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Valuing Student Opinion and Choice:
Blogging to Create a Community of Learners

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Proposal for partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education
Moravian College
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
2011

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| ABSTRACT..... | 5 |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | 6 |
| LIST OF FIGURES | 8 |
| RESEARCHER STANCE..... | 9 |
| Introduction..... | 16 |
| Collaboration | 16 |
| <i>The value of collaborative feedback provided through blogging</i> | <i>17</i> |
| Effective Communication | 22 |
| <i>Clarity of thought expressed through blogging</i> | <i>22</i> |
| <i>In-class discussions affected by blogging</i> | <i>24</i> |
| <i>Social aspects of discussion affect effective discussion</i> | <i>26</i> |
| Differentiation..... | 27 |
| <i>Student impressions and interactions with blogging</i> | <i>28</i> |
| <i>Importance of rubrics in blogs.....</i> | <i>31</i> |
| Conclusion | 32 |
| RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY | 34 |
| Setting and Participants | 34 |
| Trustworthiness..... | 34 |
| Data Collection | 36 |
| <i>Pre-Post Survey</i> | <i>37</i> |
| <i>Final Projects</i> | <i>37</i> |
| <i>Project Reflections</i> | <i>38</i> |
| <i>Informal Interviews.....</i> | <i>38</i> |
| <i>Student Blogs</i> | <i>38</i> |
| <i>Student Portfolios</i> | <i>39</i> |
| <i>Field Log.....</i> | <i>39</i> |
| THIS YEAR’S STORY | 40 |
| Students in Charge?: Creating a Class Modernization of <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> | 40 |
| Summer’s Over: How do we begin? | 42 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| How do you feel about Technology and Participation? | 46 |
| What's a Blog?..... | 50 |
| Are We Ready to Start? No Turning Back... .. | 54 |
| What does Collaboration in the Classroom Look Like? | 57 |
| What's Happening so Far? | 60 |
| What are Students' Reactions? | 63 |
| Where to Now? | 64 |
| Take Two: What did They Think This Time? | 69 |
| End of First Quarter: How do I Grade the Blog?..... | 70 |
| What Happens to a Dream Deferred? | 73 |
| Poetry: Who is the American Master? | 77 |
| End of Second Quarter: What do the Rubrics Tell Me This Time?..... | 79 |
| Surveys and Portfolios: What did Students Learn So Far this Year? | 82 |
| Student-Led Discussion: What the Classroom Looks Like Now | 87 |
| FINDINGS..... | 89 |
| Introduction..... | 89 |
| Student Relevance..... | 89 |
| Effective Communication | 93 |
| Student-Student Interactions | 94 |
| Teacher-Student Interactions | 100 |
| Discussion..... | 103 |
| WHAT'S NEXT? | 109 |
| WORKS CITED | 112 |
| APPENDICES | 116 |
| Appendix A..... | 116 |
| Appendix B..... | 118 |
| Appendix C..... | 119 |
| Appendix D..... | 120 |
| Appendix E | 121 |

| | |
|------------------|-----|
| Appendix F | 123 |
| Appendix G..... | 124 |
| Appendix H..... | 125 |
| Appendix I | 138 |
| Appendix J | 139 |
| Appendix K..... | 141 |
| Appendix L | 142 |
| Appendix M | 144 |
| Appendix N..... | 146 |
| Appendix O..... | 148 |

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study documents the observed behaviors and reported experiences of a regular education English teacher and her class of seventeen honors-level 10th grade American Literature students engaging in an asynchronous blog. This study examines the uses of blogging in the high school classroom as well as the effects on student learning including improvement in student motivation, writing, and comfort in the learning environment. In this study, technology is not viewed as a replacement for human contact, but rather as a means of enhancing in-class discussion and learning. It was found that some students who were not comfortable speaking in class were more comfortable sharing and collaborating on the blog. Also, the data suggested that blogging in the classroom enhances student interest, prompts students to construct personal meaning, fosters student voice, and creates a collaborative learning environment among students and between teacher and students. The role of the teacher is discussed within the context of a student-led, constructivist classroom arising from the implementation of online blogs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to say a very special thank you to my 10th grade honors class. You made this study what it is with your unique personalities and eagerness to share your perspectives with me. Thank you for your enthusiasm, participation, and willingness to help me throughout this process. You truly are an exceptional group of individuals, and I will always have fond memories of you as we shared this journey together. I really could not have done it without you!

I would like to thank Dr. Grove for being so incredibly helpful and patient throughout this process. It has been a long and tough road, but your calm demeanor and supportive attitude allowed me to keep my composure. At times when I thought it would all fall apart, you were there to inspire me and keep me on track. Thank you for taking the time out of your schedule to read, reread, and reread my thesis. It is what it is because you were there to help.

Dr. Shosh, you have played a very valuable role in my education throughout my time spent at Moravian. Your dedication and leadership have encouraged me to do my best and to strive for excellence. I came back to Moravian because of you. Thank you for always believing in me and for your hard work and dedication to the MEDU program.

Thank you to my MEDU 702 class. We shared, vented, commiserated, and celebrated with one another. I would not have survived this process without all of your help and encouragement. I am proud of everyone for persevering, and I am very thankful to have shared this experience with you.

To Allison. Thank you for being such a great friend and proofreading my thesis for me. I am so grateful that you took time out of your busy schedule to help me edit my paper.

To all of my loving friends and family for putting up with me throughout this process. Thank you for understanding when I missed events, went home early, and was stressed out. You all encouraged me and listened to me when I needed you. Your confidence in me means so very much.

Finally, to my husband, Michael. You were there through my nervous breakdowns, listened to me talk endlessly about blogs, (more than what you ever wanted to know!) and have been my biggest supporter since I started the MEDU program. Thank you for helping me out around the house, giving me time to write, supplying me with coffee, and always believing in me. Your optimism and light-heartedness helped me to relax and stay focused. No matter how worried or anxious I was you could always make me laugh. Thank you, and I love you!

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 7.1: Blog Responses to <i>Night</i> | 65 |
| Figure 7.2: Blog Grades and Comments on Rubric 1 st Quarter..... | 71 |
| Figure 7.3: Blog Grades and Comments on Rubric 2 nd Quarter..... | 80 |
| Figure 7.4: Student Portfolio Reflections..... | 82 |
| Figure 7.5: End of Study Blogging Rubric Responses..... | 85 |
| Figure 8.1: Visual of Categories and Codes to determine Theme Statements.... | 90 |

RESEARCHER STANCE

In the words of Albert Einstein, “It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity.” How true his statement is for us today. Technology is progressing at such a rapid rate that society can barely keep up with the latest developments. Many public schools are certainly behind the times, putting the next generation at risk; many students will not be prepared for life after high school with the current technology gap. The disconnect between high school and the workplace is going to leave students without skills needed to survive. Therefore, as a teacher researcher, my focus is to prepare students for the advancing technological age by incorporating blogging into the classroom to improve their writing and discussion skills.

In the English classroom, so many skills need to be taught that it can be overwhelming. There is reading, writing, presenting, and discussing; all of which affect every other class and part of a student’s life. Mingled in the mix comes research and word processing skills, coupled with the fact that the world is constantly advancing technologically. The MLA format cannot even stay the same. The tasks at hand and pressures felt to accurately prepare students are daunting. With only 42 minutes in a class period, and an ungodly array of material to trudge through, the reluctant participant is often able to hide. Why don’t they care, and how can I make them care? There is not just one answer to

these questions. If there were, teaching would be a totally different story. In order to find an answer, many more questions about teaching methodologies must be asked.

A technology class that I took in the spring of 2009 really interested me in the idea of using blogs in the classroom. With the busyness of my classroom, a blog seemed as if it could be a way to accomplish more, giving students another source to turn to for assistance in assignments as well as help to create a safer learning community. I had every intention of starting a blog with my 10th grade honors students at the beginning of last year, but preparing my 11th grade students for the PSSAs took precedence. My plan was to have students help each other and discuss the novels that they read over the summer through the blog so that in-class discussions would run more smoothly. Students often arrive somewhat clueless at the beginning of the year, and holding an online discussion would remind them of what they read (or encourage them to read a novel that they did not get to read over the summer). With the stress of teaching some 11th grade classes I was never able to get the site up and running, and the blog was brushed under the rug.

I struggle with getting all students involved in the classroom. With the push to pass the PSSAs, much of the focus is taken away from student originality and creativity and put on reading skills. Students begin to get accustomed to

responding to multiple choice assessments and forget what it is like to use other modes of expression. Many times the ideas are there, but the motivation to be involved has been sucked out of them from skill and drill lessons. In my experience, students (who are not primarily motivated by grades) have been motivated by two major factors. Students involve themselves when they enjoy the topic and/or have an opinion on the topic. Students also seem to be more into an assignment when using computers, whether it is for typing a paper or researching background information on an author or time period. When students are given the choice between reading two pages in the book and looking up the same information on the computer, most students will choose the latter. They seem to respond to the use of technology more than notebook journals. I was interested to see if, by changing my instructional design, students would be more motivated to learn, and thus engage in more meaningful discussion in order to improve the overall quality of work and writing being produced. I see my research study as directly relating to preparing students for the world that awaits them after high school.

In order to take part in discussions, students need to make connections to the subject matter, have some level of understanding of the material, and be able to formulate questions and opinions. Many students choose not to participate in active discussions and so are missing out on a full understanding of the text/material. They are also giving up the opportunity to share their opinions. I

do not want to give students their opinions, but rather I want to give them tools in order to form their opinions. As Beers (2003) states, “Dependent readers must be reminded often that comprehension begins prior to reading and extends into the discussions they have after they’ve finished reading” (p. 101). By making predictions and asking debatable questions, my classroom becomes an environment that fosters creative thinkers as well as students with the *wish* to learn. I believe that when students can see a direct correlation between text, words, and their lives, they will remember, form opinions, and *learn*. Therefore, it is my goal to more actively involve students in class discussions. Some students are shy and take time to think about their responses. In the meantime, another more advanced student might have already responded. Through the use of technology and online discussion forums, students will have time to think about their questions and responses. They also have time to think about what other students have said.

Recently, research is one area that seems to be taking a backseat in our English curriculum. In my first year of teaching, I had five of the 10th grade college prep classes. At that time the students did an I-Search report which was a career based research report. They then presented their information to a board of teachers, and this counted as their senior research project. After my first year, the school did away with the I-Search in 10th grade, thus taking a huge chunk of research out of the curriculum. Even though this was a challenging assignment

for many students, it equipped them early on with proper researching skills. When taking this away, we replaced the project with PSSA prep time. Needless to say, the focus turned to reading and multiple choice questions instead of research and writing. Although the project is gone, the idea of the project still has merit. Students completed the project because they had motivation to do it. They had choice in researching what they wanted to research. Currently, when students are using computers in the classroom, they are more apt to look up information, check meanings and spellings of words, and double check their thoughts. Writing improves because students are looking up quotes and information for supporting evidence and checking their word usage. By encouraging blogging, students converse with one another as a way of adding knowledge to their papers.

In the study I conducted in “Teacher as Inquirer,” I looked at the effects of grouping students and having them work consistently within the established groups. The students built relationships with one another and became more comfortable in sharing with the class. When someone speaks for the group, it is less intimidating to speak up. I saw more camaraderie in my classroom. Students peer edit in the classroom to get each other’s perspectives and to improve their papers. Blogging is another means of “peer editing.” Students get feedback from one another and have one more resource to turn to for help. Perhaps the most important part of fostering learning in a classroom is the environment created. A classroom is a community. Depending upon the approach, it can be a caring and

safe learning environment, or it can feel cold and hostile. Good teachers strive to make classrooms comfortable for students so that they are willing to share, collaborate, and get the most out of the experience. However, there needs to be a strong emphasis upon real-world application in student learning. Romano (2004) tells us in *Crafting Authentic Voice* that we need to pick topics and projects that will be of “burning interest” to our students (p. 25). When students can see that what they are learning relates to their lives and is useful to them, they will become interested and motivated to learn. Students need to recognize that they are an important part of society, and they have the ability to improve the larger community. The feeling of belongingness is very important to student motivation.

Motivation, discussion, and writing are intertwined. Although it may be outside of our comfort zones, teachers must strive to use more technology in the classroom. Blogging in the classroom introduces a positive way to use technology—the way it should be used. If students can see the benefits and importance, motivation will increase. When students are motivated, many of the negative issues that teachers encounter fall away. My experiences as a teacher, my course work as a student at Moravian, and my observations about the changing world of education have brought me to my research question: “What are the effects of using blogging to motivate and improve discussion and writing

for 10th grade honors students?” My study may not provide *the* answer, but it provides me with a new and coherent perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Motivating students to learn is a large part of the battle in our constantly changing technological world. Any time students are allowed to use computers, they seem to get more interested. At the same time, technology should not just be “fun” for students; it is important for them to experience different facets of technology in order to be successful later in life. There are various research studies centered on the value of collaborative feedback through blogging, the effectiveness of blogging, the teacher’s role in the discussion of blogging, student interpretations and interactions with blogging, and the importance of rubrics in correlation to blogging. These topics help teachers to see the importance of collaboration, effective communication, and differentiation in the classroom.

Collaboration

The point of a blog is to share ideas, and so collaboration is an integral part of blogging. Researchers emphasize the importance of collaboration within the classroom as well as partnerships with sources outside the classroom when implementing blogs into the curriculum (Boling, Castek, Zawilinski, Barton, & Nierlich, 2008; Davis & McGrail, 2009; Schaffhauser, 2009; Skinner, 2007; Witte, 2007). The research provides varying suggestions on *how* to put collaboration into practice. Boling et al. (2008), Witte (2007), and Davis (2009)

describe situations in which students collaborated in different ways. Writing and discussing with an audience will make the stakes higher for students. In turn, it is also more realistic for students to have others depending on their work; when someone other than the teacher is waiting for the students to collaborate, students are able to get a real feel for the world.

The value of collaborative feedback provided through blogging

Only so much can be said in class, and only so many students can fully express their ideas due to time constraints. Many students are apprehensive when having to speak in front of a large group, but are more comfortable when having time to think about how to articulate their thoughts. Boling (2008) shares instances in which students used a blog following a literature circle discussion format. One class shared responses with collaborators over 100 miles away, while another class responded to the literature by creating poems. Using Google Docs, students gave one another feedback on the poems. Going even further, this class audiotaped the reading of their poems and posted the recordings on “Youth Radio Blog” (p. 504). Sharing, editing, revising, and publishing through the use of blogs gives students skills needed in our modern world.

Witte (2007) shares a story about an eighth grade student, Cassandra. She was disengaged in class, and when meeting with her parents, Witte related this observation to them. To Witte’s surprise, Cassandra’s parents said that she was

writing at home all the time. Cassandra then said, “That’s online writing, not boring school writing. We all do it on Xanga” (p. 92). This is a perfect example of the value of teachers getting to know students and listening to student needs/interests. It also shows how the writing became important to the student when she was collaborating with her peers. Cassandra’s statement spurred on Witte to try the Talkback project. In this project, middle school students corresponded with pre-service teachers, discussing novels and reflecting on text. Witte tells us that the project “...spread as far as Iraq, where a soldier wrote to ask if he could participate in the book discussion with his son’s literature circle group” (p. 94). This shows the sheer magnitude of the Internet. The fact that students were able to interact with a soldier halfway across the world is remarkable. All students should be experiencing this type of authentic learning in the classroom. The world was brought to the students in this instance, indicating that collaborative feedback enhanced the learning experience.

Building this type of a learning community does not just happen automatically. It takes a lot of time and preparation on the part of the teacher in order to properly educate students on the usefulness of blogs. Davis (2009) explains how a fifth grade class was guided through the process by reading student blogs, wikis on blogging, and a “blook.” They were fully exposed to the blogging method of learning by experiencing the products of collaboration before being immersed in the technique themselves. They were then given “comment

starters,” to aid in getting the posts started. Davis states that, “As our students mastered these practices, they began to move from peripheral to full participation. They posted and commented more often and, more important, offered their own ideas and questions” (p. 76). Thus, by building these kinds of learning environments teachers are able to observe and reflect on the benefits of student collaboration.

Just as Witte’s (2007) project spread to Iraq, other educational online communities exist that could be used to help students learn from people across the globe. Schaffhauser (2009) explains the usefulness of ePals and the International Education and Resource Network. Teachers can sign students up with classrooms from across the country or around the world. Many teachers are profiled, praising the difference such collaboration has made in their classrooms. One teacher, states:

If I can get a group of students to see that other people are going through what they are and opening their eyes to the bigger picture, when they grow up and become citizens they’re not going to perpetuate [stereotypes].

That’s the ultimate goal. The world has to work together. It’s not us and them. (p. 5)

What a profound statement. The skills being taught through blogs go beyond the classroom in such a way as to teach students the value of different cultures and to

open their eyes to the bigger picture. The extent and value of the feedback that can be gleaned from such teaching practices are convincing.

While all of these researchers are in favor of and discuss the benefits of blogging in reference to the feedback provided from collaborating, Skinner (2007) explains some concerns involved with online collaboration, stating:

Even though one of the goals in education is to develop learners who handle complex thinking skills independently, teachers cannot take a back seat. Oliver & McLaughlin (2001) warn designers that online discussion can produce volumes of unproductive communication if activities are not deliberately constructed. Anderson et al. (2001) observe that discussion stalls at the lower levels of critical inquiry when the teacher's presence, as instructor, designer or facilitator, is lacking. Morgan & O'Reilly (2001) warn that the more complex thinking processes rarely happen without the help of the teacher. (p. 383)

As stated, the teacher's role is very important to the success of the blog. The feedback that students give one another needs to be meaningful. There needs to be a balance between student independence and teacher scaffolding. In this study conducted with undergraduates, various results occurred. While most students saw the online communication as beneficial, Skinner writes:

Although approximately three in four students felt part of a community of learners in EL104, remaining students felt a lack of connection and needed additional help if they were to benefit from the experience. The failure of community can weaken knowledge construction, which is more complex than at first appears. (p. 390)

When there is a breakdown in collaboration, there may also be a breakdown in learning.

The beginning phases of a blog and the overall fostering of a safe environment is an extremely important task for the teacher to orchestrate. Researchers emphasize the importance of setting the class up properly for use of a blog (Boling et al., 2008; Davis & McGrail, 2009; Jewell, 2005; Skinner, 2007; Wang & Hsua, 2008; Witte, 2007; Zawilinski, 2009). Despite the balancing act required to ensure success in collaborative feedback, Boling et al. (2008) highlights the fact that blogs, "...provide students with real audiences while learning about different communities and cultures. This, in turn, can result in increased motivation and literacy engagement as students read, write, create, and produce for meaningful, and authentic purposes" (p. 505). It is possible to enhance the collaborative element of learning in the classroom through blogging, but the execution of the teaching method marks the difference between success and failure.

Effective Communication

Communicating effectively will increase student understanding and, in turn, motivate students to share in discussion. Research indicates that students can realize the significance of effective communication as a result of the blogging experience (Boling et al., 2008; Davis & McGrail, 2009; Jewell, 2005; Wang & Woo, 2007). It is important for students to be comfortable in discussion; social conversations on the blog add to the feeling of community within a classroom. Effective communication takes on a new meaning regarding the blogging classroom community.

