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Blogging and Audience Awareness

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ABSTRACT

Awareness of audience is a difficult concept for young writers to embrace. However, Weblogs or blogging may foreground the needs of the audience for a given written work, and provide novice authors the tools to obtain and make use of audience feedback, and subsequently, grow as writers who are aware of their audience. The article presents a case study conducted in a second-grade classroom for the purpose of comparing students' growing awareness of audience and the ways in which their written work addressed the needs of the audience. Methods used included analysis of student written work, student comments to peers on blog posts, and survey data. Findings show that student writers were able to improve their writing based on the near-immediate feedback provided by their peers; students were able to provide substantive feedback on the work of others; and students were motivated to revise their work based on the feedback they received via blog comments.

Given that a primary purpose of writing is to share information with others, those who are considered skilled writers are acutely aware of their audience. They greet, address, and even question the reader because they know that writing serves as a form of communication, and that they are "speaking" to the readers they wish to engage. Through the interactive ways they choose to share their ideas, skilled writers demonstrate a deeper understanding of audience. The questions they ask, the topics they choose, the comments they make, the amount of information they convey, and the language they use stems from their understanding of the readers—their audience. In contrast, as Roser and Bomer (2005) suggest, emerging writers may simply and briefly report an experience without regard for the reader, the readers' perspectives, or the need for engagement.

When teachers ask students to craft a text, they are not only expected to write a clear message, but also to gear the message toward a particular audience, one that is often unknown to the writer. For developing writers, this may seem to be an overwhelming task (Wollman-Bonilla, 2001). As can be concluded from Ede and Lunsford's (1984) review of research on audience awareness, an understanding of audience is not an option for skilled writers. They noted that without a clear understanding of the imagined audience, writers are hampered by a kind of tunnel vision; they know what they mean to say, and therefore assume

they have done so because a real person does not exist to contradict their beliefs. ". . . unless the writer is composing a diary or journal entry, intended only for the writer's own eyes, the writing process is not complete unless another person, someone other than the writer, reads the text also" (p. 169). Therefore, in addition to constructing sentences, using descriptive language, and articulating thoughts clearly, emerging writers must be taught to move beyond themselves as they learn to consider dimensions of the audience for whom they write (Frank, 1992; Leitão, 2003). This is often a complex task for emerging writers who, when asked to address a real audience, are unable to envision the audience and consequently share a substantial base of information. Even when teachers attempt to make the audience authentic by asking writers to craft letters to their relatives, many young learners may not be motivated to do so because they are not experiencing immediate, concrete engagement with the audience, thus disallowing them a clear sense of engagement and authenticity (Beach, 1989).

The need to develop a sense of connectedness with an audience as a way to support children who are in transition from emerging to skilled writers was described by Davis and McGrail (2009) who found that elementary students did not realize how readers perceived their writing. They were even "surprised" to learn that others were interpreting their writing. Referred to as *decentering*, this behavior suggests that these children are like others who lack the necessary social and cognitive development to imagine the perspective of another person (Chandler, 1977). A young child who has not decentered might spontaneously launch into a discussion about a favorite toy without providing any cue to the listener about the topic of discussion. Kroll and Lempers (1981) concluded that decentering in writing tended to lag behind the ability to decenter in speaking. Therefore, students who are able to decenter conversationally may still lack audience awareness in their writing. Traxler and Gernsbacher (1993) and Holliway (2004) alike concluded that the reciprocity among readers' needs, text, and the writer could be successfully accomplished when writers learn to take the perspective of their readers.

The concept of matching informational details to the needs and interests of the audience can be traced back through history to the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who addressed several concepts with regard to audience awareness (Barnes, 1984). Although Aristotle focused on speaking, we take the liberty of applying his concepts to writing, another form of language, to better understand how to create a balance between the perspective of the writer and the needs of the reader. We believe that Aristotle's caution about the need for the speaker to ensure the understanding of

the listener supports the conclusion that the writer must ensure clarity resulting in better understanding on the part of the reader. Parallel to his suggestions regarding the need for clarity when speaking is a requirement of clarity of thought and voice that must be conveyed in writing to an immediate and subsequently responsive audience. Whether speaking or writing, in order to be comprehensible to an audience, the communicator must strike a balance between the thoughtful presentation of the intended ideas and the clarity and cohesion of the text. While the ancient philosopher could not have envisioned blogs, Aristotle's conclusion that the manner of composition has a direct impact on what is or is not understood by the audience is relevant in the twenty-first century.

CREATING AUDIENCE AWARENESS

In order for students to write with an awareness of audience, they must first truly understand their readers' needs and perceptions. Reader feedback is a direct means of providing this information, thus illustrating how the writer's message was interpreted. Because writing can be deeply personal, and is a delicate matter, peer feedback should be given tactfully (cf. Wolsey, 2008) so that writers feel receptive to the information as a means of improvement. When students read teacher feedback, they may perceive the primary model of feedback as corrections.

Despite teachers' best intentions to provide helpful feedback, writers do not typically benefit from near-immediate feedback (Kroll, 1978; Olson, 1994). The way students develop the awareness of readers' reactions is through hearing the reader's immediate responses to their writing. A delayed response may not benefit the writer who considers that the piece is complete and has subsequently moved on to another. Peer revision and editing enable students to note the perspective of the reader some time after the draft has been written. The writer then decides whether or not to make changes based on the feedback, and if so, to what degree. This process may be seen as more corrective than interactive since a teacher generally assigns the peers who will be the editors.

