library provided access to a “social networking website,” they risked losing federal funding. The American Library Association strongly opposed this legislation, but in an election year, with a name like “Deleting Online Predators’ Act,” it garnered votes from politicians who wanted to align themselves with fighting child predators.

The House bill defines “social networking” as “offered by a commercial entity; permit registered user to create an on-line profile that includes detailed personal information, permits registered users to create an on-line journal and share such a journal

with other users; elicits highly personalized information from users; and enables communication among users.” Although the bill was supposedly aimed for social networking sites like MySpace, LiveJournal, and Facebook, this definition covers any online tool that allows for feedback or commenting, including blogs, Amazon, and news sites.

Differentiating between blogging and social networking becomes important in this climate, and although this bill was not passed, I believe we can expect future assaults. The wiki, “Support Blogging,” describes the difference between social networking sites and blogging:

Educational blogging takes advantage of the desire to express oneself and to receive feedback, but within the confines of the technology and the educational environment it is implemented in. And when done as part of a teacher- or parent-initiated program, educational blogging starts with the assumption that the teacher or parent will be actively watching the content and the dialogue. The ability to contribute, through posting content and comments to the web, in an academic discipline accomplishes something of significance: it gives youth a vision of their ability to add to the accumulated knowledge and understanding of the world.

Currently, the controversy has died down in the media concerning this bill. The bill passed overwhelmingly in the House and died in the Senate.

Instead of censoring the use of these technologies, we need to begin to consider what a new literacies classroom would look like. Kist (2005) explores this issue in his

study of middle and high school classrooms that incorporate new literacies into their curriculum. Kist (2005) studies five schools incorporating new literacies into their curriculum. He outlines five characteristics of a new literacy classroom which he uses to identify classrooms that would be involved in his study:

1. Classrooms feature daily work in multiple forms of representation.
2. There are explicit discussions of the merits of some certain symbol systems in certain situations with much choice.
3. There are metadialogues by the teacher who models working through problems using certain symbol systems.
4. Students take part in a mix of individual and collaborative activities.
5. Classrooms are places of student engagement in which students report achieving a 'flow' state. (p. 16)

One of the problems he noticed was that these new literacies classrooms remained very dependent on paper. He found teachers struggling with teacher as a facilitator rather than in a transmission mode. Teachers may feel they need to understand how to use all of the technology or know all of the "answers" before they teach students, when, in fact, students may know more than the teacher. The students may teach the teacher and other students. Kist found students learned most from the collaboration. Studies of new literacy classrooms are important as we begin to explore how communication arts classrooms could look in the future.

The shift will be difficult. Knobel (2001) studied a young man, Jacques, who failed with school literacy, but excelled when creating and presenting material to a large audience at church and for his father's business. Jacques was literate. In contexts outside of school, he understood audience and rhetorical strategies and experienced success. The literacies he performed outside of school were chosen by him. These experiences were authentic and meaningful. Knobel's finding is similar to what Heath (1983) found in her seminal study of two communities in a disadvantaged area in the Piedmont region of the Carolinas, the African-American community Heath studied Jacques "failure" at school-based literacies. The literacies these students brought to school were not the ones accepted or valued by the school.

Ignoring out-of-school literacies is not uncommon. The same is true for film and video. These are literacies students "read" and know. How often are they explored in the classroom? The shift is necessary. Fox (1996), in *Harvesting Minds*, describes student's perceptions of commercials that they saw daily on Channel One. Students had no experience processing the images and messages, thus, they believed what the advertisers sold. They were inundated with commercial messages each day. Many believe films and video are benign and have no influence on our thinking. Fox (1996), Arnheim (1969), Fiske (1987), and others would disagree. We have to get to the point where we acknowledge what students know, and what they will need to know for the future. This is the direction that new literacy studies takes us.

Even on a basic level, many schools do not have the technology resources to support new literacies classrooms. If they do, teachers may not have professional development or even minimal technical support. In this time of *No Child Left Behind*,

using computers in a class may feel like teaching another subject as opposed to a tool that could support all subjects.

Conclusion

Rosenblatt, Britton, and Barnes, in addition to exploring reader response, expressive writing, and exploratory talk, discuss how students experience language. Thus, the idea of “language learning” is important to this study as well. Dudley-Marling and Searle (1991), in *When Students Have Time to Talk*, describe necessary elements for language learning: authentic audience and settings, opportunity to practice language, and the opportunity to experiment with language (p. 11-12). Although these authors discuss young learners, these same elements are necessary for all levels of language learning.

Many times these elements are not part of classroom conversations, especially with secondary students. Students may not have the opportunity to talk or write to an authentic audience or in an authentic setting. In order for children of all ages to learn language, they need to hear it, practice it, and experience it. Many times, in secondary classes, the development of language is not considered. We may perceive that students are “developed.” Since students can speak and write their name, it is time to learn “correctness.” This adherence to correctness, or transactional forms of speaking and writing, serves to stifle experimentation with language. Students rarely get the opportunity to practice language—either through writing or talking. Experimentation with language is, more often than not, out of the question, pushed aside for “correct” language. The experimentation and exploration is where the potential lies for the most learning to occur.

An environment has to be created to nurture language development: “If we wish to immerse students in language we need to create physical environments that allow students to talk with and listen to their teachers, peers, and, if possible, other adults” (p. 18). Dudley-Martin and Searle explain how teachers need to listen and pay attention to students, so they can understand the languages that students use outside of school (p. 27). Learning from students experience outside of school can provide teachers with information on language experiences that students are already familiar with. Creating an environment where students can share is important. While this section explored mostly talk, the next section explores the importance of the expressive component of writing.

New Literacies represents the change occurring as new technologies integrate with literacy. Texts are changing as students become expert at manipulating digital video and music. Students know how to upload video to YouTube, and many students publish their writing on the Internet each day. Students are now literate beyond hard cover textbooks and paper and pencil. In order to prepare students for the future, we would prepare them for the technological literacies that will become more common (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). These changes are not much different from the historical account of literacy provided by Neil Postman (1985) in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. In 1985, Postman claimed that “television is the command center of the new epistemology” (p. 78). Television changed how we think, but technology evolves, and now we have homes and schools with computers, cell phones with Internet, and pocket-size “televisions” and even smaller, “nano,” digital music players. Media literacy has been necessary and ignored by the majority of teachers, but new literacy researchers call for media literacy and critical literacy in the classroom.

Students have a broader view of the Internet than teachers. A 2001 study by Pew outlines five metaphors describing students' views toward the Internet. Students saw the internet net as a 1) virtual textbook and library; 2) virtual tutor and study shortcut; 3) virtual study group; 4) virtual guidance counselor; and 5) virtual locker, backpack, and notebook. The same students in the focus groups also saw a gap in how technology is addressed in their schools. Administrators, instead of teachers, controlled how the Internet was used in the school. Teachers' use of technology varied widely in their classrooms; typical assignments related to technology were unengaging and without purpose to their lives and technological abilities. Beyond that, access to computer labs was limited to certain times of the day and only available in computer labs. Once in the labs, software blocks access to legitimate sites. Because teachers know all students do not have access, they rarely assign homework that is Internet-related.

In the study, students raised concerns about technology in education. The students hoped schools could improve the "quality" of access to computers and improve the availability of information; provide professional development and technical support for teachers; prioritize keyboarding, computer, and Internet literacy classes; and address inequalities in access. Improving access, quality, and integration of online tools is not an unreasonable request for students in this millennium. In the next section, I describe classrooms that do incorporate digital literacies.

A few themes run through the material outlined in this chapter. First, expressive writing and exploratory talking are both important pursuits. Second, students are using technology outside of the classroom and these experiences are changing how students think, read, write, and work.

The articles already mentioned and the articles yet to be discussed have an underlying similarity and connection. Writing helps thinking and talking helps thinking. Many times the language that they use to discuss the importance of talk and of writing overlap, so my literature review overlaps a bit with reading response theorists, such as Rosenblatt, and composition researchers such as Britton.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In January 2006, I began a pilot study of a ninth grade class in which the teacher incorporated blogging into her communication arts classroom. From January 2006 until May 2006, I observed her classes and the blog, and I spent time interviewing thirteen students in her courses. In September 2006, I began this dissertation study of a case study of a ninth grade communication arts class (see Appendix A for a timeline of the research). The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze how the use of a blog influences students' writing, response to literature, and thinking as shown through their blog posts. In this chapter, I will describe the research methodology I used in the fall of 2006 as I observed the classroom, analyzed the blog, and interviewed students. In the following sections, I explain the questions that guided me through the pilot and dissertation study, the rationale for choosing a case study approach, the context of the study, and data collection procedures.

Questions for the Study

Building on Guzzetti and Gamboa's (2005) question from their study of adolescent girls' out-of-school literacy with personal blogs, this study asks the following overall question: How do adolescents engage with in-school digital literacies? More specifically, I approached the research with the following questions:

1. What does blogging mean for students' writing?
2. What does blogging mean for students' responses to literature?
3. What does blogging mean for students' thinking in an unprompted literature

Questions one, two, and three will be answered through analysis of the blog and interviews with students.

Rationale for a Case Study Approach

Qualitative studies are long-term, prolonged studies that take into account the specific context of the classroom and the researcher's point of view. Qualitative studies are descriptive and thorough, and researchers who choose this approach understand that each person, classroom, and situation is unique. Qualitative researchers emphasize the importance of discovery (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). For the qualitative researcher, the question becomes "What can we discover through the unique experiences of the individuals in the research study, and how do my beliefs impact the conclusions I make?" Qualitative research, according to Strauss and Corbin, is multi-method. This study depends on interviews, classroom observations, and the blog. Strauss and Corbin write, "Most [qualitative] researchers are secure enough with their findings that they regard their theories, even after publication, as qualifiable, modifiable, and open in part to negotiation" (p. 4). This statement is true for this study because the context created through the interplay of this particular teacher, these particular students, and this research cannot be recreated.

My identification with the qualitative research perspective led me to investigate methodologies that fit my constructivist epistemology. What I found through this investigation was an affinity toward case study research. A researcher using a case study approach realizes the importance of the stories and the context. Dyson and Genishi (2005), in *On the Case*, write, "Everyday teaching and learning are complex social happenings, and understanding them as such is the grand purpose of qualitative case studies" (p. 9). As a teacher myself, I understand that a lesson plan created by one teacher cannot be recreated in my own class in an identical manner. Personality and teaching

styles are different for each teacher, and each group of students in the classroom brings unique talents and challenges. But I can look at a teacher's lesson plan, and, if I know her situation and the context of her classroom, I can modify the lesson plan to make it work my own way. Qualitative studies offer that type of transferability to teachers. Qualitative researchers do not assume all classrooms can be treated equally; researchers in this area can only explain and describe the context to the best of their ability and hope that information will help another classroom teacher to consider and modify the results for his or her own needs.

Merriam (1998) writes that case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (p. 29). For example, case studies focus on a particular problem or situation. In this study, the particular situation is a group of ninth graders who blog for class. Case studies focus on thick description and are heuristic in that they "illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon [blogging] under study" (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 30). Stake describes case studies' unique characteristics. According to Stake, case studies are more concrete, more contextual, more developed by reader interpretation, and based more on reference populations determined by the reader (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 32). Interestingly enough, the *reader* of the case study report generalizes the results to his or her population based on the contextual and concrete details provided by the research.

In this dissertation study, I was a visible presence in the classroom observation, but I was mostly an invisible presence on the blog. I acted as a "participant as observer," defined by Merriam (1998) as a researcher whose activities are known to the group, but "are subordinate to the researcher's role as participant" (p. 101). I assumed the position of "least adult" (Mandell, 1988), assuming less authority than the teacher and parent.

Although my presence influenced the classroom, my goal was to “capture naturally occurring activity” (Spradley, 1980) as students used a blog to respond to literature.

The findings from this study are based on information co-constructed by the teacher, myself, and the students. Any kind of presence in this environment changed the meaning of the study, so my assumption is that I cannot be distant and objective. I became a part of that classroom and continually reflected on how I co-constructed knowledge with both the teacher and the students. In some cases, I collaborated with the teacher, and on some days, I assisted students with questions if I was approached. Occasionally, I shared articles and reflected with the teacher, listening to her observations and sharing my own. This “mutual engagement” with the teacher, students, and the classroom constructed the “subjective reality that is under investigation” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15).

Because of my epistemological stance, I recognize any kind of presence changes the environment, and that my presence influences results in some way. To guard against undue bias, I triangulated results using reflective journals, student interviews, classroom observations, classroom teacher reflections, and the blog. For example, when I would hear a statement from a student during classroom observations, I would triangulate that statement using his writing from the blog, student interviews, and the teacher’s perspective in order to guard against influencing results. Later, as I analyzed the data, and begin to formulate conclusions, I would confirm the results by triangulating one student’s statement with other students’ statements in separate interviews.

In contrast, my participation was more active in relation to the teacher; however, it focused on supporting and encouraging Mrs. Jones’ use of blogging and not on other

aspects of her teaching. I acted as Mrs. Jones' technology support person and as a sounding board for her ideas. I also offered suggestions, if asked. As I came across articles or resources on the topic of education and blogging, I shared those with her. I loaned her references such as Will Richardson's book, *Blogs, Wikis, and Podcasts* (2005), a "how-to" for teachers incorporating blogs, wikis, or podcasts into their classrooms. I also shared several lesson plans from the National Council of Teachers' of English and International Reading Association website, Read-Write-Think (<http://www.readwritethink.org>), and from the Library of Congress website.

This dissertation study is a qualitative case study, although I quantify some results in the area of fluency. I chose qualitative case study because methodology focuses on prolonged engagement and the importance of thick description. It was also important for me as a researcher to approach the research context as a person ready to discover inductively rather than approaching the classroom with a fixed idea for how a blog influences the classroom.

Context

As I explained previously, in a qualitative study the context is important. Qualitative researchers recognize how the context—the students, the school, the teacher, the demographics, and the research impact the conclusions of the study. In the following section, I describe the site, the students, and the teacher who participated in this dissertation study.

Participants and Setting

The research took place in one of five high schools in the city of Hillsdale, the center of a metropolitan area of 175,000 in the Midwest. According to the state's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website, in 2005, 1,714 students attended Hillsdale High School. Of that total, 3.2% are Asian, 2% are black, 1.4% are Hispanic, .4% are Indian, and 93% are white. Eleven percent of students receive free and reduced lunches. Seventy-five percent of students leave Hillsdale High School to attend a four-year or two year college program

The school itself, a boxy brick building, was built in the early 70s. The interior of the school consists of concrete blocks painted cream. Most rooms have one 5 x 2 window. Mrs. Jones's room is an exception with its four large windows overlooking a courtyard with trees. Her inner room sits off a small corridor ten feet from the main hall. The corridor protects her room from noise during passing time and the extra hallway space adds to her classroom space when students work in small groups.

The natural light and decorations around the room create a homey and comfortable feel. One bulletin board lining the south wall includes forty or more school pictures of past students. Student-created brown paper bag "puppets" based on characters from texts read in class hang on the back wall next to two bookshelves filled with textbooks. The green chalkboard, one of the few left in the school, frames the front of the room and provides an area for the day's objectives and an agenda. Students chat as they find their seats at pentagonal tables which replaced the desks formerly occupying the space. Many times class begins with focused freewriting for five to ten minutes. She may talk over them for a moment, pointing to the objectives in the front of the room and

giving students a preview of the day, but fairly quickly the writing begins. If there is school business to take care of, such as attendance, she does that. Sometimes she sits and writes with them.

The Class

The class I observed was a ninth grade communication arts class—English I Honors. The students are in their first semester at this high school. No grade requirement or recommendation is required for students to be in this honors class. Students sign up for the class of their choice, but students who take the honors class are viewed by most teachers in the school as ambitious, studious, and successful. In the interviews, nearly all of the students expressed the importance of good grades. Her largest class had thirty students. Mrs. Jones's classes closely followed the breakdown of ethnicity for the entire school. The school followed a four-block schedule. The English I Honors class met each day for approximately ninety minutes from August to early January. Students on a four-block schedule attend four ninety minute classes each day.

In order to obtain more information about the students' background with technology, I created a survey based on a survey a Pew Internet and American Life Project (Lenhart & Fox, 2006) survey used to obtain information on bloggers (See Appendix B for the survey). Only 28% of students in Mrs. Jones's class had created a blog. Fifty-five percent of students had read a blog before. One hundred percent of the students use computers on a frequent basis (see Appendix C for the complete results of the survey).

The Teacher and the School

Mrs. Jones has taught 24 years total and six years at this high school. She completed her MS.Ed in Administration in the summer of 2006. She has no interest in pursuing an administration job, but the degree increased her salary and her retirement as she moved toward the last years of her career.

Literature discussion has been a focus of her teaching throughout the years. While a middle school teacher at a feeder school for Hillsdale, she organized student book groups in her eighth grade classes. She wrote grants to buy books and invited community leaders and parents to share and discuss books with the students. In 2005, she was awarded a district award for her commitment to reading instruction; her work with the blog influenced her receiving this award.

In late August, before school began, Mrs. Jones broke her arm and leg, causing her to miss the first month of school. This unfortunate event marked Mrs. Jones' entry into blogging. Previously, she had not blogged, but the accident forced her to find a way to connect and communicate with the substitute teacher and the students. She created the blog "Teaching Outside the Classroom Box." Mrs. Jones posted daily, always including a picture along with her post that represented the content of her post. She asked the substitute to pull up her blog daily for the students. He did not, but she continued to blog each day throughout the semester. She coached the substitute on how to use the projector and laptop and show her posts to the class each day. She found out later he rarely did this. Even with a fantastic substitute it is difficult to be absent from a classroom, especially at the beginning of the year. Mrs. Jones said to me at one point after her return, "These classes will never be 'mine' like they would have if I would have been here from the first

day.” Mrs. Jones always had good classroom management skills, but one class in particular was wild. She found out from other students that the substitute had no control and for weeks students had come in and done whatever they wanted—mostly chatting instead of doing any kind of work.

Mrs. Jones does not consider herself a technology expert. She uses email, and within the last year she learned how to text message. In fact, students showed her how to text message. She was open to learning about technology from students, and she asked for their help when technology issues appear.

Hillsdale has two mobile computer labs available for checkout through the technology support person. The mobile lab included wireless internet and a wireless printer. Mrs. Jones brought the mobile lab to her classroom at least once each week, allowing students computer access at least once a week.

This school was selected because of the computer access and because the teacher is a former colleague who was willing to incorporate blogging into her curriculum. When I began to blog during my graduate course work, I shared with her my experiences and asked about her interest in creating a blog for her own class. She was enthusiastic and willing to try something new.

Students in the Case Study

Evan.

Evan is a blonde, popular, and affable freshman at Hillsdale High School. His blog name is James Blonde, a play on words with James Bond. He plays on the high school basketball team and is busy with other school activities. I chose to discuss Evan because he was a student Mrs. Jones identified several times throughout the semester as

the “best blogger.” Months after the class was over, Mrs. Jones identified Evan as one of the top bloggers. As a researcher, Evan stood out because he posted frequently, and, as I describe later, his writing had voice. A reader could not help but notice Evan’s posts with the pictures and exaggerated capitalization.

He wanted to get an “A” in the class and had to work hard for it. He described the blog as “helpful,” although in the beginning he believed that Mrs. Jones was “crazy” for asking students to blog. Soon enough, he embraced blogging and began to look down on students he perceived as not taking class work and the blog “seriously.” Even though he saw blogging as important, he explained in interviews, that due to time constraints he did not get to blog as much as he felt he needed or wanted to.

Carrie.

Carrie is a freshman at Hillsdale High School with dark curly hair and opinions that she sometimes shares with the entire class. In the individual interviews and the focus group interviews she was vocal, open, and willing to share her ideas and thinking. During observations, I rarely saw her participate in whole class discussions although she describes herself as a student who is willing to share her opinions. She also describes herself as a hard worker, a student who “when I say I am going to get something done, I will usually do it.” Like Evan, Carrie has gone to school with most of the people in the class. She did not have any previous experience with blogging: “I truly didn’t know what a blog was when I entered the classroom. I knew how to get around on the internet, but I wasn’t comfortable using it.”

Rhonda.

Evan was the outgoing student, Carrie was moderately quiet, and Rhonda was so quiet I handed her the digital recorder and sat closer because I could barely hear her speak. At the beginning of the semester, Mrs. Jones was concerned whether Rhonda's parents would allow her to participate on the blog. Rhonda, up to the ninth grade, had been home schooled. She was a very quiet student who was extremely well-mannered. In interviews, her peers identified her as a blogger they liked to read. Evan had this to say about Rhonda:

People can be so much more expressive when it's not them talking to you. It's kind of like talking to someone with a mask on compared to talking with someone face to face. Like Rhonda, she has never said a word to me in school ever. It's cool to see that she will talk to you outside of class.

Carrie mentioned Rhonda's blogging in the focus group interview:

Carrie: Rhonda, has some really good posts, she can nail a topic very well.

KF: Who are you favorite bloggers?

Melanie: I like yours (to Rhonda)

They all agree.

KF: Why?

Melanie: She always points out ideas that I hadn't taken into consideration, so then from that I can just look at it a different way, whatever we are talking about.

Evan: She never misses a beat on anything.

Carrie: If you are behind or confused about anything, it's always good to look at Rhonda's post to read or post a comment.

Rhonda was home schooled until the fall semester of this dissertation study.

Rhonda describes herself as a student who “tries to do what I'm supposed to and gets things done . . . I try to do things to the best of my ability.” Blogging was new for her. Her previous experience with computers consisted of using a computer for Spanish, using email, and looking information up on the internet.

Tim.

He said little in class, and he explained to me in an interview that it seemed pointless to raise his hand when the teacher asked a question, especially if he already knew the answer. He came to my attention for several reasons. He seemed to be a contradiction. He was so quiet he seemed almost disinterested. In the focus group interviews he said he posted to the blog for the grade, but in an exit pass given to the teacher he told Mrs. Jones that her class was one of the best he had ever taken and he loved the blog. One of the first times I noticed him was during a classroom observation. As he listened to “Radio Diaries,” a National Public Radio website consisting of audio diaries, and the story of a young woman with cystic fibrosis, Tim opened up Google, listened to the audio, and looked up “cystic fibrosis” and researched the disease as he listened to the story of the woman. This was an example of the potential of computers in the classroom. I was excited by his multi-tasking and by his ability to juggle modalities—listening, typing, and reading at the same time. Instead of asking the teacher about cystic fibrosis, he was finding the information himself.

He had not blogged before and he did not think he would blog in the future. His only use for the Internet was to look up baseball statistics.

Curriculum

Mrs. Jones uses a modified reading and writing workshop approach. Students self-select topics and genres, participate in peer conferences with a first, second, and third draft, and collect their work in a portfolio. Because of her interest in self-regulated learning, she asks students to reflect on their writing process. Besides self-selecting topics to write about, students self-select “independent reading” books, and, in addition, read the following major texts during her class: *The Odyssey* (read with the substitute teacher while Mrs. Jones was absent); *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee; *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* by Ernest Gaines or *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor; and *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. These texts are listed in the ninth grade curriculum for the district and were available in classroom sets.

In previous classes she had taught, students read *Romeo and Juliet* after finishing *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but when one student wondered what it would be like to read *To Kill a Mockingbird* if it were written in Tom’s perspective, Mrs. Jones and I began a conversation of her curriculum and the next reading choice. Instead of going ahead with *Romeo and Juliet*, I suggested finding texts that would be thematically related to *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I knew *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* were available in large sets in the school book room. Based on our discussions, Mrs. Jones decided to use these books to extend and build on the conversations begun during the reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Students chose between one of the two books and continued to post entries to the blog on the same site.

During this time, Mrs. Jones began to look for sites on the Internet that would supplement and extend the conversations brought up by the book. Students read other texts throughout the semester, and their posts reflect the other readings. For example, students listened to or read stories on “Radio Diaries” (<http://radiodiaries.org>), a National Public Radio site. Students listened to the stories of Thembi, a young woman from Africa with AIDS; Ota Benga, a Pygmy who was exhibited like an animal in a zoo; and schoolchildren protesting Apartheid in South Africa, among others. [“Radio Diaries” funds people to record audio oral histories of significant events.] Other texts included a *Reader’s Digest* article on manners; and photographs from the Library of Congress related to the time period in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Students read more texts than these, but the blog posts reflect these works more than others.

Students began blogging the week of October 15, 2006, after Mrs. Jones returned from sick leave. Students began to read and blog about *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Before they posted for the first time, Mrs. Jones and the class created a set of rules to guide them. She posted the following message to the blog:

I hope you’ll see this space as an opportunity to make literature discussion your own, making connections with other bloggers. Feel free to post questions, comments, pictures, illustrations, and to discuss related outside resources, passages, and whatever comes up in your reading.

This message (see Table 2), along with the rules that students created in a whole class discussion, framed the blogging that occurred during the semester. As I stated previously, although this study was initially focused on reader response, little direct instruction of

reader response activities occurred, although the teacher's underlying philosophy seemed to be closer to reader response than other types of literary theory.

Table 2: Mrs. Jones's First Post of the Semester

<p>Welcome to Reading Great Books 3!</p> <p>Welcome bloggers. I hope you'll see this space as an opportunity to make literature discussion your own, making connections with other bloggers. Feel free to post questions, comments, pictures, illustrations, and to discuss related outside resources, passages, and whatever comes up in your reading. I hope you'll learn more about your reading, yourself, each other, and the world out there. Go ahead and dive in!</p> <p>Here are the guidelines you guys created and voted on in class:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Make your post easy to read.2. Don't write any personal information.3. Don't write anything your grandmother couldn't read.4. School rules apply to the blog.5. Create a title for your post.6. Respect your readers.7. Don't give away clues for future reading.8. Choose your resources carefully. <p>Happy blogging!-</p> <p><i>posted by Ms. James at 2:53 PM 2 comments</i></p>
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Students, through class discussion, created the rules in Table 2.

Using Pseudonyms

Mrs. Jones asked students to create a pseudonym for safety, so a stranger could not read the blog and identify a student. She also told them that they could be as anonymous as they wanted. She would always know their identity, but if they did not want anyone to know, then they should not tell their classmates. Only one student actively concealed her identity (in fact, her peers never knew her gender since her name was Chris P. Bacon). Other students did conceal their identity, but they did not actively tell others who they were. As the semester went on, most of the students knew each other's name, so they were not anonymous for long. Pseudonyms helped students feel open to express their ideas and opinions. Many students felt like the pseudonyms and the distance created by blogging helped "shy" students to share more than they would in an in-class discussion.

Institutional Review Board

The University of Missouri-Columbia's Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviews research projects with human subjects. I submitted paperwork for Institutional Review Board approval and the Public Schools research approval in December 2005 and again in the summer of 2006. I explained to students that the study was voluntary. I also explained to the teacher the time commitment involved and made it clear to the students and the teacher that the study was voluntary. The pilot study and dissertation study received IRB approval. In addition, I received approval through the school district's research office.

Mrs. Jones sent a letter home to parents along with the youth assent and consent forms (see Appendix D, E, and F for the letter and consent forms). If students did not wish to participate in the study, I did not include posts or comments from students who

did not sign the assent or whose parents did not sign the consent forms. The consent form, assent form, and letter home to parents stressed that students were not allowed to include last names, the city, the state, or the name of the school. If they did, the blog post would be deleted or edited, and the student could lose blogging privileges. The dissertation proposal was available to the teacher, principal, parents, and students who wanted information beyond the consent forms.

The Blog

Mrs. Jones created the blog on “Blogger,” a free web site with a feature that allows users to quickly and easily create a blog. Once the blog is created, the teacher can set the settings to allow only invited members to post or comment. To become a “member” of the blog, the teacher sends an email invitation. Once the students receive the email, they click on a hyperlink which takes them to a page where they create a username, password, and profile. Students had the option of using a screen name, or pseudonym. The teacher kept a master list of students’ real names and screen names. The teacher did not allow students to reference the name of the high school, town, address, or any personal information, including last names. Although only members of the blog can post, anyone can view the site on the Internet.

Mrs. Jones acted as an administrator [I was also an administrator. If there was a technical problem, I could log on and help her.] As the administrators, we unclicked the Blogger option for a “profile” for added safety. When the profile is activated, readers of the blog can link to the user’s name and view other blogs that the user is signed up for. Also, Mrs. Jones deleted blogs with inappropriate language, comments, or pictures, as she saw fit, although this happened rarely. Posts with questionable content were handled

in the following way: if there was questionable content, the teacher discussed the post with the student, notified the parent or guardian of the student if necessary, and notified the principal if necessary.

Lessons on blogging.

I include this section in order for readers to understand the context of the classroom and the lessons. The lessons described in this section assist with incorporating blogging rather than deepening literature response. Through discussions and the previous experience in the pilot study, Mrs. Jones felt several lessons needed to precede the actual blogging. For example, students needed an email address or needed to know how to create one. In order to post to the class blog, students needed an email account. Blogger sends an email invitation. Users click on the link that Blogger sends, and create a user name and password to gain entry into the site. Although today's students are perceived as technologically literate, for many of these students, this use of computers was new to them. Mrs. Jones taught the following lessons before students blogged:

1. shared her blog, "Teaching Outside the Classroom Box"
2. outlined expectations for the blog (see Appendix G)
3. created class rules for the blog through a whole class discussion
4. created an email account
5. learned to log on to Blogger
6. created an online persona
7. shadow blogged
8. learned about netiquette (See Appendix H for a detailed list of instructional events during the summer)

Mrs. Jones posted to the blog each day and explained to students the focus for each class period. The teacher's blog is a chronological archive of events for the entire semester. [The misspelling in the site's name is due to availability. The name "freshmenscholars.blogspot.com" was unavailable.]

During the pilot and the dissertation study, I shared with Mrs. Jones lesson plans about blogging I encountered on the internet. I found a lesson plan on Read Write Think, a website of NCTE and IRA, called "Naming in a Digital World: Creating a Safe Persona." She used the lesson to talk with students about creating an online persona. Mrs. Jones based a blogging lesson on an experience she had while living in Japan. She observed shoppers in Japan buying china. The shoppers stood in front of a display of teacups and saucers, and instead of picking the cup and saucer up, he or she would pretend to sip from the teacup, or "shadow taste." Mrs. Jones coined the term "shadow blog," and the lesson, to allow students to practice posting and commenting on a blog without actually getting on a computer.

Netiquette is always a concern when a teacher incorporates blogging, so in preparation, she shared with students an article about manners from *Reader's Digest*, and a link on her blog to rules of blog netiquette. After reading and discussing these texts, Mrs. Jones spent some of a class period discussing the expectations and norms for the blog (See Appendix G for Mrs. Jones's blog expectations).

Through her experience in the previous semester, Mrs. Jones realized the necessity of scaffolding the technology aspect of the blog. She spent much of the early weeks assisting students with helping students to log on to the site and learning how to post.

The first paragraph of the post was created by Mrs. Jones and laid the foundation for her expectations. Her first paragraph reflects a reader response instructional stance, although there was no direct instruction of reader response techniques. There was a list of reader response activities that students could choose from, but the products of those activities were not posted to the blog. The numbered guidelines below were discussed and agreed upon by the students in the class. Once she had laid the foundation with these lessons, Mrs. Jones created the first blog post in which she responded to *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This post was one of only a few times when Mrs. Jones posted to the blog:

Friday, October 20, 2006

Heroic Characters, Mysterious Events



Some books contain characters that make me want to be more like they are. *To Kill A Mockingbird* is one of those books. Maudie and Atticus do that for me. First of all, could you believe the way Maudie reacted to the house fire? After all she went through that evening of the fire, she ends up talking about her Lane cake recipe and sending Scout and Jem home to clean up the Morphodite. Scout hears her laughing that morning after the fire and wonders what's the matter with her. What do you think? How could she laugh after all that?

Then there's Atticus. This character has been voted by many to be America's number one hero. Is he a good dad? I have to laugh when Scout approaches him (last night's reading) with all her reasons to get to stay home from school...stomach, dizziness, attempted ringworm, and the best of all, cussing. I thought it was hysterical when she asked her Uncle Jack to pass the *damn ham, please*. (cussing while asking please...) It made me think of those feeble attempts I made when I was young to try to act old. It also reminds me of my attempts to stay home from school. Why does Atticus ignore her? Is that effective parenting? What does this teach Uncle Jack?

How about you? Comments about the characters, their prejudices, their kindnesses, their parenting skills? How about Boo? How did Scout not notice him? What about Jem? Why was he out on the porch after the tree hole incident with tear stains on his face? Why didn't Scout hear him...or better yet, understand him?

Gosh, there's so much to say about the reading so far. Have at it. What do you think?

posted by Ms. James at [5:56 AM](#)

A teacher's written and spoken responses influence students' responses (Johnston, 2004).

In the above post Mrs. Jones reflects on certain characters, asks questions (fourteen questions), includes specific examples from the text, and relates personally to the text.

The tone of the post is casual and conversational. Her post focuses on the text rather than directing students in ways to consider responding to the text. In the expectations, Mrs.

Jones invited students to include pictures, connect personally, and connect to outside

resources, and in her own post she included a picture and personal connection but no hyperlink to outside resources that connect to the text.

Lessons on literature response.

Mrs. Jones's initial instruction on blogging was aimed at preparing students to blog. With these particular lessons, Mrs. Jones assisted students in posting entries to the blog. The focus of these lessons was more about technical skills than direct instruction of literature response methods. The focus of the study concerns how students use the blog as a place for unprompted literature discussion. I think it is important to remember that few teachers are incorporating blogging into the classroom, and any time a teacher does try to use an innovative technology the process of instruction not only focuses on the content but on how to use the technology. During this semester, most of the early lessons focus on blogging rather than using the space to practice reader response and/or critical theory.

Data Collection

Participant interviews and observations in “natural settings” are the data collection tools of the researcher coming from the constructivist paradigm (Hatch, 2002). As a researcher, I identify both ontologically and epistemologically to the constructivist paradigm, which focuses on the co-construction of knowledge and the idea that reality is universal and unknowable (Hatch, 2002). Contextual details and capturing the voices of the individuals in the case are important so readers can place themselves in the perspective of the individual and understand unique social constructions of this particular “bounded system” or case study (Hatch, 2002). This context was bounded by both time and place (Creswell, 1998).

Multiple sources for data were collected: interviews, class observations, student and teacher blog posts, and artifacts (assignments, handouts) satisfying Yin’s (2003) recommendation of six types of information: “documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts” (p. 85-97).

I collected the following data during the semester:

- field notes from observations (see Appendix I for a complete list of observation dates);
- reflections posted by Mrs. Jones to a teacher-research blog;
- the class blog, “Reading Great Books;”
- the teacher’s daily blog outlining the day’s agenda;
- artifacts (school assignments, self-evaluations, letters to the teacher);
- emails sent to me by Mrs. Jones;

- comments posted to the blog; and
- interviews with students (see Appendix J for a complete list of interviews).

Sources of Data

Observations, interviews, and artifacts in the form of blog posts were the main forms of data that I collected. These data are the foundation of my study. Observations helped me to understand the context and instruction; interviews helped me to understand the students' perspective; and the blog helped me to understand how students used the blog to read, write, and think. The next sections will describe more specifically each of these types of data.

Observations

The observations of the class and in-class discussion helped me understand how Mrs. Jones explained the blog to students. The teacher's explanation influences how students use the blog. During these observations, I kept a field journal. I took copious amounts of notes while I sat in the classroom, and I took summary notes when I left.

Mrs. Jones's absence at the beginning of the semester delayed initial observations. She returned at the end of September and I began observing her classroom one to two times a week. Field observations were especially important early in the semester as I became familiar with the new students, their screen names, and their classroom personas. Watching Mrs. Jones's interaction with the students and the students' interaction with each other and the blogs, enabled me to describe the context of the classroom.

The Blog

I tried several different methods as I read and attempted to keep track of the numerous blog posts. Throughout the semester, I read the blog entries on the computer screen. I would visit the website and scroll down the page to read the posts from the students. Blogger archives the blog posts either daily, weekly, or monthly, based on the administrator's preference. The students' site was archived weekly. On the right-hand side of the page, readers of the blog can click on a week and read the entries posted within those seven days. At the end of each week, I printed all of the blog entries for that week. I also watched the blog by using an aggregator called "Bloglines," (<http://www.bloglines.com>), an online service that allows users to subscribe to web pages and notifies subscribers when web pages are updated. An "update" on a blog occurs when someone posts an entry to the blog. As a subscriber to Bloglines, I could log in and see only the new posts, and I could search the blog by pulling up posts within the last 24 hours, 48 hours, one week, or one month. Bloglines also enabled me to click a box that kept the post as "new." Bloglines is helpful, and I would recommend that teachers who ask students to blog should use it to track new posts. In the end, printing the blog posts by week was the easiest way to read and organize the numerous posts. Another helpful data collection tool was that the Blogger website sends an email to one administrator when people post comments to the blog. This feature allowed me to "collect" time-stamped comments in my email inbox.

As I read through the blog and took notes, I looked for interesting questions, connections, and conversations. I purposely kept my research questions as open as possible, so I was receptive to the possibilities of what might occur in the blog. I

consistently stepped back from the data, so I was not coming to a conclusion too early, making judgments, or narrowing my focus too soon. I hoped to keep my mind open and the questions and labels broad, so the early ideas did not influence later analysis. The early weeks of the study were an opportunity to take a broad look at all three classes and keep my eyes open for possible angles, patterns, and anomalies.

At the beginning of the study, in October and November, I developed and refined hypotheses based on patterns that I found through data collection, but I was still looking broadly at all three classes. At this time, I reconsidered my theoretical framework, as well, and reconceptualized my research questions to assist me in narrowing my data collection.

Table 3: Amount of Data Collected

Type of Data	Amount of Data
First block blog posts (by the end of class)	497
Second block blog posts (by the end of class)	615
Third block blog posts (by the end of class)	677
Teacher and Researcher Blog posts	78
Teacher's Class Blog posts	80
Student Interviews	24

With over 1200 posts for three classes, I eventually had to make some decisions on how to narrow the scope of the study. Through reading the blog and talking to Mrs. Jones, I attempted to identify posts of interests on the blogs (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 237). Through November, I began to narrow the focus to one of the three classes. By the end of November and early December, I focused exclusively on her third class of the day. I chose this class for several reasons: Mrs. Jones had established a good rapport with class; this was her largest class, and this was the class with the most blog posts. Also, by third block, Mrs. Jones had worked through any inconsistencies in her lesson plans or technical support problems. This class seemed to run more smoothly. This was also the

longest class period of the day. Students met for approximately one hour, they went to lunch for a half an hour, and then they returned for 45 minutes. The break in the schedule allowed me time to meet with students before or at the end of lunch, and I also had time to talk with the teacher.