Clarity of thought expressed through blogging

Castek, Zawilinski, Barton, and Nierlich (2008) relate their personal interactions with blogs. They created a project in order to unite students across the country. In this assignment, the authors addressed the fact that student writing improved because:

Writing for an audience of their peers motivated both classes to extensively revise and edit. In contrast to pencil-and-paper writing activities, students enthusiastically reworked their ideas to help their virtual partners grasp the ideas they wanted to communicate. (Castek et al., 2008, p. 506)

Writing in this manner improves students' writing skills and enhances their confidence. As Jewell (2005) relates "Students are inclined to be more careful with their written language than with their oral language. Additionally, students can be more daring with their discussion-board analyses than they are with their oral assertions" (p. 83). Student writing is enhanced when writing authentically. Blogs encourage this type of writing competence. McPherson, Wang, Hsu, and Tsuei (2007) state that "The online environment in K-12 fosters the emergence of student voice describing unique perspectives, feelings, and ideas in the communication exchange" (p. 27). Using technology, especially blogs in the classroom, gives students confidence, makes them conscientious, and prompts "real" writing.

After implementing blogging in a course for pre-service teachers, Wang & Hsua (2008) show another way in which students were able to more clearly articulate ideas. Students were able to learn more about one another and appreciated the diversity in the classroom. Because students became more aware of others' opinions, thoughts, and ideas, the comfort level went up and "One participant pointed out that he liked the blogging activity because it provided the bloggers with opportunities to interact with each other on issues other than the course-related topic" (p. 84). From this angle, students communicated with one another on a different level and so in-class interactions became more effective. As Wang & Hsua state, "...the participants in an online discussion environment

tend to be more critical and reflective, given the advantage of time and space convenience” (p. 82). If students are thinking more deeply about what to say before they say it, then they are most likely communicating with one another in a more effective manner. In this same study, the instructors related that students “...knew that all their posts were available to other readers... and, therefore, wrote with greater discretion because they realized they were writing to audiences beyond classmates” (p. 84). An outside audience makes the stakes higher and, in turn, prompts students to take more care in order to communicate more effectively with the outside world.

In-class discussions affected by blogging

In conjunction with blogs, some research suggests to still hold face-to-face discussions (Wang Q. & Woo H., 2007; Yu, 2009). These discussions can demonstrate if more students speak up and get involved because of the blogs or not. Therefore, holding systematic face-to-face discussions might show if blogging motivated students. Sorensen and Baylen (2004) explain that students might need to learn new roles and communication patterns for higher levels of communication to occur in an online environment (p. 124). In a study they conducted, they found that communication skills of initiating and supporting discussion were evident, but that challenging, summarizing, and monitoring were lacking. Not only do teachers need to properly educate students in the technical

use of blogs, but teachers must properly educate students regarding online discussion formats. One way to accomplish this is by role-playing (Sorensen 2004, p. 125). There are four key differences between asynchronous online discussions and face-to-face discussions, according to Wang and Woo (2006): access, timing, mode of expression, and visual cues. In addition, Walther (1996) found that “online discussions were more task-oriented and focused compared with face-to-face discussions” (p. 273). However, “Communication in face-to-face discussion is easier and more natural than in online discussions” (p. 283).

Unfortunately, many students are quiet during class discussions.

Townsend conducted a study on silent students in the classroom. Students may be quiet in discussion for a variety of reasons including not understanding text, shyness, and a preference to write and think about responses before talking. Townsend (2005) provided a list of ideas to help students speak out in discussion: student generated questions, think time to skim assignments before discussion, writing down reactions to reading, small group/paired talk to generate questions, writing responses to each other’s questions, time to explain responses with reference to text, giving students a chance to rehearse thinking by talking to a partner, and allowing students to write about their developing thinking (pp. 79-80).

Clearly, a blog could address many students' apprehensions without taking away class time. Seeing the two sides of the issue, and combining online with face-to-face discussions should provide for a rich learning environment. Student interactions on and off-line are reported to be "psychologically connected" (Subrahmanyam, Garcia, Harsono, Li, & Lipana, p. 241). In an action research study conducted by Yu (2009), the teacher related student reactions to a combination of asynchronous online and face-to-face discussions. As with most options, some students preferred online discussions claiming a higher comfort level, while other students found the face-to-face discussions to be more beneficial. Overall, Yu found that "...the majority of students claimed a favorable perception of both online and F2F discussions" (p.17).

Social aspects of discussion affect effective discussion

Teachers tend to constantly remind students to stay on task. When conversations stray from what we consider to be "productive learning," off-task talk is thought to be useless and a waste of time (Chen & Wang, 2009). Chen and Wang researched "social talk" in an online high school forum. The researchers were interested in the effects of off-task talk during online, asynchronous conversations on student learning. Social conversations were found to be relevant to the learning process. They found social talk to be purposive, strategic, and

goal-oriented. Students selected what they saw as important postings that contained attributes of social talk. It was also reported that:

...significant correlations are found between social talk and on-task talk as well as social talk and the emergence of Important Postings...On-task and off-task talks not only co-occur, but also inter weave to accomplish effective discussion and negotiation. (Chen & Wang, 2009, p. 608)

It is important to look at all aspects of student interaction and dialogue. What may seem to be unimportant may actually show deeper knowledge and understanding of a task.

Differentiation

Differentiating methods and lessons is important in order to increase student motivation. There is clearly a connection between motivation and student achievement (Covington, 2000). Using blogs in the classroom is a way of differentiating instruction and therefore might serve as a motivator for students to perform at higher levels of cognition. The social aspect of a blog is often what motivates students and the learning process (Subrahmanyam et al., 2009; Chen and Wang, 2009; Wang and , 2008).

Student impressions and interactions with blogging

Teachers can allow students to have a choice so that the students are personally involved in what they are learning/writing. Student blogs contain more depth when the students are interested in what they are writing about (Boling, 2008; Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Wang, 2008). Learning logs might be a way to tap into personal interest and therefore enhance motivation as Hurst (2005) reports. The blog serves as a variation of a learning log. Blogging sparks creativity and gives students a feeling of ownership (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Davis A. & McGrail E., 2009; Boling E. et al., 2008; Subrahmanyam et al., 2009). Research states that students using the blogs, "... could pursue answers and direct their own learning" (Davis & McGrail, 2009, p. 76). Ducate, & Lomicka (2008) found student comments to correspond to Ferdig and Trammel's (2004) list of benefits of using blogs. These benefits were seen as enhancing student interest and involvement and giving students more opportunities to participate in the learning process. Students expressed a way to improve the blogging experience by allowing for more choices in blog topics, especially by making topics more personal. Allowing students to take ownership is important in fostering a successful discussion. As Newstreet (2008) explains of using Socratic circles, "They knew that there was a purpose in reading the poem, and wanted the discussion to be successful..." (12). Using a combination of

discussion techniques will enrich student learning and build more effective communication skills.

Steps must be taken to appropriately evaluate student increase or decrease in motivation and improvement or lack of improvement in discussion when implementing blogs in the classroom. It is the role of the teacher to model appropriate student interactions in order to achieve the desired result (Davis & McGrail, 2009; Sorensen C. and Baylen, 2004; Wang & Hsua, 2008). Sorensen & Baylen (2004) report that, “Students may need to learn new roles and new communication patterns in the online environment to stimulate the higher-level communication patterns (challenging, summarizing, monitoring)” (p. 124). Wang & Hsua (2008) list strategies to facilitate blogging and ensure positive results from student interaction: providing exemplary questions and sample articles to build a framework, relating in-class discussions to blog topics, and posting links to online resources to deepen discussion (p. 85). A key component to evaluating an increase in motivation and improvement of discussion is to ask students about their perceptions of a blog.

Student pre- and post- surveys, checklists, and conferencing provide the teacher with a more accurate view of students’ interactions with a teaching method (Hust, 2005; Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Yu, 2009). By conducting surveys and conferences, student perceptions can be reported and recorded. From a study conducted with a foreign languages class, Ducate & Lomicka (2008)

report that students had made both negative and positive comments to be considered in further research. Students were not always interested in topics, comments were not always made in a timely fashion, and discourse strategies were sometimes confining. Students enjoyed learning more about classmates, practicing vocabulary and grammar, and learning more about the target culture of the blogs. Some students found the discourse strategies to be a help instead of a hindrance. Overall students wanted to see more personal topics to be included in the blogging experience (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008, p. 23).

Hurst (2005) also reports on the benefits of conducting a survey to assess student perceptions. Combining learning logs with social interaction

Ninety percent of students reported that talking about the text helped them remember the material better, and 94% of them stated that they gained new perspectives from the discussion of the text that they had not thought of previously. (p. 44)

Personal feedback from students guides the teacher to the next step to be taken.

Yu (2009) was also able to pinpoint student perceptions about online discussions through surveys. Many students were able to better understand classroom activities due to feedback from others online and from in-class discussions. Some students voiced criticism that they already knew what was going on, and in-class discussions got too far off-topic (Yu, 2009, p. 37). Student perceptions coupled

with teacher observations are necessary for conducting effective online and face-to-face discussions.

Importance of rubrics in blogs

Evaluating student blogs can be a daunting task. The volume of responses coupled with the subjectivity of the information can make it difficult for teachers to focus on appropriate criteria. Penny and Murphy's (2009) goal in the research report *Rubrics for designing and evaluating online asynchronous discussions*, was to identify range, type, and percentage of performance criteria used in rubrics for online discussions. Rubric categories researched are grouped into cognitive, performance, mechanical, and procedural. The study stresses the importance of a social presence, meaning that students should be responsible for collaborating in person as well as online. The study advises to consider performance criteria and ratings that emphasize interactions with others when assessing online student discussions. In the findings, Penny and Murphy (2009) state:

Assertion or 'maintaining and defending ideas' (Pena-Shaff & Nicholls, 2004, p. 254) was poorly represented in the rubrics. One method of rating this behaviour is to rate learners on replying to messages that challenge their ideas. While several ratings assessed learners on referring to the comments of others, we found no ratings that specifically evaluated the learners' responses to challenges of their ideas. (p. 811)

A rubric unites the teacher and the student in that it creates a clear set of expectations. With that said, the teacher needs to make sure that the rubric represents what the teacher is really looking for. Penny and Murphy (2009) offer the advice:

The inclusion of performance criteria and ratings that emphasise interactions with others, particularly the ability to share reflections, insights, information and resources with other members of the group, may aid in social bonding and lead to increased cognitive activity. (p. 816)

The teacher needs to prepare students for such higher levels of thinking and include these performance criterions (thought/reflection, arguments, feedback, references/support, quality and relevance etc.) on a rubric. Penny and Murphy also suggest that:

Researchers might wish to create and use a rubric to track progress in one or more OADs, then analyse the transcripts of the discussions to try to determine if learners did achieve benefits. (p. 817)

Conclusion

The research indicates that collaboration, effective communication, and differentiating instruction are important aspects to consider when trying to increase motivation for writing and discussion through blogs. As Zawilinski (2009) states, blogging is said to "...support the development of online

comprehension and communication skills and create a collaborative learning community that builds a deeper and broader understanding across the curriculum” (p. 656). Working together and writing in an online environment tends to make the learning experience more authentic. Allowing students to take ownership, create questions, scaffold one another’s knowledge, and tap into personal interests can motivate students. When students feel comfortable with text, have time to think about responses, and discuss outside of the classroom walls, the discussions inside the classroom may be amplified. The value of the blog lies largely in the correct and careful implementation of the method. According to the research examined in this review, the online social environment of blogs coupled with the social environment of the classroom should lead to an increase in motivation and an enhancement of textual understanding, helping students to refine their writing skills.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Setting and Participants

My study was conducted at a suburban high school in eastern Pennsylvania that has about 800 students throughout grades nine through twelve. This study focused on 17, 10th grade honors students in American Literature. The ages of participants ranged from fourteen to sixteen years. All students were regular education learners with one student having a gifted I.E.P. The classroom chosen for this study contained a computer lab to prompt student participation and collaboration.

Trustworthiness

Reality is skewed by our own perceptions and beliefs, and so it was important for me to focus on the data before focusing on my own interpretations of the data. Measures, as suggested by Hendricks (2006), were taken in order to ensure trustworthiness of the study. Hendricks suggests to ensure trustworthiness by holding persistent and prolonged study observations, recording data accurately, using member checks, triangulating data sources, providing thick descriptions, employing techniques in negative case analysis, making clear any researcher bias, keeping a record (field log), and presenting results to key audiences (pp. 107-108). I engaged in all of these measures during my study. The Human Subjects Internal Review Board at Moravian College approved my action research study to

be conducted in my classroom. I also received approval from my building principal. Permission letters were sent home with the students in the classroom that I studied. Anonymity of students is retained through the use of pseudonyms. I was careful not to reveal the identity of students, staff, or other teachers who may be involved. I tried my best to remain objective throughout the study, putting aside my biases in order to report on what I *observed* through the data. Ongoing self-reflection and my research support group helped with this aspect of the study.

In order to collect data for my research, I used pre- and post- surveys, as well as group conferences and informal interviews with the students. I kept a field log. I also observed students while working on the blogs and holding in-class discussions. Students were encouraged to be honest on all assignments and surveys. All final projects serve as a means of data. Reflections were completed as soon as possible in order to present accurate interpretations. I also returned to the reflections on multiple occasions to further develop the meaning of my study to me.

In order to promote validity of my study, I have taken into account Johnson's (1997) strategies to promote qualitative research. Student quotes were a *very* important part of my study. Therefore, I used "low inference descriptors" as a source of triangulation. As I have utilized multiple sources of data and

collection methods, my study employs “data/method triangulation.” Since I used surveys and discussed the process with students in informal interviews, “participant feedback” was also used. I exercised “peer review” as a method since I discussed the process with others at school and in class. I used “reflexivity” and came to many new understandings about myself while doing this study. “Theory triangulation” helped to solidify the trustworthiness of my action research as I looked at multiple perspectives of researchers such as Dewey, Freire, and Vygotsky. By reflecting and using theory triangulation, I have been made aware of my personal biases and beliefs. As I am a constructivist teacher, I believe that students need to be engaged in activities that prepare them for the real world that prompt them to work together. I came to realize that not all students immediately see the value in working with one another and not all students are comfortable in sharing their personal thoughts and feelings with the world. In order to separate factual information from beliefs, I made sure to keep separate columns in my field log. Finally, I used “pattern matching,” as I was able to see themes emerge from my study.

Data Collection

In order to collect data, I had students take pre- and post- surveys, conducted informal group conferences, and conducted individual interviews. The online blogs served as a way for me to collect writing samples. Final projects and

student portfolios are also forms of data used to evaluate student interest and success. Students wrote reflections after each final project. I created a field log and used double entry journals to record observations in the classroom and my reactions to these observations.

Pre-Post Survey

Students were given two surveys at the beginning and the end of the study. At the beginning of the study, students were given a class comfort survey which asks questions about their comfort in participating in classroom discussions. This survey was also given at the end of the study. At the beginning of the study, students were given a technology survey to gauge their interest and familiarity with blogs. At the end of the study, students completed a blog interest survey that asked questions about their perceptions on how the blog personally affected them in class. These surveys were taken from teacher researcher S. Yu's (2009) action research study.

Final Projects

Students completed an array of final projects for the class that were linked to discussions on the blog. The blog was to be used as another source for students to turn to for ideas and help with projects. As a class, students created a 1920s

party for *The Great Gatsby* and a play for *A Raisin in the Sun*. Students individually wrote a paper for *Night* and a found poem for our poetry unit.

Project Reflections

After each project, students filled out a project reflection form. This form asked students to reflect on their progress in class, asked how they could have done better, questioned the usefulness of the blog, and asked for suggestions on how to improve for the next assignment.

Informal Interviews

During the two large group assignments, I informally met with the group-appointed group leader about the group's progress and the group's use of the blog. I asked questions about the usefulness and the practicality of the blog for the assignments as well as how the blog could be more helpful.

Student Blogs

Each student created an email address in order to be a participant in the class blog on edublogs.org. Students participated in various blogging activities ranging from personal thought and opinion, to homework assignments, to collaboration on projects. Student analysis of literature being studied and opinions on related topics were graded according to a 50-point rubric for the first

and second quarter. The blogs are one the most important pieces to the study where I was able to analyze student participation and interest. Student voice and interest are evident in responses made as well as in the timeliness of the posts.

Student Portfolios

At the end of the second quarter, students reflected on the work done to date in a “working” student portfolio. Students picked four assignments under the categories of class work, final product, favorite assignment, and most-learned-from assignment and reflected on performance and knowledge gained. Some students offered further criticisms about the blogging assignments giving further insight into how they felt about the methodology.

Field Log

During the entire study, I kept a field log. In the field log, I recorded observations that I saw in the classroom, dialogue during classroom discussions, and informal conversations between students. The field log enabled me to accurately record and reflect on the experiences during the study. In order to differentiate between observations and my thoughts, I used a double-entry journal format.

THIS YEAR'S STORY

Students in Charge?: Creating a Class Modernization of *A Raisin in the Sun*

“Jill has something to say,” I cut into the chorus of voices trying so desperately to be heard above the rest. “I’ve been *trying* to share!” Jill says with an exasperated expression. This is coming from the quietest girl in the room. She doesn’t speak up often, and when she does, her voice is very soft. The class politely quiets down for Jill, anxious to hear her suggestion. After all, she doesn’t offer it often. “I agree with Andre about Mama dying. It goes perfectly with the overall theme that we’re trying to convey. But, what about George? Is he still going to be in the play?” This question about a character that has been missed raises further discussion. Kevin, Amy, and Jen, the group leaders, have been writing nonstop on the board, while trying to hear all suggestions. So far the main conflict of the modernization of *A Raisin in the Sun* is centered around winning \$15 million in the lottery. The theme is, “Money doesn’t bring happiness.” Symbols include a money bag with splattered blood, a family photo, and a character who steals. The setting is an apartment downtown in Atlanta in 2010. Who made these decisions? The students of 2nd period. The real discussion has now begun about whether or not to keep the names and characters the same and if the villain or an innocent character should die. The class has once again started to

discuss with multiple students talking at once. Kevin tries to silence everyone, bringing his reasoning to the group.

“Remember, we don’t want to use excessive violence. Some people mentioned this on the blog, so by a show of hands, how many people think that Mama should die?” Kevin proposes. Kevin loves being in charge. The rest of the class respects him, thankfully. He’s the type of student who could potentially be resented for his insights and ability to “get it.” Instead he helps his classmates and is seen as a revered leader. When Kevin took on the “teaching” role, Mark called out, “Kevin should be a college professor!”

Nikki, although not always vocal in class, stated her ideas about the modernization beautifully on the blog, “We should only kill off mama. that will have the biggest impact on the family, she holds the family together, and if she dies they will realize how selfish and greedy they are being. Also discrimination should be a probleme because that is one of the most apperent problems in the book, and we dont want to shift the modernisation too much.”

“Then we all, or most of us, agree that Mama dies,” Jen states. I look at the clock, seeing that time’s almost up. Forty-two minutes flies with this class! We never have enough time together. It has taken two days to get to where we are at with our class project, but a constructivist classroom takes more time than a teacher-led lecture.

“Tomorrow we will take a little more time to tie up some loose ends, and then you will split back into your groups to work on your script. Remember, you are writing your own Act, but you must coordinate with the rest of the class. Use the blog to communicate!” I quickly end class before the bell.

This is November, a little over halfway through my study. So, how did this classroom evolve into this scene?

