

FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS
REGARDING THE USE OF CLASSROOM BLOGS
TO IMPROVE STUDENT WRITING

by

EMILY M. SIMS

VIVIAN WRIGHT, COMMITTEE CHAIR

AMY DAYTON-WOOD
CLAIRE MAJOR
LISA SCHERFF
KAREN SPECTOR

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explored first-year composition (FYC) students' use of classroom blogs in their writing practices. Together, a social constructivist worldview and socio-technical systems (STS) theory provided a working framework for this investigation. STS theory holds that there are several human and organizational factors (i.e., personnel and technical) operating mutually that create interrelated relationships. All participants (personnel factor) were enrolled in a FYC course at a medium-sized community college satellite location. This group of FYC students participated in classroom blogs (technical factor) to reflect on the writing process and their growth as writers throughout one full-term fall semester as part of the course section requirement. The study examined students' blog posts, peer comments, and artifacts (including prewriting activities, early drafts, and final drafts of essays). Additionally, students completed PMI inventory sheets, which were reflective in nature; students identified *pluses* (P), *minuses* (M), and *interesting* (I) aspects of their blog participation. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with a purposeful sample of six students. Themes emerged from various sources of data, namely, blog posts, PMI inventory sheets, and semi-structured interviews. The themes identified were as follows: sensitivity to peers' experiences and opinions, openness of peers' views and opinions, awareness in writing, and growth as writers, growth as humans.

Findings of the study revealed that FYC students need more opportunities to write both formally and informally. Additionally, as FYC students gained confidence in their writing abilities, motivation was increased and writing was improved. Moreover, secondary education writing teachers and FYC instructors need to work closely together to communicate student

expectations at the FYC level. Policymakers should revisit current secondary education writing requirements to determine students' preparedness for FYC courses. Finally, this study found that the virtual classroom transformed the physical classroom; the physical classroom environment changed because student relationships were forming via classroom blogs. Supported by STS theory, personnel (FYC students) and technical (classroom blogs) components proved to be interrelated as changes in one component generated changes in others factors.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved husband Lamar and our two precious sons Tanner and Payton. They have been my unwavering support system since the beginning of this process. I am eternally grateful and blessed for their unconditional love; it was their love that has pulled me through to the end. No doubt, this is a shared family accomplishment. I love you with all of heart, Lamar, Tanner, and Payton!

I thank my God for giving me this opportunity to pursue a doctorate degree. With Him, ALL things are possible. I am also indebted to my wonderful parents who always taught me to value education and to never take it for granted.

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is more evident than ever. I will be forever changed from this experience and by all the people I met along this amazing journey.

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CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

Overview

In Chapter I, information is provided to help readers understand the evolution of the present study. Background information, written in a narrative perspective from my previous classroom experiences, illustrates how this study transpired. Using socio-technical systems (STS) theory as a working model, the statement of problem and the purpose of the study are connected. Research questions are posed as well as the significance of the study. From the review of related literature, a series of terms are explicitly defined and used throughout this study. Finally, the organization of the study for the remaining chapters will be articulated.

Background

Writing is an exploration. You start from nothing and learn as you go.
E. L. Doctorow

In my experience and practice as a secondary English classroom teacher, I was astutely aware of the increasing influence technology and other non-textbook driven instructional practices had on student learning. At times, classroom teachers systematically subscribe to monotonous, teacher-centered instruction, which may minimize student engagement in academic learning environments. Interestingly, I have discovered that the basis of these casual observations was not germane just to the high school setting but proved to be transferrable to the college academic setting as well.

Having taught first-year composition (FYC) courses at the community college level for several years, I began to notice the lack of student engagement with the material and each other

in my FYC courses. Additionally, as technology standards become a mandated component of these courses, digital literacies skills (O'Brien & Scharber, 2008) become inherent within the composition curricula. To address the issue of engaging students in the learning process and, at the same time, provide opportunities to enhance students' digital literacies in the classroom, I began to incorporate blogs in my composition courses. Since many two-year college students are already somewhat familiar with asynchronous digital communication (e.g., emailing, social networking via Facebook, Twitter, etc.), infusing technology into my instructional practices was both practical and relevant (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Furthermore, in a study of a group of undergraduate students in an online learning environment, Fisher, Phelps, and Ellis (2000) found that activities that utilized an asynchronous mode compelled students to be "more formal and less chatty in their communications, but were giving serious thought to course content" (p. 490). My charge was to explore how classroom blogs facilitated FYC students' growth as budding writers.

As the current workforce continues to value and seek individuals who possess evolving digital skills (Clark, 2010), many community colleges around the nation are proactively addressing the need to incorporate technology into classroom instruction by adopting various types of technology plans. The community college involved in this study instituted a Technology Engagement across the Curriculum (TEC) Initiative as a means to speak to technology use in educational settings. The initiative holds that students should use technology to interact with classmates, communicate with instructors, engage in technology-rich learning opportunities, and connect through hands-on experiences. In essence, this college is deeply committed to equipping students to use a variety of technologies that can be beneficial to learning that occur inside and outside the classroom.

Generally, students are reluctant to discuss their writing and writing struggles with others. Moreover, a large majority of students are not confident in their writing abilities, partly resulting from their high school experiences, which may have presented limited occasions for focused writing (Enders, 200; Klages & Clark, 2009). Therefore, during in-class peer editing session participation, inevitably, many students would collectively confess that they felt uncomfortable when others read their writing and dreaded any form of critical or constructive feedback. They were preoccupied with observing peers' nonverbal language (e.g., body language and facial expressions). To add to the dynamics of my composition classroom, students were enrolled at a community college satellite campus, which represented unique characteristics particular to this learning environment since a large number of my students are older and possess job-related and family responsibilities as well as unique skill sets.

Over three years ago, in an intentional effort to address digital literacies issues in my FYC courses, I implemented informal writing opportunities. I utilized classroom blogs to involve students in the learning of writing and in improving their writing. Throughout several semesters, I had discovered that students' blog posts became progressively lengthier with rich details while focusing on a specific topic. Their comments to classmates' posts were reflective and insightful, which led to student curiosity and inquiry. Students voiced their anticipation in coming to class ready to discuss their writing. A sense of enthusiasm permeated our blogging learning community. In their blog posts, students expressed their writing struggles as well as their ways of thinking through them. Moreover, I was able to use information obtained from their blogs to guide future writing instruction. Seemingly, because of these blogging opportunities, students were enhancing their writing abilities as well as gaining confidence in their writing skills. The

culmination of these experiences prompted me to investigate how FYC students use required blogging in their writing practices in composition courses.

Statement of Problem

The traditional role of the classroom teacher has exponentially evolved over the last several decades. Educators have determined students learn most effectively by active, meaningful involvement with educational stimuli as well as with their peers; hence, the birth of group activities, a concept popularly termed cooperative learning. Current research indicates that emerging technological advances are influencing classroom practices (Beldarrain, 2006; Ohler, 2009). As a result, educators are being challenged to revisit conventional views of teaching and learning in an effort to maximize student learning.

Educators are becoming legally responsible and professionally obligated for producing students who possess digital literacies (Witte, 2007). In fact in K-12 education, 98 percent of U.S. states adopted the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) (Hong, 2008). Within the last two decades, technology has changed the way instructors are teaching and the way students are learning (Hong, 2008; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Furthermore, the advent of Web 2.0 technologies is providing rich, significant learning opportunities for today's digitally literate students. Web 2.0 digital technologies offer the "advantage of high speed connectivity to deliver levels of interactivity, multimedia, and communication" (Goodman, 2007, p. 85). Furthermore, Bizzell (2009) argued that what teachers and students needed was

not a one-way acculturation process, but a two-way... multidirectional process of collaboration and change whereby new forms of discourse were incorporated into academic ways of doing things, and new types of intellectual work were thereby enabled. (p. 178)

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (2010) has developed a set of standards charging educators with preparing students to use a variety of technological tools to

communicate knowledge, while equipping them to be reflective and critical members of physical and digital learning communities. A vast number of students spend much of their day passionately subscribing to the belief that technology is what keeps them connected to the social world (via Facebook, MySpace, etc.), so it seems reasonable to bring collaborative digital tools into their learning environments, thereby, connecting them to the world of academia. Accordingly, as these students transition from the secondary classroom to the college classroom, instructors, more specifically those who teach composition, are embracing new technologies as an effective pedagogical component in enhancing student engagement and student learning as writers (Mueller, 2009; Purdy, 2010; Vie, 2008). Indeed, the advancement of technology changes society, and in turn, societal factors influences instructional practices employed in the classroom. Instructors define to what extent these influences are embodied in pedagogy. Presently, technological literacy is a vital aspect of the writing classroom, and instructors must be mindful of the ways new technologies influence students' digital literary practices (Clark, 2010; Vie, 2008).

Regardless of students' declared majors, first-year college students will inevitably find themselves sitting in a freshman composition course. Much like the process of life, the process of writing can be complicated, multi-faceted, and downright messy. For writers at any level, there are constant shifts of grandiose successes and arduous failures each followed by brief moments of exhilaration and frustration, respectively. Consequently, without appropriate guidance and support, this can be a daunting experience for many freshman writers. Additionally, when writing is compounded with a digital forum, such as blogs, instructors' guidance and support become indispensable components for students' growth as writers.

Much of the existing research soliciting empirically-derived data regarding blogs in education have been conducted outside the United States (Cuhadar & Kuzu, 2010; Deng & Yuen,

2011; Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup & Conole, 2008). However, little research has been conducted in the U.S.; moreover, a notable lack of research exists in addressing FYC students at the community college level and the use of classrooms blogs to help them improve as writers. Therefore, in an era of exponential technological advances in classroom practices and a growing number of FYC students in the U.S. (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2008), there is a present need to merge these two areas of research by exploring, describing, and interpreting how FYC students use required classroom blogs in their writing practices throughout the stages of the writing process.

Socio-technical Systems (STS) Theory

Socio-technical systems (STS) theory was first developed by Trist and Bamforth (1951). They held the assumption that an organization consists of relationships among human and nonhuman elements. These elements are aimed to complement one another as productivity and efficiency is maximized. More recently, as technology use in organizations and industries rises, there are also increased references to STS theory in myriad working environments (Appelbaum, 1997). In fact, according to Appelbaum (1997), many organizations have implemented STS techniques, which now only loosely resemble the original theory. Moreover, organizations have begun to widely adopt STS theory into their working environments as STS theory lends itself to generality and adaptability to many organizational environments and situations (Appelbaum, 1997).

More specifically, in a recent study, Kim (2008) believed that four components should be holistically considered to better understand human behaviors and organizational outcomes in an educational environment. These components include social, psychological, environmental, and technological systems (Kim, 2008). Hendrick and Kleiner (2001) provided further

elaboration by stating that this theory consists of a technical subsystem, a personnel subsystem, external environment, and a work system design; Kim adapts these components to suit an blogging environment (see Figure 1). Furthermore, these elements exhibit a mutually interdependent relationship in which the change in one factor affects all other factors. STS theory operates with the belief that organizations are open systems; an open system is defined as a work system, which has “permeable boundaries exposed to the environment in which they exist” (Hendrick & Kleiner, 2001, p. 24). According to Appelbaum (1997), STS theory

is based on the premise that an organization or a work unit is a combination of social and technical parts and that it is open to its environment. Because the social and technical elements must work together to accomplish tasks, works systems produce both physical products and social/psychological outcomes. The key issue is to design work so that the two parts yield positive outcomes. (p. 453)

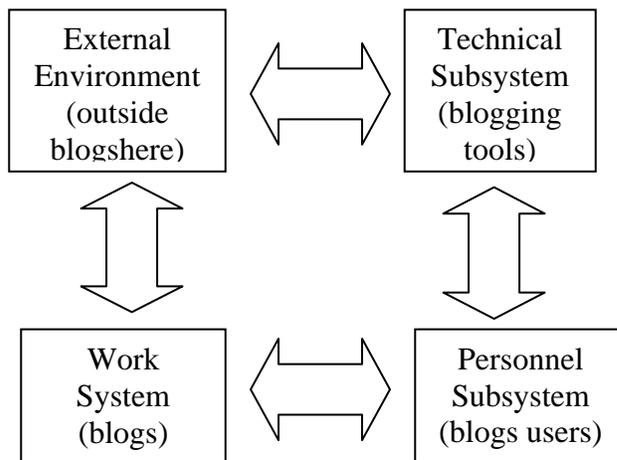


Figure 1. Interdependent Components of STS Theory within the Blog Phenomenon. Adapted from Kim (2008, p. 1346)

In a study conducted (Kim, 2008) comparing the use of blogs in education and the use of traditional computer-mediated communication (CMC) applications, Kim (2008) adopted the STS theory framework to guide the study. Regarding STS theory, Kim’s study (2008) “explored the blog phenomenon by investigating the interactions between blogging tools (a technical

subsystem), blog users (a personnel subsystem), factors external to blogshere (an external environment), and a blog (work system)” (p. 1346). A summary of key elements in Kim’s study (2008) is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Kim’s (2008) Study

Research Question	Purpose of Study	Methodology	Conclusions
Why should traditional CMC tools be replaced with educational blogs?	Analyze benefits of educational blogs over CMC tools based on existing literature Use the STS theory to explain the phenomenon of blogs while posing a theoretical model in educational settings	Review of prior studies to develop a model to use in educational settings guided by STS theory	Personnel subsystems (bloggers) and technical subsystems (blogs) work interdependently to enhance activity within the blogshere. Increased amount of student feedback may likely enhance motivation. In an educational context, convincing support to replace CMC with blogs is not substantiated through the studies reviewed.

This present study seeks to model components of STS framework throughout the process of investigating how FYC students use of classroom blogs in their practices during the writing process (see Figure 2).

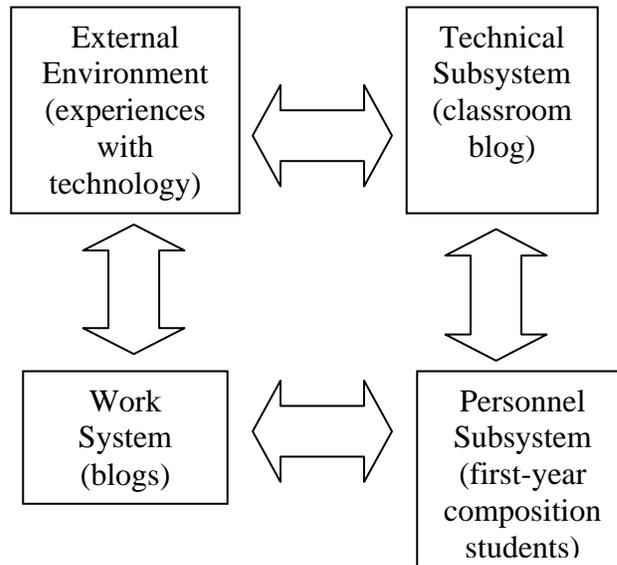


Figure 2. STS Theory in Context of the Classroom Blog Phenomenon and FYC Students. Adapted from Kim (2008)

STS theory framework was used in developing and organizing this study in a manner that places priority on FYC students, their personal and academic experiences with technology, use of blog, and classroom blog participation. According to STS theory, an alteration in one of these factors will influence all others factors as they are inter-related. For example, participants’ lack of exposure to technology in the academic setting may yield minimal understanding of how technology can facilitate learning, which may influence their level of motivation and participation in classroom blogs.

Social Constructivist Worldview

From a social constructivist perspective, “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they work live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences-meanings directed toward certain objects and things” (Creswell, 2007 p. 20).

Researchers who adopt this worldview rely heavily on the individuals' views of the phenomenon being studied in a specific context. They subscribe to open-ended questions throughout their investigation to encourage participants' authentic views of the world as participants discuss and interact with one another (Creswell, 2009). In carrying out this study, I embraced the opportunity to observe participants interactions with one another through their blogs posts as well as during class meetings. I sought to understand how students made sense of their blog participation as FYC students. As data were collected from open-ended sources (i.e., questionnaires, blog posts, PMI inventory sheets, and interviews), I maintained sensitivity (Merriam, 1998) to the meanings participants attached to their blog participation and to each other in view of their role as writers. STS theory complements the social constructivist worldview as many components were investigated and given meanings based on the individual's experience. In theory, several factors (e.g., individuals and phenomenon) can impose change on one another. Consequently, this study explored the evidence of such change.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how FYC students use of used classroom blogs in their writing practices in a composition course. More explicitly, the aim of this study sought to explore students'

1. use of classroom blogs to enhance their confidence in formal writing situations;
2. engagement in reflective practices about the recursive process of writing using blogs;
3. collaborative behaviors in developing their writing abilities using blogs; and
4. overall participation in classroom blogs as a means to demonstrate their growth as writers throughout the writing process.

Additionally, this study serves to highlight the innovative possibilities and potential benefits of adopting classroom blogs in the FYC classroom.

Research Questions

The primary research question asked how first-year composition students use required classroom blogs as part of their writing practices throughout the stages of the writing process? Moreover, since the study is exploratory-based, several sub-questions were formed to reveal the essence of classroom blog participation in the FYC classroom.

Secondary research questions included the following:

1. To what extent do classroom blogs promote confidence in students' writing abilities;
2. To what extent do classroom blogs engage students in reflective practices regarding their writing; and
3. To what extent do classroom blogs encourage collaboration among student writers?

Significance

Exploring the use of classroom blogs outside the designated instructional time and without the confines of classroom walls can prove to be valuable as students are able to network with one another before, between, and after class meetings. Since FYC students are being introduced to a new learning environment (i.e., college setting) and encountering many unfamiliar faces, blogs can provide a nonthreatening approach for students to become acquainted without loss of valuable instructional time (Ramaswami, 2008). Likewise, as students begin to feel more comfortable with one another, optimal learning can then readily occur during scheduled class meetings (Clark, 2010). At the same time, students are learning to collaborate

within a digital forum through their writing, helping to prepare them for the competitive, digitally mediated workforce they will one day face. As FYC students are afforded opportunities to participate in and navigate through their thinking and learning about the writing process utilizing an online learning community for academic purposes, aptly, these experiences may then be transferred into other disciplines and into the real world.

Definitions of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following operational definitions have been adopted:

Blogs are a social networking tool that purposefully establishes a personal or professional online community that chronologically archives members' posts and comments in the form of an informal, digital journal.

Community College Students are set apart from four-year institution students primarily by the diverse student population (Ammon, Bowman & Mourad, 2008; Helfgot, 2005; Kim, 2002). They differ in learning styles, personality types, and academic levels. There are disparities in students' ages, ethnicities, and socio-economical backgrounds. Some students take one class a semester while others take a full course load each semester. Some students work full-time; others work multiple jobs or have no job at all. There are more women enrolled in community colleges than men (Helfgot, 2005). In general, non-traditional students are more prevalent in the two-year college environment. Non-traditional students make up half of the community college student population. For the purposes of this review, all subsequent references to non-traditional students reflect the characteristics as defined by the National Center of Educational Statistics (2008).

Digital Literacies, as defined by state and national standards, refer to using computers, reading web pages, and understanding how to view digital images, as well as "things that

digitally literate people produce” (e.g., blogs, wikis, podcasts) (O’Brien & Scharber, 2008, p. 66.)

