How Does the Use of Blogs Impact Student Motivation for Literature Discussions?

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This study sought to determine the impact of blogs on student motivation to discuss literature. The participants were 11 male and 12 female fourth grade students ranging from eight to ten years of age. All of the students were instructed in one classroom located in a suburban school setting. All students had access to computers fitted with high speed Internet in their classroom. Most of the students had access to the Internet at home as well. Semi-structured interviews and survey instruments were administered over a six-week period. The response data were analyzed to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of the students as well as to make suggestions for improvement with reference to the use of blogs. Data analysis revealed gender and reading ability did not impact preferences significantly, and there was generally an equal split between preferences for blogs and face-to-face discussion of literature. A major factor in student preference was the ease with which the blog approach was perceived. Ease interacted with time limitations, technological ability, individual and group dynamics, and beliefs towards publication to a worldwide audience. It was concluded that blogs, while not solely motivating, can impact student motivation toward discussion.

Rationale & Question

Literature discussion groups are a popular approach for encouraging students to interact with one another about text. Tompkins (2003) notes forming literature discussion groups in the classroom may lead students to read new and engaging texts, view themselves as readers, enable them to develop critical and creative thinking, and self-assess their learning and work habits in a supportive community of learners. Literature discussions allow students to share connections, questions, predictions, and personal thoughts about a given text with their peers. According to Leu and Kinzer (2003),

> Although literature discussion groups are defined in a variety of ways,
> they often provide opportunities for small groups of children to read
> a single work of literature on their own and then come together to
> have a grand conversation (p.215).

Often, however, the literature discussion strategy can be difficult to structure. In some cases the strategy results in some students overpowering the discussion. Clarke and Holwadel

(2007) reported a number of difficulties often seen when implementing literature discussion groups including discursive, structural, as well as social tension difficulties. Students frequently have difficulty determining what to say, and can easily get off topic. Students who are shy often do not get the opportunity to share their views on the text they have read.

Davis and McGrail (2009) described blogging as a method of communicating by which "an author or groups of authors post their work to Web pages that display their posts in reverse chronological order" (p. 74). The purpose of this study was to determine if blogging can act as a motivator to discuss text. More specifically, does blogging increase students' desire to partake in literature discussion and foster interaction with each other over the material being provided?

Significance of Study

Considering the increased use of technology in today's world, it is becoming more and more important for students to become fluent with their use of technology. Indeed, being able to use technology as a form of communication is critically important to success in today's society. The goal of this study was to determine if the use of blogs increased student motivation for literature discussions while providing practice in communicating with technology. Can the use of blogs motivate students, particularly reluctant readers, to experience benefits from literature discussions taking place through blogging?

Literature Review

Literature Discussion Groups: Positive and Negative Aspects

Literature discussion groups come in many forms. They range from literature circles with designated roles for each student, to less structured literature discussion groups. Educators use these approaches as ways to encourage students to apply reading comprehension strategies and discuss literature. "Literature circles (or book groups or books clubs) provide the opportunity for groups of students, typically five or six, with the chance to make meaning from a text - independent of the teacher" (Sandmann & Gruhler, 2007, p. 106). Through peer-led discussions of a text students can actually "take ownership of their learning and provide a forum that allows all students' voices to be heard" (Evans, 2002, p.46).

Literature discussion groups enable students to make predictions and connections, ask each other questions, monitor their own reading, summarize, and evaluate content as they

proceed through text(Brabham & Kidd Villaume, 2000). Furthermore, the conversations provide students the opportunity to assemble their own unique understanding about a specific literary piece. This authentic literature experience allows students to utilize higher level thinking skills as they become life-long readers.

Sandmann and Gruhler (2007) emphasize literature discussion activities that center on student choice. To provide structure and help facilitate literature discussion groups, teachers may use teacher book talks, role pages, or two-part journals (Sandmann & Gruhler, 2007).