Interviews

By late October and early November, I began to interview students (see Appendix J for a complete list of interview subjects) in first, second, and third block. Cresswell (1998) suggests finding cases with “different perspectives on the problem” and identifying “ordinary,” “accessible,” or “unusual” cases (p. 62). To identify a purposive sample for the interviews, I merely read the blog, noting who blogged, who commented, and I talked with the teacher concerning what she saw occurring on the blog. For example, she might point out what she might term a “good” blogger, meaning a student whose blogging she noticed in some way. That may be because they were posting or commenting frequently, or standing out through the visuals they used, or the voice of their writing. Although student interest and enthusiasm would ebb and flow, I identified students by their enthusiasm, or lack thereof, and quality of blogs (quality meaning critical thinking, asking questions, connecting to the text) and started my interviews there. Early interviews with individual students were exploratory (see Appendix K for tentative interview questions).

After I narrowed the focus to her third class, I began to interview students one-on-one. The interviews were not unsuccessful, but in *Harvesting Minds* (1996) Dr. Roy F. Fox uses focus groups. I liked his idea because, like he, I thought students would be more willing to talk within a group rather than only to me, and I hoped that they would be

able to bounce ideas off each other. I hoped to create an atmosphere of conversation and meaning-making rather than a question and answer session with me as the host. I wanted the students to feel free to discuss and talk among each other, and I hoped this would allow me to see a truer picture of their thinking since I would not be the sole audience. To begin this process, I took a list of all the students in the class and randomly assigned them to focus groups. I tried to mix groups heterogeneously based on gender. Interviews improved because of the focus groups. Instead of students focusing on me or my questions, which I saw as starting points, not as questions that needed to be answered, students talked among themselves, using each other's ideas to clarify, support, or disagree with each other. I began the interviews with warm-up questions, and I had prepared a list of tentative questions as support. I attempted to follow the students' thinking rather than guide the interviews with pre-planned questions. Students directed the flow of the conversation as much as possible. I tried to sit quietly and listen, focusing on following up their thinking with "why?" in order to help them elaborate their thinking as much as possible.

These focus group interviews took place in Mrs. Jones's corridor during her class. Interviews with the groups lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. I audiotaped and transcribed each interview. Like with Fox (1996), the group interviews helped me to identify "informers," students willing to speak freely and voluminously about their interaction with the blog. I noted the more talkative students and completed individual interviews with some of these students.

Other Sources of Data

I reviewed my reflective journal and impressions that I collected and recorded throughout the semester. I reviewed Mrs. Jones' blog, "Thinking Outside the Classroom Box," to create a timeline of instructional events.

The last piece of data collection was the member check. In member checking, "the task is to obtain confirmation that the report has captured the data as constructed by the informants, or to correct, amend, or extend it, that is, to establish the credibility of the case" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 238). By the last two weeks of the semester (mid-January), I completed a member check with students by posting tentative conclusions to the blog and asking for student feedback. Students commented to my posts, and they returned to their class blog and created posts concerning the tentative conclusions. Many of them cut and pasted my conclusions and "answered" each tentative conclusion. I had used this blogging form of member check during the pilot study and found it worked well.

I read their comments to frame and revise those initial findings. I used my dissertation advisor, Roy Fox, as an auditor. In December 2006, I asked IRB for an extension on the timeline of my study, so as I analyzed and wrote interpretations during the spring, I could ask the students follow-up questions if necessary. I began data analysis in earnest in January 2007.

Data Analysis

I used a constant comparative method, both collecting and analyzing at the same time, although a bulk of the analysis occurred in the spring of 2007 (See Appendix L for a section of blog posts and comments). Data analysis needs to be open-ended and

constant comparative and begin on the first day (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I used both an inductive and interpretive analysis as outlined in Hatch (2002): “In reality, it will often be the case that researchers will have done a typological or inductive analysis at some level, then move to the next level in order to add an interpretive dimension to their earlier analytic work” (p. 180). He finds that “most studies will be richer and findings more convincing when interpretive analytic processes are used along with or in addition to typological or inductive analysis” (p. 181). This analysis moved from the specific to the whole (Hatch, 2002). I collected data from the classroom and its informers, and then during analysis, I collected the pieces to form the whole with my over-arching questions being, “What does all of this data mean?” Using an inductive analytic method, I developed categories based on the data. I tried to name what I saw in the blog posts. I coded the blog posts each week (See Appendix M for initial coding), and then I created separate lists of codes (see Appendix N for a list of codes).

I analyzed and categorized the data in order to find patterns based on the specific data collected. Potter (1998) writes that induction “is an analytic technique that directs researchers to look for patterns in data so they can make general statement about the phenomenon they examined” (p. 151). In addition to inductive, I then used an interpretative approach. Hatch (2002) explains that interpretation is part of all qualitative research, and that “interpretation is about giving meaning to data. It’s about making sense of social situations by generating explanations for what’s going on within them” (p. 180). I categorized and generalized from the specific data, and I also attempt to interpret. This interpretative analysis influences my thinking as a researcher.

From the first day of the study in the fall of 2006, I read field notes and the blog, looking for a holistic sense. I read through the blog posts. Through the lists of codes, I looked for patterns, and attempted to collapse individual codes into groups. I read the data many times over, identifying impressions. I re-read the data and identified where my provisional interpretations are supported or challenged. I wrote a draft summary of tentative conclusions, reviewed interpretations with the students and teachers, and then revised the summary and focused on excerpts that support interpretations.

In-depth data analysis occurred in the spring of 2007. I read through all of the blog posts from third class fairly quickly, writing notes in the margins about ideas, thoughts, or categories that might describe what I saw in the students' writing. After writing these notes, I typed initial categories from week three into a separate document (see Appendix N for initial categories) which included every note that I wrote (about 18 pages). I then read through the codes from the initial read-through, looking for patterns and codes that could be collapsed. A "pattern" was defined in the interviews, when the similar statements were made by three or more students. I also categorized a pattern when three or more similar situations or events were encountered in the blog posts. While part of this initial read-through included open coding, two articles guided my coding—Hillocks' (1980) "Toward a Hierarchy of Skills in the Comprehension of Literature" and Odell's (1999) "Assessing Thinking: Glimpsing a Mind at Work."

Hillocks' (1980) outlines the following types of hierarchical questions necessary for students' deepening comprehension and critical thinking of literature. Although Hillocks focuses on questions, I turned his questions into statements and used those as codes. Hillocks describes two types of categories: inferential and literal, below those two

levels are several sub-categories. He asserts that each category builds on the previous one, and if students are unable to answer one type of question, then it is unlikely they can move to the next, higher-level comprehension question.

Table 4: Hillocks' (1980) Hierarchy of Comprehension Skills

<p>Literal Level of Comprehension</p> <p>Basic Stated Information: extremely important, repeated, and prominent</p> <p>Key Detail: Important to the twists and turns of the plot; bear causal relationship to the plot</p> <p>Stated Relationship: The reader must locate the relationship which is said to exist between at least two pieces of information (two characters, two events, a character and an event, etc.)</p> <p>Inferential Level of Comprehension</p> <p>Simple Implied Relationships: Similar to stated relationships except the answers are not stated explicitly in the text.</p> <p>Complex Implied Relationships: Inferred from many different pieces of information involving a large number of details. The reader must identify the details, discern whatever patterns exist among them, and then draw the appropriate inference.</p> <p>Author's Generalization: Goes beyond character to imply what the story means about human nature; corresponds to theme but more deeply than teachers typically consider it. The difference between complex implied relationships and author's generalization is the fact that CIR depends on the text, while Author's Generalization moves beyond the text.</p> <p>Structural Generalization: The reader identifies and explains how parts work together to achieve certain effects.</p>
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In contrast to Hillocks' work, which outlines types of questions that reveal a hierarchy of comprehension, Odell (1999) outlines thinking strategies (not in hierarchical form) that teachers (and he recommends students) use to evaluate thinking in writing.

Table 5: Odell's (1999) Categories and Definitions for Assessing Thinking in Writing**1. Dissonance:**

Students point out or overlook problems, ambiguities, ironies, questions, uncertainties, or conflicts

- a) Students point out things that surprise or puzzle them.
- b) They pose questions.
- c) They indicate that are confused, uncertain, or ambivalent about something they have experienced.
- d) They comment on ways in which two strongly held beliefs (ideas, values) are inconsistent with each other.
- e) They notice ways in which people's actions seem inconsistent with their words.
- f) They mention ways in which something conflicts with what they had expected or would have preferred.

2. Selecting:

Students include or exclude observations, "facts," personal experiences, feelings, and memories

- a) When students respond to literature or write personal experience narratives, they focus solely on the events that happened, or they include information about people's thoughts, feelings, and motivations.
- b) When they describe, they look for details that will "show, not tell."
- c) When they try to write persuasively or informatively, they include the kind of information that is likely to be appropriate given the knowledge, needs, or values of their intended readers.

3. Encoding/Representing:

Students use different kinds of language to articulate their ideas, feelings, perceptions, and memories.

- a) When students discuss personal events, they use relatively abstract, generalized terms.
- b) When students discuss personal events, they use language that reflects the personal significance of those events.
- c) When students try to think through complicated issues, they use highly emotional language that might limit their ability to see the complexity of a situation.
- d) Students come up with metaphors that let them take a fresh look at the subject they are considering.
- e) They choose words whose connotations are appropriate for their subject matter, audience, and purpose.

4. Drawing on prior knowledge:

Students explicitly refer to things they already know in order to understand something new.

- a) When students read a complicated piece of literature, they comment on how this piece relates to other texts they have read or movies they have seen.
- b) When they encounter a difficult problem, they use what they know from comparable problems or from prior schoolwork in order to solve it.
- c) When they are introduced to new concepts in their courses, they consider ways in which those concepts apply to their personal experience or ways in which they are or are not compatible with what they've learned previously.

5. Seeing relationships:

Students mention cause-effect relationships, time, if ... then, similarity, and differences in their writing.

- a) Students note when and why things happen.
- b) They create hypothetical scenarios, speculating about how one thing might cause or lead up to another.
- c) They make distinctions, noticing ways in which something is different from something else.
- d) They classify or note similarities.
- e) They comment on how things change.
- f) They notice ways in which a person or object fits into his/her/its physical surroundings.

6. Considering different perspectives:

Students consider ways in which other people might perceive, interpret or respond to a given idea, fact, or experience.

- a) Students consider good news as well as bad, pro as well as con.
- b) They adopt another's perspective, trying to imagine how a character might respond to a particular situation.
- c) They think of different conclusions that might be drawn from a particular set of data.
- d) They put themselves in their reader's place, trying to understand the knowledge, values, or needs with which the reader approaches their writing.
- e) When they disagree, they consider ways in which that person's views might possibly make sense.

Hillocks and Odell provide frameworks for two ideas in which I was interested in. First, Hillocks offers a framework to analyze the level of literature comprehension within students' writing. Second, Odell offers a framework to analyze thinking strategies found in students' writing. While open coding would have addressed some of the same issues that Hillocks and Odell do, using their lenses allowed me more time for analysis rather than creating my own framework which would not have been as developed or as tested as these scholars.

Hillocks' (1980) hierarchy and Odell's (1999) categories are merely variations of hierarchies such as Hayakawa's, and all of these hierarchies have a common thread—better thinking, writing, and understanding occur when students move among the levels. Thus, as I read the blog, I looked for posts that included more than one of the categories.

Paivio's (1986) dual coding theory also influenced early coding. In their blog posts, students incorporated images pulled from Google Image searches and related those images to the written content of their post. Paivio's work identifies two types of thinking processes: one related to visual thinking and one related to verbal thinking. Using dual coding theory was a way to understand how visual thinking might be a part of blog posts; possibly students were using both cognitive processes. Because of the student posts with a link to images, "visual thinking" became one of the codes that I used.

In summary, as I read, I coded the posts using Hillocks' hierarchy of skills for comprehending literature and Odell's categories for assessing thinking in writing. I also kept in mind my research questions and used open coding. I allowed the codes to change and expand as data collection progressed, but Hillocks' and Odell's work provided a place to begin analysis, especially in terms of the quality of response. I used Hillocks' codes, Odell's codes, and my own codes after the first read-through (See Appendix M for sample coding procedures)

Many of my open coding categories fit with the categories outlined by Hillocks and Odell. For example, when a student evaluated a character's choice or response to an event in the novel, I had written "evaluates a character's choice" in the margin. Odell's sub-category under "Considering Different Perspectives" says that writers "think of different conclusions that might be drawn from a particular set of data" or writers "adopt another's perspective, trying to imagine how a character might respond to a particular situation" (p. 9). My note of "evaluates a character's choice" was then subsumed into Odell's category of "Considering Different Perspectives." This happened with many of my marginal notes as I coalesced my notes and coding.

After reading through the blog, I read through the interviews. Using open coding, I wrote notes in the margins. I looked for patterns or contradictions between what students wrote on the blog and information they shared in interviews. During subsequent read-throughs, I used those initial codes, adding, changing, and connecting those categories. I cycled through a number of times, building categories, naming them, and looking for illustrations and evidence in the student blog posts for each of the categories. The categories, definitions, and illustrations are reported in Chapter Four.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline three types of logs to create trustworthiness. I used one log, in which I tried to record day-to-day notes, personal notes and methodological notes. Mrs. Jones' blog acted as my log of activities, as did our research blog, "Teaching with Blogs." I created a form and provided her a binder to write down dates, times, and impressions that she had each day, but the blog was a better way to collect these materials and it is what she used most.

Safeguards

Some of the safeguards include prolonged engagement; I observed from the end of September through January. I also observed her class during the pilot study from January 2006 to May 2006. Carefully, coding, re-coding, categorizing data, and using constant-comparison create safeguards as well. My frequent contact with the teacher through email, face-to-face discussions, and phone calls helped me to gauge the status of the study and to add insight to my own understandings of what I observed.

Triangulation was reached with a second source. No source was considered unless it was triangulated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For instance, a result was confirmed through the blog post, interview, teacher, or writing assignment I collected. Patton (1987) outlines four types of data triangulation: data sources, investigators, perspectives, and methods (Yin, 2003, p. 99). I triangulate data through the blogs, students' handwritten reflections, student interviews, and teacher comments. According to Yin, data triangulation will help with "potential problems of 'construct validity'" and I will have "multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (p. 99). The instructor blog, the student blog, the field observations, and the interviews offered rich opportunities for triangulation.

Debriefing is an important aspect of trustworthiness. This occurred when I tested initial hypotheses, developed methodological design, and discussed with someone for “catharsis” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I created an audit trail by maintaining records of evidence. The blog is an especially good tool to create this audit trail because the students’ work, the teacher’s assignments, and the teacher and researcher dialogue are published on the internet. Anyone can read these thoughts.

Credibility

Credibility is built through prolonged engagement which will allow me to build trust, and it is necessary to avoid distortion of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I built credibility by showing the participants their responses and letting them know the information won’t be used against them (this information was also included in consent forms). Providing anonymity and honoring their input also helped to build trust (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability

Transferability can only be achieved through thick descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since my paradigm is constructivist, I realize that each individual brings unique experiences to situations and multiple realities exist, thus this study cannot be exactly replicated. While it cannot be replicated, I can describe as clearly as possibly the context of the classroom.

Dependability

The teacher and I kept our logs and posted to the blog. There was an inquiry audit by Dr. Fox and the review committee. A review committee was established and includes Dr. Roy F. Fox, Dr. Donna Strickland, Dr. Carol Gilles, Dr. Richard Robinson, and Dr.

Lloyd Barrows (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 246). I wrote a draft of the case to give to Mrs. Jones, and I shared the case with Dr. Roy F. Fox and Dr. Donna Strickland. The auditors will, according to Lincoln & Guba's directions, examine the product, the process, dependability, and the product.

Limitations to the Pilot Study and Dissertation Study

The area of Hillsdale consists of mostly white middle class students. The students in the class were "honors" students who self-selected this course because the class is perceived as more rigorous than "regular" English. Many of these students had access to computers at home. They did go home, get online, and post to the blog. Although all students were able to blog at least once a week during class, the opportunity to blog at home, I believe, allowed those students to have a richer experience with blogging.

By the end of spring 2006 semester, during the pilot study, more teachers signed up for the mobile computer labs, so to ensure the use of computers in the fall, Mrs. Jones scheduled the computer lab during the summer. Meanwhile, the school technology support person who had been very helpful during the pilot study, quit and moved to Texas. The new technology support person who was hired took a less personal approach with Mrs. Jones.

After the pilot study, Mrs. Jones and a colleague wrote maintenance notes about each laptop in the mobile computer lab. Instead of repairing the computers, the tech support person's solution was to sit the "broken" laptops in the corner of her office, thus reducing two mobile laptop labs into one. When Mrs. Jones encountered technical problems in her classroom, she would call the tech support person for help. By the end of the dissertation study, the new technology support person no longer took Mrs. Jones'

phone calls. Instead, she required Mrs. Jones to call the district's central technology office (in another part of the city) to turn in a work order if she had a question. This was a new procedure instituted after Mrs. Jones requested assistance from the new technology support person. This was not a district-wide rule, but a site-based rule created by the technology support person at the school.

Mrs. Jones' summer sign-up for the computers and LCD projectors did not endear her to the librarians either. Through Mrs. Jones's interviews, it seems that the librarians saw early sign-up as "hogging" the computers. Resentment seemed to bubble up when Mrs. Jones checked out a LCD projector (the previous tech support person planned to fix it, but the new person did not know how). When she kept the projector for a week, the librarian called and said, "You know, you just can't keep that. You have to bring it back." So, Mrs. Jones returned it while three laptop projectors sat unused in the library.

I can only guess the reasons for the technical support person's and the librarian's response, but I know from observations and interviews that Mrs. Jones was insistent and persistent when she needed help with the lab. She did not find help from technical support on the school-level, from the librarians (the staff that usually get assigned to be technology assistants), or on the district-level. The frustration on the part of technical support person and the library indicates an underlying problem for teachers who attempt to use innovative pedagogies related to technology. Neither teachers nor support staff can be blamed when there is a lack of professional development support and resources available for teachers who may implement innovative technology tools.

Although students seem to respond well to her teaching, her enthusiasm for and participation in an innovative curriculum were not highly regarded by other teachers and

the new principal. She shared with her department how she incorporated blogging into her class and the students' writing on the blog; no teachers commented or asked questions.

The previous principal, who had been supportive of Mrs. Jones's entrée into blogging, retired. A new principal was hired the summer before the dissertation study began. She quickly made an appointment to meet with the new principal to describe the study during the summer. The principal was receptive to continuing the study, but during the year, Mrs. Jones attempted to follow-up to share with him what she felt were classroom success stories pertaining to the blog, but there was little interest returned by the administrator. In fact, at one point during informal classroom observation he pulled Mrs. Jones aside and asked her how she paid for the Internet and access to the Library of Congress website. He did not seem to understand that Internet access was free and available to anyone with access.

In August 2006, Mrs. Jones had an accident which caused her to miss nearly a month a school. Teachers know the importance of setting a tone and a routine in the early weeks of the semester. Since Mrs. Jones did not return to the class until the end of September, she missed those early opportunities to create her own unique classroom environment and tone. Because of this absence, it took longer for Mrs. Jones to build a rapport with some of the classes and students. This normally would not have been the case.

Although these obstacles slowed her down, she forged ahead and saw another opportunity to incorporate more technology into her classroom. With the help of \$2,000 she had received through a district reading award, Mrs. Jones and a colleague from a

cross-town high school wrote a grant to buy new technology equipment. In the technology grant application, she proposed using \$1,000 of her award to match the amount of the grant for a new laptop projector. The grant was not funded.

Whenever a teacher tries something new in their classroom, there will be “obstacles.” In a qualitative study, it’s important to outline these events (and each could be a dissertation in itself) to share with teachers interested in incorporating blogging, or any technology, what a teacher may encounter.

Chapter Four describes the stories of four students: Evan, Carrie, Rhonda, and Tim and the results of the analysis of the entire third period class. I attempt to identify patterns and conclusions based on the data analysis as described in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The first sub-question of this study asks, “What does blogging mean for students’ writing?” In general, a majority of students posted frequently on the blog. Interestingly, students did not even realize how much they wrote. Overall, students were motivated and interested in the blog. In the beginning of the semester, most of the posts seem written for the teacher, but as the semester progressed, students seemed to write for their own purposes. For example, students played with voice and style and added pictures to their posts. What does blogging mean for student writing? The results suggest that having an audience beyond the teacher influences what they write and how they write it. The second sub-question of this study asks, “What does blogging mean for students’ responses to literature?” Students made text-to-text and text-to-self connections in their unprompted responses. In addition, their writing revealed a variety of levels of comprehension. The third sub-question of this study asks, “What does blogging mean for students’ thinking?” A variety of thinking strategies could be seen in students’ writing on the blog. In addition to verbally processing their thinking, students used visual processing methods when they found images to integrate alongside their writing.

For all three questions, I focus mainly on four students, Evan, Carrie, Rhonda, and Tim. I also incorporate the voices of other students who support the assertions found in this section. In all three sections, I analyzed Evan, Carrie, Rhonda, and Tim’s posts from the beginning, middle, and end of the semester.

The following section explains in more detail the results of the first sub-question of this study, “What do blogs mean for students as writers?”

What Does Blogging Mean For Students' Writing?

The mobile laptop lab was in the classroom one to two times a week, and during that time, students would blog. Students who had access to computers at home, or in other classes, blogged outside of school in addition to blogging during class time. A majority of students blogged and commented each week, and they posted a significant amount of writing on the blog. Over nine weeks, one class of thirty students wrote approximately 327 pages (250 words per page, double-spaced) in over 600 blog posts. In fact, students were surprised by how much they wrote on the blog. The blog became a form of consistent writing practice. Overall, I arrived at the following conclusions concerning what blogs mean for students as writers:

1. Students' fluency increased.
2. Students wrote with voice.
3. Students' confidence in their writing increased.
4. Students valued feedback from their peers which helps them learn about audience.
5. Students felt open and willing to express and share their writing, thereby creating a community.
6. Students developed and defined blogging as a genre appropriate for their class blog.

In the following sections, I describe and clarify each of the conclusions, and include evidence from students' interviews and blog posts. I did not edit the students' posts for errors in spelling or punctuation. The student writing appears as it does on the blog.

Students' Fluency Increased

Fluency is basic to writing. When a writer is fluent, she generates ideas quickly and writes smoothly and easily. People are not born with this ability, but it can be learned through intensive writing practice. An increase in fluency can be analyzed by counting the number of words in students' posts across a period of time. I analyze the class's word count and each of the case study students' writing during the semester in order to understand students' fluency on the blog. Below, I analyze the fluency of the class, followed by Evan, Carrie, Rhonda, and Tim's fluency.

As a class, students wrote a significant amount on the blog during the semester on the blog, and as the semester progressed, they wrote more and with more ease. The blog posts were archived weekly on Blogger. Table 6 shows the number of posts, the topic of the posts, and word counts for weeks one through nine, and the average number of words per post for each week. Over nine weeks, students wrote a total of 81,645 words. The average word count per post was 168. Using the average page of writing, which consists of 250 words with normal margins, students wrote approximately 327 pages as a class just on the blog. On average, each student wrote approximately eleven pages.

Table 6: Number of Posts Each Week; Number of Words Each Week; Average Number of Words Per Post

Week	Dates	Topic	No. of Posts	No. of Words	Avg. words per post
1	10/15/2006 – 10/22/2006	TKAM+	15	3155	210
2	10/22/2006 – 10/29/2006	TKAM	83	14,474	174
3	10/29/2006 – 11/05/2006	TKAM	86	13701	159
4	11/05/2006 – 11/12/2006	TKAM/I.R.	22	2919	132.68
5	11/12/2006 – 11/19/2006	I.R.	48	7978	166.2
6	11/19/2006 – 11/26/2006	Roll/Jane++	50	8992	179.84
7	11/26/2006 – 12/03/2006	Roll/Jane; I.R.	64	10601	165
8	12/03/2006 – 12/10/2006	What is courage?; R. & J.+++	67	12479	186
9	12/10/2006 – 12/17/2006	R. & J.	51	7346	144
10	12/17/2006 – 12/24/2006	R. & J.; I.R.	54		
11	12/24/2006 – 12/31/2006	*	7		
12	12/31/2006 – 01/07/2007	* social	10		
13	01/07/2007 – 01/14/2007	R. & J.	40		
14	01/14/2007 – 01/21/2007	** weather	4		
15	01/21/2007 – 01/28/2007	End of R. & J.; weather; I.R.	54 (some of these were for the final; I will exclude those)		

* holiday break

**ice storm; missed three days of school

+*To Kill a Mockingbird*

++*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry; The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*

+++*Romeo and Juliet*

The amount of writing practice students experience on the blog is significant when considering the research on the amount of writing students typically do in schools. In the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2005), only 39% of students had written more than three papers, three to five pages long, during their current school year. Thirty-six percent report they had not written papers more than five pages long (Yazzie-Mintz, p. 8). Even if 39% of students wrote three papers, each three to five pages long, they will have only written 15 pages. On the blog alone, students averaged eleven pages of writing. This number does not take into account daily freewriting and formal papers written in

addition to the blogging. Nagin (2003), in *Because Writing Matters*, includes previous research reporting the lack of extensive writing practice in schools:

Children don't get many opportunities to write. In one recent study in grades one, three, and five, only 15 percent of the school day was spent in any kind of writing activity. Two-thirds of the writing that did occur was word-for-word copying in workbooks. Compositions of a paragraph or more in length are infrequent even at the high school level. (p. 6)

In Table 6, the highest average number of words per post is 210 words, but that occurs during the first week of the blog when only 15 blogs were posted. The most posts occur during the first week when students posted 86 times. This was the week students wrote the most words—14, 474—during the semester. By week eight, students averaged 186 words per post. This occurs at the end of *Roll of Thunder* and *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* when students were asked to consider the question “What is courage?” in terms of the two novels and other readings they had done so far. I include samples of these posts later in Chapter Four.

The lowest average word count occurred in week four and can be attributed to a pause between class novels. During the week and the next, students posted about their independent reading book. These posts were similar to written “book talks.” While some students appreciated the book recommendations, the blogging during this time was not lively. Students in interviews share that they prefer blogging when everyone reads the same text.

Interest level and students' engagement with the novel influence student blogging as well. For example, *To Kill a Mockingbird* has long been an engaging novel for many readers. The text requires inference, and students asked each other many questions. By the end of the semester, when students read *Romeo and Juliet*, posts were shorter and focused more on students' confusion with the language. In the following sections, I analyze fluency in Evan, Carrie, Rhonda, and Tim's blogging during the semester.

Evan's Fluency in Blogging

Evan posted nearly every week and sometimes more than once a week. Although, as I explain later in this section, his word count decreases by the end of the semester, he posts 28 times during the semester, averaging 197 words per post. Evan wrote the equivalent of 22 pages on the blog. This total does not include daily freewriting and self-initiated essays written during the semester

Although Evan posts consistently and frequently, a comparison of his first five posts and last five posts does not show increased fluency (see Table 7). In the beginning of the semester, Evan averaged 236.8 words per post. By the end, he averaged 158.2 words per post. (see Appendix O for a word count of Evan's posts for the semester).

Table 7: Comparison of Evan's Early and Late Semester Posts

First Five Blog Posts of the Semester	Number of Words Per Post	Five Blog Posts of the Semester	Number of Words Per Post
1 st post	561	20 th post	114
2 nd post	164	21 st post	190
3 rd post	209	22 nd post	129
4 th post	98	23 rd post	147
5 th post	152	24 th post	211
Total	1184		791
Average words per post	236.8		158.2

The first five posts analyzed for fluency were written while Evan read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a novel that ignites the enthusiasm of students. Several events can explain

his decrease. He recognizes that he is not writing as much in December and attempts to explain the decrease:

Well, I don't really know what to talk about, I mean, everyone is talking about *Romeo and Juliet* and yeah that's what we're covering in class but it's getting old on the blog, hence the picture, cause we keep talking about the same thing so I can't wait to see what comes next. SOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO, yeah boring post huh. I guess everyone is pretty much on the same page with the whole understanding the reading. I'll agree that it isn't easy but it's gettin better and hey, that's life.

In this post, Evan describes frustration and boredom with the blog. The content and pictures are repetitive. He is not engaged in the reading. Evan's fluency increases and decreases depending on this engagement with the topic.

Carrie's Fluency in Blogging

Carrie's fluency increased during the semester. She posted over 40 times during the semester and continued to post after the class completed the semester (see Appendix P for word counts of Carrie's posts). By the end of the semester, Carrie wrote 50% more words per post (See Table 8). She averaged 233 words per post, and over the course of the semester wrote over 37 pages on the blog alone. I asked Carrie to compare this semester's blogging and writing to her previous school writing experiences:

I think we get more practice in actually. I know last year you got an assignment and a worksheet and you wrote it down and it was the usually constructed response stuff.

This gives you more freedom, different perspectives you can do, and now in freewriting I don't have as much trouble sitting down and thinking, 'Okay where'm I going to start?': It's a lot easier just to start writing.

As students become more fluent, they should be able to access their ideas more quickly. This happened for Carrie. She notices that she writes more and finds a connection between writing frequency and her ability to generate ideas. The blog opens up options for her in her writing, and that "freedom" allows her to access her ideas and write more easily, thus, becoming more fluent.

She mentions that the blog allows for more freedom than "constructed responses," the state-mandated question found on the state's standardized test. The constructed responses are open-ended questions about a text students read, and the answer must include at least two specific details from the text that support their answer. The goal for students is to answer the question with support from the text. These types of questions often do not promote fluency in writing. The question format allows four lines of writing. In fact, this type of question may block students' thinking by minimizing how much they write. When students have the opportunity to write more, they learn to tap into ideas and generate ideas on their own.

Table 8: Comparison of Carrie's Early and Late Semester Posts

First Five Blog Posts of the Semester	Number of Words Per Post	Last Five Blog Posts of the Semester	Number of Words Per Post
1 st post	168	36 th post	349
2 nd post	149	37 th post	268
3 rd post	132	38 th post	158
4 th post	159	39 th post	369
5 th post	145	40 th post	419
Total	753		1563
Average words per post	150.6		312.6

Rhonda's Fluency in Blogging

Rhonda's fluency increased during the semester (see Table 9). In fact, she was surprised by how much she had written. When I asked how much she thought she had written, she assumed she had only written a few pages. Rhonda wrote 5,222 words in 35 posts and wrote approximately 20 pages (see Appendix Q for word counts of Rhonda's posts).

Table 9: Comparison of Rhonda's First and Last Posts

First Five Blog Posts of the Semester	Number of Words Per Post	Last Five Blog Posts of the Semester	Number of Words Per Post
1 st post	186	19 th post	118
2 nd post	85	20 th post	230
3 rd post	174	21 st post	137
4 th post	141	22 nd post	166
5 th post	65	23 rd post	205
Total	651		856
Average words per post	130.2		171.2

Tim's Fluency in Blogging

Tim's fluency did not increase. Over the course of the semester, Tim did not write as much as some of the other students, and he wrote more than some. Tim posted 18 times during the semester with a total word count of 1,541. He averaged 82 words per post, and during the semester, wrote approximately 6 pages on the blog (see Appendix R for a word count of Tim's posts). The blog posts were so consistent in the word count I almost wondered if he counted the words before he posted (see Table 10).

Table 10: Comparison of Tim's First and Last Posts

First Five Blog Posts of the Semester	Number of Words Per Post	Five Blog Posts of the Semester	Number of Words Per Post
1 st post	84	14 th post	76
2 nd post	90	15 th post	43
3 rd post	77	16 th post	56
4 th post	92	17 th post	75
5 th post	143	18 th post	100
Total	486		350
Average words per post	97.2		70

Tim wrote fewer words than the three previous students. Although the numbers reflect a tentative conclusion that Tim was not producing as many words as some people, as a researcher, I do not know if Tim wrote more in the process of composing these blog posts. Ideally, I would have sat with him and timed the production of his posts. If I consider fluency in terms of writing practice, Tim consistently posted each week to the blog. He met the assignment, but did not blog outside of the assignment as much as the previous three students.

Through May 18, 2007, the last time a student posted to the blog, students posted a total of 686 times, an average of 22 posts per person. To become fluent, a writer has to have a commitment and motivation to write. The computers were in the classroom once a week, so at a minimum, thirty students would post once a week, for a total of 30 posts a week. Over twelve weeks, if all students posted once a week, there would be 360 posts on the blog. Students posted well beyond that. The large number of posts indicates an engagement and commitment to posting.

Fluency is important because it influences all facets of our writing. Through intensive writing practice, writers learn to access ideas quickly and produce a large number of words in a short amount of time. Fluency is also important for the fact that students, as shown in the High School Engagement Survey (2005), are not offered many

opportunities where they can write without boundaries. Initially, students like Jake can feel frustration when they are asked to write without a specific prompt from the teacher: “It [the blog] was frustrating at first because I was so used to people telling me what to write down all the time. Then I got more creative with it and it became easier as I continued to do it.”

Although teachers may believe they help students’ writing by providing prompts, Jake’s quote reveals that the prompts act as boundaries that actually inhibit his thinking when it came time to generate ideas independently. Constructed responses have a specific structure. Books reports have specific structures. These structures may appear to assist, but in fact, they create boundaries for some students’ thinking and writing. With frequent opportunities to write without prompts or forms, students can build fluency, and begin to explore their writing voice. Fluency and voice are connected in that as we write more, we begin to move closer to our writing voice. The next section describes voice in Evan and Carrie’s writing.

Students Wrote With Voice

As readers, many of us recognize when a piece of writing has “voice.” Although we may sense “voice” as we read, defining the term is difficult. How do we know writing has voice? Romano (2003) encountered the difficulty in defining “voice” when he attended a holistic scoring session with a group of teachers:

When the teacher saw *voice* as one aspect of our rubric, discontent spread like poison. Voice is too hard to explain, one teacher argued, too slippery, too messy, too elusive. Others agreed.

What does voice involve anyway? they asked.

Others answered: Sentence rhythm.

OK, they said, score that.

Organization.

Score that.

Diction.

Score that.

But don't try to score voice. It's impossible to pin down.

Ironically, through this exchange teachers began to pin down a definition of voice in writing. Through this humorous and slightly bittersweet story, we begin to glimpse the beginning of a definition of voice. Voice in writing consists of sentence rhythm, organization, and diction. Romano (2003) advises writers to “trust the gush”:

Trusting the gush means moving on the heat quickening in you.

Trusting the gush means being fearless with language.

Trusting the gush means writing about what you are emotionally moved by and perhaps don't even know why.

Trusting the gush means putting on the page those thoughts, connections, and perceptions that stand ready to be uttered. (p. 51)

In the introduction to *Landmark Essays on Voice and Writing*, Elbow (1994) defines “voice” through the following elements:

- 1) audible voice or intonation in writing
- 2) dramatic voice in writing

- 3) recognizable or distinctive voice in writing
- 4) voice with authority—“having a voice”
- 5) resonant voice or presence

This is a comprehensive definition of voice. The first item on the list describes how writers project sound onto words. Writers combine words into sentences; the punctuation and capitalization writers use impacts the aural quality or tone of the writing. Eventually, teachers may “teach this out” of students, because, to create this aural quality, students may break the rules of style (Weathers, 1980; Romano, 1988). Second, dramatic voice occurs when the readers feel like they know the character of the author through her words. For example, writing could sound “guarded” or “confident.” Readers then identify the writer as guarded or confident through the style the writer chooses. Third, writers have voice when they develop a recognizable style. The style becomes recognizable when writers create patterns in their writing. Fourth, when students “have a voice,” they feel the authority to write and share. When students, “have a voice,” they feel like they can take risks with their writing, similar to Romano’s exhortation to “trust the gush.” Fifth, writing with voice has resonance. Elbow describes his last point as the “swamp,” because resonance describes a feeling. The reader feels the writer behind his words. Elbow (1994) also describes this fifth quality of voice as “sincere.”

Most of the time, according to Elbow (1994), instead of cultivating voice, teachers help students to remove voice from their writing. He argues that writers know “speech” well. Writers attempt to get that tone of speech into their writing. Teachers “help” students take the qualities of speech out of the writing by teaching students to create distance, and, thus, lose the quality of voice in their writing. For example, students

use punctuation to create the speech-like qualities of voice in writing. As teachers, we ask them to omit exaggerated punctuation or spellings in favor of “correct writing” so the writing sounds more academic.

Voice is linked to fluency and expressive writing in that the more we practice writing the closer we come to finding our writing voice. Expressive writing is one of the best ways to work on voice. Expressive writing is close to the self, and this type of writing does not ask writers to distance themselves from their topic. Britton (1975), in his study of secondary writers in Britain, identifies three generalizations of “expressive language”:

First, expressive language is language that is close to the self. It has the function of revealing the speaker, verbalizing his consciousness, and displaying his close relation with a listener or reader. Secondly, much expressive language is not made explicit, because the speaker/writer relies upon his listener/reader to interpret what is said in the light of common understanding . . . , and to interpret their immediate situation . . . in a way similar to his own. (p. 90)

All of these examples attempt to define and clarify voice in writing. When a writer has “voice,” he writes about topics that are important to him; he is “fearless” in his writing; and, to some extent, ignores audience. In the following section, I analyze voice in Evan and Carrie’s writing.

personal favorite: “endang” in which the emphasis is placed on the second syllable. Evan has a purpose for his playful style of writing and punctuation: “My goal,” he explains, “is to make people come back and read my post again.” I asked him to explain to me what he meant, and he showed me a post he had written, “Got Milk” (see below) on December 4. According to Evan, this posts shows how he would “try to just throw a little ‘Evan’ into whatever I am writing. I am trying to accomplish being me in whatever I write, just being different, and not what everyone else is.”

Monday, December 04, 2006

Got Milk? Oh wait, Got Courage?



Do you have the ability to look fear in the eyes and say Bring It...