Non-traditional Students possess several identifying characteristics which include, but are not limited to students who are over 25 years of age; delay entering college upon high school graduation or receive a GED; assume family obligations; enroll as full or part-time status; maintain full or part-time employment; and represent minority groups or populations (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2008).

Traditional Students possess several identifying characteristics which include, but are not limited to students who are under 25 years of age; enroll in college the semester after high school graduation, maintain full-time status; and are still dependent on their parents (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2008).

Web 2.0 Technologies encompass a wide array of online interactive, collaborative tools that can be used for both personal and academic purposes. These technology tools allow users to contribute, change, and share information as well as comment on other users’ content in real time (Solomon & Schrum, 2007).

Statement of Reflexivity/Positionality

Hatch (2002) posits that in qualitative research “the act of studying a social phenomenon influences the enactment of the phenomenon” (p. 10). Because my roles in this study were both the primary investigator and course instructor, there was a legitimate concern that students may experience an unintentional sense of coercion. To minimize this unavoidable factor, I solicited the assistance of a colleague who distributed and collected informed assent and consent forms, which remained in a sealed envelope until submission of all final grades. Also, throughout the

semester, I continuously reminded students that although I would read each of their blogs posts, I would not directly comment on their posts on the classroom blog. However, I verbally referenced their postings in class meetings as a means to address pressing issues or concerns. I wanted this space to be a learning community solely for students, where they might uninhibitedly voice their genuine thoughts regarding the writing process throughout the semester. I believe my visible “intrusion” into this learning space may have caused some reluctance in students’ candidness in their posts. At the same time, I was incisively aware the students realized my presence in their classroom blog forum since I had to read their entries to assign credit for their participation. Unfortunately, in an effort to obtain intimate, precise language shared in students’ posts, this reality was inescapable.

Being a researcher who holds that individuals construct knowledge from their unique experiences with other individuals and the environment in which they dwell, I believe investigating students while engaged in the phenomenon offers rich insights into their classroom blog experience. As a result of my past promising experiences with the use of blogs in teaching writing, I have found blogs to be beneficial to students in reflecting about the writing process. I was sensitive to the fact that my advocacy for integrating technology into instruction and for embracing technology as an important educational tool in my composition classroom had the potential of biasing my interpretations; therefore, I judiciously included actual statements from participants’ posts throughout my analysis to maintain the presence of the participants’ voices. I also included posts where students displayed adverse attitudes toward their blog participation. Moreover, I employed member checks for needed elaboration, clarification, and verification purposes only.

Assumptions

“Respecting the empirical world means making as few assumptions in advance of the study as possible” (Woods, 1996, p. 37). As individuals and researchers alike, we naturally develop certain assumptions that guide our way of life or plan of research, respectively. Assumptions are often personal as they are residuals from individuals’ backgrounds and lived experiences. Together, professional relationships such as dialogue with colleagues and exposure to scholarly research can mold educators’ existing assumptions (and, at times, create new ones). As I flesh out my assumptions regarding this study, I hold the following foundational statements, resulting from all the aforementioned:

1. All instructional practices should yield growth in student learning;
2. Technology can no longer be an afterthought in students’ educational endeavors as they will be competitively contending for positions in a digitally mediated society;
3. Digital literacy skills are transferable across multiple academic disciplines and have relevant potential for real-world application;
4. Classroom blogs may help to facilitate student collaboration and reflective practices with minimal involvement from the instructor, hence, students begin to manage their own learning; and
5. Classroom blogs can be adapted to meet the instructional goals of any course discipline.

Limitations

Several limitations were apparent at the time of this study. First, since I served as primary investigator and course instructor, the potentiality for students to misrepresent their information

was heightened, thereby, compromising the authenticity of students' blog posts. Second, because data were gathered over the course of one full-term semester in which the class physically met once a week, accurately gauging substantial growth may be difficult to determine in such a brief timeframe. However, the course met for two hours and forty-five minutes each week, which allowed for lengthy periods of intense and focused writing experiences. Lastly, having taught this course in this format for several semesters, generally speaking, a majority of the students were non-traditional, therefore, the findings will not be generalizable (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to the traditional student population. Despite these limitations, the promise of this study may help to inform educators of students' (primarily first-year students) reflective and collaborative behaviors when using technology tools in the classroom to engage students in the learning process.

Organization of Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I illustrated an overview of the study, which includes research questions, statement of reflexivity/positionality, assumptions, and limitations. Chapter II depicts a review of related literature divided in into three major sub-sections: 1) classroom blogs: in education, in the composition classroom, and for reflective practices; 2) first-year composition students: background in writing, writing into confidence, FYC student expectations, and support and guidance; and 3) digital literacies. Chapter III presents an exploratory study in which this current study is based. Furthermore, the chapter addresses qualitative research design methodology with an emphasis on case study. Data collection entailed open-ended questionnaires, blog posts, PMI inventory sheets, subsequent artifacts and early drafts, final drafts, and semi-structured interviews with sample participants. Chapter IV discusses data analysis and results of FYC students' use of required classroom blogs.

Finally, Chapter V provides findings and conclusions of the study as well as implications for secondary education writing teachers, FYC instructors, and policymakers. Also, suggestions for further research in the area of classroom blogs and FYC students are presented.

CHAPTER II:
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Traditionally, first-year composition (FYC) courses are strategically structured so that all students participate in similar in-class writing experiences. By incorporating classroom blogs as a tool to think through their writing, students will spend time outside the classroom reflecting on their writing without the confines of time and space, which is often quite limiting in the traditional composition classroom. Through this study, there exists an ideological aim of maximizing student learning in the traditional composition classroom as well as illuminating the benefits of weaving in Web 2.0 technology tools into intentional instruction.

Overview

Since this study investigates both FYC students at a community college and the use of classroom blogs, it is necessary to explore relevant literature that speaks to the multiple layers in these areas. These layers of research include blogs in education, in the composition classroom, and for reflective practices; community college students (background in writing, writing into confidence, FYC student expectations, and support and guidance); and digital literacies. FYC students comprise the majority of this review. Since there were no relevant studies found that addressed the use of blogs in the FYC classroom, I conducted a separate review of each of these topics previously mentioned, thus, further highlighting the need for this study. In reviewing the literature, I employed the terms FYC and freshman composition students interchangeably, depending on the term adopted by a given author.

Blogs

Blogs, which are a socially interactive, collaborative Web 2.0 tool introduced 1999, initially served as personal journaling tools (Wang & Hsua, 2008). Now over a decade later, the use of blogs is being notably adopted in classroom practices across many disciplines in various educational settings. Blogging allows users to exchange ideas and share experiences, thus, creating a backdrop for social constructivist learning (Wang & Hsua, 2008). In sum, learning becomes mediated and negotiated through these social interactions via blogs.

Blogs have gained popularity with the current student generation and adult population at the personal level. Presently, a growing number of educators are testing its potentiality at the academic level (Paulus, Payne, & Jahns, 2009; West, 2008). In fact, research has found that using computer networking to teach writing offers a pedagogical model that provides collaborative, situated writing experiences that target a real audience (Beldarrain, 2006; Lundin, 2008). As a writing teacher for over eleven years, I felt both personally and professionally compelled to respond to this call- - the call to become a digitally literate writing teacher. I aimed to ensure my composition classroom provided real, relevant writing experiences in which students demonstrate critical thinking skills and decision- making processes.

As a Web 2.0 technology tool, which involves collaborative, interactive written communication among its members, blogs are just one of many engaging Web 2.0 technologies that composition instructors can incorporate into instruction to entice student writers, especially reluctant student writers. As in any business (and contrary to some views, schools have distinct characteristics of a business), we have often heard that success is largely dependent on listening to the customer. In a typical classroom, students represent the customers. Jack Goodman (2007) reiterates this truth: “Listen to your customers” (p. 84). One middle school teacher did just that.

According to Witte (2007), during a parent-teacher conference, a teacher inquired as to the student's lack of involvement in classroom writing activities; puzzled, the parent responded, "But she writes all the time!" (p. 96). After listening to the student, the teacher discovered that the student loved writing essays and poetry on the computer. It was an impending battle of interactive online writing versus what she felt was boring school writing. As a result, students merged their online and school writing to form a blog entitled the Talkback Project. Students enthusiastically created and shared writings using this classroom blog site (Witte, 2007). "If we want to communicate with this demographic [students ages 10-20], we are going to have to think of ways to meet them using the media they find most comfortable" (Goodman, 2007, p. 85). Communication through the use of modern technology (e.g., blogs, wikis, YouTube, podcasts, MySpace, etc.) is second nature for most students; whereas, many educators are awkwardly feeling their way through these seemingly foreign concepts.

The benefits of blogs are two-fold: students develop digital fluency and students strengthen literacy skills (Witte, 2007). Participation in blogging activities yields positive attitude changes about the writing process and increases the quality of writing partly due to feedback (Ramaswami, 2008). As students become actively involved in blogging regularly, they view themselves as an integral part of the writing process and are more inclined to allow themselves to be vulnerable to the process.

Classroom blogs enable writers to engage in informal written communication among its members. Students' unedited thoughts and first drafts are respectfully embraced (Smith, 2008). In essence, blogs provide a digital forum for students to share, express, and voice ideas in written form. As an added benefit, students are able to access the data systematically since it is chronologically archived, allowing them to retrieve and reference any and all blog posts as they

draft and compose their essays (Overby, 2009). For students who experience insecurities and inhibitions in their writing, blogs serve to provide them with a safe forum where they can gain confidence *in* and feel empowered *through* writing; it is necessary for educators to create and foster nonthreatening, familiar platforms for today's digital students (Smith, 2008). The use of Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs can hone in students' existing abilities and actively engaged them in writing.

Nonetheless, Ramaswami (2008) legitimately posed this question regarding blogs: "Can this often belligerent wasteland of poor punctuation and indiscernible structure actually help students become better writers?" (p. 21). In a study conducted by Ramaswami (2008) involving a group of high school English students, findings indicated that blogs significantly helped students to articulate ideas (prewriting), begin writing research paper (introduction), organize thoughts (arrangement), and develop ideas and receive constructive feedback (revising and editing). Clearly, these findings methodically address the conventional writing process. Additionally, research revealed that blog writing "can become a real-life experience in the writing process- draft, edit, revise, publish- with the capabilities of getting responses from others beyond the teacher" (Ramaswami, 2008, p. 25).

Moreover, all this is accomplished without any overt intervention from the teacher. Interestingly, students become better writers not *because of* instruction but *regardless of* instruction. They have more opportunities to reflect on their writing as well as their classmates' writings. The presence of writing in all forms (conventional and digital) begins to saturate students' lives, sometimes unknowingly, since blogging is usually an activity students participate in outside of class. Students are not always cognizant of the fact that writing is a process of thinking. Even when they are informally writing in blogs, students are thinking about writing.

From my classroom experience, I have observed that informal, un-evaluative writing opportunities provide students with a voice that may often go unheard when there is pressure of an inevitable formal, evaluative assessment. Nothing stifles a student writer more than the coercive power of the infamous red pen. Blogs can transform this power into a product: a better student writer. According to Smith (2008), students' blog posts reflected types of mini-essays with clear beginnings, middles, and ends followed by solid, supporting details. They wrote more freely with little regard to self-editing or grammatical and mechanical errors. However, it is notable to observe that errors made in blog posts were similar to those found in more formal essays. Plainly, participating in classroom blogs does not further perpetuate student errors in writing; they simply illuminate them, which can be a basis for developing subsequent instruction in writing (Smith, 2008).

Another study (Xie, Ke, & Sharma, 2008) found that engagement in blogging activities improved students' reflective skills mainly because they become both a participant *in* and reader *of* their writing. Also, when students are blogging, they spend time making sense of their writing knowing that what they write has a digitally live audience. However, the nature of written feedback from peers alone did not significantly influence students' quality of reflection. Therefore, it remains imperative that instructors provide students with continuous, effective feedback during blogging activities (Xie et al., 2008).

Additionally, classroom blogs can influence students' weekly writings. Their writings become lengthier, more thoughtful, more responsive, and more frequent; students are more precise, more exact, and more focused with their writing (Martindale & Wiley, 2005). They are aware that their writing will be read by others and not just the teacher, which supports the idea that students' writings should be published and shared. Stephen Krause (2005), a professor of

English language and literature, has successfully used blogs in students' on-going journaling as a common pedagogical technique in writing courses and hailed that blogs, if used properly, can be a teaching tool for collaborative, interactive, and reflective writing. Similarly, in a recent study (Halic, Lee, Paulus, & Spence, 2010), blogs were found to foster a "sense of community," where collaborative relationships could naturally develop. In this study of 67 undergraduate students, data were gathered and analyzed from an online survey. It was determined that as higher levels of a sense of community among students in the class were reported, student learning also increased (Halic et al., 2010).

Blogs can help to encourage students to take risks in their writing, a concept not easily facilitated in the traditional classroom (Addison & McGee, 2010). Since students are not confined to classroom walls when participating in writing activities using blogs, they may write more freely and expressively; moreover, they are not overly concerned with writing correctly but rather writing genuinely (Smith, 2008). Many students are already using personal blog forums outside the classroom; it seems logical to incorporate this tool inside the classroom. Similarly, blogs are an educational approach that goes beyond the normal school day and building and reaches into the rich, complex lives of every student participant (Overby, 2009).

Regarding student writing, blogs provide instructors with insights into how students "think, interact, and make meaning" (Smith, 2008, p. 57). This information can be useful when revisiting present lessons or creating future writing lessons to meet the vast individual writing needs of students. Often times, composition students are reluctant to share their struggles with teachers face-to-face, making the digital forum of blogs a potential avenue for teachers to obtain explicit data about students' writing issues. At the same time, instructors are responsible for

monitoring and facilitating interaction among students as well as for participating in the fruitful exchange of knowledge and deep reflection that blogs offer (Beldarrain, 2006).

Admittedly, further research is needed in the area of using blogs to teach writing. We do know that blogging creates more student opportunities of writing, revising, responding, and reflecting (albeit, informally); that alone has great potential for improving students' writing.

Writing requires practice, and blogging provides numerable occasions for such participation.

Quite simply, students who blog also write more and write better (Ramaswami, 2008).

Therefore, instructors should be challenged to experiment with networked pedagogies to improve student writing (Freidoff, 2008; Lundin, 2008; Simmons, 2005).

At the outset, it may appear that writing teachers are forced to add yet another fashionable, educational hat (a technologically savvy one) to their already abundant collection, but I hold this is one that will generate student learning capital. Writing teachers must be open-minded and perceive classroom blogs as an alternate way to engage students in writing, critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making activities through the collaborative efforts of students, teachers, and the world via Web 2.0 (Halic et al., 2010).

Other Web 2.0 Technology Tools

Klages and Clark (2009) hold that “[w]hile many basic writers come to us today with the fluency of digital natives, they still have the same need for learning writing and critical thinking skills that has traditionally marked basic writers” (p. 33). In contrast to formal writing in the composition classroom where writing is approached as a process-based endeavor, the virtual world is process-less: writing becomes an act of moving from immediate composing to “instant publishing without the skills of proficient writers and thinkers” (Klages & Clark, 2009, p. 33). Additionally, unlike Facebook and online journaling forums where writing is expressive and

personal, which allow users to construct multi-dimensional personas, basic writers become conditioned from their classroom experiences that writing is detached and prescriptive.

There continues to be a great concern as to whether college-bound high school students are being adequately prepared for college-level writing (Addison & McGee, 2010). In a study conducted by Acker and Halasek (2008), they discovered that mandated standardized testing compelled teachers to challenge the pressures of accountability by incorporating innovative strategies that foster student learning. More specifically, this study (Acker & Halasek, 2008) employed the use of ePortfolio in hopes to improve high school students' writing skills.

Acker and Halasek's (2008) study involved 41 students from area school districts in Ohio and spanned the course of one school year. Participants were instructed to write a three to five page essay. After receiving feedback, they would revise the essay with the aid of ePortfolio. Paired eReaders were comprised of high school teachers and college instructors. The readers would then provide formative feedback on the draft essay and summative feedback on the final essay. The numerical scores, comments, content analysis of workshop conversations were used in the data analysis of the study. Two methods of data analysis were used in the study: 1) the numerical Likert scale rating of the draft and final essays were compared using standard *t*-test procedures and responses of teacher comments and 2) assessments of writing were gathered, recorded, coded, and analyzed by a research assistant and one project leader. In addition, the project leader and research assistant analyzed the data to reveal recurring themes and patterns among teachers' comments, observations, and opinions.

Acker & Halasek (2008) stated one of four alternative null hypotheses: "H1: Students who receive feedback from both high school and college instructors will improve their writing as assessed on a rubric correlated with successful college writing" (p. 6). Using a five-point Likert

scale, the faculty from the university assessed the students' writings. The high school teachers selected the rubric used in this study, which was a well-known, validated assessment tool adopted by the OhioWINS Summer Institute in which conventions, ideas, and content are measured.

The results of Acker and Halasek's (2008) study indicated that students' writing improved. At the same time, students' responses to surveys revealed that they benefited from the ePortfolio. The most significant areas of improvement were in ideas and content and organization. Students indicated that they developed skills in managing and assessing their own learning. Participants felt a sense of responsibility and authority over their writing and learning. One significant observation reported from the study was the notable evidence supporting the benefits of collaboration between high school teachers and college instructors.

If participants were college bound or advanced level students, it is likely their motivation to perform well was high. However, I realize that the researchers primarily sought to investigate if ePortfolio and a collaborative effort between high school teachers and college professors would help improve students' writing. It was interesting to note that high school teachers by trade focused on local conventions while college professors possessed a global perspective of writing. This knowledge should be shared with students, high school teachers, and college instructors to allow for a smoother transition from high school writing skills to college-level writing skills (Addison & McGee, 2010; Sommers & Saltz, 2004).

First-year Composition Students

First-year composition (FYC) students possess distinct characteristics that separate them from more experienced students. For most freshman students, their familiar ways of thinking about writing are academically challenged when they first encounter college classroom practices

because there is a disconnect between what is being taught in high school writing classrooms and what is being expected in college composition courses (Kill, 2006). Additionally, non-traditional students prefer learning environments that place a premium on student engagement and collaboration (Kim, 2002).

Background in Writing

Many factors must be considered in defining and identifying mainstream college freshman composition students. With that in mind, it is important to know their background as high school writers. According to research by Enders (2001), senior students, at large, are leaving high schools deemed less than proficient in writing. Similarly, Applebee and Langer (2009) found that only 23% of Grade 12 students were rated as proficient writers. Patterson and Duer's (2006) study offers one of among many plausible explanations for these findings. Their study found that "genuine differences" existed in instructional writing strategies based on students' educational plans after high school. In many instances, high school students may not have initial intentions of attending college but may later decide to pursue career fields that require college experience. Furthermore, in Applebee and Langer's (2009) systematic review of writing instruction using data collected from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), they reported that

although...there has been some increase in the writing students are doing, many students seem not to be given assignments requiring writing of any significant length or complexity. This is of particular concern for college bound students who will be expected to write even longer papers when they begin their college coursework, as well as for those entering better-paying jobs with higher literacy demands in the workforce. (p. 21)

As a result, some students enter college composition classrooms deficient in many areas of writing due to their lack of exposure to necessary writing skills in high school (Dorow & Boyle, 1998; Simmons, 2005). Although this may resonate as a common, realistic scenario, it is

quite problematic for FYC instructors. There appears to be a disconnect between what students are doing in high school writing classes and what they are expected to do in college composition courses (Addison & McGee, 2010). Consequently, freshman students are not meeting the writing objectives necessary to succeed at the college level (Wardle, 2009). Hence, transitioning high school writers to college freshman composition writers, which can be quite traumatic, is a responsibility that seems to fall fundamentally on college composition instructors. In a recent study by Addison and McGee (2010), it was determined that over half of college faculty members reported sending students to institutional support services for assistance in their writing.