Summer’s Over: How do we begin?

The first day of school leaves students a little overwhelmed and sometimes a bit apprehensive. There is so much for a teacher to learn about new students, and so much for the students to learn about the teacher. On the second day of school, I wanted to get a feel for students and their comfort with discussion. Since many of the students went to school with one another since grade school, there was a certain level of comfort within the room. On the other hand, this was still high school, and there is more moving around in today’s society than there was years ago. Not everyone was familiar with each other, and not all students grew up with one another. On the second day, students did a “practice” warm-up. The warm-up contained examples of opinion questions to be discussed throughout the year. Students stood when in disagreement, and stayed seated when in agreement with the controversial statement that was read.

Most students, after a few brave trailblazers, warmed up to share their opinions. After how quiet students were on the first day, I was pleased to see their interest.

Wayne and Kevin were clearly “class leaders.” They really wanted to share and often dominated the discussion. Six students only spoke when prompted by me and two were non-participants. I was very pleased to see students sharing such personal experiences and examples. In response to the statement, “It’s more difficult to forgive yourself if the person you have hurt doesn’t forgive you,” Gina offered, “Sometimes I’m really mean to my mom. Then I feel bad afterwards.” In response to, “People with money are happier than people without money,” Wayne shared, “My brother’s girlfriend is just mean, and he doesn’t see it. She always wants *things*.” This first discussion reinforced the research that states that students are more involved and interested when topics pertain to them personally. I already knew that an important part of the blog was going to be asking students to share opinions. Both Gina and Wayne would surprise me again and again with their insights and thought-provoking connections between life and literature.

As I prepared to begin my field log and class observations, I explained my project to my students. I gave them their letters at the end of the first week to take home to their parents to sign. “Did you pick us because you like us the best?” Amy asked. I smiled. “I like all my students,” I avoided the question. The truth

was, I did feel that this class held a special dynamic. Yes, it was an honors class, and I knew that I would probably get more participation by running the study with this class than with a college prep class, but there was something else that felt different about this group of students. From my beginning observations, I could tell that they really wanted to share their ideas and express themselves. “We will be starting the blog soon. More information is to come...”

Our first task together as a class was to discuss, analyze, and write a literary analysis of *The Scarlet Letter*. As this text can be extremely difficult for students to understand on their own, we did some in-class activities to get everyone started. As we were not yet ready to use the blog, we did an in-class discussion carousel. The topic of discussion did not leave much room for opinion and so students were much quieter than in our first discussion on the second day of class. Students analyzed themes and symbols seen in *The Scarlet Letter*. Since students were in groups, a group leader emerged who took over as speaker. Instead of students offering opinions and sharing what they had contributed, only one person spoke. Those who spoke showed me that they were comfortable, and I could also see who I was going to need to prompt, like on the first day of discussion. The class contained a very linear discussion, dependent upon what was written on the group posters. I asked myself, “Was there too much work done before discussion? If students discuss on the blogs before class, will that hinder class discussion?” Once again this discussion activity showed me the importance

of making material relevant and connecting ideas in literature to student lives. Students continued to work on *The Scarlet Letter*, drafting their literary analyses. Since collaboration is an important part of blogging, I was interested to see how students interacted with one another while working individually on their papers. Amy was in College Prep English last year, but I was already starting to see her as a leader in the room. She has been working extremely hard to understand how to write the literary analysis, coming to me after school for help. In class, Emma asked Amy, “Do you know where Pearl asks Hester about the “A”?”

Amy replied, “I think when Pearl makes an “A” on the beach.
“Do you know what chapter?”

Students were helping one another and discussing in a collaborative manner despite the independent assignment. If working at home, they did not have this option. Introducing a blog will allow students an extension of this face-to-face interaction. At the end of class Kevin asked me, “When are we going to start the blogs? What are we going to be doing?” I was pleased to see student interest. Students had not forgotten about our class project and I wanted to ask a few more opinion questions before we actually started the blog.

How do you feel about Technology and Participation?

It was September 20th, and students had about three weeks together in class. In order to gauge student interest and opinions, two surveys were given. One survey was given about technology (**Appendix A**), the other on class comfort and participation (**Appendix B**). According to the technology survey (**Appendix A**), twelve out of seventeen students reported use of a computer more than once a day. The remaining five said that they use the computer once a day. All students had working computers with internet at home, which was a huge plus for my study. Twelve students had an email address that they used regularly and one of these students said they used email “only when something important was coming.” Five of the students did not have addresses. All students agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident about using a computer and the internet. Five students had *never* posted to a blog, and the remaining twelve students had. From this technology survey, I was able to see that students had confidence, background knowledge, and experience in using technology. Students were very computer literate, or perceived themselves to be. The majority of students knew what a blog was and what the purpose of a blog was, even if they had not posted to one themselves. Even though students had email addresses, I planned to have students make new Google addresses in order to use GoogleDocs.

Students filled out a class participation and comfort survey the same day (**Appendix B**). Gary, Gina, Amy, Phil, and Nikki all had disagrees and strongly **disagrees** on their surveys. They did not feel nervous speaking up, enjoyed talking and volunteering in class, and overall felt confident when they did speak in class. From what I had observed in the first few weeks of class, Amy and Gina were always asking questions. Phil, Gary, and Nikki often did not seem nervous, and only spoke up when given the chance. After getting to know the students thus far into the year, I thought that Amy and Gina were really going to enjoy the blog due to their outgoing personalities.

The following had a few concerns:

Kevin had all agrees and disagrees except in the “I have many ideas but I can’t put them into words fast enough” column. Kevin had a gifted I.E.P., and I could always see the wheels turning. Throughout the course, the blog served his needs by allowing him to have more time to think and get out ideas that he was thinking but unable to articulate in class.

Roy felt anxious about speaking up in classroom discussions. He had been very quiet in the beginning of the year, but did speak if called on or if he had a question. Cassie’s survey showed that she got very nervous if the teacher called on her, and she felt anxious when she spoke up in class discussions. She sat in the

front and often only talked to me. However, when we did the carousel activity earlier in the week, she was the spokesman for her group.

Liz felt anxious about speaking, and she reported that she got nervous if the teacher called on her. Liz seemed to be very outgoing to me in class, so her response was somewhat of a surprise. I did learn that she was only in College Prep English last year, so some of her misgivings were due to the fact that she felt as if she was behind some of her classmates who took honors English in the previous year.

Mark didn't like it when the whole class was listening to him, and he usually did not volunteer to speak during discussions. Mark had been very quiet to this point in the year, and I felt as if I did not know him well yet.

The following have many concerns:

Dan felt anxious about speaking up, got nervous if the teacher called on him, didn't like it when the class was listening to him, and got bored during discussions. Dan often asked me questions after class. He did most of his work and paid attention, but he did not volunteer. He spoke if I called on him.

Jen didn't know what the teacher was looking for in discussion, often lost focus, got nervous if the teacher called on her, took a long time to think about something to say, had difficulty following what was being said, couldn't put ideas

into words fast enough, usually didn't understand the material, and didn't like it when the whole class was listening to her. Jen's apprehensions were somewhat of a surprise to me. She had a bit of a speech impediment—nothing severe—that I had noticed, but she did volunteer and speak out more than some of the other students in class. She definitely came and asked me questions when she needed help.

Jill felt anxious speaking up, didn't know what the teacher was looking for in discussion, got nervous if the teacher called on her, was afraid that others would make fun of her questions and answers, and didn't like it when the whole class was listening to her. Jill was extremely quiet and was very soft-spoken when she did speak. She was very self-conscious.

Zach was afraid that other students would make fun of his questions, usually didn't volunteer to speak during discussions, and often did not do homework or read material being used in class discussion. Zach often only volunteered to ask questions and to seek clarification on assignments. He usually did not volunteer opinions or personal analysis of text.

Andy felt anxious speaking up, didn't know what the teacher was looking for in discussion, had ideas, but couldn't put them in words fast enough, usually didn't volunteer to speak during discussions, and sometimes got bored during discussions. When he actually spoke, he was well-spoken and it was very easy to

follow his train of thought. The blog was an effort to alleviate some of his insecurities/timidity.

Wayne felt anxious about speaking up in class, strongly disliked it when the whole class was listening to him talking, and when he did speak up, he felt that others did not understand what he was saying. Wayne volunteered all the time so I was surprised that he got nervous. I had noticed that he didn't look at anyone but me when he was speaking, and I did have to prompt/ask questions about his explanations at times. Despite this, he did put himself out there to try to make others understand his point-of-view.

Both of the surveys helped to inform my instruction, including the next step to be taken: example blogs.

What's a Blog?

Most students were familiar with the idea of a blog, but in order to gain further interest and to explain the purpose of the blog, students investigated a few example blogs. The research also suggests walking students through the process by carefully explaining the set-up of a blog before launching into the full use in the classroom. Students looked at and investigated classroom blogs from around the world in order to see what others were doing and to see what they would like to do with the blog (**Appendix C**).

#1-What interests you about blogs?

- Blog 1 interests me because it like a question that I like, “If you had...then what would you bring...” type question. I like blogs that make you think what you would do. (Jen)
- Because I get to read everyone’s opinions and thoughts on one topic or more. You can share your opinions and it makes great debates. (Gina)
- I like to hear what people think about different ideas. I think cool what people have to say and how it’s different. (Zach)
- It is a new way to do responses. I like it because it is not the standard boring method of writing a response. (Roy)
- Something that we can do using technology. Everything is online now. (Emma)
- It is interesting to hear different views on a particular matter in a way you haven’t thought of. (Kevin)
- I like how they are a bit fun to do. I also like how they are asked questions. (Andy)
- Blogs interest me because you can write your thoughts on something online. I like that because everyone can read it and discuss it out of school. (Nikki)
- Nothing really. (Dan)

The students all had the same idea of collaboration in mind. By seeing what classmates think beforehand, they are not alone in their thoughts and can receive some validation on their thoughts. Sharing opinions was important to them. Roy and Emma were both recognizing the importance of changing the way that we do things in an advancing society. Kevin was always thinking. To see that he was still interested in other viewpoints, despite the fact that he strives to be the best in the class, was encouraging. He still recognized the importance of learning from others. Nikki saw the benefit of extending learning outside of the classroom walls. Dan was not interested in this. At this point, I was wondering if I would be able to reach him through this study.

#2-What would you like to do on the blog?

1. Opinion:

- I'd just like it to be normal with freedom of thought or interpretation because it's your opinion. (Wayne)
- I would like to compare my thoughts expressed in my blog with other students to see how they can relate. (Nikki)
- I would like to do our class blog on things that we like as a class. Also, we can have mini-debates over subjects and we could give viewpoints. (Andy)
- I like have the thought of having one or two blogs and we could choose one that interests us more. We should have different blogs like some that have a fact and some opinion. (Jen)
- I would like to discuss relaxed topics; like what we feel about a certain topic. (Cassie)

2. Class topics:

- We should talk about what we are learning to provide discussion in a public forum and better understand the material. (Kevin)
- Discuss many novels. (Dan)
- We could discuss the books that we read or if we like our assignments. (Amy)
- Maybe have a section where the students can post stuff and collaborate on group projects or help people if they forgot to bring stuff home. And another section to discuss stuff that happened in class and get help. (Roy)
- To discuss novels and coordinate English projects. (Phil)

3. Unrelated answers:

- We should talk about sports because they're awesome. (Kevin)
- We should have a sports blog because I am a devoted athlete and it would interest me. (Mark)
- We should have a sports blog because sports is a good topic to write about. (Gary)
- Sports, environmental issues, writing- I choose these because it's what interests me. (Zach)
- Society, economic issues, books, magazines, sports, environmental issues. (Gina)
- I don't know. (Emma)

As seen from the second question, students were really interested in sharing ideas and getting their opinions out there. The research states that students are more likely to use the blog, and it is more likely to be successful when students are able to take ownership of the blog (Ducate, & Lomicka 2008; Davis A. & McGrail E. 2009; Boling E. et al 2008; Subrahmanyam et al. 2009). Students had things to say, and they wanted to be heard. Students identified that time spent outside of class could enhance understanding and productivity in class. Students wanted to work together and valued opinions and help from classmates. This was showing me that many of them had felt isolated in the past.

#5- What questions/ apprehensions do you have about blogs?

- Making sure they're done in time; making sure they're correct. (Cassie)
- No, I love blogs (Jen)
- None. (Andy)
- I would like to know the kind of blogs we will be doing, as well as how many and how often they will be done. (Nikki)
- What does it have to do with English and writing? No offense, but it would make more sense to build writing skill through creation/creative writing. (Wayne)
- When would I have to do it? (Dan)
- None really. (Roy)
- Will it be successful? Will people use it? Because from past experience, a class blog was not as active. (Phil)
- I will forget about them easily. (Emma)
- How do you let other people know about your blog? Can you talk about anything? (Gina)
- When do we start? (Kevin)
- Can other people read our page? (Liz)
- That someone will try and find me and kidnap me. (Jill)
- That creepers will find me. And that I will start a fight with my opinions. (Amy)

I was also unsure as to how the blog was going to work with timing. If students did not go on the blog, it would flop. At the same time, I hated to inflict pressing due dates. I didn't want it to become so burdensome that students just went on to make their comment/post and did not read other students' posts. Phil once again posed a valid point/concern. The blog needed to be active for it to work in the correct manner. It was, in a way, comforting to see that students did have a guard up and had been taught to be careful in online interactions. For these very concerns and apprehensions, I chose to use a blogging site that only allows those who are invited to discuss the topics. People could see our blog, but could not participate in it. Overall, students recognized the important capabilities of a blog, and the ways that the blog was going to enhance the classroom. They also offered helpful reminders to me as to how to make the blog more successful. Student opinion and choice were top priority.

Are We Ready to Start? No Turning Back...

It had taken a while to put everything in place. To have enough time for the blog in between all of the other daily demands of the classroom in the beginning of the year was overwhelming. We were doing vocabulary, reviewing grammar and paper writing, discussing *The Scarlet Letter*, and getting to know one another. But, on September 28th, we were ready to go. After researching

over the summer, I decided to use the Edublogs.org site. I chose this site because of its accessibility, privacy settings, and controls. I wanted to make sure that no one else could enter our blog to ensure safety and comfort for my students. In order for the site to be easier to access, I paid for a one-year subscription of \$30.00. This got rid of ads and made the site easier to set up. Student blog accounts were set up by me. I used student email addresses and school issued identification numbers to make usernames. Two students had issues with setting up Gmail accounts. Students needed to have an email address to be added to the blog, and because of the Google documents capabilities, I wanted all students to have Gmail.

Students began presenting the characters of *The Great Gatsby* in class. I decided to post another opinion question for students to respond to as we began our blogging journey. It was very exciting to see our blog finally up and running. It felt like it took forever to get everything situated. It was one of those things that you didn't know what was going to happen until you tried it, and that's what makes it scary to do in your classroom. We always want everything to be in perfect order (at least I do), and technology can be so finicky. It did take a lot of time and planning on my part to get everything set up, but it was so rewarding to see student responses on the blog. I wanted to see how many students went on the blog before I actually handed out the rubric. I knew that it was wishful thinking for them to go on it on their own, but at the same time, I hoped that some of the

students who were really interested would go on without the enticement of a grade. It would be great not to have to attach a grade to the blog, that they would see the value in the blog without a “reward,” but I knew that this was probably unrealistic.

Zach and Roy—two of the quietest students—were the first two to respond on the blog. Zach had some spelling errors, looking like he was writing on facebook/texting, but he was the first one to write, and he rated the book on a scale of 1-10. Other students started to do the same seeing Zach’s example. Most of the students greatly disliked the character Tom. Zach called him “disgusting.” Emma played devil’s advocate, saying that she liked how Tom was used in the story: “...when Daisy threatens to leave him for Gatsby, you look inside him more closely.” Students were starting to debate a little bit in sharing what they thought and not what they thought others wanted to hear.

Wayne brought up the question of the novel pertaining to life today, and Phil picked out the aspect of “difficult love triangles of the real world.” By seeing one another’s ideas, students were starting to make meaning for themselves about the literature. I noticed that in Wayne’s descriptions/blog entries that he was much more eloquent than in class. In class he often mumbled and looked only at me instead of at his classmates. He volunteered a lot, but others seemed to tire of his lengthy explanations. He had been able to articulate himself better when he had time to think about what he was saying on the blog.

Andy, who was another very quiet student in class, had a very well-written post. He analyzed the characters saying, “Then there were characters like Mertyl, who dreamed of attaining the dream...Overall, the American dream was present in the novel, just not fully present in some instances.” He just defined a major theme of the novel.

From this we began to discuss the ability to achieve the American dream. Gina, Cassie, Phil, Wayne, and Amy, all had opinions about this which they shared. Amy wrote, “I don’t think that the American dream will ever change in fact I think the more poverty in the country, the more people long for that American dream.” The students going on the blog were benefiting from the interaction and defining their beliefs. The students who were not going on the blog at this point were really missing out.

What does Collaboration in the Classroom Look Like?

As students offered opinions on the blog, we began working on our 1920s *Party like a Fitzgerald Great Gatsby* project. Students rated their interest levels in fashion, entertainment, poetry, food, and important people. According to interest, students were put into groups, and given requirements to complete in order to recreate a 1920s party. I set up a page on the blog for each group so that they could coordinate within their group and between groups outside of the classroom. I also handed out rubrics for the blog and explained that at least two

blog posts/comments should be made per week. After handing out the rubric, I noticed an increased interest in the blog. I set students loose.

Groups congregated in the back of the room choosing to settle in around the computers. I sat on a desk, eavesdropping on their conversations. As students worked on the task at hand, six students were on the blog: Mark, Gina, Phil, Cassie, Liz, and Jen. Dan told Jen, a part of the food group, to ask people if they had any food allergies. They were eventually going to bring in some snacks for the day of the party. This was something that I hadn't even thought about asking. The whole room was abuzz with voices and the clickety-clack of keystrokes. Liz was discussing while blogging with Kevin, Phil, and Roy. She was on the original opinion blogs instead of the group blog. Liz explained as she was talking about Daisy and Kanye West, "Everyone has their flaws." Lauren was making an interesting connection between Kanye West and *The Great Gatsby*. Listening to her conversation made me think about future posts/questions for the blog. Connecting the characters to a modern day character/person could be an interesting discussion point. Many students naturally make connections to people who are in the limelight. My thoughts were interrupted by an outburst from Liz. "You can read it when it's posted!" she exclaimed as she covered the screen with her hands. "What can I write about Daisy?" Mark thought aloud. Liz quickly responded with, "I like her." Kevin shot back, "She does things at the expense of others." At this point, I became very interested in their conversation. Liz

responded with, “I want to marry a guy with money. I mean, I want love, but I don’t want a poor guy.” Liz wasn’t afraid to say what she wanted to a few students, but she might be wary of saying the same thing to everyone in class; most students greatly disliked Daisy. I was very interested to see what she said about Daisy on the blog. Later that day, I looked at Liz’s two posts:

#1. “My reaction to *The Great Gatsby* is that overall it was a pretty good book. I like how there was two men who both wanted Daisy. I think that the way the book was written wasn’t my style though, it took awhile for thing to start happening in the book and by the time I got into reading it, it was almost over. I didn’t like the way the book ended though, I wanted Gatsby to find another girl that he loved as much as he loved Daisy.”