Now I don't personally know the dictionary definition of courage but you may. From my prier knowledge it involves lions tigers and bears, OH MY!!!!, JP. It involves Lions tigers, and Superman..... right?

Well, can you tell me but simply put... it's the ability to stand up for the underdog, for what's right, for the little guy, you guys got it. Either this Lion in my pictures deadly serious and going to rip someone's head off, or he has no clue what's going on... ha you can tell me that one too.

Hey let me KNOW what courage is, I think it may be different for everyone.

Peace

posted by James Blonde at [11:35 AM](#) .

In order to get the attention of his audience, he cultivates a voice using capitalization, punctuation, text formatting, pictures, and jokes. In a later interview, he explains his writing voice:

I try to be sarcastically funny in everything I say, everyone knows that I joke a lot. Everyone knows that when I say something it is false or sarcastically correct. I think I am respectful of my audience. I try to throw things in my writing to see if people are paying attention.

When I asked Evan about his use of capitals and excessive punctuation, he describes those choices as an expression of his personality. Evan takes risk in his writing. He does not follow “rules” in his post, and his writing engages the reader.

In addition, Evan has a recognizable pattern in his writing. He begins with a catchy title and lead sentence in each of his posts. His use of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling are also common traits in all of his posts.

Analysis of Carrie’s Voice in Writing

Carrie, on the other hand, found her voice through writing about topics important to her. In the beginning of the semester, her writing only hints at the voice that she would develop over the semester.

Monday, October 23, 2006

Scout, one-of-a-kind!

I'm finally here! That was quite the adventure, and the tester of my bloodpressure. O-well, now about the book; I absolutely love it. It was a bit of a drag at first, but now it keeps me on my toes. Scout is so entertaining and keeps me laughing the whole time. In the last few chapters, with the annoying cousin and the crazy lady, Scout was pushed to the limit. (kind-of like getting on this blog spot!) Her stubbornness and strong will shows during this particular part. When she struggles through the rough commets and the constant torment I can't help, but to be proud of her as she muggles her way through. Even when she knockes her cousin's face off, I laugh and my mind screams, "Go Scout!" It seems crazy to be proud of a made up character, but her struggle is so real and understandable. Am I crazy to feel some of these things or is anyone else feeling the same way.

posted by Carrie1600 at [11:48 AM](#)

Carrie uses parentheses and exclamation points to emphasize the sound of her writing.

These parenthetical asides also indicate her awareness of audience. She includes few

specific details from the chapters she read. She does explain her personal reaction as she reads.

Over time, Carrie develops her ideas about writing voice, although differently than Evan. He plays with language. She sees the topics she chooses as most important:

I need to think outside the box, put feeling into it because you don't want to read a dry piece that has no meaning to it. But, if you read a piece, you have to have passion in a piece of writing for it to be good.

Through this excerpt, Carrie explains the importance of an author engaging with the topic. "Passion" for Carrie means that she chooses topics that are important for her. The excerpt above also shows that Carrie, like Evan, understands the need to take risks in writing in order to find voice in writing. Her later writing seems to be as much for herself as for the reader, and the topics that she chooses to write about appear emotionally moving for her. She "trusts the gush" that Romano writes of. In November, she wrote about grandparents:

Grandparents. . . Who Knew?



When thinking of grandparent many memories can surprisingly occur. A day at the lake, a walk in the park, or just sitting in the living room watching you Grandpa "reading" the newspaper. (while you were imitating him) Either way, if we were close or far away, most of us can remember something about our grandparents. We know them as grandma or grandpa, or even Nanna and Baba, but whatever we call them they are our grandparents. Yes, they are our elders, but they were once our age and we sometimes forget that. They were once high school students themselves in "the day."

This Thanksgiving my family stayed home, were we share our meal together. When doing the mountain of dishes afterwards, I started questioning about my family to my mom. You see I was never really close to my only living grandparents. They were always there, don't get me wrong, but I truly never "connected" with them. I always felt distanced and like they were just old people out to get me. Anyway, I found something a little more than just a couple of old people when quizzing my mom. Here was a young women who was a foreign exchange student that went to England for two years and studied English, while a vibrant young man was playing collage baseball as a pitcher. (I would like to see him try that now!) When I heard about my grandparents history, my mouth literally dropped. Looking at them you would never have guessed! A English teacher and a baseball player, quite the mix there.

From my experience here, there is a lot to learn from your elders. (even if they do seem like an old text book) Take some time away and talk to your grandparents; they are worth your time. If you have any "interesting" stories, please post. Thanks a million and have a great holiday break.

posted by Dakota1600 at [1:15 PM](#) | [4 comments](#)

The pattern Carrie eventually develops can be seen at the beginning and end of this post. She includes a picture directly related to her post, and at the end of the post, she asks the reader to comment or she advises the reader in some way. These connections to the audience may help readers to see the person behind the words.

For students to work on their writing voice, they must write about topics other than those assigned. First, self-selected topics offer the potential for authenticity—for students to write what they know. Carrie moves beyond interpreting and analyzing literature. While she does this, she also writes about topics that are important to her.

Evan and Carrie's writing shows voice. They were not the only students to show voice in their writing. Elbow (1994) describes how adolescent writers may use punctuation and capitalization to portray sounds in their writing.

Notice, for example, the informal writing of adolescents or of people who are just learning the conventions of speech. In addition they often use striking textual devices that are explicitly designed to convey some of the vividly audible features of speech—some of the music and drama of the voice: pervasive underlining—sometimes double or triple; three or four exclamation marks or question marks at once; pervasive all-caps; oversized letters, colors, parenthetical slang asides (NOT!!). (p. xxx)

Elbow (1994) describes how teachers inhibit writers from using voice, and students may refrain from using their writing. Further, according to Elbow, students lack voice because of “their worry about conforming to our particular conventions of writing and their fear of mistakes: Unskilled writers who are not worried—usually unschooled writers—tend to write prose that is very audible and speech-like” (p. xxv-xxxvi). Evan, especially, uses textual emphases such as punctuation and capitalization to create a sound to his writing. Carrie did this to a lesser extent when she incorporates parentheses into her writing. The parentheses help her create a quieter voice and sound in her writing.

Elbow describes how voice can be “heard” through recognizable patterns: “Like composers or painters, writers often develop styles that are recognizable and distinctive” (p. xxx). This occurs for both Evan and Carrie. Evan consistently writes a catchy heading and a lead sentence. Carrie includes pictures and ends her posts with questions aimed to

get her readers to comment and consider the ideas she set forth in her posts. Evan and Carrie's writing has authority and confidence. They do not seem to be afraid of taking risks with their writing.

Few opportunities exist for students to practice writing with voice in many classrooms. This tendency has much to do with the emphasis on preparing for standardized testing or an emphasis on teacher-provided topics. Students cannot practice voice through writing short answers to constructed response questions. These short answer questions do not promote voice or fluency. Although the performance assessment section of the state's standardized assessment includes "voice" on its scoring guide, on-demand, timed essays do not provide students with opportunities to practice fluency and voice. In preparation for these on demand writings, teachers may prepare students by giving them prompts to write about when, in fact, teachers might help students by not focusing on correctness allowing them to make mistakes and play with sound in their writing.

The writing students posted to the blog included many examples of students playing with and practicing voice. Students became aware that writing has a sound. In interviews, several students explained that it did not matter if students had pseudonyms because they could still identify the authors because their writing "sounded" like them. This thought parallels Elbow's (1994) ideas that readers can identify writers through recognizable patterns, even though they do not know the writer.

Students' Confidence In Their Writing Increased

For this section, confidence in writing is described as the students' perception of writing growth. I argue that as students' fluency increases, the voice in their writing improves, and students' sense of confidence in their writing increases.

At the end of the semester, I completed a member check. Students discussed the tentative findings I posted to the blog. Many of the students noted a general improvement in their writing:

I thought that the writing became stronger, the posts became longer and better than they were in the beginning. —Kat

The posts got much larger. There are also more comments and most have comments now.—Shaw

I am pretty sure we just became more comfortable and less guarded about our thoughts, feelings and ideas.—Rhonda

I think we became a little more relaxed and personal towards the end of the semester.—Belinda

I find by looking back at old posts that my writing has matured and changed. I know what I am doing and writing now, I have grown through the blog and my posts. —Carrie

i liked when she said the thing about our writing changing. it really did. if you looked back you can notice the changes we have all gone through.—Belle

I think blogging really did improve my writing skills.—Lucy

Three common themes run through the students' comments above. Kat and Shawn notice how bloggers became more fluent. Rhonda and Belinda notice how bloggers let their guards down. Carrie and Belle looks at the archived posts to compare earlier and later blog posts.

Lauren, who posted as Lilmisssunshine, wrote a longer post describing the growth in her own writing:

She [Keri] asked how our blogging changed from the beginning of the semester to now, and I don't know about you guys, but mine has changed alot! At the beginning I felt like I had to do all the requirements for posting, and answer everything Mrs. Jones wanted us to answer. So, my posts, I'll admitt, were pretty boring and alot like an essay that has certain requirements. Over time, I became more comfortable with the blog and started to loosen up on what I said and started to write about what I had on my mind after our readings or doing our homework. The blog became as if I were really talking out-loud to the class, instead of typing it for everyone to see.

Writing through the blog has made me not afraid anymore to say my opinions and questions out-loud in class. I have gained a confidence in myself just through typing it to everyone else, and I hope that others have gained what I have through the blog.

Lauren initially approaches writing on the blog like she did “an assignment”—she answers the questions the teacher asks. When she wrote to fulfill the assignment, the content of her post was fixed, and the form was fixed. She wrote the post like the essays she had written in the past. The feeling of comfort allowed her to “write about what I had on my mind,” instead of answering questions. [It is interesting to note here that Mrs. Jones rarely assigned students specific writing prompts.] For her, blogging was similar to talking and different than “typing it.” I speculate she “typed” plenty of “assignments” before, but when she blogs, she writes to an audience and “talks” to them. Sharing with an audience helps her to gain confidence, and the fact she is “not afraid” also suggests an increase in confidence.

Rhonda, Carrie, and Melissa reveal this same thinking in a group interview:

Rhonda: There's a lot more pressure involved in regular assignments. There's more pressure to make it perfect, and you think more about making it perfect instead of content.

Melissa: There are less rules on the blog than in writing. We don't have to have it in a certain format.

Rhonda: This is more on content than the picky stuff, spell check though, that always helps.

Melissa: I wouldn't look at it [the blog] as fun as it is if she had more rules.

Carrie: You would start looking at it as an assignment rather than enjoying it.

The excerpts from these students reveal their understanding of "assignment." An assignment focuses on "picky stuff." With assignments, teachers are more interested in "perfection" instead of ideas. The blog did not feel that way to these students. Ideas were more important than the "picky stuff." With fewer "rules," they could enjoy the blog and write their ideas rather than working on "perfecting" the form or the surface errors. Writing about ideas built more confidence in their writing skill than correcting errors.

The students may have originally approached blogging as an "assignment." Blau (1991) cites Scardamalia and Bereiter's research:

[P]oor writers conceive of every school writing task as a 'knowledge telling routine' performed for the teacher, whereas the good writers seem able to turn teacher-assigned writing tasks into occasions for serving superordinate purposes of their own, while they also satisfy all of the constraints of the assignment. (p. 292)

Fairly quickly, possibly because she saw the writing that her peers were putting on the blog, Lauren no longer saw the posts as "as assignment." This insight allowed her to approach the writing with fewer restrictions. Several experiences during the semester

contribute to students' increased feelings of confidence including frequent opportunities to write for a variety of audiences, sharing, and a general feeling of "loosening up."

Students perceived improvement, but only because they were able to return to the writing from the semester. They not only considered their own progress, but they looked at the class's writing and perceived improvement as a class. They could then think about their own thinking. Regardless of whether the students' confidence can be quantified (although future studies using writing apprehension surveys might help address this), the confidence that students perceive is an important first step in helping students to improve their writing.

In the section above, I discuss how students' confidence increased through their experience with the blog. As students feel more confidence in their writing, they want to share their writing more.

*Students Valued Feedback From Their Peers Which Helps Them Learn About
Audience*

Students value other students' perspectives, and they value feedback from their peers. In writing workshop classrooms around the country, students share writing with their peers. Several aspects of the blog provide a key difference. First, the entire class, not just a student's small writing group, can view and read the thinking and writing of his or her peers. Second, posting a comment and providing feedback to each other was easy and accessible with the commenting feature because students had the opportunity to read feedback to their writing much more frequently than if the teacher were the only audience. Third, students began to like the feeling of "being read," or as Evan, states, "known." Comments validated students' writing and their ideas.

For Evan, comments to his posts represent evidence that his peers value and respect his writing. In one of our interviews, I gave him a print out of his blog posts. As he looked through the 30 pages of posts and comments, he said, “It’s very cool in my opinion to be kind of “known.” I don’t know. It’s neat to me that people respect you enough to comment what you worked on for. It made me feel good that I saw that people commented me, and it let me down whenever I only had one comment.” In Evan’s mind, comments equal respect for his writing and lack of comments feels disappointing.

For me, I like to comment to other people to get them to return the comment to one of my posts or comment to someone else, kind of like a chain that keeps on going. Other times I like to discuss some of the questions that they have, if my perspective of the answer is what they might be looking for or want in that area.

Evan wants a dialogue with his audience, and he strives for “a chain of comments.” In order to create a chain of comments, he asks readers for their opinions. For example, he writes, “Hey let me KNOW what courage is, I think it may be different for everyone.” If he does not receive a response, his post feels like a failure, so he begins to pay special attention to rhetorical strategies, such as voice and image (which I will discuss later in Chapter 4). He begins to understand, even if the feedback is non-evaluative, that he can gain readers and comments through his writing style and the images that he chooses. So, in essence, the feedback, which he wants, even though it is non-evaluative, pushes him to write better.

He enjoys the comments, but, more important, Evan feels the comments helped him to elaborate in his writing:

When I write, a lot of the time I am trying to get across whatever I am thinking and I know a lot of time people have a hard time interpreting that. I get a lot of comments saying, ‘Well, I had no idea what you were talking about.’ I think that it [the comments from peers] helps with your writing as getting feedback. I think beforehand if we were to write a story about whatever it would probably be pretty decent. I think after this [the blog] there would be a noticeable difference because you get feedback from everyone else—talking to them, relating back to whatever . . . it just helps your writing, I guess, by writing.

Commenting is important for Evan because he can create a conversation and extend people’s thinking and his own. Instead of responses to literature being static pieces—turned in to teachers and never seen by students again—students depended on feedback from each other. Students build on each other’s thinking through answering each other’s questions and adding to each other’s knowledge.

Comments motivate Carrie as well:

I get excited. They read it! I was so happy and all I can think of is, thank you, thank you, thank you, then I go and scroll and find theirs and I say thank you about six times and then I find something to say about theirs, it’s just that you are so happy. It’s so educational.

What does Carrie mean by “educational?” She may mean that through reading the comments of her peers she may learn something about her own writing. She can read the

perspectives of other individuals, and she has the opportunity to respond to their writing as well. Logistically, this type and amount of feedback might not be possible in a class without a blog. Karen describes this as well: “Cause, like, in class, you can’t talk to everybody at the same time, but on the blog I feel like you can.”

The blog is important because everyone can share. The following excerpt is taken from a group interview of Carrie Evan, Melissa, and Rhonda:

Carrie: Another thing is you get to see what other people are thinking and not all of us agree on stuff, so you are open to new ideas and you just learn about the people through blogging, their personalities outside of school.

Evan: A lot of the people in our class are shy, so reading their post is a big factor in seeing how they are on the outside.

KF: Has anything surprised you?

Carrie: When you are reading something, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, where there is a lot of racism and prejudice, you really see how people take that and you read some powerful posts and you are just in awe that a ninth grader could write this.

Later in the same interview:

Carrie: You learn more than just about books, you learn about people, and different cultures and you learn to be a better person really.

KF: What on the blog has helped that?

Melissa: being polite and commenting to people who deserve a comment. If you could tell they did put some effort into their post, then you want to comment and that’s just the polite thing to do.

Carrie: You learn to respect their interests also and their ideas, you don’t want to sit there and destroy someone on the other side of the computer screen. You want to uplift their ideas and still be critical of them, but you have to be aware of what you are putting out there, and you have to remember that there is someone else reading this.

Evan though Melissa had read *To Kill a Mockingbird* the previous summer, she was surprised at what she learned through reading posts: “When we started blogging about it, I was caught off guard. I was like, ‘Oh! That’s what that meant! I got a much better understanding of it compared to what I read before.’”

Jeff, in a separate group interview, describes the importance of reading each other’s perspectives and offering feedback. In this same exchange, I asked Ross and his group about other opportunities they might have at school to share ideas with each other:

Jeff: You kind of learn other people’s opinions too. There was this one time where someone posted that she didn’t like the end of TKAM, and I posted back that I actually liked it.

KF: How often do you have the opportunity to share what you think or what other people have to say about a topic?

Lucy: I don’t have many teachers that will let us. I only have that in history class. Sometimes, once in a blue moon, we will have a reflection sheet.

Ross: Yeah, there’s this question, ‘So, do you think it was good for the U.S. to stay in the Vietnam War.’ You’ll just state your opinion.

On the blog, students are able to share their thinking and read and reply to the thinking of their peers. The sharing of opinions and feedback is important because students learn about audience through reading and commenting on other posts and through receiving comments from their readers. Evan learns to elaborate based on his readers’ needs. Carrie learns to provide feedback that generates ideas rather than stifling ideas. Typically, students receive evaluative feedback in the form of grades or some type of corrective comment from the teacher. Students have rarely written for an audience who provides non-evaluative feedback. And, according to these students, they are infrequently asked to share their thinking or

opinion about school-related topics:

Jacob: In previous classes, you just read the book and then write a paper. You wouldn't talk about it with anyone else.

Eric: We just wrote things down and you wouldn't be able to see other people's opinion.

Jacob: Read a book, take a test.

Jordan: You get to really understand what the author is talking about.

They learn through each other, and they learn about each other. Students were motivated by the exchange of ideas. They could not believe the ideas floating around the minds of their peers, and, in fact, students learned from seeing the perspectives of their fellow students.

*Students Felt Open and Willing to Express Ideas and Share Their Writing, Thereby
Creating a Community*

Several aspects of blogging influenced this result. First, students felt that the pseudonyms helped them to share. Second, students had an equal opportunity to share. Third, students had more time to process their thinking and even revise their posts on the blog. They can begin a post, save it, and return to it at a later time. Fourth, students could choose their own topics. These aspects of the blog came together to instill in students a sense of "freedom" to express ideas and to share writing.

This willingness to share was facilitated in the early days of the blog through the pseudonyms students used. Most students are not confident when it comes to sharing writing with a group of students in face-to-face conversations. Teachers have to spend time developing a classroom environment in which students feel comfortable to share.

Pseudonyms, which, in reality, only provide a modicum of anonymity, help students initially feel safe to express their ideas.

Students mention repeatedly how the pseudonyms help “shy” students to express their ideas. This anonymity, according to Jake, provides a “great way to be able to talk to people if you don’t want to talk to them one-on-one or if you are shy. It’s original because they are really not expressive in class, and on here they can tell you what they are really feeling.” Pseudonyms create a distance between the writer and their ideas. Even if another student disagrees with their ideas, the student is not disagreeing with the person, only with the pseudonym. The ideas precede the person.

More students had an opportunity to share their thinking on the blog than in a class discussion. Students in Mrs. Jones’s class sat approximately four to five students per table. Many times she asked students to discuss and talk at their tables and then the class would have a whole group discussion. Alternating between small and whole group discussions was effective in giving everyone a chance to talk, yet all students, and shy students, still may not have openly shared ideas in their small group discussions. The blog gave every student an equal chance to share their thinking and writing. The posts and the comments equalized conversations, and more voices were heard. It is not unusual for a student to not participate in discussions, but the distance that the blog created and then the additional distance created through the pseudonym allowed for a comfort level that allowed students to share their writing, as Linda explains:

I would highly recommend it because it’s really good for students to express their feelings, like Mrs. Jones did. She kept everyone’s names to themselves, to where they could express really what they

meant. They don't always talk about what they are thinking during class because they are shy, so this year, they have a chance to really express what they are thinking.

Tim, who was quiet himself, explained that quiet students would feel more comfortable blogging than sharing their ideas aloud to the class:

KF: Where you surprised by anyone in the class?

Tim: Some kids who you might not think were going to talk all that much in class feel more comfortable writing about things on the blog than they would talking to everyone in the room.

KF: Did you feel that way?

Tim: Yeah, a little bit.

Tim saw the blog as helpful to shy students, and he also put himself in that category—a student who might not normally share ideas but could on the blog.

Evan describes how it feels to share on the blog, and he describes why he thought he got to know students on the blog:

People can be so much more expressive when it's not them talking to you. It's kind of like talking to someone with a mask on compared to talking with someone face to face. Like Rhonda, she has never said a word to me in school ever. It's cool to see that she will talk to you outside of class. It's very social, very interactive.

On the blog, Evan describes a situation where students feel more open to talking to each other than they might feel talking to each other in class or out in the hall. Like Tim explains, "It's not like I'm going to go around talking to kids about the book we're

reading or what they think about this and that in the hallway, but you have to do it and it does help. Helps me to understand the book.”

Students feel more open to share when they have time to process their thinking. Conversations and discussions that begin in class would not normally be continued until the next day. With the blog, conversations were archived, and students posted outside of class or began writing in class, saved their post as a “draft,” and returned to it later. This can be seen in an excerpt from a focus group interview:

Derrick: It’s like a classroom outside of school.

Aadhar: Yeah, you can just tell your mind and just tell whatever you are thinking.

Derrick: You do what you want.

Aadhar: Yeah.

KF: Can you do that more easily on the blog?

Derrick: Yeah.

Aadhar: Yeah.

Janet: Some people are shy—some people don’t like to talk in front of a lot of people or share their ideas and I think it’s easier for them to do that.

Aadhar: Yeah, it’s easier to talk to a screen than talk in class.

Hilary: Like you get your point across better because you can backspace and stuff and when you write it down people don’t want to erase it so they just leave it.

Derrick: Or when you are having a group discussion you can’t take back what you said. And most of the time you don’t get all of the constructive responses and criticisms that you can like in posts. Whenever you are posting or commenting, more than one person can comment at once.

Hilary: You can ask questions.

Derrick: Yeah.

Jill: Yeah.

The excerpt reflects the connections students see between the importance of self-selecting topics, using the blog, and having more time to revise.

The blog gave Carrie more time to process her thinking:

The other thing is when you do something in the class you have a time frame. And blogging, most of it is done at home, so it's more of a relaxed atmosphere. Most of the time you do it on your own time, and if you want, you can start a post, save it as a draft and come back to it and edit it, but when you do a page in school, when it's turned in, it's turned in and you can't take it back.

In class discussions, she had to formulate and share her ideas quickly. On the blog, she can begin a post, save it as a draft, and return to it at a later time. Kayla and Louis express the same feelings:

Kayla: If you are, like, in front of the class, you don't have much time to think about what you are going to say cause you can't just stand up there and not saying anything.

Louis: Yeah, and if you type it and you say something and you are reading over it and you want to change it or take something out.

Kayla: You can erase.

In addition to the added safety of revising your ideas before presenting them to class, classroom conversations no longer end at the end of the period. Teachers simply run out of time, but the blog created a place where conversations continued.

Self-selecting topics and then sharing their writing on the blog also helped students share. When students are fluent and confident, they may begin exploring topics that are important to them personally. Evan felt like his writing was strengthened because he could choose where to take his writing:

The best way that it can strengthen your writing too is letting you take your writing where you want to take it, I think. Kind of like you don't want to necessarily have to do a constructed response for every assignment, you want to be able to freewrite and take your story to this spot or that spot or view this point and that is a huge strength in writing to do what you want to do with what you got. I think that helps tremendously.

Evan saw the option of making decisions about the direction of his paper as a help to his writing. Evan's response shows that he is thinking like a writer. He sees options in writing, and he discerns that different genres have different purposes. Lauren hints at this when she explains how blogging increases her confidence. She felt more relaxed which made her feel open to explore her own ideas.

Carrie, who posted frequently to the blog, often wrote about topics unrelated to reading. In her post, "Music for the Heart," she writes about a concert she attended with her mother which helped alleviate her stress:

Sunday, December 03, 2006

Music for the Heart

Have you ever been so stressed out and you feel like you have no where to turn? Well, I think almost everyone of else can relate to that senior. I found myself in this position this weekend, I was so stressed and so worn down that I was for sure that my hair was going to fall out. (seriously!) Anyway, my mom was convinced that I should take a break and go do something that would be fun and relaxing. You can imagine what my eyes where doing right then, rolling around and around. So, in order to get me to "enjoy" myself, that crazy, cleaning lady took me to the Jim Brickman concert. All

the way to downtown, I kept think, "Who is Jim Brickman?" Now that I have seen him perform I can tell you guys that he is one of the most amazing piano writers that I have ever heard! You don't have to like piano to like Jim Brickman, he is a pop pianist. He was amazing and very funny. I laughed till I cried, I sat there dumb struck(the way I look in math class), and I even found myself smiling ear to ear. This concert made my weekend, it took a sour day and turned it very sweet.

Music is a strange thing, it somehow takes us away to a far place. If the tune being country, or in my case pop-piano; it truly is amazing. I am curious, like I always am, what music do you find yourself listening to, to get away for a while? Share your tips, I am very excited to read them all! Have a great week, and if you can I strongly urge you guys to look up this great artist. (Jim Brickman)

Sometimes self-sponsored writing acts as an opportunity for students, like Jake, to share extremely personal events such as his grandfather's recent death and Jake's absence for the funeral.

Grandpa



I wasn't at school today and it was because my grandfather passed away. I went to his funeral today and since everyone was around I tried my best to keep it cool and not wear my emotions on my sleeve and I think that I did a very good job. I was pallbearer and I was very honored to carry his casket. I think it would be a good freewrite subject about my grandpa and so I decided to do it on the blog. My grandpa was a great man who loved the Lord and always made time for family. When I was young he was diagnosed with Alzheimers disease. It was all down hill from there.

My grandma refused to put him in a nursing home because she thought they might not treat him correctly. She was so right. My grandpa's pace maker went out about 7 years ago and his heart kept on ticking. I know for a fact that he would have not lived as long if she hadn't given him the care she had. For this I respect my grandma very very much. I could go on forever about him but I don't want to take up too much space so I'll quit, but that's why I wasn't at school today.

posted by cookiemonster at [8:24 PM](#)

Six students commented on Jake's post, encouraging and supporting him during the loss of his grandfather.

6 Comments:

[BlueJay712](#) said...

I'm sooo sorry that your grandpa died! That's really depressing! I don't think i could handle it if my grandpa died b/c i love him so much! I hope the upcoming break will be happier for you.

[Thursday, December 21, 2006 9:01:00 PM](#)

[cookie monster](#) said...

thanks its jsut kind of hard during this season becasue when you look aroung at the table hes not there! O well hes in a much better place.

[Thursday, December 21, 2006 9:16:00 PM](#)

[Leprechaun from Uranus](#) said...

mam... i'm so sorry... i can feel your pain man... but hey i'm prayin for you and your fam.. if you need nething you got me and the class to be there for ya... aight!?! and you're right... he is in a better place now ;) chin up

[Thursday, December 21, 2006 10:05:00 PM](#)

[ballet rocks](#) said...

I really feel bad for your family. They will all be in my prayers!

[Thursday, December 21, 2006 10:31:00 PM](#)

[The Duchess](#) said...

I'm so sorry, I wouldn't know what to do if my Grandpa died :(I hope that your break will bring a lot of happiness for you and your family!

[Friday, December 22, 2006 10:17:00 PM](#)

[Rhonda](#) said...

derek

I'm sorry your grandpa died. I can't imagine what that may be like for you and your family. I was really happy to read that he was a believer. That must be a huge comfort for you, but I know it still hurts. I'll keep you and your family in my prayers.

[Saturday, December 23, 2006 9:02:00 PM](#)

Self-sponsored writing did not have to be serious either. On a lighter note, Lucy shares an experience she has on a school field trip:

Sunday, December 17, 2006

Japanese Club daytrip to Kansas City, good times, good times...



I spent the whole day Saturday at Kansas City with the Japanese Club! I had to wake up at about 6 A.M., so that kind was the worst part of the trip, it doesn't count though! Here's just a schedule of how I spent the trip and how I felt.

1. Went to the shopping center/skating rink to kill some time before the museum. We had to have a partner to walk around with, so I spent the time with my friend Sarah. We visited a few places that we liked there, but I didn't buy anything. Then I bought some lunch at a Chinese restaurant but I didn't even finish it because it was so bad. After we got sick of the shopping center, we watched the skaters at the rink.
2. Left the shopping center/skating rink and went to the art museum. I was still with Sarah, but we now had a group with D.J., Logan, and Nathan. We were led to look at the ancient Asian art section, some of the Native American art and African art, American artists, and Egyptian/Greek art. My favorites were the Asian and Greek sections. The statues from the Asian temples were really beautiful and well made and so was the Greek architecture. After that we went to the plaza, which had breathtaking Spanish architecture! We were all really hyper and probably scaring everyone, but it was fun!! We even found a mall there and I bought a video game called River King, from the makers of Harvest Moon.
3. We had dinner at Hibachi steakhouse. It's similar to Nakato's and we had a chef cook in front of us. My favorite course was, and always will be the onion soup. (yum!) It was good, but it wasn't as good as Nakato's since I prefer my food with less soy sauce. Of course, Logan and D.J. were clowning around and started throwing ice cubes onto the grill to watch them melt! When we finished, we still had an hour left to burn so my table went outside and goofed off while watching the horse carriages pass by. Then we left and went home!

This isn't really about Romeo and Juliet, but it's something that was school related and would be easy to post about :)

Posted by *The Duchess* at [4:37 PM](#) | [3 comments](#)

In an interview, Lucy explained why she wrote about topics seemingly unrelated to the literature: “If you are blogging about the book all the time, people aren’t going to know

what kind of person you are. They're just going to think—they don't have anything else to say besides this book.” Through the sharing of their writing on the blog, students built a community. Evan explains, “Half these people I know really well in class now. I knew them but I know them a lot better now.” He knew who they were, and, in fact, had gone to school with them, but because of the blog he had gotten to know them much better.

Self-sponsored writing is a result of students' fluency, confidence levels, and interest in obtaining feedback. Students used self-sponsored writing to heal, as evidenced in Jake's post about his grandfather's death. Pseudonyms, processing time, and opportunities to share writing, contribute to helping students feel open to share and express their ideas. Exploratory writing and thinking was valued on the blog. In this particular class, there was no such thing as “off-task” writing. Students did not abuse this either. The fact that students are willing and excited to share their writing is important. A variety of reasons influenced students' willingness to share on the blog. The fact that students blogged about topics unrelated to the blog shows that they saw the blog as more than fulfilling an assignment. The fact that they are open to write and share topics unrelated to the class discussion shows that the blog was about more than just responding to literature. They began to see that writing could help them share events that happened to them that were close to their hearts.

This willingness to share could also be easily crushed if a teacher were to ask students to “stay on topic.” Focusing on specific prompts will help students to stay “on-topic,” but the blog will only be about literature response instead of also improving writing and thinking. Through the frequent writing and sharing of writing posted on the blog, students develop an understanding of a blogging genre appropriate for their class.

As writers and readers of the class blog, they came to understand their class blogging as a genre. The next section explores students' perspective of blogging as genre.

Students Developed and Defined Blogging as a Genre Appropriate for Class

Students identify characteristics of effective and ineffective writing on the blog. Cooper (1999) defines "genre" as "types of writing produced everyday in our culture, types of writing that make possible certain kinds of learning and social interactions" (p. 25). Based on his research, he defines genres as "social, communal, situation, functional, structured, and stable" (p. 25). Genres represent classifications. Even among blogs, there are different genres of blogs. For example, people who write "filter" blogs search the internet for information and synthesize a variety of internet articles on certain topics. Some bloggers, especially on MySpace or Facebook, which are websites focused exclusively on social networking, write posts that are diaries, descriptions of daily events and routines. For students in Mrs. Jones class, they developed an academic genre for the class blog which also included voice, pictures, and emphasis on ideas.

While Cooper finds it important to share "genre-specific criteria" before he makes an assignment, the bloggers created their own characteristics of blogging as a genre in their class. The criteria they came up with were unsolicited and were not a topic of discussion in this class. Through reading the blog and posting, students came to understand blogging as a genre of their class. In interviews, when I asked students to tell me about effective and ineffective posts, they answered quickly and without hesitation.

As students write and read on the blog, they begin to understand blogging as a genre. Specifically, they identify and discuss characteristics of effective and ineffective blog posts based on their experiences with blogging in the class. This awareness of what

constitutes effective and ineffective writing occurs without direct instruction or classroom conversation. This awareness is inductive rather than deductive. Their understanding of genre grows out of their evaluations of blog posts. As they read and write on the blog, students see what “worked” with the writing.

In a focus group interview, I asked students to describe an effective blog post.

Jake described the following:

Something informative that’s different cause usually when we are reading the same book it’s all about the same think at one time. Like when we were reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*, there were a lot of posts about the trial, about how they thought that Tom Robinson was innocent and how it was unfair. Something that stuck out would be like a different title or a different opinion on the title or something that’s not even about the title. Something that’s different from what everyone else was writing about.

For Carrie and Evan pictures were important for a post to be effective. According to Jordan, a good picture beckons readers to a post and acts as a visual summary of the writing: “If you see a blog and it has a picture of a dog, you already have an idea of what the blog is about.” Belle adds, “It’s [the picture] like a summary in itself. We were writing one [blog post] about courage and a whole bunch of people put lions.” While the picture represents the content of the post, when students repeat images instead of finding unique pictures, students no longer perceived the post as effective. The repeated image becomes a visual cliché.

Effective posts “related” in some way. Kayla said, “If you want a good grade, you

have to have a lot, but if you want to have just a good post, you just have to relate.” For Lizzie, an effective blog post just “have[ing] to relate. You put a picture up and link.” This idea of “relating” means that they need to identify personally with the events, somehow make a personal connection for a blog post to be effective. Lawrence explained, “When you do a reflective post, you can connect and relate to what you are blogging about.” “Relating” means that students connect to the reading through considering different perspectives or identifying with the events or characters in the readings. Effective writing made some kind of connection either between ideas or between a picture and an idea.

Students identify length as a measure of effective and ineffective writing, although length of posts means different things for different students. Some students think longer posts are better. Some students think shorter posts indicate someone has not read. Regardless of those differences, students seem to look for a balance in the amount of writing on the blog. Carrie identifies longer posts as ineffective, but for Carissa, longer posts indicate that her peers “might have a good opinion about what they wrote or want to talk about.” A short post might also indicate that the writer is writing just for the points or that the person did not read, according to Kayla: “Like some of them I’ve seen they’re a short post. They’re like ‘oops, I forgot to read.’ It’s like they posted just to get the points. It’s not really for the benefit of everyone. It’s just that they did it.” Short posts might mean that the writer did not read. Ineffective blog posts were short, and students felt like they could identify who blogged “for the grade” and who blogged to share their thinking. Carrie interprets length with a more sophisticated response: “Some people can blog and it can go on for pages but they can say so little, but other people can have a short blog, but

it is so powerful. You can say a lot in a short amount of room but say little in hundreds of pages.”

Students identified voice as important as well, but they did not use that term. Carrie thought including “passion” and “thinking outside the box” were important when writing effective blog posts: “I need to think outside the box and put feeling into it because you don’t want to read a dry piece that has no meaning to it . . . you have to have passion for it to be good.” She describes “passion” as “feeling, emotions . . . you can tell that the author cares about the characters and what is going on. It has to move you. It has to affect you.”

Carrie’s ideas connected to students’ beliefs concerning capitalization or grammar. Students did not see correct punctuation as the focus of the blog:

Evan: I don’t focus on capitalization and stuff.

KF: Why?

Evan: I dunno. It’s kind of easier. You don’t have to and you can type faster.

Jacob: It’s a very informal type of work. Cause you’re socializing. Well, not socializing, but communicating with your peers. I think it’s more about getting your point across than like your grammar.

Students perceive ideas as more important than punctuation. The blog is about sharing ideas and communicating, and grammar becomes secondary.

This perception follows Odell’s (1999) work which uses his codes to help teachers look beyond surface errors and focus on assessing thinking strategies that students use in their writing. Students’ perceptions of blogging as a genre are influenced by the fact that they perceive writing on paper different from writing on the blog. For Rhonda, writing on paper is a more formal and informative type of writing than writing

on the blog: “Because if you write on paper you make sure everything’s perfect, but with this you’re thinking more about content than format.” She describes the writing on the blog as casual, content-focused, less formal, conversational, and personal. Rhonda explains, “I think it [blogging] allows for less formality and it makes things seem like an everyday conversation or something.” It’s more like an everyday conversation in that “it’s more casual than writing on paper. Because if you write on paper you make sure everything’s perfect, but with this you’re thinking more about content than format.”

Students recognized, unsolicited by the teacher, effective and ineffective characteristics of blog posts. They came to know this through frequent reading and posting on the blog. A pattern emerged among these examples. Students as they understood genre began to have expectations for the fellow writers on the blog. Students valued a new way of thinking, or as Carrie explained, “thinking outside the box.” I began to see that students expected more out of each other on the blog than even Mrs. Jones might have. Students believe that when other students post about similar topics or use the same picture that they are lazy. Students also believe that what students post to the blog should benefit everyone. That type of thinking shows that students began to think of the blog, and its contents, as a community. The community had rules, and the rules included effective blog posts. As a writer, students expected each other to add value to the blog—with a new picture or a new idea. If students have frequent opportunities to write for a variety of audiences, receiving a variety of comments, eventually they come to their own definitions of genre.

Conclusion: What Does Blogging Mean For Students' Writing?

Writing on the blog was engaging and motivating for the students because they liked writing with a computer. To some extent, they were motivated by the novelty of using laptop computers at school. They were also motivated by the ability to guide their writing and take it in their own direction. Writing and reading on the blog enabled them to understand characteristics of effective and ineffective writing. The practice in general improved their fluency, and they gained confidence through writing about ideas. Cooper and Selfe (1990) created a network for students to discuss class readings. They discovered that the “lack of face-to-face cues reduced the dominance of the instructor” and “eliminated much gender, age, and social status bias. As a result, competition took place “on the level of ideas rather than on the level of personality” (as cited in Selfe & Hilligloss, 1994, p. 101). The findings described in this dissertation reflect the same results. Cliques, social class, and popularity were pushed aside. Students focused on each other's ideas instead of focusing on the social currency of their peers. Students enjoyed the opportunity to read the ideas of their peers. Unfortunately, this was an unusual experience for most of the students. The next section explores the second sub-question: What do blogs mean for responding to literature?