Writing into Confidence

How do first-year composition students feel about their writing and preparation for college composition courses? A survey (Enders, 2001) of freshman composition students indicated that frequent writing practice in high school was the best preparation for college writing. Students who practiced and wrote more essays in high school felt more prepared to undertake college composition courses (Enders, 2001).

According to Smith (2008), several areas of struggle seemed to be prevalent among freshman writers. Below four student-voiced comments summarized these struggles:

[1] Writing has always been my foe, enemy, nemesis, and whatever other bad names you can think of to give it. [2] When it comes to essays, and papers it's difficult for me to write because I feel pressured to write well, instead of writing how I feel. [3] I have a bad habit of constantly revising my writing because I'm never satisfied with it...I guess you can say I am a perfectionist. [4] I'm constantly reading my essays over and over, paranoid that I might make some silly mistake. (p. 44)

These transparent comments revealed freshman students' genuine attitudes and perceptions about their writing. In comment 1, the student indicated repeated negative past writing experiences, making it difficult to believe future success in writing is a possibility (Downs & Wardle, 2007).

Next, in comment 2, the student felt little ownership as a writer and is excessively concerned with grammar and mechanics (Klages & Clark, 2009). Finally, in comments 3 and 4, the students viewed their writings as product not process-oriented tasks (Smith, 2010; Sommers, 2006). The observations previously described are representative of the mindset of many freshman writers.

Smith (2010) contends that “[m]any basic writers become too worried about error...and avoiding errors that they render themselves incapable of developing any extended idea or thinking about the...direction of a whole essay” (p. 671). Freshman composition students have difficulty owning their writing. That is, they often wrestle with selecting topics and developing ideas as students surmise that high school teachers always told them what topics to write about and how to write it (Enders, 2001). As a result, freshman writers have difficulty developing and organizing their ideas in a manner that consciously considers the reader. Students are accustomed to short, focused writing; they are not equipped in completing extended writing that requires topic exploration and development, a demand of college writing (Applebee & Langer, 2009).

The types of writing students are assigned in high school and the effect these writing experiences have on their college composition courses are also addressed in current research. Ideally, collaboration between high school writing teachers and college composition instructors is a fundamental necessity but has proven to be quite inconsistent (Enders, 2001; Patterson & Duer, 2006). To meet the demands of testing standards in high school, college freshman writers’ primary high school background in writing involved reporting, describing, and summarizing (generally factual data); minimal attention is given to writing skills that entail analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing (Enders, 2001; Heyda, 1999; Sommers & Saltz, 2004). The latter skills are essential for successful college writing.

FYC Student Expectations

College composition courses require students to write lengthier and more complex essays in comparison to high school writing, which often lacks any standard criteria in these areas as current criteria is often guided by state and federal mandates (Applebee & Langer, 2009). Although almost half of high school seniors reported writing essays more than three pages in length, it is rather alarming that some were only required to write papers between one and two pages (Applebee & Langer, 2009).

Additionally, college faculty members are more inclined than high school faculty to require students to submit multiple drafts of writing and conduct writing conferences (Sommers, 2006). It is necessary to offer student writers “cumulative practice and sustained instruction” (Sommers & Saltz, 2004, p. 146). Receiving continuous feedback throughout drafts is favored over receiving feedback on just final drafts, which is seemingly when intentional writing instruction occurs (Sommers, 2006). Similarly, providing students with expectations throughout the semester about their writing progress is preferred to overwhelming them with needed improvements all at once; this continual, gradual feedback may also be applied to future writing assignments (Sommers, 2006).

Addison and McGee’s (2010) study revealed discrepancies in faculty and students’ perceptions of writing. Students rated themselves with a high ability to demonstrate organization of ideas and mastery of grammar; conversely, faculty members were not as optimistic with students’ organizational and grammatical abilities in writing. Unfortunately, even when faculty engage in best practices to teach writing, students do not necessarily submit to these practices in learning to write.

Support and Guidance

Unfortunately, students have been conditioned throughout their educational experiences that writing is an impersonal and prescriptive task in which grammatical errors are punishable by the bleeding red pen (Klages & Clark, 2009). Students professed that high school writing was mainly about grammar, mechanics, and hard facts (Sommers & Saltz, 2004). Therefore, college composition instructors should not just mechanically correct students' errors but rather consider the students' capacities and the meaning of their mistakes (Smith, 2008).

Interestingly, one study (Sommers & Saltz, 2004) noted that freshman students "build authority not by writing from a position of expertise but by writing into expertise" (p. 134). Regrettably, students were rarely given freedom in their writing from choosing topics to arranging and organizing information; thus, it is no surprise that they mainly focused on the product of writing not the process of writing (Smith, 2010). Sommers (2006) found that freshman students often lacked the ability to anticipate a reader's response to their writing, a critical thinking skill often absent among freshman writers. Essentially, writing requires thinking; if students are not writing in their classes, they are just absorbing information without thinking or questioning (Sommers & Saltz, 2004).

Composition instructors should provide students with frequent opportunities to practice writing; at the same time, students should also embrace these opportunities by boldly establishing their position as writers. Too often students' voices in writing are muffled by simple facts and insignificant statistics (Klages & Clark, 2009). Through purposeful writing, freshman students establish a voice in which they can speak back to the world while simultaneously providing them with opportunities to become involved in the course (Sommers & Saltz, 2004).

As one student commented, “It’s tough getting better as a writer when nobody is showing you how” (Sommers, 2006, p. 254). Freshman students are frequently and explicitly told *what* they need to do to improve their writing but rarely shown *how* to do it. Freshman composition courses provide limited opportunities for students to engage in informal writing and reading and responding to other students’ work; in contrast, these activities are well established in the high school classroom (Addison & McGee, 2010).

Freshman writers openly admitted that they feel out of place, threatened, insecure, and incompetent in their new role as a college student (Smith, 2008). At this pivotal point, composition instructors must seize the opportunity to transform these feelings into a sense of belonging, safety, security, and competence. Students must possess the belief that achievement is within reality and within their power if an outcome of success is to be realized. Gaining confidence in writing can take freshman writers to new heights in their composition courses and possibly translate into other areas of academia (Downs & Wardle, 2007).

In a survey conducted by Enders (2001), freshman student writers voiced that frequent practice in writing is the single most important concept high school teachers can provide for students in preparing them for writing in college. Suffice to say, it is not enough for students to write often; they must also write with intention. Many times, freshman student writers view writing as a performance for the teacher rather than a useful skill that holds an important, relevant role in their lives (Clark, 2010).

Accordingly, instructors should pose meaningful, purposeful writing assignments in which students experience both a sense of personal connectedness and passion for a topic (Kahn, 2009). Allowing students to write about what matters to them helps students to own their writing

and convey a personal voice through their writing (Kahn, 2009; Sommers & Saltz, 2004). Composition instructors cannot assume freshman students come to class as fully developed writers; more accurately, they should be viewed as freshly evolving writers, whose skills are seemingly imperfect and generally unpolished (Downs & Wardle, 2007; Sommers, 2006). When students are expected to possess a certain degree of knowledge about writing prior to entering the college composition classroom, they approach writing with increased reluctance (Sommers, 2006). Nonetheless, students cannot continue to write like they did in high school if they expect to be successful in college composition courses. With clear guidance from composition instructors, students must discover that there is a greater purpose in writing than simply to complete an assignment (Sommers & Saltz, 2004). It is imperative that students enter college having written often and for a variety of purposes and audiences (Enders, 2001).

As with any instructional strategy, using Web 2.0 tools should be approached with great care and attention to proper procedure. According to Dubisar and Palmeri (2010), instructors should acknowledge existing composition pedagogy as well as potential technological pedagogy. Vie (2008) asserted that media convergence with blogs, wikis, social networking sites, and other technologies possess potential pedagogical value as students must continually be aware of audience and discourse communities. Additionally, by publishing online “as public discourse and new knowledge in the field” (Hocks, 2003, p. 649), students are instantly aware of the impact on diverse audiences, which creates an authentic learning experience. Equally, Lunden (2008) found that blogs and wikis in writing activities provide students with real and responsive audiences (as cited in Sorapure, 2010).

Another way instructors can foster student growth in writing is to provide students with evaluative measures prior to administering writing assignments. Students must understand why

and know how their writing will be assessed or evaluated. In other words, in regards to the writing process, students need to be aware of where they should be going if they are ever going to get there (Wardle, 2009). At the most general level, the writing process involves acts of invention, arrangement, revision, editing, and publishing. Ineffective or imprecise comments on students' writing reinforce students' perceptions that writing simply involves following the rules; therefore, it is crucial that instructors include clear directives and text-specific information (Sommers, 2006). Comments should serve to help students evaluate and develop control over their writing. Effective and specific instructor comments may shape students' future writings throughout college (Sommers, 2006). Emphasis on the writing process not the writing product should be continually reinforced through instructors' detailed, reflective comments (Sommers, 2006).

Without instructor guidance and direction, composition instructors cannot naively assume that students internalize their prescribed comments and transfer them to subsequent writing assignments. In fact, such comments and feedback can be more effective if dispensed before and between writing drafts (Smith, 2010; Sommers, 2006). Even if composition instructors are aware of this and subscribe to this belief, they are often bound by time constraints and the sheer number of student writers for whom they are responsible. Although it is beneficial in theory, the practice of conferencing with students about their writing between drafts is rather tedious and virtually impossible to perform for each writing occasion. One desirable option that may offset this limitation is incorporating peer conferencing sessions (Smith, 2010).

Inarguably, the process of writing involves a set of complex, intricate skills and should be treated as such by both the student writer and the composition instructor. FYC instructors must begin with teaching students about language and discourse, which demands that instructors are

knowledgeable in these areas (Wardle, 2009). Unfortunately, instructors assigned to teach freshman composition courses are not always astutely armed with effective pedagogy in writing. For an array of circumstances (some beyond the control of educational powers), a number of instructors who lack educational credentials and professional skills are accountable for nurturing growth among freshman writers (Downs & Wardle, 2007). Nevertheless, this does not lessen the impending responsibility of educators (in all fields and disciplines) to ensure students exit high schools and colleges with the effective writing skills necessary to achieve success in whatever path in life they may travel.

Digital Literacies

In today's educational era an interest in digital literacy is escalating. To ignore the influence of technology in teaching writing would be negligent. Smith (2008) acknowledges, "Using a familiar, flexible, lively Web 2.0 platform engages new college students in the act of writing as...interactive, powerfully creative, mentally challenging, and intellectually transformative" (p. 37). This, in fact, has contributed to the changes in writing practices adopted in higher education. An influx of writing activities using digital technologies such as discussion boards and blogs has permeated the composition classroom. This has resulted in students' ability to upload and share portions of their essays and solicit feedback from classmates, a practice that eliminates time constraints and uncomfortable issues associated with face-to-face communication (Smith, 2010).

Students seek a learning environment that encompasses student involvement and interactive activities, especially those computer-based. Today, teachers acknowledge this ideal exists; however, research reveals that this ideal is not widely evident in the classrooms (Fisher, 2009). Classroom environments that once housed passive receivers of knowledge will be

replaced with active learners of information. Instructional practices will be defined with role playing, games, hand-on activities, and virtual learning, all of which can be efficiently facilitated and enhanced using available technology (Wepner, Ziomek, & Liqing, 2003).

To compete in the world marketplace, students must acquire global awareness and social responsibility. According to McCoog (2007), teachers should incorporate the use of technology into the classroom to present these skills. As the concept of multiple intelligences becomes widely acknowledged and accepted, teachers should adopt a technology-based curriculum to assess students. Technology coupled with effective instruction is the key to developing globally marketable students (McCoog, 2007).

Peter Elbow (2007), an emeritus professor of English at the University of Massachusetts in Amhurst, contends that

the Internet has brought to the experience of writing: so many more writers, so much more writing in the world, so much more writing for *strangers*! Instead of writers only wondering about what teachers will find right and wrong in their words, more and more writers wonder less defensively what kind of person readers will think they are. (p. 171)

These sentiments just begin to skim the surface of how technology has changed the way students are being instructed in writing. Technological advances are creating and developing active, independent writers (Smith, 2008). Thus, students are using the written word to express their identities and to reveal a sense of self like never before. Although students may not be actively aware of their roles as writers when contributing to various social networking sites, they are still engaged in forms of writing. New digital technologies have the prospect of generating a high degree of written discourse among students (Elbow, 2007).

Although students demonstrate digital literacy from a social perspective, it cannot be rashly assumed that students know how to use Web 2.0 tools with instructional goals in mind; instructors must provide the assistance and support needed from an academic perspective (Purdy,

2010). According to Hocks (2003), participating in activities using digital technologies provides students with an “alternate way of representing their understanding of the course material” (p. 650).

Exposure to Web 2.0 technologies in the classroom has distinct implications for student learning. However, educators are cautioned to ensure that digital technologies are primarily based on educational purposes not social rationale (O’Brien & Scharber, 2008). Students engage in decision-making and critical thinking skills when using Web 2.0 tools (Anderson, 2006; Clark, 2010; Reid, 2008; Sorapure, 2010). These skills can be transferable to other areas of academia as well as life in general. Web 2.0 technologies provide numerous options for discovering innovative ways to engage students in authorial control of their writing (Clark, 2010). Also, by using multimodal digital technologies, students actively construct new knowledge and gain critical technological literacies (Hocks, 2003). To further elaborate, they think critically about visual information through interpretation and production. It is necessary for educators to create and foster nonthreatening, familiar platforms for today’s digital students (Smith, 2008).

Digital technologies have gently nudged unsuspecting educators to recognize that significant learning occurs outside the four walls of the traditional classroom. In fact, theoretically speaking, the four walls are somewhat symbolic of a prison in which learners are held captive from the ultimate learning environment – the world. Web 2.0 digital technology is the key that unlocks classroom doors and frees learners to access enumerable learning opportunities (Kist, 2004). With these digital technologies, students experience a collaborative, interactive, and reflective learning environment not bound by physical structures (Kist, 2004). Moreover, peruse the personal space of many high school or college students and one would likely discover a plethora of digital gadgets in their immediate possession- from cell phones to

iPads to laptops. Today's students are entering the classroom with digital literacy skills in which educators have yet to acknowledge through relevant instructional activities (Smith, 2008). To complicate matters, because of rapidly developing technologies, few educators have gainfully acquired and meaningfully applied such skills in their classroom practices (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). The advent of Web 2.0 digital technologies has exacerbated the technological gap between teachers and students.

As educators, we are charged with producing digitally literate students (Witte, 2007). It would be negligible to situate students in a digital society ill-prepared to face future technological challenges. Over the past two decades the spread of technology has largely affected the teaching of writing and changed the context in which writing instruction is being delivered (Addison & McGee, 2010; Applebee & Langer, 2009). The use of Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs can hone in students' existing abilities and actively engaged them in writing. Since many freshman students are familiar with this means of written communication, it is essential for composition instructors to consider how digital technologies can enhance students' writing in college.

Summary

In Chapter II, the review of related literature encompassed blogs, FYC students in regards to their past and present writing experiences, and digital literacies. Moreover, it is the compilation of this comprehensive review that further solidifies the need for this present study. In terms of students' writing abilities and expectations, there is a discernible gap from the high school writing classroom to the college composition classroom. Additionally, current research suggests that students become better writers when they simply write (with a purpose); blogs can be the tool used to engage students in more writing opportunities while simultaneously

enhancing digital literacies skills. Chapter III articulates the case study research design, methodology, and data collection procedures employed to address how FYC students use required classroom blogs as part of their writing practices throughout the stages of the writing process.

CHAPTER III:
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

To borrow Einstein's words, "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted." The quality of one's experiences with the world is often difficult to quantify. According to Merriam (2009), "[q]ualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5).

Overview

This chapter discusses the methodology of the study, which is divided into distinct sections. The first section is an overview of the qualitative research design with an emphasis on case study. The second section summarizes an exploratory study regarding first-year composition (FYC) students enrolled at the same community college as the participants of the current study and how they perceived their growth as writers using classroom blogs. The selection of participants and setting is also discussed.

Research Design

Blog participation requires students to navigate language; therefore, a premium is placed on word choice. Similarly, qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning behind the word choice. In fact, it is primarily through language that researchers can access (and often assess) individuals' perspectives of their experiences (Polkinghorne, 2005). Qualitative research helps

researchers understand an issue or a problem by exploring the contexts and settings of a particular group of participants (Creswell, 2007). Theoretically speaking,

Van Manen (1990) holds that

The methodological rule is that social reality and society should be understood from the perspective of actors who interpret their world through and in social interaction. Its application is in the role behavior and perception studies; its interest in empirical research led to the grounded theory method of Glaser and Strauss (1967). (p. 186)

Similarly, Blumer (1969) contends that the relationship between the data sources should be carefully scrutinized as they will determine the results of a given study, Therefore, the researcher is cautioned to consider how such connections among data are systematically or judiciously obtained and determined (Blumer, 1969).

Like socio-technical systems (STS) theory stance, blogs are also viewed as an open system in which the system possesses boundaries established by the external environment. Since the purpose of this study was to explore how FYC students (personnel factor) use required classroom blogs (technical factor) as part of their writing practices throughout the writing process (external environment), STS theory was adopted as the guiding framework in addressing this phenomenon. Data were collected throughout the semester from the following sources: preliminary questionnaires, blog entries, Plus-Minus-Interesting (PMI) inventory sheets, student artifacts of essays (i.e., prewriting activities and earlier drafts), final drafts, and semi-structured interviews with selected sample participants. Since multiple sources were used to gather data, triangulation and member checks were optimized (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009). These sources were analyzed in relation to the personnel (FYC students), technical (classroom blogs), work (blogs), and external environmental (students' experiences with technology) subsystems.

Moreover, after data were gathered and reviewed, a purposeful sample of six students was selected for intensive investigation into the classroom blog phenomenon. The sample of participants was representative of the larger pool of participants as they varied in gender, age, ethnicity, and life experiences (e.g., social, academic, professional, etc.). In addition, this sample of six attended almost every class meeting, completed all blog posts, and submitted requirements for all essays; therefore, they generated exhaustive insights through all the sources of data gathered for analysis. Emerging themes were sought to identify and examine students' perceptions of using classroom blogs to improve their growth as writers. These themes were then scrutinized to determine if an interrelated relationship among blogs, more specifically classroom blogs, FYC students, and the composition classroom existed.