While the use of literature discussion groups has many positive effects, there also are negative aspects that may hinder student achievement. In a study investigating student perceptions, Evans (2002) surveyed students to determine how they viewed literature discussion groups. Three themes reflecting hindrances to literature discussion were identified. They included conditions of discussions, gender influences, and the presence of over-dominating group members. Evans (2002) concluded students wanted structure for their discussions, felt more comfortable with students of their own gender, did not like when bossy students constantly interrupted in discussions, and often felt intimidated to talk. Evans (2002) stated that negative effects may occur when students' book discussions remain at a "superficial level with no real discussion of opinions," or when time is spent "discussing topics unrelated to the book" (Evans, 2002, p. 53). These difficulties occur often in classrooms that utilize literature discussions.

Clarke and Holwadel (2007) reported difficulties with literature discussions such as negative language due to hostility and tension in a classroom, actual problems with "to the point conversations," as well as difficulties with the structuring of literature groups (p.22-23). Despite repeated instruction and modeling of literature circles, conditions such as student perceptions of one another did not allow for thoughtful discussions (Clarke and Holwadel, 2007). Allen, Moller, and Stroup (2003) also noted the difficulty students may have with enacting such roles as "compassionate guide or respectful respondent" (p.226). Other difficulties with literature circles arise when some students complete the reading and others do not (Allen et al., 2003).

Literature Discussion Groups and Blogs

Students use various technologies for purposes of communicating from texting, to chat rooms, to e-mail. Children are now more able than ever to effectively communicate through technology. Can this desire to constantly be connected positively influence academic

communication as well? In today's world and more and more as we progress into the future, it is imperative that individuals possess skills that allow them to "access, gain, transform, and transmit information" (Smith, Mikulecky, Kibby, Drehr, & Dole, 2000, p. 380). Individuals must be able to find printed and graphic information, and analyze, synthesize, evaluate and transform it through writing, speaking, and representing. All of these skills occur in effective literature discussion groups, and can be applied to blog literature discussion groups as well. Sternberg, Kaplan, and Borck (2007) also support this idea of new literacies.

> For students to be fully literate in today's world they must become proficient
> in the new literacies practices of information and communication technologies
> (ICTs)" (p. 418). … [these technologies are]… "Both facilitators and a medium of
> literacy teaching and learning" (p. 420).

It would seem that by using blogs for literature discussions, students can develop skills in various literacies including the use of technology.

Before beginning a classroom blog, it is important to note that there are various types of blogs that can be used in classrooms. Zawilinski (2009) lists classroom news blogs, mirror blogs (which allow students to reflect on their own learning), showcase blogs, and literature response blogs as the most common types of blogs found in elementary classrooms. Doris de Almedia Soares (2008) lists additional classifications including the tutor blog, the learner blog, and the class blog. Thus, when educators are designing their class blogs they need to consider the format best suited for the group of students in their classroom.

Technology, specifically blogs, can greatly enhance literacy skills and increase motivation. In one study of online learning communities, Larson (2009) designed and implemented a qualitative research study with fifth grade students in which students chose and read e-books and responded to them on online message boards. Statistical analysis of student interviews revealed students wanted to take ownership of their online learning by creating their own discussion prompts. The students most enjoyed experiential and aesthetic prompts by which they could generate and talk about their own experiences and feelings. The findings also showed the students did not enjoy cognitive prompts, and did not frequently reply to interpretive prompts. Finally, although prompts seeking clarification were used, they did not elicit much follow-up discussion once the prompt was answered. Indeed, according to Larson (2009), the students equated clarification prompts to worksheet questions. The major conclusion Larson

reached was that "Engagement in an asynchronous online literature discussion encourages students to respond deeply to the literature, share their ideas with others, and carefully consider multiple perspectives and thoughts" (Larson, 2009, p.646).