What Does Blogging Mean for Students' Responses to Literature?

Mrs. Jones's goal for the blog was that it would be used for students to respond to the readings. Students respond to literature in a variety of ways. For example, students can respond to literature in writing, or they can respond to literature through face-to-face literature discussions. Some teachers might also view responding to literature in terms of answering questions at the end of a selection in a textbook.

The students' online responses extend the classroom conversation because the posts can be archived and read any time, not just during class. Because of the blog, students responded to the readings without prompting from the teacher. Their posts were not shallow because of the teacher's lack of direct instruction. The students' responses were insightful, interesting, and personal. Also, students learned from reading the perspectives of their fellow students. In previous classroom experiences, they had little opportunity to hear or read their peers' perspectives. The teacher was no longer the sole audience since the teacher did not post prompts. They responded to each other rather than answering questions.

I analyzed students' responses to the literature they posted to the blog using Hillocks (1980) and Rosenblatt's (1978) work, both of which primarily influenced my thinking. Hillocks' hierarchy of comprehension and Rosenblatt's aesthetic-efferent continuum provide a framework for considering students' responses. Responding to literature was studied by I.A. Richards (1929) who found that students' depended on personal responses in their interpretation of poetry. Richards saw this dependency on personal response as a deficit in students' ability to interpret. Rosenblatt took his findings and considered what these personal transactions met. She found a transaction between a

reader and a text based on what the reader brings to the reading.

Hillocks' compiled his hierarchy in an attempt to identify levels of comprehension and create questions that would help students move toward higher levels of comprehension. He believed this was important because a "significant problem problems for teachers are to identify levels of comprehension skills relevant to reading literature, determine the levels at which students comprehend literature, and to plan for instruction accordingly" (p. 55). Hillocks identifies these levels in his article, and I use his levels to determine how students comprehend literature.

In many ways, this study, and this section in particular, is similar to Barnes (1992) and Britton's (1975) research on talk in which they found students took longer turns in discussions not prompted by the teacher. Students who were guided by questions provided by the teacher took shorter turns and focused on answering the questions rather than exploring their thinking and "transacting" with the text.

Students, without prompting from the teacher, can initiate and sustain sophisticated literature discussions. Students respond along the aesthetic-effereent continuum, and they responded literally and inferentially to the readings.

I arrived at the following conclusions:

1. Students used the blog to clarify their understanding of the text.
2. Students discussed their reading process in their posts.
3. Students' posts reflected a variety of Hillocks' comprehension skills.
4. Students rarely responded to the readings in terms of author's generalization and structural generalization.
5. Students connected the readings to other texts.
6. Students connected the readings to their lives.

Students Used the Blog to Clarify Their Understanding of the Text

Students use the blog to clarify their understanding by re-reading previously posted blogs and by asking questions in their blog posts. Through these experiences, students came to the conclusion that blogging increased their comprehension of the texts they read in class. The archived posts were helpful when students returned to the blog: “This way,” Jake explains, “we can look over the blogging, the past blogs.” For Jake, this was important when he was confused about what he read:

I didn’t understand stuff in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Like someone did something or when a different character came in, I would go back to the blog to see what different people said about it. Like when the one guy that lived with the black people came like he was drunk. I didn’t get that part, so I read back to other blogs to see what they had to say about it.

Evan also uses the blog to clarify his thinking:

Like in *Mockingbird*, I didn’t even know what was going on half the time, but I could go to the blog and read other posts, make a comment to them, ask them questions, and know exactly what I had no idea about . . . Without this [the blog] I would be lost right now cause even with *Romeo and Juliet*—it’s confusing. She [Mrs. Jones] has her own website and you can go to that and read it if you miss any assignments.

Evan explained how he read other students’ post, asked questions, and read the teacher’s blog to clarify his understanding. When students had trouble understanding the text, they

looked for clarification through reading other students' blog. Neither I, nor Mrs. Jones, believed that the students read the blog in lieu of the novel.

Carrie used the blog to post questions:

I remember one of the very first chapters [in *To Kill a Mockingbird*], I just sat there and I didn't catch anything they said, and I started freaking out, and I thought, I don't know if I am getting over my head, and I just remember going to the blog and typing a list of questions and I got every one of them answered.

Carrie quickly obtained feedback from her peers when she posted her questions to the blog. Her fellow students answered her questions. Not only did she benefit from asking the questions and receiving feedback, another student benefited from answering her questions.

Blogging increased Rhonda's understanding as well. Instead of reading and putting the text away like she had done in previous classes, Rhonda used the blog to think about the reading more. The blog "makes you think about what you've read instead of just reading it over and putting it away and probably not thinking about it until the next quiz or test. It makes you think about it [the reading] more. I honestly think it helps more with comprehension." Without the blog, she felt like her participation in class would have been different, "If she [Mrs. Jones] didn't have the blog, I would just do my reading and then put it away and go to something else. I wouldn't think about it as much." Without the blog, Rhonda would have completed the assignment. With the blog, she began to think more about what she read because she had to post her thoughts to an audience.

Rosenblatt (1978) sees the classroom environment and the sharing of responses as an essential “starting point for growth in critical power” (p. 146). The blog allowed them to see all of the responses from their peers, and these experiences assist them in valuing other students’ responses to the literature. These initial experiences will help them as they move toward assignments requiring responses based on published criticism.

The importance of sharing not only answers, but questions is sometimes overlooked. Students used the blog as a place to have their questions answered and to also posts questions. Blau (2003) outlines the following principle for literature classrooms: “Confusion often represents an advanced state of understanding” (p. 21).

The fact that students used the blog to ask questions and to read the interpretations of their peers has implications for Vygotsky’s (1978) work. He saw that children could move beyond what they could do independently when they worked with an adult or a more capable peer. For Vygotsky (1978), collaboration helps students move beyond their developmental level. Students in the class who did not understand the readings could learn from and clarify their thinking through the help of their peers by reading responses and asking questions. Students were eager to read what others wrote and were open to ask questions of each other. I have to wonder if students would have been as willing to ask questions of Mrs. Jones, even though they described her as an understanding and kind teacher.

Sharing their perspective and reading the perspective of others became paramount. Rosenblatt (1978) discusses the importance of sharing:

Learning what others have made of a text can greatly increase such insight into one’s own relationship with it. A reader who has been

moved or disturbed by a text often manifests an urge to talk about it, to clarify and crystallize his sense of the work. He likes to hear others' views. Through such interchange he can discover how people bringing different temperaments, different literary and life experiences, to the text have engaged in very different transactions with it. (p. 146)

Students were engaged by the blog because they could read the different perspectives of the other students in the class. Reading the blog did not cause student to not read the novel. In fact, the audience on the blog made students more accountable. Students did not like to get “behind” in the reading. They felt like they could tell through the responses who read and who did not. Just because they were going to the blog looking for clarification does not mean that they were not re-reading the novel itself. Personally, I might read something I do not understand, and discuss with my colleagues their perspective, which can help give me some insight that might clarify my thinking. Students were not reading to look for answers, but looking at the blog to consider other perspectives. While students may have said they did not understand, they may also have felt like their perspective was not “right” (a remnant of frequent emphasis on efferent responses). If this is the case, students probably read other people's responses in order to support and gain confidence in their own thinking or to look for new ideas that they had not considered.

Students reported that the blog helped with their comprehension. Overall, several factors improved students' understanding. They could return to the blog and re-read posts of peers who seem to understand the text better. They wrote each week and this writing

practice in responding to literature helps them comprehend what they read. In essence, students write about the literature in order to learn. The students found that they could learn from reading the perspectives and writings of their peers. I was surprised by the importance students placed on reading the blog. Initially, I focused on what blogs meant for students' writing, but students depended on the blog and their peers for clarification and reading support.

In many classrooms, teachers provide the answers. In this case, the blog provides a place where peers can ask and discuss "honest" questions. Like McKenna explains in an interview, Mrs. Jones already knows the answer, so she prefers to ask her peers. This comment reveals that she is not looking for an "answer." She is looking for perspectives and ideas. If McKenna wanted an "answer," she would just ask the teacher. Students used the blog to ask and answer questions that they had about the text. Students work together through their writing on the blog to explore meaning. This interplay between reading the text, posting responses to the blog, and then reading and commenting on the responses of their peers worked together to help students clarify their understandings and, thus, comprehend the readings.

Students Discussed Their Reading Process in Their Posts

When students mention their reading process, they describe the progress, pace, and obstacles they encounter as they read. Mrs. Jones did not ask students to describe how they read, yet the inclusion of comments about their reading process occur approximately 30% of the time in the first two weeks of posting. By discussing their reading process, students were able to identify with each other and discuss parts of the text which were difficult or to explain the busy-ness of their schedule. The discussion of

their reading process might also have been a form of “warm-up” writing. Either way, it is significant that students discuss their thinking as they respond to literature. The following are excerpted from five different students’ posts:

Now that i'm all caught up on the reading, I'm enjoying the book a little more now. The last few chapters are starting to move faster and have been pretty interesting.

So far in " To Kill A Mockingbird" I haven't had much trouble.

Well, shame on me, I didn't do my reading last night because I was up until 12:15 last night finishing my science project. So I guess I will be getting all caught up tonight.

After starting off slow, the book is finally picking up. The events from the past couple nights have even made the small print easy reading.

And this reading is so addicting i cant sit my book down! last night the reading was very exciting! at first i was not looking foward to the reading but i found out shortly that it was a very good book. it has been good ever since the first chapter!

These “reading process” parts of posts dropped off significantly in the next weeks, until *Romeo and Juliet*, when students discussed their frustration at the language of the play:

Saturday, December 09, 2006

A Challenge...

Has anyone finished the reading for Act 1, Scene 1 yet? What do you think of the reading? I finished just a few minutes ago and I'm finding it hard to read and understand. I'm excited to start reading something new, but I think this will be a challenge for a while. Hopefully, it will be easier to understand after we get into the play more. Well, I sure hope so anyway. Let me know what your thoughts are about this weekends reading.

:)kittykat07

posted by kittykat07 at [6:16 PM](#)

Students share a variety of thoughts about their process. Sometimes they share about their busy schedules and how they did not have time to read or do the homework. Sometimes

they brag about how far they have come in the reading, or sometimes they apologize for falling behind.

Rosenblatt's (1938, 1978) work offers a hint as to why the description of their process slows down after the first few weeks of the novel and the play. Students became engaged in the book and the idea of "what happens next," which Rosenblatt describes as the "basic forward movement of the reading process." Early in the book, they may not yet be at the point where they are engaged enough to make predictions or be in the flow of the reading.

Students' Posts Reflected a Variety of Comprehension Levels

In this section, using Hillocks' hierarchy of comprehension levels, I analyze each of the case study students' first of the semester, middle of the semester, and end of the semester posts. Other hierarchies could be used for this analysis. For example, I could have used Moffett's (1968) growth sequences for the development to of language or Bloom's (1956) taxonomy. Hillocks' hierarchy is only one way to consider the content of students' posts in order to begin a dialogue with the students and a way for them to assess their comprehension and possible create an awareness.

As I explain in Chapter Three, Hillocks' (1980) hierarchy consists of two main categories: literal and inferential. The sub-categories of literal questions are basic stated information, key detail, and stated relationship. The sub-categories of inferential are simple implied relationship, complex implied relationship, author's generalization, and structural generalization. Below, using Hillocks' words, I outline his descriptions of each:

Literal Level of Comprehension

Basic Stated Information:

Information is extremely important, repeated, and prominent.

Key Detail:

Detail is important to the twists and turns of the plot and bears causal relationship to the plot.

Stated Relationship:

The reader must locate the relationship which is said to exist between at least two pieces of information (two characters, two events, a character and an event, etc.).

Inferential Level of Comprehension**Simple Implied Relationship:**

Readers deal with denotative and connotative clues, relate them to their own personal experience, and then infer a cued relationship. The relationship is similar to stated relationships except the answers are not stated explicitly in the text.

Complex Implied Relationship:

The relationship is inferred from many different pieces of information involving a large number of details. The reader must identify the details, discern whatever patterns exist among them, and then draw the appropriate inference.

Author's Generalization:

The generalization goes beyond character to imply what the story means about human nature, and corresponds to theme but more deeply than teachers typically consider it. The difference between complex implied relationships and author's generalization is the fact that CIR depends on the text, while Author's Generalization moves beyond the text.

Structural Generalization:

The reader identifies and explains how parts work together to achieve certain effects.

In addition to Hillocks, Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory and the aesthetic-efferent continuum is important when discussing students' responses to the literature. Rosenblatt describes how to explore stance: "In order to begin to consider the stance of the reader, we ask what the writer/reader focuses her attention on" (p. 35). Efferent responses center on the following:

Attention is centered predominately on what is to be extracted and retained after the reading event. Meaning results from abstracting out and analytically structuring the ideas, information, directions, or conclusions to be retained, used, or acted on after the reading event. (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 11)

Aesthetic response, according to Rosenblatt (1994), centers on the following: “In this [aesthetic stance] kind of reading, the reader adopts an attitude of readiness to focus attention on what is being lived through during the reading event.” (p. 11). The reader is at the center. A good example occurs when Carrie identifies with the characters. The events in the novel revolve around Scout, but Carrie puts herself alongside Scout. When students make that connection or feel that empathy or sympathy, their response moves toward the aesthetic stance. As Rosenblatt points out, the continuum is not an either-or situation. Students in one post or at different times may respond to reading with an aesthetic stance on one occasion and an efferent stance on another.

Analyzing the posts for levels of comprehension and then finding patterns among their posts is difficult because the students all wrote so differently. Yet, I can say students included at different times all types of comprehension levels. Students describe basic stated information, key details, and stated relationships. They reveal comprehension in terms of simple implied relationships and complex implied relationships. More infrequent, students connect their reading to larger themes or human nature or speculate on the author’s decisions on structuring the text. This section focuses on the level of comprehension revealed through Evan, Carrie, Rhonda, and Tim’s posts.

Evan's First of the Semester Post

As described earlier in Chapter 4, Evan's writing is filled with details and voice. At first glance, Evan's post looks like summary—a literal response to the reading. He includes specific details in his re-telling of the events of the early chapters.

<p>Friday, October 20, 2006</p> <p>Anyone lose their pants??? Anyone lose their pants?</p> <p>Jem did, and had a difficult and awkward time getting them back.</p> <p>Last nights reading continued on from Scout, Jem, and Dill getting back from wondering around Boo Raddley's house. They found some pretty weird things and saw some too. As they wondered around things got very eery, (sp?) or suspicious. In a split second a shotgun shell fired, and they took off as fast as they could away from the house. Not far from the edge of Boo Raddley's property they encountered a chain link fence and crawled under it as fast as they could. Scout and Dill got threw without a problem but when Jem tried to his pants got cought and he took off without them. Chapter 8 starts here.</p> <p>Scout and Jem were lieing in bed sound asleep when Scout woke up to Jem calling for her. Jem told her that he was going back to Boo Raddley's house to retrieve his pants. Scout got chills down her back when she heard this because she was scared of Boo Raddley. She offered to go with him but he told her to stay home. Scout got very nervous as Jem was gone, thinking every second that Jem was gone Boo Raddley had kidnapped him. Finally Jem returned home and was more scared than Scout.</p> <p>Jem told Scout that when he got to the Raddley's house he found his pants without a problem. What scared him was that when all three of them (Jem, Scout and Dill) were running away from the house Jem's pants were basically torn off and knotted up. When he arrived at his pants, they were stiched up at the tare, and folded. Jem got to thinking and came to the silly conclusion of thinking Boo Raddley could read his mind and know what he was going to do next. Jem was very suspicious and saftley home for the night.</p> <p>The next morning Scout awoke to THE WORLD ENDING!!!!!!!!!! Just kidding. Scout awoke to what she thought was the world ending. It turns out she awoke to snow. Kinda different huh? Anyway as you can tell Scout had never seen snow before. Jem soon after explained to her what snow was. As soon as the last word of explanation left his mouth, Scout wanted to go outside and make snowmen!!! Jem told her that they had to wait a little while for more to fall down and then they could go. As soon as the waiting was over, they were off! Jem told her to gather dirt, (I was thinking dirt? What the heck , your making snowmen aren't you?) and snow. Jem knew what he was doing though. Even though there wasn't a HUGE amount of snow they made excellent snowmen, or as I read they did. Jem and Scout Put the dirt into balls, the size of snowmen, then packed snow on top of the dirt. Pretty genius huh? I thought it was.</p> <p>Soon after the neighbor's house cought on fire. Big city</p>	<p><i>Basic Stated Information</i></p>
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<p>comotion. Firetruck's, stuff being thrown out the window's, the whole nine yards. Long story short, the house went up in flames and burned to nothing, sad I know. Well I know that's not a LOT about the last part but sorry, that's all she wrote. Let me know what's happenin!!! Peace Out!!! <i>posted by James Blonde at 1:02 PM</i></p>	
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Evan thoroughly describes details of the early chapter he read in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

While this post might be dismissed as mere summary, this process of re-telling can be important for students. Barnes (1992) writes, “In early literacy studies, re-telling is an important comprehension strategy.” Many times with older students, teachers dismiss re-telling as a form of lazy thinking, when, in fact, re-telling, or “re-articulation” as Barnes calls it, is a part of the process a student may need to go through in order to understand. Barnes also sees consequences for student writing if students ignore re-articulation. By leaving this stage out, “odds and ends of information are strung shapelessly together (p. 56). This kind of re-articulation of thought is more likely to happen in discussion than in the silence of individual thought, because in discussion all pupils have at least some awareness of the need to frame ideas so that others can understand them.

Hidden among the detailed and sequential re-telling, Evan asks the question, “What would happen if?” Evan formulates a question for his reader that would require them to piece together details from the novel which would result in the students answering at the complex implied relationship level. He has a clear perception of the way the characters feel, and he discerns the degree of fear that Scout and Jem experience. Even though he retells basic stated information, his detail reveals understanding. Beyond that, the specificity in his posts reveals his high level of interest and engagement.

Evan's Middle of the Semester Post

By the middle of the semester, Evan's response to the reading includes literal and inferential levels of comprehension. At the time of this post, he is reading *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. This particular post is shorter than the first, and he includes basic stated information which is appropriate since not all of the students are reading this book. More importantly, this post reflects a simple implied relationship when Evan connects the events in the novel to his own feelings about racism.

<p>Thursday, November 16, 2006</p> <p>You Killed How Many White Kids Today? That's how it could have been... or as some would say, should have been.</p> <p>I'm currently reading the book, "Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry". This book is so far surprisingly good to me. It's about racism, and that topic really sparks my attention. Learning what whites did, and how I will NeVeR, I mean NeVeR, do anything remotely close to that. We need to learn from our mistakes and this was a colossal one. But, that's just me. If you chose to show racism, just an advisory now, DO NOT do it near me, ya'll hear. I wont be pretty. End of story.</p> <p>Like Wild Emo Child previously said on an earlier post, the book is about this black family, and their's TON'S of racism in this town that they live in, you get the picture. Well one day the children finally get their fill of it and retaliate. They decide to dig this ditch to stop a bus that's been slapshing them everyday on their way to school. At the end of the day, their lucky they didn't get someone killed. I'm not gona retell the story, I'll put you guys to sleep... What I want to know is what would have happened if they did kill someone. Or if they would have gotten caught for what they did. I guess I'm gona have to read to find out huh?</p> <p>Sorry this post is so dang long, it's an important topic, you guys 'll live...</p> <p>Easy reading, till later, Peace <i>posted by James Blonde at 7:42 PM</i></p>	<p><i>Author's Generalization</i></p> <p><i>Simple Implied Relationship</i></p> <p><i>Key Detail</i></p> <p><i>Complex Implied Relationship</i></p>
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In Evan's first post of the semester, his stance appears efferent. By the middle of the semester, Evan's post appears more aesthetic. He reveals his feelings about racism, and he moves beyond plot summary. His post reveals both literal and inferential elements, including evidence of understanding simple implied relationships, complex implied relationships, and a move toward author's generalization. He discusses his personal feelings about racism. Hillocks' saw author's generalization as understanding beyond the

teacher's typical theme. While Evan does not elaborate, he does move toward author's generalization when he addresses racism. He identifies a pattern in the novel, and connects those events to himself and the world. At the end of the post, Evan asks an inferential question which requires the reader to consider cause-effect relationships in the text to consider an alternate ending.

Evan's End of the Semester Post

In December, Evan nears the end of *Romeo and Juliet*, and he posts an alternative ending to the play. His understanding of the events is apparent, and he embellishes the ending with his choice of language and humor.

Carrie's First of the Semester Post

Carrie describes her frustration with getting on the blog, and she describes her feelings as she identifies with the character Scout.

<p>Monday, October 23, 2006</p> <p>Scout, one-of-a-kind!</p> <p>I'm finally here! That was quite the adventure, and the tester of my bloodpressure. O-well, now about the book; I absolutely love it. It was a bit of a drag at first, but now it keeps me on my toes. Scout is so entertaining and keeps me laughing the whole time. In the last few chapters, with the annoying cousin and the crazy lady, Scout was pushed to the limit. (kind-of like getting on this blog spot!) Her stubbornness and strong will shows during this particular part. When she struggles through the rough comments and the constant torment I can't help, but to be proud of her as she muggles her way through. Even when she knocks her cousin's face off, I laugh and my mind screams, "Go Scout!" It seems crazy to be proud of a made up character, but her struggle is so real and understandable. Am I crazy to feel some of these things or is anyone else feeling the same way.</p> <p><i>posted by Dakota1600 at 11:48 AM</i></p>	<p><i>Simple Implied Relationship</i></p> <p><i>Key Detail</i></p>
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Carrie's post reveals two unique characteristics. First, she identifies closely and powerfully with Scout. Second, the main portion of the post describes her feelings as she reads. She identifies with the character, and her post describes how she feels as she reads. Through reading this post, I eventually decided that this post needed to be considered using Rosenblatt. With that, Carrie's first post of the semester takes an aesthetic stance. Carrie identifies with the character of Scout. She describes her blood pressure and her frustration with the blog. Her details do not focus as much as on the text as they focus on the emotions she feels as she read—she laughs; she cheers. Carrie describes how she feels as she transacts with the text, especially as she identifies with Scout.

Carrie's Middle of the Semester Post

By the middle of the semester, after much trial and error, Carrie posts a picture to the blog. Incorporating illustrations alongside her writing marks a turning point in her responding and writing (which I describe later in Chapter 4).

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

Broken Heart



A broken heart is something that we have all heard of and maybe even seen; but to actually experience one is a different subject. When I was reading Miss Jane Pittman, I was crushing along when I got to a few chapters where Tee Bob experiences “puppy love” with the African American school teacher, Mary Agnes. Well, that little crush of Tee Bob’s turns into a lot more. He start to look at the young teacher with eyes of love, the only thing stopping him was the color of her skin. You see Tee Bob was the recipient of the plantation and Mary was part African American, making her “out of Tee Bob’s league.” To prevent anymore damage than what already was done, Mary decides to leave; trying to salvage what she could. Before Mary could leave the her front steps, Tee Bob makes his last and final attempt to “sweep” Mary off of her feet. Sadly and even heart breaking, Mary reminds him of what they have and what they would have would be equivalent to nothing. In the end, out of haste and pure sadness Tee Bob takes his life, claiming that he now has nothing to live for. All through these chapters my heart couldn’t help, but to ache along with Tee Bob’s. How treacherously would it be to have your heart stomped on? Yet, how would it feel to be responsible for another’s death, like Mary? I don’t know if I could live with that, could you? Have you had any experiences in this area? Post and it will be greatly appreciated. *Posted by Dakota1600 at 8:44 PM*

Stated Relationship

Stated Relationship

Simple Implied Relationship

Simple Implied Relationship

Simple Implied Relationship
Complex Implied Relationship

The depth of her comprehension in terms of Hillocks’ categories increases significantly. Not everyone in class is reading *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*.

She describes the events of that section of the novel in sequential order which reflects her ability to understand key details and stated relationships within this section of the novel. The interesting part of Carrie's response occurs toward the end of her post when she asks questions and, once again, describes her emotional response to the reading.

By the end of the post, Carrie generalizes the events so her readers can relate. She asks her readers to infer: How would they feel if this happened to them? From this point through the end of the semester, Carrie frequently formulates questions at the end of her post that pushes readers to think about and comment at the author's generalization level. Her questions ask readers to consider themes that Carrie sees, not those identified by the teacher.

In this post, Carrie asks many questions that move beyond the details of the text. Through her questions, she helps readers identify with the characters and consider what these experiences would mean to them personally. Her questions also address both characters in this part of the novel. She asks "how treacherously would it be to have your heart stomped on" like Tee Bob. Then, she asks how it would feel to be responsible for another person's death—like Mary Agnes. Her questions involve and invite the audience to think more deeply about the ideas she describes in her post. Beyond Hillocks' categories, Carrie, once again, includes lines that describe feelings she has as she read: "My heart could not help but ache." She describes how she feels internally as she reads the tragic story. The feelings she describes indicate a response on the aesthetic end of the continuum.

Carrie's End of the Semester Post

Carrie describes the plot of the play using a metaphor. She compares the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* to an abstract image.

<p>Thursday, December 21, 2006</p> <p>Something So Simple is So Complicated!</p>  <p>~ Something so simple is so complicated it almost seems in this book. It is almost like this picture I posted. There is many twists and turns, smears and bends, but yet through it all it creates a masterpiece. That is what <i>Romeo and Juliet's</i> story is to me. . . a masterpiece. It is a tale with many "layers" in it, making it the novel it is known and loved for. Complicated. . . Interesting.</p> <p>~Well, I better take not of "the topics" since everyone else is posting about it, so hear it goes. When Tybalt stabbed Mercutio, I didn't think that the murder was intentional at all. (the heat of the day went to all of their heads in my personal opinion!) Anyway, Tybalt was out to fight yes, and Mercutio was persisting him to draw, so that didn't help the situation either. With Romeo trying to stop the brawl before it got out of hand, Mercutio was paying more attention to his friend, trying to maneuver around him. As where Tybalt's anger and rage was aimed at Mercutio, so there we have the stab and the life taken. It was a fight with many emotions rising the ceiling, and many complex backgrounds grinding together with great and mighty force. With the death of Mercutio, we all knew that Tybalt was next, only adding to the complexity of our picture of the story-line even further. Mercutio dead, Tybalt as well, and now the young Romeo banished. WHAT ELSE COULD GO WRONG! I know. . .I know. . there is always another smack</p>	<p><i>Structural Generalization using a visual</i></p> <p><i>Key Detail</i> <i>Complex Implied Relationship</i></p> <p><i>Simple Implied Relationship</i></p> <p><i>Complex Implied Relationships</i></p>
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<p>in the face waiting for us in the upcoming acts. As for now, our picture of Romeo and Juliet is constantly adding twists and turns, dives and rises, only making it more exciting to read/look at.</p>	
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Posted by Dakota1600 at [6:16 PM](#)

Through the metaphor, her writing reveals an understanding of complex implied relationships and structural generalizations—two of the highest levels of comprehension. Carrie includes details in this post, but not for description. The details support her assertions.

Her use of imagery in this post may help her understand and discuss the complexity of the structure. In an interview, Carrie explains that pictures help her generate ideas. She begins by comparing the structure of the picture with the structure of the plot. In this case, the picture is her aesthetic response. She responds to the novel like a viewer responds to the picture. She follows lines and swirls, sometimes feeling confused and then surprised “like a smack in the face.”

Rhonda’s First of the Semester Post

In her first post, Rhonda writes about *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

<p>Friday, October 20, 2006</p> <p>Getting Started</p> <p>This blog thing is really neat.I've never posted on the internet before,so this experience is very new to me.So lets get started.</p> <p>Last nights reading was very eventful.For one thing it snowed in Maycomb for the first time since 1885.Wow! That is about 45 years since the last real winter in Maycomb.I found Scout's reaction to the weather very amusing.Apparently she thought the world was ending.But she was really excited when she built a snowman with Jem.</p> <p>Also another interesting aspect of last nights reading was the fire at Miss.Maudies.Although Scout was scared,something really exciting happened.She had her first real interaction with Boo Radley(according to Atticus).I really wish that she would've turned around when she recieved that blanket!</p> <p>In addition to these events we were introduced to some new characters Cecil Jacobs and Francis.What pain these two cruel boys caused Scout.Constantly these two kept taunting her about her fathers new case involving a black man.Truly we are beginning to see the racism that was deeply felt in the south at this time.Without doubt this new case will make life very difficult for Jem,Atticus,and Scout.</p> <p><i>posted by Rhonda at 11:51 AM</i></p>	<p><i>Basic Stated Information</i></p> <p><i>Stated Relationship</i></p> <p><i>Basic Stated Information</i></p> <p><i>Basic Stated Information</i></p> <p><i>Complex Implied Relationship</i></p>
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Her first post of the semester has four paragraphs and a sense of a beginning and an end.

Rhonda even uses transitional words between paragraphs. Her comments in the interview and the structure of her first post indicates that she focuses just as much on format as content. Rhonda's writing appears more controlled than either Evan's or Carrie's. In the interviews, I asked her to describe her best post, and her description offers insight into the controlled-nature of her early posts:

KF: Why do you like this one?

Rhonda: I think I like the words that I used. I think I might like it better because I have better sentence openers.

KF: Show me what you're talking about.

Rhonda: In this one I'm starting them all with subjects. There's my "ly" ending and my subject. I think I started it with too many

subject. This one I think I might have switched up a little more. It still has a lot of subject openers, but I think I might like the sentence openers a little better.

KF: Do you think about your sentence structure when you're blogging?

Rhonda: It goes back to the DVDs I did last year. It tried to teach you how to write better by causing you to think outside of the box and not putting the same thing over and over...try to make it more interesting by using different formats for the beginnings of your sentences. That's what I try to do.

KF: Every time you blog?

Rhonda: Yeah...and when I write. It's been so ingrained that I do it every time I write.

While Evan describes almost all of the events, Rhonda selects particular events that interest to her. She identifies with the character when she wishes that Scout would have turned around to see Boo. She ends the post with two important inferences: 1) that the novel hints at the racism of that time, and 2) that Atticus, Jem, and Scout will have problems in the future.

Rhonda's Middle of the Semester Post

In the middle of the semester post, Rhonda's response reveals higher inferential levels of comprehension than did her first post of the semester.

<p>Monday, November 20, 2006</p> <p>Terrible Distrust</p> <p>Jane has definitely met her share of troubles. It amazes me how she meets so many tragedies, and faces them head-on. Her courage is amazing. She has had to face life without children of her own, the deaths of the two most special men in her life and the abandonment of another. One would think she has been totally desensitized to horrible situations. She has needed someone to fall back on, yet she has failed to recognize the only one who can really heal her pain.</p> <p>On another note, I have spotted another similarity between "To Kill a Mockingbird" and "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman". In both stories a black person has met distrust simply because of their color. When the two witnesses in our current book gave testimonies about their observations of the murder, they are constantly asked the same questions (although they are stating the truth). These witnesses are believed to be drunk (just because of their color) when it is clearly obvious that they were sober. This situation is very similar to Mockingbird because Tom Robinson is not trusted because his testimony is not consistent with Bob Ewell's word.</p> <p>PREJUDICE IS TERRIBLE!!!</p> <p><i>posted by Rhonda at 9:02 PM</i></p>	<p><i>Stated Relationship</i></p> <p><i>Complex Implied Relationship</i></p> <p><i>Complex Implied Relationship</i></p> <p><i>Complex Implied Relationship</i></p> <p><i>Author's Generalization</i></p>
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She describes events in Jane's life, and comments on the connection between these events. She reveals an understanding of a complex implied relationship when she includes details to support how Jane ignores "someone" who could help her. Rhonda's implication is that only God could help Jane through these hardships. Another example of her ability to comprehend at the complex implied relationship level occurs when she compares two different novels—*To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Autobiography of Miss*

Jane Pittman. By the end of the post, she comprehends at an even deeper level (author's generalization) when she begins to connect the two texts to a larger issue—racism. She does not develop the author's generalization, but her writing hints at her understanding of the larger significance of the events that occur in both of these novels. Her use of punctuation in this post is much more risky. The ALL CAPS, in addition to showing voice, reflect her aesthetic and emotional response to the racism in the novel. In her earlier post, Rhonda did not infer until the very end of her post. She gets to deeper levels of comprehension much sooner.

Rhonda's End of the Semester Post

The following post was written in December while Rhonda read *Romeo and Juliet*.

<p>Monday, December 11, 2006</p> <p>Think Twice</p> <p>I just finished reading Act 1 scenes 2 and 3 and it is a little bit hard to understand, but after awhile it kind of makes sense. Basically, Juliet's mom has just asked how her daughter felt about being married and honestly I'm feeling really sorry for her. You see I am just about a year older than Juliet and I am definitely not ready to be married(especially to someone I've never met). If I were Juliet I would be flattered that a guy like Paris liked me, but at the same time it would make me sad because I would have to leave my family and the life I knew when I just was not ready.</p> <p>As for Romeo, he mildly urks me. He thinks he is desparately in love with someone that will never feel the way he does. That is kind of sad, but I really wish Romeo would accept this fact and move on. He is throwing his own private "pity party" and it is continually becoming more annoying. I have to admit, I have been guilty of throwing a similar "parties" about other things, hopefully by observing this guy, I'll think twice before I throw another "pity party".</p> <p><i>posted by Rhonda at 4:07 PM .</i></p>	<p><i>Basic Stated Information</i></p> <p><i>Complex Implied Relationship</i></p> <p><i>Author's Generalization</i></p> <p><i>Complex Implied Relationship</i></p> <p><i>Complex Implied Relationship</i></p>
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In this post, Rhonda shows evidence of understanding at the complex implied relationship level through her explanation of the patterns of behavior that have brought the two characters to this point. Not only does she see patterns within the text, she identifies with both Romeo and Juliet, and she backs these comparisons with details. In her post at the beginning of the semester, her writing focused on re-telling the story. By the end of the semester, she clearly paraphrases and connects to the characters. She looks at the pros and cons of Romeo and Juliet's behavior. Even though she does not sympathize with Romeo's behavior, she suspends closure and considers why he might be feeling the way, and she compares herself to both Romeo and Juliet. She moves far away

from relating the details of the plot and moves toward figuring out the characters' motives.

Her post toward the end of the semester reflects a drastic change in the amount of aesthetic response she includes. Her later posts show emotion, and her writing is more relaxed. Although in the beginning, she re-tells details, she ends the semester by seeing relationships, considering different perspectives, and describing how the characters make her feel. Her response to the play at the end of the semester also seems to show that she trusts her own thinking more than she did early on through the risks she takes.

Tim's First of the Semester Post

Unlike the others in the individual case studies, Tim posted less frequently and with fewer words than the others. His first post did not come until October 27. His infrequent posting and "man of few words" status does not mean that his writing did not show comprehension. He is succinct compared to the others described in this section.

<p>Friday, October 27, 2006</p> <p>Atticus is Awesome</p> <p>Atticus is not only a good father, but a good lawyer. He really knows what he is doing in the court room. I bet he was assigned Tom Robinson's case because the judge knew that he had a good chance of proving Tom innocent. I think there are a lot of good people in Maycomb, like Atticus, but there are also some mean and racist people. I think Tom Robinson is innocent, the jury will make him guilty because he is black.</p> <p><i>posted by Tim at 11:55 AM</i></p>	<p><i>Stated Relationship</i></p> <p><i>Simple Implied Relationship</i></p> <p><i>Complex Implied Relationship</i></p> <p><i>Complex Implied Relationship</i></p>
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The three previous students spent time describing the events in their first post of the semester. He does not describe events. Tim immediately moves into higher levels of comprehension. Throughout Tim's post, there are examples of his ability to infer at least

to the level of a simple implied relationship. His post is filled with inferences. He has read about Atticus as a father and as a lawyer, and he infers that Atticus is good at both. He infers that there are both good and racist people in Maycomb. He takes the early details and makes a prediction about events that will occur later in the novel. Tim's post deals strictly with the text and reveals little aesthetic response.

Tim's Middle of the Semester Post

In his mid-semester post, Tim discusses *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

<p>Friday, November 17, 2006</p> <p>ROLL OF THUNDER, HEAR MY CRY</p> <p>So far, i think this book is pretty slow. Most books are at the beginning, but the walk to school took up about 15 pages. Hopefully it will get interesting. The giant stranger may provide some excitement. I can tell that this book talks about racism a lot. Like when the white bus speeds by the black kids and gets Little Man dirty.</p> <p><i>posted by baseballsock at 11:25 AM</i></p>	<p>Complex Implied Relationship</p> <p>Structural Generalization</p> <p>Complex Implied Relationship</p> <p>Author's Generalization</p> <p>Simple Implied Relationship</p>
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Tim describes how the pace of the book feels slow, and once again, he makes a prediction. By comparing the text to other books he has read, he shows an understanding of complex implied relationship. Although he does not explicitly discuss the author's choices in her structuring of the novel, Tim hints at the structure of the novel. Except for Carrie's last post, when she predicts more tragic events to come in the play, Tim is the only student among the other three who consistently predicts.

Tim's End of the Semester Posts

Tim's posts are short. Below, I include two of his posts from two successive weeks. Tim's post on December 12 reflects his frustration at the language in the play. By the second week, the events of the play become clearer to him.

<p>Tuesday, December 12, 2006</p> <p>What?</p>  <p>I'm sorry but I can not understand a word in Romeo and Juliet. All that "Where art thou?" just doesn't make sense. I think the translated version of R&J will really help me out. I'll just have to read both versions.</p> <p><i>posted by baseballsock at 8:23 PM</i></p>	
<p>Monday, December 18, 2006</p> <p>Balcony Scene</p>  <p>The balcony scene is the best! The most famous line in the whole play, "Oh Romeo, Romeo. Wherefore art thou Romeo?" is in the balcony scene. I like the conversation between the two, and how Juliet can't quite go inside and Romeo can't quite walk away. It was my favorite scene so far.</p> <p><i>posted by baseballsock at 9:14 PM</i></p>	<p><i>Key Detail</i></p> <p><i>Simple Implied Relationship</i></p>

On December 12, Tim expresses confusion and some frustration concerning the play.