Case Study

Just as STS theory and blogs are systems of bound units, case studies are also critically bound units of individuals, classroom, programs, etc. (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Patton, 2002). Merriam (1998) further holds that if the phenomenon being studied "is not intrinsically bounded, it is not a case" (p. 27). Case studies may be characterized by the following; particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (Merriam, 1998, 2009). This study is particularistic in that it specifically focused on FYC students and the use of classroom blogs to facilitate their growth as writers; it is descriptive in that several sources of data generated thick description (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Patton, 2002) via interviews, artifacts, blog entries, etc, which were collected over time. Lastly, the study is heuristic in that the reader was presented with new insights and meanings regarding the use of classroom blogs in the FYC classroom, allowing readers to rethink and illuminate the blogging phenomenon in an academic setting.

Furthermore, case study research is suitable for answering questions that seek the *how's* and *why's* of a particular phenomenon (Barone, 2004). Accordingly, this present study investigates the primary question: *How* do first-year composition students use required classroom blogs as part of their writing practices throughout the stages of the writing process? Case studies have promise for effectively addressing educational innovations and for informing policy (Merriam, 1998, 2009). Blogs, sprouted from the rise of Web 2.0 technologies, are obliging educational entities to re-evaluate current policy so that they reflect such technological advancement.

Summary of Exploratory Study

The purpose of the exploratory study was to investigate how students enrolled in a FYC course at a medium-sized community college perceived their growth as writers through participating in reflective and collaborative practices about the writing process using classroom blogs. More specifically, the instructor created a classroom blog and examined how students reflected on the writing process and how peer comments influenced their interaction and collaboration.

The exploratory study was conducted in fall 2010 and illuminated many aspects of FYC students and their use of Web 2.0 technologies in reflecting on the writing process. It was evident that additional preliminary and follow-up data were needed to generate a richer analysis; therefore, several data collection sources, which are addressed later in this chapter, were incorporated into the current study.

The 12 participants in the exploratory study comprised a range of diversity from academic levels, ethnic backgrounds, cultural experiences, gender, and age. In addition, 75 percent of the participants possessed familial responsibilities, adding to the challenges in meeting

the course requirements. They were enrolled in the composition course during a full-term fall semester. The course met for two hours and forty-five minutes once a week. Participants completed four blog entries over the course of the semester. Student data were collected from their electronically submitted blog posts, so the authenticity of the data was quite optimal. Additionally, blog posts were chronologically archived allowing for continual access to the data, which also enabled me to repeatedly refer to the original student data for reliability. Although not a requirement in all sections of English composition courses, students enrolled in English composition courses taught by the investigator were required to participate in blogging activities (as part of the section requirement), which reflected their perceptions of successes, struggles, and overall observations of their growth as writers. Students were encouraged to be reflective regarding the writing process in their blog posts as well as to comments on peers' posts.

From the exploratory study conducted earlier, the following themes emerged from the data obtained from students' blog posts regarding their experiences with the writing process: emotionally charged, personal application, academically based, and reflective nature. Furthermore, the findings further confirmed and supported several of the characteristics found in the related literature of FYC students. Students struggle with topic selection. One of several plausible explanations is that from their high school experiences in writing, students are accustomed to the teacher providing them with a generic topic in which to explore (Enders, 2001). In FYC courses, students are required to survey their varied interests and develop an essay based on those specific interests. Seemingly, incorporating transitional activities may minimize students' anxieties and frustrations in the composition classroom.

Students are generally reluctant and insecure about their writing abilities and opportunities for success. Blogs may help to convey encouragement and provide support among

peers. When students feel confident in writing, this often translates into confidence in other areas of their lives (Downs & Wardle, 2007). One student, who was returning to school after being a stay-at-home mom for the past 15 years, expressed that blogging about her frustrations and problems about writing helped her gain confidence as a writer. Because students' posts became progressively reflective in nature, they possessed an authoritative voice in their writing, which is also essential in formal writing (Kahn, 2009; Sommers & Saltz, 2004).

From this exploratory study, the following early assumptions were developing:

1) students come into the FYC classroom with technology skills that further divide traditional and non-traditional students; 2) classroom blogs may be employed to promote growth in writing in a way that place students in a position to manage their own learning and improve their writing; and 3) students hone their reflective practice skills while participating in classroom blogs. These assumptions cannot be addressed in isolation of one another, but rather they should be viewed as harmoniously co-existing and reliant upon one another as supported by STS theory.

Clearly, the results of this study warranted further investigation into the classroom blog phenomenon. In hindsight, obtaining additional sources (e.g., questionnaires, inventories, student artifacts, and interviews) of data would have added to the richness of data and thickness of description (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The present study sought to incorporate such multiple sources.

Participants

Participants selected for this current study represented a purposeful sampling strategy, which is a characteristic of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). They were enrolled in the researcher's English composition course for one full-term fall semester in 2011 at a satellite campus of a medium-sized community college located in the southeastern United States. All

students were registered for the course as a partial fulfillment of their program or degree requirement. For some, this was the only composition course required; for others, this was the first of many English composition and literature courses required to complete their degree or program of a study. Still, others had previously taken a non-credit developmental English course as a prerequisite (if they did not achieve a minimal English score on college entrance exams) to prepare them for the writing demands of a FYC course.

Characteristically, students in this course possess an array of writing experiences from writing simple narrative paragraphs to extensive writing in high school Advanced Placement (AP) courses; it is important to note that the latter is not a typical student in this course. Generally speaking, some students lack confidence in their writing abilities and many demonstrate only basic writing skills. Some students just graduated from high school within the last year (i.e., traditional students); others are pursuing a second-career or obtaining additional training in a specialized field (non-traditional students).

At the conception of the study, 26 students were officially enrolled in the course. By the end of the semester, official enrollment was reduced to 21 students; however, only fifteen students were actively attending classes and completing course requirements. Notably, this trend is the norm rather than the exception.

Then There Were Six

From the 15 students who were regularly engaged in course activities, a sample of 6 participants was purposefully selected (Creswell, 2007; Hatch 2002). As previously stated, these participants were an embodied sample of diversity of the entire class as they possessed varying ranges and degrees of ethnicity, gender, age, and social and academic experiences. It is important emphasize the diversity of the sample since community college students possess unique

characteristics (Ammon, Bowman, & Mourad, 2008; Helfgot, 2005; Kim, 2002). At the same time, the purpose of this study was to explore how FYC students use classroom blogs in their practices. The focus was not on an isolated population but rather on the all FYC students.

Additionally, in an effort to celebrate the unique qualities the sample participants personified, a brief biographical sketch of each participant is depicted below. Each sample participant was assigned a pseudonym, which is used throughout this study, to ensure anonymity. The first three participants illustrated participated in the first semi-structured interview conducted, and the following three sample participants were involved in the second semi-structured interview.

Kira

Kira, a Black mother of two, is a first-time college student who graduated from high school twenty years ago. She is pursuing a degree in nursing. Since this was her first formal writing class since high school, she had expressed high-levels of anxiety. This was further evident as she was almost always the first student to arrive for class each week and usually the first student to post on the classroom blog. Kira does not have a Facebook account; in fact, she had not experienced any type of social media communication prior to this course.

Max

Max is a White male and had just graduated from high school the previous spring semester. Max attended a small private high school, making the transition into college even more eventful. After completing a two-year stint at the community college level, he plans to transfer to a four-year university to major in pharmacy. As a proudly confessed outdoorsman, Max was not into the technology scene from the outset. Max is an infrequent Facebook user.

Wendell

Wendell is a White male. As a dual-enrolled high school senior, Wendell offers a unique dynamic into the classroom. Although he was a product of a home-schooled learning environment, he exhibited a demeanor in class and through blog participation that did not necessarily complement the predisposed perceptions some individuals may possess about home-schooled students (e.g., shy, reserved, socially awkward). Interestingly, his classroom blog account was established using a parent's email account (even email correspondences were filtered through a parent's account), which further reminded the instructor and his peers of Wendell's youth. He has a Facebook account and uses it regularly to update his profile status, which reflects his recent life experiences and daily encounters.

Kira, Max, and Wendell all admitted to never experiencing blogs of any kind (social or academic) prior to taking this a course. Many other students in the class also expressed similar sentiments. Max and Wendell are Facebook users, but Kira does not have a Facebook account.

Abby

Like Max, Abby (a Black female) had also graduated from high school the previous spring; however, she attended a large public school (the largest level of student population classification for high schools in the state). The high school she attended was within a few miles from the community college in this study. She is a frequent Facebook user, and contends that many of her peers use this tool unproductively, such as perpetual engagement in high-school drama antics.

Richard

Having been retired from 20 years of service in the U.S. Army, Richard (a Black male) was returning to school to major on business. He is married with young adult children. He has

not taken a writing class since high school. He worked while attending college part-time. Richard was not a regular Facebook user although he admitted to reading status updates occasionally.

Yogi

Like Richard, Yogi had served in the military (ten years in the U.S. Navy) and was currently pursuing a degree in business. She is a Black female and was not employed outside the home since she was attending school full-time. Yogi juggled school and family responsibilities. Her experiences with formal writing were traced back to her high school days. Interestingly, Yogi is also Richard's sister-in-law.

Abby, Richard, and Yogi share similar characteristics with each other as well as with other classmates. One factor they collectively possessed was an excitement for new learning opportunities.

After formal approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the community college, an IRB certified colleague invited all students to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. Since I served as both the instructor of the course and the investigator of the study, this protocol helped to reduce any potential threat of coercion. The colleague distributed informed assent forms (as some students were below the age of 19) and informed consent forms. These forms explained the purpose of the study and identified participants' rights during the duration of the study. Moreover, students who chose to participate in the study returned and placed their informed assent and/or consent forms in a large sealed envelope, which remained secured and sealed until all final grades were submitted.

Setting

Like the sample of participants in the study, the setting of the study was also purposefully selected as I had been teaching at this satellite location for over four years and had access to a

classroom and participants readily available as well as liberties to incorporate technology into instruction with unlimited constraints. The setting of the study was a satellite campus of a medium-sized community college located in the southeastern United States; the college is comprised of one main campus and five satellite campuses. All satellite campuses are within a 50-mile radius from the main campus and each offers traditional, independent, television/video, and internet course delivery options.

There are approximately 7,000 total students enrolled at all campus sites. Female students make up 61% of the student population while males represent 39%. Similarly, 61% attend full-time and 39% attend part-time. The ethnicity of the student population in percentages is as follows: White-72%; African American- 22%; and other- 6% (<http://www.collegeview.com/index.jsp>). The main campus houses a student population that is more representative of the traditional student; whereas, the satellite campuses attract a larger non-traditional student population. At the time of the study, the research site reported a student population of over 1800.

Face-to-face class meetings occurred once a week every week and lasted two hours and forty-five minutes. To obtain an overall sense of the FYC classroom weekly protocol, see Table 2. Many participants completed their blog entries at home or at another location other than school site. Students who did not have internet access outside of school completed their postings before or after class in a computer lab on campus. Since students composed final drafts of essays in-class in the campus computer lab, participants were able to access a computer readily throughout the semester.

Table 2

Overview of Course Dates and Activities

Course Dates	Activities
Friday, August 19	Introduction to Course; What Makes a Good Writer? PP; Parts of an Essay PP; Reading and Writing Activities; MLA Format
Friday, August 26	The Writing Process; Invention; Arrangement; Narration Rough Draft Due in Word Document via email; Blog Post #1 Due
Friday, September 2	In-class Narration Essay #1 Due ;Invention (Prewriting) Strategies, Writing Introductions, and Topic Development Activities; Comparison and Contrast PP
Friday, September 9	Comparison and Contrast Topic Exploration Due; Blog Post #2 Due
Friday, September 16	In-class Comparison and Contrast Essay #2 Due; Classification and Division Essay PP
Friday, September 23	Classification and Division peer editing session; Blog Post #3 Due
Friday, September 30	In-class Classification and Division Essay #3 Due; Exemplification Essay PP
Friday, October 7	In-class Exemplification Essay #4 Due; Process Essay PP; Blog Post #4 Due
Friday, October 14	In-class Process Essay #5 Due; Process Essay Activities; Peer Editing Session
Friday, October 21	Cause and Effect PP; PMI Inventory Sheets Due; Blog Post #5 Due
Friday, October 28	In-class Cause and Effect Essay #6 Due; MLA Research Essay Format and Documentation
Friday, November 4	Argumentation Essay PP; Research Essay Handout and Guidelines
Friday November 11	NO CLASS- Veterans' Day Holiday
Friday, November 18	Locating Reliable Sources; Work on Argumentation Research Essay; Blog Post #6 Due
Friday, November 25	NO CLASS- Thanksgiving Holiday
Friday, December 2	FINAL Exam; Research Essay Due at the beginning of class.

Data Collection

Although not a requirement in all sections of English composition, students who enrolled in English composition taught by the investigator participated in blogging activities (as part of the section requirement), which reflected their perceptions of successes, struggles, and overall observations of their growth as writers. As the instructor of the course, I was afforded the opportunity to build a natural rapport with the students throughout the semester through weekly interactions. Data collection encompassed the following sources: preliminary questionnaires, blog posts, PMI inventory sheets, artifacts and early drafts of essays, final drafts, and semi-structured interviews. The primary sources of data were in written context (e.g., blog posts, PMI inventory sheets, artifacts, and early and final drafts). Van Manen (1990) holds that

Writing forces the person into a reflective attitude – in contrast to face-to-face conversation in which people are much more immediately involved. This reflective attitude together with the linguistic demands of the writing process place certain constraints on the free obtaining lived-experiences descriptions. (p. 64)

Table 3 depicts a summary of the various sources of data collected throughout this study as well as the method, frequency, and purpose of data collection.

Table 3

Summary of Data Collection and Procedures

Source of Data	Method/Frequency of Data Collection	Purpose of Data Collection
Questionnaires	Administered once at the beginning of the semester using Survey Monkey; developed open-ended questions to encourage authentic responses and accurate descriptions	To solicit students' prior experiences with technology tools in and outside the academic setting
Blog Posts	Created a classroom blog using the blogspot.com tool and required a minimum of six student posts throughout the semester	To provide a digital forum where students can freely discuss areas of the writing process among their peers in an informal learning space
PMI Inventory Sheets	Completed one time during the semester around midterm	To elicit information regarding what students found to be pluses (P), minuses (M), and interesting (I) during blog participation
Artifacts and Early Drafts	Compiled various prewriting and early drafts on a weekly on-going basis throughout the semester	To understand the thought process that students undergo in developing their topics and organizing their essays
Final Drafts	Collected and analyzed drafts for evidence of students' growth as writers (approximately every two weeks)	To demonstrate students' potential growth as writers as referenced in blog posts, peers' comments, and other writing activities
Semi-structured Interviews	Conducted with six selected participants on two separate occasions; interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed	To obtain a deeper understanding of how participants use classroom blogs to facilitate their growth as writers

Preliminary Questionnaires

Having conducted an exploratory study several semesters earlier, it was determined that obtaining background information about students' behaviors with technology would have helped to better understand the skills and experiences students already possessed with technological tools. The purpose of this questionnaire was to identify students' prior experiences with using technology tools in both academic and non-academic situations. The researcher created an original online survey, which was generated using Survey Monkey®. At the beginning of the semester, participants received an email with the survey link inviting them to complete the six-item open-ended survey (see Appendix A). The information obtained from the survey helped to inform the research process throughout the semester. For example, as several students indicated they had little experience with using technological tools for academic purposes, those participants were provided with more instruction, encouragement, and motivation. Moreover, the instructor also found it necessary to instruct and reinforce basic computer skills for these identified students.

Blog Posts

Participants' individual blog posts were chronologically archived in a classroom blog created and managed by the instructor. The following instructions appeared in the course syllabus under blog instructions:

All students have received an invitation via blogspot.com to join our classroom blog site. Check your email account. You must accept the invitation before you can post to any blog. I will initiate topics for each required post. Posts **MUST** be a minimum of 200 words, and students **MUST** comment on other classmates' responses to receive full credit.

As means to stimulate students' thinking about upcoming essays, the instructor developed blog prompts (see Appendix B) that presented a real-life scenario in which students can relate for each

of the patterns of essays covered in class at a given time. (Essays are discussed in greater details under Final Essays). The instructor refrained from posting comments on individual students' blogs as to allow for collaboration and reflection to occur freely without instructor imposition. However, when appropriate, the instructor made references in class about students' posts to provoke discussions or ignite further insights. It is important to note that the instructor's implicit presence within the blogging forum was not intentionally overt or visible, but students were clearly aware of the composition instructor's virtual presence. Therefore, when analyzing data to yield findings, the researcher is fully alert to the fact that prudent attempts must be made to maintain an objective perspective.

Participants completed a minimum of six blog posts throughout the semester, which averaged into one post every other week. Student data were collected from their electronically submitted blog posts, so the reliability of the retrieved data was quite optimal. Additionally, blog posts were reverse chronologically archived allowing me to access to the most recent data continually and enabling me to reference the original student data for accuracy repeatedly. Students were encouraged to reflect on the writing process in each blog post. They interacted with peers via blog posts by responding/commenting on posts. This informal collaboration continued throughout the semester. There was a two-week period between each blog post as to allow for possible reflective responses to surface. Moreover, this data generated students' open-ended responses about their perceptions about the writing process and subsequent blog participation.

In addition to the blog prompts provided for the various patterns of essays, students were encouraged to reflect on the writing process and their blog participation experiences throughout the semester. For example, on blog posts 4, 5, and 6, I initiated the following prompts:

Now that you are almost halfway through ENG 101, "reflect" on your progress as writers in general. Also, specifically address your thoughts about using this classroom blog in this course to help you develop as writers. (blog post 4, October 2, 2011)

Also, what have you learned about yourself as a writer as you continue to participate in this blog and read your classmates' posts and comments? Please be specific. (blog post 5, October, 17, 2011)

In as much detail as possible, please discuss how you feel you have grown as writers throughout this semester (from your first day in class until this point). I am interested to know if you think that this classroom blog has affected your perceived growth as writers in any way. (blog post 6, November 17, 2011)

Plus-Minus-Interesting Inventory Sheets

The Plus-Minus-Interesting (PMI) inventory sheets (see Appendix C) gathered student data on what they found as *pluses*, *minuses*, or *interesting* about their blog participation. Edward De Bono (1984), developer of the Cognitive Research Trust (CoRT) program, introduced the PMI strategy as the first stage in the program. CoRT's goal is to "teach thinking skills useful to everyone in and out of school" (De Bono, 1984, p. 17). Initially, it was intended for students to complete a PMI inventory sheet at the end of each week that a blog post was due; however, it became quickly apparent that the information gathered from the PMI inventory sheets were already being discussed in students' blog posts. The data collected from the PMI inventory sheets served to further corroborate data in their blog posts.