Thus, just as with literature discussion groups, online message boards are often focused on having students make connections and share experiences. This is an important concept to consider for literature discussion groups as well as blogging; the goal of both is to allow students to make meaningful connections and discuss quality literature.

Blogs as Motivators

A common theme throughout the research is that the authenticity of blogs as discussion enablers by a wide audience can be engaging for students. The use of blogs "can result in increased motivation and literacy engagement as students read, write, create, and produce for meaningful and authentic purposes" (Boling, Castek, Zawilinksi, Barton, & Nierlich, 2008, p. 505). Davis and McGrail (2009) explain that students want to write well on their blogs to attract posts from other students, making students focus on clearly stating ideas so that others can understand. Access to a wide audience of peers gives students a purpose for writing since the audience is no longer just a teacher, and the quality of work may improve due to this specific purpose (Karchmer, 2001). In her study, Karchmer interviewed thirteen teachers to see how the Internet influences literacy and literacy instruction in their classrooms. Karchmer's findings showed that according to the participating teachers "Class members were highly motivated by the prospect of other people reading their work" (p. 459). These levels of motivation, however, differed amongst teachers of children of different age and grade levels.

Student perceptions are critical to the success of literature discussions whether in person or online. Ellison and Wu (2008) found blogging "was uniquely engaging for students in a way traditional papers were not" (p.172). According to these authors, blogging requires a less formal voice, allows students to gain feedback from peers, and increases potential for interactivity. Another benefit of blogging, is that "If a discussion ends due to time, the students who have not had the chance to contribute or who are reticent to participate have the option to later join in on the conversation in the blog by writing comments or replying to existing ones" (deAlmedia Soares, 2008, p. 520). Yet, in her study with 4th and 6th graders de Amedia-Soares found that while the students were motivated to read blogs, they did not necessarily enjoy writing their own

comments; and when students were only required to blog during school, but had the option to blog from home, the latter did not excite them.

Zawilinksi (2009) maintains literature discussion blogs have been shown to promote higher order thinking skills such as "questioning texts, thinking critically about an author's message, and synthesizing across diverse perspectives". He submits that often when students are forced to think critically, they become more involved with the task at hand. For some this is motivating, while for others it can be frustrating. Zawilinski goes on to say that:

> "This supports the development of online comprehension and communication
> skills and creates a collaborative learning community that builds a deeper and
> broader understanding across the curriculum" (p. 656).

While the use of blogs has been used successfully to enhance literature discussions and motivate students in varied instances, there are some negative aspects of blogging for literature discussions. Sturgeon (2008) lists five pitfalls educators must avoid when beginning classroom blogs. First, "Don't just dive in" (p.26). Students must have clear guidelines and expectations, just like in a traditional literature discussion group. Second, "Don't confuse blogging with social networking" (p. 27). The academic focus must be clear for students to be engaged in academic tasks and social construction of knowledge. Third, "Don't leap at the freebies" (p. 27). There are many free blog sites available; however, these sites often do not fit educational purposes. Advertisements and lack of educator control are two negatives of free blog sites. Fourth, "Don't force a sequential style" (p. 28). While most blog responses are listed in reverse chronological order, this can hinder positive discussions. Finally, "Don't leave the blogging to the students" (p.28). Just like teachers can offer constructive comments during a regular literature discussion, teachers should be free to share their ideas and input on a blog as well as help students attain the most effective discussions possible.

Even when these parameters are taken into consideration, blogs may still have negative effects. Ellison and Wu (2008) found that many blogs did not provide substantive feedback for peers, peer feedback made some students uncomfortable, and some students found it difficult to respond to other's ideas Many blog entries were bland, repetitious, and did not allow for deep discussions as literature discussions might allow (Ellison & Wu, 2008). Furthermore, without adequate modeling and guided practice, students might not fully understand how to respond to questions and comments posted on a blog.

