



Literacy 2.0

Blogging to develop written fluency in first grade



Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
I. Abstract.....	4
II. Out of the Mouths of Babes: A Student’s Response to Blogging.....	5
III. Research Perspective	6
i. Background.....	6
ii. Initial Planning for Action Research.....	7
Theoretical Framework.....	9
I. Context.....	9
II. Literature Review.....	10
i. Literacy 2.0	10
ii. Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Perspective on Learning and Language.....	12
iii. Egan’s Imaginative Approach to Literacy Instruction	15
II. Development of the Issues	19
i. Writing as Communication	19
ii. Mediation of Writing Conventions	20
iii. Selection of Engaging Writing Activities	22
iv. The Potential Benefits of Blogging.....	25
Portrait of Action Research	28
I. Research Design.....	28
II. Project Overview	31
III. Experiential Data and Interpretation.....	33
i. Introductory Activity: Paper Blogging	33
ii. The Paint Application: Students Prefer Drawing Over Taking Photographs.....	36
iii. Writing for an Audience: The Importance of Blog Comments.....	42
iv. The “No Spelling Questions” Rule: Fostering Self-Reliance and Peer Collaboration.....	44
v. The Hamburger Rubric: Transferring Responsibility to Students	51
vi. Blogging With Buddies: Collaboration and Role Reversal	53
vii. Assigned Topics: Success With Self-Directed Writing	56
viii. Student Responses to Blogging: Concluding Interviews and Surveys	60
Summary and Conclusions	64

References	68
Appendices.....	72
Appendix A: Informed Consent Documents	72
Appendix B: Assessment Tools and Preliminary Student Writing Samples	77
Appendix C: Pre-Study Survey on Student Attitudes Towards Writing Activities	90
Appendix D: Writing Quality Blog Comments	99
Appendix E: Hamburger Rubric Analogy and Class-Generated Criteria	100
Appendix F: Post-Study Survey on Student Attitudes Towards Blogging Activities	102
Appendix G: Selected Images of Students Blogging	111

Introduction

I. Abstract

Modern applications of Vygotskian theories on mediation emphasize the need for designing authentic writing activities which engage students by providing a variety of audiences rather than just the teacher. In addition, current research in literacy instruction highlights a need to establish effective practices that integrate technology into regular classroom routines and address the evolving literacy skills required in the digital age of the 21st century. This action research study explores how blogging can be employed to facilitate the development of written fluency in a first grade classroom. Blogging sessions using iPads were integrated into the daily Language Arts routine over a six-week period, taking the place of regular journal writing and other genre-specific writing activities. Additional sessions took place during other subject-specific periods including Math, Science, and Social Studies. The findings from this study indicate that providing an expanded and responsive audience will result in meaningful and engaging writing experiences for students and increase their motivation to write. While the use of iPads provided the initial motivation to engage students in blogging, receiving comments on their posts sustained students' engagement throughout the project, and provided a meaningful context for the development of literacy skills.

II. Out of the Mouths of Babes: A Student's Response to Blogging

March 14th: The room is oppressively quiet as my students have happily departed for their two weeks of Spring Break. Fighting hard against end-of-term fatigue, I sift through the video interviews recorded earlier that afternoon. I had asked the students to pair up and interview each other about their experience with our six-week blogging project, hoping that they would be more forthcoming with their peers. While certain that the responses would be charming in ways that only young children's personal accounts can be, I had reservations about whether the interviews could reveal any useful insights into the overall effectiveness of the blogs. Could a group of six and seven year-olds articulate their experiences clearly enough to provide evidence for my conclusions?

The second-to-last interview conducted was with a second language learner who, though a dedicated and hard-working student, often needs support with tasks and is limited in his ability to communicate clearly. Yet, out of all eighteen interviews, it was this student's response to the question "What was your favourite post?" that best exemplified the connections I was hoping to draw. Feeling almost foolish in my relief, I actually raised both arms and cheered upon hearing his answer: "Angry birds," he responded. "Why?" prompted the interviewer. "Because..." he hesitated, a shy smile spreading across his face, "... it got lots of comments."

III. Research Perspective

i. Background

In 2010 I secured a continuing contract at my practicum school in Burnaby; however the offer required making a transition from teaching Grades 3 – 5 to Grade 1. My central focus in adapting my teaching for the early primary grades has been on the development of practices that will equip my students with foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Initially I was concerned with the development of my students' reading fluency and investigated the manner in which the advent of e-book readers and tablets might be changing the nature of literacy. I was curious about whether regular use of these devices by young children was reshaping the process by which children learn to read and might lead us to redefine our understanding of reading development in years to come. Conversely, I have encountered more significant student resistance towards writing tasks than reading activities, which has necessitated a shift in the focus of my research to address writing instruction.

Concurrent with my transition to teaching grade one, my school underwent major renovations which, coupled with the addition of a French Immersion program, provided funding and administrative support for equipping our school with a wide array of technology. Each teacher now has access to a laptop or iPad and many have both; classes can sign out a cart with thirty iPads and another with thirty laptops for student use; and nearly every classroom has been equipped with an interactive whiteboard projector. Obviously the considerable allocation of funds required to outfit our school with all of these tools results in significant pressure on our staff to integrate technology into our everyday teaching practices. As the official Technology Liaison, I have the added responsibility of advising and supporting the rest of the staff as they attempt to embed the use of these tools into their teaching. I am personally responsible for

ensuring that we integrate technology in meaningful and effective ways and not as a superficial novelty.

As part of my quest to seek out innovative teaching practices I enrolled in the Imaginative Education Master's Degree program at Simon Fraser University. In my third semester I investigated the application of Lev Vygotsky's (1896 – 1934) concepts on mediation to emergent writing instruction. The literature places strong emphasis on the need for designing authentic writing activities that engage students in writing for a variety of audiences. As a result of my reflection on these findings, I decided to explore internet blogging as a method of supporting the development of my first-grade students' written fluency. I hypothesized that blogging would provide a wider audience for my students' writing, subsequently increasing their engagement in the act of writing and encouraging students to reflect on the clarity of their writing.

ii. *Initial Planning for Action Research*

I developed this action research project in order to explore my theories on the effectiveness of blogging. My research was conducted under the guidance of Dr. Mark Fettes and with the support of critical friends, including the SFU Imaginative Education M.Ed. cohort and the Burnaby School District Learning Technologies team. I planned to set up individual student blogs that could be accessed and updated with using the student iPads. Initial lessons would include instruction in personalizing the blogs, establishing a code of conduct, and discussing safety and privacy concerns. Time would be allotted for daily blog posts during our morning Language Arts routine. Students would also be expected to visit each other's blogs and leave comments. If the students proved responsive to this process I hoped to expand the use of the blogs to our other subject areas.

In the development phase of my project I identified several issues that needed to be addressed in the planning process. The first issue that I was concerned with was the method by which I could measure my students' level of engagement throughout the project. My initial hypothesis about the effectiveness of blogging sprung from a basic assumption that increased student engagement in writing activities would lead to improvements in written fluency, essentially an elaboration on the old adage "practice makes perfect." In order to find evidence to support this assumption I would need to clarify what observed behaviour might indicate my students' engagement in specific writing activities. As I was conducting this project as a member of the Imaginative Education cohort, I also felt a need to meaningfully incorporate the principles of Imaginative Education into my planning.

It was important to be cognizant of potential privacy concerns from parents and administrators and proactively find solutions to avoid delays in implementing the project. Past experiences with school district-approved software tools incited apprehension that students in first grade might have difficulty mastering necessary technical skills in the short time period of the project. I had similar concerns regarding the manner in which technical issues, such as the notoriously unreliable network connectivity, could impact my ability to integrate blogging into our regular classroom routine. Despite the unpredictable nature of these factors, I felt confident that the reflective process of action research would allow for ongoing adaptations to accommodate any issues that might arise.

Theoretical Framework

I. Context

Allocation of resources, public perception of technology, and my own position as Technology Liaison all serve as external pressures to integrate technology into my own school. However, although the pressures exist, they do not provide instruction with regards to the manner in which integration should occur, nor do they illustrate a quantifiable benefit for the children during the integration process. It is generally assumed by teachers and parents that the integration of technology into educational practices will inevitably be a positive process, despite the fact that there are no clearly defined purposes and goals for its use.

My practical experiences and the research I have conducted to date have informed my perspective regarding effective manners of writing instruction. I believe that the key elements of effective writing instruction include explicitly teaching the writing process, providing opportunities for students to write for an audience other than the teacher, and establishing a clear purpose for writing. Over the course of the year, students contend with a wide variety of writing tasks, including journals, stories, poems, letters, reports, how-to instructions, timelines, and persuasive writing assignments. The “special helper” writes the morning message for the class to read our daily calendar routine and a picture of the message is posted on our class website. All of these activities provide students with various opportunities to share their writing with each other, to showcase their writing on bulletin boards in the hall, and of course, to share with their parents when they take work home.

The most frequent writing activity in which my students engage is their daily journal writing. The primary audience of the daily student journal entries is the teacher, although students may share their stories sporadically with their peers. This action research project

investigates whether blogging can effectively replace journal writing and provide a more meaningful writing experience by widening the audience the students are routinely writing for.

II. Literature Review

i. Literacy 2.0

As I reviewed relevant literature to help develop my proposal, I found numerous references to the term “Literacy 2.0.” The term is an appropriation of “Web 2.0,” a phrase coined at the turn of the millennium to denote the fundamental shift in the way the World Wide Web was being crafted and used.¹ Educational theorists have adapted this concept of the web as a more dynamic medium, shaped by user-generated content, to describe the changing conception of literacy. In their introduction to *Literacy 2.0: Reading and Writing in 21st Century Classrooms*, Frey, Fisher, and Gonzalez (2010) explain:

“Literacy 2.0 represents a shift, not a replacement. Whereas literacy 1.0 was about access to information, literacy 2.0 is about finding, using, producing, and sharing information. The audience is now the world, and students expect to collaborate, interact, and participate with others across time and space” (p. 1).

The reconceptualization of literacy elucidates my position that there has been a dramatic change to the foundational skills of reading and writing that my students are expected to develop. I believe that student collaboration and integration of technology are crucial to the effective instruction of this “new literacy.”

Though specific trends change, pressure on educators to incorporate the latest technological developments into their everyday teaching practices is hardly a recent phenomenon. Perry (2013) presents a historical overview of technology and its influence on literacy; she traces waves in educational technology from lead pencils and slate tablets through to the advent of radio, film, television, word processors, personal computers, up to current trends in

¹ <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>

handheld touchscreen devices. Each new technology promises to revolutionize boring and lifeless teaching despite research that repeatedly shows “that the success or failure of the technology depend[s] entirely on the teacher” (p. 4). With each wave, similar issues arise that inhibit teachers’ abilities to meaningfully integrate technology into their practices: a lack of adequate funding for schools and training for teachers; limited research into effective applications; and constraints on time that fail to allow educational practices to evolve in response changing social dynamics. If these issues are not addressed, any implementation of educational technology is superficial at best.

The most recent trend in technology that has had a significant impact on literacy education is the rapid development and widespread availability of handheld touchscreen devices. In their 2011 study *Living in the iworld*, literary researchers O’Mara and Laidlaw discuss the impact that regular exposure to mobile devices has on the literacy practices of pre-school-aged children and the resulting consequences for instruction as these children begin elementary school. Young children engage with technology at home in diverse ways – they select content on YouTube, use Skype to communicate with out of town family, they record, edit and share images and videos and interact with any number of readily available “apps.” Their interaction enables the development of their capacity to direct information and produce their own digital content. O’Mara and Laidlaw assert that children are engaged, “as active participants in evolving technologies, and as creators, designers and experts” (2011, p. 152) – a fundamental shift from traditional concepts of students as more passive recipients of knowledge.

The implications of the changes to the collection and dissemination of information are echoed in Pilgrim and Bledsoe’s (2013) discussion of twenty-first century literacy education. Web 2.0 technologies enable greater collaboration as students engage with each other by reading,

sharing, and contributing to online texts. These activities “facilitate a constructivist approach to learning [which] builds on the work of John Dewey and Lev Vygotsky, and puts the student at the center of the learning process as an active participant” (Pilgrim & Bledsoe 2013, p. 29).

However, Pilgrim and Bledsoe caution that “traditional reading instruction may not be sufficient to provide skills students need for online reading contexts, as students encounter non-linear and multimodal information during online interaction... online reading requires a complex set of literacy skills that are still being understood and studied by researchers” (2013, p. 40). In order to properly mediate students’ development through the use of Web 2.0 tools, teachers need to have a thorough understanding of the corresponding skills and strategies required for online comprehension.

ii. *Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Perspective on Learning and Language*

The literature on Literacy 2.0 is rife with references to the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896 – 1934). Vygotsky’s theories on social and cultural concepts for learning and mediation of learning through cultural tools are hailed as essential to our understanding of new literacies by researchers such as Frey, Fisher, and Gonzalez (2010). In a discussion of the interactive and collaborative nature of Literacy 2.0 activities they state: “whereas literacy 1.0 was about access to information...literacy 2.0 is about finding, using, producing, and sharing information... and students expect to collaborate, interact and participate with others” (2010, p. 1). The depiction of the social situation of learning is echoed in McGinnis’ (2013) argument for a distinctly Vygotskian approach of “systematic instruction” through “motivating activities that allow children choice and ownership of their literacy experiences” (p. 64).

The importance of Vygotsky’s work to effective literacy instruction lies in the understanding that as language is acquired it forms the very basis of our conceptual

understanding of the world. Literacy, argue Egan and Gajdamaschko (2003), “is not only the mechanics of writing to which a child is being introduced in school but the whole new system of cognitive psychological tools that literature has historically stored within itself” (p. 8).

Vygotskian theory (2012) states that learning is the process of acquiring cultural tools which engender the development of conceptual thought. The acquisition of language in particular shapes the uniquely human aspects of the way that people think and engage in the world. The development of literacy skills is heavily emphasized in the first years of school. A student’s future success in formal schooling hinges on their ability to read and write with fluency and comprehension.

Egan and Gajdamaschko (2003) neatly summarize the significance of literacy and its impact on education:

The invention of writing transformed the educator’s task. Increasingly, as literacy developed, significant amounts of knowledge were stored in coded form. Access to this store was attained only through becoming skilled in literacy. Consequently, all literate cultures invented some formal system of education into coding and decoding knowledge (pp. 83-84).

Unfortunately, simply agreeing on the importance of the system of coding and decoding knowledge does little to inform teachers on best practices of formal writing instruction.

Traditional early primary writing instruction places significant emphasis on the coding system; it restricts writing in the first years of formal schooling to meaningless rote practice of letter formation and phonetic letter-sound relationships. Students perfect their penmanship and spelling and memorize a progressive list of high-frequency sight words while remaining completely divorced from the rich communicative powers of written language. Other colleagues insist that learning to write should be an independent discovery process, unique to each student. The belief is that exposure to print is sufficient to develop students’ understanding of written

language and teachers should attempt to avoid any systematic instruction of rules. Unfortunately, this approach leaves students with fragmented, episodic knowledge of the system of written language.

Both approaches fail to engage students in the fundamental purpose of writing – communication. Students should understand writing as a social act, one that is used to exchange information, thoughts, or ideas with others. Cohen and Riel (1989) argue that teachers must draw students’ attention to their audience:

“Writing is usually directed to others for a specific purpose. An exception to this is the writing that children routinely do in classrooms. Students usually learn to write in schools by first writing words, then isolated sentences, and only later paragraphs – all outside of a communicative context” (p. 143).

The emphasis of either rote skill practice or unguided discovery of written language in the first years of schooling denies students the opportunity to practice performing the abstractions of thought required to plan for a writing task. Students need to be taught to conceptualize the absent reader to whom their writing should be addressed. Vygotsky’s (2012) theories on learning and development emphasize an inextricable relationship between thought and language and offer a far more engaging approach to instructing students on the processes of writing.

In his treatise *Thought and Language*, Vygotsky (2012) asserts that in order “to devise successful methods of instructing the schoolchild in systematic knowledge it is necessary to understand the development of scientific concepts in the child’s mind” (p.155). The internalization of language as verbal thought shapes the unique way human beings make sense of the world. While heavy emphasis is placed on the acquisition of literacy skills in schools, if teachers are not aware of the relationship between language and thinking they cannot properly mediate students’ learning. Writing enables students to move from spontaneous to scientific thinking because it allows for analysis of language and subsequent introspection of thought.

Effective writing instruction requires deliberate emphasis on the communicative nature of written speech. It is futile to attempt to instruct students in the conventions of writing without first drawing their attention to the inherent usefulness of written language. Vygotsky (2012) clearly emphasizes that motivation to write must precede mediation of writing conventions:

The child has little motivation to learn writing when we begin to teach it. He feels no need for it and has only a vague idea of its usefulness. In conversation, every sentence is prompted by a motive... The motives for writing are more abstract, more intellectualized, further removed from immediate needs. In written speech, we are obliged to create the situation, to represent it to ourselves (p.192).

This obligation to “create the situation” for writing is the principle concept that must be made clear for students before any other instruction in conventions can begin. Students are not motivated to write if they do not see the need for it.

The implication is not that letter formation and conventional spelling are unimportant topics; rather that they are not an effective entry point with which to engage young children in the process of learning to write. Once students are familiar with the communicative purpose of writing they can be drawn forward on the developmental continuum of written language. In their work developing Washington state literacy standards that align with a theoretical Vygotskian framework, Bodrova et al. (2000) delineate a “predictable but not rigid sequence of accomplishments” (p. 11). They insist that students must first know that the purpose of writing is to communicate before they can be expected to apply the alphabetic principle and other complex conventions of writing.

iii. Egan’s Imaginative Approach to Literacy Instruction

The final aspect of the theoretical framework in which my research is grounded is the principles of Dr. Kieran Egan’s Imaginative Education theory. Egan’s work, also heavily influenced by Vygotsky, proposes that imaginative teaching practices can reshape foundational

literacy instruction to be more engaging and effective. The three foundations of Egan's (2006) Imaginative Literacy Program are: the application of Vygotsky's theories on the development of cognitive tools; the examination of how thinking develops in traditional oral cultures; and the routine engagement of students' imaginations through alternative planning frameworks. The challenge for educators lies in knowing "how to stimulate, use, and develop these tools to enhance students' understanding and their literacy skills" (p. 10). The importance of Vygotsky's work to Egan's conception of effective literacy instruction lies in the understanding that as language is acquired it forms the very basis of our conceptual understanding of the world.