#2. “Out of all the characters Nick was my favorite. He always helped out Gatsby with all of his plans to sweep Daisy off her feet, even though none of them worked. Nick always was involved in everyones lives, and kept everything a secret. I think that made him a very trustful person.”

As suspected, Liz didn’t share what she shared in the group discussion she had in class. However, I did note that she did not say anything negative about Daisy as many other students had. This was a reminder that sometimes the “unlikeable”

characters may be liked by some students. In a class discussion, if I voice my own negative impressions about a character, I may be stifling a student's thought process. Discussing this other side to characters, and prompting honest feelings instead of a prescribed reaction, could be an enlightening experience.

What's Happening so Far?

There were many positive observations, and some surprises in the classroom. The group blogs were not used how I had planned them to be used. I wanted students to ask others about quotes, what to write about in their papers, and where to find information for their presentations. Instead, many of the posts were silly banter between students almost like an online chat room. Gina even stated, "This is my new fb" (facebook). Students were not completely off-task. They did ask things like, "What kind of cupcakes would you like to have at the party?" and "What would you wear to a 1920s party?" Responses from Mark started to surprise me. He was very quiet in class, but his personality was starting to come out with things like, "I want the food at this party to be awesome. Maybe some steak or ribs would be good. Don't disappoint me Gary. I relying on you my man." I began to refer back to my lit review and the importance of "social talk" in an online format. I was seeing that students were very comfortable with one another, adding to the overall environment of the room. This "social talk"

dialogue carried over into the classroom presentations where a very interesting dynamic between students was observed.

It was time to present the information from *The Great Gatsby* project. Students had two days to present their findings, followed up by the actually “party.” The whole class was discussing and asking questions, adding info to each other’s presentations. As the “Important People” group presented, Kevin, Wayne, Phil, and Cassie were all really chiming in from the audience, especially about Al Capone. The group presented on Greta Garbo. A listening student stated, “I don’t like silent movies.” Then Liz said, “Coolidge was a president? It’s funny to have him at a party with Al Capone!”

Despite the formality of class presentations, students handled the presentations as more of a collaborative discussion. The “audience” of students was interrupting, but they weren’t being rude. They were adding their input and asking questions of the presenters; they were not told to do this. The classroom was running like the classroom blog. Information was being presented, and students were commenting and making connections. It seemed as if the blog had worked to make students more comfortable and accustomed to discussing/asking questions.

The “Food” group was next. As they talked about cupcakes, Jen stated, “I asked on the blog, but none of you said what kind you wanted!” Students began to talk about whether they wanted vanilla or chocolate for the party.

Cassie exclaimed, “Make confetti!”

Emma shot back, “They didn’t have that then!”

Amy suggested, “Put music notes on them!”

Eventually they decided on lemon in order to keep in accordance with the time period. As the students discussed the alcohol of the time period, Kevin chimed in, “There’s a speakeasy still in NY behind a hot dog stand.” Amy responded, “It’s so cool that it’s still there!” A slide on “bathtub gin” came up. Amy had a strong reaction, “Ewww! That’s gross! Did they have soap?” Mark, with eyes rolling, replied, “Of course they had soap.” Liz, “That’s disgusting! Switch the slide.”

The group ended with the invention of sliced bread, to which Kevin observed, “The best thing since sliced bread... not the pyramids or great wall of China, sliced bread!” The discussion continued with 1920s games and the contest of pole sitting:

“What happened if it thunderstormed?”

“How did they go to the bathroom?”

“That’s crazy!”

“They were really into marathons!”

Students were really engaged and interested in what their classmates were saying. Some questions went unanswered by the groups. As I reflected on the classroom observation, I realized that another great application for the blog would be to write down student questions and present them on the blog so that students could get more answers. I had never seen such interest in presentations as I saw this day. I was seeing a change in student discussion.

What are Students' Reactions?

After the project, I had students fill out a "Party Reflection" (**Appendix D**). Nine students found the blog to be effective and helpful, while five students did not, and one student was in-between. Jen made some great points. She wanted to get feedback from her peers, but not everyone went on the blog and saw her post. She mentioned that some people wrote some silly things, and this seemed to have bothered her that people were appearing to be off-task. Zach didn't see the blog as being helpful to the project, but learned more about the novel due to other people's posts. Like Jen, Zach wanted to see people respond to the questions that groups had. Jen was more vocal in class than Zach. Zach was often one of the first to respond on the blog. Due to his quiet nature, I believed that the blog was something he really liked to do since he felt less like he was on the spot.

Where to Now?

Night by Elie Wiesel was next on the “to-do” list for students’ summer reading. Just like with *The Great Gatsby*, we began with some “refresher” questions on the blog. Zach had said that he really learned from the others’ posts, and now that we were warmed up, I wanted to see how a discussion online would directly correspond with an in-class discussion. So, students were to post on the blog in anticipation of a whole-class discussion. As silly as the students can be, they were very serious in their responses about the memoir *Night* (See **Figure 7.1**). Many students really put themselves into the equation saying things like, “If I was in a situation...” Through the blog discussion they began to reflect and state their views. Wayne, saw the positive stating, “...it also inspires hope and strength.” Phil even stated, “*Night*, I believe, is the only book that can really open people’s eyes to understand the impact of poor decisions we make regardless of how large or little. By far, this is the only book I have read where my heart felt like bursting with sadness.” This was a beautifully stated and eye-opening analysis. I was learning so much about my students from these blogs. I didn’t know if Phil would have shared this in class. It definitely contained a different effect by being written. Many students expressed interest in learning more about Wiesel and who he had become. Kevin wrote, “I would like to get his opinion on human rights today and how it relates to his own experiences.” Because of some

of these interests, I changed my plans and had students watch the Elie Wiesel-Oprah interview. I also gave them a biographical paper option for their final paper.

On the day of our in-class discussion about Wiesel's experiences in the Holocaust, Gina's question of "Why?" really made me think. "All this just makes me think, why do people hate and do things like this to one another?" she asked. Some questions have no definitive answers, but this question embodies the reason why we discuss and learn about these things. The blog is there not only to make students more comfortable with speaking in class, but to get them to come to new understandings about literature, the world, and themselves.

Figure 7.1

[Night](#) October 14

Write a reaction to Night. What were you thinking as you were reading? How is this memoir the same yet different from other pieces that you have read about the Holocaust?

"Night"

1.  [October 15th, 2010 at 1:15 pm e](#) Cassie Says:

My reaction to Night was that it was really disturbing. I was just thinking how could have this really happened to people. The events that went on during this was unbelievable. All the events that I have read about are all pretty much the same, horrifying. I think that it is important to learn about this because it should never happen again.

2.  [October 17th, 2010 at 8:45 pm e](#) Amy Says:

while i was reading it i thought how crazy it was that these things actually happened. in the begging since we know what will happen i feel upset that the don't believe that anything bad will happen to them and wish they would listen when people tell them to move and i get out. This memoir is very personal it is a person and what happens to their life and how they feel you really get an inside look on what happens to them through out this time.

3.  [October 17th, 2010 at 9:51 pm e](#) Andy Says:

While I was reading Night, I couldn't believe the things that were taking place. It made me feel upset when Elie would describe the circumstances and situations that he and his family had to go under. It made me feel pity towards him and his family too. It was extremely hard to believe the things that went on in the story. This memoir is much more deeper and darker than any other that I have read, but it is also very similar and talks about the same subjects and events.

4.  [October 17th, 2010 at 10:41 pm e](#) Kevin Says:

My reaction to Night was one of sadness. To hear such a personal account of the Holocaust instead of the impersonal texts in history books was eye-opening. It is amazing to think that man could show such cruelty to his fellow man. Never again...

5.  [October 17th, 2010 at 10:43 pm e](#) Roy Says:

It was really a sad book and it was hard to believe that one group of humans could do these things to another group of humans. It was very disturbing to know the conditions that people were forced to undergo and it was different because most pieces i have read about the holocaust was from a third person perspective of a historian looking back on it or a soldier fighting on the front lines but this is the first account i have heard from the inside of a concentration camp.

6.  [October 17th, 2010 at 11:20 pm e](#) *Jill Says:*

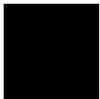
This book made me really sad,I hated reading about what these poor people went through. It was hard to think about what happened back then.

7.  [October 18th, 2010 at 9:04 am e](#) *Jen Says:*

AS I was reading the book i was thinking how could people live like that? as the characters were moving throuh the camps i was cheering them on and hoping they would make it like they were part of my family. This book was different from others because he surives but his family doesnt. most books i read it is a person that dies in the end or it is a small family that stays together.

8.  [October 18th, 2010 at 9:15 am e](#) *Phil Says:*

Though this may be the second time I have read this book, Night had opened my mind and made me question the possible goodness of people. It is a sad fact that we are only the living beings who kill our kind for no reason but because of hate, want, confusion and stupidity. Night, I believe, is the only book that can really open peoples eyes to understand the impact of poor decisions we make regardless of how large or little. By far, this is the only book I have read where my heart felt like bursting with sadness. At most times, we expect that such sad stories would end with a happy ending, or a perfec closure. Night does not. It forces the actual thought that no true sad story as this one, could ever end on a happy note. In this real world, people have been murdered, hurt, depressed beyond comprehension. Night has personally affected on much of how I perceive life. No other piece of literature can be more influential and controversial than Night by Elie Wiesel.

9.  [October 18th, 2010 at 9:15 am e](#) *Mark Says:*

I though Night was a great book and it really helped me understand more about the Holocaust. As I was reading Night I kept thinking how much pain Elie must've been going through. I thought it must've been torture being worked such long hours with such little food. Before this book I didn't know much about the Holocaust, but after reading it it really helped me understand how horrible and disturbing it was.

Seeing students' interest in the memoir through the blog and through our discussion, I came up with the idea to have each student pick a different connection piece out of the back of the *Night* books. In the class sets that the school owns, there are various pieces of literature related to the Holocaust. Each student picked one, and wrote his/her responses to questions provided on the blog. Each student was then assigned to make at least two comments on their classmates' posts. Posting reactions online instead of taking time to do it in class saved a lot of time and gave students a picture of 11 different pieces of literature that connected to *Night*. We never would have had time to do such an assignment if students had to present their findings in class. There were also some great points of discussion that stemmed out of student answers on the blog. Nicole stated that "the soldiers always had a choice," so I posed the question, *Do we, as humans, always have a choice? Is there such a thing as, "No choice?"* Since I was able to reflect on student answers, I was thinking more and was able to come up with some more thought-provoking questions for my students. This also led to the final paper/project for the unit. Instead of having only one choice of focusing on a literary element, students were given a few different options due to their interest shown in class (**Appendix E**). All work done up to this point on the blog was there for students as a resource in completing their final product.

Take Two: What did They Think This Time?

Reflecting on the *Night* final product, the class was split as to the “helpfulness” of the blog (**Appendix F**). Students were asked: *Was the blog effective for this assignment? Did you get help from reading and writing the various posts, was anything added to your paper, or were your ideas affected by others’ ideas?* Zach, Mark, Wayne, Andy, Gina, and Nikki agreed that it was helpful. Andy stated, “The blog was very helpful because it gave us other people’s insight. The posts about *Night* also really helped. None of my paper was affected by others ideas though.” Emma, Dan, Gary, Cassie, Jill, Liz, Amy, Jen and Kevin explained that it was not helpful to the outcome of their final project. Students were also asked: *How could the blog be more helpful to you?* Five students were satisfied with the usefulness. Four students wrote that it would be more helpful if all students would use it and use it more often. They seemed to be interested in getting more feedback from their peers. Eight students suggested that the blog would be more helpful if it had more websites and resources listed for student use. Kevin proposed a combination of the two suggestions, “The blog could have been more specific to the different projects. It would have been more helpful to have people doing similar papers to share ideas.” Similarly, Gina connected back to the *Gatsby* project when she wrote, “Well, when we did the Great Gatsby Blogs, it really helped because I liked that they were organized and

had tabs on the top for each category. I would like to do that again.” Visually, it was important for students to be able to easily navigate. How thoughtless it was for me not to make “group pages” just because this was an individual project. I was really amazed at how much I was learning from simply asking my students what helps them to learn.

End of First Quarter: How do I Grade the Blog?

As we came to the end of the first quarter, it was time for me to grade the blogs. I soon found it to be a bit difficult to grade students on the blogs. I was using a rubric (**Appendix G**) that evaluated students on critical thinking, applications and personal examples, collaboration, writing standards, and timeliness. Each category, for the quarter, was worth ten points. So, student blogs were looked at holistically. In order to grade the blogs, I printed out the blogs for each student. Throughout the quarter I had printed out student blogs so that I could comment and reflect on their work. In order to grade, I wanted to evaluate students according to their individual responses, but yet I also wanted to look at the responses as a whole. I did find it difficult to evaluate the blogs. It took a lot of time on my part to write comments and convey to students what I would like to see from them in future blogs (See **Figure 7.2**).

Figure 7.2

| Name | Grade | My Comments |
|--------|-------|--|
| Amy | 48/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your personal voice really shines through. Watch grammar and conventions! |
| Cassie | 50/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal connections are thoughtful and relevant. Very easy to see your personal point of view. |
| Wayne | 50/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very in-depth analysis of content. Very personal and extremely reflective. Offers help and constructive criticism to classmates. |
| Dan | 36/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You need to try to put more effort into your posts. Many posts are vague and/or missing. |
| Mark | 41/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add more information to the posts that you agree with. Why do you agree? What examples can be used? Try to add more personal examples. Great Gatsby posts are missing. |
| Gina | 38/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most posts done are reflective, but missing posts. Connect and provide more personal points of view. |
| Gary | 44/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try to add more of <u>your</u> viewpoint/personal examples on topics. Make sure that all responses are done on or before the due date! |
| Jill | 39/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try to add more personal examples to illustrate your point of view. Watch conventions! Great Gatsby posts? |
| Nikki | 48/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shares personal connections and posts are very reflective. Watch grammar and conventions- a few errors. You post on many different topics and did more than asked. |
| Zach | 48/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflective. You clearly read other students' posts and add your comments. Watch spelling! |
| Emma | 46/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Last few posts are brief. Most posts share personal connections. You really say how you feel about topics. This can be hard to do! |

| | | |
|-------|-------|---|
| Liz | 50/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I really hear your <u>voice</u> in your responses. You stay true to your personal views☺ |
| Roy | 50/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You really open up on the blog! I enjoy reading your perspective, and I'm sure that the others do too. Try to voice your comments in class! |
| Jen | 44/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could offer more personal connections. For the most part it is easy to understand your point, but watch spelling and conventions for clarity of thought! |
| Andy | 50/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal connections and reflections on what others have posted. Ideas are very clear and coherent. |
| Kevin | 50/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You use great comparisons and descriptive figurative language to convey your point. Information is clearly written with the intent to help classmates. |
| Phil | 50/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some very personal feeling and deep analyses, especially of <i>Night</i>. |

It is essential to use a rubric to evaluate a blog. I decided to stick with the same rubric for the next quarter so that students would have continuity. When using the blog in the future with other classes, I may reconsider point values and timing of grading. It was difficult to sift through so many blogs at once. It may also be helpful to assign more specific point values to each category instead of a blanket ten points. Overall, students mostly lost points for timeliness, writing standards, and applications and personal examples. Timeliness was a concern from the beginning, and the blog does not spell check. Some students started to first write their responses in a word document and then copy and paste to avoid grammar issues. With 1st quarter behind us, it was on to our final summer reading play, *A Raisin in the Sun*.

What Happens to a Dream Deferred?

While completing their *Night* projects, students began discussing questions dealing with *A Raisin in the Sun* on the blog. I wanted to see how students would respond to one another in class after see one another's ideas on the blog. The project for this reading was going to be a modernization of the play, so students needed to discuss some of the "big ideas" connected with the play before beginning. Students were instructed to go on the blog before class, but I also printed out the blogs to have an in-class discussion (**Appendix H**). Students were given "Discussion Debriefing" sheets (**Appendix I**). Students were put into groups of four, and were instructed to discuss points of interest generated from the blog. As always, the discussion did not go as planned. I circulated the room, observing groups. As it was a Friday, there was some off-task chatter about sports and the weekend. Three out of the four groups needed to be reminded to stay on task. The group of Cassie, Nikki, Andy, and Phil was *very* quiet. All four enjoyed writing on the blog, but getting them to discuss in class was another story. The group finally began to discuss quietly, and all I heard Cassie say (about Wayne) was, "He writes stories and novels on the blog." I did not like the attitudes coming out that day.

I next observed the group of Jen, Wayne, Emma, and Dan. Emma and Wayne were in a heated discussion while Jen was trying to be the "voice of reason" as she had often been throughout the year. Emma fired at Wayne, "This

is so pointless! Your blog doesn't make sense!" Wayne, very calmly tried to explain his point, "You aren't understanding what I'm trying to say. Ignorance isn't bliss is the bottom line." On the other side of the room, Zach, Mark, Gary, and Kevin discussed the blog about being "sold out." Zach stated, "He didn't sell out." Mark and Kevin countered, "Yes he did!" "Not to the landlord guy" Zach replied.

Finally, Gina, Amy, Jill, and Liz were also discussing the "sold out" blog. "What does 'sold out' mean?" Gina asked. Amy explained, "It's like to give up a belief." Then, about the poem title, Gina exclaimed, "It exploded! He used the money! I get it now. It's so cool how she used this poem to begin the play."

Gina had made a connection between the poem and the play through discussion of main ideas and characters. It was a very insightful connection to make considering that the only discussion that had taken place was between students on the blog and in groups in class. At the end of the period, students handed in their discussion debriefing sheets. Although I had been hoping to hear more discussion around the room, the sheets did provide further insight into student thought and personal reflection (**Appendix J**). Their next task was to start offering ideas about how to modernize the play.

On the following Monday, students were split into three groups according to the three Acts of *A Raisin in the Sun*. As per Gina's request after the last

project, I made a blog page for each group. In groups, students were to summarize and analyze their act of the play and come up with ideas to modernize. All of this was to be posted on the blog in order to coordinate with the other groups. I, once again, circulated the room observing students at work. They really didn't need me. The class was student-driven. They had all of the tools; they just needed time to work. This is how the classroom had evolved. Student opinion was being valued. Student assignments were being created with special concern for collaboration and personal interest; therefore, students were taking over. After spending two days deliberating (See page 37, **Students in Charge?: Creating a Class Modernization of *A Raisin in the Sun***) it was time to write the scripts. While writing, the blog was an important part of the process. Students used it as another means of communication in order to get the play together. After writing scripts, we spent a week performing and filming the play in the school auditorium. It was a long process, yet it was a valuable experience as seen from student reflections (**Appendix K**):

“What is the most valuable thing that you have learned from this assignment? Why?”

- Eight students wrote about teamwork and coordinating with others. Gina wrote, “The most valuable thing that I learned was that you really have to work well with others to accomplish your goal.”

- Three students found that it takes a lot of work to write and produce a play. Liz wrote, “It’s not easy to write plays. You need to make sure that it’ll make sense to other people.”
- Two students said that time management was the most valuable thing learned.

“Was the blog effective for this unit? Explain.

- Eight students found the blog to be helpful for sharing thoughts and working across groups.
- Six students found it more effective to just talk to others when in class. Wayne wrote, “It didn’t beat human to human contact. Human speech can’t be replaced.”