Online publishing also may have conditions which impact motivation. For many students, having ideas published in writing is intimidating. While some students may be motivated to prepare well thought out works to be published on the Internet, others may view this as highly intimidating, and therefore less motivating. "Online publishing is highly motivational for students, provided the students feel comfortable keyboarding and the length of what they are writing is measurable" (Karchmer, 2001, p. 461). If students do not feel comfortable with technology, this can affect willingness to complete blogs (de Almedia Soares, 2008). Some students may enjoy posting short, quick comments but may not be interested in posting longer in-depth posts (de Almedia Soares, 2008). These factors must be taken into consideration when designing and organizing a literature response blog, as was done with this study. Using a literature discussion guide, students were required to write responses in four main areas of discussion so all students could bring information to the discussion whether online or in person.

Summary

Literature discussion groups can be a highly effective way for students to apply reading strategies while socially constructing meaning. While beneficial for most, there are downfalls to literature groups including difficulties with overpowering leaders, students who are reluctant to share, and off task behaviors. The use of technology, and specifically blogs for literature discussions and literacy learning, has been shown to be motivating and academically beneficial. In a world in which students need technological literacy as much as traditional literacies, there are ways by which students can discuss literature while enhancing their technological skills. For blogs to be successful, however, educators must carefully select the type of blog that can be most effective for their classrooms and must provide modeling and guided practice in the use of blogs. Furthermore, there are noted difficulties students can incur with using blogs including lack of technological ability, preference to reading blogs rather than posting comments, and a lack of quality discussions. When these factors are taken into consideration, however, blogs have the potential to provide students with an engaging way to discuss literature.

Method

Participants

Participants were 23 fourth grade students from one fourth grade class in a suburban school. Of the 23 students, 11 were male and 12 were female. All of the students had prior experience with computers; however, none had received formal computer instruction. There was a wide range of reading abilities throughout the sample population. All students involved had access to computers at school, and most had computer access at home. Every student had received direct and explicit instruction on the components of a literature discussion (i.e. expression of personal feelings, making connections, raising questions, and responding to others). Of the 23 students, 14 participated in literature circles prior to this research.

Procedures

The class was divided into three guided reading groups (below grade, on grade, and above grade level readers) as determined by an informal reading inventory and placement test data. Each group was given a different book to read authored by Johanna Hurwitz. Her books were chosen because they offer readers many opportunities for making connections and each at a reading level appropriate for all the participating students. It was felt that providing books written by the same author would eliminate speculation among students as to whom the high or low readers were in the class. Books were assigned rather than independently chosen by students. This allowed student motivation for discussion to be the prime research variable rather than book choice. The students were given time each day to read approximately ten pages of their assigned text. Time also was provided during the guided reading period of the day during which the students, in groups, were asked to discuss the books they were reading according to directives given on a graphic organizer (Appendix D) detailing the elements of a positive literature discussion. Modeling of verbal literature discussions as well as blogging using the graphic organizer with a familiar story was done repeatedly by this teacher during this time.

For the first two weeks of the study, students were required to both post a blog and discuss their reading with the group face to face. In doing so, all students experienced both forms of communication before being given a choice. For the remaining four weeks of the study, students were permitted to choose which method they wanted to utilize. In addition to the literature circle blogs which were set up for each reading group, a separate independent reading

blog also was established. Students were able to post their responses to their independent reading books. This allowed opportunity to determine if students were motivated to discuss literature through blogs beyond classroom requirements.

Data Collection

To identify prior attitudes towards blogs and literature discussion groups, questions on a pre-survey instrument were completed by all students (Appendix A). At the end, the same survey instrument was utilized for post results. To determine strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvements, the author created a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B). The interview questions were posed at the five week mark after students experienced the option to make choices of their literature discussion formats.

The study was divided into two components: a required literature discussion and an optional blog. Students were required to discuss literature with a small group or on the computer at least once a week. Additionally, students had the opportunity to participate in a separate blog regarding their own personal reading. The author analyzed the number of blogs per student along with the number of blogs associated with independent reading books to determine trends and motivation levels of each.