In the preface to *Teaching Literacy: engaging the imagination of new readers and writers*, Egan (2006) states that a part of the novelty of the imaginative approach is the extension of Vygotsky's cognitive tools – those "*features of our minds that shape the ways we make sense of the world around us*" (vi) – to literacy instruction. The cognitive toolkit of oral language, as defined by Egan, consists of: the story form, the flexible use of metaphor; vivid images, binary opposites, rhyme and rhythm, and jokes and humor (p. viii). These tools engage emotions and the imagination, promote flexible thinking, aid memory and organization, and make language visible, bringing an increasing awareness and control of the seemingly arbitrary nature of the symbolic language used in writing.

Imaginative literacy practitioners make use of cognitive tools to extend their students' understanding of written language far beyond the mechanics and conventions of writing. Egan (2006) maintains that "everything we want children to learn about literacy was invented long ago for human purposes and is attached to human hopes, fears, and passions" (p. 57). Successful literacy instruction "requires us to engage the feelings of our students in what we want them to learn" (p. 3). He cautions that the failure to emotionally connect students with the cognitive

toolkit of literacy reduces literacy learning “to a crude acquisition of skills removed from what can give them life and meaning” (p. 58). Egan emphasizes the importance of the story form, or narrative, as the most important of all the cognitive tools. Storytelling is highlighted as a necessary skill that enables teachers to enrich their lessons and deliver content more effectively.

The power of the story form lies in its ability to “shape content of any kind, true or fictional, into emotionally satisfying forms” (Egan 2006, p. 6). Stories provide us with a greater understanding of events and information because they “shape experience and knowledge into forms that can uniquely establish their emotional meaning... no other form of language can do this” (5). The conceptualization of lessons and units of study in narrative form “can help to bring some extra energy and interest into teaching and learning” (p. 15). Egan recognizes that teachers might be overwhelmed by the task of transforming standard curricular content into a fictional narrative. While relating an example of teaching the symbols for numbers in a Kindergarten class, he assures educators that it is not necessary to “make up a complicated story in order to personalize the ingenuity involved in counting systems” but rather more useful and significant to provide “a simplified account of historical development” in order to acknowledge what individual people discovered or invented long ago (p. 9). The purpose of Egan’s narrative is to emotionally connect students’ to a moment of historical ingenuity, which allows them to feel like a participant in the remarkable adventure of human development.

Another example from Egan (2006) demonstrates the use of the story form in teaching the conventions of language. In order to circumvent feelings of frustration and confusion in students struggling with the overwhelming complexity of English spelling and pronunciation, Egan suggests that teachers create “a stock comic character who has come from another country or another planet and is trying to learn about the local language and its written form” (p. 11).

Students take on the role of teacher or guide for the character and share their knowledge of language conventions. This process enables students to relish in their successes and existing knowledge rather than focusing on what they have not learned yet or have trouble remembering. The process by which the story is used as a cognitive tool in teaching is not about the creation of fictional narratives; rather, the story shapes content in order to draw out the “human meaning and importance” of a topic (Egan 2006, p. 19).

Egan (2006) gives a less extensive discussion on applications of the remainder of the cognitive toolkit of oral language – metaphor; vivid images, binary opposites, rhyme and rhythm, and jokes and humor – in imaginative literacy instruction. Skilled use of metaphor encourages students to view and reflect on language as an object. Egan recommends the use of metaphor to promote metalinguistic awareness and help students gain power over language (p. 33). The use of metaphor relies heavily on the provision of vivid images that direct students’ attention to the central concepts of a topic. Oral storytelling is promoted over reading picture books because physical pictures “limits each student to the one shared representation” (Egan 2006, p. 16).

Egan (2006) also argues that storytelling allows teachers to take advantage of “another principle of learning commonly evident in children’s thinking before literacy takes over their minds” – the location of conflicting forces, or binary opposites, such as good and evil (p. 27). Engagement with binary opposites allows teachers to gradually expand students’ understanding by introducing concepts that emerge between two extremes. Rhyme and rhythm introduce students to language patterns and their potential for humour can “increase both the impact and the pleasure of literacy” (Egan 2006, p. 44). Finally, Egan highlights the possible instructional uses of jokes and humor, topics “not often discussed in books about teaching literacy” (p. 39). Metalinguistic awareness is required in order to appreciate the humor of word-play; subsequently

jokes challenge students to “see” language objectively and aid their ability to manipulate it and use it with increasing flexibility. Therefore, “any sensible program... will recognize humor as a *constituent* of adequate orality and literacy” (p.39).

Egan’s (2006) recommendations for an imaginative approach to literacy instruction are built on a foundational assertion that “we are not genetically predisposed to become literate” (p.132). He compares the “initial effortless articulation” of children learning to talk with “the so often hard, hard work of acquiring literacy” and explains that while the latter “is supported by our evolutionary development; the other is a technical invention of a few thousand years ago” (p. 133). Egan insists that the best way to ensure success for all students is for the teacher to emphasize the toolkit of oral language with which students are universally equipped and recognize that “orality develops, whereas literacy is learned” (p. 132).

II. Development of the Issues

This study explores the theory that writing for an audience will enhance engagement and motivation and subsequently support student development in writing. The belief that the integration of technology into the regular classroom routines is essential for the development of evolving literacy skills required in the digital age of the 21st century also informs my research design. My study attempts to apply principles of imaginative literacy instruction throughout its course. Prior to the commencement of the study, I determined that further research was required in order to establish which specific writing activities could incorporate the three aspects of writing for an audience; integration of technology; and imaginative literacy instruction.

i. Writing as Communication

Vygotsky (2012) asserts that oral language develops naturally out of “living communication with other people,” (p. 45) whereas written language “is vastly more abstract and

arbitrary” (p. 45) and requires proper motivation to master. In oral conversation a child’s speech is prompted by the other participant. Written speech is “addressed to an absent or an imaginary person or to no one in particular – a situation new and strange to the child” (p.192). Though writing is still an act of conversation, the absence of tangible audience makes the process more abstract. Teachers need to select writing tasks that help students create a strong mental image of their audience.

Egan’s (2006) imaginative approach envisions lessons and activities that engage students on a personal level by acknowledging “literacy as a human activity” (p. 14). Students develop cognitive tools as they interact with each other, with language, and with the world around them. Dyson and Freedman (1990) also describe writing as “a cultural tool, one that members of a society use to carry on their lives together” (p. 2). They point out that “children... are first introduced to literacy within their homes and communities and within the social and emotional context of relationships” through activities such as list-making for shopping trips, phone messages, and ‘I love you’ notes from child to parent (p. 2). Students must be encouraged to view writing as yet another way to engage in conversations. They must also understand written language as something with which they can be playful as this will increase students' sense of ownership over their writing.

ii. *Mediation of Writing Conventions*

Once the communicative purposes of writing have been established, teachers can utilize tools such as external mediators and visual models for supporting student development in writing. Potential mediators are easy to identify in most primary classrooms – anchor charts, alphabet lines, word walls, and graphic organizers such as Venn diagrams, word maps, and concept webs. Difficulties arise when teachers provide students with these tools to use as writing

aids but fail to explicitly demonstrate their utility. Teachers must model the precise use of a new tool then engage students in using it with gradually decreasing support until they are able to use it independently. Bodrova and Leong (2007) assert that the simple presence of a mediator such as an alphabet poster is not sufficient because “unlike adults and older children, young children can only use mediators that are external and overt, because the use of mediation is not yet integrated into their thought patterns” (p.51).

In their discussion of mediational tools Bodrova and Leong (2007) make reference to a student attempting to spell the word “make.” She looks at the alphabet poster on the wall, spies an image of “moon,” identifies the similar sound at the beginning of the two words and diligently copies the letter “m” from the poster onto her paper. This process does not arise spontaneously – it requires explicit modeling and repeated practice with gradually decreasing support. The teacher must “think out loud” for the students while modeling each step in the process – isolating the “m” sound at the beginning of “make,” locating the alphabet poster as a source of information, recognizing the similar beginnings of the words “moon” and “make,” associating the letter “m” with the sound “mmm,” and reproducing the figure on paper. The process is then repeated with the teacher asking leading questions to guide student participation: “What sound do you hear at the beginning?”; “What other word starts with that sound?”; “What word do you see on the poster that starts with that sound?”; “What letter makes that sound?”; “How do we draw that letter?” and other similar questions. Teachers cannot hope to maintain students’ interest in this lengthy process without first stimulating their desire to communicate in writing.

One of the mediational tools I provide to my students is a “spelling dictionary” – a notebook which contains alphabetized lists of frequently used words. Effective use of the dictionaries is largely dependent on reading ability. Students reading at or above grade level have

little difficulty determining the correct first letter of a word they are attempting to spell, and scanning the page for the desired word. They either locate the word and copy it, or determine its absence and ask for me to write it on one of the allotted spaces for the corresponding first letter. Unfortunately, this task becomes increasingly difficult for those reading below grade-level. The more a student reads, the higher the number of printed words to which they are exposed, and in greater frequency. They have seen printed form of the word, and are able to “call it up” in their mind when attempting to write it. Not so for more reluctant or struggling readers. Those who persevere in using their dictionary may be frustrated by their inability to read the listed words to find the word they are looking for, and ask for the word to be pointed out. Further complicating the issue, beginning readers may incorrectly identify the first letter of the desired word, and be searching on the wrong page of their dictionary. Despite these challenges, I have observed that students will persevere in learning to use their spelling dictionaries when they are deeply engaged in writing activities. Throughout this study I will monitor student engagement through the effective use of mediational tools such as the spelling dictionaries.

iii. Selection of Engaging Writing Activities

In order to maintain students’ interest in writing instruction, teachers must select appropriate writing tasks that align with students’ knowledge and interests. Vygotsky (2004) draws on the work of contemporaries, Blonskii and Zhurin (1964), when he recommends specific writing tasks suitable for young children, i.e. notes, letters, short stories, and submissions for a class magazine. Letters, which Blonskii says are “the most widespread form of writing people do” (as cited in Vygotsky 2004, p.46), provide a clear social stimulus of communicating with a person who is not immediately present. A class magazine allows for a combination of diverse skills and “brings children’s creative writing closer to children’s life. The children begin to

understand why a person would want to write and... writing becomes a meaningful and necessary task” (p.66). An emphasis on the communicative purpose of writing alerts students to the necessity of mastering the rules of written speech. Once students are properly motivated to write they are more responsive to learning and applying these rules.

Teachers need to account for the limitations of students’ knowledge and understanding and recognize that assigned topics may fail to engage students’ emotions. Vygotsky (2004) argues that “very often a child writes badly because he has nothing he wants to write about” (p.46). When written language is introduced to students as an exchange of social information they engage more productively in constructing their understanding of the writing process, conventions of written language, and the purposes for writing.

In the process of selecting my research topic I reflected on the writing activities that currently comprise my instructional practice, and sought ways I might integrate technology into our regular Language Arts routine. In the interest of providing students with meaningful and engaging writing tasks I have implemented activities from Brailsford and Stead’s (2007) *Scholastic Literacy Place* writing guide. The topic of children choosing their own bedtimes is used to teach persuasive writing techniques. Students read a collection of “pro/con” arguments from a second grade class, discuss the effectiveness of the arguments, participate in brainstorming additional ideas, and write letters to their parents. After a review of the competing arguments for choosing their own bedtimes, my first and second grade students easily transition to writing persuasive articles about choosing different pets. Other genre-specific writing projects I assign include: writing fractured fairy tales (narrative fiction and humor), creating personal timelines (biographical reports), presenting research on selected animals (non-fiction reports), and creating class magazines (incorporates a variety of genres). I generally find my students

responsive to these projects as the topics allow them to draw on personal experiences and unique interests as source material for their writing.

Genre-specific writing projects are effective for introducing students to different purposes for writing. However, they are time-consuming and I must find ways to occupy the fast-finishers while I attempt to support the struggling writers. Students who struggle with the genre-specific writing projects experience difficulty for a multitude of reasons. Some students have underdeveloped fine motor control and find the act of writing physically challenging. Others have low self-regulation or attention problems and find it difficult to maintain focus on written tasks. Second-language learners often grapple with a limited vocabulary and adapting to different conventions of phrasing and grammar. All of these students can benefit from routine practice and our daily Language Arts routine is comprised of activities that are devised to help students develop the necessary skills for writing. These activities include printing worksheets on proper letter formation; phonics skill work that reinforces letter-sound relationships; and a spelling program that uses sorting, rhyming, and comprehension exercises.

The progress I observe in my students' skill development reinforces the use of these rote practice activities; however I believe it is also important to include more open-ended writing activities in our daily routine. Personal journal writing has typically satisfied this requirement as students select their own topics each day and the entries can be completed in a relatively short time. Students share their completed journal entries with the teacher and receive selective feedback on spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and content. They may be asked to make corrections or respond to a brief comment or question related to their chosen topic. The writing in student journals is usually supplemented with a hand-drawn illustration. Students at the beginning stages of writing development will often draw a picture and dictate a description of the

picture for the teacher to scribe. Drawing is widely considered a direct prerequisite to writing: Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the importance of the transition from “drawing of things to drawing of words” to help children “make a basic discovery – namely that one can draw not only things but also speech” (p. 115).

iv. *The Potential Benefits of Blogging*

In the course of my instructional practices and research of technological tools that enhance writing development, I hypothesized that blogging is an effective replacement for daily journal writing. I specifically target the journal writing portion of our Language Arts routine because it occurs year-round rather than the genre-specific writing projects, which only last for a few weeks. Should blogging prove effective, I would incorporate it throughout the school year. There are a multitude of iPad applications that could serve as replacements for the printing, phonics, and spelling practice activities, but implementing these would accomplish little more than substituting electronic worksheets for paper versions.

During the formulation of my action plan I reviewed additional research to find support for my hypothesis and gain insight from other studies on the effective introduction of blogging in the classroom. A significant amount of studies have been conducted in the upper intermediate and secondary grades. However, interest in the use of blogs and wikis in primary classrooms, particularly for developing literacy skills, is growing steadily. In their guide *Using New Web Tools in the Primary Classroom*, Barber and Cooper (2012) highlight three advantages to blogging as “a way of writing that is at once *authentic*, in the sense that it engages an audience; *extendable*, in the sense that it can be connected to other blogs and truly *sociable* in the sense that it can connect to a wide community of potential readers and collaborators” (p. 13).

Similar to journal entries, students can combine images and writing in blog posts to communicate on a selected topic. Barber and Cooper (2012) suggest that “composing a blog can be very stimulating as children not only communicate through the written word, but also by the use of pictures... and this may help take the ‘hard work’ out of writing” (p. 89). Writing and responding to blog comments engages students in the communicative purpose of writing as posts can be made easily accessible to a wide and responsive audience. In their study of fifth graders blogging, McGrail and Davis’ (2011) concluded that receiving and responding to comments helped make the concept of writing for an audience more concrete for students. They stated that “student bloggers’ active engagement with the audience supported their cognitive growth as writers” and fostered “a strong desire to write to communicate well” (p. 433).

Journal writing provides students with an opportunity to choose their own topics and draw on personal experiences for writing. Students develop conventional spelling, proper use of punctuation, and increasingly complex sentence structures as they strive to express their thoughts clearly in written language. Blogging offers similar opportunities for overall development of writing skills and “while a blog might not be associated with a ‘traditional’ literacy lesson, children are still confronting issues like the structure of writing, the application of punctuation and the appeal of the language incorporated in the composition” (Barber & Cooper 2012, p. 90).

Research also suggests that blogging can effectively address the wide disparity in reading and writing abilities commonly found in classrooms. The ability to integrate text and other media, such as images, videos and hyperlinks, “provides a different tool to the practitioner to entice disaffected readers to interact creatively with text [and] does not limit the more able reader who can find stimulating and challenging opportunities in the same environment” (Barber & Cooper 2012, p. 89). Any activity with the dual potential to motivate struggling learners while

providing a stimulating challenge for more advanced students is highly appealing. Teachers frequently grapple with the task of tailoring their instruction to accommodate a wide range of abilities.

Finally, blogging instead of journal writing can also promote the development of Literacy 2.0 skills alongside written fluency. Researchers and educational theorists continue to develop a clear definition of these skills and the particular implications for literacy instruction in the first years of schooling. Penrod (2007) argues that when students blog they “have to make a number of decisions related to the writing process that they would not have had to make in a paper-based writing environment” (p. 20), such as choosing whether to present content as written text, as an image or video, or as a link to off-site material. The public nature of blogs in comparison with most classroom writing requires students to “actively engage in meaning making for others” and to “make judgements about what information is presented, as well as *how* it is presented” (Penrod 2007, p. 20).

Portrait of Action Research

I. Research Design

At the outset of the project I had seventeen students in my Grade 1 class and one additional student slated to return from an extended holiday sometime in February. I planned to use surveys, interviews, and my own observations to gauge student engagement in writing tasks throughout the project. Data would also be collected on the frequency, length, and quality of the students' blog posts and comment and analyzed for patterns of activity and development. The project would be conducted over a six week period, culminating with the spring break school closure in mid-March. All students were expected to participate in the lessons and activities related to the project to satisfy Language Arts objectives for the second term. Had any parents chosen not to grant consent for their child's participation in the study, that student's related work samples and responses to activities would have been excluded from any data collection and analysis conducted for research purposes.²

A few parents shared concerns with me regarding the project. In my dual role as practitioner-researcher I felt that parent concerns merited consideration, regardless of their significance. The mother of one of my high-achieving students, who is exceeding grade-level expectations in writing, emailed me after discussing the project with her child. She informed me that during the discussion her child had expressed trepidation about others reading her blog. The parent thought that her explanation of a 'blog' had made the child equate it with a diary. I was surprised that this particular child would be reluctant to share her writing as she is usually confident and often assists her peers with assignments, using her own work as an example. I hoped this issue would be addressed when we discussed the purpose of the blogs in-class and I

² Refer to Appendix A to view consent forms and the letter to families.

was curious as to whether her written output would be negatively impacted by the public nature of the blog posts.

Another parent expressed apprehension that students would be writing in “text language,” such as abbreviating “you” to “u” and see to “c.” She also thought that the iPads’ auto-correction feature would hinder the students’ development of spelling skills. I reassured her that I would be conducting lessons and discussions about the importance of proper spelling, punctuation, spacing, and paragraphing in writing for an audience and in academic writing. Also, past observations of students typing on iPads inspired another mini-lesson topic on reviewing writing before publishing, as the auto-correct feature frequently offers incorrect suggestions based on the invented spelling of first graders. The final concern shared with me was from a parent who worried that her child would be off-task during blogging sessions, distracted by the other applications available on the iPad. I intended to address this issue by having the class create a “code of conduct” for using the iPads and establishing clear expectations for blogging sessions.