Most students expressed an interest in having more assignments dealing with collaboration on the blog. Roy wrote, “Projects and regular posts are good for the blog. It is convenient and good for projects with groups working together.” Mark also suggested having more resources on the blog to turn to for assignments. Liz expressed frustration with the blog: “Nothing. I don’t enjoy doing the blogs. No one reads each others. They just comment on how they feel about the topic.” This made me wonder. Was I asking for too much opinion? I wanted to be sure to add more resources for students in the next unit.

Poetry: Who is the American Master?

Timing was behind schedule, and wrapping up my study was not going to happen for a while. Despite having my appendix out followed by strep throat, we began the next unit. I still wanted to take student concerns into consideration and see what happened on the blog when studying new material together. Up until this point, all of the work done for class had been with novels that students read over the summer. Our Whitman and Dickinson poetry unit was next on the curriculum agenda.

The unit began with blog discussions about why students liked certain songs and what role literary devices play in the music they liked. In an effort to have more resources for students to turn to, I posted links about Whitman and Dickinson. Since I was sick at home, I also instructed students to begin discussing a Whitman poem—“I Hear America Singing”—on the blog. While sick, I also changed the look of the blog so that it was easier to navigate (**Appendix L**). After some discussion of literary devices and the importance of language usage in class, students were given an assignment to post their favorite songs on the blog, accompanied by an analysis of the song. Students were also instructed to discuss the song choices of others by commenting on at least two posts. Their final project for the unit was going to be the creation of a “Found Poem” (**Appendix M**). So the song assignment was given in an effort to not only review material talked about in class, but to give students more resources.

Meanwhile, our classroom analysis of Whitman and Dickinson continued. For each poem that was going to be discussed in class, questions were first posted on the blog to give exposure to the topic and for students to formulate ideas and opinions. We then discussed in class, referencing the blog. The most interesting discussion came from the day we discussed Emily Dickinson's "Tell all the truth, but tell it Slant." This poem brought on a lot of controversy; students made connections to various other topics discussed throughout the year. Using the ideas presented on the blog, we began the discussion of what a "slant truth" really was. Wayne, Kevin, and Amy dominated the floor, while Liz, Phil, Cassie, Nikki, Mark, and Jill had been the only students to post comments on the blog. Cassie, Zach, Mark, and Jill were the only students who did not offer opinions in class. By using the blog and discussing in class, I was able to see a majority of student thought. I was also able to ask Cassie, Mark, and Jill questions during discussion to include them since they are sometimes shy about offering their point of view unless called on. The discussion quickly turned into a debate as Phil argued that sometimes ignorance is bliss, and Wayne, sticking to his belief that he had been claiming all year, argued that it is *never* bliss. Emma brought up the ideas presented in the poem, agreeing with Dickinson about "protecting" others from the "blinding" truth. Many valid points were brought up including the use of *The Great Gatsby*. Once again, students led discussion, getting at the meaning of an author's words and interpreting that meaning for their own lives. Reading the

blog before class allowed me to know students' thoughts and what questions to ask.

At this point, I really felt as if I knew these students better than any other class that I have had. Looking at their blogs and discussing in class opened a window into their minds for me. When discussing the poem "Because I could not stop for Death," Gina asked, innocently, "What does death feel like?" It was an odd question, and a "what happens/near-death experience" discussion ensued. Gina wasn't being morbid, and, looking back over some of her blogs and comments in class, I just see a girl who was very inquisitive. When reviewing *Night*, she had simply asked, "Why? All this just makes me think, why do people hate and do things like this to one another?" On another student's song post, she commented, "I really like this song. For some reason, songs or poems about depression really interest me and I can relate to them sometimes." Looking at all of these pieces, I was able to see Gina's interests, opinions, and personality. Taking a deeper look at Gina's questions in-class and her blog responses helped me to see the topics she liked to discuss and what she liked to do in the classroom. She was truly thinking about the meaning behind the author's words.

End of Second Quarter: What do the Rubrics Tell Me This Time?

I used the same grading rubric as I did for the first quarter. I went about grading the blogs in the same way as well (See **Figure 7.3**). Since many

assignments related to the blog were detailed, the blogs were a little easier to grade. It still took a long time to sift through all comments and double check responses.

Figure 7.3

| Name | Grade | My Comments |
|-------|-------|--|
| Nikki | 47/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poem explained. Shows thought • Proofread! Spelling and capitalization errors. • All posts made on time. Excellent! |
| Zach | 38/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Song not explained and missing some posts. • Watch capitalization, apostrophes, spelling, and punctuation. |
| Phil | 40/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis and personal take on poetry displayed, but some posts are missing. • A few minor spelling errors. |
| Mark | 44/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You need to explain the “why” further in most posts. • Try to ask more questions and add more information to help others. • Some spelling errors, but clear overall • All assignments completed. |
| Jill | 41/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could expand ideas further. Didn’t explain the song meaning. • Watch spelling- too=also or over amount of something. • Almost all posts completed. |
| Gina | 43/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinks about the “why” in posts. • I can definitely see more of your personality in your posts☺ • Some spelling/grammar errors, but overall thoughts are clearly communicated. • Missing 3 posts. |
| Gary | 39/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing blogs affected overall analysis. • Read other posts before posting-duplicate poem posted. |
| Jen | 37/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could explain further as to the “why” in some posts. • Didn’t do song comments. • Some posts have no capitalization and are very informal with spelling- watch this! |
| Andy | 49/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well done. You think about your posts and offer insight into material. • Missing 1 post. |

| | | |
|--------|-------|--|
| Roy | 40/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poem post not explained. • Watch punctuation and apostrophes. • Missing 2 posts. |
| Cassie | 50/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers food for thought to others. • Song choice thoroughly explained. • All posts completed. |
| Liz | 45/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing 1 comment. • Watch spelling- their, they're, your, and you're |
| Dan | 10/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know that you had many absences, but you should have checked the blog. Only 1 post was made all quarter! |
| Amy | 44/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually answers “the why” and explains. • Interesting point about how words get started in the 1st place. • Missing a few posts. • Watch capitalization and punctuation. |
| Wayne | 29/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorough explanation of song, but missing many blogs. • Why do you have so many missing assignments? |
| Kevin | 46/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing explanation of devices. • Makes personal connections and offers information to classmates. • Missing 1 post. |
| Emma | 28/50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing many posts that affect the categories of critical thinking, applications and personal examples, and collaboration. |

The majority of points were lost for missing/incomplete assignments.

Some of this can be attributed to the interruptions in the schedule such as holidays and my illnesses. Some students, such as Wayne and Dan, clearly lost interest in the value of the blog. Because I was more specific with requirements, some students did not follow through. Overall, most students participated in the blog, but the largest issue—the one that most students were concerned about in the beginning—was the timeliness of student responses.

Surveys and Portfolios: What did Students Learn So Far this Year?

As the second quarter came to a close, it was time to provide final reflections on the implementation of blogs in the classroom. Students put together portfolios and filled out post-surveys. Students were given a portfolio assignment (**Appendix N**). Seven students included the blog in their portfolio.

Figure 7.4

| Student | Reason in Portfolio | Reflection |
|---------|-------------------------|--|
| Jen | Class Work/ Homework | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I chose this piece of work because I enjoyed blogging and giving opinion. I've learned that some poets influenced people's lives through history. I also learned how American singers put literary devices in their songs. I found that if I didn't get a chance in class to complete the blog then I would have a hard time finding a way to do it at home. If I would do this again, I would make sure that I did all the blogs and didn't miss any. I would write more than what I typed as well. |
| Jill | Favorite Assignment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This blog assignment was my favorite because it was fun and I could relate to it. I learned more words that other people thought were overused. I also learned more about what my classmates thought about the list and what words they think should be added to the list. |
| Nikki | Class Work/ Homework | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I choose the blog because I feel I learned the most from using the blog. I have learned other people's opinions and views of <i>The Great Gatsby</i>, as well as many of my classmate's views on American poetry. If I didn't know what to do I could look at other's blogs to help me out. |
| Cassie | Class Work/ Homework | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I chose this blog class work because it was a fun assignment to do and find. This is one of my favorite songs so it was interesting to do a project with it. I learned that even in popular songs they use literary devices to make the song more interesting and to enhance the sound of it. |

| | | |
|-------|-------------------------|--|
| Gary | Class Work/ Homework | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I chose the blog assignment because it was basically the biggest class work/homework assignment we had all year. It was also an interesting way to communicate with my classmates outside of school. I learned many things about literature such as poetry through the blog. Reading about Dickinson and Whitman poems and answering questions about them on the blog helped me better understand the message of the poem. If I were going to do the assignment again, I would make sure I completed all the blogs before the due date so I wouldn't lost points on my final grade |
| Kevin | Class Work/ Homework | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I chose the blog for my portfolio because it was fun to do and provided good insight from other people, as well as help for certain activities. From the blogs I learned a lot about the poetry of Whitman and Dickinson. Doing the blogs and reading others' blogs was helpful in understanding the content we were studying in class at the time. They also helped in the understanding of poetry in general, through the poems and songs posted by different people. The most difficult part of this assignment is remembering to do it. I am a bit of a procrastinator, and sometimes I almost didn't do the blog. The blog worked as well as it could have, and overall proved to be very effective. |
| Mark | Class Work/ Homework | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I chose to insert the blog into my portfolio because I thought the questions were interesting and related to me. I enjoyed answering the blogs because I could express my opinions on that particular subject. I learned many things about poetry from the blogs because I could express my opinions on that particular subject. The most difficult part or question was the question saying why did Hughes write "I, Too, Sing America" and what is he trying to say. I thought this was hard because it was tough to decide what someone else is thinking and what their feelings are just from a poem. If I was going to do this assignment again, I would further my opinions on the questions and think harder about what to write. |

From these reflections, I could see that almost half of the students really valued the blogs, and felt as if they really got something out of using them throughout the first half of the school year. I myself always learned something new when revisiting their work. By listening to students, the blog was seen as

helpful for the poetry unit. Before doing this unit, I made sure to reflect on all of their ideas and I tried to incorporate their suggestions. Students liked using the blog for help in learning about completely new material.

As students filled out pre-surveys, they also filled out post-surveys. They filled out the same “Class Comfort and Participation” survey (**Appendix B**), and they completed a blogging survey (See **Figure 7.5**) (**Appendix O**).

Wayne was no longer nervous if I called on him, but still felt like others didn't know what he was saying. Cassie was not nervous if I called on her or anxious to speak up, but did get bored during discussions. Dan was no longer anxious to speak, but he was still nervous to talk in front of others. Kevin no longer felt as if he couldn't put his ideas into words fast enough. Gary, overall, was more comfortable as he marked strongly disagrees with most questions. Roy was no longer anxious to speak up. Nikki was more comfortable, marking strongly disagrees for most options. Mark no longer minds when others were listening to him. Liz was still a little anxious, but no longer nervous if I called on her. Andy was still anxious to speak up but now knew what the teacher was looking for. Zach was no longer anxious or afraid that others would make fun of his ideas, but he still didn't like the whole class listening to him. Jill still didn't like when the whole class was listening, but felt less anxious and knew what the

teacher was looking for. Overall comfort in the classroom had improved since implementing the blogs.

Figure 7.5

| Survey Statement | Agreed | Neutral | Disagreed | Comments |
|--|--------|---------|-----------|--|
| I liked participating in the online blogs. | 7 | 7 | 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They were a good way to share ideas out of class. (Nikki) • Sometimes I like the topics we can talk about, but then there are topics I don't like. (Gina) • It makes it easier to explain many things. (Phil) • Sometimes it was a hassle trying to get online because I don't have time. (Mark) |
| I learned something from reading someone else's post. | 13 | 4 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I learned things about others that I had not previously known. (Gary) • Someone else's post can actually help me understand more of the topic being discussed. (Gina) • Sort of. (Wayne) |
| I changed my mind as a result of reading someone's post. | 4 | 2 | 11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't fault the blog, I'm stubborn. (Kevin) • If I think someone is wrong then I will just say that I don't agree. (Amy). • Some people gave strong reasons behind answers that made me change my mind. (Nikki) • Reading people's thoughts in text made it easier to understand other people's views. (Phil) |
| Blogging made me more comfortable discussing in class. | 4 | 8 | 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The blog gave me ideas of what to talk about in class. (Nikki) • I didn't have a problem talking in class. (Amy) • The blog lets me think of things to say. (Jen) • I've never been uncomfortable. (Liz) |

| | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|--|
| I prefer online discussions to in-class discussions. | 3 | 4 | 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In person is <u>way</u> better. (Wayne) • I don't like talking in class. (Jen) • I would much rather talk face to face. (Liz) • They are both beneficial. (Nikki) • I don't mind them, but I'd rather be in person. (Amy) |
| I became more careful with my grammar and writing because of the online blogging. | 4 | 5 | 8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temptation to use texting lingo was strong. (Roy) • I type that way anyway... (Wayne) • I try to keep my grammar up to par as if it were an essay. (Phil) • I kept my writing the same throughout the blog. (Andy) • It's embarrassing to spell easy words wrong. (Kevin) • Since it doesn't change it automatically, it makes you more careful. (Cassie) |
| The blogging helped me to better understand the literature we studied. | 10 | 3 | 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing all the viewpoints was useful. (Roy) • Not as good as in person discussion. (Wayne) • It helped to understand things we discussed in class. (Gary) • Talking in class helped more than the blog did. (Jill) |

Looking at student surveys and comments, I was happy with the results.

Not one student could say they did not learn anything from the blogs. Most students viewed the blog as helping them to understand the material better.

Although not all students liked the blog, I think that Nikki's comment about in-class vs. online discussion summed it all up, "They are both beneficial."

Student-Led Discussion: What the Classroom Looks Like Now

It is February. Students have been regularly using the blog since October. We have had discussions, done projects, written papers, and survived an ungodly amount of snow days and other interruptions in the schedule. Students are preparing to read *The Crucible*. They have answered nine opinion questions on the blog, and are now reviewing the questions in groups. Each group is going to bring up a point that they would like to discuss/debate with the class. Groups decided to discuss the following: #1-*Confessing to a crime you didn't commit in order to avoid punishment is wise.* #3- *It is better to die for what you believe in rather than to lie to save your life.* #7- *A person is innocent until proven guilty.* Phil opens up the discussion with #3. He quickly takes over as the facilitator of the discussion, stating his opinion, "Dying in truth is always better than living a lie." Nikki mentions Columbine and how the one girl held to her belief. Liz quickly interjects her opinion saying, "Your beliefs are still there even if you lie." Cassie agrees, and Mark adds, "In the situation, you never know what you are going to do. You might do something differently than what you would think." Gina counters them, and both Gary and Mark respond with, "If someone had a gun to your head, you'd say what they wanted." "No I would not!" Gina exclaims. The discussion moves onto #7. Kevin begins with, "It is the beauty of the American court, and the flaw. Wayne argues that a person is guilty whether the guilt is known or not. As everyone wants to be heard, Jill, without raising her

hand, interjects, “I agree with Wayne. A person knows whether or not they committed a crime! Therefore, they are guilty.” Despite her timidity, Jill now speaks up and shares with the group when she feels strongly about the discussion. She is no longer silent. Each student has a voice due to the blog.

FINDINGS

Introduction

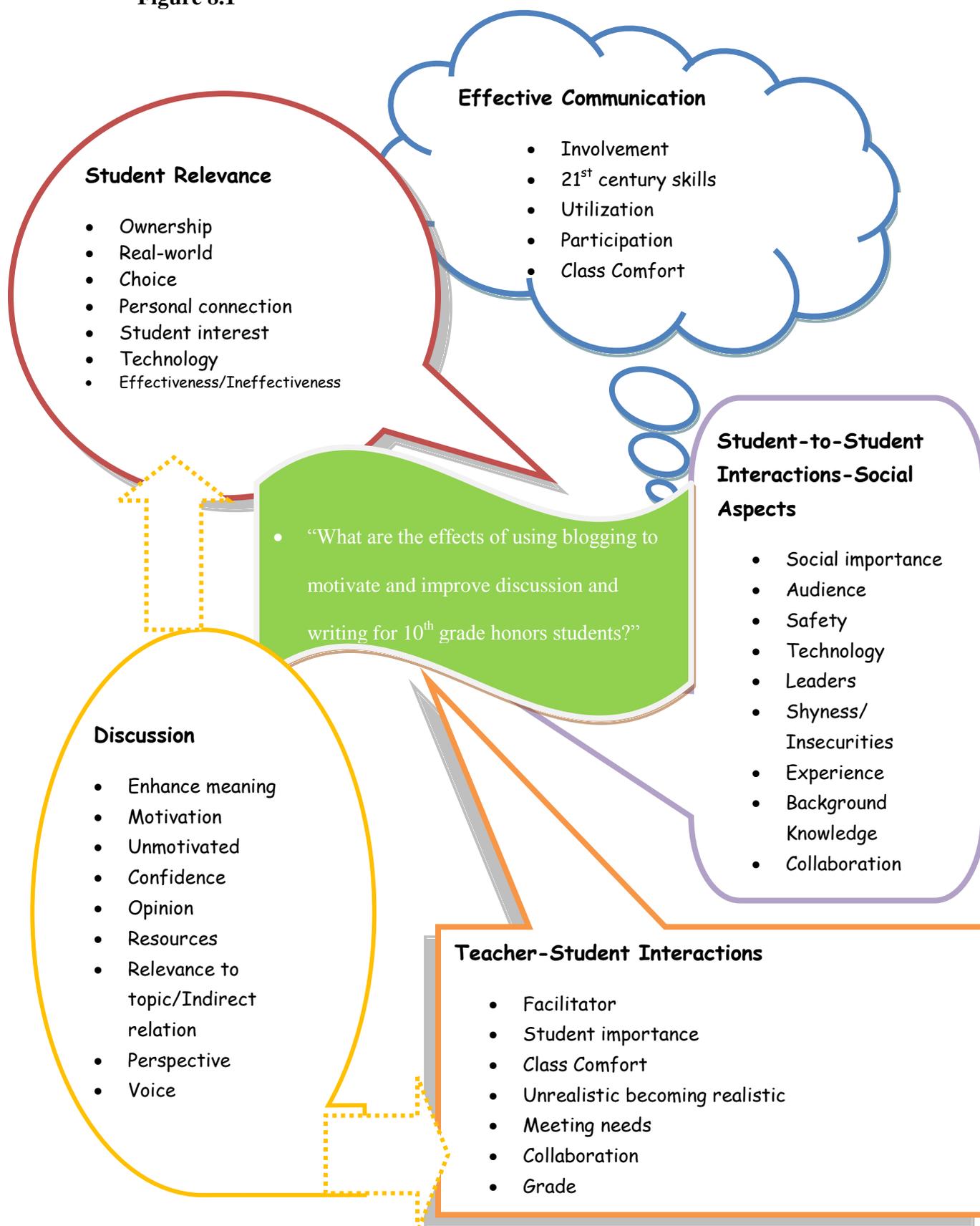
Upon review of the research done, there were five major categories found to be relevant to the study. Within these categories a list of corresponding ideas or codes were made in an effort to see the similarities within the research. From these similarities, seven theme statements, or overall findings were extracted. The categories are visually represented on the next page in **Figure 8.1**. Theme statements with connections to the research ensue.

Student Relevance

When given tools to construct personal meaning, students are able to arrive at conclusions about literature, the world, and personal beliefs on their own. Students have things to say, and blogs are a way to enhance student voice.