Data Analysis

Open coding of survey and interview question responses (See Appendices A and B) revealed a number of possible categories under which the pros and cons of blog usage as expressed by the students might be listed. These included impacts on motivation, communication, academics, social aspects, and use of technologies. Once optional blog posting time was completed, the individual number of blog posts was analyzed. A data chart (Appendix C) containing the number of posts by each student was created. The number of students who posted on the non-required independent reading blog also was noted. These results were analyzed with reference to students' gender, reading ability, and prior attitudes towards blogs. Once common themes were identified, selective coding was used to identify relationships between themes, with motivation being the main category.

Results

Pre-Survey

To analyze prior conceptions of literature discussions and blogs, a pre-survey instrument was utilized. Students were asked to respond to ten questions on their beliefs about computer use, literature discussions, and blogs. An analysis of the responses indicated there was no notable difference in the pre-survey amongst boys and girls or amongst reading levels. It appears that there was an even distribution of positive attitudes towards computer usage and literature discussions among these various populations.

Addressing the motivation factor, questions 1 and 2 asked students to indicate whether or not they enjoyed using computers for school work and non-school work activities. Of the twenty-three children responding, eighteen students responded they liked using computers for school work and nineteen responded they liked using computers for non-school work activities. These pre survey responses indicate a majority of students enjoyed using computers in school and outside of school. For most students, computer usage was a motivating factor before blogs were introduced.

Question 3 asked whether or not students had ever used blogs. The responses indicated seventeen students had not used a blog before, three students had used blogs, and three students were unsure as to whether or not they had ever used a blog. Since seventeen students had not used blogs before, the experience was considered new for them. Thus their responses to questions related to the impact of blogs on motivation for discussing literature were of significant interest.

Question 4 asked if the students believed using computers for school work is difficult. Two students responded yes, sixteen responded no, and five responded they were unsure. Since the majority of students believed computers were easy to use for school work, it was of interest to determine if these positive attitudes towards computers changed when frequent blogging of responses was required in the classroom.

Question 5 inquired as to whether or not children enjoyed literature discussions with each other while Question 6 asked if they ever participated in literature discussions. Fourteen students responded that they enjoy discussing books with other children, and fourteen students (not all the same students from the previous question) responded that they had participated in a literature circle before. Four students reported not enjoying discussing books with other children,

while 5 were unsure. It was of interest to note if any of these four children who initially reported not enjoying discussing books with other children changed their attitudes and perceptions as they were exposed to frequent literature discussions.

Asked in Question 7 as to whether or not discussing books with other children is difficult, sixteen responded no, two responded yes, and five were unsure. The responses suggest the majority of students came into this research with positive attitudes towards the difficulty of literature discussions.

Questions 8 and 9 on the pre-survey instrument respectively addressed students' preferences for discussing books with friends or with classmates using a computer. Interestingly, ten of the twenty-three children preferred talking to friends or classmates in person rather than on a computer. Ten students (not all the same students) preferred using the computer. For both questions, the girls had a higher number of students who would rather talk to friends and classmates in person; however, there were no notable differences with regard to reading abilities.

Question 10 asked students their preference for blogs versus face to face discussion if given a choice for discussing literature. While more students indicated a preference for talking to friends and classmates in person, seventeen responded they would prefer to use blogs to discuss books rather than in person. These results seemed to imply that some students viewed discussing books differently than merely chatting with friends or classmates on the computer. Thus, at the initial stages of the study, students seemed excited or open to the use of blogs for literature discussion purposes. Changes in attitudes and levels of motivation were tracked as the students became more exposed to literature discussions and blogs.

Post-Survey

Responses to the questions on the post-survey instrument showed, with little exception, students' prior ideas about the ease of computer usage and book discussions remained the same. In response to Question 1 which asked about enjoyment using computers for school work activities, seventeen students reported they enjoyed computers for school work, only one less than before.