As my main focus was on the development of written fluency, the blogging sessions and related lessons and activities were primarily integrated into the daily Language Arts routine, and took the place of regular journal writing. I allotted time for additional blogging sessions and follow-up activities during other subject-specific blocks including Math, Science, and Social Studies as needed. The students used the school’s existing supply of iPads to access and update the blog site. I contacted our district Learning Technologies team to request a class blog site but was advised to set up my own site through Kidblog.org. The team considered the Kidblog interface more user-friendly for my first graders than the district’s WordPress blog sites. I set up our class site at www.kidblog.org/mrszebraszoo and downloaded the Kidblog application on to

the school's iPads. For security purposes, students used previously assigned animal code names³ for posting and commenting on the blogs and I conducted lessons and discussions regarding internet safety and privacy. I administered a pre-assessment⁴ of the students' written fluency based on their responses to the assigned topic "What is a Friend?" and selected journal entries.

Pre-Assessment – Rating Scale: Grade 1 Writing From Experience⁵

	Not Yet Within Expectations	Minimally Meets Expectations*	Fully Meets Expectations**	Exceeds Expectations
Class Total (17)	1	6	8	2
Girls (6)		1	4	1
Boys (11)	1	5	4	1
ESL level 1 (2)	1	1		
ESL level 3 (3)			3	

*Corresponds with report card category "Approaching Expectations"

**Corresponds with report card category "Meeting Expectations"





I also administered a survey to gauge the students' attitudes towards the various writing tasks they are assigned throughout the year.⁶ Students were asked to share their feelings towards each of the tasks, positive or negative, indicated by their selections from a four-point scale of "smiley faces." They were also prompted to explain their response in as much detail as possible. I planned to compare their responses to a similar survey about blog-related tasks at the conclusion of the study.

³ I began using my married name - Zebrowski - at school in September 2011 and was subsequently nicknamed "Mrs. Zebra". My class is referred to as "Mrs. Zebra's Zoo" and each September I select animal nicknames for my students that correspond with their first initial.

⁴ See Appendix B for specific assessment tools and student writing samples

⁵ See Appendix B for complete rating scale

⁶ See Appendix C for pre-study survey questions and sample student responses.

Pre-Study Survey: Student Attitudes Towards Writing Activities				
How do you feel about:				
	YUCK!	MEH	GOOD	AWESOME!
How do you feel about:	Number of Students:			
1) Writing in your journal?	5	3	6	3
2) Your turn to write the morning message?	1	3	3	10
3) Making your timeline? (Social Studies project)	3	3	5	6
4) Working in your Printing duotang?	5	3	6	3
5) Working in your Phonics duotang?	5	6	4	2
6) Doing Spelling?	2	5	4	6
7) Writing a Letter to someone in your free time?	3	6	3	5
8) Drawing in your drawing book?	1	1	6	9

See Appendix C for samples of students' detailed written responses

II. Project Overview

The project was officially launched on February 11th, 2014, with an introductory discussion on the concept of a blog and an adapted version of the “paper blogging” lessons I found online during the research design phase (Low 2007, Rockwood 2007). Student responses to the discussion prompt “what is a blog?” were limited, which indicated that they had not been exposed to the term. I introduced the concept of a captain’s log on a ship as a record of the events on a voyage and explained that the word “blog” is an abbreviation of the term “web log.” Students then wrote and illustrated paper-based “posts” on the topic “My Favourite Food.” My fellow teachers provided post-it note responses to the paper blog posts and I used these responses to introduce the concept of internet blogs receiving comments from site visitors.

Students were introduced to internet blogging through the Kidblog iPad application on February 13th and participated in daily blogging sessions until March 14th, 2014. The Kidblog application enabled students to easily insert images and videos from the iPad camera library into their posts. The Paint application was also introduced when it quickly became apparent that students preferred to include their own hand-drawn illustrations instead of photographs in their posts. The novelty of regular iPad use during class time and the excitement generated by receiving responses to their blog posts sustained students' interest in the project. Students associated the iPads with playtime and were intrigued by the idea that schoolwork could be completed without a pencil and paper. Therefore, they approached each blogging session with anticipation, and reviewed previous posts to determine what comments they had received. The excitement generated by the responsive aspect of the blogs motivated students to write and prompted their desire to communicate clearly. This desire helped clarify the importance of writing conventions such as correct spelling and proper use of punctuation.

A major challenge experienced over the course of the study was the unreliable network connection. Student progress during the blogging sessions was frequently delayed as they waited for their iPad to establish a connection, for their work to be published, or for the blog site to load. The need to support students with technical issues detracted from my ability to monitor student activity for on-task behaviour and cost valuable instructional time. Factors which contributed positively to the blog project and warrant further discussion include: petitioning comments from other teachers, my M.Ed. cohort and the students' families; introducing the Paint application; implementing a "no spelling questions" rule; hosting cooperative blogging sessions with our Grade 4 – 5 "buddy" class; and refraining from assigning specific post topics until later in the project.

III. Experiential Data and Interpretation

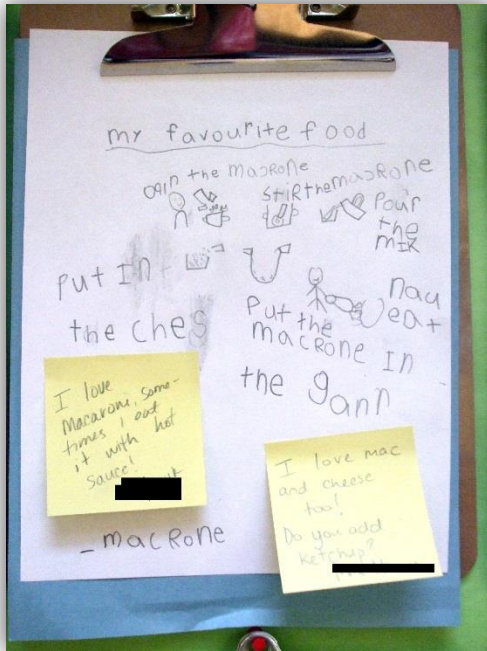
i. *Introductory Activity: Paper Blogging*

Inspiration for the paper blogging activity initially arose from the concern that technical issues could render the iPads unusable and entirely derail the project. In response to my proposal and these concerns, Dr. Mark Fettes suggested I develop a paper-based form of blogging to serve as the project's safety net. Though technical issues did present a challenge, we were still able to make effective use of the iPads. The suggested paper blogging activity served as an effective introduction to the project and helped students transition from journal writing to blogging.

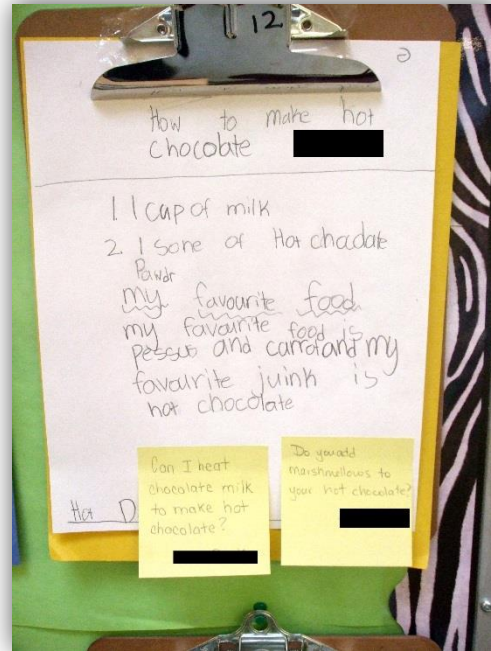
In the paper blogging activity, half of the class followed my example and drew pictures of food captioned with labels or brief descriptions. The other half wrote "how-to" instructions for preparing their favourite foods. I was pleasantly surprised that students took the initiative to structure their paper blog posts as "how-to" instructions, particularly since they had not yet received formal instruction in procedural writing this year.

I initially planned a follow-up lesson in which students would circulate with a set of post-it notes and post comments on the paper blogs. However I also wanted to conduct a discussion on what makes a good comment, as I speculated that some students would write very basic responses such as "good" or "nice." In order to avoid the use of student-generated comments as source material for the discussion, I enlisted the support of my fellow teachers, who posted comments on my sample during recess. The students were so engrossed during the creation of their posts that they required additional writing time and the comment discussion was postponed to the next day. Fortunately, the postponement provided me with time to reflect on the activity and I asked my fellow teachers to comment on the students' paper blogs after school. I believed

that gathering comments on the students' posts would help introduce the concept that blogs have visitors that serve as the audience for a blogger's writing.

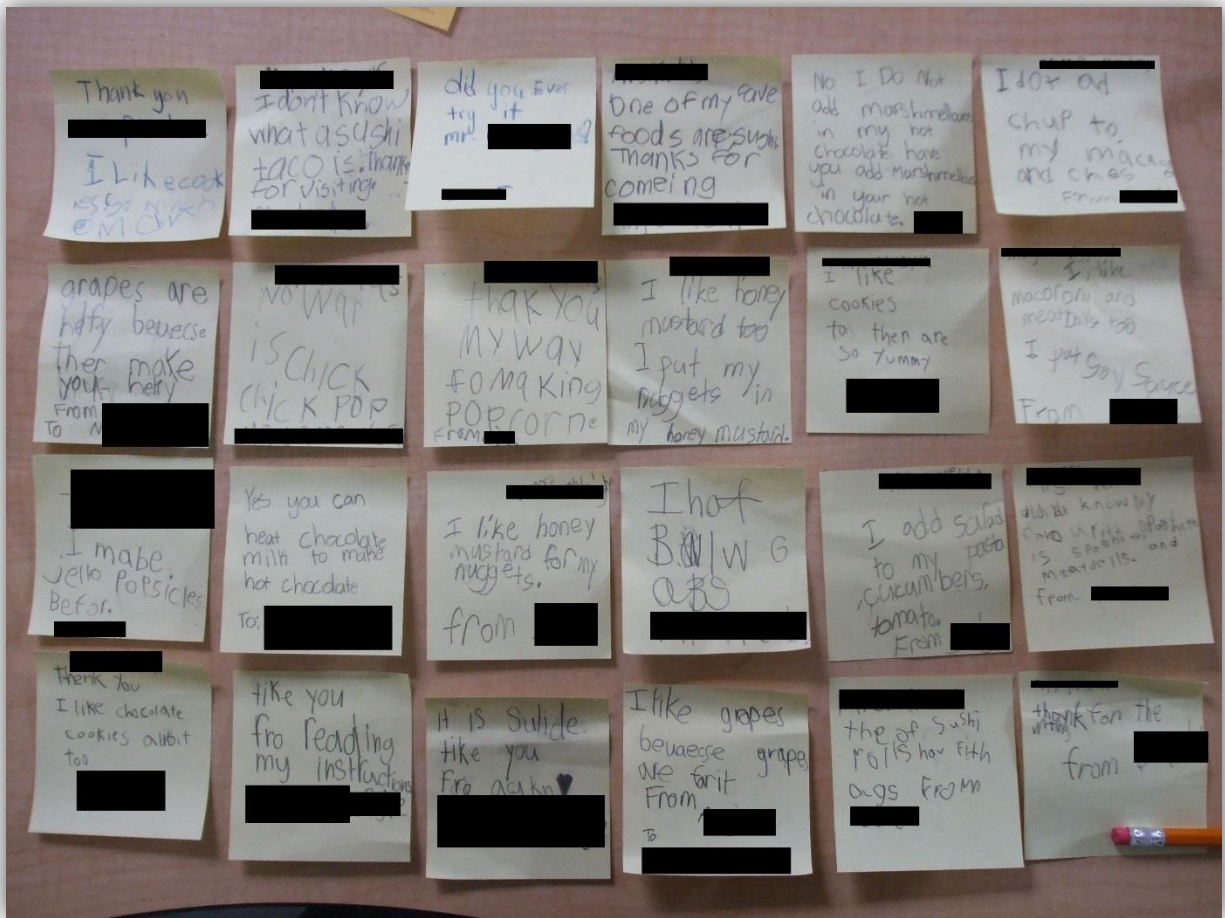


Tiger's instructions for making macaroni



Iguana's instructions for making hot chocolate

As I predicted, the students were excited by the “surprise visitors” – they immediately began reading and sharing the comments with each other. Students were asked to share the “best” comment they received, and through the subsequent discussion we came to the consensus that “a good comment makes you want to write back.” To reinforce the importance of this communicative exchange, I provided the students with post-it notes so they could reply to the teachers who commented.



Student replies - names removed

The paper blogging activity reinforced two central concepts of my study: that the integration of images with text enables students to communicate their ideas more clearly; and that a responsive audience increases engagement and motivation to write. Fortunately, the process of embedding images into posts in the Kidblog application was simple and easy to master, so I was confident that my students would be able to supplement their writing with pictures. My fellow teachers expressed that they enjoyed the post-it note comment activity and pledged their continued support of the blog project.

ii. *The Paint Application: Students Prefer Drawing Over Taking Photographs*

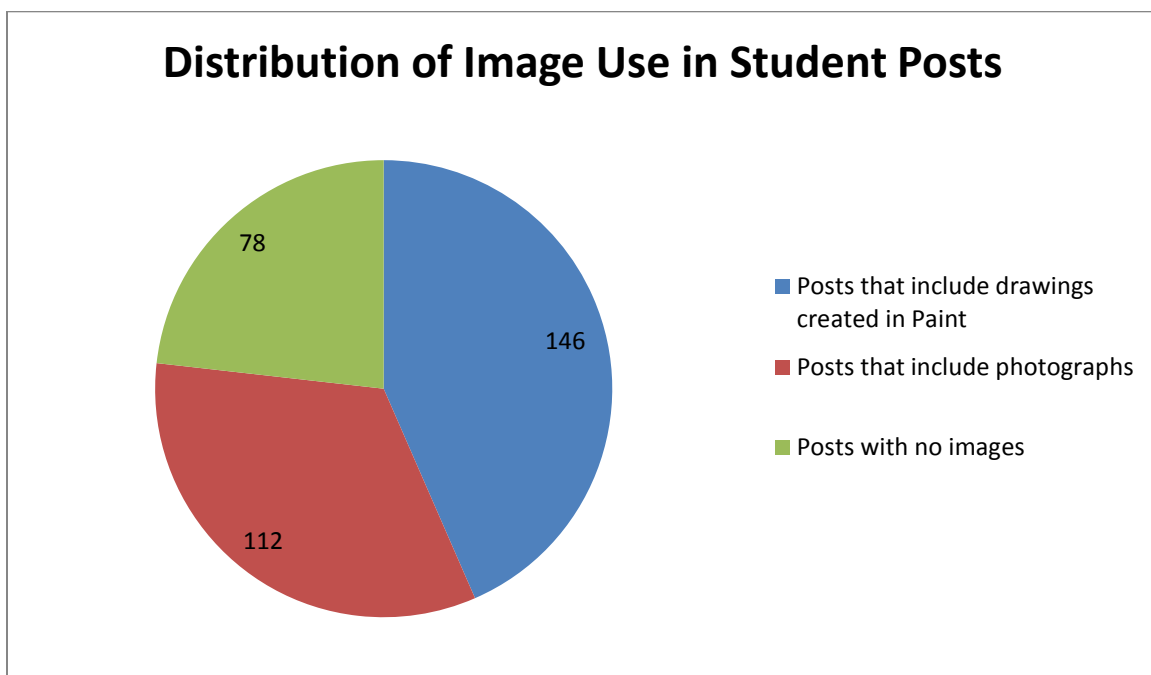
Our first iPad blogging session took place on February 13th. I felt overwhelmed by the volume of essential information that I needed to provide to the students before they could start blogging. This included: establishing and troubleshooting the wi-fi connection; locating and logging in to the Kidblog application; creating and publishing posts with inserted images; posting comments; and identifying safe blogging practices. The ability to connect my iPad to the projector for demonstrations proved invaluable at this stage. I strongly emphasized the need for students to exercise extreme patience during these preliminary blogging sessions. They were extremely cooperative and the classroom dynamic was hectic but manageable.

The students proved attentive to the lesson and all managed to successfully log in. Unfortunately, the demonstrations, discussion, and login procedures occupied forty-five minutes of the allotted hour. None of the students were able to successfully complete a post in the remaining fifteen minutes before recess. However they were highly engaged in the process, as evidenced by their focused attention on their own iPad. I was impressed by the curiosity and inventiveness displayed by several students. Two students asked if they could simply post a picture of their paper blog posts. I suggested that they recreate the information in the app instead. When faced with the desire to create their own image for their post rather than taking a picture, two other students independently decided to draw in their drawing notebooks and take a picture of the resulting illustration. Their clever improvisation indicated the need to introduce the Paint application for creating hand-drawn illustrations with the iPad.

When I informed the students that it was time to put the iPads away for recess I was met with a chorus of disappointed “aww’s.” Their obvious enthusiasm, coupled with the need to demonstrate the use of the Paint app, led me to extend the session after recess in place of our

scheduled Math lesson. After the additional forty-five minute session, eight of the seventeen students had successfully published a post, and five of the eight had viewed and commented on each other's posts.

I found it difficult to monitor student activity and check for on-task behavior during our initial blogging sessions. There were constant demands on my attention as I dealt with technical issues, answered students' questions, repeated instructions, and demonstrated processes for logging in, posting, creating illustrations in Paint, embedding images, accessing the site, viewing and responding to comments, and providing comments for others. I was concerned that the early introduction of the Paint app provided a tempting distraction for students who have difficulty with self-regulation. However it was clear that the ability to create an illustration rather than embed a photograph appealed to students, as evidenced by the prevalence of posts that contained images drawn in Paint. Students at the lower end of the writing performance scale demonstrated a clear preference for drawing over writing and spent a significant amount of time using the Paint app.



Dragonfly

Dragonfly, the second-language learner portrayed in the opening vignette, is a consistently hard-working student who rarely needs prompting to stay on-task. He often requests teacher support with reading and writing to compensate for his limited English vocabulary. He routinely began the composition of his posts with the creation of a drawing in the Paint app. He published a single post each session which was composed of a drawing and a briefly descriptive title, such as “Poshing the ruk” (Pushing the rock), or “Sking pikchr” (Skiing picture). The lack of writing in the body of Dragonfly’s would have been a concern were it not for his enthusiasm over the comments that his posts received and his consistent effort to compose a response to each comment.