Questions for the blog were formulated with the intent of students having different opinions. Debatable questions and questions that asked students for personal opinions were more interesting to students and allowed all students to state their ideas. Blogging sparks creativity and gives students a feeling of ownership (Ducate, & Lomicka, 2008; Davis A. & McGrail E., 2009; Boling E. et al., 2008; Subrahmanyam et al., 2009). The posted question, *how do colors, the*

Figure 8.1



the green light, the Valley of Ashes, and T.J. Eckleberg add meaning to the novel (The Great Gatsby)? only received two responses from students. They were given various posts to choose from, but this post did not grab student interest. McPerson, Wang, Hsu, and Tseui (2007) state that “The online environment in K-12 fosters the emergence of student voice describing unique perspectives, feelings, and ideas in the communication exchange” (p. 27). Instead, when discussing thoughts on characters, students responded with comments such as, “Out of the arrogance and carelessness, one character for me emerged as the reasonable, accountable one: Nick. Throughout the story, Nick seems to be the only one who is not swayed by the temptations of wealth and power.” This comment shows that Kevin is coming to a conclusion about literature after being given a “tool” to construct personal meaning. By sharing an opinion, the ideas behind some of the symbols are being approached. The difference in student interest means a difference between constructing meaning and receiving information. When meaning is constructed by students, it has a more lasting impression on the mind. An in-class discussion would ensue from student opinions generated and constructed on the blog. By asking the right questions and drawing on student interest, discussion can lead to bigger ideas and the analysis of important themes within the curriculum.

Because students are sociable, it is important to not only encourage social interactions to take place, but this should be done to cultivate an environment of

authenticity. Dewey (1938) clarifies with, “Enforced quiet and acquiescence prevent pupils from disclosing their real natures. They enforce artificial uniformity. They put seeming before being. They place a premium upon preserving the outward appearance of attention, decorum, and obedience” (p. 62). Discussion allows us to see who kids are. A teacher needs to know about his or her students to know about how they learn, to know how to teach them. “Personal relevance” needs to be a priority so that personal meaning is made possible. Likewise, honing in on individual interest and differentiating is an important aspect of blogging. Student blogs contain more depth when the students are interested in what they are writing about (Boling 2008; Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Wang, 2008). When students are personally invested, the best discussions will ensue. Research states that students using blogs, “...could pursue answers and direct their own learning” (Davis & McGrail, 2009, p. 76). Blogging is certainly encouraging independence of thought and pushing against “artificial uniformity.”

Not only are students arriving at conclusions about literature, but the discussion of opinions and themes leads students to think more deeply about the world and personal beliefs. Controversial topics such as those discussed in *The Crucible* allow students to reflect on personal motivations of others and themselves. This, in turn, creates a deeper meaning of literature. By first discussing on the blog, students were introduced to the ideas, aware of others’

ideas, and prepared to make a case in class. A better and more focused discussion ensues when students are prepared with the information beforehand.

Effective Communication

Student discussion is most beneficial when all students are involved and timely responses are made to avoid frustration and maximize effectiveness.

Student involvement was a concern from the beginning. As Ducate & Lomicka (2008) report, student comments were not always made in a timely fashion (p. 23). In the very first survey done, students voiced apprehensions about classmates utilizing the blog. They recognized, right from the start, that the only way the blog would work is if people did the assignments, read others' posts, and did assignments in a timely fashion. Doing all of the blogs at the end of the quarter would be even more useless than making up a test after a final. The point of the blog is to give students background knowledge and to prepare for upcoming material in discussion. If students did not go on the blog, then they were missing knowledge for discussion. Skinner writes, "The failure of community can weaken knowledge construction, which is more complex than at first appears" (p. 390).

Likewise, when doing group projects, the blog served as a way to communicate. For *The Great Gatsby* project, students were given specific group

pages. For *The Raisin in the Sun* project, one student was specifically assigned to being the blogger to communicate ideas with other groups. It's just like having a reference book. If you have the book, but don't open it, it's doesn't do you any good. Students who actively went on the blog and read other students' comments got more out of the blog than students who were resistant to the assignment. Some students, because it is a new methodology, had it in their minds that class discussion was more beneficial and so did not see the need for the blog. In many of the surveys given after large projects, students communicated frustration about the fact that not everyone was using the blog. Nikki wrote that the blog would be more helpful "If more people posted on the blog, or responded, it would be helpful to get everyone's input." This was more frustrating for students when assignments involved a group versus individual responses.

Student-Student Interactions

Blogs show students that time spent outside of class can enhance understanding and productivity in class.

Society thrives on interaction (now more than ever before). The proof of this is seen in the ever expanding use of social networks such as Facebook and MySpace, as well as the constant texting and use of Smartphones. Dewey (1938) says, of social interaction, "...the primary source of social control resides in the very nature of the work done as a social enterprise in which all individuals have

an opportunity to contribute and to which all feel a responsibility. Most children are naturally ‘sociable.’ Isolation is even more irksome to them than adults” (p. 56). No one wants to feel isolated, which is what too often happens in the classroom. Students want to feel like they are a “part” of something; that they belong to a greater whole. With the onset of technology, students need to “socially adapt” to technology in an educational setting. Being “basically literate” is now much more than being able to read and write. Being literate in today’s world is much more complicated. Students headed for college will be involved in an online learning community. Online discussion boards are a part of many college courses due to the fact that time spent together is limited. Exposing students to this methodology in high school will allow them to be more comfortable and experienced for the future.

Because of the blog, we were able to do more assignments than normal. I was able to change some of my projects to meet student needs in class, and we were able to discuss more material on the blog. We did extra assignments with *Night* and the unit on Whitman and Dickinson. In class, time was then free for students to work on meaningful projects and authentic learning experiences. Students were coming to class with more background knowledge from talking about the material, and so discussions could be more focused on what students wanted/needed to talk about as a whole class. The blog has essentially eliminated the need for warm-ups which I had previously used to start discussion. Now we

get right to the point. This is similar to Wang & Hsua's (2008) findings.

Reported in their research, students were able to learn more about one another and appreciated the diversity in the classroom. Because students became more aware of others opinions, thoughts, and ideas, the comfort level went up (p. 84).

Students also recognized the importance of communicating outside of the classroom with comments such as:

- “It was also an interesting way to communicate with my classmates outside of school. I learned many things about literature such as poetry through the blog. Reading about Dickinson and Whitman poems and answering questions about them on the blog helped me better understand the message of the poem” (Gary).
- “We can start discussions at home and save time in class” (Dan).
- “They were a good way to share ideas out of class” (Nikki).

With only 42 minutes in a class period, discussion is often cut off. As Wang & Hsua (2008) state “...the participants in an online discussion environment tend to be more critical and reflective, given the advantage of time and space convenience (p. 82). Having another link to one another outside of class made students more productive.

*When students see one another's ideas, students come to new understandings
about literature.*

Dewey (1938) writes, "Development, as often happens, proceeds here not in a circle but in a spiral, passing through the same point at each new revolution while advancing to a higher level" (pg 56). This quote made me think about the way in which students learn and construct knowledge. Students use their background knowledge and continuing experiences to make meaning out of new information. We often think of learning in terms of a circle, as stated above, since learning is an ongoing process. I like thinking about it in terms of a spiral—points at which knowledge becomes linked because of prior experiences. The series of circles incorporated in a spiral shows depth and the "ups" and "downs" of learning. When the points of the spiral intersect, I see it as connecting with the student's zone of proximal development, making an impact on his/her learning. As the quote states, getting to the "higher" level happens only when traveling through a common point.

Teachers strive to connect with students and their personal learning style. We change methods to meet our students where they are, with the intention of advancing them onto a higher level. With my honors students, I wanted them to move beyond a "circle" and rather make connections to their prior knowledge and to each other to come to deeper understandings.

Freire's (1970) ideal learner questions authority, who gets the power, and why they get the power. Although the answers elude us, the ideal learner continues to ask and seek justification. In the quest to foster students to be social activists, they must communicate. Freire (1970) writes, "Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality*, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication" (pg. 77). Isolation of students does nothing but go against reality. In the real world, people work together. Why then, do we often isolate students in the classroom? Communication is becoming even more important due to technology. The ideal learner needs to be socially active in a classroom setting in order to learn how to be socially active later on in life. Authentic learning cannot be fully enacted if students are always expected to be on their own. The sharing aspect of the blog shows students that they can be a part of a community within society. Classmates, no matter how different they may be, can provide insight and help into issues that may be hard for another to understand.

The blog made many students more comfortable with sharing ideas and discussing. The blog also gave students another reference to turn to when doing work and prompted students to think about material from different points of view. All students learned something from reading someone else's post. It did not necessarily change their mind or opinion, but doing the blogs gave insight into topics, creating a true community of learners. Student interactions on and off-line

are reported to be “psychologically connected” (Subrahmanyam, Garcia, Harsono, Li & Lipana, p. 241). Gina wrote, “Someone else’s post can actually help me understand more of the topic being discussed.” Nikki said, “The blog helped me compare my ideas with others,” and, “Some people gave strong reasons behind answers that made me change my mind.” Zach wrote, “I got to see what others thought and it helped me.” Mark stated, “People’s posts and ideas helped me better understand the material.” Amy said, “I normally can learn something from what they say,” and “It helped a little to talk about the poems.” Phil commented that, “Reading people’s thoughts in text makes it easier to understand other people’s views.” Jen wrote, “It depends on the topic. I don’t usually change my mind unless a strong point is made.” The students who had more negative responses, such as Dan with a mere, “I didn’t like it” were the students who did not complete the assignments. It goes back to the importance of utilizing the blog. The majority of students who were active in the blog learned more and found the blog to be more valuable. Students who did not complete the assignments failed to see the correlation between discussions and did not obtain the background knowledge needed for class. There is clearly a connection between motivation and student achievement (Covington, 2000). We get out of an experience what we put into it.

Teacher-Student Interactions

Reflecting on student opinions prompts further exploration of ideas. Ongoing discussion changes plans based on student needs, and time in class becomes student-led. Blogs give teachers insight into student thoughts, opinion, and social interactions.

Teaching is filled with contradictions. Vygotsky(1978) writes, “But if we ignore a child’s needs, and the incentives which are effective in getting him to act, we will never be able to understand his advance from one developmental stage to the next, because every advance is connected with a marked change in motives, inclinations, and incentives” (p. 92). This quote really highlights one of the main frustrations in the field today. Teachers are hammered with the importance of differentiating instruction, yet when testing results come in the same administrators turn around and mandate a PSSA workbook. Everyone knows what good teaching looks like, but when money is involved, scores on a test win out. With my study, I have realized how important it is to observe my students and listen to their wants and needs. Since I did my study with my honors 10th graders, it was a different experience from teaching College Prep 11th graders. Last year I was so afraid to veer from the prescribed curriculum. In doing my study, I’ve made many decisions that I felt would be more beneficial to the students. I’ve been more in tune with what they need in the classroom, and the

overall environment has been unlike any other class I have had before. Student pre- and post- surveys, checklists, and conferencing provide the teacher with a more accurate view of students' interactions with a teaching method (Hurst, 2005; Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Yu, 2009). If I have learned nothing else from the study about my methodology of blogging, what I have learned is how different a classroom can be from truly trying to cater to student needs.

Freire (1970) deals directly with the issue of oppression as a social problem, observing that, "In this way, the problem-posing educator constantly reforms his reflections in the reflection of the students. The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher (p. 80-81). When students are able to see themselves as collaborators instead of "docile listeners," the classroom environment changes. When the source of curriculum is problem-posing vs. banking, domination/oppression is alleviated. Creating an environment where students are "co-investigators," sharing in the learning that is occurring, increases motivation and productivity. Students have ideas, and they want to be heard. The interactive format of the blog setting has begun to carry over into the classroom. During student presentations on *The Great Gatsby*, the classroom was anything but "docile listeners." They were engaged in the student-led presentations, asking questions, and adding information to what the groups were saying. The blog has also allowed students to share personal dialogue showing how students are reflecting on what they are

reading. One student writes, “In this real world, people have been murdered, hurt, depressed beyond comprehension. *Night* has personally affected on much of how I perceive life. No other piece of literature can be more influential and controversial than *Night* by Elie Wiesel.” Students are taking on a different role in the classroom. They are not just listeners, but rather active participants. Their opinions and ideas displayed on the blog prompted me to change assignments and to allow a more constructivist classroom to take place.

Each day students see us, we have the opportunity to make a connection with them; we have the overwhelming task of teaching them what they need to know for the future. It is imperative that we pay attention to and meet students where they’re at developmentally. Instead of fostering dependent learners, teachers should strive to create independent learners. Vygotsky (1978) states, “...what is in the zone of proximal development today will be the actual development of tomorrow - that is, what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow” (p. 87). This quote reminds me of Ben Franklin’s aphorism, “If a man empties his purse into his head, no man can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.” The nature of my study allowed me to gain insight into students’ inner thoughts on a regular basis. By blogging instead of journaling, I could easily check in with students on a timelier basis and see where they may have confusions or insights. Not only could I do this, but all of the students were able to help one another.

This is really where we can start to see students becoming more independent. Throughout the classroom modernization of *A Raisin in the Sun*, I took a “back seat.” Skinner (2007) writes:

Even though one of the goals in education is to develop learners who handle complex thinking skills independently, teachers cannot take a back seat. Oliver & McLaughlin (2001) warn designers that online discussion can produce volumes of unproductive communication if activities are not deliberately constructed. (p.383)

Since my activities were “deliberately constructed,” taking a “back seat” was a good thing. Student leaders even emerged in classroom discussions. My role was not one of direct instructor, but rather of a facilitator.

Discussion

Student discussion online does not always have a direct bearing on final products.

Originally, I had intended for the blogs to have a direct correlation to student final products. I wanted to see if student products were better because of the blog. Most students did not feel as if the blog explicitly helped them to create their final product. Asking about such concerns proved to be easier to do in person, plus if students were working on a project at home with a specific

question, it was easier to email me. Students suggested that more resources be made available on the blog for help with projects. They also suggested setting up groups for projects that were done individually for support. Students who did not find the blog helpful explained:

- “The blog for me wasn’t effective. I didn’t really need to know anything that was blogged about. Nothing was added to my paper from others” (Jen on the *Night* project).
- “No, it wasn’t effective. The blog didn’t have anything that would help me with my paper” (Liz on the *Night* project).
- “I didn’t use the blog at all for this. I just used the book for reference” (Emma on the *Night* project).

A few students did see the blog as useful to the assignment:

- “It was effective because I like other people’s ideas on the story. My ideas were affected from others to help diverse my paper” (Zach on the *Night* project).
- “It could have helped the projects that were based on biographies or themes” (Gina on the *Night* project).

The majority of students did not see the relation to their project. Gina, even though she did not personally use the blog for her project, did identify the value in

it dependent upon the project chosen. By discussing material before having a final assessment students went into projects with deeper background knowledge, but most comments suggest that the blog did not have a direct correlation to the creation of a final product when working on an individual task. The blog did have more impact when working on group projects:

- “The blog was a great tool for helping put the project together. The posts were very helpful to me; they gave me ideas of what music to find and other entertainment to bring” (Kevin on *The Great Gatsby* group project).
- “It was effective because it made choosing what food we would make easier. We found some help from the posts about the Great Gatsby because they told us that were some foods they had like oranges and lemons” (Dan on *The Great Gatsby* group project).
- “The blogs completely helped us because that was another way of communicating other than text messaging. Also, people responded with good responses and gave us information on what we could or not eat, what to wear, or how was the invitations going to look like. We each had a little bit of our opinions on things” (Gina on *The Great Gatsby* group project).

- “I think the blog was successful it helped us get in touch with everyone from class to talk about ideas. But, I think it didn’t help with the actual writing of papers” (Amy on *The Great Gatsby* group project).

As with any methodology, the blog is more conducive and expedient for certain projects. There is not always a direct correlation between the blog and a final product, but the blog is another source for students to utilize.

Students who are quiet in oral discussion are active in online discussion. Online discussion is not a replacement for face-to-face discussion, but a combination of the two is ideal.

Vygotsky (1978) writes, “Development in children never follows school learning the way a shadow follows the object that casts it” (p. 91). I love the image that this quote creates. I envision Peter Pan reattaching his shadow to his feet with glue. If only we could just “glue” knowledge to our students; if only our students could turn around and see what they’ve learned following them. I see this as relating to the previously stated quote about learning as a spiral. Students, especially in high school, collect a mishmash of learning throughout the day. Something they learn in history class one day may not be called upon in English class until three months later. Therefore, teachers need to employ methodologies that meet students in their zone. In some respects, the student blog does “follow” my students. It is somewhat of a “shadow” of their thoughts, opinions, and ideas.

Going back and rereading what others have written and what they themselves have written serves as a way to deepen knowledge and come to new understandings. In conjunction with blogs, some research suggests to still hold face-face discussions (Wang Q. & Woo H. 2007; Yu 2009). So, discussing in class solidifies the information in their minds even further.

Many students are uncomfortable speaking up in class. No matter how comfortable they are with their classmates, the teacher, or the material, some students will never be outspoken leaders of the room. Some students would rather observe than be observed. Because our students are so diverse and have different needs, the blog fills in a gap for those students who are apprehensive to speak in discussions. Research indicates that students can realize the significance of effective communication as a result of the blogging experience (Boling et al., 2008; Davis & McGrail, 2009; Jewell 2005; Wang & Woo, 2007). Wayne, Nikki, Phil, and Jen all reported that they became more comfortable discussing in class from using the blog. Nikki wrote, “The blog gave me ideas of what to talk about in class.” Jen said, “The blog lets me think of things to say.” Wayne would much rather discuss in class than on the blog, but ironically he strongly agrees that the blog made him more comfortable to talk in class. Only three students preferred the online discussions to in-class discussions. I found similar information to Yu (2009) who writes, “...the majority of students claimed a favorable perception of both online and F2F discussions” (p. 17). Nikki, who was neutral, thoughtfully

stated, “They are both beneficial.” As the research suggests, a combination of online asynchronous discussions coupled with face-to-face discussions is best (Yu, 2009). Blogging is not a substitute for, but rather an extension of, classroom discussion.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Blogging can be used for many different purposes within the classroom. Overall, I found the teaching methodology to be beneficial when using in the 10th grade American Literature honors classroom. There are still many avenues that need to be explored with this teaching methodology.

Students appreciated that time could be spent outside of the classroom discussing topics that we may not have time to discuss when in the classroom together. They also liked having another resource to turn to, whether it was me, the other students, or links posted for help with assignments. I am very interested in incorporating a blog with a class over the summer. The honors classes read four books over the summer, and I think that having a blog where dialogue could take place before classes meet in the fall would be very beneficial. It often takes weeks to discuss each book, and I would like to see if a summer blog could cut down on some of the lower level discussions that take place in the beginning of the year. Likewise, the College Prep classes also read one novel over the summer. I would also like to see if a blog would improve the focus, background knowledge, and understanding of the novels. Some students flourish when

reading independently while others flounder. Having the blog as recourse may encourage students in the summer reading task.