These realizations caused us to wonder if having both an authentic purpose and a known and interactive audience would support a group of second graders in developing an understanding that their writing is a means of communicating with that identified audience. Since the children were extremely motivated by the idea of writing blog posts and receiving "comments" on their blog postings from their classmates and family, we wondered if this interactive context would promote an interest in writing and an increased awareness of the importance of audience.

THE TECHNOLOGY CONNECTION

Today's students are faced with numerous technologies through which they have immediate access to an audience. New technologies do not restrict publishing a text until it is clear, on topic, and appropriately directed to the intended reader. Rather, any person with the required technology can immediately publicize his or her ideas to a worldwide audience. Writers, in the online environment,

have a growing responsibility to revise and improve their own writing to ensure that the reader is able to gain a clear understanding of the intended message.

For many students, technology has entered their lives as they write for an audience without the knowledge of how to do so properly. For them, first drafts are live pages at the click of a button. No filter exists to catch misspellings, unclear sentences, or absent punctuation. The reader may be left to wonder about intended meanings, and the writer may be completely unaware of errors or miscommunications. Klages and Clark (2009) noted that although students may not realize it, the quality of the message communicated through technology is a reflection of the author.

BLOGGING AND AUDIENCE AWARENESS

As technologically savvy teachers are realizing, a class blog provides a location for published writing viewable by multiple audiences as well as a potential means through which to teach students to write. A class blog may connect writers and readers while providing an authentic twenty-first-century venue for writing practice and instruction. For example, emerging writers, knowledgeable of the content they wish to convey, may neglect to include proper conventions or adequate information for their readers. Enabling the comment function on a blog allows various audiences to respond to the writing. This creates a channel through which the reader can provide an immediate response to the author.

In traditional writing instruction, the student makes decisions about how to improve writing in isolation, whereas receiving immediate feedback on a written blog occurs within the context of a social environment (Goldman, Cohen, & Sheahan, 2008). The opportunity to write on a blog offers the possibility that students might revise their writing more carefully because they know that their words will be viewed by a larger audience.

Using a blog for writing instruction enables prompt responses and centralizes the feedback to a given text. Because the comment is attached to the live page containing the blog, students have immediate access to the response. In traditional writing assignments, the teacher must respond to and return the papers, increasing the time between the writing and the receipt of feedback, depending on the logistics of the situation. Conversely, as Chretien, Goldman, and Faselis (2008) suggest, one benefit of blogs is in the, ". . . ability to receive timely feedback and support from peers and instructors . . . and the dynamic interaction between the students and instructor" (p. 2069). Blogs potentially create a multiplier effect on information. Each time the instructor provides feedback to one student, the entire class receives this feedback, extending the reach of the teacher and the opportunities for the students to learn from the challenges they face as individuals as well as those faced by their classmates. Additionally, the teacher's limited time is well spent in responding to the writing because students who learn from their classmates will likely encounter new and different challenges, rather than repeating the errors of their peers. When blogs are used an active learning environment develops and "the teacher

is not the only individual providing information” (Goldman, Cohen, & Sheahan, 2008, p. 1659).

Klages and Clark (2009) asked an important question regarding the development of instruction to meet students’ needs: “How do we adjust our own understanding of ‘good’ writing from traditional print literacy to digital literacies—and in ways that are continually shifting?” (p. 36). One method of overcoming the growing divide between the classroom and the world beyond the school is to bring digital text into the classroom (Sweeney, 2010). The Weblog, or blog, in particular, lends itself to classroom writing because it blends the digital world with quality writing in a way that texting or word processing does not. Not only is blogging a relevant medium for students writing in the digital age, but it also has one key advantage over traditional pencil and paper writing. Blogs can foreground an inherent consideration of audience (Ellison & Wu, 2008). Instructing students in writing through blogging at a young age may provide them with a better opportunity to communicate clearly in the digital age.

We wondered if by reading blogged responses students might truly realize a sense of audience. Additionally we wondered if they did so, would they also be able to transfer this knowledge of audience and the power of feedback to other forms of writing. Furthermore, we believe that because students will be expected to be fluent in their use of technology, learning to read and write blogs in conjunction with traditional writing instruction would certainly prepare them for writing beyond the classroom.

METHODS

The case in the present study is defined as one teacher and her class of 18 second-grade students. The setting was a public school in the western United States with a population of approximately 400 students in grades kindergarten through six. Students in this school are 58% Caucasian, 30% Asian, 7% Latino, 3% Filipino, and 1% African American. Many of their parents hold graduate degrees, which are predominantly science-centered. Students at this school demonstrate high levels of ability on state standardized tests, and all students have access to computers in their homes. During the course of this study, four of the students were absent for part of the instruction and/or survey collection. Their responses were therefore excluded from the survey data. However, they participated in the study to the extent their presence allowed, and they were included in some of the other data collected.

The school and its occupants place a great deal of value, overall, on access to technology. Each class in the school receives one hour of technology lab time with a technology teacher each week. The technology teacher coordinates with classroom teachers to design technology-based assignments aligned with grade-level standards. In a typical session, the technology instructor launches the day’s project, and the students begin. Next, the technology teacher sits with the grade-level teacher and launches a learning activity for the teacher. The technology teacher then supports any of the learners, including the teacher, who need assistance. This

format allows students and teachers alike to learn from the technology teacher’s expertise. Finally, projects are shared on a school site, where they can be accessed online. In addition to technology instruction and the lab, each class has at least two classroom computers and access to the lab without the instructor for finalizing classroom projects.