Artifacts and Early Drafts

In developing and composing essays, participants completed various activities to facilitate topic development such as formal outlines (see Appendix D). These invention strategies were implemented after introducing each pattern of essay and completed in the classroom setting. Early drafts of student essays were used to develop students' final drafts. It is desirable to have early drafts of each pattern of essay peer edited. However, because some class meetings required additional explanation of a concept, time did not always allow for this activity. Peer

editing sessions were conducted for three of the six patterns of essays. During these sessions, the instructor provided guidelines for specific areas in which to focus for each type of essay (see Appendix E). Artifacts and early drafts were collected and reviewed to generate a holistic perspective of students' development throughout the writing process.

Final Drafts of Essays

As a bound course, students were required to compose six specific patterns of essays. Participants' final drafts of essays were collected and compared to blog posts and peers' comments for evidence of participants' growth in writing. Students composed six in-class final draft essays: narration, comparison and contrast, classification and division, exemplification, process, and cause and effect, respectively.

Semi-structured Interviews

After data from the numerous sources were carefully read and reviewed, it became evident that six participants warranted further investigation regarding their classroom blog experience. These sample participants were described at length earlier in this chapter. During the last two weeks of the semester after class, using a purposeful sample (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002), I conducted two separate semi-structured interview sessions with three participants in each session (see Appendix F). Two sessions were employed to accommodate for participants' schedules of availability. The first interview session included Kira, Max, and Wendell; the second session included Abby, Richard, and Yogi.

Each interview session was digitally recorded for data accuracy and transcribed for data analysis purposes. Participants were provided digital copies of the interview transcriptions. I also requested that they carefully read the transcripts to ensure the accuracy of its contents (Hatch, 2002). One participant from each session replied by email to verify that the transcriptions

represented an accurate account of each session. Initially, broad questions were posed to elicit candid responses. The preliminary data revealed that classroom blogs were seemingly relevant and valuable to students from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, these six participants were selected to be representative of the class diversity. Within the limits of time and accessibility, these six participants provided further data that reiterated the class's observations collectively regarding the use of classroom blogs as part of their writing practices.

Data Analysis

In close keeping with Van Manen's (1990) thematic analysis, a detailed approach was adopted in which every line and sentence was analyzed to reveal the essence of FYC students' experiences with the classroom blog phenomenon. Theme analysis involves "the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work" (Van Manen, 1990, p.78). Interestingly, the term *dramatized* reflected the language adopted by participants in describing the use of blogs via semi-structured interviews as they infused emotionally-charged verbs such as *love*, *punished*, etc. Data from blog posts, PMI inventory sheets, final drafts of essays, and semi-structured interviews were analyzed for recurring themes. In accordance with STS theory, analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which one factor (e.g., experiences with technology) of the subsystem influenced other factors (e.g., classroom blog participation).

All participants' blog posts were printed; entries were grouped into the six required blog posts. Additionally, the six sample participants were grouped separately as to allow for more extensive analysis. All posts were carefully read and re-read to gain an overall sense of the participants' classroom blog participation. However, only data from six sample participants underwent a constant comparative analysis (Creswell, 2007, Patton, 2002). Data from blog posts,

PMI inventory sheets, and semi-structured interviews were scrutinized and coded for initial patterns and themes (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009), using Excel spreadsheets to manage each of the sources of data. As initial patterns and subsequent themes were revealed, categories were developed to represent the data. Once the data were exhausted, I analyzed the data once again for potential patterns that may have overlooked. Next, as recurring patterns and emerging themes were identified, data were collapsed into major themes. This analysis continued until no new themes could be identified from data. This process was used to analyze blog posts, PMI inventory sheets, and semi-structured interviews. In regards to the STS theory, data analysis for each of the sources previously mentioned allowed me to investigate FYC students (personnel), the classroom blog (technical), and semi-structured interviews and PMI inventory sheets (external environment).

Trustworthiness

Triangulation was employed by utilizing multiple sources representing a single phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009). Sources were systematically reviewed to ensure data were triangulated, thereby, corroborating data from multiple sources. Also, to address reliability issues, interview transcripts were provided in a digital format to the six students who participated in the semi-structured interviews to give them each an opportunity to verify its contents for accuracy. Two students (one from each interview session) responded via email that they read the transcripts and confirmed that the transcripts represented an accurate account of the interview sessions to the best of their recollection.

Summary

This chapter discussed case study research design and included a summary of an exploratory study (which led to the present study). Participants and setting were described. From

the participants, six sample participants were detailed. Data collection procedures and methods for each of the multiple sources were illustrated. Chapter IV presents the results of the data that were collected throughout this study as well as the themes derived from the data.

CHAPTER IV:
DATA ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Overview

This chapter reports results of the online questionnaire and summarizes the participants' experiences through excerpts from their blog posts, PMI inventory sheets, interviews, and essay drafts. Additionally, an exhaustive data analysis depicts the sample of six participants' classroom blog experience through multiple sources of data collected. The results are presented in a manner in which the integrity of the social constructivist worldview (Creswell, 2009) was preserved while attending to the framework of socio-technical systems (STS) theory in an educational setting (Kim, 2008).

Research Questions Revisited

Results were reported while maintaining focus on the primary research question and sub-questions. How do first-year composition (FYC) students use required classroom blogs as part of their writing practices throughout the stages of the writing process?

1. To what extent do classroom blogs promote confidence in students' writing abilities;
2. To what extent do classroom blogs engage students in reflective practices regarding their writing; and
3. To what extent do classroom blogs encourage collaboration among student writers?

Demographics

When the official roster was finalized almost midway through the semester, there were 21 students enrolled in the course: 15 females and 6 males. Notably, of the 21, six females were listed on the roster but did not attend class or complete course requirements. Therefore, data were collected from nine females and six males. None of these students missed more than one class meeting, and 11 students boasted perfect attendance for the semester.

Preliminary Questionnaire

Of the 24 students initially enrolled in the course, 13 students completed the anonymous online questionnaire. The primary purpose of the questionnaire was to assess the students' prior experiences with technology. Participants were asked six open-ended questions (see Appendix A). A definition for Web 2.0 was provided at the beginning of the questionnaire. It was evident that almost all (11 of 13) students regularly used technology tools to access search engines. Over one third of the students who completed the questionnaire reported having no experience with Web 2.0 and another one third referred to utilizing CMC tools (i.e., Blackboard). Three fourths of the participants indicated that they used technology tools in academic settings for the purposes of accessing course information or fulfilling course requirements. Additionally, the majority (11 of 13) of the respondents used technology tools in non-academic settings for the purposes of communicating with family and friends. Overall, the results of the questionnaire indicated students were familiar with using technology tools in academic and non-academic settings for a variety of purposes, which helped to provide insights into students' existing behaviors and experiences with technology.

Blog Posts

Blog posts were completed throughout the semester. The frequency of participation is presented in Figure 3. Although the number of actively enrolled students decreased over the course of the semester, the number of posts ranged from 12-19. Peer comments were often absorbed within the actual post to eliminate a procedural step (i.e., the *comment* button had to be clicked each time to view comments to individual posts). Many students opted to incorporate their comments to classmates' posts in their initial posts. This saved a step when accessing comments. The total number of comments represented comments made in initial posts and comments posted to individual posts.

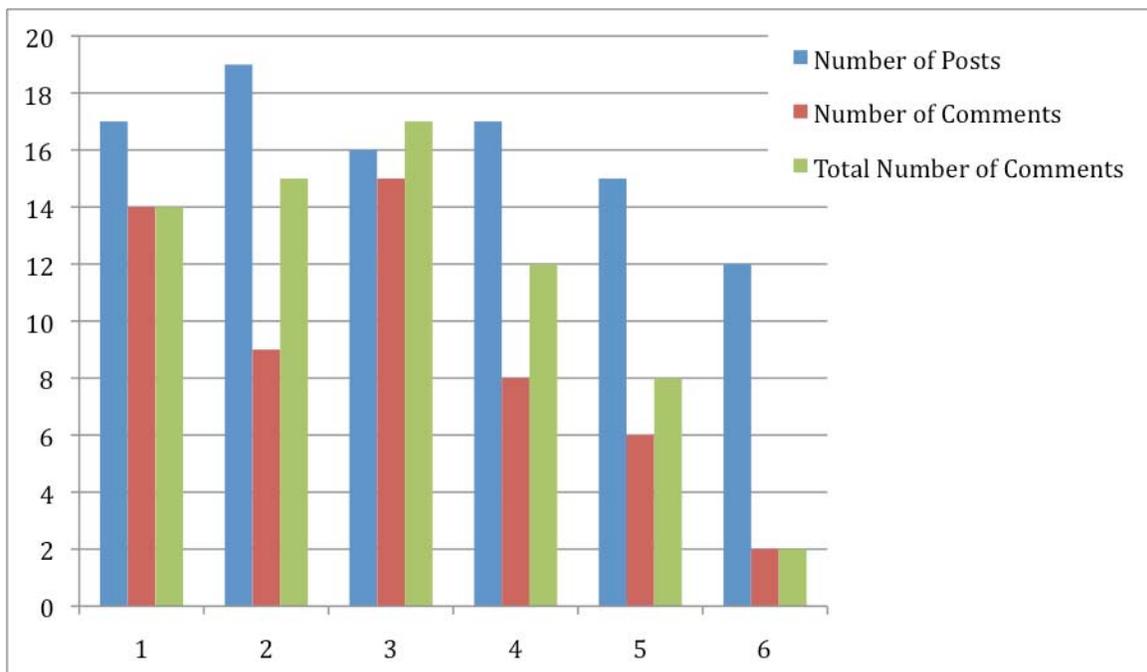


Figure 3. Summary Blog Participation: Posts and Comments

Making Connections with Peers

As the semester progressed, it was evident that students began to feel comfortable with one another. There were times when students shared extremely personal information with the class. One student stated that she had been abused physically by her spouse; another student

noted she had been on drugs and had her two children taken away from her. Yet, another confessed that she had been living in her car for a week. Surprisingly, she even managed to post her blog post on time that week. As these experiences were shared week after week, I realized that I was in the midst of some very courageous individuals who spoke not in an attempt to draw discomfort from their peers and classmates, but rather to empower them. It was an apparent message to all the students- traditional and non-traditional- that everyone has the right and authority to own his or her life. These discussions did not occur until several weeks into the semester after several blogs had been posted.

At their own will, students began to move from their regular seats. Theo (a pseudonym), a White male who often projected an unwelcoming demeanor, had a difficult time finding his place socially. He moved seats to sit by Richard (one of the sample participants). From the first day of class, Theo, voiced strong opinions about certain topics and his beliefs. However, during one class meeting, again after students had completed several blog posts, Richard made a comment in class regarding Theo's blog posts. Richard shared with Theo that he liked reading his blog posts because he seemed *real* and *smart*. From that day forward, I observed a marked change in Theo's behavior and attitude. He smiled more. He was less confrontational.

Interestingly, Richard discussed Theo at length in an interview as noted below:

I would read Theo's blogs, and Theo is very smart, very intelligent. And you know, his opinion is his opinions. And it gives you something to think about. Ok, he's knocking on some doors somewhere with some of the blogs he posted. And I was like, "Well, that's just Theo." He's just keeping it real. Me and my sister-in-law [Yogi] talk about Theo, you know. That dude, he just...he's funny. I could hang out with Theo for a couple hours a day just to get my laugh on. You know, he was sitting up here in the front and now he's done moved back there with me. He said, "I like you guys. You the only guys that'll talk to me." And I was like, "What?" But, you know, he's good people. I mean, I try to be friendly with everybody. (personal communication, December 2, 2011)

Another student who was not one of the sample participants made new friends. I included an excerpt from Sheila's (a pseudonym) blog post to further exemplify the diversity of the class. Sheila, a student who had been home schooled all her life and lived abroad with her missionary family until recently, forged new friendships as she stated in her last blog post:

I have blogged before when I lived overseas as a way to express myself and to update my family back home. This was just organized blogging, instead of coming up with my own topics I was given a topic. It was interesting to see to my classmates' point of view on some topics and I believe it helped us all grow closer in the classroom setting. I know I made friends not just because of the blog but because of the classroom setting. (blog post, December 6, 2011)

Another interesting aspect that evolved from this classroom blog was that students who were no longer attending class regularly were still completing their blog postings. Jacob had not attended class in over one month. In fact, he only attended four class meetings at the beginning of the semester. Moreover, he completed 5 of the 6 required blog postings. His last blog post read:

I do like this blog post thing though. It allows me to see what others peoples opinions are an gives me a little better idea on what to write on the subjects....I believe we are only going to keep advancing into this and using these blog post helps set us up for our future college courses. (blog post, October 20, 2011)

PMI Inventory Sheets

PMI inventory sheets were submitted via email around midterm of the end of the semester. Fourteen students completed and submitted the sheets. A major *plus* of the classroom blog participation was being able to view classmates' opinions and views, which seemed to generate a sense of comfort among students. The primary drawbacks (*minuses*) were computer issues and time management. Finally, participants found other members' posts *interesting* as they shared their thoughts and opinions. Each of the participants documented aspects of the classroom blog that were pluses, minuses, and interesting (see Table 4).

Table 4

PMI Inventory Sheets Summary of Sample Participants

Participants (pseudonyms)	P (+)	M (-)	I (!/?)
Max	<p>“It allows you to be interactive with your fellow classmates on a regular basis.”</p> <p>“It keeps you updated on upcoming assignments.”</p> <p>“It allows you to share your thoughts on the topic of your assignments.”</p>	<p>“There are not any negative flaws, except extra homework.”</p>	<p>“It is a fun way to be active outside of the classroom.”</p> <p>“It keeps you informed on others thoughts and somewhat feeling on the topic of discussion.”</p>
Kira	<p>“I think it’s a great way to converse with other students about several issues that we are having trouble with.”</p> <p>“I also think it helps improve your writing skills.”</p>		<p>“My English 101 blog post is my very first and I’m kind of enjoying it!”</p>
Wendell	<p>“Blogs allow me to see the opinion and perspectives of the other students. They also stimulate discussion amongst us students.”</p> <p>Also introduces “some students to blogging.”</p>	<p>“Kind of awkward at first for people who don’t blog or do much online communication.”</p>	
Abby	<p>“Minimum word count, enables a decent conversation”</p> <p>“does not have to be grammatically perfect”</p> <p>“allows us to voice our thoughts, opinions, & ideas without criticism or judgment”</p> <p>“Improves English/writing skills in an informal manner”</p> <p>“allows you to connect to your classmates outside of the classroom, in a positive way”</p>	<p>“limited discussion, topics relate only to English curriculum”</p> <p>“no text language i.e.: lol, ijs (could also be a positive thing)”</p>	<p>“In the beginning I did not quite understand the concept of the class blogging, but I must admit I have begun to like it.”</p> <p>“Technology is constantly changing and moving forward and we must keep up. What better way than to blog, which is what most of us do anyway on social networking sites.”</p>
Richard	<p>“The advantage of the class blog, it gives me incite on my topics for an essay. I become more comfortable writing my essays and it calms down my anxiety after reading what others have to say.”</p>	<p>“I guess I can say the down side to the class blog, would be I’m not into the internet social scene but in this class I find myself getting more involved.”</p>	<p>“The interesting thing about the blog, it lets me see that I’m not alone in my fear and nervousness when comes to returning to school after being absent from it for so many years.”</p>
Yogi	<p>“A good way to communicate with peers”</p> <p>“Allows us to voice out opinions and not be judged”</p> <p>“Helped to overcome the fear of writing”</p>	<p>“Determining a topic”</p> <p>“Getting to the blog site itself for the first time”</p>	<p>“How we see things so differently”</p> <p>“How we can be classified by what we write”</p>

The Story of Six

From the outset, the purpose of this study was to explore a blog phenomenon with FYC students in a composition course and how these students used blog participation in their writing practices. From a social constructivist worldview, the STS theory was upheld throughout this study to determine if the interrelated components (i.e., technical, external environment, personnel, and work) played a role in FYC's students required classroom blog participation. The results of the data collected are organized in a manner that sought to explain students' socially constructed experiences. Each sample participant's story was told from the information obtained through the data collection and analysis. Participants' stories were organized in an attempt to reveal the essence of their individual and collective experiences using classroom blogs in a FYC course.

Kira

From the first class meeting, it was evident that Kira was new to the whole college experience. Two adjectives she used to describe herself were *shy* and *cautious*. She had many questions and required continuous affirmation of her abilities. She was almost always the first student to arrive to class and the first student to post her blog post, which further amplified her insecurities as a student. She admitted:

I might forget so while it's on my mind I go ahead and do it, but then after I've done it, and it stays on my mind and I wonder - I wonder what they wrote I wonder what they said so I go back and check. (personal communication, November 18, 2011)

Although Kira never missed a class meeting and smiled often during class, she lacked self-confidence as a FYC student. When I asked about her experiences from the beginning of the semester to the present time, she exclaimed, "Oh my goodness, I was terrified! But it's gotten much better. The blogs helped a lot." After discovering that she had not been in a classroom in

almost 20 years, I began to understand the basis for her need for frequent reassurance. In her first post, she wrote:

I have been out of school for almost 20 years, so being in a classroom after all that time terrifies me. English is not one of my strongest suits. In order to write correctly you have to be able to speak correctly. I try to use correct grammar, but who hasn't used the word ain't. The word has been around since forever. I think before conversing with someone, especially my English instructor. I know whenever she hears the word ain't, or any usage of incorrect English she cringes. That's what scares me. We've been using that dialect from our elders for years. It still doesn't make it right. I'm so ready for this class. I want to be able to express my feelings and opinions through writing effectively. I know it's going to be hard work, but I open to learning. I figure if I pay close attention and apply the rules for writing I should be fine. I hope, but sometimes it is easier said than done. I just hope I don't fall behind, so I'm going to take it one day at a time. (blog post August 25, 2011)

This was Kira's first experience with any type of social media for personal or academic purposes. She commented, "My English 101 blog post is my first and I'm kind of enjoying it!" Undoubtedly, she was particularly motivated and seemed to embrace new experiences, both of which appeared to impact her performance. In fact, her motivation to improve as writer continued to escalate as the semester progressed. She remarked, "I want to be a better writer so I try to critique everything I write." In her fourth post, she reflected:

Hi classmates, I think I express myself better in paper than vocally. I can say how I feel and display my thoughts, but writing is considered personal. As for writing these different types of essay correctly; it's a job that requires a lot of work. The last essay I wrote (classification/division), I spent an entire week composing it and it was not correct. I had to write brand new essay in class, in about forty-five minutes. I wonder what grade I received on it. I'm trying hard to do everything correctly, but still making mistakes, I can honestly say I am learning a lot, because things I am learning in English 101 I am able to use in Speech class. The ability to speak effectively requires great English and communication skills. So, I am still absorbing it all. (blog post, October 3, 2011)

When asked about how blogging influenced her writing, Kira stated:

I'm more concerned about it (using correct grammar and mechanics). I still spell check and try to use the right everything- the right grammar and punctuation. Yeah, I still do it...since we've started blogging I've always done it. (personal communication , November 18, 2011)

Kira continued to demonstrate growth as a learner and as a writer. I am quite certain her enthusiasm for learning will continue well after final grades for this course have been posted.