(Questioning, or dissonance, is not an area included in Hillocks' hierarchy, although Blau identifies "confusion" as an important principle for literature discussions.) By the next week, Tim's post revisits the same scene, but this time he understands it. His post on December 12 reflects a more aesthetic response since it indicates his feelings toward the

text. The next week's post is aesthetic in that it indicates his excitement with understanding.

In his end of the semester posts, Tim writes about how he does not understand the play, and he does not understand "Wherefore art thou, Romeo?" The blog allows him to return to that idea in the next week's post and describe what that means. The next week he reports that the balcony scene is his favorite. Without an audience on the blog, would Tim have returned to that idea and clarified his thinking? For Tim, audience made all of the difference. Mrs. Jones and I believe that Tim would not have shared much thinking with his classmates in small group discussions and definitely not in large class discussions.

Each of the students (except for Tim whose posts were mostly inferential from the beginning) comprehended the reading at more inferential levels as the semester progressed. The posts become more expressive as time passes which indicates an aesthetic stance as well.

Evan and Rhonda begin the semester with posts that reflect formulaic types of writing. Evan writes a five-paragraph response, and Rhonda writes a three-paragraph response. But, the end of the semester, content seems to supersede form. In an interview, Rhonda supports this assertion: I asked her to read her first post and then her most recent post and describe what she noticed: "I notice that the last one that I did is far more personal than the first one. This one [first post] is more of a restatement and gave a couple of opinions, but this [recent post] gave more of a deeper connection to something that I felt more personally." She thought the change occurred because "I probably became more comfortable with it [the blog], and with practice, I probably got better or

maybe I connected more with this book [*Mockingbird*] than with this one [*Romeo and Juliet*].

She believes that the change in her response to the literature occurs because of practice or because of her engagement with the text. Rhonda discussed with me how she wrote when she blogged: “I tried to make connections between my life or something I read or something that we were doing with something that we were reading or try to elaborate and give my opinions on a subject.” By making connections and elaborating she felt “it would be interesting instead of saying what we did all over again. Make it new.” She describes her response on the blog as an attempt to make a deeper connection.

Evan’s writing in response to the literature becomes more aesthetic. In the beginning, he “re-articulated,” and he “carried away” information about the plot. As the semester progresses, he moves away from reporting details. He begins to include his opinions on racism, and by the last posts, rewrites an irreverent “endang” of the play.

As the semester progressed, Carrie’s writing becomes more philosophical, more generalized, and more reader-centered. She attempted to pull larger text-to-world connections and text-to-reader connections out of the novels. Both color and image became more apparent in her later posts. She writes to inspire her readers to think about larger questions and issues by asking readers to put themselves in the characters’ shoes. Although Tim’s posts were short, from the very beginning he predicted events in the novels and the play. He was not prolific, but he was to the point.

The students in this section all considered the readings at higher levels of comprehension as the semester progresses. Their writing reflects a growing comfort level in their writing. Carrie, Rhonda, and Tim seem to let their guard down by the end of the

semester. While Evan began the semester with a more relaxed voice, his first post was a five-paragraph essay. The writing in response to the literature shows that students read and understand the novels and the play. More importantly, the students ask many questions. The quality and content of the writing will be much different when students ask the questions as opposed to the teacher providing “discussion” questions for the students. They generate questions on their own, and their responses provide evidence that students moved toward higher levels of comprehension without prompting as the semester progresses.

Students Moved Toward Higher Levels of Comprehension

In Hillocks’ (1980) taxonomy, author’s generalization and structural generalization are the highest levels of comprehension, but students rarely discussed the readings in terms of author’s generalization or structural generalization, but many posts moved toward these levels. Student writing that included evidence of author’s generalization would show students connecting the events of the novel to the outside world. Students recognize themes not typically mentioned by the teacher. When they did, they only seemed to move toward considering theme more deeply or considering how the author’s craft influences the events in the text. They did not elaborate, and they were not conscious that they were discussing the text at higher levels of comprehension. A response was a response. It is important to note these movements toward the higher levels of comprehension and to share these examples. With an awareness of what these levels might look like, teachers can build awareness of levels of response and assist students to consider the text at the author’s generalization or structural generalization level.

In the previous section, Evan, Carrie, and Rhonda all moved toward author's generalization, although they did not always elaborate on the themes that they mentioned. It was important to include this section because few students elaborated deeply concerning author's generalization or structural generalization. Beyond the case study students, one particular student, Ross, who posted as Leprauchaun, consistently reveals an understanding of author's generalization and structural generalizations. While this was not common, I believe it is important to show the potential for students and directions higher levels of comprehension we might be able to lead students toward.

In the post below, Ross's writing reveals evidence of understanding at the author's generalization level. In other words, he discusses theme in a way that may not have been discussed by the teacher:

<p>Friday, October 27, 2006</p> <p>Not Cool</p> <p>Man, that's not cool. All the evidence is there and the jury (because of their beliefs or because of their ego) throws it all away and convicts the poor guy. What's up with that!? Where's that justice in that!? I don't understand it!!...Ugh....I demand a recount!! lol.... I can't believe things like this happened all the time only just 70 some odd years ago. It's weird to think about. I guess it's hard for us to think about this because we're so used to there being blacks around and because we get along with them. I could definately feel Jem's anger and sadness toward this situation. He thought the all people of Maycomb were wonderful people until this happened. Maudie makes things better. She is a very wise lady. There were some people trying to help out such as Judge Taylor. That's why he appointed Atticus to the case to represent Tom's defense. I don't understand why people couldn't see that we're all the same, blacks, whites, indians, mexicans, asians, etc. We can all talk, eat, drink, run, jump, sit, stand, etc. We are all the same.... with the exception of skin color... yeah lol. I don't understand how someone can call themselves "superior" to someone else... at least when it comes to race. I don't get it...</p> <p>Ahhh!! The stupid picture uploader thing isn't working!!! That makes me angry!! >: (O well, I'm out.... Layta!</p> <p>- Da Leprechaun from Uranus!! You know it! Fo Sho!</p> <p><i>posted by Leprechaun from Uranus at 12:24 PM 2 comments</i></p>	<p><i>Author's Generalization</i></p> <p><i>Author's Generalization</i></p>
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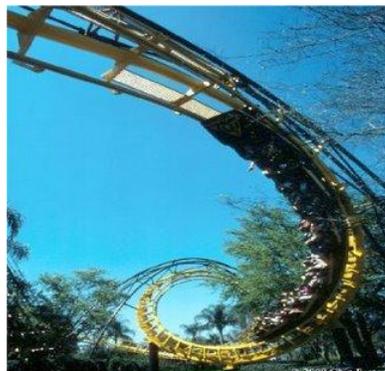
Ross compares the treatment of African-Americans then and now. While this is a move toward author's generalization, later on in the post he finds a theme for himself that can be taken from the novel—"all people are the same."

In later posts, Ross shows an understanding of structural generalization. This level of comprehension occurs when students discuss how the author structures the novel or how the structure influences the story in some way. Once again, in these unprompted

literature discussions, these levels of thinking were not commonly reflected in student writing, but they were there.

Friday, November 03, 2006

It's Been A Fun Ride



I really did enjoy this book. Harper Lee really just had a way of capturing the reader's attention. I don't if it was just the way she aligned certain parts of the story, or maybe the way she worded things. I don't know, it was really good. That's all I can say. I really just like how she makes you feel what the characters are feeling at times. When Jem got frustrated, man, I would get so frustrated also. I felt like I was right there with him through his hard times throughout the book. It was really cool how Harper Lee did that. Also, again, I'm mentioning the ending. The ending was so unique! I've never seen any book that ended with a little reminder at the end, just to keep the message fresh in your head. I thought that was awesome. Two thumbs up! lol...

Well it's been a fun ride! Too bad it has to end though. I wonder what kind of people Jem and Scout will grow up to be like. They're probably gonna be pretty awesome people. Jem will probably get his first gun, get really good at it, become better than Atticus, and grow up to be the sheriff. That's what I think. I think Scout is going to grow up to be like Maudie, just because Maudie is the real Mother figure to her. Although Alexandra was there, she didn't really help too much lol.

Hmmm... what do you guys think they'll grow up to be like?... lemme know your thoughts, I'm pretty interested in what you guys think...

Well I'm out! I be checkin wit chya'll layta!

-Da Leprechaun from Uranus
 posted by Leprechaun from Uranus at [11:40 AM](#) | [0 comments](#)

Structural Generalization

Structural Generalization

Although he does not elaborate, his post reflects an awareness of how Lee structures the novel. Another example of this level of comprehension occurs when he sees how the book Atticus reads to Scout at the end of the novel parallels the plot of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Ross notices the author behind the story. He discusses the structure of the piece.

Students Connected the Readings to Their Lives

Students share personal experiences related to the readings from the class.

Lawrence, writing as Dyami Kaga, wrote in response to reading about Thembi, an AIDS victim in Africa, on “Radio Diaries,” about his family’s experience with AIDS:

November 20, 2006

The Horrible Virus of AIDS

I'm blogging while I am listening to Thembi's diary. It's really sad to live with virus or know someone who lives with it, for me, AIDS isn't a foreign thing because my cousin has obtained the virus. Thembi decided to get a test done when her boyfriend died from a weakness and she was worried that he died from AIDS. When she got the test done it turned out that she was HIV positive for many years and she was worried that she might have given it to her boyfriend. Even with the virus it is still possible to carry on a life that is close to normal, yet, you have to take medication and tests to be sure that your immune system is not spiraling down. My cousin is living in Alaska at the moment and I don't know of his wellbeing, yet I know that he has to take medication. Every year my mother and I take part in the AIDS walk for the sake of my cousin. Listening to Thembi's diary is really hard, because I'm listening to what she starts to feel, she says that she refuses to use the diary for about a month because she didn't want to hear her own sick voice, she mentioned how when she looked in the mirror her face looked like bones and how dark her face was. She began to cry because her mother told her she might have to go to the hospital. And it makes me think about my cousin, and his well being, I wonder if he is doing well, and if he will ever move back to live with his family.

posted by Dyami Kaga at [12:03 PM](#) | [2 comments](#)

In another example, the teacher posed the question “What is courage?” (one of the rare times she prompted the students) and asks students to connect that question to the previous readings. This was one of the few times the teacher gave students a specific prompt. Belle writes about her brother’s deployment to Iraq. Belle’s post stood out

because she found a website that translated English into other languages. The title of her post shows the word “courage” in seven different languages. The content of her post reflects her concern for her brother, a soldier in Iraq:

Monday, December 04, 2006

**megaroC ;otadlos led oiggaroC;tadlos nu'd egaruoc eL ;netadloS senie tuM ج ندي ال شجاعه
de um soldado; Valor de un soldado; A Soldier's Courage**

Were supposed to be writing about how the characters are courageous and how courage has been demonstrated. But that's not what I thought about. I thought about me, my family. Mainly my brother.

You see, the past few years have been really hard for my family. We have gone through some tough times, and we made it. We are still making it. That's courage. I look up to my parents so much. But to understand why I do, I have to go back a few years.

My brother Stephen was a senior at Parkhill when September 11 happened. He is extremely smart, made straight As, and was even senior class president. But 9/11 really hit him hard. He decided to join the Marine Corps. He enlisted a few months before graduation and was gone a few days after. He would be going to boot camp then later on to train in recon. Three years later, he is in Iraq for the second time. The first was last year, and he went on a Tour of the Pacific. He trained in many countries before going to Iraq, and stayed there for 5 or 6 months. There he patrolled the cities, and shot any insurgents that were a threat. He also went up to the Iraq-Syria border to keep insurgents from coming into Iraq. While he was there for 5 months 10 men died out of his unit of 50 or so.

But that was just the first time. He is gone again. This time for 18 months. He left this August but I got to visit him before he left. This time he is somewhere around Baghdad. We aren't really sure where, but one of the towns near there. He goes around from each town and patrols and guards supplies getting into towns.

That's courage. My brother. All the soldiers there. Their families too. I'm sure some of you know what I mean. It's really hard not knowing when you're going to see your big bro again. You mind just replays all the memories you have with them. It's sad. That's why I look up to my parents. They have to go through this but also raise their other kids. They have 3 others to raise, one other that just moved out again with a 2 year old. They have a lot on their plate. They get through the day with courage. They try and be brave and be happy. Waking up each day and thinking, hoping that today is going to be good. Trying to be happy, because tomorrow everything could change. But that's just the families. Just think about the soldiers. I could never go out there and do what they are doing. They have true courage. They have to have courage to get them through the day. The soldiers, and families, each not knowing what is going to happen. It's عاجشلا valor; mut; le courage; coraggio; coragem---**courage**.

In the first paragraph, Belle does not explicitly explore “courage” as found in the characters of the literature she had read. Instead, she draws on prior knowledge and explains how her family and brother show courage since he deployed to Iraq. She includes the story of her brother, his time in Iraq, his redeployment, and the experience her and her parents go through. She represents her story through the narrative of her experience and through the word “courage” seen in different languages.

These examples are important because of the aesthetic stance the authors take.

Rosenblatt's transactional theory is in effect here. They transact with the text based on their own experiences. These deeply personal examples show that students have authority and agency on the blog. Would students in a typical face-to-face discussion have time to share their thinking to this extent? Would students, if the audience was the teacher, have shared this? On the blog, they shared these deeply personal experiences with a large community of their peers. Typically, this response would be written and turned in for the teacher. Blog posts were written for the class. Students felt safe enough to share deep connections they felt to texts that they read in class. Writers have a chance to be more personal in their responses.

Conclusion: What Does Blogging Mean for Students' Responses to Literature?

Students do not have to be prompted in order to have a meaningful literature discussion. Students, without prompting, show evidence of high levels of comprehension. In their previous classroom experiences, they have written answers to constructed responses and written book reports. In their initial posts, they wrote in response to literature, and, based on the characteristics of formulaic writing in their writing, students wrote for the teacher. As the semester progressed, their responses became more relaxed, and students saw the content as more important than form or punctuation.

The blog offered a space where students shared what they know. They were not bound to answer particular questions that the teacher set forth. They created their own questions which is more powerful than answering someone else's questions.

Shirley Brice Heath, (1983) in *Ways with Words*, shows how teachers may not value the ways of knowing and meaning making that students bring with them to school.

Students bring valuable experiences to the classroom. This idea is similar to Rosenblatt's transactional theory which emphasizes the importance of the transaction that takes place between the reader and the text. To put it simply, a teacher who allows students to post without prompting has a willingness to acknowledge the experiences that students bring to class.

The interface of the blog facilitates these student-centered discussions, but just as easily, the potential of blogging can be destroyed. For example, if a teacher creates a blog and then provides three questions a week that students need to answer about the literature they read, the blog becomes merely a place to post answers and to save paper. The power of the blogs as a place to respond to literature came just as much from the teacher's philosophy as the blog itself. She let them write and ask their own questions. The blog allowed all of the students to post and comment to each other on equal footing, and with some distance, via pseudonyms. In classrooms, even those that value literature study groups and class discussions, can never have enough time for each student to respond individually to the class. The blog allowed these forums for students to explore their thinking about the literature and share it with the entire class, not just the teacher.

As teachers, we want to see that the writing and reading has a positive impact on students. We might hope that students "think critically." In "Critical Thinking and English Language Arts," Langer (1991) explores the types of thinking required and learned through literature. Similarly to Odell (1999) and Hillocks (1980), Langer outlines thinking strategies readers may use when they read literature. For example, readers rethink interpretations, consider new ideas in terms of the whole, question ideas that lie

beyond the text, go beyond the information, explore possibilities, and reflect. For effective instruction that builds on critical thinking, Langer identifies three principles:

1. Students are treated as thinkers.
2. Literature reading is treated as question gathering.
3. Class meetings are treated as a time to develop understandings.

When discussing how schools can reform, she suggests that “English classes will need to emphasize the tapping of initial interpretations, the exploration of possibilities, the development and reshaping of interpretations and the assumption of critical stances as characterizing thought-provoking instruction.” Students were treated as thinkers on the blog. They guided the discussion with their own questions and responses, but class meetings were not the only time when students could develop understandings. The blog blurred “class meetings.” Students responded on the blog outside of class, and this also influenced students’ responses to literature.

What Does Blogging Mean for Students’ Thinking?

What does blogging mean for students’ thinking? First, I will begin with a brief review of what “thinking” may mean. Three underlying beliefs form this section: 1) we learn what we think through writing (Emig, 1977; Zinsser, 1993); 2) thinking in writing occurs through expressive, rather than transaction, forms of writing (Britton, 1975; Elbow, 1976; Moffett, 1968); and 3) thinking has a social component (Moffett, 1968; Vygotsky, 1978). Thinking in writing occurs through expressive, rather than transactional, forms of writing. Many times when teachers focus on teaching transactional forms of writing, or writing to convey information, the goal becomes helping students to avoid errors in writing. This focus obstructs students from using

writing to explore their ideas. The second belief is that we learn through interaction and collaboration (Bruffee, 1981; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978)

Fulwiler (1987) proposes journaling as a form of writing that supports thinking. According to Fulwiler, journal writing, which generally is written for expressive purposes, has been thrown aside for being “meandering, colloquial, loosely-structured, often speculative, and highly personal.” Fulwiler describes how journaling forces writers to “look, and look again,” foster fluency, and tolerate ambiguity. Journaling fosters fluency because ideas come first. Tolerating ambiguity comes from the fact that students do not use journals to record answers to specific questions prompted by the teacher. Students use journals to write and figure out what they think.

Berthoff (1987) describes dialectical notebooks, an off-shoot of journal writing, as a writer dialoguing with herself. Thinking is revealed in these dialogues when writers have a “willingness to entertain further questions, to return to assumptions, to re-assess what has been given or asserted is entailed in learning to think” (p. 14). Berthoff’s words speak to the importance of tolerating ambiguity, which Fulwiler mentions.

Blau defines “performative literacy” as “the kind of knowledge that enables students to perform as autonomous, engaged readers of difficult literary texts at any level of education” (p. 210). In order to obtain this “kind of knowledge,” students need to have the following characteristics:

1. capacity for sustained, focused attention.
2. willingness to suspend closure
3. willingness to take risks
4. tolerance for failure

5. tolerance for ambiguity, paradox, and uncertainty
6. intellectual generosity and fallibilism
7. metacognitive awareness

Emig (1971) explores how twelfth grade students think as they compose. In “Writing as a Mode of Learning,” Emig (1977) describes how writing helps learning. She cites Bruner who writes that we learn “by doing;” by depiction in an image; and by “restatement of words.” She argues that writing does all three of these things. Through writing, “information from the *process* is immediately and visibly available as that portion of the *product* already written” (p. 125). When students write about what they read, they can see the process of interpreting, analyzing, and thinking about literature. Although students interpret and analyze in their writing, they may not have an awareness for how they think unless the teacher helps build an awareness, or metacognitive ability. The act of writing slows our thinking down, pacing writing because we cannot write as fast as we think (p. 127).

Visual thinking, as opposed to verbal thinking, is mostly ignored. Gardner (1997) in his description of multiple intelligences describes “spatial” thinking. Arnheim (1969) believes visual thinking comes before verbal thinking. John-Steiner (1997) discusses visual thinking in creative individuals, in addition to verbal thinking.

Odell (1999), in “A Glimpse of the Mind at Work,” outlines thinking strategies that can be found in writing, although he concedes the following: “No written product can give us access to all the thinking processes a writer or reader has gone through. But, a written interpretation of a literary text can reflect meaning-making strategies that are as important for students’ reading as they are for writing” (p. 16). He argues that “important

elements of the thinking process are conscious, knowable, and teachable” (p. 8), which brings us to the table below. Odell describes thinking through the following characteristics:

Table 11: Odell's Thinking Categories

1. Dissonance:

Students point out or overlook problems, ambiguities, ironies, questions, uncertainties, or conflicts

- g) Students point out things that surprise or puzzle them.
- h) They pose questions.
- i) They indicate that are confused, uncertain, or ambivalent about something they have experienced.
- j) They comment on ways in which two strongly held beliefs (ideas, values) are inconsistent with each other.
- k) They notice ways in which people’s actions seem inconsistent with their words.
- l) They mention ways in which something conflicts with what they had expected or would have preferred.

2. Selecting:

Students include or exclude observations, “facts,” personal experiences, feelings, and memories

- d) When students respond to literature or write personal experience narratives, they focus solely on the events that happened, or they include information about people’s thoughts, feelings, and motivations.
- e) When they describe, they look for details that will “show, not tell.”
- f) When they try to write persuasively or informatively, they include the kind of information that is likely to be appropriate given the knowledge, needs, or values of their intended readers.

3. Encoding/Representing:

Students use different kinds of language to articulate their ideas, feelings, perceptions, and memories.

- f) When students discuss personal events, they use relatively abstract, generalized terms.
- g) When students discuss personal events, they use language that reflects the personal significance of those events.
- h) When students try to think through complicated issues, they use highly emotional language that might limit their ability to see the complexity of a situation.
- i) Students come up with metaphors that let them take a fresh look at the subject they are considering.
- j) They choose words whose connotations are appropriate for their subject matter, audience, and purpose.

4. Drawing on prior knowledge:

Students explicitly refer to things they already know in order to understand something new.

- d) When students read a complicated piece of literature, they comment on how this piece relates to other texts they have read or movies they have seen.
- e) When they encounter a difficult problem, they use what they know from comparable problems or from prior schoolwork in order to solve it.
- f) When they are introduced to new concepts in their courses, they consider ways in which those concepts apply to their personal experience or ways in which they are or are not compatible with what they’ve learned previously.

5. Seeing relationships:

Students mention cause-effect relationships, time, if ... then, similarity, and differences in their writing.

- g) Students note when and why things happen.
- h) They create hypothetical scenarios, speculating about how one thing might cause or lead up to another.
- i) They make distinctions, noticing ways in which something is different from something else.
- j) They classify or note similarities.
- k) They comment on how things change.
- l) They notice ways in which a person or object fits into his/her/its physical surroundings.

6. Considering different perspectives:

Students consider ways in which other people might perceive, interpret or respond to a given idea, fact, or experience.

- f) Students consider good news as well as bad, pro as well as con.
- g) They adopt another's perspective, trying to imagine how a character might respond to a particular situation.
- h) They think of different conclusions that might be drawn from a particular set of data.
- i) They put themselves in their reader's place, trying to understand the knowledge, values, or needs with which the reader approaches their writing.
- j) When they disagree, they consider ways in which that person's views might possibly make sense.

Odell (1999) describes how the categories he outlines can help teachers and students glean information from their writing and begin a dialogue about their thinking.

In addition to Odell's work, during analysis, other types of thinking on the blog became apparent. Students used images to represent their thinking. Students collaborated and learned from each other, and they used writing to explore their thinking.

In the previous sections, I explored what blogs mean for students as writers and respondents to literature. In this section, I began by exploring ways to assess thinking in students' writing. In the remainder of this section, I analyze the same posts of the case study students in the response to literature section. In addition, I include examples from other students who represent unique examples and parallel the thinking of the case study students.

In the following section, I report on the thinking found in a mostly unprompted literature discussion on a blog. Based on all of the data from the case studies, I arrived at the following conclusions:

1. Students' writing reflected a variety of thinking strategies.

2. Students expressed dissonance.
3. Students drew on prior knowledge.
4. Students demonstrated visual thinking in their posts.

In the following section, I develop and provide evidence for each of the results mentioned above.

Students' Writing on the Blog Reflected a Variety of Thinking Strategies

In this section, I focus on naming the thinking in students' blog posts. I analyze the thinking in Evan, Carrie, Rhonda, and Tim's posts from the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. On the left-hand side of the column, I include the students' blog post. On the right-hand side, readers will see coding, based on Odell's work. Each code is aligned with one of Odell's sub-categories.

Evan's First of the Semester Post

Evan's first post of the semester was his longest (561 words). As I explain earlier in Chapter Four, Evan's writing on the blog has voice. In addition, Evan's writing exhibits several thinking strategies.

<p>Friday, October 20, 2006</p> <p>Anyone lose their pants??? Anyone lose their pants?</p> <p>Jem did, and had a difficult and awkward time getting them back.</p> <p>Last nights reading continued on from Scout, Jem, and Dill getting back from wondering around Boo Raddley's house. They found some pretty weird things and saw some too. As they wondered around things got very eery, (sp?) or suspicious. In a split second a shotgun shell fired, and they took off as fast as they could away from the house. Not far from the edge of Boo Raddley's property they encountered a chain link fence and crawled under it as fast as they could. Scout and Dill got threw without a problem but when Jem tried to his pants got cought and he took off without them. Chapter 8 starts here.</p> <p>Scout and Jem were lieing in bed sound asleep when Scout woke up to Jem calling for her. Jem told her that he was going back to Boo Raddley's house to retrieve his pants. Scout got chills down her back when she heard this because she was scared of Boo Raddley. She offered to go with him but he told her to stay home. Scout got very nervous as Jem was gone, thinking every second that Jem was gone Boo Raddley had kidnapped him. Finally Jem returned home and was more scared than Scout.</p> <p>Jem told Scout that when he got to the Raddley's house he found his pants without a problem. What scared him was that when all three of them (Jem, Scout and Dill) were running away from the house Jem's pants were basically torn off and knotted up. When he arrived at his pants, they were stiched up at the tare, and folded. Jem got to thinking and came to the silly conclusion of thinking Boo Raddley could read his mind and know what he was going to do next. Jem was very suspicious and saftley home for the night.</p> <p>The next morning Scout awoke to THE WORLD ENDING!!!!!!! Just kidding. Scout awoke to what she thought was the world ending. It turns out she awoke to snow. Kinda different huh? Anyway as you can tell Scout had never seen snow before. Jem soon after explained to her what snow was. As soon as the last word of explanation left his mouth, Scout wanted to go outside and make snowmen!!! Jem told her that they had to wait a little while for more to fall down and then they could go. As soon as the waiting was over, they were off! Jem told her to gather dirt, (I was thinking dirt? What the heck , your making snowmen aren't you?) and snow. Jem knew what he was doing though. Even though there wasn't a HUGE amount of snow they made excellent snowmen, or as I read they did. Jem and Scout Put the dirt into balls, the size of snowmen, then packed snow on top of the dirt. Pretty genius huh? I thought it was.</p> <p>Soon after the neighbor's house cought on fire. Big city</p>	<p>Selecting (2c)</p> <p>Selects Specific Events and Details (2a, 2b, 2c)</p> <p>Encoding (3e)</p> <p>Selecting (2c)</p> <p>Dissonance (1a)</p> <p>Dissonance (1a)</p>
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<p>comotion. Firetruck's, stuff being thrown out the window's, the whole nine yards. Long story short, the house went up in flames and burned to nothing, sad I know. Well I know that's not a LOT about the last part but sorry, that's all she wrote. Let me know what's happenin!!! Peace Out!!! <i>posted by James Blonde at 1:02 PM</i></p>	<p>Selecting (2c)</p>
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Evan's writing reflects the following thinking strategies: dissonance, selecting, encoding, and seeing relationships. First, I begin with dissonance. When a student expresses dissonance, they reveal that their understanding is incomplete in some way. Evan shows dissonance when he discusses how Jem and Scout react to the snow and the making of snowmen.

Evan selects and describes specific events that occur in the chapters. In effect, although he retells, he does show, not tell, through his choice of details. In three places, he writes directly to his audience. He has an attention-getting title and lead sentences. He checks to see if his audience pays attention when he writes, "The world is ending!" and he signs off at the end by apologizing for the length and asking for a response. The information he chooses to include reflects his understanding about what his audience needs. All of these examples reflect Evan's success at selecting.

Third, Evan's writing reflects his ability to encode. Odell explains that we can encode through visuals, music, or spoken and written language. He writes, "Whatever medium we choose, we have to find some way to represent ourselves and others what we are thinking, feeling, observing, remembering, reading" (p. 9). Evan chooses to represent himself through his written language. In interviews, he explained he wants to be known

as “sarcastically funny.” His word choice reflects his goal; thus, he represents his thinking, observing, memory, and reading in a unique way.

Evan’s post is written in essay form and consists of five paragraphs, minus the lead sentence that stands alone. The language he uses is conversational, and he uses punctuation and capitalization to add voice (as discussed previously in Chapter Four). This type of writing reflects his previous classroom experiences with writing. In interviews, Evan explained that he wrote mostly book reports, summaries, and constructed responses. He encodes for two audiences. He writes for the teacher by formatting the response as a five-paragraph essay, and he encodes for his peers by his awareness of the audience—“are you paying attention?”

Fourth, Evan writing shows that he sees relationships among the details that he selects. His retelling reflects his understanding of how the details work together. He understands cause-effect relationships, and he makes distinctions about how the characters are feeling. For example, “Jem is more scared than Scout.”

Overall, Odell’s codes help us to look beyond surface errors and our preconceived notions or “good” and “bad” responses to literature. I think most of us might at first look at Evan’s post and dismiss it for summary, when in fact, Evan’s response to the literature, show evidence of understanding and thinking.

Evan’s Middle of the Semester Post

By November 19, his writing changes.

<p>Thursday, November 16, 2006</p> <p>You Killed How Many White Kids Today? That's how it could have been... or as some would say, should have been.</p> <p>I'm currently reading the book, "Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry". This book is so far surprisingly good to me. It's about racism, and that topic really sparks my attention. Learning what whites did, and how I will NeVeR, I mean NeVeR, do anything remotely close to that. We need to learn from our mistakes and this was a colossal one. But, that's just me. If you chose to show racism, just an advisory now, DO NOT do it near me, ya'll hear. I wont be pretty. End of story.</p> <p>Like Wild Emo Child previously said on an earlier post, the book is about this black family, and their's TON'S of racism in this town that they live in, you get the picture. Well one day the children finally get their fill of it and retaliate. They decide to dig this ditch to stop a bus that's been slapshing them everyday on their way to school. At the end of the day, their lucky they didn't get someone killed. I'm not gona retell the story, I'll put you guys to sleep... What I want to know is what would have happened if they did kill someone. Or if they would have gotten caught for what they did. I guess I'm gona have to read to find out huh?</p> <p>Sorry this post is so dang long, it's an important topic, you guys 'll live...</p> <p>Easy reading, till later, Peace</p> <p><i>posted by James Blonde at 7:42 PM .</i></p>	<p>Selecting (2c) and Encoding (3e)</p> <p>Selecting (2c)</p> <p>Dissonance (1d, 1f) Drawing on Prior Knowledge (4c)</p> <p>Seeing Relationships (5a)</p> <p>Selecting (2c) and Encoding (3e) Seeing Relationship (5b)</p> <p>Selecting (2c) and Encoding (3e)</p>
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In his mid-semester post, Evan's writing reflects dissonance, selecting, encoding, drawing on prior knowledge and seeing relationships. A pattern begins to emerge in Evan's writing. He begins his post with another attention-getting title. He knows how to use language in order to entice an audience, thus he understands how to use language to

make his voice stand out to a reader. By including the title of the book, he also shows that he can select details that help readers. He quickly moves into expressing dissonance and drawing on prior knowledge. His beliefs conflict with the events in the novel, and the concepts he reads about in the novel apply to him personally. He does not support anyone who shows racism.

In the next paragraph, he sees a relationship between the events and reveals an understanding of cause-effect relationship. He explains, using specific details, how the characters “retaliate.” Another example of his ability to see relationships occurs when he asks a hypothetical question: “What I want to know is what would have happened if they did kill someone?”

Punctuation, for Evan, is his way to encode his thinking and create voice. This post is different than the first post in that he talks about his opinion toward racism, thus drawing on prior knowledge. While he still retells and selects sections of the novel to discuss, he understands his audience a better, possibly because he has read posts that summarize too much. He looks beyond the text and asks his readers a question.

Evan’s End of the Semester Post

By the end of the semester, the pattern established in the previous posts continues. He begins with an attention-getting title. The most significant aspect of Evan’s post is how he encodes his writing. He continues to play with voice, and he uses a language and style that will appeal to his readers—high school freshman.

understand the original ending and then rewrite it to fit his imagination, voice, and sense of humor. And, as in the previous two posts, Evan carefully selects details and information that appeals to his audience. Table 12 summarizes the codes found in Evan's three posts. Odell's codes are not hierarchical, although students' ability to write appropriately for an audience was common for all students. His mid-semester post includes more thinking strategies than the first. His last post was different than the other two; he responded to the literature by re-writing the ending. I could view his last post as drawing on prior knowledge, if I consider his reading of *Romeo and Juliet* as "prior knowledge," which I did not. He has to understand cause-effect relationship in order to rewrite the ending.

Table 12: Odell's Codes Reflected in Evan's Writing

First Post	Mid-Semester Post	End of the Semester Post
Dissonance	Dissonance	X
Selecting	Selecting	Selecting
Encoding	Encoding	Encoding
X	Drawing on Prior Knowledge	X
X	Seeing Relationships	Seeing Relationship
X	X	Considering Different Perspectives

Carrie's First Post of the Semester

The following section includes Carrie's first post, a mid-semester post, and an end-of-semester post. The topic of the first post is about her early reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

<p>Monday, October 23, 2006</p> <p>Scout, one-of-a-kind!</p> <p>I'm finally here! That was quite the adventure, and the tester of my bloodpressure. O-well, now about the book; I absolutely love it. It was a bit of a drag at first, but now it keeps me on my toes. Scout is so entertaining and keeps me laughing the whole time. In the last few chapters, with the annoying cousin and the crazy lady, Scout was pushed to the limit. (kind-of like getting on this blog spot!) Her stubbornness and strong will shows during this particular part. When she stuggles through the rough commets and the constant torment I can't help, but to be proud of her as she muggles her way through. Even when she knockes her cousin's face off, I laugh and my mind screams, "Go Scout!" It seems crazy to be proud of a made up character, but her struggle is so real and understandable. Am I crazy to feel some of these things or is anyone else feeling the same way.</p> <p><i>posted by Carrie1600 at 11:48 AM .</i></p>	<p>Dissonance (1f)</p> <p>Selecting (2c) Selecting (2a)</p> <p>Encoding (3e) Considers Different Perspectives (6b)</p> <p>Selecting (2a)</p> <p>Dissonance (1f) Considering Different Perspectives (6b, 6d)</p>
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Carrie's post shows evidence of dissonance, encoding, selecting, and considering different perspectives. Carrie is metacognitive in both her process of getting on the blog and in her reading process. She briefly describes her difficulty and her thinking. Her references to reading and blogging also reveal her dissonance (and slight frustration) in posting to the blog and in the events of the reading. Carrie writes for an audience of peers. The asides to the audience about her process and the parentheses she uses to talk to her audience show her awareness.

The main focus of the post focuses on Carrie situating her feelings of identification with the character of Scout. She does not understand how she could feel so close to this character, and she wonders if others might feel the same. In contrast to Evan, who shares many specific details from text, Carrie shares her feelings *about* the text in much more general terms, rather than describing or retelling as Evan does. Carrie also considers different perspectives. This is seen through her identification with the characters. She almost imagines herself by Scout's side. Carrie identifies with Scout, empathizing with Scout's struggles. At the end of the post, she considers the perspective of her readers, and expresses dissonance when she asks: "Am I crazy to feel some of these things or is anyone else feeling the same way?"

Carrie's Middle of the Semester Post

In this post, Carrie responds to *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*.

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

Broken Heart



A broken heart is something that we have all heard of and maybe even seen; but to actually experience one is a different subject. When I was reading Miss Jane Pittman, I was crushing along when I got to a few chapters where Tee Bob experiences “puppy love” with the African American school teacher, Mary Agnes. Well, that little crush of Tee Bob’s turns into a lot more. He start to look at the young teacher with eyes of love, the only thing stopping him was the color of her skin. You see Tee Bob was the recipient of the plantation and Mary was part African American, making her “out of Tee Bob’s league.” To prevent anymore damage than what already was done, Mary decides to leave; trying to salvage what she could. Before Mary could leave the her front steps, Tee Bob makes his last and final attempt to “sweep” Mary off of her feet. Sadly and even heart breaking, Mary reminds him of what they have and what they would have would be equivalent to nothing. In the end, out of haste and pure sadness Tee Bob takes his life, claiming that he now has nothing to live for. All through these chapters my heart couldn’t help, but to ache along with Tee Bob’s. How treacherously would it be to have your heart stomped on? Yet, how would it feel to be responsible for another’s death, like Mary? I don’t know if I could live with that, could you? Have you had any experiences in this area? Post and it will be greatly appreciated.

Posted by Dakota1600 at [8:44 PM](#)

Encoding (3b, 3e)

Selecting (3c)

Seeing Relationships (5a)

Selecting (2a)

Seeing Relationships (5b)
Dissonance (1b, 1f)
Considers Different Perspectives (6c)

Carrie's uses dissonance, selecting, encoding, seeing relationships, and considering different perspectives in her mid-semester post. In the case above, Carrie begins the post by using an image that parallels the content of her post. The image can, like Odell describes, help her to "take a fresh look at the subject they are considering." She selects particular details that support her theme, "broken hearts." She explains the events in the text and why they happen. Toward the end of the posts, she poses hypothetical questions for her readers, and within those hypothetical questions, she asks the readers to consider different perspectives, both Tee Bob's and Mary Agnes's.

Carrie's End of the Semester

In the last post, she responds to *Romeo and Juliet*.

Thursday, December 21, 2006

Something So Simple is So Complicated!



~ Something so simple is so complicated it almost seems in this book. It is almost like this picture I posted. There is many twists and turns, smears and bends, but yet through it all it creates a masterpiece. That is what Romeo and Juliet's story is to me. . . a masterpiece. It is a tale with many "layers" in it, making it the novel it is known and loved for. Complicated. . . Interesting.