The teacher who is a focus of the case study is the second author. The first and third authors assisted with the design of the study, and data collection and analysis. All the authors collaborated on the writing of the resulting manuscript.

Design of the Study

Data were gathered and triangulated from student blog posts, students’ comments to blog posts, lesson artifacts, and data from the two surveys (Reinking & Watson, 2004; Creswell, 1998) (see Appendix A). We employed a mixed-methods multilevel triangulation design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) in which the pre-instruction survey data informed the qualitative analysis of blog posts, blog comments, and lesson artifacts. In turn, these data became the lens for the analysis of the post-instruction survey data. In conjunction with a traditional class writing assignment, students were given a pre-instruction survey regarding audience awareness. The same survey was administered after students had their writing posted to the class blog to determine whether or not posting to a blog had any effect on students’ consideration for the audience. The blogs were posted and available to all students, but not to the public. Classmates as well as the teacher and parents could respond to the blog by making a “comment.”

Since the heart of this investigation was the rate of transfer of audience awareness to traditional classroom writing after blogging, the survey was administered yet again when students wrote a traditional handwritten piece after posting their writing to the blog. Students’ ideas about audience awareness with regards to their writing were assessed based on a comparative analysis of student responses on the pre-, during-, and post-blogging surveys (see Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6). Analyses of student writing and responses or comments to blog posts were also analyzed for indicators of audience awareness.

Student surveys were used to collect information on students’ ideas about their writing. Raw data were categorized based on responses given, and analyzed according to trends, with consideration given to the writing piece and specific student responses. The blog archive provided a valuable data source and included all the pieces of writing posted on the class blog as well as the corresponding comments. As new pieces of writing were added to the blog, previous pieces could still be viewed through the archive.

“Comments” were responses to the writing posted online. The comments were an important component of this study because they provided immediate feedback to the students on their writing and evidence that an audience they could perceive and visualize had read their writing. Students in the class, their parents, and the teacher commented on the writing. On a typical blog, the comments would be open to any reader; however, to protect the

identity of the students involved in this study, the blog was linked to a user login and password protected site. The only direction given by the teacher was to identify oneself and to provide detailed information to help the writer improve.

While this was the students' first experience with commenting, they were familiar with providing feedback to peers through questions, "pushes," and "praises," an instructional tool devised by the teacher to scaffold student comments and responses to the writing of peers. *Pushes* were statements encouraging the writer to grow; *praises* were statements recognizing attributes of the writing enjoyed by the reader. For example, a comment on Tyler's (all names are pseudonyms) blog was, "I liked that you put a lot of detail like the word bloody. I could really see it." This comment was considered to be "praise" because it recognized that the author had added details and given a specific example of detail that was meaningful to the reader. A "push" appeared in this comment to Alexander's post: "Your writing is great, but maybe you could go back and check to see if you need to make anything plural." The second part of this statement "pushes" the writer to check his work and use proper subject/verb agreement. Decisions for instruction were made based on the students' needs and experiences, and therefore, were focused on student learning as a result of the study, and not simply the study itself.

The Blog Project

Each student had just published an expository writing piece, an animal report. The students had taken this piece through many of the recursive phases of writing (e.g., Emig, 1971): prewriting (researching and note-taking), drafting, peer revising, peer editing, teacher conferencing, editing, and publishing. These handwritten reports were the students' monthly, featured writing, and were hung on a wall portfolio, visible in the classroom. Once a new piece was written, the previous piece was moved to the students' binder portfolios, which held their writing throughout the school year.

The first day of data collection was focused on determining the students' ideas about who would read their animal reports. Students were receptive to completing the survey, though it appeared difficult for them to respond to such questions, perhaps because they had not considered these ideas before. After some clarification of the questions, all students were able to complete the survey. While a typical scaffold may include sample responses, this survey had the potential to influence students' ideas. Therefore, when students had trouble, they were simply encouraged to "do their best."

The next day, blogging instruction began. The lesson started when students recorded what they knew about blogs on sticky notes and posted them on chart paper to share with the class. Immediately after sharing the ideas, Alexander asked, "Are you going to tell us which ones are correct?" This question indicated the student's perception that there were clearly correct and incorrect answers and also suggested his drive to find the correct answer as determined by the teacher. However, the teacher's goal

for the students was to have them understand the notion of audience and decide for themselves if they needed to revise their own understandings of a blog post.