I would also like to see how a blog would work in other classes. Could a blog be successful in a College Prep or Basic English classroom? This year, we were lucky to have computers in the back of the classroom. I would like to see if the blog would be as successful if students did not have constant access to computers in the room. I would probably have to work out times with the computer lab in order to accommodate all students. There were some students who were resistant to the idea of the blog, and they never fully got “on board” with the methodology. I would like to examine further as to how to get all students interested in using the blog. I believe that this is deeply connected to ownership. Now that I know what projects and units the blog really works for, perhaps my introduction of the blog would grab students interest more than in my “trial run.” Students need to see the benefits from the beginning; as some of my students expressed, the blog wasn’t helping them for certain assignments, and perhaps this caused loss of interest.

Grading was difficult. Now that I have used the blog for various assignments, I would change the rubrics. Instead of attributing ten points for each category, the point values need to be more specific within the categories. In addition to making point values more specific, I would also like to grade the blogs

twice over the course of a quarter. Grading all of the blogs and the end of the quarter was extremely time consuming as I had to reread all blogs to accurately grade each student.

Finally, I would eventually like for students to expand their blogging experience outside of my classroom. I would like to see if blogging across classrooms and even between teachers could be beneficial. The way that the American Literature curriculum is set up, there is sometimes overlap with the history department. A few of the history teachers have expressed the idea of co-teaching for certain units. Although that may not be a practical idea right now, blogging could be a way to test it out. When reading literature from the 1920s or WWII, students in my English classroom could collaborate with students in the history classes deepening their knowledge and understanding of the time period and literature.

Blogging has many positive implications for the classroom, and it will continue to be used in education. It is important for teachers to use blogging as a way to make material relevant to the student, effectively communicate, improve student and teacher interactions, as well as to enhance discussion. Allowing students to take ownership and see the value in collaboration will determine the effectiveness of the blogging experience.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Technology Survey

Name _____

Circle your answer unless otherwise instructed.

1. How often do you use a computer (both in and outside of school)
 - a) Only when the teacher takes the class to the computer lab
 - b) Once a week
 - c) Once a day
 - d) More than once a day
 - e) Other

2. Do you have a working computer at home?

| | |
|--------|----|
| Yes | No |
| Unsure | |

3. Do you have access to the Internet at home?

| | |
|--------|----|
| Yes | No |
| Unsure | |

4. What do you use your computer for? (Check all that apply)

| | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't have one | <input type="checkbox"/> School work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instant messaging | <input type="checkbox"/> Buying online |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Downloading music | <input type="checkbox"/> Email |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social network sites (Facebook etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Surfing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Games | <input type="checkbox"/> Blogging |
| | Other: _____ |

5. Do you have easy access to the Internet anywhere else? (E.g. public library, friend's house)

If yes, where? _____ No

6. At home, how often do you have access to the Internet?

- a) Whenever I want
- b) Whenever I'm allowed
- c) I have to share and wait for others
- d) Sometimes I don't get a chance at all
- e) I don't have access at home

7. Do you have an email address that you use regularly? Yes No

8. Have you ever posted to a blog online? Yes No (skip to question 10)

9. On average, how often do you post messages online?

- a) More than once a day
- b) 2-3 times a week
- c) Once a week
- d) Other: _____

10. Circle the number that best applies: 1=Strongly Disagree
2=Disagree 3=Agree 4=Strongly Agree

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I currently use the computer mainly for schoolwork. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I currently use the computer mainly for entertainment. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I feel confident about using the computer. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I feel confident about using the internet. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Appendix B

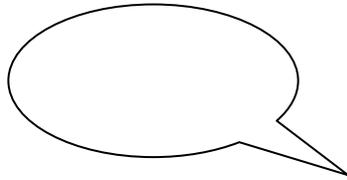
Class Comfort and Participation Survey- Pre and Post

Name: _____ Age: _____

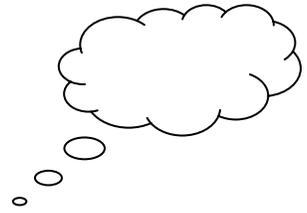
Read each question carefully and select the appropriate number.

1= **Strongly Disagree** 2=**Disagree** 3=**Agree** 4=**Strongly Agree**

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I feel anxious about speaking up in classroom discussions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I don't know what a teacher is looking for in a discussion. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I often lose focus during class discussion. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I get nervous when a teacher calls on me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. It takes me a long time to think of something to say in class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. I have difficulty following what is being said by others in class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. I am afraid that other students will make fun of my answer. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. I am afraid that other students will make fun of my questions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. I have many ideas but I can't put them into words fast enough. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. I usually don't understand the material being discussed in English class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. I do not like it when the whole class is listening to me talking. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. I usually do not volunteer to speak during discussions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. When I do speak up in discussions, others do not understand what I am saying. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. I often do not do my homework or read the material being used in class discussion. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. I get bored during class discussions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |



Appendix C



Blogs- What They're All About!

- We are going to be starting a Classroom blog together. Before we do this, investigate some classroom blogs from around the world. See what others are doing, and what you would like to do!
 - Some of you have experience with blogs, and some of you do not. So... go to my teacher website- You can do this by going to the high school website, clicking on Faculty, and then clicking on my name. Under links on the left-hand side, click on the links entitled: **Example Blog 1**, **Example Blog 2**, and **Example Blog 3**. After surfing the sites, answer the following questions.
1. What interests you about the blogs? Why?
 2. Seeing examples of what others discuss and create what would you like to do on our class blog? Explain.
 3. How do see blogs being beneficial and helpful to you in the classroom? Could this help when doing group projects and writing papers? How? Explain your opinion.
 4. Would you like to have your own blog page? Why or why not?
 5. What questions/apprehensions do you have about blogs? Explain.

Appendix D

Party Review

Now that we have investigated the time period, and *The Great Gatsby*, you have one more task at hand. You will be writing a party review. As a guest, would you want to attend another party thrown by the class? The following is a list of what to include in your analysis:

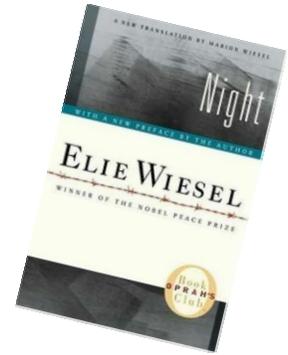
1. Critique the class/ each group on the job that they performed for the party. Who/which group did you learn the most from? Why? What would you have liked to learn more about? Why?
2. Critique your own group on your party performance. What did the group do well? What could have been done better?
3. Explain what you like the most about the 1920s.
4. Explain what you like the least about the 1920s.
5. If picking only one person from the time period who would you want to meet the most? Why?
6. In your opinion, was the class effort of the party a success? Why or why not?
7. Was using the blog effective for this assignment? Did you or your group members find help from reading and writing the various posts about *The Great Gatsby*? Explain.
8. How could the blog be more helpful for the next project/assignment? Explain.



Appendix E

Night

Project Choices



Choose one of the following options in order to demonstrate your understanding of the memoir *Night*. You must let me know which project you are going to complete. Please obtain a rubric for the assignment that you choose.

1. **Insight into Life-Theme:** A theme is an insight into life offered by a text. Explore the theme of emotional death, self-preservation versus family commitment, or the struggle of faith as developed throughout *Night*. Begin your paper by stating what stance you believe that Wiesel takes on one of these issues, and use the text to support your opinion. (Remember to avoid using "I" and "you"!) Use at least **3 quotes from the text** to support your thesis. Create a cover and a title that is appropriate for your essay. Be sure to follow the MLA format and include a works cited page in MLA format.
2. **Poetic Expression:** Research poetry about the Holocaust or by survivors of the Holocaust. Create an anthology of poems that connect with **images, themes, or characters** in *Night*. For each selection, choose a quote from *Night* that connects with the poem and write an explanation of the connection between the poem and *Night*. Your collection should include at least 10 poems with 10 quotes and 10 explanations. Bind the collection, and create a cover that is appropriate for your anthology. Be sure to follow the MLA format and include a works cited page in MLA format.
3. **Testimony to Biography:** Investigate Elie Wiesel's life after his liberation, and prepare an analysis about the Nobel Prize-winning author. **Instead of simply reporting the facts of Wiesel's life, draw connections between the narrator of *Night* and the man who he**

became. Consider the insight into young Eliezer that is presented in *Night*, and research the author with the idea of discovering what became of the young survivor. Consider Wiesel's experiences in France, his struggle to become a writer, and his feelings about music and religion. Use at least **3 quotes** from *Night/Wiesel* to show how Elie is the same and different from whom he was in the camps. Create a cover and a title that is appropriate for your essay. Be sure to follow the MLA format and include a works cited page in MLA format.

4. **Moving Pictures:** Watch a documentary or film based on the Holocaust. Write a review of the film that incorporates your impression of the production, and that relates the film to *Night* through images, themes, and characters. Use at least **3 quotes from *Night*** and **3 quotes from the film** to write your compare/contrast analysis. Be sure to follow the MLA format and include a works cited page in MLA format.
- Remember that you can use the blog for help. Read your classmates' analyses of the connection pieces. You may want to incorporate these pieces/ideas into your project.

Name: _____

Project Choice: _____

Appendix F

Night Project Reflection

Respond to the following and attach to your paper.

1. How do you feel about your final product? Is it your best work? Are you confident in the end result? Explain.
2. What was the most difficult task to complete? Why?
3. What is the most valuable thing that you have learned from this assignment? Why?
4. Was using the blog effective for this assignment? Did you help from reading and writing the various posts about *Night*? Was anything added to your paper or were your ideas affected by others' ideas? Explain.
5. How could the blog be more helpful to you? Explain.
6. What grade do you feel you deserve? Why?

Appendix G

Blogging Rubric

| Critical Thinking _____/10 | Applications and Personal Examples _____/10 | Collaboration _____/10 | Writing standards _____/10 | Timeliness _____/10 |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| Postings frequently demonstrate use of upper level thinking (analysis, synthesis, evaluation) and illustrate a thoughtful approach to the content. | The blogging responses share personal connections to the topic while at the same time integrating the information from class readings. Postings apply course concepts insightfully. | Postings offer constructive criticism, questions and information to help other students/groups. | The writing from blogging posts is clear, concise, and easy to understand. Ideas and responses are communicated clearly and coherently. | The responses are submitted on or before the due date. |

Total: ____/50

- Students should post at least 2 comments/responses per week.

Comments:

Appendix H

A Raisin in the Sun Blogs

Explain whether you agree or disagree with the following: It is justified to hate someone when they openly oppress, humiliate, and hate you.



1. [October 26th, 2010 at 8:58 am](#) *Jill Says:*

We are supposed to forgive and forget. Keeping a grudge and hating someone isn't good for anyone. Even if they are mean and hurtful towards you, you can be the better person and not retaliate. Two wrongs don't make a right.



2. [October 26th, 2010 at 9:07 am](#) *Roy Says:*

I would say it depends on how bad the person is oppressing/humiliating/hating you. Like in the extreme case of The Holocaust then I think it is entirely in the victims rights to hate their captors/oppressors. In the case of *The Raisin in the Sun* and racism. I would say it is understandable to hate the racist but you shouldn't stoop to their level. In the case of school and people just getting out of hand and saying mean things then I would say it's not worth it to hate them back and you should just move on.



3. [October 26th, 2010 at 3:09 pm](#) *Wayne Says:*

That is a complicated question, as most would believe it is politically correct to hate them. However, what would that gain? Nothing. In the end, I believe that the best thing to do is love them. You might think I'm crazy here, but if you play the mockingbird roll, eventually those who are good hearted will come around and see how awful the oppressors are. Also, at the same time, it would anger the oppressors because they're not getting the effect they wanted to get from you. By denying them that, you're destroying ALL of their POWER. So, in the end, it only makes sense to pick yourself up off the ground when you've been thrown down and smile and ask how their day's going.



4. [October 26th, 2010 at 10:31 pm](#) Kevin Says:

Sure, you can forgive, but it is a bad idea to forget. Like the Holocaust. Sure, we can forgive the Germans (and we did), but we cannot simply forget things like these like they never happened. Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it. So forgive, yes, but do not forget.



5. [October 28th, 2010 at 8:43 am](#) Phil Says:

If it is one who you wished to be friendly with, try to love them. If they are someone you do not know to well; let all hell break loose. What I am trying to say is that if someone tries to put you down, get up and achieve higher than them. However, it's ultimately your choice. No decision is wrong, just some are better than others.



6. [October 28th, 2010 at 9:03 am](#) Cassie Says:

This is a good question, personally, I would probably ignore the person. I would try to stay away from them at all costs. If they came up to me or anything I would just be as nice as I could because some things you would say could get you into trouble.



7. [October 28th, 2010 at 9:11 am](#) Liz Says:

If this was a situation that I was in, I wouldn't start anything, just ignore them. People think the best way to go is to get into each other's faces and scream at each other when in all reality, that is completely immature. It's not worth hating someone for no reason.



8. [October 29th, 2010 at 2:55 pm](#) Amy Says:

I think that even if someone is hateful and mean to you that you should just let them be and not pay any attention to them it may be tempting to say something back but, nothing good will come out of it.



9. [November 2nd, 2010 at 11:47 pm](#) *Dan Says:*

If you were to hate someone that is hateful towards you then you are no better than them. You are showing hatred as they are. Forgive and forget. You can dislike them, but don't hate them. In the end, you gain nothing from hating someone.

Why is it important for people to have a dream? Or is it?



1. [October 26th, 2010 at 8:56 am](#) *Jill Says:*

It's very important for a person to have dreams. It gives us something to aspire to. If people didn't have dreams, the world would be very boring. Our dreams make us happy and we work harder to achieve them.



2. [October 26th, 2010 at 8:58 am](#) *Roy Says:*

I would say it is very important for people to have a dream as it sets a goal and can keep people going in tough times. Sometimes a dream can define an entire person and make them who they are so dreams can be extremely critical for people.



3. [October 26th, 2010 at 3:16 pm](#) *Wayne Says:*

It's definitely important to have a dream. Think about it. Education is a perfect example because so many don't strive the extra mile. As like in life... If you don't have a dream of being with someone you love, you're bound to spend the rest of your life feeling sorry for yourself because you never stepped up and dreamed of how good it could be. That's the only reason why there is happiness like that; people dreamed dreams of love and fought for what they believed in, even when they had nothing left to give. Without a dream, there is nothing. Just like in the novel, they had a dream of owning a house. What would have been the situation if they hadn't had that dream? Nothing; they'd be right at square one each time the check came. Dreams make WHO WE ARE. And they separate us from misery.



4. [October 28th, 2010 at 8:44 am](#) Gary Says:

It is very important for people to have dreams and goals in life. Dreams give us something to look forward to in life, something we strive to achieve. If people didn't have dreams, then there really wouldn't be anything worth living for.



5. [October 28th, 2010 at 8:47 am](#) Phil Says:

Forget about important, it is absolutely necessary to have a dream. Without a dream, a person has no goal or motivation to anything. If you are one of those few, get a dream fast for it is the dream that has led the human race with progress.



6. [October 28th, 2010 at 9:04 am](#) Liz Says:

I feel like if you don't have a dream, there's no point in living. If you have a dream, you have to work to get to achieve that dream, it won't happen over night. Dreams help you get motivated to do what you truly want to do in your life, if you have a dream and don't want to follow it you need to motivate yourself into doing it.



7. [October 28th, 2010 at 9:07 am](#) Mark Says:

In life, dreams are definitely important. Dreams motivate us to do achieve a goal. Dreams give us hope that times will get better or that something good will happen. As said by a very wise man, "I have a dream!". A dream can set us free from our fears. Dreams are extremely important in the world in my opinion.



8. [October 28th, 2010 at 9:46 pm](#) Gina Says:

Yes, I think it is definitely important to have a dream. Without a dream, you have no goals in life. You would get no where. Dreams are the things that motivate us and make us achieve something. You have to work hard for it but in the end, it's worth it.

9.  [October 29th, 2010 at 1:14 pm](#) *Cassie Says:*

Dreams are the most important thing to have in life. They are what pushes you to get where you want to be in life. They make us think about where we want to go, and they make us do it. They motivate and push you.

10.  [November 2nd, 2010 at 11:44 pm](#) *Dan Says:*

Dreams are a necessity in life. You must have them, they are what keep us pushing for more. We all have dreams we want to complete. This gives us the determination to do it. If you didn't have any dreams you wouldn't have determination. Dreams are necessary because they cause us to achieve something.

**If you were to win \$250,000 in the lottery, what would you do with the money?
Why?**

1.  [October 26th, 2010 at 8:55 am](#) *Roy Says:*

Right now I would probably put most of it away for college but I would keep a little money for personal spending and I would find a way to waste it. Maybe buy a big tv or something like that. I mean you got to have SOME fun with the money.

2.  [October 26th, 2010 at 8:57 am](#) *Roy Says:*

but really by the time taxes and stuff come around \$250,000 is not a very big lottery it should be like the lotteries today where you can get several millions. I think I could do a lot more with that.

3.  [October 26th, 2010 at 8:59 am](#) *Jill Says:*

I would put a lot of the money for collage and then i would use some of the money and help my parents pay off bills and credi cards. If they was any money left i would use the money to buy things i needed/ wanted

4.  [October 26th, 2010 at 9:00 am](#) *Mark Says:*

If I were to win 250,000 dollars, it would really only be 162,500 dollars because of government tax. Anyway, I would first buy a sweet car to drive around in. then I would put the rest of the money into savings. Maybe if I felt generous I would give a portion to Greg and Kyle.

5.  [October 26th, 2010 at 9:04 am](#) *Andy Says:*

Well, if I win the lottery now, I would most likely put 95% of the money away for college and life after that, and spend some of the money on entertainment and material things. Now if I was older and out of college, I would spend the money on an exotic car.

6.  [October 26th, 2010 at 9:05 am](#) *Mark Says:*

Winning 250,000 dollars in the lottery is pretty sad considering people win millions.

7.  [October 26th, 2010 at 9:09 am](#) *Jen Says:*

i would save my money for college. then help pay some of my family's debt back. Also i would donate some money has well. but i would leave money for myself to by new things for softball, like a new bat and tees so i can improve my skills

8.  [October 26th, 2010 at 9:13 am](#) *Gary Says:*

If I won \$250,000 in the lottery, I would buy an awesome car. I would put most of it away for college, after I spent like \$50,000 on useless stuff. I would also use some of the money to help my family out with things we need or could use.

9.  [October 26th, 2010 at 3:21 pm](#) *Wayne Says:*

I don't think I'd spend a dime on myself. I'd divide it up to help others maybe? Maybe help the ones close to me who have financial trouble? It would definitely help, but by no

means would I feel I could not live without the money. Money is something that helps pay the bills and make living easier. True happiness is something you can't reach with cash.



10. [October 26th, 2010 at 10:28 pm](#) Kevin Says:

First, I'd put away half for college. Then, I'd take the other half and buy new seat licenses for the NY Giants for me and my dad. Then, with whatever is left, I would pimp my room. I'm talking flat screen mounted on the wall, surround sound, Xbox 360 hooked up, and anything else extravagant that I could think of (shark tank comes to mind). Money may not be able to buy happiness, but it sure can come close.



11. [October 26th, 2010 at 10:29 pm](#) Kevin Says:

To answer the second part of the question, I would put half away for college because college is expensive. Everything else would be for my own luxury.



12. [October 28th, 2010 at 9:00 am](#) Cassie Says:

If I won that amount of money, I would definately first put it away for college and all schooling expenses. Second, I would help my sisters pay for their college expenses. My guess is that would take up the whole amount of money.