~Well, I better take not of "the topics" since everyone else is posting about it, so hear it goes. When Tybalt stabbed Mercutio, I didn't think that the murder was intentional at all. (the heat of the day went to all of their heads in my personal opinion!) Anyway, Tybalt was out to fight yes, and Mercutio was persisting him to draw, so that didn't help the situation either. With Romeo trying to stop the brawl before it got out of hand, Mercutio was paying more attention to his friend, trying to maneuver around him. As where Tybalt's anger and rage was aimed at Mercutio, so there we have the stab and the life taken. It was a fight with many emotions rising the ceiling, and many complex backgrounds grinding together with great and mighty force. With the death of Mercutio, we all knew that Tybalt was next, only adding to the complexity of our picture of the story-line even further. Mercutio dead, Tybalt as well, and now the young Romeo banished. WHAT ELSE COULD GO WRONG! I know. . .I know. . there is always another smack in the face waiting for us in the upcoming acts. As for now, our picture of Romeo and Juliet is constantly adding twists and turns, dives and rises, only making it more exciting to read/look at.

posted by Dakota1600 at [6:16 PM](#)

Encoding (3d)
Selecting (2a, 2b, 2c)

Encoding (3d)

Encoding (3c, 3d)

Selecting (2b)
Seeing Relationships (2a)

Dissonance (1f)

Encoding (3d)

Carrie's post, written toward the end of the semester, uses the following strategies: dissonance, selecting, encoding, and seeing relationships. As the semester progressed, Carrie's writing becomes more philosophical, more generalized, and more reader-centered. She recognizes larger text-to-world connections and text-to-reader connections out of the novels. Both color and image became more apparent in her later posts. She writes to inspire her readers to think about larger questions and issues by asking readers to put themselves in the characters' shoes.

Most significant is how she uses an image to encode her thinking. This post represents metaphorical thinking. For Carrie, the image is a lens she uses to view and describe the complex twist and turns of play. She supports this thinking by selecting events surrounding Tybalt and Mercutio. She does not summarize for the sake of the teacher but to describe to her readers why she has that opinion. She selects details from the play that support her metaphor, and within that selection of details, she explains cause and effect relationships. She expresses dissonance when she foreshadows the ominous events to come. All three of Carrie's posts reveal a wide range of thinking strategies. In Table 13, I summarize the codes I used in the analysis of her posts. Although the three posts do not show Carrie drawing on prior knowledge, there were other posts among her 40 that do reflect that type of thinking.

Especially in her mid-semester and end of semester post, Carrie sees relationships and explains when and why things happen. One aspect of thinking that was fairly unique to Carrie's writing is her ability to consider different perspectives and ask her readers to consider different perspectives as well. She does not seem to focus on finding answers.

Her writing seems to focus on generating questions and asking readers to bring their own experiences into their interpretation of the literature.

Table 13: Odell's Codes Reflected in Carrie's Writing

First Post	Mid-Semester Post	End of the Semester Post
Dissonance	Dissonance	Dissonance
Selecting	Selecting	Selecting
X	Encoding	Encoding
X	X	X
	Seeing Relationships	Seeing Relationships
Consider Different Perspectives	Considering Different Perspectives	X

Over the course of the semester, Carrie's writing changed. Her early posts were more aesthetic. She focused on her feelings and emotions as she read. As the semester progressed, Carrie became more text-based. She discussed the reading, gave her opinions, and supported her ideas with the text. The three posts discussed in this section do not reveal evidence of Carrie drawing on prior knowledge. In fact, she posted several long posts, unrelated to the literature, in which she drew on prior knowledge. She wrote about how a music concert helped to relieve her stress; she wrote about grandparents; and she wrote about 9-11. In these particular examples, she did not use this strategy.

Rhonda's First Post of the Semester

Rhonda's first post concerns *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

<p>Friday, October 20, 2006</p> <p>Getting Started</p> <p>This blog thing is really neat.I've never posted on the internet before,so this experience is very new to me.So lets get started.</p> <p>Last nights reading was very eventful.For one thing it snowed in Maycomb for the first time since 1885.Wow! That is about 45 years since the last real winter in Maycomb.I found Scout's reaction to the weather very amusing.Apparently she thought the world was ending.But she was really excited when she built a snowman with Jem. Also another interesting aspect of last nights reading was the fire at Miss.Maudies.Although Scout was scared,something really exciting happened.She had her first real interaction with Boo Radley(according to Atticus).I really wish that she would've turned around when she recieved that blanket!</p> <p>In adition to these events we were introduced to some new characters Cecil Jacobs and Francis.What pain these two cruel boys caused Scout.Constantly these two kept taunting her about her fathers new case involving a black man.Truly we are beginning to see the racism that was deeply felt in the south at this time.Without doubt this new case will make life very difficult for Jem,Atticus,and Scout.</p> <p><i>posted by Rhonda at 11:51 AM</i></p>	<p>Selecting (2a) Encoding (3e)</p> <p>Dissonance (1f)</p> <p>Seeing Relationships (5d)</p>
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In this post, Rhonda expresses dissonance, selects specific events, and uses appropriate language for her audience to encode her writing. Rhonda focuses on the events. At one point, she expresses dissonance: “I really wish that she would’ve turned around when she recieved [sic] that blanket.” At the end of the post, she mentions how the events of the novel relate to larger issues of racism in the south.

Rhonda’s Middle of the Semester Post

Rhonda wrote this post while she read *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*.

<p>Monday, November 20, 2006</p> <p>Terrible Distrust</p> <p>Jane has definitely met her share of troubles. It amazes me how she meets so many tragedies, and faces them head-on. Her courage is amazing. She has had to face life without children of her own, the deaths of the two most special men in her life and the abandonment of another. One would think she has been totally desensitized to horrible situations. She has needed someone to fall back on, yet she has failed to recognize the only one who can really heal her pain.</p> <p>On another note, I have spotted another similarity between "To Kill a Mockingbird" and "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman". In both stories a black person has met distrust simply because of their color. When the two witnesses in our current book gave testimonies about their observations of the murder, they are constantly asked the same questions (although they are stating the truth). These witnesses are believed to be drunk (just because of their color) when it is clearly obvious that they were sober. This situation is very similar to <i>Mockingbird</i> because Tom Robinson is not trusted because his testimony is not consistent with Bob Ewell's word.</p> <p>PREJUDICE IS TERRIBLE!!! <i>posted by Rhonda at 9:02 PM .</i></p>	<p>Selecting (2a) Dissonance (1f) Considering Different Perspectives (6d) Encoding (3e)</p> <p>Seeing Relationships (5d) Drawing on Prior Knowledge (4a)</p> <p>Selecting (2b)</p>
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Rhonda experiences dissonance, selects events, encodes using language, draws on prior knowledge, sees relationships, and considers different perspectives. Rhonda begins the post by describing specific details in Jane's experience and expressing dissonance concerning Jane's ability to overcome her personal hardships. Rhonda empathizes with Jane's ability to move forward in her life. Rhonda also describes in detail the similarities she sees between *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Miss Jane Pittman*. The thinking strategies overlap at this point. She sees similarities between the two novels, and she draws on prior knowledge of a previously read text. The details she selects support her assertions.

Rhonda's End of Semester Post

In the end of semester post, Rhonda's most unique characteristic is her ability to consider different perspectives on so many levels.

<p>Monday, December 11, 2006</p> <p>Think Twice</p> <p>I just finished reading Act 1 scenes 2 and 3 and it is a little bit hard to understand, but after awhile it kind of makes sense. Basically, Juliet's mom has just asked how her daughter felt about being married and honestly I'm feeling really sorry for her. You see I am just about a year older than Juliet and I am definitely not ready to be married(especially to someone I've never met). If I were Juliet I would be flattered that a guy like Paris liked me, but at the same time it would make me sad because I would have to leave my family and the life I knew when I just was not ready.</p> <p>As for Romeo, he mildly urks me. He thinks he is desparately in love with someone that will never feel the way he does. That is kind of sad, but I really wish Romeo would accept this fact and move on. He is throwing his own private "pity party" and it is continually becoming more annoying. I have to admit, I have been guilty of throwing a similar "parties" about other things, hopefully by observing this guy, I'll think twice before I throw another "pity party".</p> <p><i>posted by Rhonda at 4:07 PM .</i></p>	<p>Dissonance (1c)</p> <p>Encoding (3e)</p> <p>Selecting (2a)</p> <p>Considering Different Perspectives (6b)</p> <p>Draws on Prior Knowledge (4c)</p> <p>Dissonance (1d)</p> <p>Seeing Relationships (5d)</p> <p>Considers Different Perspectives (6b,6e)</p>
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In terms of selecting, Rhonda focuses on the motivations and feelings of the characters and considers the pros and cons of Romeo and Juliet's behavior. Even though initially she does not sympathize with Romeo's behavior, she suspends closure and considers why he might be feeling the way he does. Significantly, she compares herself to both Romeo and Juliet. She moves away from relating the details of the plot and moves toward figuring out the characters' motives. Students frequently identified with the experiences of one character, but Rhonda was one of the few who considered the perspective of both

Romeo and Juliet, and, even though she disagrees with Romeo, she attempts to consider his side of the story. She draws on prior knowledge when she considers how the same events would influence her thinking and behavior, and she consider the events in terms of her own experiences, noting between herself and the characters,

Table 14: Odell's Categories Reflected in Rhonda's Writing

First Post	Mid-Semester Post	End of Semester Post
	Dissonance	Dissonance
Selecting	Selecting	Selecting
Encoding	Encoding	Encoding
X	Drawing on Prior Knowledge	Drawing on Prior Knowledge
X	Seeing relationships	Seeing relationships
X	Considering Different Perspectives	Considering Different Perspectives

Table 14 reflects the thinking strategies most apparent in Rhonda's posts, and we can see more clearly that between Rhonda's first and mid-semester posts she employed more thinking strategies and higher-level thinking strategies. In all three posts, Rhonda uses language to clearly articulate her ideas. Her writing is controlled, especially in her first post. She may continue to have a perception that writing is a tool for answering questions rather than a tool for exploring answers.

In an interview with Rhonda, I asked her to read her first post and then her most recent post and describe what she noticed: "I notice that the last one that I did is far more personal than the first one. This one [first post] is more of a restatement and gave a couple of opinions, but this [recent post] gave more of a deeper connection to something

that I felt more personally.” She thought the change occurred because “I probably became more comfortable with it [the blog], and with practice, I probably got better or maybe I connected more with this book [*Mockingbird*] than with this one [*Romeo and Juliet*].

She believes that the change in her writing occurred because of practice or because of her engagement with the text. Rhonda discussed with me how she wrote when she blogged: “I tried to make connections between my life or something I read or something that we were doing with something that we were reading or try to elaborate and give my opinions on a subject.” By making connections and elaborating she felt “it would be interesting instead of saying what we did all over again. Make it new.”

Tim’s First Post of the Semester

In the following section, I analyze the thinking in three of Tim’s posts.

<p>Friday, October 27, 2006</p> <p>Atticus is Awesome</p> <p>Atticus is not only a good father, but a good lawyer. He really knows what he is doing in the court room. I bet he was assigned Tom Robinson's case because the judge knew that he had a good chance of proving Tom innocent. I think there are a lot of good people in Maycomb, like Atticus, but there are also some mean and racist people. I think Tom Robinson is innocent, the jury will make him guilty because he is black.</p> <p><i>posted by Tim at 11:55 AM</i></p>	<p>Encoding (3e) Selecting (2a) Seeing Relationships (5b) Seeing Relationships (5c) Seeing Relationships (5b, 5c)</p>
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In Tim’s first post of the semester, his writing includes examples of selecting and seeing relationships. In terms of selecting, Tim focuses on the motivation of the characters, such as the judge. This particular post reveals Tim’s ability to see relationships. He looks at the events and considers how these events might lead to another event. Essentially, Tim infers future events based on what he has read. He hypothesizes scenarios based on the events in the novel. Tim chooses words that fit his audience. His language is not emotional. He is to the point, and he speculates about future events in the novel.

Tim’s Mid- Semester Post

In this post, Tim discusses *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*:

<p>Friday, November 17, 2006</p> <p>ROLL OF THUNDER, HEAR MY CRY</p> <p>So far, i think this book is pretty slow. Most books are at the beginning, but the walk to school took up about 15 pages. Hopefully it will get interesting. The giant stranger may provide some excitement. I can tell that this book talks about racism a lot. Like when the white bus speeds by the black kids and gets Little Man dirty.</p> <p><i>posted by baseballsock at 11:25 AM</i></p>	<p>Drawing on Prior Knowledge (4a) Dissonance (1f) Seeing Relationships (5b) Selecting (2b)</p>
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Tim’s mid-semester post shows the following thinking strategies: dissonance, selecting, drawing on prior knowledge, and seeing relationships. Tim draws on prior knowledge when he compares the structure of the novel to previous books he has read. He expresses dissonance when he describes how the book is not engaging him as quickly as others. He once again hypothesizes about the “giant stranger” and predicts that he may play a larger part in the novel.

Tim's End of the Semester Posts

In this section, I included two of Tim's posts.

<p>Tuesday, December 12, 2006</p> <p>What?</p>  <p>I'm sorry but I can not understand a word in Romeo and Juliet. All that "Where art thou?" just doesn't make sense. I think the translated version of R&J will really help me out. I'll just have to read both versions.</p> <p><i>posted by baseballsock at 8:23 PM</i></p>	<p>Dissonance (1a) Encoding (3e)</p>
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The first post reflects Tim's dissonance. His post reflects his frustration with the play. He just does not understand what occurs. By the next week, Tim moves beyond this confusion.

<p>Monday, December 18, 2006</p> <p>Balcony Scene</p>  <p>The balcony scene is the best! The most famous line in the whole play, "Oh Romeo, Romeo. Wherefore art thou Romeo?" is in the balcony scene. I like the conversation between the two, and how Juliet can't quite go inside and Romeo can't quite walk away. It was my favorite scene so far.</p> <p><i>posted by baseballsock at 9:14 PM</i></p>	<p>Encoding (3e) Selecting (2b, 2c) Seeing Relationships (5a)</p>
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Fulwiler (1987) describes journaling as the ability to look and look again, to inquire.

Moffett (1968) describes thinking as the ability to return to an old thought. Tim does this in these two posts. In one of his end of the semester posts, he writes about how he does not understand the play and how he does not understand “Wherefore art thou, Romeo?” He returns to the same idea the following week, but this time he celebrates his understanding. By the following week, “wherefore art thou” is his favorite line.

Table 15: Odell’s Categories Reflected in Tim’s Posts

First Post	Mid-Semester Post	End of Semester Post
X	Dissonance	Dissonance
Selecting	Selecting	Selecting
Encoding	Encoding	Encoding
X	Drawing on Prior Knowledge	X
Seeing Relationships	Seeing Relationships	Seeing Relationships
X	X	X

Odell’s work provides a framework for looking closely at students’ writing, helping both teachers and students to identify the thinking that occurs. The students’ use a variety of thinking strategies which are reflected in the writing on the blog. Students tended to include more examples of dissonant thinking as the semester progressed. Students frequently included observations, details, and feelings within their posts (selecting). They all used appropriate language for the audience they were writing for (encoding/representing). In the initial post of the semester, none of the students drew on prior knowledge or considered different perspectives. In fact, only Tim considered cause-

effect relationships, or discussed relationships in the first post of the semester. By mid-semester, the students used more thinking strategies than in the first post of the semester. This was in part due to the students' openness to share. As they wrote on the blog, they became more confident in their writing, their responses, and their ability to generate ideas. Dissonance is one strategy that Odell outlines that seems especially important. In the section, I analyze examples of dissonance among the case study students and other students in the class.

Students Expressed Dissonance in Their Writing

Odell (1999) defines "dissonance" as the feeling that "things just don't add up." Blau (2003) in *The Literature Workshop* discusses dissonance in terms of literature instruction: "Confusion often represents an advanced state of understanding and yields the best opportunity we have in classrooms to help students advance in their knowledge" (p. 209). The case study students included dissonance in their posts, but this willingness to suspend closure was prevalent among many of the students. Pulling out students' examples of dissonance in their posts is important because it is rare that students consider and explore ideas instead of answering questions.

In the beginning of the semester, students ask questions and express confusion with the reading and the blogging. For example, in week one and week two, approximately 30% of posts contained dissonance. In the weeks following, examples of dissonance dropped off. As they became more comfortable with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, student writing included fewer examples of dissonance until they began reading *Romeo and Juliet*. The blog then became a place for them to share their confusion at the language and to share links that might help "translate" the language of the play. The

ability to express dissonance, “pointing out problems, ambiguities, ironies, questions, uncertainties, or conflicts” helps students to focus on meaning-making rather than answer-giving. If they needed help, by blogging about their dissonance they receive help from their peers instead of the teacher. Kasey wrote the following post which reflected several examples of dissonant thinking:

<p>Friday, October 20, 2006</p> <p>So far.....</p> <p>At first I really didn't understand the book. The first three chapters kind of flew right over my head. I would get frustrated having to re-read pages two and three times. finally in about chapter four or five, I began to understand a lot better. Now I am enjoying the book. It just keeps pulling me in and I really like reading it and following along.</p> <p>I really liked last night's reading. I found it really funny when Scout woke up, she looked out the window and saw snow for the first time and shouted,"The world's endin', Atticus!!" I just don't understand who could be that afraid of snow, but I guess I can understand if you've never seen it, it might appear a little strange.</p> <p>I couldn't help but laugh when Jem and Scout kept repating they didn't want to waste the snow, and took Maudie's snow out of her yard, using her peach basket. Why would you want to take snow, like that? It just seemed strange. Funny, but strange.</p> <p>I also got a little frustrated while Scout and Jem watched Miss Maudie's house burn down in the middle of the night, and later came to find out that the blanket wrapped around Scout, that no one noticed, was put there by Boo Radley. It just made me let out a big,"ugh!" I couldn't beleive it.</p> <p>-kt_hxc <i>posted by kt_hxc at 11:49 AM 1 comments</i></p>	<p>Reading Process</p> <p>Dissonance about reading process</p> <p>Dissonance</p> <p>Dissonance</p> <p>Dissonance</p> <p>Dissonance</p>
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Cynthia’s post about *Romeo and Juliet* reflects her dissonance with the events as well:

<p>December 21, 2006</p> <p>YOUNG LOVE</p>  <p>How can it be that so many young people our age fall in love? I admit, I have...really. I'm sure alot of you know what I am talking about because I was in a very public relationship for almost 2 years.</p> <p>Anyway, in Romeo and Juliet, they "fall in love" very very fast. It keeps me wondering where the downhill part is because in alot of relationships these days, they lead to break-ups and in marriage, sometimes divorce. I am by no means agreeing with those things because they both really suck because obviously there are broken hearts and all of that stuff...</p> <p>I was just really fascinated about how Shakespeare has written Romeo and Juliet's feeling because he has almost nailed it..we teenegers fall for people pretty fast...well, not all of us, but alot of us just dive head first into love.</p> <p>So let me know how you guys (and girls C:) feel about this topic.</p> <p><i>posted by *-ThatsHot~* at 11:38 AM 3 comments</i></p>	<p>Dissonance</p> <p>Dissonance</p> <p>Dissonance</p>
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Dissonance in their posts is expressed as questions but also as confusion. There is a sense that these students explore and consider what these ideas mean. In one focus group interview, students described their previous experiences with book talks, which were literature discussion groups. The group was led by a community person who would come

in to discuss the book with them. Kris liked the blog better: “On the blog you can talk about different things instead of strictly about the book. On the blog, we have more say.” Ross explained that they had to stay “on-topic” in the book talk. The leaders would give the small group two questions. Instead of helping or guiding students, the questions obstructed discussion. The book discussion became an assignment, questions to answers, and students lost interest. Dissonance is important because the students saw the blog as the place where they formulated questions. This was empowering and unique. A short excerpt from an interview with Karen makes this point:

KF: How is that handwritten response the same or different than your blog?

Karen: Because we can ask the questions. When they’re written for you, you just answer back.

Students Drew on Prior Knowledge

In the response to literature section, I use some of the same blog posts. In Hillocks’ hierarchy, higher levels of inference and comprehension are achieved when students connect readings to previous readings. This ability to draw on prior knowledge also reveals higher levels of thinking. According to Odell, a student “draws on prior knowledge,” when she explicitly connects her reading and/or writing to things she knows. As students posted to the blog, they drew on prior knowledge in several ways: 1) they shared connections to personal experiences in relation to the readings; 2) they connected their response to the literature to other classes; and 3) they connected their reading to movies and television.

Lawrence, in response to reading about Thembi, an AIDS victim in Africa, on “Radio Diaries,” drew on prior knowledge and shared his experience with AIDS:

November 20, 2006

The Horrible Virus of AIDS

I'm blogging while I am listening to Thembi's diary. It's really sad to live with virus or know someone who lives with it, for me, AIDS isn't a foreign thing because my cousin has obtained the virus. Thembi decided to get a test done when her boyfriend died from a weakness and she was worried that he died from AIDS. When she got the test done it turned out that she was HIV positive for many years and she was worried that she might have given it to her boyfriend. Even with the virus it is still possible to carry on a life that is close to normal, yet, you have to take medication and tests to be sure that your immune system is not spiraling down. My cousin is living in Alaska at the moment and I don't know of his wellbeing, yet I know that he has to take medication. Every year my mother and I take part in the AIDS walk for the sake of my cousin. Listening to Thembi's diary is really hard, because I'm listening to what she starts to feel, she says that she refuses to use the diary for about a month because she didn't want to hear her own sick voice, she mentioned how when she looked in the mirror her face looked like bones and how dark her face was. She began to cry because her mother told her she might have to go to the hospital. And it makes me think about my cousin, and his well being, I wonder if he is doing well, and if he will ever move back to live with his family.

posted by *Dyami Kaga* at [12:03 PM](#) | [2 comments](#)

In his post, Lawrence draws on personal knowledge of his cousin's struggle with HIV to understand and relate to Thembi's own experience. He also selects details from Thembi's story that show the pain she goes through as she sickens and relates her experiences to what he imagines his own cousin might be going through. Besides drawing on personal knowledge, he compares Thembi and his cousin, thus seeing relationships between two similar experiences.

In another example, the teacher posed the question "What is courage?" Students were asked to answer the question in relation to their reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "Radio Diaries," *A Wreath for Emmett Till*, and *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. Belle, who in an interview later explained that she did not follow directions, wrote about her brother's deployment to Iraq. Belle's post stood out because of her title. She found a website that translated English into other languages. The title of her post shows the word

“courage” in eleven different languages. The content of her post reflects her concern for her brother, a soldier in Iraq:

Monday, December 04, 2006

'd egaruoc eL ;netadloS senie tuM شجاعه un soldat;Coraggio del soldato; Coragem de um soldado; Valor de un soldado; A Soldier's Courage

Were supposed to be writing about how the characters are courageous and how courage has been demonstrated. But thats not what I thought about. I thought about me, my family. Mainly my brother.

You see, the past few years have been really hard for my family. We have gone through some tough times, and we made it. We are still making it. Thats courage. I look up to my parents so much. But to understand why i do, i have to go back a few years.

My brother Stephen was a senior at Parkview when September 11 happened. He is extremely smart, made straight As, and was even senior class president. But 9/11 really hit him hard. He decided to join the Marine Corps. He enlisted a few months before graduation and was gone a few days after. He would be going to boot camp then later on to train in recon. Three years later, he is in Iraq for the second time. The first was last year, and he went on a Tour of the Pacific. He trained in many countries before going to Iraq, and stayed there for 5 or 6 months. There he patrolled the cities, and shot any insurgents that were a threat. He also went up to the Iraq-Syrain border to keep insugrents from coming into Iraq. While he was there for 5 months 10 men died out of his unit of 50 or so.

But that was just the first time. He is gone again. This time for 18 months. He left this August but I got to visit him before he left. This time he is somewhere around Baghdad. We arent really sure where, but one of the towns near there. He goes around from each town and patrolles and guards supplies getting into towns.

Thats courage. My brother. All the soldiers there. Their families too. Im sure some of you know what i mean. Its really hard not knowing when your going to see your big bro again. You mind just replays all the memories you have with them. Its sad. Thats why i look up to my parents. They have to go through this but also raise their other kids. They have 3 others to raise, one other that just moved out again with a 2 year old. They have a lot on their plate. They get through the day with courage. They try and be brave and be happy. Waking up each day and thinking, hoping that today is going to be good. Trying to be happy, becuase tomorrow everything could change. But thats just the families. Just think about the soldiers. I could never go out there and do what they are doing. They have true courage. They have to have courage to get them through the day. The soldiers, and families, each not knowing what is going to happen. Its عاجش لـ valor; mut; le courage; coraggio; coragem---**courage**.

In the first paragraph, Belle’s does not explore courage found in characters of the literature she had read, thus explaining her comment about not following directions. Instead, she shares draws on prior knowledge and explains how her family and brother have been courageous since he deployed to Iraq. She includes the story of her brother, his time in Iraq, his redeployment, and the experience she and her parents go through. She represents her story through the narrative of her experience and uniquely through the word “courage” seen in different languages. It is interesting to note that while Mrs.

Jones's prompt led Belle to write about this experience. Belle still felt like her post was "off topic."

Several students drew on prior knowledge by sharing experiences and learning from other classes. Hank describes how his Speech teacher discusses Atticus:

Mr. Snowman

i think it was quite humorous when jem and scout made their "Snowman." i also think it was quite racist when they made sure to cover up the dirt snow man because it looked like a black person. i was surprised that atticus was not mad when the kids dug up the dirt in the backyard. i also think that atticus was right when he said that ms. maudie was secretly pleased with their work.

today in my speech class mr. [I@#&\\$s](#) said that he was reading a book called the 101 Most Influential People That Never Lived (a book about famous literary characters or etc.). in the book it says that atticus is one of the most influential people. i think this is because he is a model parent and citizen. he always knows the best way to say things. harper lee did a great job of creating him.

ms. maudie handled her situation very well. although i do think she was hiding in her feelings. what do you think? the only thing that she could have been happy about is the men in the neighborhood saved most of her furniture.

it was very nice that the men banded together to help ms. maudie. i do not think that people today would have done the same thing that they did back then. people were really considerate of their neighbors back then.

Posted by Hank Hill at [11:46 AM](#) | [2 comments](#)

Stryker draws on prior knowledge by connecting the *To Kill a Mockingbird* to the moving "Driving Miss Daisy."

Driving Miss Mockingbird

As I was reading about Aunt Alexandria, in the book, it reminded me of this old movie I watched called "Driving Miss Daisy". It was about this old lady who is white, and here driver who is black. Throughout the story the old woman is always trying to prove that her driver is a bad person, just because he is black. Everytime she throws him a curve ball, he passes the test with flying colors. In the end they become the best of friends and Miss Daisy overcomes her stubbornness of being partly racist.

Can you believe people's thinking back then. I can't believe how stubborn and barbaric their thinking was. How can someone not like someone just for the color of their skin. They don't even know the person and they already dislike them. Did you know that they used to have different water fountains, schools, train cars, everything, for black people and white people. They used to say if someone was black or white, but the more important thing is that everyone is a PERSON, with feelings, emotions, and thoughts. I hate segregation and I think it should be outlawed. I know, I know, it's a free country, yada yada yada, that's not the point. Racism is wrong no matter what you say. That's what I think about segregation.

Anyway, the way Aunt Alexandria treats Calpurnia reminded me of the way Miss Daisy treated her driver. People need to get out of the mind-set of segregation and racism and get back to the real world. We should all treat each other as equals. Remember the words "All men (and women) are created equal". We should live and abide by those words. If we do that the world would be a much better place.

Posted by Stryker at [11:32 AM](#) | [2 comments](#)

Lucy, after listening to "Radio Diaries," connect Laura's fight with cystic fibrosis to a television show on Discovery Channel and includes a link to the website.

Weak lungs, Strong heart

After hearing about Laura, a woman suffering from a serious lung condition, I learned about what kinds of difficult obstacles people like her were forced to overcome. I knew that people like her suffered, but I had no idea how really horrible it was. She suffered from CF, a disease that weakens your breathing. It was a very sad recording and even put one interviewer in tears, the part where her Dad recalls telling her for the first time that she could die was very emotional. Shows about people living with physical problems can be seen on TLC, the learning channel. I've provided a link about one boy who suffered from a horrible skin disease and can be seen on TLC on the show *The Boy whose Skin Fell Off*.

www.channel4.com/health/microsites/B/boy_whose_skin_fell_off/index.html

Posted by The Duchess at [12:22 PM](#) | [3 comments](#)

National Public Radio's "Radio Diaries" web site reminded Belle of an assignment in history class. Through this prior knowledge from her history class, she returned to the site and searched for essays related to a class discussion in her English class.

Wednesday, November 29, 2006

This I Believe

When Ms. James was showing us the site Radio Diaries, it reminded me of an assignment I got in history. We were learning about the 1950s and our teacher wanted us to write an essay for a program that started then. Its called This I Believe. Its not really about prejudice but its about the struggles that we all go through. Every single race. This site has people tell the personal philosophies, and core values and beliefs. I searched for essays that tied in to the discussion in class, and I found Jackie Robinson's. Its so powerful. Here is part of it. If you want to read the whole essay just search Jackie's name on the This I Believe site.



"Whatever obstacles I found made me fight all the harder. But it would have been impossible for me to fight at all, except that I was sustained by the personal and deep-rooted belief that my fight had a chance. It had a chance because it took place in a free society. Not once was I forced to face and fight an immovable object. Not once was the situation so cast-iron rigid that I had no chance at all. Free minds and human hearts were at work all around me; and so there was the probability of improvement. I look at my children now, and know that I must still prepare them to meet obstacles and prejudices."

Idk. I just liked this in his essay. It made me realize that we all have obstacles and we push through them, and we make it. All our obstacles are different, yet we all face them. The major one is prejudice. It is always going to be there. We just have to be strong, live through it and possibly change it for the better.

posted by Belle at [12:13 PM](#)

Once again, a connection to Moffett (1968) can be made. Thinking, according to Moffett, is returning to old ideas. Through connecting new readings to previous texts they have encountered, students reveal a deep level of thinking.

Connecting is important to thinking. Drawing on prior knowledge can be compared to Moffett's description of thinking as returning to an old idea. Blogging was unique to students for the fact that they could talk about more than one topic at once. This probably explains why Britton (1969) and Barnes (1992) found students spoke in longer turns in student-guided literature discussion. Staying "on-topic" obstructed their thinking. Through the blog and the connections they made to prior knowledge, students were able to not only "think outside the box," but share that thinking. Mrs. Jones did not ask the students to draw on prior knowledge and make these connections, yet they did.

Students Demonstrated Visual Thinking in Their Posts

Finding images that represented the thinking in their posts was important to students. Students deliberately chose pictures that they searched for on the Internet and used those images as a rhetorical strategy and as an invention strategy. For some students, the picture acted as a springboard for their writing and thinking.

Arnheim (1969) believes that visual thinking comes before verbal thinking. Rosenblatt (1978) encourages the creation of imagery in reader response: "the production of imagery is a continuous and important part of the reader's construction of meaning . . . in addition to fulfilling such cognitive functions, imagery serves as a means to increase involvement in and enjoyment of the reading" (p. 39). Imagic response occurs on the blog with the students' inclusion of pictures along with the text. In interviews, students

describe the high value they place on images. The students would go to Google Image, a website, and search for pictures that they could include with their post.

Carrie felt like including pictures in her post was one of the most important lessons she learned during the semester she blogged. According to Carrie, the pictures she chose inspired her writing. She did not always include images in her post. In fact, at the beginning of the semester, Carrie did not know how to insert pictures into her blog posts. Not that she did not try. On her first eight posts, Carrie did not include pictures. On the ninth, she was unsuccessful in her attempt to include a picture, but she managed to include a link to a picture. On the 10th post, she did not include a picture. On the 11th post she included a link, but on the 12th, 13th, and 14th posts, she did not include an image. In her fifteenth post of the semester, she did include a picture in the blog post. After this and throughout the rest of the semester, every post included a picture. For Carrie, the picture helps her to generate ideas for her writing. In the exchange below, Carrie describes the importance she places on posting pictures with her posts:

C: The thing I have learned the most is how to post pictures and I have taken full advantage of that.

KF: Why is that so important?

C: I enjoy art, and a person's art is someone expressing themselves, and I use the picture to express myself. It's almost like my writing. It goes with it. Like last night's [post] was mainly *Romeo and Juliet* and Shakespeare. I usually pull up Google then, and look for a picture. And I go off of that.

C: I don't know what I would do without the pictures, it's my favorite part.

K: What makes you choose the pictures?

C: I usually want something bright, catches your eye, so when you are scrolling down, you don't overlook, you stop and look at it and

usually the title, cause when you first go on, it usually shows the first few posts in order and you want a title that catches the person's eye and they want to go see it, just catch the person's attention.

In that exchange, Carrie compares writing to choosing a picture. This indicates that for Carrie, visual cues are tied to verbal cues. The picture inspires her to write words. She begins with the visual before she writes. Expression, through words or pictures, is important to Carrie. Typically, visual representations are not a part of verbal in-class exchanges or included both formal and informal writing. Blogging gave her internet access which gave her the opportunity to find images on Google Images that inspired her writing. The interview above also reveals her consideration of how the audience would read her work. She considered the picture in terms of the rhetorical situation. The picture had to work visually for readers, and it had to grab their attention. She explains how she scrolling impacts the reader's viewing of the picture.

Students saw the pictures as a visual summary of their writing. Pictures were important for a post to be effective. A good picture beckons readers to the post and acts as a visual summary of the writing:

Jordan: If you see a blog and it has a picture of a dog, you already have an idea of what the blog is about.

Liz: It's like a summary in itself. We were writing one [blog posts] about courage and whole bunch of people put lions.

Liz describes a visual cue acting as a verbal cue. She expects readers to see the picture and understand the verbal content of the post. Evan describes the visual as "like a summary in itself."

In two separate interviews, students describe the importance of the image:

KF: What's your favorite part of the blog?

Jordan: The creativeness you can put out there. I know in some things you can add pictures, but in formal papers you can't. When you can add pictures to it, you can kind of get the point across a lot easier, and I think it will be more creative with the pictures.

Evan: You can't really draw pictures on paper. It's better on the blog, I guess.

For Jordan, visual thinking and verbal thinking are not part of formal, or academic, writing. My first question is "Why does Jordan think this?" In many academic works, visuals are included. In his experience of writing at school, visual thinking is not allowed in "formal" papers. But, Jordan feels like the image helps him to convey his point. His writing becomes more effective with a visual.

In a separate interview, Derrick describes how he chooses pictures:

KF: What's been your favorite part of the blog?

Derrick: Making the blog. Like choosing the right pictures, cause there's a lot of pictures. Cause when you go to Google Image search there is a lot to choose from, and it kind of and it's kind of special because you get to choose what fits your blog most.

It's personal. It's not, it's not alienated. It's on a personal level the blog is, like whenever you are talking in class you can put your personal opinion into it, but people can't see that and people can't read it and people interpret what you say differently on the blog than maybe what you say in real life.

I think it would be cool to do a blog where you just showed pictures and see if you could get a message across.

In the above excerpts, students use the visual to access the verbal. For Derrick, choosing a picture also showed students' creativity. Evan might not draw a picture, but he wanted to choose a picture that would go with his words.

Students describe the picture as one of the most important characteristics of an effective post. Ineffective posts might “reuse” the same picture as previous posts. In Cooper and Selfe’s (1990) study, students using an online discussion compete on the level of ideas. The blog became a competition of imagery. Evan created his own visual, so he does not have to “repeat” the pictures that his peers have already posted on the blog. One time, Evan was annoyed to find “Everyone had already taken every picture of Shakespeare ever made, and I took two pictures, one was a shake and one was a spear. This was my favorite because it was unique like that.” When he could not find a picture that had not been used, he found two pictures to create his word. Evan’s combination of pictures was a way for him to encode the name with two visuals. He was proud because other students in the class were satisfied to use the same picture, but he would not do that.

Saturday, December 09, 2006

Looks Good Huh



Well since everyone already stole EVER LAST PICTURE of Shakespeare, I decided that I would make my own.

You get it???? Shakes on the left and a spear on the right, ha, I crack me up...

Well, since we're already into it, everyone enjoyin it? I think that I am, I'm kinda ridin the fence on it because for me, plays are hard to read and comprehend. So I don't know what do you guys think about it. Shakespeare was such an intelligent cat, that I bet half the stuff He himself wrote, He couldn't even understand. I mean, have you seen some of his work, and in Romeo and Juliet it's almost the same way. Well, at least for me it is...

But hey I'm not complainin, it's cool. And we even get to insult each other, you ho's! Of corse by that I mean you hurry's! But hey call me what you want, all you gota do is click that little word right down there..... the word comment, and you can comment me as MANY times as you would like.

Have a good one,
Peace

posted by James Blonde at [3:44 PM](#)

For the students, the visual adds meaning to the words. Students do not randomly choose a picture to include in their post. Students describe a similar process in which they go to a site such as Google Image, do a keyword search, look through a large number of images, and consider which post connects best to the written words. According to Derrick, the personality that may come through in a face-to-face conversation is lost on the blog, but Derrick views the image as a way to personalize his post and be more creative. Most interesting is Derrick's idea to post a blog with only images. He wants to include only images and see if his readers can "read" the post.

Students tap into visual thinking by choosing images on the internet that parallel the content of their posts. Choosing imagery, even though they did not create it, was a motivating and engaging task. Students saw the image as equally or more important than the verbal language.

Conclusion: What Do Blogs Mean for Students' Thinking?

I have heard many teachers say, "I want students to think," or "Students are not critical thinkers." Based on the findings of this section, I argue that as teachers we may overlook evidence of thinking in students' writing; however, frameworks, such as Odell's and Hillocks', can help us identify thinking strategies that students use. I fear that "thinking" at school is too often focused on "correctness." For example, teachers may believe that students do not show thinking unless student writing is "error-free." Odell's framework helps us to focus on the content.

In the posts discussed in this section, each student selected specific events from the text that were appropriate for their audience. In terms of encoding and representing their thinking, they moved between visual and verbal representations, integrating both types of thinking toward the end. Students shared their thinking and learned from each other. Thinking was collaborative on the blog.

Conclusion: Chapter Four

In this study, I explored how a ninth grade communication arts class used blogs to support their, mostly, unprompted literature discussion. I began this chapter exploring the following overall questions: How do adolescents engage with in-school digital literacies? My specific research questions follow:

1. What does blogging mean for students' writing?

2. What does blogging mean for students' responses to literature?
3. What does blogging mean for students' thinking?

Using students' blog posts, interview, and observations, I answered the above questions. Blogging was engaging and motivating for the students. As writers, students wrote significant amounts and, overall, improved their fluency. In terms of responses to literature, students responded without prompting and their posts reflected a variety of comprehension levels. Students moved between aesthetic and efferent responses. Students formulated their own questions—asking and answering each other's questions. They learned from sharing their thinking on the blog.