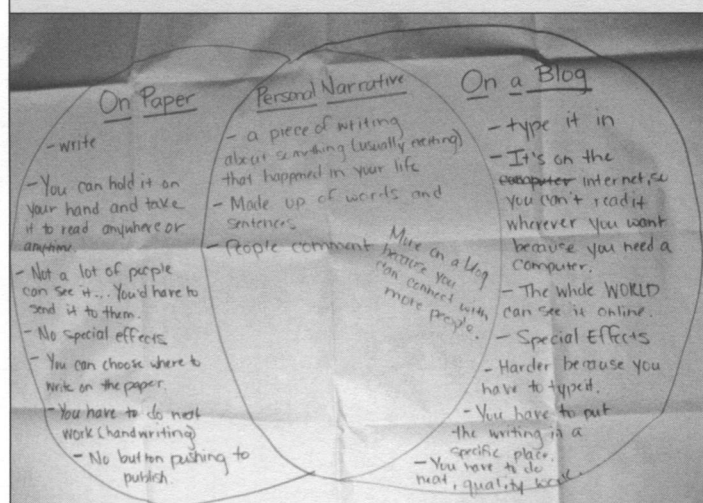
A response was not given to Alexander's question; instead, students were invited back to their desks where they viewed four different blogs, projected on screen, and discussed the various features of each blog. On one blog, students noticed some photographs they believed added meaning. In response to another blog, created by a student who came from France, the class agreed it "didn't make sense." Students were then prompted to pair-share with a partner to discuss the reasons. Many students agreed that because English was the blogger's second language, the task was hard for her. Other students said, "When you write on a blog the whole world can see it, so you should make sure that you reread it and get everything right." Even before creating blogs, students had clear opinions about what made a blog appealing to the reader. The students studied the blog posts written by others in order "to become comfortable and familiar with the art of blogging before writing their own" (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008, p. 24). At the close of lesson, students recorded their ideas about blogs on sticky notes only if they had different ideas than they had before they looked at blogs.

After students gained some experiences with blogs, they viewed a concise video on the origins of blogging (Common Craft, 2007). Without some exposure to blogs, the idea could have been rather abstract. However, after students had seen blogs, it was easy for them to understand the purpose and relevance of blogging. Students were given the task of recording something they either liked or did not like about one of the blogs and provide a rationale that supported their thoughts. Their awareness of supported likes and dislikes was the first step in preparing them to think about what to include in their own blog posts and why they were doing so.

Blogging personal narratives. During the next class students participated in a discussion about *personal narrative*. The class read about this genre in the writing textbook and reviewed an example. After a discussion in which the students generated a Venn diagram (see Figure 1) comparing writing personal narratives on paper versus writing them on a blog, they had some time to discuss possible "personal narrative" topics with one another, and then it was time to begin. Students began drafting a personal narrative, and any students who had trouble getting started met for small group brainstorming. Almost immediately, students started telling stories, and headed off to begin writing.

One problem surfaced when all the students wanted to publish their writing on the same day. Because the number of blogs posted could deter students from reading others' blogs, the teacher decided to publish only one student's writing at a time. A discussion was held with the class, and the students agreed that if there were too many blog postings to read, people probably wouldn't read them all and/or take the time to comment. A randomly chosen student submitted a written piece to the teacher, who typed the text verbatim, and posted it to the blog. The teacher, as the typist, posted blog entries quickly and ensured that auto-correct and

Figure 1. Venn Diagram



spell-check did not make changes to the students' writing. Next illustrations were scanned and included in the blog posting. A benefit of this system was the teacher's close analysis of student writing. The process of typing student writing enabled the teacher to clearly see students' strengths and needs.

At this point, Jeremy was concerned that his parents would not be able to read his blog entry if it were posted one day, and somebody else's was posted the next. His understanding was that his posting would no longer appear. This was an important consideration, but one that the blog format addresses. The class reviewed the teacher blog, which had several postings. Jeremy saw that when a new piece of writing was added, the old one was still there; it was not the first posting on the page. Next, the class visited the blog archive in which all of the postings for a site were kept should there be too many postings for one page. Jeremy and his classmates were reassured knowing their writing would remain available to readers. This understanding certainly indicated their awareness of a recognized audience.

The name of each student was written on the end of a Popsicle stick. The sticks were placed in a mug, and the teacher held the mug out to one side. Looking in the opposite direction, she chose a stick and continued to do so until each student had been assigned a number. The students agreed that the person whose stick was chosen first would be the first to present a blog post. The subsequent order would be determined by the numbers, and the process would continue until all the entries were posted. It was decided that three pieces of student writing would be posted for each writing session.

The next writing lesson began with a review of Maxine's post; she was student number 3. Her post was projected on a screen, and she read it aloud to her classmates. Maxine knew what she intended to convey when she read her post aloud, so she read it as intended rather than reading the words and punctuation as they were written. As a result, the class heard what the writer intended to write instead of what was actually written. They did not appear to notice the discrepancies between what was read and what was

written. The teacher changed the procedure for the next piece of writing to prevent the author from projecting intentions on the writing rather than simply reading the writing. After the posting was read, students offered "pushes" and "praises." This process had the potential to be a delicate matter, except that students had experience in giving feedback to one another in a thoughtful way throughout the school year. Students, all of whom had computers with Internet access at home, were encouraged to comment from home to give Maxine some additional feedback.

Broadening students' perspectives. The goal of the next writing assignment was to see the world as reporters do. In their writer's notebook, the students made lists of events that were "happening" in their lives. They talked about what kind of writing could go on a blog, and determined that any type of writing was acceptable. It could be news, but it could also be another type of writing. Sam reported that he was starting his own blog at home and was interested in sharing that blog with the class. At this point it became clear that students were motivated and knowledgeable enough to continue writing on the blog. In the interest of maintaining their motivation, the blog instructional plan focused on students' specific needs as demonstrated in their published blog writing.

Students recorded their comments on sticky notes, and the teacher typed them onto the blog. In reading student writing on the blogs, it became clear that students lacked details in their writing. Therefore, the next writing lesson focused on adding details when describing a setting. First, students brainstormed a list of places they knew well. Next, they each decided on one they felt they could describe best. They each created a graphic organizer highlighting points about the locations they had selected. For the next writing lesson, students viewed a video clip on "similes." After a short lesson and discussion on similes, students added at least one simile to their graphic webs about their selected place. Students then drafted descriptive paragraphs using their webs as a guide, and this paragraph was posted to the class blog.