Dragonfly's first post: "Pushing the rock"



Dragonfly's second post: "Skiing picture"

Hedgehog

Hedgehog’s posts also consisted solely of a drawing and a title. He had a difficult second term for personal reasons and he demonstrates a particular aversion to written tasks. He is a capable and knowledgeable student and does not have any fine motor control issues that would make the physical act of writing difficult. During class discussions he is usually eager to share

his ideas and he responds thoughtfully when I prompt him with questions. Despite his willingness to share his knowledge orally, he often refuses to complete written assignments of any kind and frequently asks me to write his ideas for him. He is usually amenable to drawing instead of writing a response whenever possible. As with Dragonfly, the lack of writing in Hedgehog's posts was compensated for by his comment activity. Both Dragonfly and Hedgehog greatly benefited from the ability to post drawings on their blogs as it allowed them to receive comments and become engaged in the conversational aspect of the blogs. Hedgehog's first post was published on February 19th, outside of our regular blogging sessions. I allowed him to use the Kidblog app on my iPad as a reward for positive behaviour. He selected the image of the minion pumpkins from my existing iPad photo library. His first post published during a blogging session was not completed until a week later.



Hedgehog's first post



Hedgehog's second post: "The angry birds game"

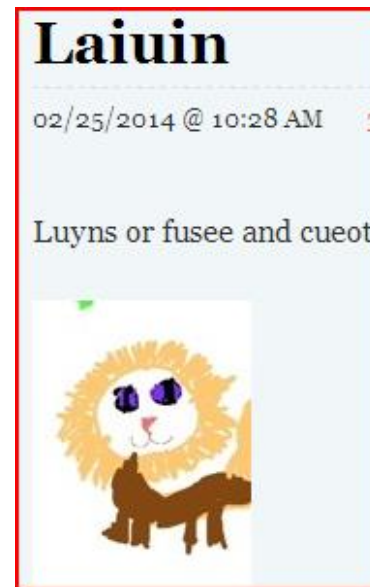
Lion

Lion is a Grade 2 student who was transferred into my Grade 1 class in January, midway through the second term. She has undiagnosed learning challenges, severely low written output, and requires one-on-one support to complete assigned tasks. She exhibits a particular affinity for

drawing and if left unattended, will choose to draw and colour for extensive periods of time. Naturally, Lion was predisposed to devote her time during blogging sessions to the creation of drawings in the Paint app. She did not compose any posts or comments without one-on-one teacher support. It was unclear whether she was unable to master the procedure for publishing posts independently or simply lacked the necessary motivation. However, under direct supervision, she was able to input a title for her posts and compose a brief descriptive sentence to accompany her selected drawing. Lion's unobtrusive manner and the large number of demands on my attention often meant she was left unattended until late in the blogging sessions. Her first two posts were published under supervision on February 25th, nearly halfway into the project. Previous attempts to assist her with publishing were derailed by her iPad's uncooperative wi-fi connection.



Lion's first post - "Alvin is chubby"

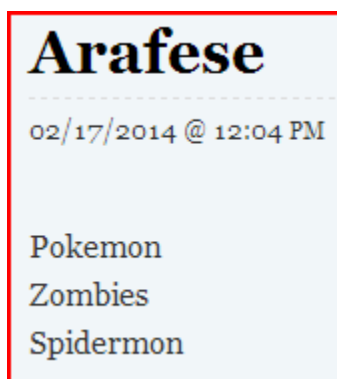


Lion's second post - "Lions are fuzzy and cute"

Monkey

Monkey is a novice second-language learner whose code name accurately reflects his personality. He frequently exhibits mischievous and unpredictable behaviour and the challenges

he faces as a second-language learner are exacerbated by an apparent unwillingness to put forth his best effort on assigned tasks. As with Lion, Monkey also required one-on-one support in order to successfully publish posts and comments. He would usually occupy himself with the Paint app when left unsupervised but his habit of distracting his peers with negative behaviour meant that he commanded more of my attention than Lion. Monkey's first post, entitled "Arafese" (Everything) contains a list of three things he likes. Despite having created multiple drawings in the paint app earlier in the session, he refused to follow the demonstrated steps to successfully embed an image into his post. On March 13th I noted in my research journal that Monkey independently approached me with his iPad and asked for my assistance to publish the picture he had created in Paint. The writing in his post "plats vs. zombies" accurately describes his drawing, but despite my attempts to dissuade him, he chose the unrelated title of "Baba".



Monkey's first post: "Everything"



Monkey's March 13th post

iii. *Writing for an Audience: The Importance of Blog Comments*

In order to ensure that the students had sufficient opportunities to master the requisite blogging skills and procedures, time for lessons and discussions in the initial sessions was limited. Discussions and lessons focused on protection of student privacy and the production of quality comments. Students were required to parrot the safety rule mantra “no names, no faces” at the outset of each session and, with the exception of one accidental video post and occasional incidences of student nametags in the background of photos, they were attentive to the privacy guidelines. I also noted several incidences in which students enforced the guidelines for each other, such as when Octopus reminded Tiger to make sure his nametag was not in the picture he took of his Lego car on his desk (field notes, Mar. 12th, 2014).

As part of our earlier discussion of the paper blog comments, the students viewed a video created by Linda Yollis’s (2011) third grade class entitled *How to Write a Quality Comment!* The video helped the students arrive at the conclusion that a good comment makes a person want to write back. The blog comments and subsequent replies initially produced by the students were shorter and less detailed than their replies to the paper blog comments, which indicated the need to review the elements of a quality comment. As a result, I led a brief discussion and projected a reference chart that highlighted the essential elements: including a greeting; using proper spelling and punctuation; complimenting the writer; writing relevant comments; and reviewing writing prior to posting.⁷ The responsive element was crucial to maintain student interest in the blogs and as such, I set aside time each evening to comment on all student posts. I also relied on my fellow teachers, the students’ families, and members of the M.Ed. cohort to provide quality comments throughout the duration of the project.

⁷ See Appendix D for chart.

On February 18th, I noted in my research journal that “I really noticed a sense of excitement from the students about their blogs, and I think it is the comments that are responsible” (field notes 2014). I had even persuaded my husband to visit the blog and post a few comments from “Mr. Zebra,” which inspired a round of laughter from the students and several plaintive remarks of “I want a comment from Mr. Zebra!” In an attempt to prevent students from fixating on one particular blogging activity, I wrote a list of assigned tasks on the whiteboard:

- 1) reply to comments
- 2) make a new post
- 3) comment on each other's posts

I hoped that the visual reminder of my expectations would help students manage their time better during the sessions. The order of the tasks was purposely designed to engage students in conversational writing activities at the start and end of each session. I hoped that students would allot more time to comments than posts and subsequently be less inclined to devote the majority of their session time to drawing in the Paint app. I was encouraged by the immediate occurrence of short conversations between students in comment threads, such as Deer and Otter thanking each other.

As noted in the preceding discussion of the Paint app, Dragonfly and Hedgehog were particularly engaged by the comment aspect of the blogs. Dragonfly clearly expressed his excitement in his interview response – his favourite post “got lots of comments” (student interview, Mar. 14th, 2014). He frequently requested that I read out the comments he had received and diligently composed a reply to each comment. On February 26th I noted that Hedgehog, who had previously devoted the majority of his session time to essentially playing with the Paint app, had shifted his attention to tallying the number of comments on each

student's posts. He proceeded to announce how many comments each post had received and even wrote "otter you have tons of comments" on Otter's February 13th "Lego" post.⁸ His engagement in the comment aspect of the blogs was also evident the following day when he arrived at school and proudly announced "I logged in on my mom's computer and gave [Otter] a comment" (field notes Feb. 27th, 2014).

The students frequently provided evidence of their engagement in the comment aspect during the blogging sessions. On February 26th Albatross happily exclaimed "my mom replied to me!" (field notes, 2014). During normal class time, Octopus has difficulty getting started on assigned activities, is usually unable to sustain attention on a task without frequent prompts, and needs reminders to ask for support if needed. However, that same day he demonstrated an unusual spark of initiative and sought my attention to say "I want to comment on [Otter]. How do I find [Otter]? How do I comment?" (field notes, Feb. 26th, 2014). The following day he excitedly reported that "my mom already downloaded [the Kidblog app] so I can do it at home!" (field notes, Feb. 27th, 2014). In my reviews of the blog activity each day I found that students were consistent with their replies to comments. Students thanked visitors who issued compliments, responded to questions, and frequently revisited past posts – as evidenced by the progressive date stamps on comment threads. The comment aspect of the blogs allowed students to communicate with their peers, families, and other blog guests in a new and exciting manner.

iv. *The "No Spelling Questions" Rule: Fostering Self-Reliance and Peer Collaboration*

There are times when a snap decision reveals itself to be a flash of brilliance. Any practicing teacher will know that these decisions are seemingly spontaneous and appear to come out of thin air. Their true inspiration is only revealed under extensive examination and reflection. On February 18th one arose out of a feeling of desperation and being completely overwhelmed. I

⁸ <http://kidblog.org/mrszebraszoo/68dfb329-c6cf-44e3-b329-8b59883b990c/lego/>

happened to notice that the most common and frequent question being addressed to me during our blogging sessions began with the words “How do you spell...?” When it comes to spelling for most written tasks, I have always encouraged students to “sound it out,” and refer to their dictionaries for more difficult words. I reassure them that their spelling does not have to be perfect, as I would rather they use their phonics knowledge and gradually build their bank of known words. Despite explicitly teaching these strategies, some students still rely on asking me how to spell various words.

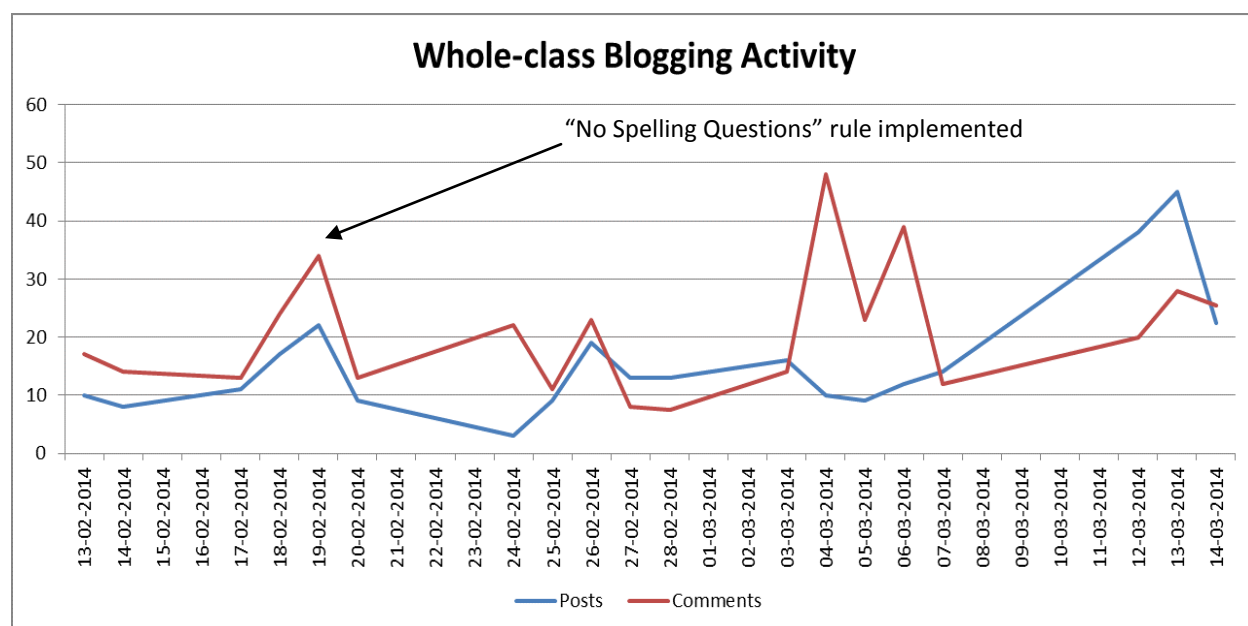
I felt myself being bombarded with a significant amount of “how do you spell...” questions. As this was our third official blogging session, the students were becoming more comfortable with the technical process of posting, thus reducing the number of operational questions in comparison and increasing the amount of time spent on the task of writing posts and comments. At the start of the day’s blogging session I reminded the students of their three responsibilities (reply to comments, make a new post, leave comments for others). I decided to briefly interrupt the class to institute a new rule for our blogging sessions. With some effort at humour, conveyed by my word choice and tone of voice, I announced that no one was allowed to ask me any spelling questions. The options for spelling would include the following:

- 1) sound it out
- 2) check your dictionary
- 3) ask a friend.

My intent was threefold: to encourage students to apply their phonics skills, emphasizing that correct spelling was not required as long as “we can tell what you mean if it looks the way it sounds”; to make me more available to answer non-spelling-related questions, troubleshoot problems; and to observe the students’ work habits and progress with the blogs. The students

found this rule entertaining which contributed to its successful implementation. When students forgot and started to ask "Mrs. Z, how do you spell...", I smiled and replied in a sing-song voice "That sounds like a spelling question!" Each student laughed and then turned to a friend to ask or consulted their dictionary. As the session went on, students started to catch themselves asking me and other students popped their heads up and exclaimed "you can't ask her that!" An unexpected but pleasant side effect of suggesting students "ask a friend" their spelling questions was increased collaboration overall between the students – they were sharing tips on creating their posts, commenting, using the Paint app, and other functions.

The most apparent impact of the new rule was increased productivity from the students who tend to be hindered during writing tasks by a desire to spell words correctly. On February 24th, I noted in my research journal that students had taken the "no spelling questions" rule to heart and were effectively implementing the suggested strategies. Overall, I found that students were composing replies and posts faster than they were when they relied on asking me to spell out words for them.

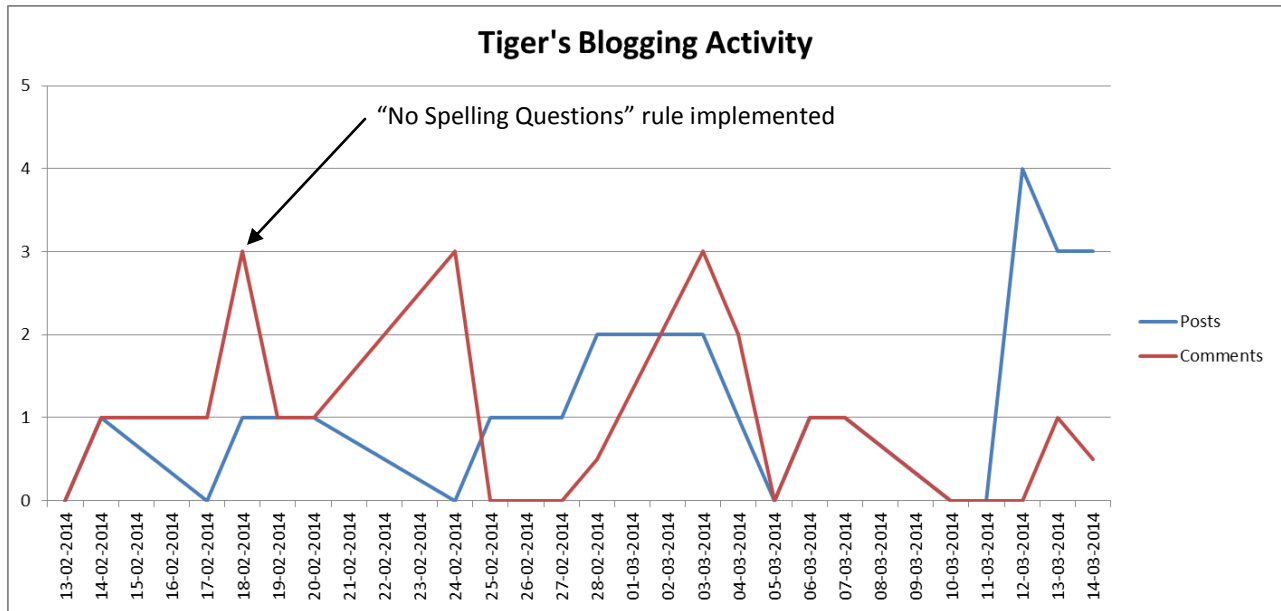


A few students in particular were significantly impacted by the implementation of this rule, based on their participation and blogging habits prior to and immediately following the implementation of the rule.

Tiger

Tiger had difficulty completing posts during the introductory sessions because he would wait for my attention to help with spelling. He was fixated on ensuring that he wrote each word correctly and relied on my support when he composed. Depending on the difficulty of the word, I would coach him through the process of using phonics knowledge to sound it out, help him locate it in his dictionary, add the word to his dictionary when not found, or simply spell out the word for him. All of these options required more time than when Tiger later attempted them on his own, since he no longer had to wait for my attention, and the apparent increase in his confidence reduced the time he lost in hesitation.

On a few occasions after the rule was instituted Tiger would approach me and ask “Is this how you spell (blank)?” When I replied in the affirmative he smiled broadly, announced proudly “I used my dictionary!” and headed back to work with an observable spring in his step (field notes Feb. 18th, 2014). The “no spelling questions” rule forced Tiger to relinquish his dependence on direct teacher support and independently attempt strategies that he had received instruction on such as dictionary use and the application of phonics knowledge. Tiger was able successfully complete posts in the allotted time and that success translated into increased confidence and a sense of accomplishment, which in turn, provided the motivation to continue posting.



The institution of the no spelling questions rule coincides with Tiger's second successfully published post and one of his most prolific sessions for commenting. Prior to the rule, Tiger was essentially lacking an online presence on the blog site, and after the rule's implementation, he posted and commented on a consistent basis.