Her final blog post summed up her blog experience:

Well, classmates this semester is almost over. I can honestly say this English class has taught me a lot. I've even written several different types of essays and joined my very first blog posting in this class. When the class first started I was struggling with the format of essay writing, but paying attention to the instructor and my mistakes helped me so much. Formal writing is a process, which takes practice, but it can be accomplished. It cannot be done overnight, but it can be done. As for the blogs, I was able to share some of my feeling and viewpoints on certain subjects. I really enjoy blogging! I can now say I've learned to express myself efficiently on paper. I am so glad I obtained the knowledge and had the privilege of meeting all of you, you too Mrs. Sims. (blog post, November 15, 2011)

In matter of months, the once a shy, cautious FYC student had sprouted into a confident, expressive writer. Without a doubt, Kira felt ready to tackle the writing challenges she may encounter in future courses and possibly in life as she pursues a nursing degree.

Max

Wearing worn out cowboy boots, a pair of jeans for pure comfort, and a belt with a buckle only a serious outdoorsmen would sport, Max clomped his way into the classroom. Without first surveying the room for available seating, he immediately headed straight to the back corner of the classroom. Because he was quite systematic and convincing in his approach to locating his seat for the remainder of the semester, I could only assume this was a ritual in each of his courses. Or maybe, this was an overt expression of his discontentment for having to be in this FYC classroom in the beginning. In his first post, Max wrote:

When I found out I was taking English 101, I was rather unhappy. Once I made it to class on my first day I realized it wasn't going to be too terribly hard, just challenging, which is what I need. I went to Hope Christian School (a pseudonym) and the English program was either extremely strong or very weak and it all depended on which instructor you had. I was one to procrastinate, just like Wendell, but managed to get it turned in on time and make an average grade. I've always been pretty good with spelling and thought provoking essays and papers, but was never really good with using correct grammar. The

career field in which I am going into is Veterinarian medicine. This semester, in English 101, I expect to learn how to write better in a way [and] understanding why we write the way we do, and what different ways of writing mean. (blog post, August 25, 2011)

In fact, when I asked Max to tell about his reaction when I first informed the class that they would be participating in a classroom blog, he responded, “Are we being punished?” Like Kira, this was Max’s first blogging experience, and he is relatively new to the social media scene. During the interview, he commented:

Blogging has helped me a lot.... I have never blogged at all. I’m actually kinda new to Facebook, and it’s kinda a struggle. It’s allowed me to interact with others and feed off of them for what they have to say, you know, see if my ideas and opinions go along with theirs, and it’s been a new learning experience and the whole writing in class and out of class has helped. We didn’t do a lot of that in high school. (personal communication, November 18, 2011)

Max was cognizant of people who attend college and recognized his responsibility within the college setting. Throughout the semester, he was very observant of his classmates especially the older students; he looked at them with reverence. His third post revealed:

Well, I see different people at school everyday and it’s actually quite interesting. I also see a lot of students like me. I consider myself to be the type of students who has many capabilities to be a great student but getting adjusted to college life is not easy...Everyday I tell myself you gotta get up and go to class whether I want to or not. I also understand that it is a whole lot harder for students who have been out of school for years, but it’s all a challenge. (blog post, September 21, 2011)

Max never missed a class meeting. I believe his upbringing played a role in his unblemished attendance. He often shared that his parents instilled in him good work ethics and strong moral beliefs. His motivation to attend may be explained, at least partly, by the learning, Max wrote:

My writing experience is getting better and better every week. I am enjoying it more and more as the semester progresses and hope to get more out of it as the semester goes on. I have learned more than I learned in my whole high school career... I’m not one to enjoy writing, by any means, but Mrs. Sims makes it fun and understanding. Therefore, I don’t mind going to class. (blog post, October 20, 2011)

In a previous blog post, he alluded to the fact that he had difficulty using correct grammar. As evident in his subsequent entries, his personal observations exhibit his awareness of his writing abilities. Nonetheless, Max stated that the blogs had helped him. He added, “I’m very cautious about this: Is this capitalized? Does a comma go here? Is this spelled correctly? That’s what I worry about.” Fortunately, by the end of the semester, Max no longer viewed the classroom blog as *punishment*. Even though he described himself as a “typical country boy who wants to be outside and have nothing to do with technology,” he admitted, “It (blogs) has given me a new aspect especially of technology and blogging and communicating with others.”

Wendell

When Wendell announced to the class that he was a dual-enrolled homeschooled high school senior, several students appeared surprised, but, at the same time, intrigued. In his first post, he shared:

Like some other classmates, I am a home school kid. So being in an actual classroom is something I haven’t experienced since public school for my third grade year. Initially I expected the three-hour class to go by ever so slowly, but it was a pleasant surprise when it went by rather quickly...It is my hope that by the end of this semester I will be able to write much more effectively and express my views through writing. (blog post, August 25, 2011)

His appearance definitely resembled one of extreme youth; however, he displayed wisdom beyond his years. In fact, after several class meetings, it seemed a moot issue to everyone. His personal observation and ability to convey his sense of individuality was evident in his fourth post:

For the sake of originality, I shall not begin this post with “hey ya’ll” or “hey guys.” Instead, I will formulate my own interesting introduction. What up, all my peeps/bros/classmates? So, all of us have had our writing issue this semester. Some like Carla (a pseudonym) have had issues with commas. However, we’ve all been improving. I can safely say that most all of us have improved upon our use of the word “you” in writing. Personally my main problem has been a lack of confidence in my writing ability. I have made my grammatical errors in each essay, but mostly my problem is a lack of

faith. Those of you who are fans of Stars Wars probably thought of Darth Vader saying “I find your lack of faith disturbing” after that sentence. Pardon that deviation from the subject. I couldn’t resist. After writing a few essays I have gained confidence in my writing ability. (personal communication, October 6, 2011)

Wendell was able to express himself more effectively when writing in the classroom blog or in his essays than vocally in a face-to-face encounter. Interestingly, during the interview session his remarks reflected a response more characteristic of a high school senior. When asked about how his writing experiences had evolved since in the beginning of the semester using the classroom blog, Wendell said:

Now the essays like from the first time we wrote I was writing and I was like oh my gosh this is the terriblest thing I’m gonna make a D on this and then come back and I got a B on it and I was like hey that’s not too bad so after the grades just kept getting better and better until I sorta realized that I’m not a crappy writer after all and uh well that’s all I have to say about that. You know, it’s getting confidence that I actually had some writing ability. With the blogs, you know, I really like those cause it sorta gives you a chance to see others opinions on subjects and stuff and also lets you take a break from the really formal structure writing so you can, you know, just say what you want in whatever way you want while still spelling and typing legibly, of course. I think the blogs are really helpful. (personal communication, November 18, 2011)

He confessed, “I’m a bit of a grammar Nazi myself, you know, especially about spelling and capitalization and punctuation, you know, that’s really one of my pet peeves.” This is not surprisingly as grammar is heavily focused upon in high school. Accordingly, in his final post, Wendell reflected:

First, I’ve improved upon my use of contractions in relation to formal writing. Before this class, I used contractions in essays and such without giving it a second thought. But after this class, I know that contractions have no place in formal writing for the most part. (I find it ironic that I began this paragraph with a contraction.) Second, and this is something I know most of my classmates can relate to, I have eliminated my use of the word “you” in formal writing. Many times I had to go back and edit my essay to replace all the “you’s” with acceptable substitutes. (blog post, December 6, 2011)

Clearly, he was cognizant of the formal writing conventions even as he was composing his blog post. As a dual-enrolled high senior, Wendell was well on his way to winning the battle. His lack of faith and confidence in his writing abilities was no longer his nemesis.

Abby

After the first few class meetings, it was evident that Abby was slowly acclimating to her new role as a college student. However, this characteristic is germane to most students like Abby who had recently graduated from high school. She reported in her first post:

Fresh out of high school I have yet to begin to question the things around me. I just go with the flow of things not to be left behind. I can already see this class is going to help change that. Starting with the new learning techniques such as blogging. Blogging is slightly new to me, but so far I seem to like it. It is something different from Facebook and other social networks. Sharing ideas and opinions on significant topics such as learning, instead of whose boyfriend is cheating with whom. Blogging is much more mature, excluding a lot of that negativity. (blog post, August 25, 2011)

Obviously, her reference to the boyfriend gossip indicated she was not too far removed from the high school drama. She was finding her way through her first experience in the college scene. At times, her insecurities surfaced. For example, as instructions for various assignments were announced, she had many procedural questions (e.g., due dates, formatting of essays, etc.). Abby confessed in her post:

I believe we were all a bit nervous of what the classroom would hold. I had a couple of questions like: how will the teacher be? Will I have to sit next to some weird person? Is there anyone in class I can study and work with? And will I be able to perform decently in a college setting? Now that the first day is over these questions seem so silly. The college experience is not where you are or who you are with, its what you make of it. So looking forward I expect to learn expect to learn more than the average English class. I mean writing and grammar sure enough, but also social skills, self discipline, perfected study skills and what a thesis statement really is. (blog post, August 25, 2011)

Additionally, although a grading rubric was provided for each essay, she inquired as to how the essays would be evaluated. After her first essay was graded and returned, she expressed disappointment with her score. She requested a conference after class on several occasions to

discuss her performance. Throughout the semester, it became increasingly apparent that what Abby was experiencing in college was very different than high school. No longer would mere effort carry her through a class. During the interview, she surmised:

College writing is more in depth. It's more detailed, more advanced. You know, in high school, it's just anything, you put anything down, as long as they see effort. But it's like in college you have to do effort and experience, and what you learned this week. It's a lot. (personal communication, December 2, 2011)

Abby also admitted that she did not understand the rationale behind a classroom blog, but she stated she liked it. She added, "Technology is constantly changing and moving forward and we must keep up. What better way than to blog, which is what most of us do on social networking sites." She liked the idea that the focus of the blogs was not on grammatical correctness, but she, nevertheless, believed it "improves English/ writing skills in an informal manner." Amusingly, she later posted the following:

Honestly I feel as if using the blog has not affected my writing skills in any kind of way. I feel this way because they are two different forms of writing. The blogs are more unscripted, informal, and freehand while the essays are at the margin serious. Using the blog we can kind of drift off topic, expressing each thought as they stumble across our brain, when we write essays we are forced to follow structure: stay on topic do not use contractions, do not use "you", etc. Although, I do believe it has improved my communication skills as far as social networking. It is nice to carry on a decent conversation.... I really enjoy blogging. (blog post, October 3, 2011)

Abby commented on several classmates' posts throughout the semester and often reiterated how much she enjoyed blogging. As the class seemed to become closer, she even commented on Kira's post, "I must admit. I do enjoy English class now. It seems like all I do is laugh."

Richard

Having been retired from 20 years of service in the U.S. Army, Richard was eager to share his life experiences, both his trial and triumphs, with young people. He expressed that if his

insights in life could benefit a young person then his sense of purpose would be realized. He seemed to seek out those individuals who were unlike the masses. He indicated in his first post:

I'm not sure where to begin. I've been out of school so long, over twenty years so this is new to me all over again. I've been in a classroom setting many times in the military but to me this is a different feel for me. I made the choice to pursue a degree in business and this class is a requirement (there is no turning back now). I hope to be a success in this class and not get on anyone's nerves. I'm also looking forward to making new friends and be of some help to someone and lord knows I'm going to need it. This is pretty sad I'm struggling to blog, I'm not a social media type person but I'll become one in this class. Writing essays is not a strong point for me; it is definitely different from just writing your own personal thoughts down. I know I'm not alone on this because there has got to be someone in the same situation as me. I'll do the work I have to, I just ask that you guys keep your fingers crossed. I'm already looking forward to class next week. Maybe after a few classes, I'll be able to shake the cobwebs loose. (blog post, August 25, 2011)

He admitted that he should not be struggling to compose a blog post, but quickly points out that He is willing to do what it takes to achieve success in this class. After composing several more blog posts and essays, Richard welcomed new challenges and a newfound confidence in writing.

I have become more relaxed utilizing the social media networks since I have begun this class. I'm looking forward to this exemplification essay next week to further improve my writing ability. I know it will be a challenge, but I'm looking forward to the chance to prove I can succeed I this class....This class has given me the opportunity to express myself to a certain degree with the different styles of writing that are being taught. I know with continued practice and direction, there will be more success coming my way in this class and in my personal writing. (blog post, October 6, 2011)

He later expressed that writing is challenge- one that he is ready and capable of taking on.

Richard realized that as with many courses, the difficulty level of the courses would increase as the semester progressed. This anticipation allowed him to prepare for his success in the course.

He wrote:

This English class has given me confidence in my ability to write compared to when I first started this course several weeks ago. Coming up with essay topics to write about has gotten easier. I know the harder ones are around the corner but I'm pretty sure I'll be good at it. (blog post, October 20, 2011)

Throughout the semester, Richard was the voice of reason in the class. He was the one student that would question other's thinking and challenge them to examine their logic. However, his approach was always non-confrontational and diplomatic. This approach is likely attributed to his military background and life experiences. I believed his valued contributions to the class served as perpetual affirmation of his decision to return to school. He noted, "The interesting thing about the blog is that it lets me see that I'm not alone in my fear and nervousness when it comes to returning to school after being absent from it for so many years." Moreover, the classroom blog had enticed Richard to explore other blogs beyond his FYC course. Even after injected several times that he did *not* do social media, he eventually acknowledged:

Actually, it [the blog] was the best thing about the class. I mean I would read other people's blogs, but I'm not a social media type person, but being in this class and doing those blogs, you know, just reading blogs. I find myself reading other comments. If I just go on the internet in general, I find myself reading other people's comments about different issues that's going on, you know, around the world. (personal communication, December 2, 2011)

In general, Richard discovered that using blogs prompted him to re-evaluate his use of language in multiple settings as he was conscious of his use of formal language in activities outside of the classroom also. When he typed up memos at work and sent out emails, he observed that he did not use the second pronoun *you*. When he blogged and wrote *you*, Richard said, "I see it typed *you*, and I start all over again."

Although Richard stated that he is not one to share his personal feelings, he candidly informed others in the class of issues many would classify as personal. He commented:

I'm not one to talk or discuss my personal life. I have never been. Up until I married the second time around there was a lot of things I was holding back. I wasn't talking about it. Although I was married and I had a wife and I had kids, I did what I had to do for them. But as far as expressing myself, you know, emotionally, I kept it in a box. And it has a lot to do with my past relationship experiences . And now it's something totally

different. You know, I think some of my past experiences can help a young person out or help somebody out that's going through whatever they're going through. (personal communication, December 2, 2011)

Through his willingness to mentor other students, Richard fostered a sense of appreciation for the diversity (of all kinds) that permeated the FYC classroom. Younger students displayed respect for non-traditional students like Richard who chose to return to school later in life as noted in Max's post:

I really enjoy seeing the older students who have come back to school...I think it takes a lot of courage to come back to school after so many years has passed. In actuality I look up to these certain students because their setting an example for me and other people who are scared to come back to school. (blog post, September 21, 2011)

At the same time, other non-traditional students looked to him as an inspiration that they too could be successful in a FYC classroom. Without a doubt, his presence in the classroom encouraged and inspired all students in some way.

Yogi

From my initial encounter with Yogi, I found her to be friendly, polite, and cooperative. Having served in the U.S. Navy for ten years may have contributed to her exceedingly cooperative spirit. Like many of the other participants, Yogi's lack of self confidence in her writing abilities produced beginning fears. In her first blog post, she wrote:

I must admit, I was a little nervous at the start of this class. It has been so long since I've had to do any type of writing, except for my personal use. I vaguely remember writing in high school. Writing six essays is definitely at the bottom of my "want" to do list. I am enjoying my other classes only because I don't have to do much writing. I thought I was going to fail miserably at writing the narrative essay. As I read "Only Daughter", it helped me realize, I could actually pull this off. As I sat and began to write my thoughts, it seemed as if writing was a natural thing, like I had done it a million times before. I had such a positive attitude about it when I finished. The feeling of nervousness is slowly fading as I'm getting back into the swing of things. I know now, enrolling in this class was a good idea. After having to write the first essay, my confidence has improved, big time. I never thought I would feel this way about a college English class, but I'm ready to do this. (blog post, August 25, 2011)

She attended every class meeting and completed all required assignments. Seemingly, the self-discipline instilled in her from her days in the Navy transferred nicely into her role as a college student. In one of her previous posts she commented, “I see a lot of papers hanging from books, folders and tablets. I think as college students, we should be better organized.” She possessed a sense of personal responsibility and accountability, which she believed all college students, should exude. Additionally, she recognized the value of acquiring effectively writing skills, which she felt could help students prepare for future jobs.

I’m not writing *you* now. I never use *you*, and some other little mistakes that, you know, it [blogs] kind of helped me correct. Overall, I mean, I’m really glad I took this class when I did. You know, ‘cause, just not in this class, it helps.... your writing skills. In the military you constantly got to do a resume. You know, I may have done some of that on some previous resumes and I never even noticed. But overall, I really enjoyed it [blogs] though, I liked it. It was very helpful. I mean very. (personal communication, December 2, 2011)

Yogi confessed that she had limited writing experiences when compared to the writing requirements for this course. She further corroborated the previous observation in her fourth post:

I must say this ENG class has been a great deal of help. I have learned of writing habits I never realized I had. It has helped me to catch small mistakes that I make and become a better writer. This class as a whole has been a good learning experience. I never really knew how to write more than one type of essay at the start of this class. Actually, I don’t remember ever having to write as many essays as I will have by the end of this class. I enjoy the blog site for two reasons, one, it saves on buying paper and two, it is a much convenient way of writing. At the click of a button I can turn in an assignment or post a blog....I definitely prefer technology over the traditional way of doing things. (blog post, October 6, 2011)

As the semester progressed, she continued to embrace new learning experiences. Yogi projected a sense of confidence in her writing abilities, which was absent at the beginning of the semester.

Indeed, midway through the semester, she posted:

I am definitely a better writer. At the start of this class, I was afraid of failing and putting ideas on paper for people to see. I now have the confidence to write and share my ideas with an audience. (blog post, October 21, 2011)

In her final reflection over the course of this learning experience, she surmised her writing ability was not the issue, but rather it was the absence of confidence as a writer. Yogi's observation is quite empowering for she came to this self-realization her own, which has great potential to transfer to other areas of her life. She affirmed:

As a writer, I feel I have grown in the following ways. I have become more open-minded about topics....At the beginning of this class I did not think I was a good writer. As a result of taking this class, I found out, not only was I a good writer but I had more potential than I realized. I am now willing to share my ideas and let others read some of my writings. Now, that I am confident in writing, I am conscious of my past mistakes and this class has been a tremendous help. I must say, I will definitely remember this class and how it helped me to overcome my obstacles....I'm off to becoming a great writer. (blog post, November 19, 2011)

In matter of three months, Yogi went from "I thought I was going to fail miserably..." to "I'm off to becoming a great writer." Plainly, her cooperative attitude played major factor in the final outcome; however, the learning opportunities presented throughout the semester may have also facilitated Yogi's continuous optimism in her writing abilities.

Themes Identified

Based on the data analyzed from the sample students' blogs posts, PMI inventory sheets, and semi-structured interviews, several themes emerged from the data. By incorporating multiple sources of data collection throughout the study, trustworthiness was ensured as data were triangulated (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009). The following themes were revealed from the data: sensitivity to peers' experiences and opinions, openness of peers' views and opinions, and awareness of writing.