For Question 2, which asked whether the students liked computers for non-school work activities, twenty of the twenty-three reported they enjoyed computers, again, these results indicate computers remained motivating for a majority of students.

Relative to Question 3 and 4 which probed previous usage of blogs as well comfort level using computers, post survey responses revealed all students in this study acquired skills in using blogs and viewed the use of computers as easy.

Answers to Questions 5, 8 and 9 were studied in conjunction with Question 10, (the item most vitally related to this study's inquiry as students approached its culmination). Asked their preferences for discussing books with other children (blogs or face to face), the class was basically split in half on preferences. Eleven students reported enjoying blogs more and twelve students reported enjoying face-to-face literature discussions more. There were preferences associated with students' reading levels. Similar to the pre survey responses, a larger number of females reported enjoying the personal connections provided by face-to-face discussions. In contrast, Question 5 post survey responses, when compared to Question 5 on the pre-survey revealed a slight decrease in the number of students who claimed they enjoyed book discussions with children. A comparison of pre survey versus post responses to question 10 showed seven of the students who initially indicated they would prefer blogs, and chose blog discussions, later reported enjoying face to face discussions more. It may be that while blogging initially appeared more motivating that the blogging experience led to a change in preference.

Question 6, asking about literature circles participation was eliminated from the post survey instrument as literature discussions were a component during the six weeks of the study. Responses to Question 7 indicate seventeen of the twenty-three students reported discussing books with other children was not difficult, while three did not, and three were unsure. These results are consistent with the pre-survey responses. Only one student changed his opinion from book discussions being difficult to not difficult.

An interesting finding appeared with reference to Question 8, which asked students about their preferences in talking to friends on the computer or in person respectively. For most students, their responses were consistent with their initial response to Question 8 on the pre-survey instrument. If they chose blogs, they reported liking talking to friends on the computer. If they initially chose person to person, they reported person to person.

Interview Responses

Participants were interviewed individually at the culmination of the study. The responses were compared and contrasted with the responses to the questions on the pre and post survey

instruments (See Appendix B) and to determine which aspects of blogs and literature discussions were motivating and not motivating for each individual.

Interview responses suggest the main motivator was level of ease with which students perceived the approach of choice. Time constraints, group dynamics, and feelings about publishing to a wider audience were factors associated with ease. For example, the students who chose blogs reported typing their responses was faster and easier than face to face literature discussions, whereas the students who chose literature discussions said it was easier to talk rather than sign on the computer, load the web-site, and type a response. One student responded, "I thought I would like blogs better, but I felt rushed because it took a long time to sign on the computer and type the blog." Another student commented "With literature discussions I can just go and talk, but with blogs I have to really think about what I am going to say." In conjunction with this, when asked which method was most exciting, eight students reported a different method than the one they initially chose as the method they would like to use. This shows pre blog use excitement for a method was not necessarily an indicator of which method students would choose after a blog experience. The findings suggest prior to blog use, students chose what they believed to be easier.

Students' facility with using technology appears to be directly related to the time issue as it impacts motivation. Most of the fourth grade students who reported enjoying face to face literature discussions said typing and computers were difficult for them. They reported it took a lot of time to sign on the computer, get to the blog site, read everyone's responses, and then type. One student responded, "I have to type with one finger and that takes a long time." For some students, perhaps those who had dexterity with keyboarding and use of computers, blogs were their method of choice. One student commented it is like Instant Messaging. This student also liked that she could blog from home if she ran out of time in school or just wanted to add more to her blogs. One student even said blogging is "addicting because it is like Instant Messaging."