Tiger puts his trusty dictionary to good use

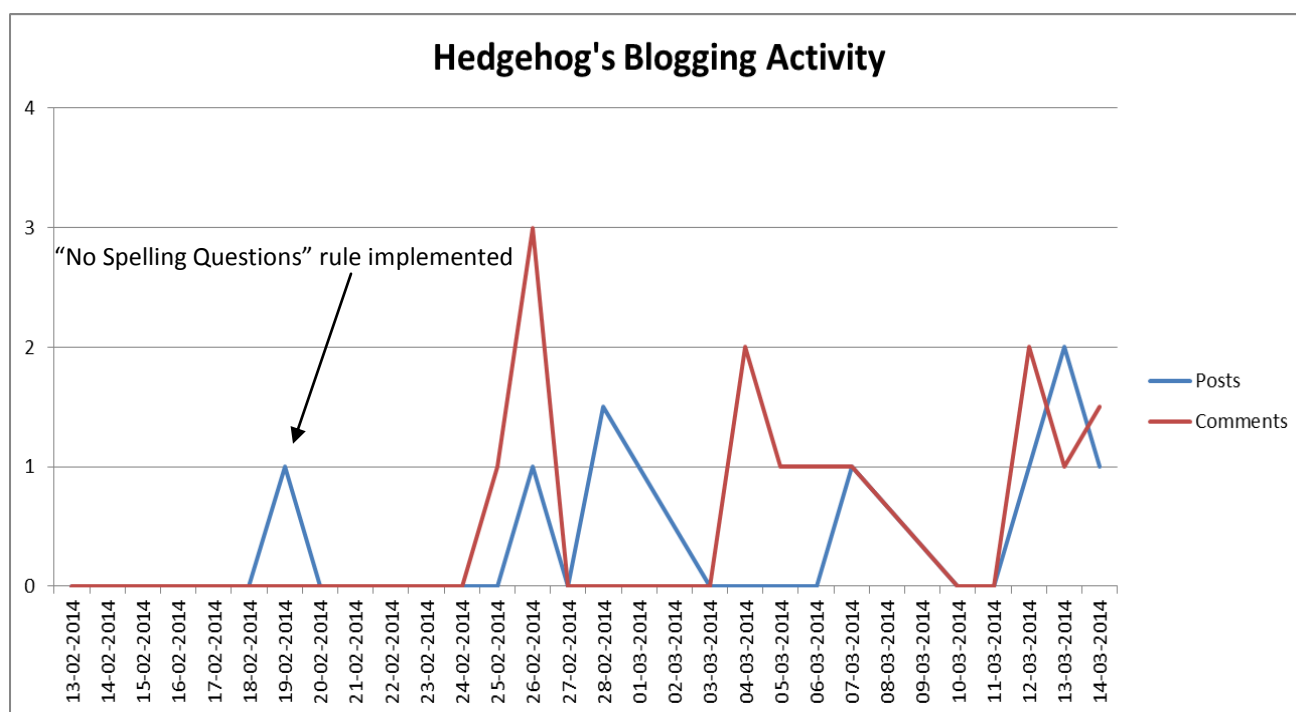
Hedgehog

As was previously mentioned, Hedgehog struggled with motivation and displayed a particular aversion to written tasks. Prior to the implementation of the spelling rule he had not published any posts or comments, despite being more than capable of spelling or sounding out most words he might want to use. Immediately after I announced the new rule, Hedgehog asked me how to spell “angry birds.” Armadillo responded before I could, exclaiming, “That’s a spelling question, you can’t ask her that! But I can tell you!” and proceeded to spell it out for Hedgehog (field notes, Feb. 18th, 2014).

For the remainder of the session, Hedgehog frequently turned to Tiger or Octopus, who were working on either side of him, to ask spelling questions, to show what he was creating in Paint, to see what they were working on, and to share posts from other students that he found interesting. In the early sessions he had essentially been playing in the Paint app, which I was allowing as a method of reinforcing any periods of calm, controlled behaviour. After the rule was implemented he became fixated on investigating the number of comments each student had received on their posts and sharing the number with them. I believe this was a result of the general increase in student collaboration. He did not publish any comments of his own until a week later, but I was pleased with his more constructive use of the blogging sessions for reading through the blog site rather than dabbling aimlessly in Paint.



Hedgehog asks to borrow Tiger's dictionary




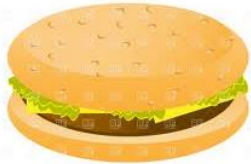
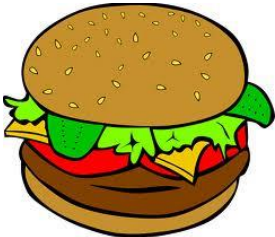
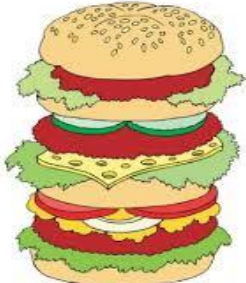
Hedgehog's first recorded blog activity coincided with the advent of the "No Spelling Questions" rule

v. *The Hamburger Rubric: Transferring Responsibility to Students*

After the successful implementation of the “no spelling questions” rule, my next plan of action to continue fostering student self-reliance and peer collaboration was to hold a class discussion and create a simple rubric with the students on "what makes a good post," "what makes a good comment," and "what is blogging time for?" However I was concerned that the length of time that the rubric lessons required would serve as an unwelcome interruption of the daily blogging sessions and derail my students' progress. Therefore I chose not to introduce the rubric until February 28th. By then it was clear that the students were fully engrossed in the project and it was important to provide them with tools that would help them improve their posts and comments.

Last year a colleague and I collaborated on a story unit with our two classes and we partnered with a member of the District Learning Technologies team in order to explore effective iPad apps for the unit. During the unit, the Learning Technologies teacher presented a lesson that she uses to teach rubrics in which she recounts a story of going to a restaurant and ordering a hamburger.⁹ The lesson allows students to anchor abstract report card terminology to the concrete images of hamburgers that are introduced in the story. I sought her permission to adapt this lesson for the blog project. On the morning of February 28th, we were scheduled to introduce the blogs to our buddy class and have a collaborative blogging session with them. I booked the iPads for an additional block after recess and planned the rubric lesson for the start of the second blogging session.

⁹ See Appendix E for a complete account of the Hamburger rubric analogy

Not Yet Meeting Expectations	Approaching Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Exceeding Expectations
			

The Hamburger Rubric

I shared the hamburger analogy with the corresponding images projected on the whiteboard. Afterwards I explained to the students that the descriptive terms applied to the hamburgers throughout the story – Not Meeting, Approaching, Meeting, and Exceeding Expectations – are the same terms used on their report cards. I prepared a blank rubric with the headings for "blog posts" and "comments" and I asked students to suggest what each of those should have in order to qualify as "meeting expectations." I was remarkably impressed by the students' responses. Not only did they suggest all of the elements I would have included, they were also able to explain why each element was important.¹⁰ I left the rubric projected on the board while the students blogged and prompted them to refer to it as a checklist of requirements for their posts and comments. Students were expected to ask self-reflective questions such as "did I ask a question?" and "did I use punctuation?" and ideally monitor their own productivity during the sessions.

It was difficult to determine the specific impact of the introduction of the rubric as it was implemented on the same day as our first "buddy session". The buddy sessions resulted in definitive spikes in blog activity and may have inspired the students' productivity during the rubric session. However, the quality of the students' contributions during the creation of the

¹⁰ See Appendix E for the rubric of class-generated criteria

rubric reassured me of their progress. Though it was difficult to record individual student suggestions while I administered the lesson, I managed to record two particularly thoughtful comments. In regards to the composition of an effective post, Iguana suggested that pictures were necessary “so they know what you’re talking about.” When we discussed quality commenting habits, Mouse proposed that students “reply to other people who don’t have comments, not just the same people all the time” (field notes, Feb. 28th, 2014).

vi. *Blogging With Buddies: Collaboration and Role Reversal*

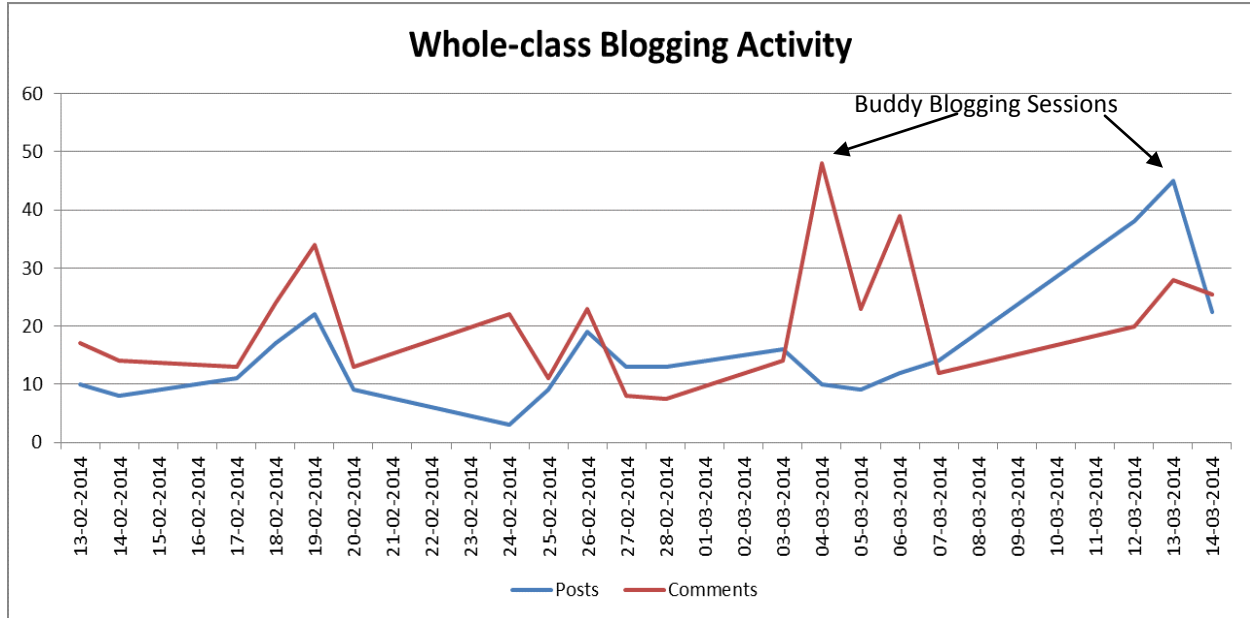
The cooperative blogging sessions with our buddy class were not part of my original action plan. Weekly buddy activities usually take place on Friday mornings in the hour before recess. The buddies read together and then collaborate on a craft activity. The sessions are intended to build empathy in the older students as they assist their younger buddies. They also contribute to a positive school community through the connections that are established between students from different classes.

Introducing the older buddies to the blogs would require a reversal of the usual dynamic in which the older students assist or teach the younger students. I was hesitant to involve the older buddies in a blogging session until my students were fully engrossed in the project and would be able to confidently demonstrate the requisite skills and procedures. During the February 26th session the students were so deeply engaged in blogging that I was able to take photographs of the class in action. The increased independence and peer collaboration I witnessed indicated that the students were ready to introduce the blogs to their older buddies. I approached the other teacher and proposed a blogging session on Friday, during which her students would post comments and my students would demonstrate use of the Kidblog and Paint apps.

The session was structured such that it would be apparent for my records which posts and comments originated from the joint session. I had already shown my class the necessary steps to access the blog through the Safari browser instead of the Kidblog app so that comments from the buddy session would appear from "guests" instead of their individual accounts. The following instructions were provided to both classes:

First half of the session 9:30 – 10:00	Second half of the session 10:00 – 10:30
- big buddy holds the iPad	- little buddy gets to hold the iPad
- read through blog site together	- log in to Kidblog app and show big buddy
- comment on posts that "inspire" you	how to make a post and insert a picture
- use big buddy's initials and little buddy's code name when commenting	- use Paint if you want, but not the whole time

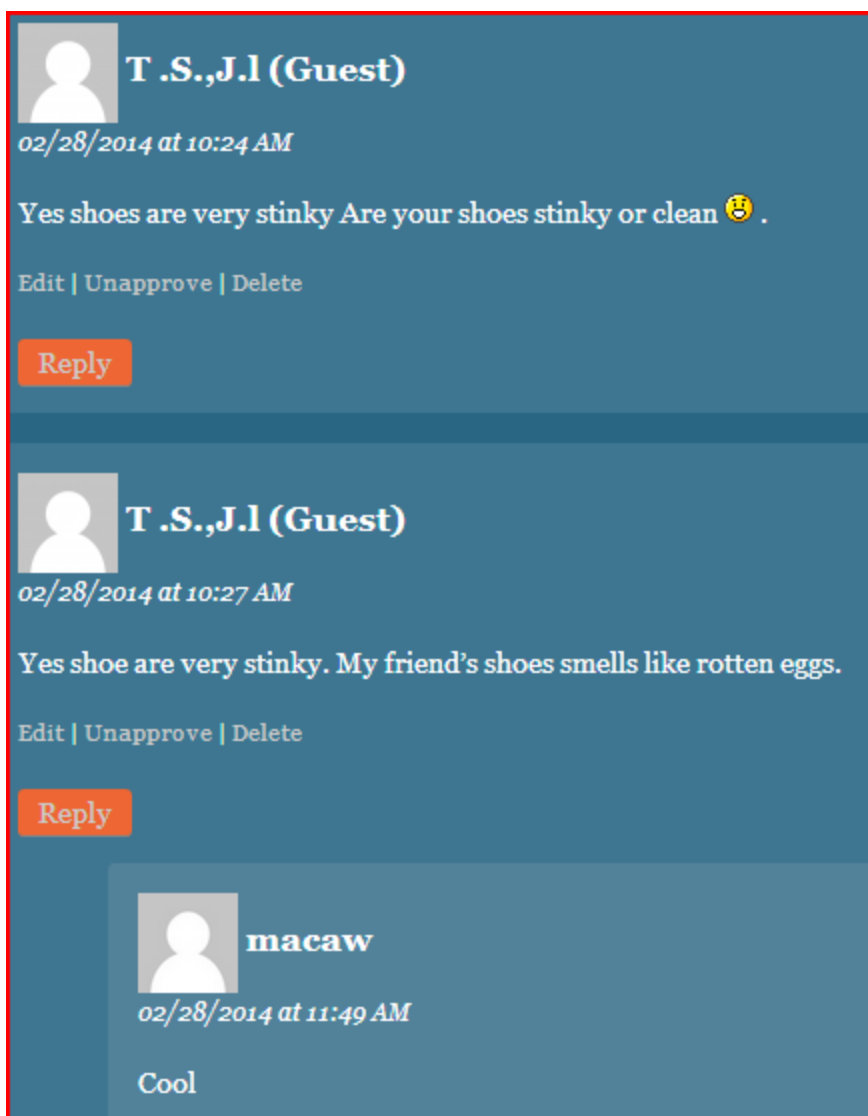
In terms of the sheer volume of blogging activity, the session was highly successful. I later noted in my research journal that “I can't call this session anything but a huge success. There were so many comments being posted I couldn't keep up with approving them all (over 100 comments in half an hour!)” (field notes, Mar. 3rd, 2014). I overheard several of the older buddies inform their teacher that they were excited about the blogs and impressed that first grade students had created the content they viewed on the site. I suggested that the big buddies were welcome to visit the blog at home and leave comments. Their enthusiasm was evident as several of them petitioned their teacher to post the link to the blog site on their class website for easy access. In order to protect student privacy I insisted that the big buddies continue to use their initials on the blog. That evening I noted the appearance of comments from four guests who used initials. The following chart reflects the dramatic increase in students’ post and comment activity in response to the buddy blogging sessions on February 28th and March 14th.



Due to the overwhelmingly positive response from the students, we scheduled a second buddy session on March 14th. I attribute the success of the collaborative sessions to three factors: the sense of pride and accomplishment that my students experienced as they shared their blogs with their buddies; both classes' excitement over the unexpected use of iPads during buddy time; and the older buddies more advanced literacy skills, which enabled them to successfully publish greater content in the allotted time. The comments provided by the older buddies also added a new element to the conversational aspect of the blogs. Prior to the session my students had only received comments from adults and each other. The buddies' comments engaged students in a new manner of conversation with an intermediary audience of older peers. In her concluding interview Macaw shared that February 28th post "Shoes" was her favourite because of the humorous comments she received from her older buddies:



Macaw's Favourite Post



The resulting comments from her older buddies

vii. *Assigned Topics: Success With Self-Directed Writing*

During the development of my initial action plan I selected potential post topics that aligned with the special events and subject-specific content that students would encounter in the course of the blog project. I wrestled with the decision of whether to assign or suggest topics throughout the course of the study. As the blog posts were intended to replace the students' regular journal writing, I felt it was important to preserve the freedom they had in selecting their journal entry topics. I also did not want to prevent students from posting or dampen their

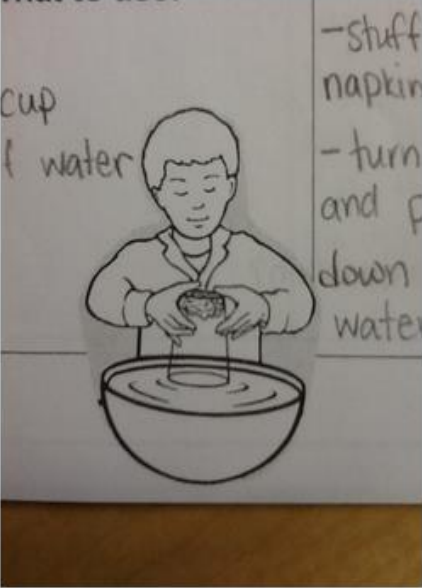
enthusiasm for the project by insisting that they post on assigned topics. However, the surprising initiative that students demonstrated when they experimented with procedural “how-to” writing during the paper blog activity suggested that certain topics might hold unearthed potential.

Despite the success of the assigned paper blog topic “My Favourite Food,” my initial attempts to introduce suggested topics during the iPad blogging sessions were met with significant resistance. Students ignored the suggested list of topics and only one student responded to my four Science experiment posts as requested.

No Vacancy

02/27/2014 @ 9:39 AM [2 Comments](#) [Edit this Post](#)

On Wednesday Squirrel asked “what happens to a napkin in a cup when the cup is pushed upside down into a bowl of water?”




What happened?

(Left) Students were asked to comment with their hypotheses.

(Below) Iguana was the only student to respond.

2 Comments




iguana

02/27/2014 at 10:12 AM

The napkin will stay dry

[Edit](#) | [Unapprove](#) | [Delete](#)

[Reply](#)



Mrs. Zebra

02/27/2014 at 3:46 PM

How come?

The paper blog topic “My Favourite Food” was specifically recommended for the activity as it was a widely accessible subject. I decided my students needed more time to master the requisite skills and procedures for blogging before they would begin to experiment with different writing styles in their posts as they had on paper. I set aside the planned topics and devoted my attention to assisting students with technical issues, supervising the composition of posts and comments, and answering questions.

I revisited the issue of assigned topics on March 12th when a particularly ideal opportunity presented itself. Students had completed the assigned activities from a Math unit on Measurement and I felt that they would benefit from a review of the concepts. I was also reluctant to introduce a new unit of study immediately before the two-week Spring Break school closure. The culminating activity in the Measurement unit includes a letter from the fictional “Queen of the Giants,” who requests that students locate the largest objects in their classroom and send them to her for a special display in her castle. The activity reinforces specific vocabulary introduced throughout the measurement unit as the Queen requests the tallest, longest, and heaviest objects, and objects that hold the most volume and cover the largest area.

I thought the “scavenger hunt” aspect of the activity corresponded well with the structure of the blog posts as students could take photographs of relevant objects and describe their findings. In order to capitalize on the benefits of the provided narrative, I instructed students to address their posts to “the Queen of the Giants.” The session was extremely productive – nearly every student successfully published a post with at least three of the five requested objects. Unfortunately, a temporarily misplaced iPad drew all of my attention for the final fifteen minutes of the session and students were distracted as a result. The following day I checked in with the


students who had not published a related post and discovered that they had merely run out of time in their quest to find all five items, or failed to publish as a result of the distraction.