Evan began the semester by re-articulating the events of the novel. By the end of the semester, he continued to use his voice to attract an audience, but he moved beyond re-articulation. He began to draw on prior knowledge, and he was able to understand *Romeo and Juliet* enough to reformulate the ending.

Carrie began the semester with an aesthetic post that described her feelings as she read and her feelings about the character of Scout. As the semester progressed, her writing became more philosophical. Her view of the text opened up, and she began to end each post by asking her peers to consider other perspectives. This was significant because she shared her perspective, but then formulated questions to help get them to think. Her use of imagery was interesting because she actually used the image to help describe a complex plot.

For all of these students, I believe the image helped them to comprehend and interpret. The two separate thinking processes required for verbal and visual thinking (Paivio, 1968)

may have helped them to draw on new ideas and to interpret and comprehend at higher levels.

Rhonda does not include many images in her posts. She used a Mac at home, which, for some technical reason, made it difficult to incorporate pictures into her blog posts. Her writing was controlled and formulaic. She carefully chose transition words for each paragraph. She had a formula she used that had worked in the past. By the end of the semester, the formula disappeared for the most part. Rhonda's writing revealed a high level of comprehension, and she used a variety of thinking strategies. Her writing loosened up, and she began to see the ideas as more important than the form.

I do not feel like I know as much about Tim. In our interviews, he was quiet, and his posts were to the point. What is significant about him is that although his posts were short, thinking was revealed in his writing. In fact, compared to the others, his first posts revealed much more inference than the other three students. He was very quiet—the most quiet of the four students. He blogged because it was assigned, but he also noted that he never would have talked as much about literature if he did not have to blog.

For all of these students, and the others whose blog posts were included in this section (and even the ones who were not), blogging was a motivating and engaging experience. In this chapter, I analyzed the blog posts of students in Mrs. Jones's ninth grade communication arts class in terms of students' writing, response to literature, and thinking. What does blogging mean for students? All of the students in Mrs. Jones's class responded positively to the blog. They shared their responses to literature, and they also shared personal experiences unrelated to literature. The blog was a valuable experience to

the students in this class. They perceived that the blog helped them with their writing and comprehension.

In the next chapter, I will outline major conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter examines the implications and recommendations of the findings detailed in Chapter Four. I will begin by summarizing the results from Chapter Four. Then, I will explain the major conclusions which can be drawn from this study of students who blog about literature. I will also explore the pedagogical implications for teachers who consider incorporating blogs into a communication arts classroom and offer suggestions for future research.

The study took place in one of five high schools in the city of Hillsdale in the Midwest with a population of 175,000. Students in a ninth grade communication arts class used a blog to discuss literature. In the results, I focus on four students: Evan, Carrie, Rhonda, and Tim, but I also include voices from other students from the class of thirty students. A mobile laptop lab was available at the school, and the teacher brought it to her room at least once each week. Students had the opportunity to blog at least once a week during class.

Summary of Results

Students can sustain appropriate and beneficial online conversations without direction from the teacher. As teachers, we may resist allowing students to discuss topics and issues without teacher-generated prompts. Most teachers have experienced class discussions going astray, and to imagine allowing students to write “whatever they want” to an audience on the blog may cause concern. However, allowing students to guide their own discussion is not akin to “anything goes.” I suggest through this research that students, with minimal prompting, can lead productive and insightful discussions. As teachers, we may sometimes hinder student-led conversations. The blog helps teachers to

guide from the margins, and, simultaneously, allow students to develop their own areas of interest in literature discussion. In addition, teachers still can help students develop even higher-levels of comprehension in a facilitator capacity.

In interviews, students, who came from two feeder schools, described their recent middle school writing experiences. Students had written book reports, answered questions provided by the teacher, and answered constructed response questions. They described turning the answers in to the teacher, and sometimes never seeing those answers again. They never mentioned formulating their own questions about what they read.

Students did describe, from the recent past, what appeared on the surface to be aesthetic literature experiences. At one of the middle schools, students participated in a “book club.” Students read one book from several options. At an appointed time, an adult from the community led the discussion. The necessity of the adult reveals an underlying assumption: students need an adult to lead a discussion about a book. In these interviews, students described little excitement. Jake and Ross described filling out a handout, and “getting through” the experience. Overall, the book club felt like another assignment. Although community involvement is important, students did not need an adult to discuss the reading, especially if the adult was the lead “question-asker.”

These previous experiences influenced students’ perceptions of the blog. One key reason is that students shared their responses with each other. Although a blog is not necessary to construct classrooms centered on student talk, the blog did provide one important benefit. In a face-to-face situation, students do not always participate equally. Sometimes students do not have time or opportunity to share their thinking, or they think

of an idea later in the day. The blog allowed the students an opportunity to return to a thought that was interrupted. Or, when they thought of an idea later, they could go to the blog and post their ideas. Classroom conversations extended beyond the confines of the concrete block walls.

Many forces were at work on the blog simultaneously—the teacher, individual identity, group identity, teacher philosophy, and school climate—came together to form a complicated environment which highly influenced the integration of the blog.

In the following sections, I summarize the results for each of the three main research questions.

What Does Blogging Mean For Students' Writing?

The following assertions with student examples are reported in Chapter Four. In the section below, I summarize the results:

- Students' fluency increased.
- Students wrote with voice.
- Students' confidence in their writing increased.
- Students felt open and willing to express and share their writing, thereby creating a community.
- Students developed and defined a genre for the class blog.

Simply, students wrote more. The class of thirty students wrote over 380 pages in one semester (250 words per page, regular margins, double-spaced). Each student averaged 12.5 pages of writing on the blog during the semester. Within the individual case studies, Carrie wrote 30 pages and Tim wrote six pages, but both of those totals include more writing than is typically done within a classroom setting (Yazzie-Mintz,

2006). Students liked to blog, and writing on the computer assisted them in generating more words than they usually had the opportunity to write. Writing practice influenced students' development of voice. This, in turn, led to students developing confidence in their writing ability. As confidence increased, students felt willing to share their writing. Through sharing responses and responding as readers, they learned about writing. Students realized what worked in writing and what did not work. For example, they began to notice that length mattered. Some people could say a lot in few words; some people could say little in many words.

Students developed an understanding of visual rhetoric as well. They considered how pictures and words work together to appeal to an audience. As they read, students thought about what they liked in other people's blogs, and they tried to emulate those same qualities that made the post "effective." This critical stance came from reading multiple entries written by their peers, not from being taught how to be critical thinkers. Mrs. Jones did not ask them to analyze the writing of their peers, but through their reading they were able to develop and define an understanding of blogging as a genre for their class. In addition, through sharing their work, students received more feedback from their peers than they had in previous classes.

Students found that writing on the blog was motivating. Several aspects of the blog contributed to this feeling. Most of the writing on the blog was unprompted; students wrote to their peers; students wrote expressively, which offered them a safe atmosphere to write, and thus, ask questions. The teacher did not actively participate in the students' blog. These factors came together to build community on the blog.

The success students felt from writing on the blog led students to believe that writing on the computer was easier than writing on paper. In their previous experiences, writing on paper consisted of transactional writing—writing to convey information. The type of writing they did on the blog was expressive—they were writing to explore and figure out their reading and what they thought about it. Students felt that this writing was different. Although they did not know the terms “expressive” and “transactional” writing, students expressed the difference by describing the freedom of blogging and the ability to express their opinions. In previous courses, this often did not happen.

What Does Blogging Mean For Students' Responses To Literature?

The following assertions are described more fully in Chapter Four:

- Students used the blog to clarify their understanding of the text.
- Students discussed their reading process in their posts.
- Students' posts reflected a variety of Hillocks' comprehension skills.
- Students rarely responded to the readings in terms of author's generalization and structural generalization.
- Students connected the readings to other texts.
- Students connect the reading to their lives.
- Students reported returning to the blog to ask questions and read other posts in order to clarify their thinking about the text.
- Students shared descriptions of their reading process without prompting from the teacher.
- Students' responses revealed a variety of levels of comprehension.

Using Hillocks' (1980) work, I described the levels of comprehension found in their responses to the literature. Many times as teachers we see reader responses as subjective. We ask students to respond, and we assess the work for participation. This is an effective way to assess, especially as you help build students' confidence in relying on what they know. But, teachers can also support students to move toward higher levels of comprehension. On their own, some students could consider the piece of literature in relationship to human nature. Some students discussed the structure of the text, and how the author used structure for specific effects. More often than not, students did not reach these higher levels. I will discuss later how this could be done. However, the point is, that there needs to be a balance of aesthetic and efferent responses, but even in aesthetic responses, we can help students move toward thinking more deeply through analyzing the levels of comprehension in their own response. This will also help students to continue to consider their metacognition as well.

Teachers like to see students find text-to-text connections. If students can do this, they have the ability to identify patterns among texts. On the blog, students showed evidence of making these intertextual links. They connected what they read to other texts—television shows, other books, and movies. Not only did they see connections to other texts, students made text-to-self connections as well. Students connected the reading to their own lives in sometimes very personal ways which they were willing to share with the class. This shows motivation and engagement and an amazing willingness to share. A community was built, and that community is revealed through the topics they shared in their writing.

What Does Blogging Mean For Students' Thinking?

The following items describe results related to thinking and blogging:

- Students' writing reflected a variety of thinking strategies.
- Students expressed dissonance.
- Students drew on prior knowledge.
- Students demonstrated visual thinking.

As a teacher of pre-service and in-service teachers, I frequently hear teachers say that writing is highly subjective. This reaction appears to be a defensive measure. If writing and assessing writing is subjective, then we cannot teach it the wrong way. Many times, our writing grades may be based on intuition—a students' writing feels like an "A," "B," or "C." Odell (1999) describes categories that could be used to assess thinking in writing. He provides questions that we can ask ourselves and our students as we respond.

I hear teachers discuss how "students don't think," and they might also discuss the importance of teaching "critical thinking skills." Blau (1991) responds to this idea:

The problem of teaching students how to think critically or effectively is not subject to solution by direct methods of instruction for the simple reason noted by Dewey when he observed that there is no method for thinking: thinking is the method. That is why any method we teach is useful only insofar as it is employed by someone who is already thinking. (p.288)

As teachers, we spend too much time teaching thinking when it is something that we all do without being taught. Instead of teaching thinking, we need to help students become aware of the critical thinking they already do, and as teachers, we need to be able to

identify what thinking may look like. When students have an awareness of the thinking strategies they already use, then we can discuss how to promote even *more* critical thinking strategies. Teaching thinking is not a pre-strategy. Odell's categories are so helpful because they give teachers and students a vocabulary for discussing how thinking is revealed in their writing.

For example, "dissonance" reflects thinking. This may feel strange to some. How could opposition and confusion reflect thinking? Students need opportunities to explore and wallow in confusion. On the blog, students expressed dissonance, which is rather rare for classrooms. Since the teacher was not asking specific questions, it opened the door for students to do a lot more wondering and questing-asking. Questions and confusions preceded answers. This was new for students, and it contributed to their engagement and motivation.

Blau (2003) explains that we think more when we have more freedom. Usually, we restrict students' thinking by binding their thinking with specific questions. When students guide the direction of their own thinking, I believe it was easier for them to draw on prior knowledge. Through drawing on prior knowledge, students saw the relevance of literature to their own lives.

Students processed their thinking visually as well as verbally. Blogging is writing, so students use verbal thinking skills to post to the blog. But, the Internet gave them access to images. Because of this, students could, in addition to verbally processing their thinking, incorporate images that assisted with their visual processing. For example, students used an image to generate ideas. They looked for images that described their ideas, and then they wrote. Or, they wrote and looked for images that represented their

writing. Students receive few opportunities to process their visual thinking, but the accessibility of images on the blog made it easy for students to do this. The blog allowed students to tap into visual thinking. It was interesting to hear a student say that she liked putting images on her blog posts because she could not do that with “formal papers.” According to her, “formal papers” do not include visuals. Because of Internet access, students were able to find images that correlated with their thinking, or they found images that inspired their thinking.

We think through writing. Students had the opportunity to write frequently, and capture their ideas. All of the students’ “old ideas” are captured on the blog. This is an opportunity for rich metacognitive reflection and analysis. Collaboration was important to students’ thinking. Over and over, they described how they learned from reading the perspectives of their peers. Students both answered and asked questions, bypassing the teacher as the main transmitter of knowledge in the classroom.

Limitations

There were limitations to this study. At the beginning of the study, Mrs. Jones broke her arm and leg and was in a wheelchair for several months. Because of the accident, she was not able to build community within the classroom from the beginning of the school year. When she returned to class at the end of September, she had to build a relationship and create routines that had not been established.

Weather and the school schedule also provided limitations. In early December and again in January, two ice storms caused school to be canceled for several days. The school is on a four-block schedule. Teachers meet with students each day from August until January. In January, students move to their second semester classes. While I like the

four-block schedule, I wondered how students experience with the blog would be different if they blogged for the entire year—August to May.

Students' access to computers is always an issue in a study like this. Students had access to a computer for an entire block for at least one day a week. Some students had access to computers at home, and others did not. While everyone had the chance to blog at school, it makes a difference when students have that same access at home. Students with easy access at home are much more likely to blog more frequently than the students who do not.

A methodological limitation is that my approach was too broad from the very beginning. I began the semester by collecting data on three classes. I spent time interviewing students from all three classes. This study could have been better served by narrowing my scope to one class much more quickly, and then focusing even more on individual students. The intent was not to narrow in too quickly. I tried to stay unbiased, but by narrowing the number of classes and, thus, students, would have allowed more time for follow-up interviews and more in-depth case study for individual students.

Blogs are a tool that can help teachers to re-envision their teaching. Mrs. Jones felt that blogging was revolutionary. Unfortunately, colleagues do not always appreciate the first person who tries an innovative teaching method. According to Mrs. Jones, colleagues were not interested in listening to her ideas about incorporating blogs.

There is a large learning curve for teachers, and incorporating technology requires teachers to rethink their curriculum. At first, Mrs. Jones asked students to turn in handwritten reader response activities in addition to their reader responses on the blog. She had always had them choose from a list of reader response activities. She had to ask

herself, “Do students still need to be turning in handwritten reader responses, or can they post their work on the blog?” At first, she did ask them to blog their responses and choose reader response activities from the list, but eventually she realized that she could not just “add” blogging. Incorporating blogging forced her to reconsider many of the assignments that she asked students to do.

At the time of this study, it seemed that there were many newscasts and news articles discussing online predators and sites such as MySpace. An early limitation was that parents and administrators would associate *any* online tool with online predators. While the larger audience was a key component of the motivation behind the blog, it is also the scariest part of blogging. Teachers have to be vigilant that students do not share information that identifies who they are and where they live. This is easily fixed now, even since the study ended, “Blogger” web site now has an option where only the people invited to your blog can see the blog, but at the time, Mrs. Jones’s class blog was visible to anyone although only the students could post.

There is always a fear, in any writing assignment, that students may write something “inappropriate” or link to inappropriate sites, such as pornographic ones. There are many blocks on Internet access at the school, so finding pornography might be difficult. Students could go home and post inappropriate material. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project study (2007), “Teens, Privacy, and Online Social Networks,” 53% of homes use internet filtering software on their home computers. These challenges can also be faced. Blogger now allows the administrator of the blog to moderate comments and posts. The posted material can be sent to the teacher who approves it and allows it to be posted. There are limitations to this as well. As much as

the students posted, the teacher's email inbox would be inundated with comments and posts, quickly increasing her workload to an almost unimaginable extent. Theoretically, the teacher would then become the center of the discussing again. He or she would be the one to approve and allow certain posts and comments. I could also see teachers asking students to revise posts, thus turning the blog into an assignment rather than a place to generate ideas and aesthetic responses. The teacher would once again become the main audience, the main filter, for discussion and responses in the classroom. For example, would a teacher allow Evan to mention Romeo and Juliet drinking an "aphro" and "making love?" It was a fairly harmless comment, but would it be allowed?

Students could write inappropriate messages on the blog. Students could, as they are home on the Internet, link to pornography sites in their posts. Fortunately, none of these things happened, and "Blogger" has safeguards where teachers can moderate comments and posts, offering a final approval before it can be posted. If students write inappropriate posts or comments, the teacher can also remove names from the list of students who have access to post to the blog. The teacher could then assign other work not on the blog. Inappropriate remarks are a common facet of high school life, but as teachers we often do not hear them. The remarks are whispered or yelled in the hallway. Many of these students could go home and look at inappropriate material on the web. The benefit of the blog is that the inappropriate nature of some comments is obvious and there for everyone to see. I see this as a benefit because then we can address it, rather than ignore it. Capturing material that could be considered inappropriate could be the ideal teaching moment.

Pedagogical Recommendations

Following are recommendations for teachers who are considering implementing blogs into their classroom:

1. Teachers should create an individual blog site. The teacher can use this blog to discuss the day's events, lessons, assignments, and ideas. This allows teachers a place to "talk." Teachers will run less of a risk of dominating the students' blog. Teachers can also use this blog to model writing on the blog. They could incorporate images and links and other resources into their own posts. In addition, the teacher has a chronological record of her plans for the semester or the year, and parents could visit the site to find out information about the class. The blog could be a good public relations/community tool for the teacher and the school.
2. Teachers should define explicitly the purpose of the blog for their classroom. Decide the goal of the blog: Is it to be used for generating ideas, conversation, content, or form?
3. Teachers should survey students and identify their access to and experience with the Internet. Offer an alternative for students who, at times, may not have access. Students can turn in paper copies.
4. The "Blogger" website gives administrators the option to only allow invited readers to read the blog, but, teachers should consider whether they want the blog to be viewed only by the students or by the Internet in general. Teachers need to make sure that students do not allow

access to their profile on Blogger or include personal information, such as last names, phone numbers, and school names.

5. Before blogging, teachers will need to teach mini-lessons on netiquette, creating digital personas, appropriate language, audience, setting up email accounts, and logging in. Many students may not have email and may not be able to do something as simple as create a login and password. This will need to be done together as a class.
6. Teachers need to get permission from the school and a signed permission form from the parents. Teachers can send letters home to the parents, and invite parents to read the teacher and class blog.
7. Teachers should spend time building community in the face-to-face classroom. This point is imperative. Community-building in the classroom will translate to a sense of community on the blog.
8. Teachers should delineate between expressive and transactional forms of writing and aesthetic and efferent responses. Teachers may discuss this with the class, or just be aware of the difference and create lessons that offer students opportunities for both. I recommend beginning with expressive writing, exploratory talk, and aesthetic responses before moving on to more transactional, informational, and efferent responses.
9. Create opportunities for freewriting. Freewriting each day will help students prepare to begin the spontaneous writing necessary for blogging.

10. Teachers should present and review other blog sites and bloggers. Use Odell (1999) and Hillocks' (1980) categories to analyze and discuss the writing posted on other blogs.
11. Teachers can use Odell's thinking strategies to discuss student writing. Model a piece of your own writing, including a blog post, and discuss it with the class. Ask students to analyze the thinking strategies they use in their writing.
12. Teachers can incorporate more explicit reader response activities, and ask students to post their responses. For example, teachers could ask students to respond using the following methods: articulated response, imagic response, unarticulated response, and poetic discourse (Anderson & Rubano, 1991).
13. Teachers can explain "fluency" to students. Teachers could make fluency a goal for the semester, and then show students how to do a word count, using a word processing program, in order to analyze the number of words they wrote for the first five posts and the last five posts.
14. Teachers can emphasize hyperlinking and hypertext. Blogs can act as mini-research papers. Students can research, write about their research, and embed the sources using hyperlinks.
15. Take more time to explore and analyze expressive writing because it tells us so much about how students think. Drafts of writing that are messy are just as valuable as papers with perfect MLA format and

error-free writing. The ideas came first on this blog and that freed students to think. It would be an easy transition to now have them discuss how to “clean up” typographical errors. Frequently ask students to respond metacognitively to their thinking on the blog.

16. Create a partnership with a school that is reading the same book. Share a blog and discuss responses online.

Most of these recommendations appear focused on high school students, but the suggestions can work with other grade levels, including university. In this dissertation study, Mrs. Jones had taught for over twenty years. This amount of experience and her ability to create her own pedagogical path were important forces that enabled her to effectively integrate blogging into her classroom. She, like so many other highly engaging teachers, takes risk. She did not hesitate to incorporate a blog into her class, even though this was not a communicative tool she previously had experience with. She knew that blogging was relevant and engaging to students, and she jumped in, even though the students’ knew more about blogging than she did. It is easy to refrain from trying a new exercise, lesson plan, or tool because we have not tried it ourselves, but maybe one of the larger lessons of this study is as teachers, especially in our quickly changing technological culture, we need to be more open to facilitating new experiences for our students that we do not know as much about.

As a teacher of a methods class for pre-service English educators, blogging worked in my class as well. My course meets one night a week, and we do not always have time to discuss the readings as much as I would like. In

previous semesters, students turned in paper copies of their responses to the readings. We briefly discussed the readings in class. I took the responses home and read and responded myself, but with once-a-week class meetings, by the time I returned the paper to the students, over two weeks might have passed. There was no timely feedback and no real dialogue. Any opportunity for further discussion had passed.

Ultimately, I was the sole audience. Now, students post their responses to the reading and their field experiences on the blog. They share responses and read and comment on their peers' posts. Students can delve into the questions and problems they see in their field and in the readings. The feedback is much timelier than what I could do with paper copies, and most important, I am not the sole audience.

The next issue that is of interest to educators who wish to use a blog concerns record-keeping: How do teachers keep track of the posts? Online tools, such as Bloglines, a website aggregator, can "collect" the most recent posts. Each time a subscriber, such as myself, logs in to the site, I can see the posts in the last 24 hours, 48 hours, one week, or a month. I can also click the blog posts "keep as new." As I read through Bloglines, I can easily record students' posts.

If I am recording comments, I would create a separate email account. The Blogger website will send an email of each comment posted to the blog with the time and date. I can easily skim through the emails I receive, and check the students' names as I read or skim through. Other blog providers may have other features that assist with organizing the blog website.

Since the “Blogger” website was acquired by Google, several Blogger features have changed since data collection ended. For example, Blogger now has a “tagging” feature. This allows writers to label their posts. This label can be shown as a hyperlink on the sidebar of the website. This new feature could also help teachers to organize student postings. Teachers could create labels for responses to certain texts or for responses written during a certain week. In addition, the “tags” also will help students to learn to succinctly summarizing their work, and may, in turn, help students learn more about creating and using “keyword searches.”

Suggestions for Future Research

What happens to students who experience a class that values expressive writing as they move on to classes that focus on transactional forms of writing? What happens to a ninth grade student who has the opportunity to create their own questions and then moves into a classroom where they answer the teacher’s questions in large group discussions. I would like to interview Evan, Carrie, Rhonda, and Tim, and see how they feel about the blog as they reach the second semester of their sophomore year. In fact, I would like to talk with them once a year about their experiences with writing as they move through high school. This research recommendation is not specifically related to blogging, but blogging caused me to think about students’ experiences with writing and literature in class. Through the interviews during this semester, I thought about how much students have to offer to teachers. Students “know” school, and they have great feedback and advice for teachers. We do not usually ask them though. I began to think about the power

behind the students' perspectives. What would happen if teachers interviewed their students more?

Overall, students in Mrs. Jones class were motivated and engaged students who chose to be in an honors class. In presentations at National Council of Teachers of English conferences and regional conferences, I have had teachers tell me that special education students and struggling students would be motivated by blogging. I have also had teachers say that blogging would be too hard in a "regular" class or in a special education class. In the future, more research needs to be done in classrooms that are not affluent, white, and honors.

The previous suggestions for future research relate specifically to students individual experiences with literacy within their school. The potential of blogs moves beyond having students share a blog in class. The true potential lies in connecting classrooms from different areas. I would like to research a partnership between two schools that share a blog and discuss literature.

Beyond the students, future research could involve the evolution of teachers as they incorporate technology into their class. For Mrs. Jones, no professional development, at the school or through the district, was offered to assist her implementation of over \$30,000 worth of technology. Instead of being encouraged for using the technology, her questions seemed to ignite annoyance from librarians, the technology support person, and some colleagues. Further research needs to be done concerning technology-related professional development offered to teach, and understanding obstacles that prevent teachers from incorporating technology into their classrooms.

The archival feature of blogging is a useful tool for literacy researchers. Watson (1990) in “Show Me: Whole Language Evaluation of Literature Groups” discusses the importance of literature discussion groups and addresses the difficulty of recording literacy events:

A problem in capturing and recording (a necessary part of school evaluation) the students’ personal and social meaning making arises. Once in a while teachers and students remember and report instances when connections are made, when patterns become clear, when learning happens. But too often these very special times are forgotten. If we are to make evaluative descriptions that show the learner thinking and feeling deeply, we must capture those occasions and then be able to retrieve the information in order to report growth. (p. 161)

According to Watson, recording “these very special times” will help teachers make a case for the learning and thinking occurring in the student discussion. Without records, standardized test scores and other quantitative measures supersede the valuable experiences students have with language in the groups. The blog is a solution to this problem, not only for the teacher looking to support the work of her students, but for the students to return and analyze their own growth.

Future studies should also explore students’ reading habits. Students frequently commented on how the blog helped them to understand the text. Are students reading the blog in lieu of reading the text? How often do students’ plagiarize? While Mrs. Jones and I do not have evidence to believe this occurred in this class, it is important to be aware of

the potential for this to occur. Teachers who ask students to write frequently have a good sense of the students' writing voice, meaning that teachers could easily identify students' writing that "sounds" different than usual. Using the Internet, teachers can quite easily "google" a sentence of a students' work that is suspected to be plagiarized. If the passage was plagiarized using Spark Notes, or some website that includes summaries of chapters, the passage will come up using a Google search. As easy as it now is to plagiarize using the Internet, it is also just as easy to find it. In a study with prolonged engagement, I believe that relationships can be built with students involved in the study. If I would have asked, I believe that students would have discussed plagiarism with me. I did not feel as if students were plagiarizing, but I do not have firm evidence or support to back this up, thus, this could be another area of research.

Students in Mrs. Jones's class expressed motivation, engagement, and enjoyment with using the blog. How many of the students in a class experience "flow"? What specific events occur in the class that create an environment for a "flow" experience? How does freewriting influence students' fluency on the blog? Without the freewriting that Mrs. Jones asked them to do in class, would students still write as much?

In addition, new frameworks must be constructed to assist teachers and researchers with analyzing and interpreting increasingly multi-modal student-created texts. For example, while Hillocks (1980) and Odell (1999) provide valuable frameworks which are helpful in considering students' comprehension and thinking demonstrated in their writing, there are gaps. What does inclusion of audio, hyperlinks, and images mean for students' thinking and writing? As writing teachers, do our tried and true frameworks limit our thinking about multi-modal texts and the potential that lies within this type of

student writing? One student in this dissertation study explained to me that formal writing does not include images. Although this would require further research, I do not think that this student's perspective was unique. As teachers, academic writing is one-dimensional. How will this traditional view of texts hold up in an increasingly multi-modal age?

A redefining of academic writing as more than a one-dimensional text may be in order. What is for sure is merely an echo of Heath (1983) and others: what do we know about the literacies that students bring to our classrooms? How, as teachers, do we provide relevancy to the assignments that we ask students to do in an increasingly global workplace with an increasing demand for technology skills? Overall, this dissertation study begs for a discussion of relevancy in this digital age, and for considering what students bring to classroom and what they will need know in the future.

Conclusion

The blog is a tool that teachers can use, but the blog is meaningless without teachers willing to decenter themselves from the discussion. Carrie described Mrs. Jones as different:

She's a student too. She learns from us and we learn from her.

Really it's just a huge learning experience for all of us. A lot of teachers, especially the older ones, have their way of teaching and it's their own and they don't want to change it, but Ms. Jones is open to change. That's always really good.

The openness to change that Carrie describes is important as new literacies become more prevalent.

The lessons learned through this dissertation study, although focused on blogging, can be applied to any type of writing done in the classroom—transactional, poetic, or expressive. Blogging offers a wider audience among students, a potential for audience analysis, and writing for a group of peers takes the writing classroom to a new level.

This study is merely a beginning. As teachers begin to incorporate blogging into the classroom, the emphasis at first will be focused on how to use the technology. For any teacher incorporating blogs into her classroom, it will take time, just like any new strategy or curricular innovation.

The teacher in this study continued to use a blog in the following semesters, and she incorporated more lessons using technology, including having students create photo stories. The more she learned about blogging and teaching with blogging, the more her teaching changed. Mrs. Jones's experiences after this fall semester are not captured in

this study. However, I can report that she continued to have students blog, and she felt that blogging changed her approach to teaching for the better.

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Appendix A: Timeline of the Research

January 2006-May 2006: pilot study

August 2006: Scheduled date for dissertation study begins. Delayed until September.

September 2006: Dissertation study begins.

October 2006: Students begin blogging on October 11.

November 2006: Presented at NCTE on tentative findings; narrowed the focus to one class, and began group interviews of the whole class.

December 2006: Data collection continues.

January 2007: Member check. Semester ends.

February 2007: Data analysis

March 2007: Data analysis

April 2007: Data analysis

May 2007: Received feedback from my auditor, Dr. Roy F. Fox, on my initial report.

June-October 2007: Writing and receiving feedback on the report.

Appendix B: Blog Survey

Blog Survey

Block: _____ Date: _____

1. Do you use a computer at your school on at least an occasional basis?
2. Do you use a computer at home on at least an occasional basis?
3. Do you use the internet, occasionally?
4. Do you send or receive email, at least occasionally?
5. Did you happen to use the Internet yesterday?
6. How many years have you been an internet user?
7. How often do you go online?
 - a. Several times a day
 - b. About once a day
 - c. 3-5 days a week
 - d. 1-2 days a week
 - e. every few weeks
 - f. every few months
8. Do you ever use the internet for the following? Check the ones that apply.
 - Creating a weblog or blog that others can read
 - Look online for news and information
 - Read online journals
 - Visit MySpace, Xanga, LiveJournal, or Facebook
 - Send or receive instant messages
 - Read someone else's web log or blog
 - Send or receive text messages using a cell phone
 - Post a comment to someone else's web log or blog
 - Take material you find online—like songs, text or images—and remix it into your own artistic creation
 - Share something online that you created yourself, like your own artwork, photos, stories, or videos
 - Instant messaging
 - post fanfiction
 - read fanfiction
 - look up words you don't know
 - look up information on a wiki
 - create or revise a wiki
 - surf the Internet

9. Do you ever get news or information from the following sources? Circle the ones that apply.
- Newspapers
 - Television
 - Magazines
 - Radio
 - Internet
 - Email
 - Blogs
10. Did you look for news on the internet yesterday?
11. Which of the following comes closest to describing why you go online to get news and information?
- More convenient to get information
 - You can get information from a wider range of viewpoints
 - You can get more in-depth information on the web
 - Combination of the above
12. In the past month, have you used any of the following?
- A cell phone?
 - Digital camera?
 - Laptop computer with wireless
 - iPod or MP3 player
13. Do you blog? [If you don't blog at all, skip questions 14-30]
14. Do you have an online journal?
15. How are they different?
16. How many blogs do you have?
17. Think about the main blog you use. Are you the only author or are there multiple authors?
18. Do you blog under your own name, or do you use a pseudonym, or made-up name?
19. What type of blogging software do you use?
- Live Journal
 - MySpace
 - Blogger
 - Xanga
 - Blogger
 - Moveable Type
 - Created own blogging software
 - Don't use blogging software

Don't know

20. Do you ever post any of the following on your blog?
- Text, in the form of essays, articles or written entries
 - Photos
 - Video
 - Audio
 - Images other than photos, like drawings, graphs, or clipart
21. How often do you post new material?
22. What inspires you to post new material on your blog?
- A personal experience you had
 - Something you read on another blog
 - Another post on the same blog
 - A song, movie, or TV show
 - Something you heard or read in the news media
23. In a typical week, approximately how many hours do you spend working on a blog?
24. Where do you usually blog from—home, school, or someplace else?
25. Does your blog include a list of links to other blogs, like a blog roll, or not?
26. Approximately how many links are on your blog roll list?
27. Do you happen to know if your blog is included on anyone else's blog roll or list of links?
28. Who reads your blog?
29. Do you allow comments on your blog?
30. Do you provide an RSS feed?
31. How often do you read other people's web diaries or blogs?
- Several times a day
 - About once a day
 - 3-5 days a week
 - 1-2 days a week
 - less often
 - Don't know
32. What do you know about blogs?

Appendix C: Survey Information Compiled from the Class

Twenty-seven students were surveyed in block three.

1. Do you use a computer at your school at least on an occasional basis?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
20	7	1

In Spanish class and in the library
For Spanish practice test

2. Do you use a computer at home on at least an occasional basis?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
29	0	0

3. Do you use the Internet occasionally?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
29	0	0

4. Do you send or receive email, at least occasionally?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
20	9	0

5. Did you happen to use the Internet yesterday?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
23	6	0

6. How many years have you been an Internet user?

<u>1-2</u>	<u>3-4</u>	<u>5-6</u>	<u>7-8</u>	<u>9-10</u>	<u>More than 10</u>	<u>No Answer/Not Sure</u>
1	7	8	4	2		7

7. How often do you go online?

<u>Several times a day</u>	6
<u>About once a day</u>	11
<u>3-5 days a week</u>	7
<u>1-2 days a week</u>	5
<u>Every few weeks</u>	0
<u>Every few months</u>	0

8. Do you ever use the Internet for the following?

Create a weblog	Look for news and info.	Read online journals	Visit MySpace, Xanga, LiveJournal or Facebook	Send or receive instant messages	Read someone else's blog	Send or receive text messages using a cell phone	Post a comment to someone else's blog
8	19	7	13	18	16	13	12

Take material you find online and remix it into your own artistic creation	Share something online you created yourself	Instant messaging	Post fanfiction	Read fanfiction	Look up words you don't know	Look up info on a wiki	Create or revise a wiki	Surf the Internet
10	8	18	1	4	15	2	0	24

9. Do you ever get news or information from the following sources?

Newspapers	Television	Magazines	Radio	Internet	Email	Blogs
18	23	20	21	25	18	6

10. Did you look for news on the Internet today?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
4	25	0

11. Which of the following comes closest to describing why you go online to get news and information?

More convenient to get information	Information from a wider range of viewpoints	More in-depth information on the Web	Combination of the above
6	3	3	22

12. In the past month, have you used any of the following?

Cell phone	Digital camera	Laptop computer with wireless	iPod or MP3 player
26	19	20	21

13. Do you blog?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
9	20	

14. Do you have an online journal?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Answer</u>	<u>Which ones?</u>
6	3		MySpace Facebook Xanga

15. How are they different?

- “Blogs help you keep in contact and journals tell about your day, etc.”
- “They aren't really”
- “Sometimes if you want to let a friend know something you can just write”
- “Not that different”

“Blogging is writing for an audience like friends, journals are only for friends”

16. How many blogs do you have?

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
5	2	0	0	1

17. Thing about the main blog you use. Are you the only author or are their multiple authors?

<u>One author</u>	<u>Multiple authors</u>
5	4

18. Do you blog under your own name, or do you use a pseudonym?

<u>Own name</u>	<u>Pseudonym</u>
6	3

19. What type of blogging software do you use?

LiveJournal	MySpace	Blogger	Xanga	Moveable Type	Created own blogging software	Don't use blogging software	Don't know/ Other
0	8	2	2	0	1	0	Facebook

20. Do you ever post any of the following on your blog?

Text (essays, articles, written entries)	Photos	Video	Audio	Images other than photos (drawings, graphs, clipart)
5	7	2	6	4

21. How often do you post new material?

- “Almost everyday”
- “It really depends”
- “Everyday”
- “I post new material whenever I feel like writing a subject that I have in mind.”
- “Once a month”
- “Everyday or so”
- “I comment people everyday.”
- “When I can get on the computer/weekly”

22. What inspires you to post new material?

A personal experience you had	Something you read on another blog	Another post on the same blog	A song, movie, or TV show	Something you heard or read in the news media
8	6	5	5	1

23. In a typical week, approximately how many hours do you spend working on a blog?

<u>Less than one</u>	<u>1-5</u>	<u>6-10</u>	<u>11-15</u>	<u>16-20</u>	<u>21-50</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>
4	1	0	1	1	0	2

24. Where do you usually blog from?

Home	School	Other
9		1 friend's house 2 library

25. Does your blog include a list of other links to other blogs, like a blog roll, or not?

Yes No
5 4

26. Approximately how many links are on your blog roll list?

250, 16, 335, 150, 4,

27. Do you happen to know if your blog is included on anyone else's blog roll or list of links?

Yes No
6 3

28. Who reads your blog?

Friends, anyone interested

29. Do you allow comments on your blog?

Yes No
9 0

30. Do you provide an RSS feed?

Only two people knew what an RSS feed was, and they said **no**.

31. How often do you read other people's web diaries or blogs?

Several times a day	About once a day	3-5 days a week	1-2 days a week	Less often	Don't know	Never
2	4	2	1	11	5	4

32. What do you know about blogs?

They're fun and informative, you write things about yourself and people comment on it, you can express your personality or the way you're feeling, they're a great source of online communication, they can be good and bad, you can post stuff about events, you write about things you like and do, they're an online journal, you meet new people, it updates you on people's personal lives, you can add pics and music, several said "I don't know."

33. What do you think about using a blog in class?

"It'll be weird because I don't know everyone," will be interesting, would rather blog than write, it's different but fine, it's a wonderful idea because it's a source of writing, wish we could use MySpace, will help students connect, it's a fun twist, will learn how to blog for the first time, exciting, looking forward to it, will allow students to be themselves, it's one more thing to have to do, it's unnecessary, could be a waste of time, don't like the idea,

34. What do you see as the benefits to blogging in a class?

Gives motivation to continue blogging after the class, you communicate to other people, can stay in touch if you're absent, good way to find good books, you can discuss what you goes on in the books you read, don't know, no homework, you get to know everyone,

can help fellow classmates, get to expand computer skills and learn other's opinions about books, there's more discussion, you can revise easily, it saves paper, you can add pictures, not sure, gives blogging experience and makes class more enjoyable, can keep connected outside of class.