The next topic for the writing lesson was, "So, you read the comments on your blog, now what?" The class discussed how having the comments could lead them to improve their next piece of writing. They talked about the need for description and detail. These ideas came naturally to the students, and after reading the comments on their blogs, the following students chose one comment from which to create a goal and shared their goals with their classmates (see Figure 2).

For the entire week, three students were asked to submit a piece of writing to be posted on the blog. They were encouraged to read over the writing with a buddy and make any necessary changes. When the students were asked to submit their writing, they stated they had chosen the piece; however, they had not had a chance to review the writing with a buddy. Because of the busy schedule, students did not have any discretionary class time in which to work on this writing. The teacher's solution was to tell the students that in the event they did not have time to work on a piece of writing with a buddy, their most recent pieces, those that

Figure 2. A Sample of Students' Personal Writing Goals Developed from Blog Comments

Student	Blog Comment	Resulting Goal as Articulated by the Student
Benjamin	"Where did this take place?"	"I will focus on Jacob's idea because it really helps you understand what's going on when you know the setting."
Maxine	"I like how you said which steakhouse it was."	"I would like to focus on Hallie's because I would like to include more details than expected."
Priscilla	"I'm guessing that you were riding on Atlantis, but anyway, what ride were you riding on?"	"Alexander's because I could add the name of the ride or more details about the things I'm talking about."
Caleb	"Maybe you should look back and see where you need to pause."	"I will focus on Alexander's comment because I can go back and check my punctuation."

had already been through the writing process as a substantive draft ready for peer response, would be published on the blog. Based on their difficulty in submitting a piece of writing, we predicted that students would be relieved to have the teacher use this piece of writing to post on the blog, but that was not the case. Rather, students seemed suddenly motivated to find the time to work with a buddy, implying that the choice of the piece of writing that would appear on the blog was important to them. In fact, none of the students chose to use the piece of writing the teacher had selected, nor the piece that would have required the least revision effort. These perceived student behaviors suggested that students were very aware of and motivated by their audience.

Eventually each student had a written entry on the blog. It was at this point that Maxine raised her hand with a question. She asked, "Mrs. Shea, is there any way we can edit our blogs because I need to change some things, like capitalization?" We reviewed some of the previous blog postings that only had a few comments, and the teacher used the Popsicle sticks with the names of the students written on them (as a method of random selection) to identify the students who would edit those entries. The class reread the entries as students wanted to make specific comments. Cameron's blog post was the last entry.

Cameron is a student who struggles as a reader but has made significant progress during the year. His piece of writing was extremely important to him. He worked on it for several weeks, and continued to ask when it would be up on the blog. After his writing was shared, and students were working on drafting new pieces of their writing, Cameron approached the teacher and stated with enthusiasm, "Today was like the best day ever because I lost a tooth, and I had my blog posted." At the end of the lesson,

students were asked to write a statement of their opinions about blogging as part of the post-blogging survey (see Figure 3).

THE STUDENT SURVEY

To more fully understand student growth as they came to understand how an audience informs their own writing, we administered two surveys. The first survey was administered before students began the unit using blogs. The second survey was given after students had completed several blog posts. During this time, students also read and commented upon the posts of their classmates.

The Initial Survey

The initial survey was intended to determine a baseline regarding what students knew or did not quite understand about the notion of audience. We wanted to determine how students understood the communicative role of writing in which others would need to construct an understanding of the writer's message. Thus, the questions referred to the animal reports students had recently composed, and each question on the pre-instruction survey (see Appendix A) probed student comprehension of what audience might mean to them as well as the importance they ascribed to that audience as they wrote their reports.

Figure 3. Students' Responses to Blogging

"So people could read it anytime and anywhere, and I could share the news"
"I like to write a blog because I want other people to know how I am and know what I do."
"To show people where you went"
"Don't do it it's a waste of time. You just write and the whole class sees it. I want the whole world to see it."
"I like blogging because it's just like sharing a piece of writing to the whole world."
"You could blog so you can tell about yourself."
"It helps to learn to express yourself."
"You get to share what you're writing."
"I like to blog so that I can show how smart I can be."
"To give news to other people"
"I think it is worth the time to blog because you get comments and the comments help you."
"So people can know events in your life."
"Blogging helps share what you like and your tastes."
"Everybody gets to look."
"To show people my best moments."
"Blogging helps your ideas come out."

The Second Survey

The second survey was administered after the students had written a pencil and paper “how-to” piece based on the social studies concept, “farm to market and the relationship of producers and consumers,” which was not posted to the blog. The second survey asked the same questions, and only minor changes were made to the wording to conform to the topic. The goal of the second survey was to determine whether or not there had been a change in perspective of improving writing and audience after students received the instruction in blog writing.

The survey was administered after three different pieces were written. The first piece was an animal research report posted on the student portfolios. The second piece was chosen by the student from a collection of writing that focused on adding descriptive details. This piece was the only one posted on the class blog. The third piece was the how-to expository piece based on a social studies unit that was noted previously. Students were asked to show how a product went from being produced to being available in a store.

The results. The survey questions were the open-response type, and the answers varied. However, there were definitive categories for the student responses, which provided valuable insight into students’ thoughts about audience with respect to their writing.