In order to extend the benefits of the “Queen of the Giants” narrative, I responded to each of the students’ posts under the guise of the Queen, and thanked them for their contributions. The excitement generated by the appearance of the Queen was best captured in Alligator’s concluding interview. She identified “Queen of the Giants” as her favourite post “because it was funny... because everyone thought Mrs. Zebrowski was the Queen of the Giants but she said no because in her comments it would just be a zebra... and also because it’s fun!” (student interview, March 13th, 2014)

Queen of the Ginas


03/13/2014 @ 11:37 AM [3 Comments](#) [Edit this Post](#)

I fond the longest thing and it is a string .



I fond a white string.

Alligator's "Queen of the Giants" post



Queen of the Giants (Guest)

03/14/2014 at 8:44 AM

Thanks Alligator, I will use it to make a bracelet.

[Edit](#) | [Unapprove](#) | [Delete](#)

[Reply](#)


alligator

03/14/2014 at 9:49 AM

Zebra said that she wasnt the queen of the giants

[Edit](#) | [Unapprove](#) | [Delete](#)

[Reply](#)


alligator

The "Queen of the Giants" replied to the posts

Spelling issues became problematic during the session due to the specific vocabulary required by the assignment. In response I wrote sample sentences on the whiteboard such as “_____ is the tallest object” and “_____ holds the most.” I observed that these specific instructions stimulated an immediate increase in student productivity. Students participated in two more directed blogging sessions in the remaining days before the break. On March 13th, students compared the volume of water that different containers could hold and on March 14th they used balance scales to compare objects by mass. During each session students took photographs of the objects in use and composed blog posts that described their findings. I provided sample sentences for these sessions such as “the _____ holds more/less” and “the _____ is heavier/lighter.” Student engagement was high during these sessions – I observed very little off-task behaviour. I planned to continue experimenting with assigning topics related to subject-specific content after the conclusion of the study.

viii. Student Responses to Blogging: Concluding Interviews and Surveys

In the final week of the project I arranged individual student interviews in an attempt to obtain a deeper sense of their feelings about the blog project. I felt it was important to compare my own observations of student activity to their personal responses in order to build a more complete portrait of the results. I had also planned a follow-up to the pre-study survey on student attitudes toward writing activities. On the afternoon of March 12th, I informed the students that I would like to have them interview each other about the blogs. I hoped that students would be more forthcoming in their responses with their peers than if I was to conduct the interviews.

I led a discussion to clarify the concept of an “interview” then asked the students to help me generate relevant questions. Their initial suggestions consisted of “did you like...” (the blogs, the posts, the comments...) questions. I hinted that these questions could be problematic and





asked, "What if someone didn't like it?" and prompted, "How can we ask a question so the person can't just say yes or no?" Students suggested including the prompt "Why?" after each question and I suggested we ask "How did you feel about...?" instead of "Did you like...?" The discussion continued until we had established the following set of questions:

- 1) How did you feel about the blogs?
- 2) What kind of posts did you make?
- 3) What was your favourite post?
- 4) How did you feel about the comments?
- 5) What was the best part?

Students were instructed to follow up on each response with the prompt "why?" if the initial response required further explanation. I added the following question to the list in an attempt to determine what aspects of blogging students considered essential for success: "What would you tell another Grade 1 class and their teacher if they were going to start blogging?"

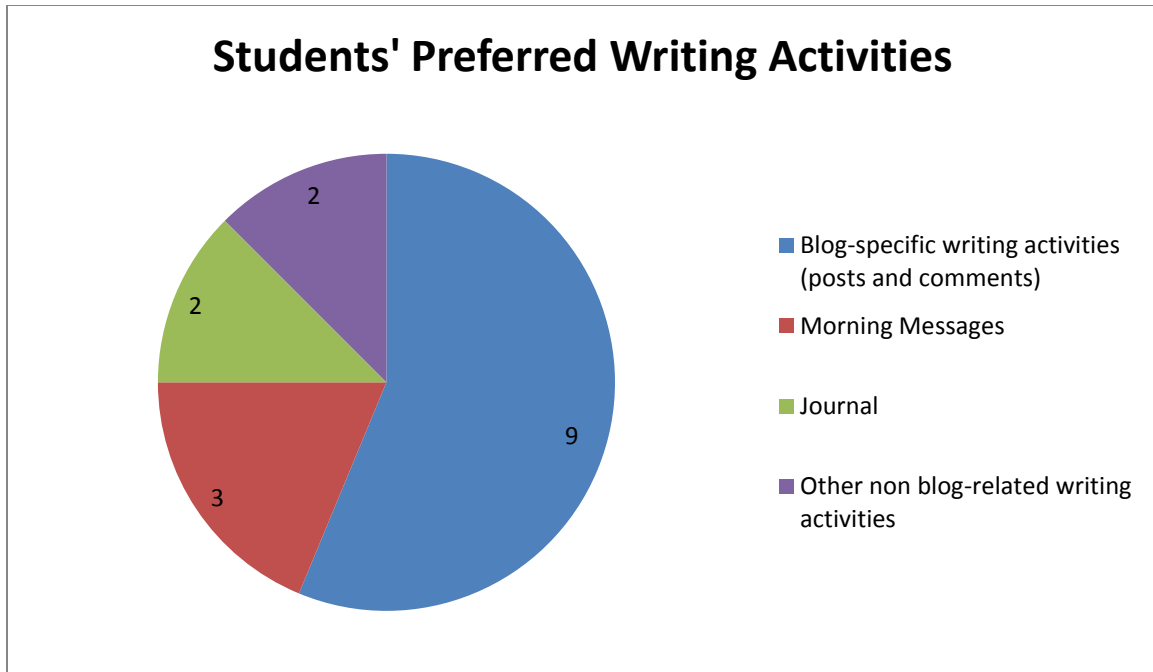
I provided Macaw and Angelfish with the list of questions and one of the student iPads and asked them to interview each other. There was only sufficient time for two sets of interviews and I knew these students would be capable of reading the questions to each other and prompting each other for more details. Afterwards, Macaw offered to interview the rest of the students so I had her operate the iPad while Deer and Otter they interviewed each other. I reviewed all four recordings after school and found that Angelfish and Macaw's responses were thoughtful and detailed. Deer and Otter's answers were comparatively short, often one word even when prompted, and they frequently laughed amongst themselves. I entrusted the remainder of the interviews to Macaw, who had proven herself capable of successfully operating the iPad and prompting her peers to provide more detailed responses.

I composed a post-study survey, using modified versions of the interview questions to parallel the format of the pre-study survey on student attitudes towards writing activities. My intent was to provide the students with as many opportunities as possible to reflect and communicate their feelings on the project.

Post-Study Survey: Student Attitudes Towards Blogging Activities				
How do you feel about:				
	YUCK!	MEH	GOOD	AWESOME!
1) The blog project	6	1	7	3
2) Making posts	1	4	4	8
3) Writing comments to others		6	6	5
4) Getting comments on your posts	2		9	8
5) Using Paint (app)		2	7	8
6) Blogging at home	5	5	3	4
7) What would you tell another Grade 1 class and their teacher if they were going to start blogging?				
8) How do you feel about:				
Writing for the blog (posts and comments) Vs. Other kinds of writing (Journal, morning messages, Tree Book...)				

See Appendix F for samples of students' detailed written responses

Students were also asked to state their preference between “writing for the blog (posts and comments)” and “other kinds of writing (journal, morning messages, Tree Book...)” The following chart reflects the breakdown of their responses to this question:



Student responses to the survey and the interview questions were thoughtful and genuine and indicated an overall positive response to the blog project. The survey responses reflect a high level of student engagement in the creation of posts, the reception of comments, and the use of the Paint app. Written comments from the survey frequently indicated that choice was a significant factor in student engagement. Students provided details such as: “I get to write about what I feel”; “I get to draw and choose which size for the paint brush”; and “I like painting my own things” (survey responses, March 2014). The survey and interview responses clearly indicated that students felt engaged by all aspects of the blogging process: experimenting with self-expression, writing to communicate, and participating in conversation. The inclusion of blogging in the regular routine of a first grade class is recommended for increasing student motivation to engage in developmental writing activities.

Summary and Conclusions

I hypothesized that the use of iPads and the provision of an expanded audience would increase student engagement in daily writing activities and subsequently lead to improvements in students' written fluency. In order to investigate possible methods to integrate technology into the instructional routines in a first grade classroom, the activity of blogging on iPads was substituted for traditional journal writing.

It was important to preserve two fundamental aspects of the journal writing activity: the ability to supplement writing with pictures; and the freedom to select any topic of interest. The Kidblog application enabled students to easily embed images and videos into their posts. However it was immediately apparent that students wanted the option to create drawings to accompany their posts instead of simply using photographic images. Fortunately, the version of Paint on our iPads offered the option to save student-created drawings to the camera library and subsequently be accessed in Kidblog. I experimented with the second fundamental aspect of the journal writing activity – assigned and suggested topics – and found that students preferred the option to select their own topics of interest in the earlier stages of the project. Once students had the opportunity to master the requisite technical skills and experiment with their own topics they were more responsive to my requests to post more specific content, such as the concepts covered in a Math lesson.

Prior to the implementation of my action plan, I believed that access to a wider audience for my students' work would be sufficient to increase their engagement in writing activities. I assumed that the public nature of the blogs in comparison to the students' journals would inspire students with a greater sense of ownership over their writing, as it would no longer be produced solely for the teacher to read. The concept of writing for an audience proved to be too abstract

for my young students. The true potential of the blogs rested in the opportunity they provided for students to engage in conversation with their audience. The comments students received on their blog posts acted as proof that their writing had a purpose – to communicate with those who visited their blog.

In the initial stages of the project I was disappointed to find that the most prolific bloggers were the more fluent writers in the class. I had hoped that the appeal of iPad use or the substitution of touchpad typing for writing with a pencil would have a noticeably positive effect on my students who tend to struggle with written tasks. While the class as a whole expressed excitement about the introduction of iPads to our Language Arts routine, the use of iPads alone was not sufficient to increase the written output of my low-achieving writers. As the study progressed, other factors had a more positive impact on these students. The introduction of the “No Spelling Questions” rule coincided with a dramatic increase in students’ productivity and peer collaboration. This in turn enabled me to devote more of my attention to students with lower output. I observed students independently employing strategies that they had previously struggled with or underutilized, such as using their spelling dictionaries; applying phonics knowledge; and seeking peer support.

Cooperative blogging sessions with our Grade 4 – 5 buddy class were an unplanned but welcome addition to the project. Student productivity spiked dramatically during the two collaborative sessions and the sheer volume of comments provided by the older students contributed strongly to the conversational aspect of the blog. The buddies also enriched my students’ blogging experience as they had previously only received comments from adults and their first grade classmates.

While summative assessment of the students' blog-related writing did not reveal any significant gains in written fluency, the observable level of engagement throughout the project suggests that blogging was a positive addition to our regular classroom routine. Students' individual written output on the blogs was equal to if not higher than their journal activity prior to the study. The responses to the post-study survey on students' attitudes towards blogging activities and the follow-up interviews indicated that students generally preferred blogging to other writing activities.

Implications for the Future

My research aspires to contribute to the theoretical discussion of Literacy 2.0 skills and provide evidence as to the manner in which the advent of digital media impacts young children's acquisition of literacy. I plan to introduce blogging to my future students earlier in the school year in order to better accommodate the time required for students to master technical skills unrelated to the task of writing. Students were more responsive to assigned topics in the late stages of the project, and therefore an earlier introduction of the blogs would enable me the integration of blogging activity into multiple subject areas throughout the year. Blogging will be an effective method for students to demonstrate their learning and for teachers to check for understanding.

The comment activity was integral to the success of this project. Throughout the course of this study, I relied on my fellow teachers, M.Ed. colleagues, friends, and family members to help maintain the flow of conversation. In the future I would try to encourage a greater number of parents and siblings to visit and respond to the blogs, possibly through assigned tasks such as the creation of posts addressed specifically to students' family members. It might also be beneficial to set aside specific session time for students to engage solely in comment activity.

Lingering Questions

Spring break has come and gone. My usual enthusiasm for returning to work in anticipation of a new term is somewhat dampened as I struggle to make coherent sense of the blog project and conclude my report. A familiar ping sounds from my nearby iPad, alerting me to recent blog activity and hauling me out of my intellectual reverie. Macaw, who continues to blog regularly from home, has published a new post relating her experience of losing a tooth to a renegade noodle. In the interest of encouraging her ongoing participation I reply and the resulting exchange of comments lightens my mood considerably. Though I am poised to shed my role as researcher, the reflective practitioner remains and contemplates how to possibly inspire this level of engagement in the rest of my students.

References

- Alvaro, J. (2011, January 18). *How can I write a great blog comment?* The Skinny. Retrieved from <http://edublogs.misd.net/theskinny/2011/01/18/how-can-i-write-a-great-blog-comment/>
- Anderson, R., Grant, M. & Speck, B. (2008). *Technology to teach literacy: a resource for K-8 teachers*. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Anderson, R.S., Goode, G.S., Mitchell, J.S., & Thompson, R.F. (2013). Using digital tools to teach writing in K-12 classrooms. In J. Whittingham (Ed.), *Technological tools for the literacy classroom* (pp. 10-26). Hershey PA: Information Science Reference.
- Barber, D. & Cooper, L. (2012). *Using new Web tools in the primary classroom: a practical guide for enhancing teaching and learning*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon New York: Routledge.
- Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. J. (2003). Learning and development of preschool children from the Vygotskian perspective. In A. Kozulin, B. Gindis, V. S. Ageyev, & S. M. Miller (Ed.), *Vygotsky's educational theory in cultural context* (9th ed., pp. 156-176). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Bodrova, E., & Leong, D.J. (2007). *Tools of the mind: The Vygotskian approach to early childhood education* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, N.J: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Bodrova, E., Leong, D. J., Paynter, D. E., & Semenov, D. (2000). *A framework for early literacy instruction: Aligning standards to developmental accomplishments and student behaviors. Pre-K through kindergarten. Revised edition* (ED465-283). Retrieved from Office of Educational Research and Improvement website: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/ERIC-ED465183/content-detail.html>

- Brailsford, A. & Stead, T. (2007). *Writing guide: grade 1*. Markham, Ont.: Scholastic Canada.
- Cohen, M., & Riel, M. (1989). The effect of distant audiences on students' writing. *American Educational Research Journal*, 26(2), 143-159.
- Drexler, W., Dawson, K., & Ferdig, R. E. (2006). Collaborative blogging as a means to develop elementary expository writing skills. *Electronic Journal for the Integration of Technology in Education*, 6, 140.
- Dyson, A. H. and Freedman, S. W. 1990. On Teaching Writing: A Review of the Literature. *Center for the Study of Writing Occasional Paper No. 20*. Berkley, CA: University of California.
- “Edublog teacher challenges”. (n.d.). Welcome. *Edublog*. Retrieved from <http://teacherchallenge.edublogs.org/>
- Egan, K. (1998). *The educated mind: how cognitive tools shape our understanding*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Egan, K. (2006). *Teaching literacy: engaging the imagination of new readers and writers*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Corwin Press.
- Egan, K., & Gajdamaschko, N. (2003). Some cognitive tools of literacy. In A. Kozulin, B. Gindis, V. S. Ageyev, & S. M. Miller (Ed.), *Vygotsky's educational theory in cultural context* (9th ed., pp. 83-98). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Ferdig, R.E. & Trammell, K.D. (2004). Content delivery in the blogosphere. *T.H.E. Journal* 31(1), 12-20.
- Frey, N., Fisher, D. & Gonzalez, A. (2010). *Literacy 2.0: reading and writing in 21st century classrooms*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

- Gavran, M. (2009). Class journal as a possibility of encouraging pupils' creativity. *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, 2 (3).
- Gebhard, M., Shin, D. & Seger, W. (2011). Blogging and emergent l2 literacy development in an urban elementary school: a functional perspective. *Calico journal*, 28 (2), pp. 278--307.
- Howard, M. E. (2011). Not an unfeasible “extra”. *Science and children*, 49 (4), pp. 32--35.
- Koshy, V. (2010). *Action research for improving educational practice: A step-by-step guide*. Los Angeles London: SAGE.
- Louise Holly, M., Arhar, J., Kasten, W. (2005). *Action research for teachers*. US: Pearson Education.
- Low, L. (2007, March 16). Workshop activity: Paper blogs. *Mobile learning: An online reflective journal on mobile learning practice*. Retrieved from <http://mlearning.edublogs.org/2007/03/16/workshop-activity-paper-blogs/#comment-7206>
- McGinnis, T. (2013). Creating a balanced literacy curriculum in the 21st century: Authentic integration of literacy 1.0 with literacy 2.0. In J. Whittingham (Ed.), *Technological tools for the literacy classroom* (pp. 64-81). Hershey PA: Information Science Reference.
- McGrail, E. & Davis, A. (2011). The influence of classroom blogging on elementary student writing. *Journal of research in childhood education*, 25 (4), pp. 415--437.
- O'Mara, J. & Laidlaw, L. (2011). Living in the iworld: two literacy researchers reflect on the changing texts and literacy practices of childhood. *English teaching: practice and critique*, 10 (4), pp. 149--159.
- Penrod, D. (2007). *Using blogs to enhance literacy: the next powerful step in 21st-century learning*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

- Perry, Karen. (2013). Literacy and technology: A historical view. In J. Whittingham (Ed.), *Technological tools for the literacy classroom* (pp. 1-8). Hershey PA: Information Science Reference.
- Pilgrim, J., & Bledsoe, C. (2013). Facilitating multimodal literacy instruction through digital curation. In J. Whittingham (Ed.), *Technological tools for the literacy classroom* (pp. 27-45). Hershey PA: Information Science Reference.
- Prentice, S. (2012). Improving writing through blogging. *Nate classroom*, Autumn 2012 (18), pp. 24 - 26.
- Rockwood, S. (2007, April 28). Paper blog LP. *No matter, there*. Retrieved from <http://bookwyrnish.edublogs.org/paper-blog-lp/51/>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman (Ed.). Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (2004). Imagination and creativity in childhood. *Journal of Russian and East European psychology*, 42(1), 7-97.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (2012). *Thought and language*. A. Kozulin (Ed.). Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Yollis, L. (2011, August 28). *Learning how to comment*. Mrs. Yollis's classroom blog. Retrieved from <http://yollisclassblog.blogspot.ca/2011/08/learning-how-to-comment.html>
- Zawilinski, L. M. (2012). *An exploration of a collaborative blogging approach to literacy and learning: a mixed method study*. Ph.D. University of Connecticut.

Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent Documents

Informed Consent by Participants in a Research Study (SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY)

Project: **Literacy 2.0: Blogging to develop writing fluency in first grade**

Principal Investigator: **Lindsay Zebrowski**

Contact Information: **Brantford Elementary, Burnaby**

lindsay.zebrowski@sd41.bc.ca phone: 604-664-8603

Imaginative Education Master's Degree Cohort

Simon Fraser University lebradbu@sfu.ca

For more information on Imaginative Education please visit www.ierg.net

For more information on SD41 Learning Technology initiatives please visit
www.blogs.sd41.bc.ca/learningtech

Dear Colleague, Parent, or Community Member,

You have been invited to participate in a study which involves a first grade class in Burnaby. The Literacy 2.0 project involves developing writing fluency in innovative ways, by integrating the use of technology into the daily classroom routine with student blogs. This approach is expected to increase students' engagement in writing for an audience, foster creativity and self-confidence, and improve written fluency. Your knowledge and understanding of educational technology initiatives, the students, and the curriculum, will help us identify the most important features of this approach and help improve foundational literacy instruction.

As a fellow **educator**, this project may involve you in curriculum development and implementation of educational technology initiatives in the classroom. You may be interviewed, invited to participate in discussions or planning sessions with other teachers, or be asked to share observations from your teaching with other teachers or researchers. The data collected will not be used for professional evaluation.

As a **parent or community member**, you may be interviewed or asked to participate in group discussions about literacy and the role technology in education, experiences in your own schooling and daily life, effective communication between teachers, students, and parents, and your thoughts on how integrating technology may make learning more engaging and successful for children.

Data may be recorded in written or digital form, including still photos, audio recordings, and videos. Any personal data that is collected during the study will be kept strictly confidential, within the limits of professional ethics. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

Simon Fraser University and those conducting this study subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of participants. This form and the information it contains are given to you for your own protection and to ensure your full understanding of the procedures, risks, and benefits of the study.

Questions, concerns or complaints regarding this research may be communicated to the principal investigator named above, to the Director of the Office of Research Ethics, SFU, or to the Fieldwork Course Instructor:

Dr. Mark Fettes, Department of Education mtfettes@sfu.ca 778-782-4489
8888 University Way, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Literacy 2.0: Blogging to develop writing fluency in first grade (Simon Fraser University)

Having been asked to participate in this research study, I certify that I have read the Study Information Document and that I understand and agree with the procedures to be used and the personal risks to me in taking part in the study. I have also been informed of the confidentiality provisions governing the research, and that I may withdraw my participation at any time.

I also understand that I may register any complaint with the Director of the Office of Research Ethics, with the Principal Investigator, or with Dr. Mark Fettes, Department of Education.

Please print the following information:

Name: _____

Contact information: _____

phone _____ e-mail _____

Signature: _____

Date (use format MM/DD/YYYY) : ____/____/____

Additional Consent for Teachers

In addition to my consent to participate in the study, I agree that, as an educator in a public setting, I may be identified by name in reports and descriptions of the project and in photos or videos of class activities which are shared with teachers and researchers outside the school district and on the project website. I understand that these images will focus on the positive achievements and abilities of the students and their engagement in learning.

Signature: _____

Date (use format MM/DD/YYYY) : ____/____/____

Informed Consent for Minors: SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Project: **Literacy 2.0: Blogging to develop writing fluency in first grade**

Principal Investigator: **Lindsay Zebrowski**

Contact Information: **Brantford Elementary, Burnaby**

lindsay.zebrowski@sd41.bc.ca phone: 604-664-8603

Imaginative Education Master of Education Cohort

Simon Fraser University lebradbu@sfu.ca

For more information on Imaginative Education please visit **www.ierg.net**

Dear parents and students,

Your teacher this year is conducting an action research project to investigate effective ways to integrate technology into daily classroom routines and develop foundational literacy skills. We would like to ask your permission to share information from your classroom with other teachers and researchers. This will help us identify the best ways of working with students and help improve education in BC and elsewhere.

The Literacy 2.0 project involves developing writing fluency in innovative ways, by integrating the use of technology into the daily classroom routine with student blogs. This approach is expected to increase students' engagement in writing for an audience, foster creativity and self-confidence, and improve written fluency. Research activities may include observations and videotaping classroom activities, interviews or group discussions with students, and analysis of surveys and reflective writing and other school work.

Students will be expected to participate in all lessons and activities, including posting to a personal blog using district-approved software, to fulfill second term Language Arts objectives. However, students may choose not to participate in interviews or videotaping, and may ask to have samples of their work excluded from the study. Any personal data that is collected during the study, in the course of researchers' interaction with students, will be kept confidential and will not be used for any outside purpose, within the limits of professional ethics. Images and descriptions of classroom activities will not identify students by name, unless permission is explicitly given by the student and parents.

Simon Fraser University and those conducting this study subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of participants. This form and the information it contains are given to you for your own protection, your child's protection and to ensure your full understanding of the procedures, risks, and benefits of the study.

Questions, concerns or complaints regarding this research may be communicated to the classroom teacher or to the Fieldwork Course Instructor:

Dr. Mark Fettes, Department of Education mtfettes@sfu.ca 778-782-4489
8888 University Way, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6

**CONSENT BY PARENT / GUARDIAN
TO ALLOW PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT
Literacy 2.0: Blogging to develop writing fluency in first grade**

**EDUC 904 Fieldwork in Imaginative Education
(Simon Fraser University)**

I have received and understood the Study Information Document, and have discussed it with my child, and consent to my child's participation in the activities described.

Please print the following information:

Name of Parent, Guardian or other: _____

who is the (**relationship** to student): _____

of

student's first name: _____

student's last name : _____

This consent applies while my child is a member of the grade one class with Lindsay Zebrowski in Brantford Elementary School.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date (use format MM/DD/YYYY) : ____/____/____

I also consent to my child appearing in photos or videos of class activities which are shared with teachers and researchers outside the school district and on the project website. I understand that my child will not be identified by name and that these images will focus on the positive achievements and abilities of the students and their engagement in learning.

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

Date (use format MM/DD/YYYY) : ____/____/____

École Brantford Elementary School

6512 Brantford Avenue Burnaby BC V5E 2S1
Telephone: 604.664.8603 Fax: 604.664.8791

Feb 3rd, 2014

Dear Families,

As you all know, I am completing a Master's degree in Imaginative Education at SFU. I have been researching effective ways of integrating technology in the classroom, particularly for enhancing foundational literacy skills. This semester I am conducting an Action Research project for my Fieldwork course.

I am interested in how children can develop their writing skills using personal blogs as opposed to the conventional "Journals" used in most primary classrooms. My hope is that the wider audience provided by the blog (other students, family members) will entice students to be more thoughtful about their writing. I also hope that the use of the iPads for blogging will make daily writing practice more engaging.

We will be using the site Kidblog, recommended by the district learning technologies team. Students will continue to use their "codenames" from the class website and there will be a code of conduct established for blog posts to ensure student privacy (e.g. no faces in pictures, no use of real names or direct references to our school/community).

Please come see me if you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions for this project. Thank you in advance for your support!

Mrs. Zebrowski

Lindsay.zebrowski@sd41.bc.ca

www.mrszebrowskiszoo.com

kidblog.org/mrszebraszoo



Appendix B: Assessment Tools and Preliminary Student Writing Samples

Quick Scale: Grade 1 Writing From Experience

The Quick Scale is a summary of the Rating Scale that follows. Both describe student achievement in March–April of the school year.

Aspect	Not Yet Within Expectations	Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)	Fully Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
SNAPSHOT	<i>The writing may consist of a string of letters or be dictated for someone else to write down. The student needs a great deal of help.</i>	<i>The writing is recognizable as conventional writing and conveys some ideas or information. The student often needs some help.</i>	<i>The writing is readable and makes sense. The student is able to write independently with occasional help.</i>	<i>The writing communicates ideas or information with some description and detail. The student is able to write independently.</i>
MEANING • ideas and information • details	• may be able to “read” own writing, but meaning often changes each time	• sentences or ideas may not be related • little development, few details	• sentences or ideas are related • some detail	• some individuality • develops a topic with supporting details
STYLE • clarity and variety of language • description	• simple words • when “reading” or dictating, may be one long sentence or a series of short, stilted sentences	• conversational • repeats simple patterns, favourite words	• conversational, some simple description • repeats simple patterns	• some descriptive language • takes risks to use new words or patterns
FORM • follows models or examples • sequence	• usually a drawing with a string of letters or one or two dictated sentences	• may be very brief • drawing may provide much of the information	• follows form modelled by teacher • writing can stand alone	• logically connected and sequenced • writing can stand alone
CONVENTIONS • capitals and small letters • spelling • use of phonics • punctuation • spacing • legibility	• strings of capital letters • may show correct initial consonant • not yet able to use phonics • no punctuation • may be copied or dictated to another person	• mostly capital letters • some words spelled conventionally • many words spelled phonetically • may experiment with punctuation • parts are legible	• both capitals and small letters • many familiar words spelled conventionally • new or unfamiliar words spelled phonetically • some punctuation • legible	• both capitals and small letters • most familiar words spelled conventionally • phonics and word patterns used to solve spelling problems • generally written in sentences; uses punctuation • legible

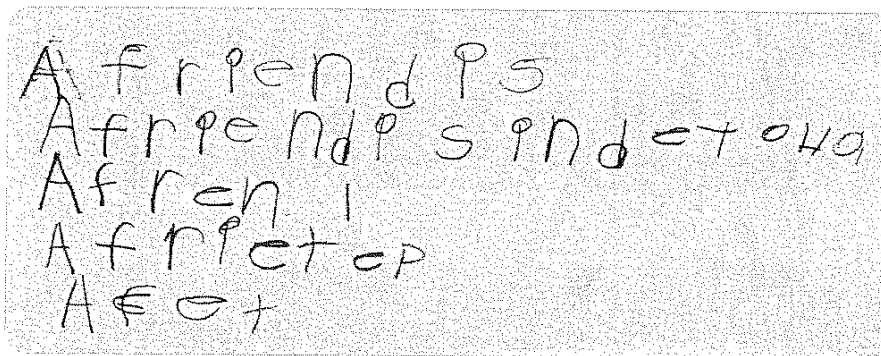
NOT YET WITHIN EXPECTATIONS

Teacher's Observations

The student has recorded the teacher's sentence stem and attempted to write strings of letters.

- ◆ strings of letters
- ◆ copied from the teacher
- ◆ no punctuation

	Not Yet	Almost	Fully	Exceeds
SHAPE/SIZE				
MEANING				
STYLE				
FORM				
CONVENTIONS				



TRANSCRIPT

A friend is
Afriendi s indet oHo
Afren i
Afrietep
Afet

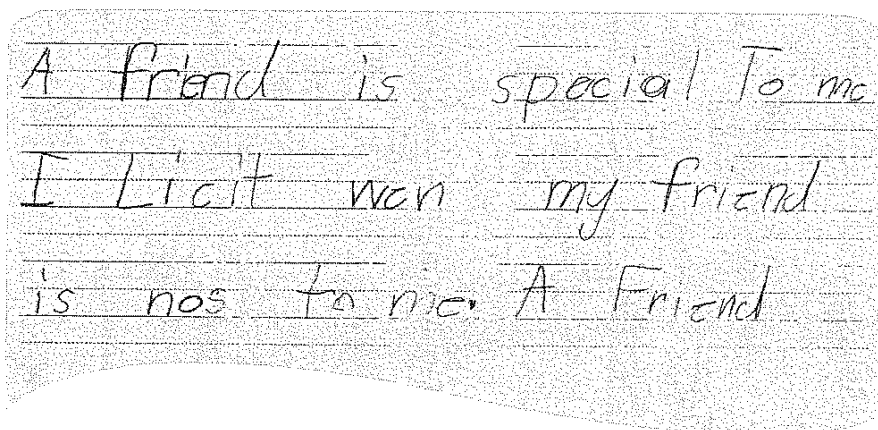
FULLY MEETS EXPECTATIONS

Teacher's Observations

The student makes personal connections to friends. The writing is readable and makes sense.

- ◆ sentences and ideas are related to each other
- ◆ conversational language
- ◆ includes both capitals and small letters
- ◆ many familiar words are spelled conventionally
- ◆ legible; there are spaces between the words

	Not Yet	Meets	Fully	Exceeds
EXAMPLES				
MEANING				
STYLE				
FORM				
CONVENTIONS				



TRANSCRIPT

A friend is special To me I Licit wen my friend is nos to me. A Friend is nice To me. A friend Play's wiTh me. A fricnd Toss secrets aBouT Me. I Like my Friend my Friend is Angie I Like Angie nye is nos To me. my oThre Friend is Tara nye is verey nos. I Like mrs Bain.

Armadillo

Meeting Expectations

Feb 13th
2014

Title: What is a friend?

A friend is someone to meet
and a friend you can make a
friend we think you also make
you don't like meen.

Armadillo

Meeting Expectations

From Experience

April of Grade 1 can generally be described as shown in this scale.

Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)	Fully Meets Expectations
<p><i>The writing is recognizable as conventional writing and conveys some ideas or information. The student often needs some help.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sentences or ideas may not be related to each other little development, few details 	<p><i>The writing is readable and makes sense. The student is able to write independently with occasional help.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sentences or ideas are related to each other some detail
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> conversational language, simple words, little or no descriptive language repeats simple patterns or favourite words, often those provided by the teacher; there is no flow to the sentences—they tend to be short and choppy or long and rambling may overuse pronouns to the point where the reader is confused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> conversational language; may include some description repeats simple sentences and patterns may overuse pronouns, but the reader can usually tell to whom the pronouns refer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attempts to follow the form modelled by the teacher writing may be very brief, with much of the information provided by a drawing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> follows the form modelled by the teacher (e.g., list, web, paragraph) writing makes sense standing alone; there may also be a detailed picture that adds information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tends to rely on capital letters; may include some small letters some conventional spelling many words spelled phonetically; may need frequent help in applying phonics may experiment with punctuation; shows some sense of sentences when reading own writing aloud parts are legible; other parts may be difficult to read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> includes both capitals and small letters (may be inconsistent) many familiar words are spelled conventionally new or unfamiliar words are spelled phonetically; beginning to use phonics consistently includes some punctuation (often applied inconsistently); shows some sense of written sentences legible, although parts may be difficult to read; spaces between most words

odd phrasing, noticeable in speech as well

combines fragments into sentences—can understand intended meaning

Iguana

Fully Meeting Expectations

What is a friend?

A friend is when you have
a best friend who
you like.

A friend is someone to
met.

A friend is someone to
play with.

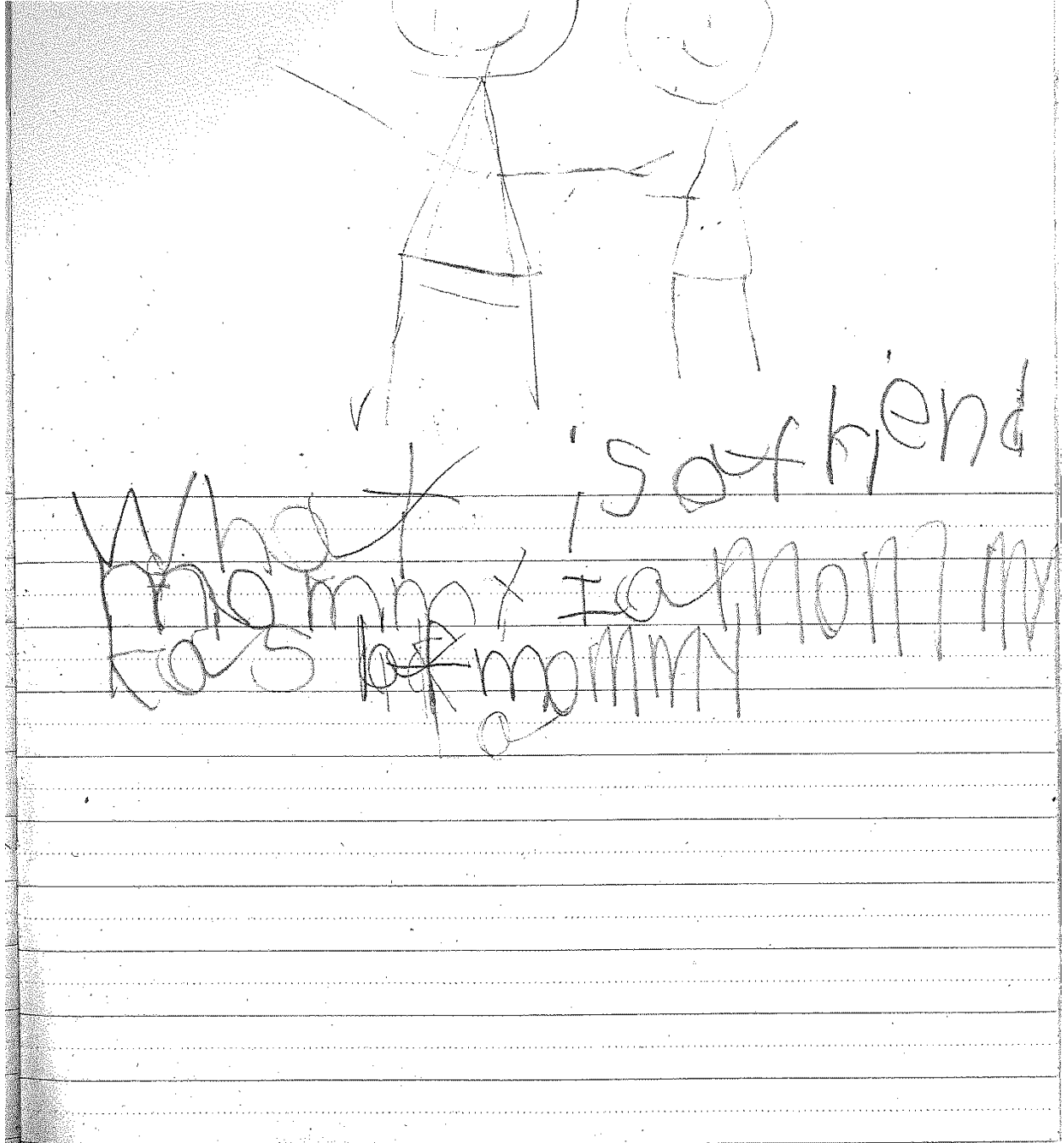
Fully Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<i>The writing is readable and makes sense. The student is able to write independently with occasional help.</i>	<i>The writing communicates ideas or information with some description and detail. The student is able to write independently.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sentences or ideas are related to each other • some detail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some sense of individuality or originality • develops a topic, often including supporting details that add "colour"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conversational language; may include some description • repeats simple sentences and patterns • may overuse pronouns, but the reader can usually tell to whom the pronouns refer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some words chosen for their effect; often includes some descriptive language • takes risks with new words or patterns • uses pronouns clearly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • follows the form modelled by the teacher (e.g., list, web, paragraph) • writing makes sense standing alone; there may also be a detailed picture that adds information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ideas or events are logically connected and sequenced • writing makes sense standing alone; there may also be pictures to add interest or information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes both capitals and small letters (may be inconsistent) • many familiar words are spelled conventionally • new or unfamiliar words are spelled phonetically; beginning to use phonics consistently • includes some punctuation (often applied inconsistently); shows some sense of written sentences • legible, although parts may be difficult to read; spaces between most words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes both capitals and small letters • most familiar words are spelled conventionally • independently able to solve spelling problems, usually by applying phonics * dictionary • generally written in sentences; may experiment with a variety of punctuation marks (e.g., exclamation, question, and quotation marks) • legible; there are spaces between the words

Iguana

Fully Meeting Expectations

Monkey

Not Yet Meeting
Expectations



Monkey

Not Yet Meeting
Expectations

ng Scale: Grade 1 Writing From Experience

Student achievement in writing from experience tasks by March–April of Grade 1 can generally be described as shown in this scale.