Sensitivity to Peers' Experiences and Opinions

A recurring pattern throughout the blog posts, PMI inventory sheets, and semi-structured interviews was the sensitivity to their peers' experiences and opinions. Yogi, stated, "We see things differently. If someone's closed-minded, you can help to, you know, see things from a different angle." Abby added:

The blogs made me more sensitive to what I thought or spoke about others. Where before I would have just said something...and now it's like, 'Oh well, you [the writer] have been in that situation. And I wouldn't want to offend her because I don't know what it's [her experience] like. I've never been there in that situation before. So now, I'm more like open-minded, I would say to others. (personal communication, December 2, 2011)

Similarly, Yogi consented:

You know, you just have to be respectful. You can say what you want to say without the hostility, without the profanity, so I mean I treated that like Facebook just like the English blog, you know, you got to be respectful and sensitive to other people when they're reading too. Just because you're thinking it don't mean you should type exactly what you think. (personal communication, December 2, 2011)

While Richard affirmed, "Yeah, I mean, I'm sensitive as to what I post. I'm not going to show no hostility. You know, because you can see a lot of that in some blogs." In response to Richard's comment, Yogi concurred, "You are right, 'cause we saw that [experience] from a different level." As a result of their FYC classroom blog experience, Abby, Richard, and Yogi all agreed the class became closer. Abby began, "We've gotten closer." Richard then followed:

Yeah, we all have gotten closer. I've never been...the one to talk or discuss my personal life....And there was a lot of things I was holding back. And I wasn't talking about it. There was a lot of things I wasn't letting go because I wasn't talking about it, you know. And after I got married the second time and after 3 or 4 years of being married, you know, it's like I had put myself in a box. You know, unintentionally, but I was in this box and I felt more comfortable with these four walls you know, around me. And it was just about me. And although I was married, and I had a wife, and I have kids, I did what I had to do for them, but as far as expressing myself you know, emotionally, I kept it in a box. And it had a lot to do with my past relationship experiences. And now it's something totally different. I think, I think some of my past experiences can help a young person out or help somebody out that's going through whatever they're going through. (personal communication, December 2, 2011)

Kira expressed, “You might not agree with everybody, it’s good to know what they are saying...and you’re able to say what you feel about a topic without any conflicts.” Max believed everyone writes differently because students all have different opinions, which help peers’ understand what the writer is thinking and feeling about a topic. When asked if he took into consideration the fact that the entire class could read his posts, Wendell responded:

I have very Christian conservative values and that would really clash with other people’s values like, you know, regarding political views, views on abortion things like that. When I write on the blog, I tend to not just flat out flaunt “Hey, this is what I stand for, you’re wrong,” I just don’t say that – try to tone it down a little. Being conscious of how I word things so as not to make people angry or anything. (personal communication, November 18, 2011)

When I asked Max, “How do you feel when students comments on your specific blog posts?” he responded:

If the comment is towards me specifically and they’re encouraging or saying something nice then I’m ok with it. But if they start bashing my beliefs or the way I’m thinking, you know, that’s kind of frustrating sometimes because I wouldn’t want to bash what they have to say or what they believe or stand on. (personal communication, November 18, 2011)

Students viewed the classroom blog forum as a safe environment in which they could express themselves freely and diplomatically without fear of retribution for voicing opposing views and opinions.

Openness of Peers’ Views and Opinions

As students began to experience a sense of closeness among classmates, they became more open to others’ views and opinions about particular topics. Because the classroom blog was a public forum for all students in class, Max felt, “It allowed you to share your thoughts on the topic of the assignments.” Wendell agreed, “Blogs allow me to see the opinions and perspectives of other students. They also stimulate discussion amongst us students.”

Yogi observed, “It is interesting how we see things so differently” while allowing “us to voice our opinions and not be judged.” Likewise, Abby stated that blogs “allow us to voice our thoughts, opinions and ideas without criticism or judgment.” Then Richard continued:

I have always been open-minded, but you know, you never know, who’s out there feeling the same way that you’re feeling. Who has the same, you know, opinions and ideas that you might have until you go onto these social media networks and this blog thing....You never know. ..A few months ago we had [blog] discussion on cause and effect essays, you know, how causes can affect an individual....You never know what a person is going through until you sit down and you get into these into discussions. I mean, I have been open-minded, but now I have respect....I respect other people’s opinions and views now. I respect that more than I did before. Being in the military can respect their views, but it doesn’t mean you have to accept their views. Now, it’s a little different because you never know what that person has gone through to get to where he or she is. (personal communication, December 2, 2011)

Awareness in Writing

With all forms of writing, there is always a perceived audience. When writing in a classroom blog, the audience is often peers. Richard injected:

I’m very much aware that there’s an audience and even on social networks you want to be aware...some people just don’t care. They don’t care who sees it, you know, what they post, but it’s about being sensitive to those that’s going to be reading whatever it is that you post. Yeah, I mean, I’m sensitive as to what I post. I’m not going to show no hostility. You know, because you can see a lot of that, you know, in some blogs, (personal communication, December 2, 2011)

For writers to improve upon their existing writing skills, they must display an overt awareness of their present abilities as writers. Richard realized, “When blogging, I’m more aware of it [writing conventions] now.” Yogi said, “It affects everything I write now. It does matter...Whether it’s in another class or something personal. It [writing conventions] sticks with you.” Abby recalled, “It has helped because I’ve not noticed...some little habits I had in writing until this class, you know, because you corrected some in some of my essays.” As students became aware of areas of improvement, they were cognizant of these conventions in subsequent writing opportunities. Richard remarked:

You know, to me, I was nervous about this class period because I had been out of school for so long. And I knew I was going to have to take this class and I knew I needed this class to benefit from it, you know, in the long run. Especially with the writing and uh it gave me an opportunity to uh, sharpen my writing skills. Because uh, I'm not saying I'm an inspiring writer, but you know, when I do write I can pretty much, you know, express how I feel, what I want to say, uh, appropriately and at the same time use the correct punctuation and all of that. You know, and it has helped me out a lot, especially when it comes to blogs. This blogging thing, and I'm going to be up front with you. I don't do social media. (personal communication, December 2, 2011)

Participants often alluded to their awareness of formal writing conventions and their level of confidence in writing as illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5

Sample Statements of Participants' Awareness of Conventions and Confidence in Writing

Participants (pseudonyms)	Conventions	Confidence
Kira	"If I pay close attention and apply the rules for writing I should be fine."	"The last couple of essays showed so much more improvements, and I am becoming a better writer."
Max	"I stopped talking in passive voice and avoid run-on sentences."	"My writing experience is getting better. I learned more than I did in my whole high school career."
Wendell	"I go back and edit my essay to replace all the <i>you</i> 's with acceptable substitutes."	"After writing a few essays, I have gained confidence in my writing ability."
Abby	"I never noticed some little habits I had in writing until this class."	"I do believe I have improved my communication skills."
Richard	"Coming up with essay topics to write about has gotten easier." "On my job, when I send out emails or type memos, I don't use <i>you</i> ."	"I'm looking forward to this exemplification essay next week to further improve my writing ability. I'm looking forward to the chance to prove I can succeed in this class."
Yogi	"Knowing how to write formally affects everything I write now."	"I used to be afraid to put my ideas on paper for people to see. I now have confidence to write and share my ideas with an audience."

Growing as Writers, Growing as Humans

From students' blog posts and interviews, as well as other data that were collected and holistically reviewed (e.g., PMI inventory sheets, essay drafts, etc.), it was apparent to many students that growth in their writing has occurred during semester; however, many also witnessed a marked change in the classroom environment. The virtual learning space (classroom blog) had transformed the physical learning environment (traditional classroom with tables and chairs). Students were not only connecting through and from their formal and informal writing experiences, they were also joining at the hearts. Friendships were forming. Those who were once strangers to one another were now seeking opportunities to foster friendships. Richard connected with Theo, a student who generally kept to himself, in such a way that Theo sought Richard's input (and approval) throughout the semester. After a peer editing session, Richard told Theo he enjoyed reading his blog posts. Theo then expressed to Richard that he liked the way he edited his paper because it would open him up to write more. From that day forward, Theo sat beside Richard, appearing quite content with his new friendship. The almost 30-year age difference did not seem to matter to either of them. Another student in the class, posted on the blog:

I'm happy to say I've made friends. Friends that I hope and pray God keeps in my life for a very long period of time so they aren't just 'that one person in that one English class the one semester,' but a friend I could talk to daily. (blog post, November 17, 2011)

Summary

Chapter IV reported the results of that data collected, re-introduced the research questions, and depicted specific results gathered from each of the six sample participants. The overall themes were also identified. Chapter V discusses the findings, conclusions, and limitations of the study. In addition, the implications for secondary education writing teachers,

FYC instructors, and policymakers. Each of whom have a vested interest in improving FYC students' writing abilities. Finally, suggestions for future research are presented.

CHAPTER V:
DISCUSSION, FINDINGS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how first-year composition students (FYC) use classroom blogs in their writing practices throughout the stages of the writing process. Also, sub-questions guiding this study were as follows: 1) to what extent do classroom blogs promote confidence in students' writing abilities; 2) to what extent do classroom blogs engage students in reflective practices regarding their writing; and 3) to what extent do classroom blogs encourage collaboration among student writers? Furthermore, socio-technical systems (STS) theory framework was used to examine the blog phenomenon in the FYC classroom. It was apparent that through their socially constructed experiences in a FYC composition course, students (personnel subsystem) were influenced by each of the following factors: external environment (prior experiences with technology), work system (blog site), and technical subsystem (classroom blog).

Overview

Over 45 years ago the following excerpt appeared in the *English Journal*:

It was very popular some time ago for intellectuals to brag that they never watched television, but today so much that is worthwhile appears on TV, one is out of the mainstream unless he can talk with others about what he has been watching. If your responsibility is to help students to become more analytical, perceptive, and proficient in the basic skills of communication, you cannot ignore one of the major influences in their lives.

It is unfortunate that this immense potential for informing and educating young people has been, so often, used so badly, that it has been allowed to cater to the bland tastes of an uninformed public, that it has allowed commercial pressures to control it so completely.

Despite these disadvantages, the teacher can still put it to work for him. It can project students, as Marya Mannes has put it, "into a world of action, distance, and difference." Rather than allowing television to distract our students, we can use it in motivating them to respond with greater interest and deeper insight to the already existing curriculum. ...

We cannot ignore what students are watching, nor can we abdicate our responsibility for encouraging them to examine critically what they see. (Hoopes, 1965)

I hold that this mindset has relevance even today. Using the television vignette illustrated above, educators could effortlessly replace the term *television* with *computer* or better yet *Web 2.0 technology tools*. Clearly, Web 2.0 technologies have created a social trail for students to connect with one other; in turn, educators are now presented with a unique opportunity to craft an academic path to maximize student learning. Blogs are among one of many ways to accomplish this. Based on the related literature and the present study's findings, I aim to use the powerful voices of FYC students to enlighten those who teach writing at the secondary and FYC levels. These students' stories must be shared not silenced.

Findings

As teacher accountability for digital literacy skills and students' writing abilities continues to increase (Clark, 2010; Hong, 2008; Vie, 2008; Witte, 2007), this study sought to explore FYC students' use of classroom blogs in their writing practices. Also, in an effort to understand students' experiences in the FYC composition classroom, blog posts, Plus-Minus-Interesting (PMI) inventory sheets, and semi-structured interviews were employed throughout the semester. Each of these sources of data served to reveal the essence of the classroom blog phenomenon through the eyes of FYC students.

Unfortunately, this study did not find significant data addressing how students used classroom blogs for reflective practices regarding their writing practices. However, I speculate some plausible explanations can be expeditiously derived. For many non-traditional FYC

students, reflective practices were not part of the learning process during their earlier classroom experiences. At the same time, according to one traditional FYC student, reflective practices would have interrupted his daily routines. During an interview, Max informed, “I’m not one to just sit at the computer for hours. I’m your typical country boy. I wanna be outside and have nothing to do with technology.” With this mindset, even if Max were engaged in reflective practices about his classroom blog use, I would be inclined to surmise that his reflection would have lacked substantial meaning to him or me. For students like Max, composition instructors should explicitly convey the value of learning through reflective practices. Nevertheless, a growing number of studies praise blogs for its ability to engage users in rich, reflective practices (Beldarrain, 2006; Krause, 2005; Martindale & Wiley, 2005; Smith, 2008; Xie et al., 2008).

Several findings from this study further substantiated existing literature; however, other findings warranted a need for additional research. Themes that emerged from data collected were as follows: sensitivity to peers’ experiences and opinions, openness to peers’ views and opinions, awareness in writing, and growth as writers, growth as humans.

Sensitivity to Peers’ Experiences and Opinions

Students’ sensitivity to peers’ experiences and opinions was the most compelling theme drawn from this study. FYC students of all ages; gender; ethnicities; and social, professional, and academic experiences, expressed an overwhelming level of sensitivity while participating in the classroom blog. This sensitivity would then transfer into the classroom as students carefully thought through their responses before verbalizing them. At times, they would even revert to humor to lighten the mood of the class. Words and phrases such as *respect*, *hold back*, *sensitive*, *not offensive*, *no hostility*, *no profanity*, and *tone it down* were echoed in students’ blog posts, interviews, and informal classroom dialogue. Students reminded themselves and each other that

every student has the right to own his or her life story without fear of judgment or shame. Classroom blogs can provide a safe forum to cultivate and celebrate such sensitivity to others (Smith, 2008).

Openness to Peers' Views and Opinions

Research by Smith (2008) found students respected peers' unedited thoughts on classroom blogs. Likewise, participants of this present study indicated repeatedly through multiple data sources that blogs allowed them to be more open to others' perspectives about various topics. This objectiveness enabled students to explore new ways of thinking. Being open-minded was a quality afforded to all FYC students in the classroom, despite age, ethnicity, or experiences. Dual-enrolled high school senior Wendell stated, "Blogs have allowed me to see my classmates' views on different subjects." Yogi, a 10-year U.S. Navy veteran posted, "I have become more open-minded about topics." Similarly, Abby, a recent public high school graduate remarked, "Blogs allow us to voice our thoughts without judgment." She added, "I discovered that things are a lot more fun when you have a positive attitude." When students display open minds about each other and about learning, the stage is set for student growth.

Awareness in Writing

Time after time, students reminded themselves and each other of the conventions of formal writing. Classroom blogs do not cause students to write using incorrect grammar and mechanics rather they bring these errors to the surface so that writing instruction can naturally take place (Smith, 2008). Although students are aware that blogs are viewed as an informal online journal, they were still cognizant of the qualities of formal writing. Yogi reminded herself of formal writing conventions every time she wrote. Her awareness was evident in her blog posts as she avoided using contractions and the personal pronoun *you*. Even the topic sentence of her

last blog post illustrated her awareness in writing. It read: “As a writer, I feel I have grown in the following ways....” She proceeded to list each way followed by supporting details. Yogi had composed a mini-essay (Smith, 2008) with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion (which optimistically stated, “I am off to becoming a great writer”). There was not a single use of contractions throughout that entire post. In fact, of Yogi’s six posts, only five contractions were identified (four of which were found in her first blog post). As Ramaswami (2008) reported, blogs can help students organize and develop their thoughts as they draft, edit, and publish. As *readers* of blogs, students recognized that classroom blogs are informal writing spaces; however, as *writers* in blogs, most students still tended to adopt a formal writing format.

Growth as Writers, Growth as Humans

Another powerful theme identified from this study was students’ growth as members of the human race. They desired to dwell harmoniously within our internal learning environment. Week after week, awkward silence was replaced with focused chatter. Although the content of students’ blogs posts were not explicitly shared in whole class discussions, I was certain students were reading each others’ posts. Kira, who was always the first student to post, confessed that she often returned to the classroom blog during the week to see what others had written. She continued, “I like it, I do.”

In general, classroom blogs helped to instill confidence in FYC students’ writing abilities. I believe that much of this newfound confidence occurred because students were writing and writing often (Ramaswami, 2008). Yogi reflected, “I don’t ever remember having to write as much as I have in this class. I now have confidence.”

Conclusions

In reviewing STS theory framework, where personnel, work, technical, and external environment components possess interrelated relationships, I contend that in an educational setting, an *internal environment* component should be incorporated into the original framework. I propose that each of the existing components (mentioned above) be maintained as they proved to be interrelated (i.e., a change in one component affected all other components) throughout this study. Interestingly, the findings of this study revealed that in an educational classroom setting an *internal environment* also exists (and quite powerfully). Figure 4 illustrates an adaptation of STS theory, which resulted from investigating FYC students and classroom blogs.

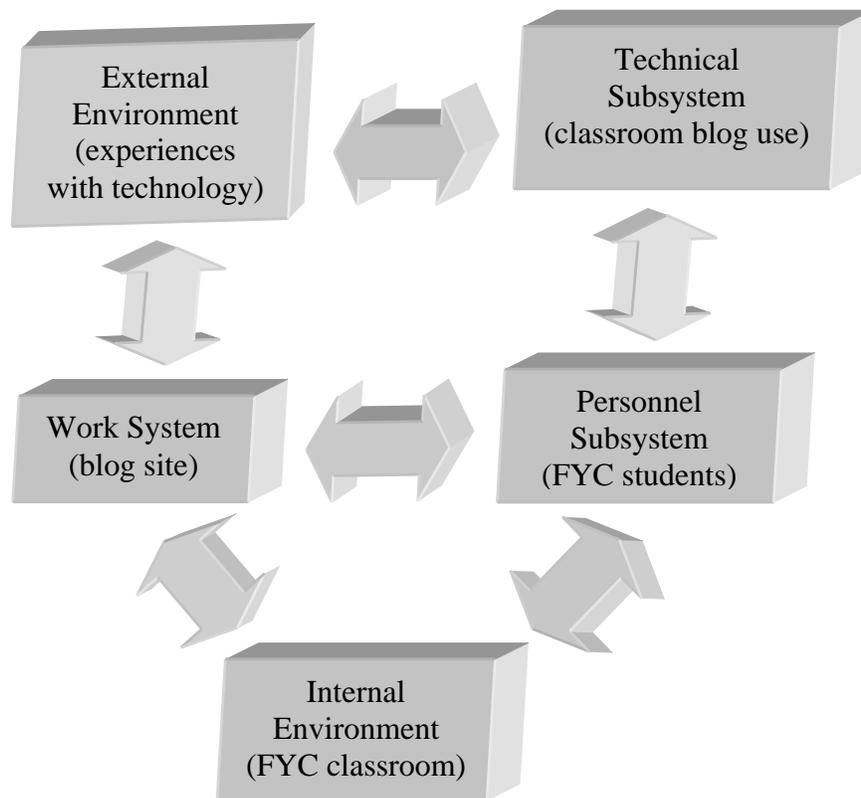


Figure 4. Proposed STS Theory for the Blog Phenomenon in the FYC Classroom. Adapted from Kim (2008)

For the purposes of illustrating the proposed STS theory in an educational context, consider two students: Richard and Theo.