Preference for group dynamics certainly played a part in the choice of method. One student stated, "I don't really have to talk to people on blogs, and I like that better." Another student commented, "I can work in peace on a blog." These students apparently preferred working on their own and having quiet time to think about their responses. Other students felt blogging was quieter so they could concentrate better. For others, blogs were noted as easier because they didn't have to wait for other students, they did not have to think of a response on

the spot, and they could read other responses at their own pace. Clarke and Holwadel (2007), Allen et al (2003) and Evans (2002) have noted several social difficulties that can occur in face to face discussions. These include students interrupting and not respecting other ideas, students who get very loud and take over discussions, and students not allowing everyone an opportunity to share all that they want to say. For students who have difficulty interacting in groups, blogging appears to be a viable alternative method for promoting literature conversations. Conversely, the students who chose face to face discussions reported they liked actually hearing other people and capturing their emotions. One student reported she enjoyed literature discussions because "You are able to see everyone's face and emotions." Another student noted, "I like to see people make funny faces when they talk about silly parts of the book." These students liked hearing how students changed their voices during literature discussions, showed emotions with their facial expressions, and became excited with new questions and ideas brought to the discussion.

A few of the fourth grade students who chose face to face literature discussions as a post survey response did so because they perceived the publication of their blog responses as discouraging. Unlike Davis and McGrail's (2009) findings in which students were more motivated to write accurately due to the fact others would read their writing, some fourth graders participating in this study found this intimidating. One student responded, "My friend told me I had tons of mistakes in my blog, and that made me mad so then I didn't want to do blogs anymore." Other students commented that it is sometimes hard to figure out what someone is really trying to say on a blog. This view supports Ellison and Wu's (2008) assertion that many blog entries were bland, repetitious, and did not allow for deep discussions as a literature discussion might allow. This was the case for many of the blog responses produced within this study. Many students would type their responses and struggled in answering other students' questions or commenting in a conversation format.

Data Chart

The data chart showing frequency of blog responses (Appendix C), suggests some students attempted blogs and then decided to do literature discussions, whereas other students consistently chose blogs. Weeks three and four saw the highest blog postings, the blog posting numbers declined in weeks five and six. This may be due to the initial excitement about blogging changing when students decided blogging was more difficult than anticipated. This is consistent

with the pre and post-survey responses. While one student posted independent blogs three weeks in a row, only three other students posted independent book blogs. This may be due to the limited postings students contributed and thus were available to comment about. It may be students did not see blogs as a non-school related activity.

Conclusions

This study sought to determine whether blogs or face to face literature discussions were more motivating to students. The assumption was that the appeal of technology would be highly motivating for students, and as shown by the pre-survey, this assumption was initially correct. Students were excited about using blogs as a new way of discussing literature. Along with encouraging book discussions, it was felt blogs would encourage the development of new technological literacies. As the study progressed, however, many other factors came into play which impacted student motivation for using blogs and literature discussions. Several students changed their initially expressed preference for using blogs or face to face literature discussions. Factors such as perceived ease of communication stemming from time constraints, technological ability, individual versus group dynamics, and issues with publication on the World Wide Web impacted motivation. Some students valued group interactions, being able to see expressions, and found they were best able to share ideas face to face. Others chose blogging because they valued unimpeded communication and instant messaging similarities and the like. These preferences do not appear to be bound by gender or reading ability. The equal split between blog and literature discussion preferences across gender and reading ability lines implies one method in and of itself is no more motivating than the other; rather, individual perceptions and skills are the key factors for motivation. Educators can use this information when structuring literature discussions of any sort. While some students may thrive on using technology, others may crave face to face interaction. These preferences can even be seen in the workplace as some individuals choose to work in fields requiring a great deal of interaction with others, while some may choose fields that allow for very little interaction with others. Instead of simply assigning one method, educators can allow students choice in the method that best supports their learning styles. Educators and researchers often claim student choice is critical to learning (Glasser, 1997). Students must satisfy their psychological needs when learning By giving students choice in how to share their findings, motivation will most likely increase(Glasser, 1997).

There were some fourth graders in this sample, who because of comparatively limited facility with computers did not appreciate the complete connection between blogging and "talking" or discussion. While the use of blogs for literature discussions is one way of exposing students to technology, educators must remember this may be new for many students and may require an abundant amount of modeling and guided practice in both spheres.