The first question asked about student expectations for the audience who would read their writing (see Figure 4). The most significant trend was between the first and second writing pieces in which there was an increase from 6 to 11 students who expected family members to read their writing. For them, the audience had expanded from classmates to family. Students recognized the expansion of their audience as the inclusion of family members responding through the blog. However, on the following surveys, the number of students who listed classmates as people who would read their blogs decreased, even though students witnessed all of their classmates reading their blogs. It is possible students recognized their classmates would read their blogs in class, and because it was obvious to them, they did not record classmates as a predicted audience. The data from the first survey question

were unclear overall and leave room for several interpretations. One that was suggested to the researchers through students’ daily behaviors was that the concept of audience was becoming so real that it was not unique enough to be reported.

The purpose of survey question three was to determine whether or not these students made changes to their writing because there was an audience. In the results presented in Figure 4, there is an unexpected dip in “yes” responses for the second writing piece. This piece was the one posted to the blog, and the survey was administered after the students’ writing had been posted. The students had been through the process of reviewing the blog posting, writing comments, and setting writing goals. They knew their classmates, parents, and the teacher would be viewing the blog, yet 43% of students responded “no” when asked if they would make changes to this piece of writing. However, on the survey administered after the final piece of writing, 93% of students responded, “yes” they would make changes knowing that an audience would read the piece. Students’ specific responses were helpful in providing more information.

Although five students responded, “no,” Benjamin’s post elaborated, “No, because I don’t know if anybody will read it.” Therefore, even though he had seen that people did read it, he would not commit to making changes unless he knew for certain others would read his work. In other words, he would make changes only under the condition an audience would read it. Oscar also stated, “No.” His reason was, “. . . because I didn’t know that you can do that.” At first it was difficult to make sense of this statement as he had taken several pieces through the writing process during the school year. When read in context with his writing piece, it made more sense. Most likely Oscar was referring to making changes once his writing had already been posted. Oscar was thinking more logistically than his classmates when he thought about making changes to his writing. Finally, the three remaining “no” responders explained they had already reviewed and evaluated their own work. In other words, it was not that they were not concerned with presenting quality work rather they had already taken this step before they responded to the survey.

On the final piece of writing, 93% of students responded they would make changes. All but one would make changes knowing an audience would read the writing. Tyler, however, responded, “No, because I didn’t feel like it.” This was an unexpected response because his two previous responses had been, “I would change my writing if it was going out in the world” and “Yes, so then people can know how smart I can be.” Therefore, while Tyler did not “feel” like making changes on this particular piece, he consistently makes changes to present his writing at its best to an audience. Overall, the results of this survey question indicate that after the students gained experience in posting their writing to a blog, the number of students who would make changes before presenting their writing to an audience increased.

Clear categories of reasons for writing that emerged were (see Figure 5): required by the teacher, for themselves, or for the benefit of others. Students whose responses were categorized as

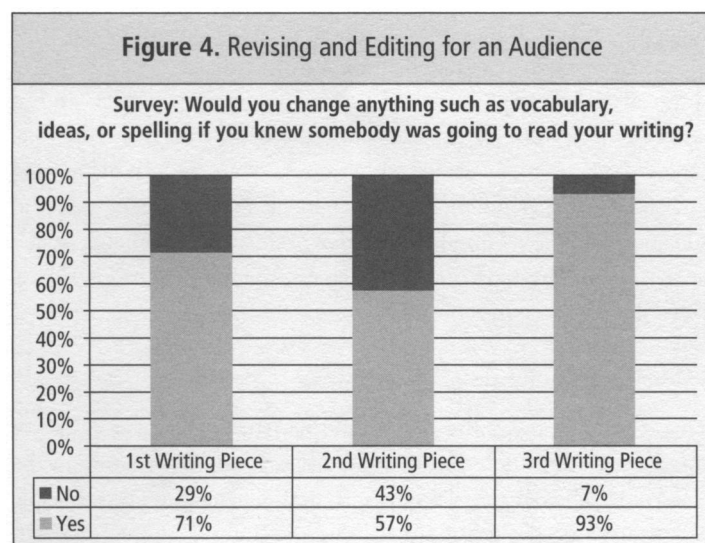
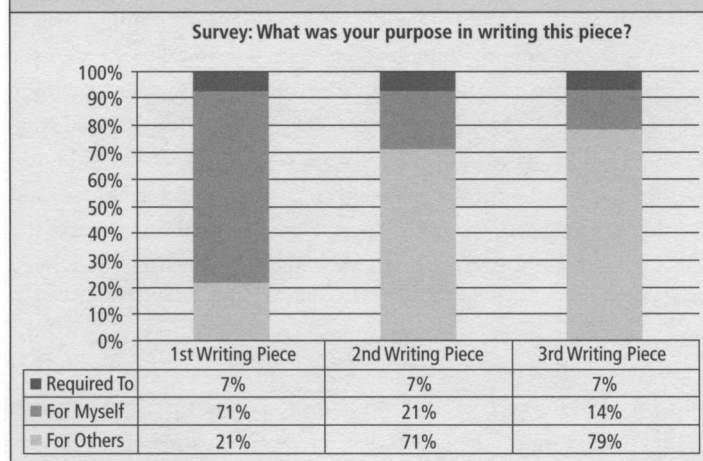