35. What do you see as the drawbacks to blogging in a class?

Students are more comfortable reading or discussing books at their table with familiar people, don't like having to write on occasion, students may not have Internet access, it will take up valuable class time, there's not much time for other class material, students may not be interested in it, there may be trouble with pages loading correctly, it may be confusing and hard to keep up with, students may express animosity towards other's opinions, identity theft, it gets in the way with doing other things, parents may not approved, everyone gets to read your writing, some people looking at your computer could connect you with your pseudonym, many students said no drawbacks

36. Level of interest in using the class blog (1=low interest, 10=high interest).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	3	0	2	2	3	3	6	1	7

37. Level of comfort in using the blog (1=uncomfortable, 10=comfortable)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	2	1	0	5	4	0	7	9	7

38. How has Mrs. Jones described blogging to your class?

Very well, she told us about it and shared her own with us, by saying that it is a form of accessing information to others and a form of free writing, she makes it sound interesting and helpful, described it as an enjoyable way to socialize about books and "save trees," it's a way to understand books better, as reflective, as a wonderful learning tool, as a way to help us learn, like a fun experience, as a way of expressing writing through writing, as a way to prove that you read the assignment, as a way to answer each other's questions, as a way of communicating about class subjects

39. How do you want readers of the blog to view your writing?

Good, something to think about, as my opinion, not necessarily theirs, in a positive way and as helpful, however they want, want them to enjoy reading it and come back to read it again, want them to understand why I am writing and what I am before they comment, want them to think that I'm a good writer, with a hard eye but an open mind, as very knowledgeable-like I know what I'm talking about, as if they are talking directly to me, want them to understand it, as good or at least have suggestions or contradictions, seriously-with a dash and a pinch of humor, as if I'm some random person who lives in a distant country, as a nice way to find things out about my books and my thoughts on the book, to respect my views and standpoints, don't care, as interesting and worthwhile to read, no too seriously

40. What was the last book you read that was assigned?

Nights in Rodanthe, The Odyssey, Tom Sawyer, The Diary of Anne Frank, Mythology by Edith Hamilton, The Cure, Ender's Game, The Contender, Ithaca, don't remember

41. What was the last book you read that you chose?

City of Flower, Millie's Courageous Days, Striking Out, Left Behind: Search for the Truth, Slam!, The Contender, Playing Without the Ball, Ender's Game, Dream Giver, Postcards from No Man's Land, Girls in Pants, Trump, Someone Like You, Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants, The Island of Dr. Moreau, The Great Good Thing, How I Live Now, Green Angel, The Kite Runner, Back in Black, A Walk to Remember, Angels and Demons, Elise's Endless Wait, Last Week, Nights in Rodanthe

42. How much writing (does not include filling in worksheets) do you do in school each week?

0-15 minutes	15-30 minutes	30-60 minutes	1-2 hours	2-3 hours
	2	15	9	3

43. How much writing do you do for school as homework each week?

0-15 minutes	15-30 minutes	30-60 minutes	1-2 hours	2-3 hours
1	6	5	8	9

Appendix D: Letter to Parents

High School

1234 Avenue

October 9, 2006

Dear Families:

It is a pleasure to be back at school working with our Freshman Honors English classes. The students have been extremely helpful, and in these first days of my return, we've established our reading and writing workshop routine, focusing on the reading and writing process. Utilizing a workshop approach provides students an authentic experience as they practice and improve their skills.

Starting next week, students will take part in an additional opportunity to enrich our reading and writing experience. Students will be invited to post written reflections to our literature on a class Weblog, a Website that allows authors to publish instantly to the Internet. This site also can be interactive because it allows students and teachers to begin conversations or add to information posted. Students will be encouraged to read and post to the Weblog both during and outside of class. They will have access to laptop computers each Friday, in addition to access to computers in the school library. It is not necessary to have computer access at home, but it would be extremely beneficial if students could access the Weblog outside of school.

My goal is simply to engage students in their own reading and writing process. The purpose of the Weblog opportunity is to facilitate publishing, expand technology skills and safety awareness, build community, and provide a lasting record of learning. Today's literacy practices are changing because of technology. This is an attempt to help students be prepared for what's to come. I will encourage students to make "classroom appropriate" comments. Only students in our class have the ability to post to our Weblog, but parents are naturally invited to read if they wish. I have been keeping a class Weblog for our students as a way for me to be part of the class, even while I was home mending my wrist and ankle. The address for that site is: <http://www.freshmanscholars.blogspot.com/> .

As a winner of the Turner Family Foundation Reading Award because of innovative reading practices, I was chosen to participate in a study with Keri Franklin, an assistant professor at Missouri State University and Director of English Education. There will be a student consent and parent/guardian consent form sent home. Participation in the study is voluntary, but blogging, nevertheless, is an established part of my classroom and students are required to blog whether or not they participate in the study.

Thank you so much for your continued support. Your students are truly a joy to work with, and I welcome any comments or questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Jones

Appendix E: Youth Assent Form

Youth Assent Form

UMC Research Project: Online Literacies and Web Logs in a High School
Communication Arts Class
2005-2007

Purpose of the Project. Keri Franklin, doctoral candidate in the Department of Learning, Teaching, and Curriculum and communication arts teacher at Springfield High School (and former Springfield High School Communication Arts teacher for four years), directs this research project, Online Literacies and Web Logs in a High School Communication Arts Class. The advisor to Keri is Dr. Roy Fox, also in the Department of Learning, Teaching, and Curriculum. The primary focus of the study is to study how web logs can be used in a ninth grade communication arts class. The primary focus of the study is to determine 1) how do we use web logs as part of a ninth grade honors class; 2) how might web logs be motivating alternatives in the class; and 3) what knowledge of technology do students bring to the class.

Nature of Participation. You will be using a web log to discuss topics from your ninth grade honors communication arts class. I'll be looking at how you use the blog, and I want to find out what you think about using a web log in class. I'll collect and look at your writing on the blog. The teacher will be doing lessons where she talks about writing online and how to use the web log to its best uses. No names or other identification will be involved, in fact, the teacher will have you create a screen name which she will keep a record of. That's to protect you. The blog will be accessible on the Internet, but only members of your class can post or comment. Some students will be interviewed concerning their use of the web log. I will also ask questions on the web log about your reading, writing, and thinking through the use of the web log. I or your teacher may ask you questions from time to time and have you reflect about your experience in using the web log. I will have you complete a survey at the beginning of the class, and I may ask to interview you at some point about your participation on the web log. Your participation on the web log will not take any extra time, since Mrs. Jones will be using the web log as an assignment and providing computer time on Friday to post. If I interview you, I may interview you once or twice for 15 and 30 minutes each time. Mrs. Jones normally has students write mid-quarter and end of quarter self-evaluations/reflections. I will collect and analyze these, and I may ask you questions about what you wrote.

Participation is Voluntary. Your participation is strictly voluntary. That means you don't have to do this if you don't want to. If you choose not to use the web log, the teacher will give you an alternate assignment that is equal to the one you would have done on the web log, except you'll use paper and pencil or you may just type it. You don't have to answer any questions at any time, and you can quit this project at any time. If you decide not to do this project or if you decide to quit later on, your grade in the class will not be influenced and it will not influence your relationships with the teacher or the researcher.

Confidentiality. I'll do everything I can to keep your information and identity confidential. In presentations and publications, we will use pseudonyms and/or assign numbers instead of using names of real people and places. All interview tapes will be destroyed after a three year period. The web log will be public, meaning that the web log is accessible online, but only class members will be able to post and comment on the web log. The students may create screen names, and there will be no reference to the school on the web log. The teacher will retain a record of the students' screen names. I ask that you don't mention the name of the high school or use your last name on the web log.

Risks. You will not be purposely deceived and this project does not pose physical danger. Any remote chance of harm may be social in nature. For example, you may feel that your written responses are deficient or you may not agree with something that someone posted (and thus, by extension, she is somehow a substandard person). People in class may post comments that oppose your opinion. Or, you may say something you regret. Because the goal is eventual publication, some students may worry that a reader will be able to figure out their identity. However, every attempt will be made to keep the participants' identity confidential and to conduct interviews and online interviews in an environment that is open, trusting, and warm.

Benefits. This study provides a safe environment in which students can talk about their thinking and questions about reading and writing in a thoughtful way. The use of the Internet and other communication technology is becoming more important. You could learn more about technology. You might enjoy exploring this tool and your learning in deeper, more complex ways. You may better understand how and why they learn. It may also help you to develop better metacognitive skills. Also, participation may motivate you to write and to regard writing as a more important process than they may currently do. You may improve their ability to use technology. You may write more. Finally, this research may contribute findings to the field of education and possibly affect teaching and learning.

Questions. If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact the project Director, Keri Franklin at (417) 823-8251, krfxv3@mizzou.edu or contact Dr. Roy Fox at (573) 882-6572, FoxR@missouri.edu. For additional information regarding human participation in research, please feel free to contact the UMC Campus IRB Office at (573) 882-3735.

* * * * *

I have read and understand the Parent/Guardian consent form and agree to allow my child, _____, to participate.

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Home Phone Number: _____

Work Phone Number: _____

Appendix F: Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

UMC Research Project: Online Literacies and Web Logs in a High School Communication Arts Class
2005-2007

Purpose of the Project. Keri Franklin, doctoral candidate in the Department of Learning, Teaching, and Curriculum, directs this research project, Online Literacies and Web Logs in a High School Communication Arts Class. The advisor to Keri is Dr. Roy Fox, also in the Department of Learning, Teaching, and Curriculum. The primary focus of the study is to study how web logs can be used in a ninth grade communication arts class. The primary focus of the study is to determine 1) how do we use web logs as part of a ninth grade honors class; 2) how might web logs be motivating alternatives in the class; and 3) what knowledge of technology do students bring to the class.

Nature of Participation. Students will be using a web log to discuss topics in their ninth grade communication arts class. I'll be looking at how they use the web log, and I want to find out what they think about using a web log in class. I'll collect and look at student writing on the blog. I will collect their mid-quarter and end of quarter self-evaluations/reflections and analyze them. I may ask them questions about what they wrote. Some students will be interviewed concerning their use of the web log. Interviews could last 15-30 minutes, but they will never interrupt their class time or class work. I will find a time convenient to talk with them. Interviews may take place via email. I will also ask questions on the web log or via email about their reading, writing, and thinking through the use of the web log. I, or the teacher, may ask students questions from time to time and have students reflect about their experience with using the web log. I will give the students a survey at the beginning of class. The survey will consist of questions about their in-school and out-of-school technology use.

The teacher will be doing lessons where she talks about writing online and how to use the web log to its best uses. The blog will be accessible on the internet, but only registered members of the class can post or comment. The students may create screen names, or we will make sure that students only use first names and do not reference the school or city. The teacher, Mrs. James, and I will be observing the web log daily. There may be times when I audiotape or videotape the class; this will only be to supplement the field notes that I am taking. The video will not be viewed by anyone other than myself in order to make sure my notes are complete. I will be observing in the classroom on one or two days a week. I will be sitting as unobtrusively as possible, writing field notes, and capturing the students' class work and discussions of reading and writing in the class.

The school's mobile computer lab will be available for the use of students. Mrs. James will be bringing the computers into the classroom for the use of students, and it is not necessary for students to have computer access at home, although they can access the site while at home and are encouraged to do so.

I am obtaining permission to do this study through the University of Missouri's Institutional Review Board, Springfield Public Schools Research Office and the principal of Hillsdale High School.

Participation is Voluntary. The participation of the students is strictly voluntary. Their grade will not be influenced if students choose not to participate in the study. Students can refuse to

answer any interview or survey questions, and they can quit this project at any time. If the student decides not to do this project or if he or she decides to quit later on, his or her grade in the class will not be influenced.

Confidentiality. I'll do everything I can to keep the student's information and identity confidential. In presentations and publications, we will use pseudonyms and/or assign numbers instead of using names of real people and places. All interview tapes will be destroyed after a three year period. The web log will be public, meaning that the web log is accessible online, but only class members will be able to post and comment on the web log. I ask that the student not mention the name of the high school or use his or her last name on the web log. Students may create screen names for the purpose of this web log.

Risks. Students will not be purposely deceived and this project does not pose physical danger. Any remote chance of harm may be social in nature. For example, students may feel that their written responses are deficient, or they may not agree with something that someone posted (and thus, by extension, may feel that they are somehow a substandard people). Or, students may write something they regret. Because the goal is eventual publication, some students may worry that a reader will be able to figure out their identity. However, every attempt will be made to keep the participants' identity confidential and to conduct interviews and online interviews in an environment that is open, trusting, and warm.

Benefits. This study provides a safe environment in which students can talk about their thinking and questions about reading, writing, and technology in a thoughtful way. The use of the internet and other communication technology is becoming more important. Students could learn more about technology. Students might enjoy exploring this tool and learn in deeper, more complex ways. Students may better understand how and why they learn. It may also help students to develop better metacognitive skills. Also, participation may motivate students to write and to regard writing as a more important process than they may currently do. Students may improve their ability to use technology. Students may write more. Finally, this research may contribute findings to the field of education and possibly affect teaching and learning.

Questions. If students have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact the project director, Keri Franklin at (417) 823-8251, krfxv3@mizzou.edu or contact Dr. Roy Fox at (573) 882-6572, FoxR@missouri.edu. For additional information regarding human participation in research, please feel free to contact the UMC Campus IRB Office at (573) 882-9585.

* * * * *

I have read and understand the Parent/Guardian consent form and **will allow** my child,
_____, to participate.

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

Home Phone Number: _____

Work Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

* * * * *

I have read and understand the Parent/Guardian consent form and **will not allow** my child,
_____, to participate.

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

Appendix G: Blog Expectations

Blog Expectations

The blog is a place for a classroom literature discussion. The blog will enrich our face-to-face conversations about our reading. It's a safe place to ask questions. We'll begin with a book that we will read together.

Do this in the following order:

1. Read first. Blogs require reading, reading other blogs, and then writing about what you read.
2. Post twice a week.
3. Make substantial comments with specific reference to something in the bloggers post, a question or an affirmation of something in the post, or a contradiction, offering an opposing view. You have permission to not agree as long as it is supported with reasoning from the text and your experience. Always display proper netiquette.

I expect you to blog during the class and blog independently.

Look for connections as you read. Make text to text connections, text to self, and text to world connections. Make notes of things you are familiar with as you read.

After you post, the next time you return to the blog, visit your last post and read and respond to the comments. !!!!!

Length

It's possible to have too long of a post. It's possible to have a very interesting paragraph or two. You can summarize but you have to put your interpretation into the post. Apply it to your own life or to the world out there. Take a look at my blog posts on Teaching Outside the Classroom Box. Think about what kinds of posts you like to read as you compose your own. Refer to the comments made on my blog posts. If you have less than a paragraph, it is too short. What you write should reflect your thinking. Less than a paragraph will not allow you to adequately expand on what your thoughts are. Don't assume other bloggers know what passage you are talking about. Include specific quotations if necessary or at least include the context of the scene you want to discuss.

Kinds of Posts

Reflective Posts: There are reflective posts where students reflect—include opinions, questions, and predictions. Text to text and text to self.

Dialectical/Dialogue Posts: Conversational posts between one blogger to another. You may ask questions of other bloggers. You may ask for clarification or justification for an opinion. You may bring up a part of the text that refutes their interpretation. Or you may find other passages that support his or her interpretation.

Filter Posts: Surf the internet and find credible information related to your topic that you want to share. There might be a new article in the *New York Times* related to something you read in class. These posts might explain the process that you went through as you searched the internet and will explain how the posts relate to what you are reading.

Picture Posts: Pictures are a great way to reflect on what you read. You might post five or six pictures that articulate your feelings about the reading better than words. It's like a photo essay.

Music Posts: You could post music that relates to your feelings about what you are reading or relates to specific scenes. Music may reflect a feeling better than words.

Try a variety of posts.

On Friday, I will randomly search for ten student names on the blog. If I do not find two posts for each name that follow the guidelines above, then the score for that week will be zero.

What you can expect from me as a blogging teacher.

I will comment on a minimum of five to ten student posts each week. Expect a comment sometime during the semester. I'll expect you to reply to my comments, which will usually ask for some kind of clarification or an opportunity to discuss further your wonderful insights.

Each week I will post. I might post interesting passages; my own reflections on what we read, or I will share sites that relate to the reading. I will post prior to the Friday computer lab day. The purpose of the post is to generate ideas, thoughts, comments, or questions for your own blogging. However my post should never limit anyone. I only post to aid

I want people to feel free to create their own direction. I don't expect all of you to comment on my posts because "it's the teacher's post." If you are having a hard time thinking of ideas, you can use my post as a starting point. You probably won't need it.

I'm just facilitating. I will comment randomly, nothing more. I don't see myself as your main audience. Your audience for this blog is the thirty other individuals. Don't see me as the final comment. I don't want you to see me comment and then all commenting is over. I hope kids respond to my comment and other bloggers in the group may respond as well if they wish.

I see the blog as a place to generate ideas. We will use the blog to build on each other's ideas.

I don't want you to focus on the grades (although that's easy to say). I know you are all honors students, but I want you to focus on the quality of your posts and creating meaningful discussions with your peers and the grade will follow.

I'll be asking you to reflect on the process of blogging. I'll collect this information via exit passes and reflections on probably a bi-weekly basis.

How will this be graded?

Students will be credited with a minimum of two blogs per week. The minimum is equal to C work which is average. Students wishing to earn an above average grade must seek out above average participation. So, for a B and above, students will post and comment beyond the minimum. I will ask you at the end of quarter and semester to justify your score. Your justification will include evidence you will need to write a reflection of the experience and present justification of your performance.

I'll ask you to fill out an informal chart with the dates of your posts.

Appendix H: Instructional Events During the Semester

Fall 2006	Classroom Focus
Oct. 9	First day to blog
Oct. 11	“Creating an Online Persona” lesson; passed out blog expectations
Oct. 12	Discussed blog safety; shared blog posts from the previous semester
Oct. 13	Read article from <i>Reader’s Digest</i> on Internet etiquette; shared a website called “Manners International”; discussed rules for the blog; students created their own rules and Mrs. Jones posted them to the site
October 16	Freewriting; filled out survey; pass out books; reading schedule; first writing due
October 17	Discussed netiquette; Mrs. Jones modeled a generic reflective post on her blog and modeled a comment to her own post; students “shadow blogged”; discussed educational blogging versus social networking; homework was to read Ch. 4-5 of <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>
October 18	Students learned how to create an email address
October 20	Mobile computer lab was brought to class; students posted to the blog
October 26	Students completed mind maps
Nov. 6	Blog assessment assigned
Nov. 6	Students completed the “crime scene” exercise; students completed the Library of Congress lesson and posted to the blog
Nov. 12	Finished <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>
Nov. 13	Blog assessment due (see Appendix)
Nov. 29	Mrs. Jones shared link to Northwestern University’s death penalty site
Nov. 30	I showed students how to use Bloglines and how to create links
Dec. 1	Students listened to “Radio Diaries” from NPR, blogged about what they heard, and created a link to the site that you listened to or another related site
Dec. 4	Mrs. Jones asks on her blog “What is courage?” and asks students to respond to that prompt.

Dec. 5	Writing workshop; conferences
Dec. 6	Mrs. Jones linked her blog to a site about Shakespearean insults
Dec. 7	Mrs. Jones asked students to "play" with words by creating new insults using Shakespearean words and elevated language.
Dec. 9	A student in 2 nd block posted a link to a translation of Shakespeare; Mrs. Jones linked that post to her blog
Dec. 12	Mrs. Jones linked to a webquest about the Capulet ball; students handed in third draft of writing
Dec. 13	Mrs. Jones linked to a dance demonstration video from the American Ballet Company
Jan. 9	Mrs. Jones links to a site about The Plague
Jan. 10	Mrs. Jones links to a virtual tour of Verona, Italy
Jan. 12	Mrs. Jones asked students to reflect on what they've learned. She offered questions to stimulate their response.
Jan. 25	Final goodbye; students posted replies to the member check

Appendix I: Field Observation Dates

Date of Observation	Collection
Oct. 11	Observation
Oct. 12	Observation
Oct. 13	Observation
October 16	Observation
October 17	Observation
October 26	Observation
Nov. 3	Observation
Nov. 7	Observation
Nov. 13	Observation
Nov. 28	Observation
Nov. 30	Observation
Dec. 1	Observation
Dec. 4	Observation
Dec. 5	Observation
Dec. 6	Observation
Dec. 7	Observation
Dec. 8	Observation
Dec. 12	Observation
Dec. 13	Observation
Jan. 8	Observation
Jan. 9	Observation
Jan. 11	Observation
Jan. 12	Observation

Appendix J: Interviews

Date	Interviews	Block
Nov. 7	Z.	1
Nov. 7	D.	2
Nov. 7	J.	2
Nov. 7	S.	2
Nov. 14	G.	1
	B.	2
	J. and J.	2
Nov. 28	L.	1
Dec. 4	Focus Group Interview #1	3
Dec. 4	Focus Group Interview #2	3
Dec. 5	Focus Group Interview #3	3
Dec. 5	Elliott	3
Dec. 7	Focus Group Interview #4	3
Dec. 8	Focus Group Interview #5	3
Dec. 13	Focus Group Interview #6	3
	Lucy	3
Jan. 8	Rhonda	3
Jan. 8	Carrie	3
Jan. 9	Elliott	3
Jan. 9	Kris	3
Jan. 12	Tim	3
Jan. 9	Carrie	3
Jan. 12	Ross	3

Appendix K: Tentative Interview Questions for Students

1. How do you compose your blogs?
2. Do you read or write first?
3. Could I sit with you as you blog? Can you think aloud as you write your post?
4. [After handing them a copy of a blog post he or she had written, ask them the following questions.]
5. Why did you post that entry?
6. Who reads the blog?
7. What's the purpose of the blog?
8. How would you describe your writing on the blog?
9. Can you compare the writing on the blog to another type of writing you do?
10. Who do you visualize as your audience?
11. As you read the blog, what patterns do you notice? What do you like? Not like?
12. When you look at the last week's worth of blogging, which posts do you remember and why?
13. Which blogs do you like to read?
14. Have the blogs given you a new perspective on reading?
15. How difficult is blogging?
16. Describe yourself as a blogger.

Appendix L: Coding for Initial Categories

first week 10 15 06 2nd read through with commens March19 - Microsoft Word

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Table Window Help

Type a question for help

Comment [MSOffice2]: Dissonance, e and f

end

The books is better to me now because now I'm at the point where I'm getting to know the characters more. Scout really stands out to me and I can relate to her. Her cousin is pretty annoying though. I better get going. Have a good weekend

kittykat :)

posted by kittykat07 at 3:54 PM | 2 comments

Here I am!



Hey, everyone! Sorry I'm a bit late on posting, but I'm finally here! The computers at school just didn't work for me, I guess. My picture that I posted with me is from the scene where Scout, Dill, and Jem try to boost up Dill to look into the Radley house. The image looked very funny to me, so I thought it would be fun to show it to everyone. So far in "To Kill A Mockingbird" I haven't had much trouble. Although I am very curious about Boo, I'm starting to wonder if mabe he isn't real. I mean, no one has really seen him. The only way people know about him is through the town gossip.

Well, anyways, I'm very excited about this blog. I think it will be very fun and hopefully it will help answer some of my questions later on.

Have an insane weekend!

posted by pandaman at 2:56 PM | 2 comments

Comment [MSOffice3]: Identification without support, doesn't explain why she can relate to Scout

Comment [MSOffice4]: Includes pic from movie and also describes blogging experience/process

Comment [MSOffice5]: Describe the picture he included; dissonance; uses a picture to support his thinking

Comment [MSOffice6]: Reading process

Comment [MSOffice7]: Dissonance; textual support for the opinion

Comment [MSOffice8]: Blog experience/process

Page 0 Sec 1 1/8 At 9" Ln Col 1 REC TRK EXT OVR

start Microsoft Office... EndNote 8 - Diss... Search Results Calculator Microsoft Outlook ... NCTE - Printer Frie... Microsoft Office W... 11:24 AM

Appendix M:

The Beauty of Youth.

Who could refuse a sweet little eight year old girl? (I would have blogged this yesterday if I could have.) The only thing that can stop an adult who is raging mad is the beauty of youth. If you were in the shoes of Mr. Cunningham, intent upon beating the snot out of a man unless you got what you wanted, would you be able to uphold that anger if a sweet little child began innocently talking about your private life? I absolutely loved the way that this was portrayed in the book, how Mr. Cunningham bent down and acted slobber again while telling Scout that he would tell his son she said hi (I guess it was hey wasn't it?) In my mind, if the angry person confronted with this situation was able to maintain their anger, and if they went as far as to harm the little child, then that person is someone who should be watched very carefully. However, not to go as far as to treat them as a criminal, because in someone with good intentions, this may upset them enough until they become a criminal.

posted by Dyami Kaga at [7:38 PM](#) | [1 comments](#)

[PaRiS](#) said...

Atticus was very lucky that Scout showed up and that she is so out going!

Thursday, October 26, 2006 9:27:00 PM

Tom is telling the truth!

If you want my opinion, I really think Tom is telling the truth. His side of the story seems a lot more believable than Mayella's and her father's. I think Atticus is doing a great job defending Tom, though. He is prepared in every way when it comes to the types of questions hes asked, and how he sets them up. Do you agree?

I certainly don't believe what Mayella is saying. The second she got up on the stand, she started bursting into tears! I mean, c'mon, thats a little overboard after only being asked one question. I think she was just upset that he wouldn't kiss her, so she turned it around and made it look as if he was raping her. She also didn't seem sure about how she would respond to the questions once she was asked them, taking long pauses and making atticus repeat them.

I loved how Tom Robinson was so polite. How could someone with such great manners commit such a crime? Especially when he doesn't have a criminal background. I guess we will see later who really is telling the truth!

Goodnight <3

posted by ballet_rocks at [7:13 PM](#) | [6 comments](#)

[kittykat07](#) said...

I totally agree with you, I can't find any way to believe Mayella and Tom, well, I think that he was the one telling the truth. He was so polite and so was Atticus. Mayella and Mr. Gilmer didn't seem to be though. I have to go with Dill when he "just couldn't stand him."

Thursday, October 26, 2006 7:35:00 PM

[Dyami Kaga](#) said...

I agree too. Atticus is a great person, and he seems to somehow know what is right in everything. *Twilight zone music*

Thursday, October 26, 2006 7:54:00 PM

[PaRiS](#) said...

I agree that I think Tom is innocent...but he does kind of have a criminal background...it's really the only thing going against him except for his race. He was convicted for disorderly conduct, but it was just a misdemeanor(sp?). I agree with you that he is telling the truth!

Thursday, October 26, 2006 9:25:00 PM

[James Blonde](#) said...

Tom AIN"T GUILTY!!!

What up miss balett??? Nice log i completely agree!!

Peace!:)~)

Friday, October 27, 2006 11:52:00 AM

[James Blonde](#) said...

SOORY I MENT BLOGGGGGGGGGG!!!!!!

Peace!:)~)

Friday, October 27, 2006 11:53:00 AM

Wow!!!

So in these chapters a lot happened! But I have to say that I think that Mayella has a little fib going on in this jury! What do you think? Atticus had some great questions regarding

her testimony! Don't you agree?

I have one main question ~ Because of the way Atticus is as a father I wouldn't think that he would care that his kids were in the courtroom, during the trial. But they did not want him to see them, or Mr. Underwood the newspaper reporter. What was up with all of this?

Peace Out Player~

posted by Lucky 13 at [6:41 PM](#) | [5 comments](#)

[chou chou](#) said...

I think, that it was just retelling the so called "rape" part he didn't want his kids to hear it, and what do u mean by "that kind of father"

Thursday, October 26, 2006 7:10:00 PM

[PaRiS](#) said...

I agree because Atticus answers all questions and doesn't usually try to keep Scout and Jem from finding things out...maybe it's just because he knows this case is different. He probably predicted the drama and didn't want them to be there for all of it.

Thursday, October 26, 2006 7:11:00 PM

[chou chou](#) said...

Are you saying Atticus is a bad father.

Thursday, October 26, 2006 7:15:00 PM

[Lucky 13](#) said...

No I am not saying that Atticus is a bad father. I wouldn't think that he would care if his children were in listening to the converstaion! But if it was about the rape part then i understand completely!

thanks for the comments!

Thursday, October 26, 2006 9:45:00 PM

[chou chou](#) said...

ahh okay

Bob Beat Mayella!

Wow! Reading about Tom Robinson's trial so far makes me nervous! He seems like such a nice man, and I would hate to see him get convicted for such a horrible crime that he didn't commit! It seems very obvious to me that Mr. Bob Ewell beat his daughter Mayella.

I think Mayella is a very lonely person and that's why she came on to Tom Robinson. Mr. Ewell saw her do this, and beat her. Now the Ewell's are trying to cover it up by saying she was beaten and raped by Tom.

Atticus seems like a very smart lawyer, and hopefully he can prove Tom Robinson innocent. I hated the way Mr. Gilmer talked down to Tom, calling him "boy" when he is 25 years old. I am anxious to get farther into the trial in tomorrow's reading. I'm ready to find out what's next!

posted by PaRiS at [6:23 PM](#) | [6 comments](#)

[Lucky 13](#) said...

I agree with you! That was a great post! and I have some of the same feelings for Mayella's family and hope also that Tom is proved innocent! Because personally I think that it was Mayella's father that beat her. Can't wait to see what happens next!

Thursday, October 26, 2006 7:02:00 PM

[chou chou](#) said...

I think almost everyone in the class thinks Mayelle's fater beat her, so I'm interestede to see if he did or not.

Thursday, October 26, 2006 7:04:00 PM

[kittykat07](#) said...

I think that Mayella's father beats her too. Atticus is doing such a great job defending Tom, I sure would hate him to be proven with the crime. I agree with you. I can't wait to keep reading to find out who is really guilty.

Thursday, October 26, 2006 8:15:00 PM

[chou chou](#) said...

i almost read ahead, but decided not to cause then... I would want to talk about it on here.

Friday, October 27, 2006 11:27:00 AM

[*~ThatsHot~*](#) said...

I think Miss Mayelle is a liar and I don't like her....

Friday, October 27, 2006 11:47:00 AM

[The Duchess](#) said...

I actually feel sorry for Mayella because she's so pathetic and she's been deprived of a normal life by her father. The only character I can't forgive is Mr. Ewell, I'm not very happy with Mr. Gilmer's racism either, but he's doing his job that he was hired to do by Bob.

Friday, October 27, 2006 8:43:00 PM

Appendix N: Sample Coding Procedures

LIST OF CODES FROM FIRST READ THROUGH March 13

Week One:

Reading process

Connects to a character

Sign-off

Pretty general, brought up points brought up by others

Blog experience

Reading process

Blog experience

Dissonance

Blog experience

Reading process

Explaining the picture

Relationships between the character and the reader

Ineffective posts

Considering different perspectives

Asks the class to respond and share their opinion

Asks for someone else who shared the same misunderstanding

Blog experience

Blog experience

Reading process

Dissonance

Asks for someone else who experienced the misunderstanding

Reading process, pace of the book

Picks one event/picks one scene

Generalizes Scout's previous activity

Evaluates character's choices

Summary

Gets attention with a witty title and question

Uses a rhetorical strategy, witty lead

Writes a title that connects to the text

Reading process

Very general

Very short post

Very short post

Blog experience

Responds to another post

Tries to explain an event

Overlooks reasons why she would think that

So many students posted about the snow thing.

Example of map not fitting territory

Considering different perspectives

Eliciting response—wants another perspective

Trying to figure something out—asking a question, asking for clarification

Asks questions and gets answers

Picked most interesting or favorite event and described it

Picks certain event to re-tell or highlight

Shares her hardship in reading/reading process

Uses specific line

Dissonance—doesn't understand why a kid would be amazed by snow

Felt emotions as she read—like a physical reaction really—"ugh"—like a hit in the stomach

Inference?

Drew on prior knowledge

Connects to a recent personal experience—event from another class

Evaluates character's response to a situation

Compares the time of the novel to today

Dissonance—times are different

Pictures represents the content of the post—guardian angel pic

Relationships—details from the book, feelings

Bragging

Connects an event—inference

Seeing relationship

He explains what this event meant even though it's unstated in the text

Infers a lot about what kind of person Boo is

Uses details from the novel

Week two:

Reading process

Connects to her parents

Questions

Look at the structure of lil miss's posts

Reading process

“that makes me so mad”—feeling
 uses punctuation to supply voice
 “we’re so used to there being blacks around and because we get along with them”
 connects to the character’s feelings
 dissonance
 author’s generalization
 confusion about basic stated info
 I think statements
 Reading process
 Cites text
 Dissonance
 Reading process
 Misunderstood basic state info
 Asks for a response
 Question
 Focuses on a specific character
 Very general
 Prediction
 Dissonance
 Cheerleading
 Visualization
 Cites text
 Question on dialect
 Structural or author’s generalization
 Map/territory—“although being an alcoholic is just as bad as living the way he does [dolphus]
 Gradations of wrongness? Dissonance/ map/territory? [dyami kaga]
 Compares atticus to a coach
 Compares dill to dolphus
 Compares her understanding to Scout’s
 I think
 Questions
 Title reflects the connection he makes in his post—“Driving Miss Mockingbird”—prior knowledge
 Did you know?
 Map/territory? “I hate segregation and I think it should be outlawed. I know, I know, it’s a free
 country, yada, yada, yad, that’s not the point”
 Generalizes to society—author’s generalization
 Asks for confirmation—“is that agreeable?”

Sees Gilmer's perspective—considers perspectives

Question

Asks for comments/response

Brings back up a previous event—cycling?

Reading process –it was just boring

Misses the point—“how does a snake feel” post

Question

Supports other posts

Summary

Picture represents the post

Compares Atticus to Einstein and genius

“we all know”

question

first time abuse was mentioned

cites specific text

asks for clarification or response

ideas generalizes from a specific event—author's generalization “the beauty of youth”

structural generalization “I absolutely loved the way that this was portrayed in the book”

infers

evaluates character's response

map/territory—dissonance? “How could someone with such great manners commit such a crime?”

asks for support

asks for support/clarification

question

emotion—nervous

infers—I think

reading process

dissonance?—“I thought it was weird how she thought that he was mocking her when he calls her ma'am

I just got the feeling

Infers

Evaluates character's position

Supports opinion with specific examples

Asks for support/clarification

Great titles

Uses punctuation to create voice

Appendix O: Word Count for Evan's Posts

#	Date	Words per post
1.	October 20	561
2.	October 23	164
3.	October 24	209
4.	October 25	98
5.	October 26	152
6.	October 30	237
7.	November 1	279
8.	November 1	125
9.	November 2	192
10.	November 3	118
11.	November 13	129
12.	November 16	259
13.	November 19	337
14.	November 20	161
15.	November 21	170
16.	November 21	63
17.	November 26+	328
18.	November 27	455
19.	November 30	114
20.	December 4	129
21.	December 9	190
22.	December 12	147
23.	December 19	211
24.	December 29*	129
25.	January 8	141
26.	January 12	90
27.	January 24	118
28.	January 25	221
	Total # of words	5527
	Average # of words per post	197.3

*snow day **holiday break +weekend

Appendix P: Word Count for Carrie's Posts

Week	Date	Words per post
1.	October 23	168
2.	October 25	149
3.	October 26	132
4.	October 26	159
5.	October 30	145
6.	October 30	148
7.	October 31	101
8.	November 1	90
9.	November 2	193
10.	November 3	266
11.	November 8	169
12.	November 10	166
13.	November 12+	159
14.	November 15	190
15.	November 18+	324
16.	November 20	181
17.	November 21	190
18.	November 25+	321
19.	November 27	175
20.	November 29	154
21.	November 30	284
22.	December 3+	299
23.	December 4	118
24.	December 4	435
25.	December 7	200
26.	December 10+	209
27.	December 11	386
28.	December 12	217
29.	December 13	313
30.	December 14	364
31.	December 19	193
32.	December 20	225
33.	December 21	306
34.	January 9	176
35.	January 10	349
36.	January 12	268
37.	January 12	108
38.	January 21+	369
39.	January 24	419
40.	February 7	251
	Total	9337
	Average word count per post	233

*snow day

**holiday break +weekend

Appendix Q: Word Count for Rhonda's Posts

Week	Date	Words per post
1	October 20+	186
2	October 25	85
3	October 25	174
4	November 11	141
5	November 14	65
6	November 16+	334
7	November 16+	91
8	November 17+	173
9	November 20	184
10	November 21	199
11	November 23**	117
12	November 24**	128
13	November 27	168
14	November 28	194
15	November 29	116
16	November 30	182
17	December 4	151
18	December 5	164
19	December 6	118
20	December 6	230
21	December 7	137
22	December 8	166
23	December 11	205
24	December 12	87
25	December 13	133
26	December 14	136
27	December 15	149
28	December 18	111
29	December 19	131
30	December 20	76
31	December 23**	97
32	December 29**	67
33	January 5	151
34	January 12	215
35	January 16	161
	Total	5222
	Average word count per post	149.2

*snow day **holiday break +weekend

Appendix R: Word Count for Tim's Posts

#	Date	Words per post
29.	October 27	84
30.	October 27	90
31.	November 2	77
32.	November 3	92
33.	November 3	143
34.	November 13	134
35.	November 15	84
36.	November 17	92
37.	November 24	66
38.	November 25	95
39.	November 27	75
40.	November 28	44
41.	December 4	115
42.	December 4	76
43.	December 12	43
44.	December 18	56
45.	January 12	75
46.	January 25	100
47.	Total # of words	1541
	Average # of words per post	85.6

*snow day **holiday break +weekend

VITAE

Keri Franklin grew up in Buffalo, Missouri, where she completed her elementary and secondary education. She attended Southwest Baptist University on a volleyball scholarship and graduated with a BS.Ed in English Education in 1997. In 1997, she began the M.A. in Writing at Missouri State, where she taught first-year composition and worked in the writing center. After graduating in 1999, Keri worked as a software trainer in the heavy duty truck industry, as a freelance writer, and as the special projects coordinator at a business journal. For five years, Keri taught seventh, tenth, and twelfth-grade Communication Arts and dual-credit composition. She graduated from the University of Missouri with a Ph.D in English Education in 2007. She is currently an assistant professor of English at Missouri State University, where she also directs the BS.Ed and MS.Ed program. Keri is married to Aaron Matkowski. She enjoys spending her time with family and friends, reading, and kayaking Missouri rivers.