Future Implications

While there was a near equal split between preferences for blogs and literature discussions with this group of participants, it is important to note this was an action research study completed with fourth graders. It appears for blogs to be successful some students will require instruction and practice in how to use blogs as a communication tool. Students may need to be shown various preexisting blogs to scaffold their understanding. Also, students may need practice in showing voice and expression through typing. In doing so, students may feel discussing through a blog is more similar to actually talking. Peer editing of blogs may also reduce negative feelings towards blogs due to grammatical mistakes.

It is important to note the outcomes may vary with participants of different ages and technological abilities. Further, as students are exposed more to texting and chat rooms, would they find blogging about literature more exciting? This study was conducted prior to the Facebook and Twitter revolution. Would the results be the same now that social media is a major element in student culture?

A student preference for individual and group dynamics was a major component investigated in this study. The findings suggest research is warranted to investigate if introverted individuals would prefer blogs while extroverted individuals would prefer literature discussions. In other words, does one's social interaction preference lead to preference for literature discussions? This is just one other area of possible future research in the quest to find the most effective and motivating means of discussing literature.

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Appendix A Pre and Post Survey

Name: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Read each question carefully. Answer all questions honestly. Circle the choice that best answers the question for you.

1. Do you enjoy using computers for school work?   Yes   No   Unsure

2. Do you enjoy using computers for non-school work activities?   Yes   No   Unsure

3. Have you ever used a blog? Yes   No   Unsure

4. Do you believe using computers for school work is difficult?   Yes   No   Unsure

5. Do you enjoy discussing books with other children?   Yes   No   Unsure

6. Have you ever participated in a literature circle?   Yes   No   Unsure

7. Do you believe discussing books with other children is difficult?   Yes   No   Unsure

8. Would you prefer talking to friends on the computer rather than in person? Yes   No   Unsure

9. Would you prefer talking to classmates on the computer rather than in person ?
    Yes   No   Unsure

10. If given the choice, would you rather discuss books with other children using a blog or in person?   Blog   Person

Appendix B Interview Questions

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. How do you feel about discussing books using blogs and literature discussion groups?
    Subprobe: (a) What makes you feel that way?
    Subprobe: (b) Have your feelings changed throughout this activity?

2. Now that you have had choice in using blogs or literature discussion groups, which method do you prefer?
    Subprobe: (a) Why did you prefer that method? (b) Did you dislike anything about that method?

3. Which method, blogs or literature discussion groups, did you feel was easier? Why?

4. If we continue this project throughout the entire school year, would you still want to use that method or would you like to use the other method? Why?

5. Would you still like to discuss literature using blogs and/or literature discussion groups even if it wasn't an assignment for school? Why or why not?

6. Which method was most exciting to you? Why?

Appendix C Data Chart

Data Chart Key

X = Blog Posting
I = Individual Blog Posting

Students	Blog 3	Blog 4	Blog 5	Blog 6
1	X			X
2				
3	X	X		
4				X
5	X	X	X I	X
6	X	I	X	X
7		X	X	X
8				
9	X	X		X
10		X		X
11				
12		X		
13		X X	X	
14	X I	I	X	X
15	X	X	X	
16	I	I		
17	X		X	
18	X	X		
19				
20	X	X		
21				
22				
23	X I	X I	X I	X
TOTAL	11 X 3 I	12 X 4 I	8 X 2 I	9 X 0 I

Appendix D Literature Discussion Guide

Literature Discussion Guide

Directions: Read the assigned amount of pages from your book. While reading, think about the following statements. Record your thoughts on the lines below. Be ready to discuss your ideas with a group and on a blog.

1. I liked…
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. I disliked…
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. Connections I made were…
_____
_____
_____
_____

4. Questions I have are…
_____
_____
_____
_____