Figure 5. Purpose for Writing



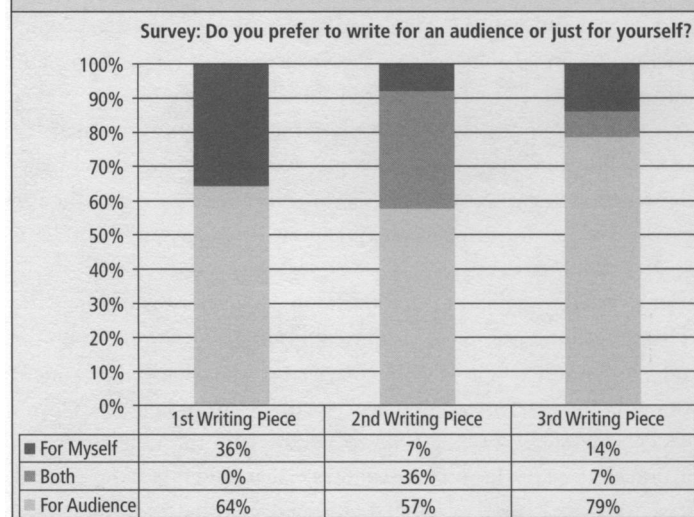
“myself” on the first writing assignment gave responses such as, “to learn about different animals.” Students whose responses were categorized as “for others” gave responses such as, “because people need to know what is happening in nature.” The percentage of students who wrote a piece because it was required remained consistent throughout the study. However, the students who stated this reason changed on each assignment. We attribute this finding to the fact that the particular piece was not exciting to the writer, while the others were, and therefore, seemed simply like an “assignment.”

More significant is the shift in purposes for writing. On the first writing assignment 71% of writers wrote for themselves, and 21% wrote for an audience. For the second writing piece, the one posted to the blog, 21% wrote for themselves, and 71% wrote for the benefit of the audience. This increase of 50% of students writing for the audience increased by an additional 8% on the final writing assignment even though this assignment was not posted to the blog. These findings indicate that students wrote with their audience in mind when their writing was posted to the blog, and after posting to a blog, they continued to write for an audience. The final writing assignment was one in which students had to learn about and explain how goods go from “farm to market.” This was also a report writing assignment, and it would then follow that students’ responses regarding the purpose of their writing would be for their own learning; however, this was not the case. On the final writing assignment only 14% of students wrote “for myself,” while 79% wrote “for others.”

After the first writing piece, 64% of students preferred to write for an audience, and 36% preferred to write for themselves (see Figure 6). On the second writing piece 57% preferred to write for themselves, and 36% preferred to write for both themselves and the audience. A total of 93% of students preferred to write for an audience on the second piece when the students who preferred to write for both are included. On the final piece, 86% of students preferred to write for an audience, including the student who preferred to write for himself and the audience.

A noticeable increase in students who preferred to write for both themselves and the audience occurred from the first to second

Figure 6. Writing for an Audience or for Self



writing on the blog. Perhaps blogging made students aware they could write what they enjoyed writing, and the audience would enjoy it, too. On the final writing piece, 14% preferred to write for themselves, which was an increase of 7% from the second writing piece. One of these students was Caleb, who preferred to write for himself on all three assignments “in case it didn’t make sense,” “because if you make a mistake it’s okay,” and “for myself because if there’s a mistake you can fix it, but if you share it and you miss a mistake it will be so everyone can see it.” The final reasoning provides more insight into Caleb’s thinking. He still feels self-conscious presenting his writing to his peers because there could be mistakes in his writing. Caleb did not reach the level of comfort of his peers in presenting his writing, but it is also clear that Caleb was aware of his audience.

Although Alexander also preferred to write for himself on the final piece, for the others, he preferred to write for both himself and others. The reason Alexander gave was, “I sort of like to write for myself because I know what I’m writing about, but it might be weird to other people.” Alexander has a fully developed sense of audience and was an extremely involved participant during the blogging instruction. He responded to nine of his classmates’ blogs, and provided detailed, thoughtful feedback. Furthermore, some of those responses were posted when he was sick and at home. It is possible Alexander was less willing to share his final piece of writing because it was “published” in the classroom and not on the blog. While there is some uncertainty regarding the reasons he changed his mind, Alexander preferred an audience when he wrote on the blog and made significant contributions to the class blog through his comments.

DISCUSSION

This study was formative, broad and holistic, encompassing all of the students and their families and creating a new dynamic in the classroom. The day the blogging instruction began, the lesson topic was written on the writers’ workshop section of the white board.

Students were engaged, and remained so throughout the duration of this study. Whether it was reading another student's blog, their own blogs, commenting, or setting goals, students looked forward to blogging, and during these lessons all students were interested and attentive. Students were thoughtful of their own writing as well as of that of their classmates, creating a collaborative environment within the classroom. Students looked closely at each piece of writing, and they began to notice content as well as mechanics. Their job was not to critique, but rather to "push" or "praise."

The student author chose two classmates who could either offer a compliment or ask a question to address something the classmate thought could be improved. The process was similar to one they knew: the author's chair (Graves & Hansen, 1983), so it was an easy transition to blog comments. However, the classroom teacher was concerned that her students would be highly critical of one another, but it was also possible that students would simply want to speak kindly to one another or think that being too harsh would affect their relationships on the playground. It is also reasonable to suggest they realized that when it was their turn to blog, those same students would respond to their writing. However, none of these situations occurred.