Two Stories, One Friendship

There could be no two people less likely to become friends than Richard and Theo. Richard was a Black mid-aged, retired military veteran. He had been married twice and has two adult children. It was no secret to anyone in the class that Richard was not into the social networking scene since he publicly announced it in one of his blog posts. Richard was always cooperative and genuinely seemed happy to be in class each week. Not surprisingly, many of the traditional students respectfully looked up to him.

Enter Theo. Theo, a young White male, established his position in class at the very first class meeting. He sat in the front table closest to the podium (possibly to make his presence known). As the class was discussing an article that was intentionally selected to incite thoughtful discussion, Theo aggressively challenged the views of others, including me. It was quite obvious he was not attempting to stimulate deep thinking (since students seemed to be experiencing awkward tension), but rather he appeared to be eliciting contempt in others. His body language and facial expressions screamed, "Challenge me, I dare you!" Needless to say, others kept a safe distance from Theo over the next few class meetings. Although he had keen technological skills, Theo did not embrace the classroom blog experience at all. Even his blog posts were brazen, he wrote:

As far as this classroom blog, it typically just hinders my free time, and I have this theory that the key to living forever is being happy through modest means, neigh through evil or stress. My free time is where I find happiness and therefore the blog draws years off my life. (blog post, October 6, 2011)

Shortly thereafter, following a peer editing session, Richard told Theo that he had been reading his blogs, and he liked that Theo was always *real*. In that instant, a friendship was birthed. Theo said Richard was the first person to acknowledge him and that he gave him good ideas on how to improve his writing. From that point on, Theo smiled every day in class, and others began to open up to him. Incidentally, his subsequent blog posts were rather philosophical at times. I am convinced Theo knew Richard was reading them.

Both Theo and Richard brought varying experiences with technology into the FYC classroom (external environment). Using a blog site (work system), a classroom blog (technical subsystem) was established, and FYC students (personnel subsystem) posted blogs regularly. Each of these components working together then created a change in the FYC classroom (internal environment).

Limitations

Several limitations surfaced over the scope of this present study. Some were simply unavoidable given the constraints of the investigator and participants. First, a major limitation of this study was the brief time frame of the investigation. While one semester may feasibly gauge students' growth as writers, it is highly probable that investigating the classroom blog phenomenon throughout FYC students' entire first year would have generated more meaningful data in which evidence of growth could be readily indentified. However, since a large number of students at the community college level are only required to take one semester of a composition course, the potential participant pool may be somewhat limited, especially at satellite-based community college campuses.

Another notable limitation of the study became fairly evident in the early stages of the investigation. Because I served as both the composition instructor and primary investigator, I

struggled to maintain a balance of my responsibilities. I was contractually bound to utilize instructional time to deliver the college's FYC curriculum to my students. Hence, the time required to solicit informal feedback was limited. Interview schedules were restricted to meeting with participants after weekly class meetings, which posed other obstacles since many students had other obligations such as family and job responsibilities. Also, the class met at 8:30 in the morning; therefore, meeting with participants before class was not a feasible option either. Finally, I believe instituting three semi-structured interviews (conducted at the beginning of the semester, midterm, and end of the semester) may have allowed for a deeper investigation into the essence of students' use of classroom blogs in their writing practices. Since the semi-structured interviews were conducted at the conclusion of the semester, I was forced to rely heavily on the data retrieved from students' blog posts during the semester.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have implications for FYC instructors, secondary education writing teachers, and all policymakers with a vested interest in improving students' writing abilities.

FYC Instructors

Evidence from both the literature and participants' classroom blog experiences indicated that students are not prepared to meet the writing demands of FYC courses. This reality was compounded when students also lacked confidence in their writing abilities. Instructors can assist FYC students' transition to college classrooms by creating safe learning environments where students are valued as individuals first (Ramaswami, 2008). Secondly, determining students' writing abilities early in the semester can help to minimize students' frustrations when writing. Employing a classroom blog at the beginning of the semester may help to illuminate students'

writing difficulties before participating in formal writing opportunities (Smith, 2008). This may also allow instructors to provide additional guidance or remediation in a timely manner.

Secondary Education Writing Teachers

Having been a secondary education writing teacher for a number of years, I was already familiar with many of the challenges secondary education educators face. Recently, the National Council of Teachers of English (2010) obligated teachers to address digital literacy skills as an integral component of the curricula. Classroom blogs satisfy both digital literacy skills and writing skills while still upholding the rigor of the English language arts curricula (Witte, 2007). Research continues to find that students need more writing opportunities in high school, which is the criticism reported throughout the literature (Applebee & Langer, 2009; Dorow & Boyle, 1998; Simmons, 2005).

Implications for Policy

An unsettling reality revealed through FYC students' classroom blog experiences and throughout the related literature is lack of collaboration among secondary education writing teachers and FYC instructors in preparing students for success as writers (Addison & McGee, 2010; Applebee & Langer, 2009; Enders, 2001). With technology tools such as blogs, this collaboration could be easily and cheaply organized. Policymakers are challenged to revisit existing policies to determine how systematic collaboration could be effectively and efficiently instituted.

Recent research suggests that FYC students are entering the classroom unprepared to meet the writing demands of the college composition classroom (Acker & Halasek, 2008; Addison and McGee, 2010; Applebee & Langer, 2009; Dorow & Boyle, 1998; Simmons, 2005; Wardle, 2009). The findings of this present study indicated two possible explanations: students

lacked preparation and writing opportunities in high school and students at the two-year college level had been out of high school for many years. The use of classroom blogs could sufficiently address both explanations. Frequent writing opportunities should be offered to traditional and non-traditional students alike. However, once again, issues of responsibility and accountability are raised. It is possible (and even probable) that more questions may be raised than questions answered. If this holds true, then, as a former secondary education writing teacher and FYC composition instructor, I am empowered to charge forward in seeking plausible resolutions.

Suggestions for Future Research

Since this study involved a purposeful sample of FYC students at a satellite campus of a community college, the findings cannot be generalized to other student populations and school settings. Thus, it is suggested that classroom blogs be explored with diverse student populations at various secondary and post secondary levels and settings. Learning environments with both nontraditional and traditional students should be explored in various disciplines regarding classroom blogs as a means to address digital literacies. Moreover, additional research is needed in the area of how a virtual learning space can influence the physical classroom environment. Using the STS theory in education, the technical, personnel, and work, and environmental components can be tested in diverse learning environments to gauge student learning (e.g., manipulating one component will alter other components, which may result in an increase or decrease in student learning). Researching such areas has promise to inform secondary teachers and post-secondary instructors.

Summary

Chapter V provided conclusions, findings, and limitations of the study of FYC students' use of classroom blogs in their writing practices. Findings from each of the emerging themes

regarding the classroom blog phenomenon were also articulated. Finally, implications for practice and policy as well as suggestions for future research were presented in such a manner as to ignite a sense of urgency in addressing ways to improve students' writing abilities to ensure their success and growth as writers in FYC courses.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Blogging in the Classroom Survey

Blogging in the Classroom

The purpose of this survey is to identify students' experiences with using technology tools in both academic and non-academic situations.

Additionally, for the purposes of this survey, the term Web 2.0 technology tools refer to web-based tools that facilitate collaboration and open communication among groups of online communities.

1. What types of technology tools (e.g., online-banking, searching websites, etc.) do you use regularly?

*

2. Describe your experiences with using Web 2.0 technology tools to enhance student learning. Please be specific.

*

3. What types of technology tools (e.g., discussion boards, chatrooms, wikis, blogs, etc.) have you used for academic purposes? Name all that apply.

*

4. For what specific purposes (e.g., uploading assignments, etc.) have you used technology tools in academic situations? Name all that apply.

5. What types of technology tools (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, wikis, etc.) have you used for non-academic purposes? Name all that apply.

*

6. For what specific purposes (e.g., social networking with friends, etc.) have you used technology tools in non-academic situations? Name all that apply.

 Done

Powered by SurveyMonkey

Appendix B

Sample of Blog Prompt for Students' Posts

MONDAY, APRIL 25, 2011

Blog Post Prompt: Arduous Argumentation*

We often find ourselves having to "argue" a point or belief to others who think differently than we do. As we discussed in class, arguments are generally ineffective if emotions begin to surface. It is difficult to be reasonable when we are overcome with intense emotions.

Consider this real case:

A nearby city is considering adopting a law that prohibits the use of cell phones while driving a vehicle. I would argue (based on reasonable evidence) that it would be nearly impossible to enforce this law because of the lack of personnel on the police force. If a law cannot be enforced, why instate it? What are your thoughts on this issue? What other arguments could you pose?

By the way, how many of you have ever used your cell phone while operating a vehicle? That's what I thought! :)

*Note: A similar prompt will be posted for each of the six patterns of essays required for the course.

Appendix C

PMI Inventory Sheet

Plus (+)	Minus (-)	Interesting (?!)

Appendix D
Formal Outline Format

Name _____
101

ENG

Topic

Audience

Purpose

Thesis Statement

- I.
 - A.
 - B.
- II.
 - A.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - B.
 - 1.
 - a.
 - b.
 - 2.
- III.
 - A.
 - B.

Appendix E

Exemplification Peer Editing Guide

Editors' Name _____

ENG 101

Writer's Name _____

1. Is the ***title*** effective? Provide evidence.
2. Does the ***introduction*** speak generally then move to specifics? Provide evidence.
3. Is the ***thesis*** strong? Provide evidence. Para # _____
4. Are the examples ***relevant*** in nature? Provide evidence. Para # _____
5. Are the examples ***detailed*** in content? Provide evidence. Para # _____
6. Are the examples ***sufficient*** in number? Provide evidence. Para # _____
7. Identify specific areas of strengths. Para # _____
8. Identify specific areas needing improvement. Para # _____

Appendix F

Sample Protocol of Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your writing experiences throughout this semester.
2. How would you describe your blogging experience in this first-year composition course this semester?
3. How did your experiences, particularly using the classroom blog, influence your writing practices?

Appendix G

IRB Approval

September 22, 2011

Office for Research
Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects

Emily M. Sims
Department of Curriculum & Instruction
College of Education
The University of Alabama

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA
R E S E A R C H

Re: IRB # 10-OR-324-R1 "College Students' Perceptions Regarding the Use of Classroom Blogs to Improve Student Writing"

Dear Ms. Sims:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your renewal application.

Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on September 21, 2012. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



358 Rose Administration Building
Box 870127
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0127
(205) 348-8461
FAX (205) 348-7189
TOLL FREE (877) 820-3066

Carpanato T. Myles, MSM, CMI
Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office for Research Compliance
The University of Alabama

10-02-324-R1

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

I. Identifying information

	Principal Investigator	Second Investigator	Third Investigator
Name:	Emily M. Sims	Vivian H. Wright	
Department:	Curriculum and Instruction	Curriculum and Instruction	
College:	College of Education	College of Education	
University:	University of Alabama	University of Alabama	
Address:	1006 Eagle Crest Blvd. SW Jacksonville, AL 36265	230 F Graves Hall Box 870232 Tuscaloosa, AL, 35487	
Telephone:	(256) 453-7468	(205) 348-1401	
FAX:	N/A		
E-mail:	esims@jsu.edu	vwright@bamaed.ua.edu	

Title of Research Project:

College Students' Perceptions Regarding the Use of Classroom Blogs to Improve Student Writing

Date Printed: 7-27-2011

Funding Source: N/A

Type of Proposal: New Revision Renewal Completed Exempt

Attach a renewal application Attach a continuing review of studies form Please enter the original IRB # at the top of the page
--

UA faculty or staff member signature: _____

II. NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION (to be completed by IRB):

Type of Review: Full board Expedited

IRB Action:

Rejected Date: _____

Tabled Pending Revisions Date: _____

Approved Pending Revisions Date: _____

Approved—this proposal complies with University and federal regulations for the protection of human subjects

Approval is effective until the following date: 9-21-2011

Items approved:

<input type="checkbox"/> Research protocol:	dated
<input type="checkbox"/> Informed consent:	dated
<input type="checkbox"/> Recruitment materials:	dated
<input type="checkbox"/> Other:	dated

Approval signature _____ Date 9/22/2011

Appendix H

Informed Assent Form

University of Alabama
Informed Assent Form for a Research Study
(for students under 19 years of age)

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The study is called College Students' Perceptions Regarding the Use of Classroom Blogs to Improve Student Writing. The study is being conducted by Emily Sims, a doctoral student at the University of Alabama.

What is the study about?

This study seeks to find out college students' perceptions about using classroom blogs as a means to improve students' writing.

Why is this study important? What good will the results do?

This study is important because students of your generation are generally technologically savvy, and the information gathered from blogs entries may reveal attitudes and perceptions not evident in the classroom as participants are likely to share valued information on blogs as opposed to face-to-face discussions. Also, students' final drafts of essays may be influenced by these practices. The information gained from this study may help to guide future instructional practices in improving student writing.

Why have you been asked to take part in this study?

You have been asked to take part in this study because you are enrolled an ENG 101: English Composition (a course that focuses heavily on writing) taught by the researcher. This course section utilizes classroom blogs throughout the semester to facilitate collaboration among students.

How many people besides you will be in the study?

There may be approximately 25 people in the study.

What you will be asked to do in the study?

If you choose to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Complete blog entries as assigned for all students by the scheduled due dates.
2. As a writer, thoughtfully reflect on the writing process and participate in on-going activities throughout the semester.
3. Participate in one-shot interview questions to clarify or elaborate on vague and/or incomplete blog entries and the writing processes.
4. Upon the completion of the study, identify a pseudonym to represent your actual name.
5. Complete final drafts essays as assigned to all students by the scheduled due dates.

How much time will you spend in this study?

This study will involve time needed to complete in-class writing activities, four blogs entries and six essays, which are assigned to all students as part of the course requirements.

Will you be paid for being in the study?

No, you will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Will being in this study cost you anything?

No, there will be no cost to you or your parent/guardian for your participation.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 9-22-11
EXPIRATION DATE: 9-21-12

Can the researcher take you out of the study?

Yes, the researcher can take you out of the study if she feels that the study may cause you harm.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Emily Sims at 256-453-7468 or at esims@jsu.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a person taking part in a research study, make suggestions or file complaints and concerns, you may call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html. You may email us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

Signing below constitutes your agreement to participate. You may choose not to participate even if your parent/guardian signs a parental consent form. You will be provided with a copy of this form.

Printed Name

Date

Signature

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 9-22-11
EXPIRATION DATE: 9-21-12

Appendix I

Informed Consent Form for Parent/Guardian

University of Alabama
Informed Consent Form for Parent/Guardian
(for parent/guardian of students under 19 years of age)

Your child is being asked to take part in a research study. The study is called College Students' Perceptions Regarding the Use of Classroom Blogs to Improve Student Writing. The study is being conducted by Emily Sims, a doctoral candidate at the University of Alabama.

What is the study about?

This study seeks to find out college students' perceptions about using classroom blogs as a means to improve students' writing.

Why is this study important? What good will the results do?

This study is important because students of this generation are generally technologically savvy, and the information gathered from blogs entries may reveal attitudes and perceptions not evident in the classroom as participants are likely to share valued information on blogs as opposed to face-to-face discussions. Also, students' final drafts of essays may be influenced by these practices. The information gained from this study may help to guide future instructional practices in improving student writing.

Why has your child been asked to take part in this study?

Your child has been asked to take part in this study because he/she is enrolled an ENG 101: English Composition (a course that focuses heavily on writing) taught by the researcher. This course section utilizes classroom blogs throughout the semester to facilitate collaboration among students.

How many people besides your child will be in the study?

There will be approximately 25 people in the study.

What your child will be asked to do in the study?

If you allow your child to be in this study, he/she will be asked to do the following:

1. Complete blog entries as assigned for all students by the scheduled due dates.
2. As a writer, thoughtfully reflect on the writing process and participate in on-going activities throughout the semester.
3. Participate in one-shot interview questions to clarify or elaborate on vague and/or incomplete blog entries and the writing processes.
4. Upon the completion of the study, identify a pseudonym to represent your actual name.
5. Complete final drafts essays as assigned to all students by the scheduled due dates.

How much time will your child spend in this study?

This study will involve time needed to complete in-class writing activities, four blogs entries and six essays, which are assigned to all students as part of the course requirements

Will you or your child be paid for being in the study?

No, you and your child will not be paid for participation in this study.

Will being in this study cost you or your child anything?

No, there will be no cost to you or your child for his /her participation.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 9-22-11
EXPIRATION DATE: 9-21-12

Can the researcher take your child out of the study?

Yes, the researcher can take your child out of the study if she feels that the study may cause your child harm.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Emily Sims at 256-453-7468 or at esims@jsu.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a person taking part in a research study, make suggestions or file complaints and concerns, you may call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html. You may email us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

Signing below constitutes your consent for your child to participate in this study. You will be provided with a copy of this form.

Printed Name

Date

Signature

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 9-22-11
EXPIRATION DATE: 9-21-12

Appendix J

Informed Consent Form

**University of Alabama
Informed Consent Form for a Research Study
(students 19 years of age and above)**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The study is called College Students' Perceptions Regarding the Use of Classroom Blogs to Improve Student Writing. The study is being conducted by Emily Sims, a doctoral student at the University of Alabama.

What is the study about?

This study seeks to find out college students' perceptions about using classroom blogs as a means to improve students' writing.

Why is this study important? What good will the results do?

This study is important because students of your generation are generally technologically savvy, and the information gathered from blogs entries may reveal attitudes and perceptions not evident in the classroom as participants are likely to share valued information on blogs as opposed to face-to-face discussions. Also, students' final drafts of essays may be influenced by these practices. The information gained from this study may help to guide future instructional practices in improving student writing.

Why have you been asked to take part in this study?

You have been asked to take part in this study because you are enrolled an ENG 101: English Composition (a course that focuses heavily on writing) taught by the researcher. This course section utilizes classroom blogs throughout the semester to facilitate collaboration among students.

How many people besides you will be in the study?

There may be approximately 25 people in the study.

What you will be asked to do in the study?

If you choose to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Complete blog entries as assigned for all students by the scheduled due dates.
2. As a writer, thoughtfully reflect on the writing process and participate in on-going activities throughout the semester.
3. Participate in one-shot interview questions to clarify or elaborate on vague and/or incomplete blog entries and the writing processes.
4. Upon the completion of the study, identify a pseudonym to represent your actual name.
5. Complete final drafts essays as assigned to all students by the scheduled due dates.

How much time will you spend in this study?

This study will involve time needed to complete in-class writing activities, four blogs entries and six essays, which are assigned to all students as part of the course requirements.

Will you be paid for being in the study?

No, you will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Will being in this study cost you anything?

No, there will be no cost to you for your participation.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 9-22-11
EXPIRATION DATE: 9-21-12

Can the researcher take you out of the study?

Yes, the researcher can take you out of the study if she feels that the study may cause you harm.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Emily Sims at 256-453-7468 or at esims@jsu.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a person taking part in a research study, make suggestions or file complaints and concerns, you may call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html. You may email us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

Signing below constitutes your agreement to participate. You will be provided with a copy of this form.

Printed Name

Date

Signature

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 9-22-11
EXPIRATION DATE: 9-21-12