13. [October 28th, 2010 at 9:02 am](#) Phil Says:

I would save some for college, then the rest for material stuff, wide screen tv, stereo system, new phone, maybe a little stocks...



14. [October 28th, 2010 at 9:13 am](#) Liz Says:

If I won that type of money I would put it into the bank for after college. There would be no point wasting on useless things that I would never use. I would use a little of it for shopping though.

15.  [October 29th, 2010 at 2:54 pm](#) Amy Says:

If i won that much money i would probably give some to charity, put some away for college and put the rest in the bank for later in life when i will probably need it

16.  [November 1st, 2010 at 8:50 am](#) Nikki Says:

I would put some of it away for college, buy a car, and I would probably give some to a charity.

17.  [November 2nd, 2010 at 11:40 pm](#) Dan Says:

I would put a portion of the money for college a portion to charity and the last bit of it, I would keep so I could just have it as an emergency. Knowing me I would probably need it later.

Explain whether you agree or disagree with the following: It is better to remain in ignorance than learn something which may be more painful.

“A Raisin in the Sun”

1.  [October 26th, 2010 at 3:35 pm](#) Wayne Says:

No. Ignorance is never bliss... Things happen in this life, and they are painful. But why do they happen? What went wrong? How'd this come to be? Simple. Everything happens for a reason, whether you want to believe it's true or not. Yes, it was hard when your boss told you to clean out your desk and leave for good. Yes, it was tough hearing second hand from your friend that the one you were seeing cheated on you. But we cannot erase the fact by pretending it's not there. Why? Because the boss would have security on standby and someone new to take the worker's place. The boyfriend/girlfriend would cheat again. We cannot bury what happens and erase it, but we can use it to make ourselves stronger. We learn from it. Granted, sometimes the painful things reverse- the job being gotten back and the significant other never doing it again. However, in a case like that, we still learn from it. We learn to forgive, but not forget. To trust, but prevent. If we simply lived in ignorance, everything would be chaos



2. [October 28th, 2010 at 8:48 am](#) Roy Says:

I agree with Will that not knowing doesn't change the circumstances that is really happening so you should know so you can adapt to it and make yourself better from it even if it does hurt for a while. Of course there are exceptions however such as when a little 2 year old kid asked where did there fish that they loved so much go it doesn't do much good to tell him his fish died rather than the fish is on a magical adventure. Or you know, something to that effect. If you told him the truth there are two outcomes one of which is guaranteed. ONE he will ask what being dead is and second he will cry. In cases like those ignorance is bliss but otherwise it usually isn't.



3. [October 28th, 2010 at 9:04 am](#) Phil Says:

Ignorance never will help society, it drives people nuts and makes society fail. Learn something new, and help yourself and everyone else. Knowledge is power.



4. [October 29th, 2010 at 12:36 pm](#) Kevin Says:

In some cases, ignorance is bliss. For example, I really don't want to know what my sister is doing with her boyfriend. I don't want to know who the CIA killed yesterday in the name of democracy. There are just some instances when not knowing is better.



5. [October 29th, 2010 at 2:53 pm](#) aleamon Says:

i disagree i feel like it is better to know the truth even if it hurts you. Yeah you might be happy being ignorant to what is going on around you but that can't last forever and when it does chatch up to you it will hurt you a lot worse.

Discuss an example of a time when someone “sold out” and how you felt about it. (This could be from your life or from society/literature.)



1. [October 26th, 2010 at 10:35 pm](#) kwilliams10 Says:

Just in general, I get really PO'd when politicians sell out on their beliefs. C'mon, pick a set of principals and stick to it. Don't sell out just to salvage a couple votes. It's pitiful and stupid.

2.  [October 28th, 2010 at 8:53 am](#) *rsmlyth* Says:

I agree with Kyle I find it annoying when politicians say stuff then go against it. For example with the midterm elections coming up there are a lot of advertising for candidates and some of them promise that they are going to fix for example lets say jobs. Yet, when you go back to previous years when that same candidate has run for office they promised a new job plan that got put into place. Now here they are saying that the plan THEY came up with doesn't work and they intend to "fix" it agasin. Its also annoying when they blame other people for this, but at the same time it is kind of funny.

Explain whether you agree or disagree with the following: Anyone can raise themselves out of poverty if they have enough determination, no matter how bad the circumstances.

1.  [October 28th, 2010 at 9:08 am](#) *Roy* Says:

I would say that its iffy because if they are making minimum wage, they have family with expensive chronic illness, putting kids through college and huge amounts of debt, unless they win the lottery or invent the next best thing or win a big time game show I would have to say that it would be very very very hard to get out of poverty if not downright impossible. So i would say it depends on the individual person's situation because if there was someone without all those circumstances and making around the same I would say it is possible if they save up money go to college and all that jazz.

2.  [October 28th, 2010 at 9:10 am](#) *Phil* Says:

In my opinion, anyone can bring themselves out of poverty and become successful. Many of the richest people in the world came from poverty. They had nothing. Yet, they had a dream; a dream to rise out of ignorance. Then they gained knowledge and became succesful. We can all learn from them.

3.  [October 28th, 2010 at 9:12 am](#) *Zach* Says:

I beleive that this is true for every situation becuae if you have hope and determination you can alomost anything you ever dreamed of doing. The key is to not quit and to always keep trying to succeed no matter how many times yyou get knocked down you always have to be willing to get back up and go after it again. If you do give up then you

will never be able to get your self out of poverty. Determination will take you anywhere and you just have to keep working hard and you will make it far in life.

4.  [October 28th, 2010 at 9:12 am](#) *Cassie Says:*

I would say most people would be able to get out of poverty if they really tried. They would have to go to every single place they could to get a job. But, the people would have to be really self-motivated and have determination.



5. [October 29th, 2010 at 12:41 pm](#) *Kevin Says:*

I think it is possible, but there needs to be a lot of determination, hard work, and a little bit of luck. Like Mike Oher. He got a break, worked his butt off, and became a first round draft pick in the NFL. As convoluted as the American dream has become, it still is possible to make something out of nothing in this country.



6. [October 29th, 2010 at 2:10 pm](#) *Nikki Says:*

Yes, i belive that anone can raise themselves out of poverty. if you are a strong willed person and have enough determination you can concoure any goal that you are willing to achieve.



7. [October 29th, 2010 at 2:51 pm](#) *Amy Says:*

i don't think that you can bring yourself out of poverty. Most kids that do live in poverty don't get a good education then, they can't get a good job and they don't make money. The cycle just keeps going and going. In some cases people get lucky and do get themselves out of debt but it isn't likely.



8. [November 1st, 2010 at 4:38 pm](#) *Emma Says:*

That isn't always true. Sometimes, a lot of bad things can happen, and its not avoidable. Sometimes if someone is out to get you, they can make your life suck. If not for outer interference like that, anyone could make a life for themselves. But life doesn't work like that.



9. [November 2nd, 2010 at 11:42 pm](#) Dan Says:

It all depends on how poor you are. If you are really poor, then its highly likely you will be able to get yourself out of poverty. If its moderate then with enough determination you can get out of it because you will have more resources then being really poor.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">“A Dream Deferred”</p> <p>What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore- and then run? Does it stink like rotten meat? Or crust and sugar over- like a syrupy sweet?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Or does it explode?</i></p> <p>By Langston Hughes</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Poetry Analysis Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What does this poem say? 2. What images does this poem create in your mind? 3. What emotions does this poem evoke? 4. What meaning can be found in this poem? |
|---|--|



1. [October 28th, 2010 at 10:29 am](#) Nikki Says:

I think that the poem asks what would happen if you didnt follow your dreams, it asks if your dream just dissaperrs into thin air or if it is kept alive. This poem makes me think of someone that regrets failing at reaching their goal, this would provoke me to want to make my dreams come true, to work for what i want, and not to give up. I think the meaning of the poem is if you dont follow your dreams,then what would happen? This makes me want to follow me dreams.



2. [October 29th, 2010 at 1:12 pm](#) Cassie Says:

The poem is saying what would happen to a dream that isn't followed. In my opinion, this is saying that if you don't follow your dreams then they will never work out. This poem provokes me to always follow my dreams and never fail. This relates to A Raisin in the Sun because if the family doesn't follow their dreams they will get nowhere.



3. [November 2nd, 2010 at 10:47 pm](#) Roy Says:

HEY! I remember this poem we read this last year! ANYWAY, I would say that it is saying that if we don't follow the dream we want it might end up dying on us. It brings up pictures of all the items it mentions. It makes me want to follow my dream and I would say that it can be a sort of reminder to always follow your dream.



4. [November 5th, 2010 at 9:14 am](#) Jill Says:

this poem is the consequence of not following your dream. the image of your dreams falling about. it makes me sad thinking about not be able to acheive my dreams. the meaning is that you should always try to acheivve your dreams no matter how rediculous they are.

Appendix I

Discussion Debriefing

Name _____ Date _____

Title of

Book _____ Author _____

Today's discussion was

I participated by

I could improve by

Circle the thing(s) you did today:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Asked good questions | Listened actively | Reread |
| Responded to others comments | Took a risk | Compared the book to my own experiences |
| Compared the book to another book | Praised someone else's ideas | Had a new thought |

Appendix J
Discussion Debriefing Examples

Discussion Debriefing

Name Emma Date 10/29/10
Title of Book Raisin in the Sun Author Lorraine Hansberry
Today's discussion was informative because we argued a lot.

I participated by discussing the blog, book, etc.

I could improve by being quiet.

Circle the thing(s) you did today:

- Asked good questions
- Listened actively
- Reread
- Responded to others comments
- Took a risk
- Compared the book to my own experiences
- Compared the book to another book
- Praised someone else's ideas
- Had a new thought

Group 4

Discussion Debriefing

Name Jill

Date 10/24/16

Title of Book Raisin in the Sun Author Lorraine Hansberry

Today's discussion was We talked about the poem and what a sell out is. Also we talked about being in debt and whether you can get out of it. We discussed what we would do if we had all that money.

I participated by asking questions and stating my opinion.

I could improve by speaking up more. shy

Circle the thing(s) you did today:

- Asked good questions
- Listened actively
- Reread
- Responded to others comments
- Took a risk
- Compared the book to my own experiences
- Compared the book to another book
- Praised someone else's ideas
- Had a new thought

Appendix K

A Raisin in the Sun Play Reflection

1. How do you feel about the final product? Is it your best work? Are you confident in the end result? Explain.
2. What was the most difficult task to complete? Why?
3. What is the most valuable thing that you have learned from this assignment? Why?
4. Was using the blog effective for this **unit**. Explain.
5. What else would you like to do with the blog this year? Explain.
6. What grade do you feel you deserve? Why?

Appendix L

Look of Blog for 1st Quarter

DVenanzi

Just another Edublogs.org weblog

HOME
ACT I
ACT II
ACT III
MODERNIZATION
WHITMAN AND DICKINSON LINKS

DICKINSON OPINION QUESTIONS
AMERICAN POEM HELP

25
Feb

Act III

Posted in The Crucible | Edit | 8 Comments »

In sports, in politics, and in war, people often *demonize* their opponents—that is, they portray their enemies as incarnations of evil. Can you think of examples? Why do you think people do this? What effect do you think such behavior has on society as a whole? Explain.

16
Feb

Act II

Posted in The Crucible | Edit | 15 Comments »

At this point in the play, what would you do if you were John Proctor?

14
Feb

Act 1

Posted in The Crucible | Edit | 15 Comments »

When someone is accused of a crime today, do people still have a tendency to “jump on the bandwagon” with the accusers? Explain your answer/provide an example.

11
Feb

The Crucible Act I

Posted in The Crucible | Edit | No Comments »

Ask for help, pose questions, and/or offer comments and connections that you observe as you read Act I.

9
Feb

Arthur Miller Link

Posted in The Crucible, Uncategorized | Edit | No Comments »

<http://poster.4teachers.org/worksheet/view.php?id=87863>

4
Feb

The Crucible

Posted in The Crucible | Edit | 18 Comments »

We are going to be reading *The Crucible*. As we read, we will be discussing the following controversies. **Explain** whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. Use examples to back up your opinion and comment on one another’s responses. Number your responses accordingly.

1. Confessing to a crime you didn’t commit in order to avoid punishment is wise.
2. The difference between right and wrong is clear.
3. It is better to die for what you believe in rather than to lie to save your life.
4. There is only one correct way to interpret the Bible.
5. That which doesn’t destroy us only makes us stronger.
6. It’s more difficult to forgive yourself if the person you have hurt doesn’t forgive you.
7. A person is innocent until proven guilty.
8. Beliefs that go against common morals should be illegal.
9. Justice is best determined in a court of law.

3
Jan

Overused Words- What do you think?

Posted in Uncategorized | Edit | 16 Comments »

Click on the link below, and read the page. Then answer the following. Start a good discussion!

February 2011

| | | | | | | |
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| M | T | W | T | F | S | S |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | |
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| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| 28 | | | | | | |
| « Jan | | | | | | |

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Look of Blog 2nd Quarter

DVenanzi
Just another Edublogs.org weblog

SEARCH

February 25

Act III

In sports, in politics, and in war, people often *demonize* their opponents—that is, they portray their enemies as incarnations of evil. Can you think of examples? Why do you think people do this? What effect do you think such behavior has on society as a whole? Explain.

by [dvenanzi](#) posted under [The Crucible](#) | 8 Comments »

February 16

Act II

At this point in the play, what would you do if you were John Proctor?

by [dvenanzi](#) posted under [The Crucible](#) | 15 Comments »

February 14

Act 1

When someone is accused of a crime today, do people still have a tendency to “jump on the bandwagon” with the accusers? Explain your answer/provide an example.

by [dvenanzi](#) posted under [The Crucible](#) | 15 Comments »

February 11

The Crucible Act I

Ask for help, pose questions, and/or offer comments and connections that you observe as you read Act I.

by [dvenanzi](#) posted under [The Crucible](#) | No Comments »

February 9

Arthur Miller Link

<http://poster.4teachers.org/worksheet/view.php?id=87863>

by [dvenanzi](#) posted under [The Crucible](#), [Uncategorized](#) | No Comments »

February 4

The Crucible

We are going to be reading *The Crucible*. As we read, we will be discussing the following controversies. **Explain** whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. Use examples to back up your opinion and comment on one another’s responses. Number your responses accordingly.

1. Confessing to a crime you didn’t commit in order to avoid punishment is wise.
2. The difference between right and wrong is clear.
3. It is better to die for what you believe in rather than to lie to save your life.
4. There is only one correct way to interpret the Bible.
5. That which doesn’t destroy us only makes us stronger.
6. It’s more difficult to forgive yourself if the person you have hurt doesn’t forgive you.
7. A person is innocent until proven guilty.
8. Beliefs that go against common morals should be illegal.
9. Justice is best determined in a court of law.

by [dvenanzi](#) posted under [The Crucible](#) | 18 Comments »

January 3

Overused Words- What do you think?

Click on the link below, and read the page. Then answer the following. Start a good discussion!

<http://www.lsu.edu/banished/current.php>

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- [Modernization](#)
- [Whitman and Dickinson Links](#)
- [Dickinson Opinion Questions](#)
- [American Poem Help](#)

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February 2011

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Appendix M

Creating a Found Poem

What is a Found Poem? A Found Poem is a poem that you create using lines, phrases, or words from other works of literature.

Isn't this plagiarism? It will not be plagiarism because you will internally cite every source and have a works cited page.

Why are we doing this? First of all, this will allow you to be creative and express yourselves, which is fun☺ Secondly, you will use the research process to find and read other poems that we haven't covered in class. This assignment will allow you to review important concepts discussed in class, and you will demonstrate understanding of poetic devices and figurative language. Finally, you get to practice using internal citations and making a works cited page.

Steps to complete your poem:

1. Pick a universal theme to write about. Universal themes are ideas that deal with love, beauty, death, fear, loneliness etc. (these are only a few examples).
2. You must find at least five poems that are about this universal theme. All poems must be written by American poets, and only two of them can come from poems studied in class.
3. You may also choose up to three songs that deal with your theme (they must be from American performers). *** Remember to utilize the blog for help.
4. Begin writing your poem using only lines, phrases, and words that you find in these poems and songs. **You may not use/add any word that is not in one of your sources. However, you may add in lines of your own in order to connect ideas and make your poem flow smoothly.**

5. Each line, phrase, or word taken from a source must be internally cited.
6. All poems and songs must be included in a works cited page.
7. The poem must be 10-15 lines. You may use one repetition of a line.
8. You must identify all poetic devices and figurative language used.
9. You must write a one-page explanation of your poem and why it is meaningful to you.

What do I have to hand in? You have to hand in two copies of the poem you've created. One should include the internal citations and identification of poetic devices; the other one should not include the internal citations (possibly a creative interpretation). Hand in a works cited page. Hand in a one-page explanation sheet about the found poem that you have created including explanations of figurative language.

- Hopefully you still have your in-text citations packet. If not, you can go to the following web site for help:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu> and click on the link for MLA formatting and style guide.

How will it be graded? It will be graded based on the following:

- Your poem centers on a universal theme
- Your source poems and songs are diverse
- Your poem is creative
- Internal citations follow the correct format
- Works cited page follows the correct format
- Correct identification of poetic devices
- Correct identification and explanation of figurative language
- Clear explanation of poem

Spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization are expected to be correct!

Appendix N

Portfolio Criteria-American Literature

Purpose: To show a clear understanding of American Literature by analyzing work produced.

Artifacts Required/Selection Criteria:

- First, look through your binder and your class folder. Locate all work done for the year.
- **The following items must be depicted in your portfolio:**
 - 1 piece of class work/homework
 - 1 final product (final paper, quiz, test, project etc.)
 - Your favorite assignment
 - The assignment that you learned the most from

Format:

- Portfolio must
 - Be organized
 - Contain a descriptive cover with a title
 - Include a table of contents
 - Contain pieces of work
 - Include reflections of work answering the appropriate questions

Reflection: An extremely important part of the portfolio is the reflection section. This is where you *explain* the significance of the chosen assignments and where you show your personal growth and understanding of American Literature. You must respond to the following questions:

1. Class work/ homework

- Why did you choose this item to include in the portfolio?
- What have you learned about American Literature from this assignment? Explain.
- Which part of the assignment did you find difficult? Explain.
- If you were to do the assignment again, what would you do differently? Explain.

2. Final Product

- Why did you choose this final product to include in the portfolio?
- What have you learned about American Literature from this assignment? Explain.
- What did you find to be the most difficult about part of the final product? Explain.
- Seeing this assignment again, how do you feel about your performance? Explain.

3. Favorite Assignment

- Why is this your favorite assignment from the year? Explain
- What have you learned about American Literature from this assignment? Explain.
- Seeing this assignment again, how do you feel about your performance? Explain.

4. Assignment- Learned Most

- Why do you feel that you learned the most from this assignment? Explain
- What have you learned about American Literature from this assignment? Explain.
- Seeing this assignment again, how do you feel about your performance? Explain.

Appendix O

Name: _____

Post- Blogging Survey

| Survey Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| I liked participating in the online blogs. | | | | | |
| I learned something from reading someone else's post. | | | | | |
| I changed my mind as a result of reading someone's post. | | | | | |
| Blogging made me more comfortable discussing in class. | | | | | |
| I prefer online discussions to in-class discussions. | | | | | |
| I became more careful with my grammar and writing because of the online blogging. | | | | | |
| The blogging helped me to better understand the literature that we studied. | | | | | |