There were students who avoided pointing out any shortcomings of student writing, and these students focused on praise. Some of these praises were generic, such as Bailey's comment on Heather's blog, "I think you did an outstanding job!" However, there were few comments that did not provide any information to the writer about what was effective or ineffective. Even a simple response was helpful, such as Hallie's comment on Maxine's blog, "I like how you said which steakhouse it was." Maxine decided to use this particular response as her goal-setting comment. Hallie had let Maxine know that she liked the detail in her writing, encouraging Maxine to use more detail. As a result, Maxine's writing goal became, "I would like to focus on Hallie's push because I would like to include more details than expected."

Comments were a critical component in this study. The comments were the opportunity for student authors to see evidence their writing had been read and thoughtfully considered (see Figure 7). Alexander, when sick for several days, commented from home with the help of his mother. The students were excited by the idea that even though he was not present, he elected to be a part of class through the use of the blog.

Feedback via comments were at first uncomfortable for Benjamin, a quiet boy who enjoyed making others laugh. He made these attempts even in his writing. On the day he would hear his comments he said, "No, that's okay, I don't really want to hear my comments." The teacher reviewed the comments, and replied, "Benjamin, I think you're going to be happy with what your classmates had to say." He then agreed and listened as the comments were read aloud: "I liked your details about where this took place," "It was very funny and you may want to improve your spelling," "I really liked your writing because it was really funny," "I like how you described Jack-Jack. I also have a dog," "What did your parents say about the broken TV?," and "I really liked your story because it

Figure 7. Student Blog Entry

<p>Benjamin's blog Monday, March 22, 2010</p> <p>Einstein, my dog, is vary fluffy. Jack-Jack, mycat, is fluffier. Einstein is bigger and Jack-Jack is smaller. Einstein and Jack-Jack are vary different. Einstein's theory is: "you exist, therefore I love you." Jack-Jack's theory is "you exist, therefore I don't like you." Einstein is not smart and Jack-Jack is smart. One day my cat was walking neksto my dog. My dog chased mycat to the pantry. My cat closed the door and ate all my candy! then he ran behind the T.V. My dog ran there too and he brok the t.v.! I grabed my cat and took him away. The chasse was over.</p>
<p>7 Comments:</p>
<p>Charlie I liked your details. Monday, March 22, 2010 - 01:35 PM</p>
<p>Jenson Where did this take place? Monday, March 22, 2010 - 01:35 PM</p>
<p>Jamie Einstein and Jack-Jack 5/1/10 4:39 PM It was very funny. You may want to improve your spelling. Monday, March 22, 2010 - 01:37 PM</p>
<p>Nancy I really liked your writing because it was really funny. Monday, March 22, 2010 - 01:49 PM</p>
<p>Hallie I like how you described Jack-Jack. I also have a dog. Monday, March 22, 2010 - 01:49 PM</p>
<p>Alex What did your parents say about the broken TV? Wednesday, March 24, 2010 - 01:31 PM</p>

was funny. You may want to check your spelling and capitalization." After the teacher finished reading the comments aloud, the attention turned to Benjamin who smiled proudly. Surprisingly, when he chose a comment from which to form his writing goal, he chose a "push" comment instead of one of the several comments praising him for being "funny." Benjamin went from fearing what his classmates would say, to smiling, and gracefully accepting the comments that focused on improvement.

IMPLICATIONS

As the findings suggest, key positive outcomes of using blogging as a tool for improving writing instruction center around instruction that focuses on how students become aware of the audience for their written work and adjusted their writing accordingly.

1. *Students developed a concern for what the audience thinks.* When students saw comments posted, they heard the voices of their audience in direct response to their writing. The writer was not there with the writing to clarify and explain, rather, the writing

had to stand on its own. Most students were excited by this idea, and enjoyed sharing their writing with and hearing comments from an audience. A few students did not, but even these students developed an awareness of their audience.

2. *Thinking about the audience motivated the majority of students to make changes to their writing.* Part of the inspiration for this study came from the teacher's frustration with the time she devoted to conferring with students and improving writing, while the majority of students were satisfied to write their pieces and be finished. However, blogging changed the situation. When students posted their writing to a blog, they were held accountable by their peers. They received comments from a variety of people, and in the end, 93% of the students stated they would make improvements to their writing if they knew someone would read it.
3. *Students understanding of audience increased even when they knew they would not be given direct feedback.* Although the children knew that not all of their writing would appear on the blog, their comments and behaviors suggested they were writing for an audience larger than themselves. As a result, their willingness to edit their pieces, use detail and descriptive language, and ask for peer editing increased.

Audience awareness is an abstract cognitive concept with which even accomplished adult writers struggle from time to time. In this study, the second-grade participants demonstrated that blogging technology can help young authors construct an understanding of what the audience for their written work might require to fully understand the text and to connect to the writer as co-constructors of the intended message. The immediacy of the feedback made possible through blog posts assisted student authors to become increasingly aware of those who might read their work. Subsequently, they revised and drafted their work accordingly.

The authors understand that some children may not have computers and Internet access in their homes, but we hope that practitioners will implement the ideas presented in this article, and send home print copies of the blogs to afford parents the opportunity to join the audience who appreciate the children's writing.

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APPENDIX A

Pre-Instruction Survey

1. Who do you think will read your animal report?
2. Does it matter to you if somebody reads your animal report?
Why?
3. Would you change anything such as vocabulary, ideas, or spelling if you knew somebody was going to read your writing?
Why or why not?
4. What was your purpose in writing your animal report?
5. Do you prefer to write for an audience or just for yourself?