Aspect	Not Yet Within Expectations	Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)
SNAPSHOT	<i>The writing may consist of a string of letters or be dictated for someone else to write down. The student needs a great deal of help.</i>	<i>The writing is recognizable as conventional writing and conveys some ideas or information. The student often needs some help.</i>
MEANING • ideas and information • details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may be able to “read” own writing, but meaning often changes each time • most of the meaning is in the drawing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sentences or ideas may not be related to each other • little development, few details
STYLE • clarity and variety of language • description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simple words • when “reading” his or her writing, or dictating, may create one long, rambling sentence or a series of short, stilted sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conversational language, simple words, little or no descriptive language • repeats simple patterns or favourite words, often those provided by the teacher; there is no flow to the sentences—they tend to be short and choppy or long and rambling • may overuse pronouns to the point where the reader is confused
FORM • follows models or examples • sequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may not resemble the form modelled by the teacher • usually a drawing labelled by a string of letters or one or two sentences that have been dictated to another person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attempts to follow the form modelled by the teacher • writing may be very brief, with much of the information provided by a drawing
CONVENTIONS • capitals and small letters • spelling • use of phonics • punctuation • spacing • legibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strings of capital letters without spaces; single letters may represent words • may show correct initial consonant for an intended word • not yet be able to use sound-symbol relationships (phonics) • no punctuation • may be copied or dictated to another person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tends to rely on capital letters; may include some small letters — reverse, no capitals/all caps • some conventional spelling • many words spelled phonetically; may need frequent help in applying phonics • may experiment with punctuation; shows some sense of sentences when reading own writing aloud • parts are legible; other parts may be difficult to read

“mommy”

(why is mommy your friend?)

“i am mommy kas” (mommy’s kid)

(why does that make you her friend?)

“laf mommy” (because I love her)

Octopus

Minimally Meeting
Expectations

What Sica friend

✓
the lie the son thing

Rating Scale: Grade 1 Writing From Experience

Student achievement in writing from experience tasks by March-April of Grade 1 can generally be described as shown in this scale.

Not Yet Within Expectations	Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)	Fully Meets Expectations
<p><i>The writing may consist of a string of letters or be dictated for someone else to write down. The student needs a great deal of help.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may be able to "read" own writing, but meaning often changes each time • most of the meaning is in the drawing 	<p><i>The writing is recognizable as conventional writing and conveys some ideas or information. The student often needs some help.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sentences or ideas may not be related to each other • little development, few details 	<p><i>The writing is readable and makes sense. The student is able to write independently with occasional help.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sentences or ideas are related to each other • some detail
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simple words • when "reading" his or her writing, or dictating, may create one long, rambling sentence or a series of short, stilted sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conversational language, simple words, little or no descriptive language • repeats simple patterns or favourite words, often those provided by the teacher; there is no flow to the sentences—they tend to be short and choppy or long and rambling • may overuse pronouns to the point where the reader is confused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conversational language; may include some description • repeats simple sentences and patterns • may overuse pronouns, but the reader can usually tell to whom the pronouns refer <p><i>Sentences are clearly developed when communicating orally but needs it dictated to record it himself</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may not resemble the form modelled by the teacher • usually a drawing labelled by a string of letters or one or two sentences that have been dictated to another person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attempts to follow the form modelled by the teacher • writing may be very brief, with much of the information provided by a drawing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • follows the form modelled by the teacher (e.g., list, web, paragraph) • writing makes sense standing alone; there may also be a detailed picture that adds information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strings of capital letters without spaces; single letters may represent words • may show correct initial consonant for an intended word • not yet be able to use sound-symbol relationships (phonics) • no punctuation • may be copied or dictated to another person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tends to rely on capital letters; may include some small letters • some conventional spelling • many words spelled phonetically; may need frequent help in applying phonics • may experiment with punctuation; shows some sense of sentences when reading own writing aloud • parts are legible; other parts may be difficult to read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes both capitals and small letters (may be inconsistent) <i>usually small letters</i> • many familiar words are spelled conventionally • new or unfamiliar words are spelled phonetically; beginning to use phonics consistently • includes some punctuation (often applied inconsistently); shows some sense of written sentences • legible, although parts may be difficult to read; spaces between most words

Octopus

Minimally Meeting/
Approaching Expectations

Tiger

Minimally Meeting
Expectations

What is a friend?
a friend is someone that
helps you for math

From Experience





April of Grade 1 can generally be described as shown in this scale.

Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)	Fully Meets Expectations
<p><i>The writing is recognizable as conventional writing and conveys some ideas or information. The student often needs some help.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sentences or ideas may not be related to each other • little development, few details 	<p><i>The writing is readable and makes sense. The student is able to write independently with occasional help.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sentences or ideas are related to each other • some detail
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conversational language, simple words, little or no descriptive language • repeats simple patterns or favourite words, often those provided by the teacher; there is no flow to the sentences—they tend to be short and choppy or long and rambling • may overuse pronouns to the point where the reader is confused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conversational language; may include some description • repeats simple sentences and patterns • may overuse pronouns, but the reader can usually tell to whom the pronouns refer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attempts to follow the form modelled by the teacher • writing may be very brief, with much of the information provided by a drawing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • follows the form modelled by the teacher (e.g., list, web, paragraph) • writing makes sense standing alone; there may also be a detailed picture that adds information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tends to rely on capital letters; may include some small letters <i>reversals</i> • some conventional spelling • many words spelled phonetically; may need frequent help in applying phonics • may experiment with punctuation; shows some sense of sentences when reading own writing aloud • parts are legible; other parts may be difficult to read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes both capitals and small letters (may be inconsistent) • many familiar words are spelled conventionally • new or unfamiliar words are spelled phonetically; beginning to use phonics consistently • includes some punctuation (often applied inconsistently); shows some sense of written sentences • legible, although parts may be difficult to read; spaces between most words

Tiger

Minimally Meeting
Expectations









Appendix C: Pre-Study Survey on Student Attitudes Towards Writing Activities








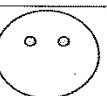
Pre-Study Survey: Student Attitudes Towards Writing Activities				
How do you feel about:	 YUCK!	 MEH	 GOOD	 AWESOME!
How do you feel about:	Number of Students:			
1) Writing in your journal?	5	3	6	3
2) Your turn to write the morning message?	1	3	3	10
3) Making your timeline? (Social Studies project)	3	3	5	6
4) Working in your Printing duotang?	5	3	6	3
5) Working in your Phonics duotang?	5	6	4	2
6) Doing Spelling?	2	5	4	6
7) Writing a Letter to someone in your free time?	3	6	3	5
8) Drawing in your drawing book?	1	1	6	9

Pre-Study Survey: Student Attitudes Towards Writing Activities				
How do you feel about:				
Samples of students' written responses when prompted to explain their selection:				
1) Writing in your journal?	"it take me to long"	"I need quwiyit time"	"it help me lnse"	"I can write what I feel"
2) Your turn to write the morning message?	"I hat being spesou hpr"	"I need to thick"	"you can write anything"	"I like to make the ! for everyone... it's funny"
3) Making your timeline? (Social Studies project)	"It boring"	"it was a little hard"	"I fel Good dowing it"	"my mom likes it" "I like to look at my picher"
4) Working in your Printing duotang?	"ulot of riteing"		"I learn how to write" "I can do it fast"	"you can write good"
5) Working in your Phonics duotang?	"Boring" "I get kunfyoosd"	"it was a little hard"	"It's easy peasy lemon scuezy"	
6) Doing Spelling?	"you circle the wrong words"	"cin of hrde" "is boring"	"it's easy" "I do it super fast"	
7) Writing a Letter to someone in your free time?	"It's boaring" "I do not no wut to writing"	"is boring"	"I can give it to my mom"	"when my mom is home and I can write letters to my friends"
8) Drawing in your drawing book?	"I don't like drawing"	"boring"	"I can make surprises for my mom" "I code draw inithing I want"	"it's fun to draw" "you can draw mazes" "I can draw my own things"

Name: _____









How do you feel about:









	 YUCK!	 MEH	 GOOD	 AWESOME!
1) Writing in your journal?				
2) Your turn to write the morning message?				
3) Making your timeline?				
4) Working in your Printing duotang?				

	 YUCK!  MEH  GOOD  AWESOME!
5) Working in your Phonics duotang?	
6) Doing Spelling?	
7) Writing a letter to someone in your free time?	
8) Drawing in your drawing book?	

Name: Deer









How do you feel about:









	 YUCK!  MEH  GOOD  AWESOME!
1) Writing in your journal?	 yuck because it takes time
2) Your turn to write the morning message?	 Good to write because i like
3) Making your timeline?	 meh because you may get stuck
4) Working in your Printing duotang?	 Awesome: because you can write good.

	 YUCK!  MEH  GOOD  AWESOME!
5) Working in your Phonics duotang?	 meh because i do sdling.
6) Doing Spelling?	 yuck because you circle the wrong words.
7) Writing a letter to someone in your free time?	 good because i like making a letter.
8) Drawing in your drawing book?	 Awesome because I can draw my own things.

Name | Iguana









How do you feel about:

	 YUCK!  MEH  GOOD  AWESOME!
1) Writing in your journal?	 I feel Good when I writing in my journal cause it hde me lense
2) Your turn to write the morning message?	 I feel AWESOME cause I Get to writing the thing that I writ
3) Making your timeline?	 I feel Awesome cause I like to look at my Picher
4) Working in your Printing duotang?	 I feel Yuck

	 YUCK!  MEH  GOOD  AWESOME!
5) Working in your Phonics duotang?	 I feel good cause I like to find up the spars
6) Doing Spelling?	 I feel Yuck cause I hate
7) Writing a letter to someone in your free time?	 I feel Yuck cause I DO Not No want to Writing
8) Drawing in your drawing book?	 I feel Good cause I Got Get to Draw

Name **Tiger**

How do you feel about:

	 YUCK!  MEH  GOOD  AWESOME!
1) Writing in your journal?	 I dont like Journal beca it take me to long
2) Your turn to write the morning message?	 I Like writng my message it is turn
3) Making your timeline?	 I fel Good downing it
4) Working in your Printing duotang?	 I dont Like dowing it

Appendix D: Writing Quality Blog Comments

How can I write a great blog comment?



<http://2kmand2kj.global2.vic.edu.au>

★ Write your comment like a **letter** by including a **greeting, content and a closing**.

★ Always use **correct spelling, punctuation, grammar and spacing**.

★ **Compliment** the writer in a specific way, **ask a question** or **add new information** to the post.

★ Write a **relevant comment** that is **related to the post**.

★ **Do not reveal any personal information** about yourself in your comment.

★ Always **read over the comment and edit** before submitting.

Appendix E: Hamburger Rubric Analogy and Class-Generated Criteria

Not Yet Meeting Expectations	Approaching Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Exceeding Expectations
			

The Hamburger Rubric

The following story was paraphrased from Livia Chan's 2013 presentation for use in this study with her permission. As the story is told, images of the corresponding burgers and report card terminology are revealed.


So, the other night I went out with my family for dinner. At the restaurant, I ordered a cheeseburger but the waitress only brought me a hamburger patty, no bun. I sent it back saying, "I'm sorry, but this does not meet my expectations". (display not yet meeting expectations patty)

A little while later she returned with a new patty, on a bun, with cheese and lettuce. I said, "This is approaching my expectations, but the menu says it's supposed to have ketchup, mustard, pickles, and tomatoes". (display approaching expectations burger)





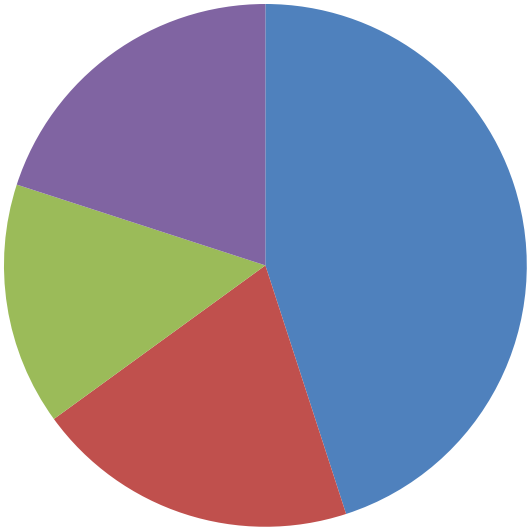
Finally, the third time, she returned with a correctly made burger, and I said, "Thank you, this is meeting my expectations". (display meeting expectations burger)

All of a sudden, the restaurant manager came over and said "I just heard about all the trouble you've been having. I'm so sorry, please let me get you a better burger, and some complimentary French fries for your trouble". I really appreciated the extra effort and when the new burger arrived I said, "Thank you, this new burger and the free fries is more than I asked for, this exceeds my expectations". (display exceeding expectations burger)

Student-generated Criteria

Exceeding Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Approaching Expectations	Not Yet Meeting Expectations
			
BLOG POST	<p>Title, Tag (tell what it's about)</p> <p>Picture (so they know what you're talking about)</p> <p>Spelling (sound it, use dictionary, ask friend)</p> <p>Sentences (that match the picture)</p> <p>Punctuation (. ! ?)</p> <p>Be Safe (no faces, no names, no address)</p>		
COMMENT	<p>Ask a question ?</p> <p>Match the post (make sense)</p> <p>Compliment (say something nice)</p> <p>Reply to different people's posts (not just your friends)</p> <p>*Write back! (reply)</p>		

Appendix F: Post-Study Survey on Student Attitudes Towards Blogging Activities

Post-Study Survey: Student Attitudes Towards Blogging Activities				
				
	YUCK!	MEH	GOOD	AWESOME!
How do you feel about:	Number of Students:			
1) The blog project	6	1	7	3
2) Making posts	1	4	4	8
3) Writing comments to others		6	6	5
4) Getting comments on your posts	2		9	8
5) Using Paint (app)		2	7	8
6) Blogging at home	5	5	3	4
7) What would you tell another Grade 1 class and their teacher if they were going to start blogging?				
8) How do you feel about: Writing for the blog Vs. Other kinds of writing (posts and comments) (Journal, morning messages, Tree Book...)				
<div> <h3>Students' Preferred Writing Activities</h3>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Blog-specific writing activities (posts and comments) ■ Morning Messages ■ Journal ■ Other non blog-related writing activities </div>				

Post-Study Survey: Student Attitudes Towards Blogging Activities

How do you feel about:



YUCK!



MEH



GOOD



AWESOME!

Samples of students' written responses when prompted to explain their selection:

1) The blog project

"it is boring"
"we have to do too much things"

"it kind of takes a long time to do everything"

"I get to write"

2) Making posts

"I get to write about how I feel"

3) Writing comments to others

"I dot No wat to writing about the posts"

"I want to know what theirs is about"

"It gives me back memories"

"I like to rit to my freds"

"I love to riti to my friens"

"I like replying"

4) Getting comments on your posts

"it a bit boring"
"their comments are too hard"

"Knowone dose inapropreet coments"
"I had lots comments"

"then I can send comments back to them"
"I like popl riting nice tigs"

5) Using Paint (app)

"I get to draw and choose wicth size for the pain brush"

"you get to draw your own pictures"
"I like painting my own things"

6) Blogging at home

"I dot do miy blogs at home"
"I do not have time"

"my mom don't listen to me, it takes too long"

"my famly lrsn how to do blgging"
"my Dad comments"

"so I can use emoticons"
"I like showing my parents"

Additional Questions

7) What would you tell another grade 1 class and their teacher if they were going to start blogging?

- "Be safe (no faces no addres and no names) and have fun."
- "how to do it" "what to do" "press on the button that has a K"
- "if your name starts with an H you can go on hedgehog"
- "explain it and give a hint"
- "sow the class haw to do bloggs"
- "no facse, no adris and no name"
- "you can do it"
- "I would tell a grade 1 class to make comments to polol"
- "help if ther dot no."
- "I would give them examples"
- "no showing faces!!!"

8) How do you feel about:

Writing for the blog (posts and comments)









- "Blog I can write about How I feel"
- "it's more fun you don't have to use your pencil"
- "it was the most funnest"
- "blogging is better because it fun"
- "writing for u blog because when I was 5 I did not know what blog means"







Vs. Other kinds of writing
(Journal, morning messages,
Tree Book...)

- "morning messeg I can tell the class whut I want to say"
- "everything is not very fun and the blog is"
- "the letter had more"
- "morning messages because it is fun"
- "I love writing my morning message"

Name: **Macaw**









How do you feel about:









	 YUCK!  MEH  GOOD  AWESOME!
1) The blog project	 I get to write
2) Making posts	 I get to write about how I feel
3) Writing comments to others	 It gives me back memories
4) Getting comments on your posts	 know one else in a proper et coments

	 YUCK!  MEH  GOOD  AWESOME!
5) Using Paint	 I get to draw and choose with size for the paint brush
6) Blogging at home	 so I can use emoticons
7) What would you tell another grade 1 class and their teacher if they were going to start blogging?	Be safe (no faxes no addres and no names) and have fun.
8) How do you feel about Writing for the blog (posts and comments) Vs. Other kinds of writing (Journal, morning messages, Tree book...)	morning messag, Blog I can tell the class what I want to say. I can write about HOW I feel.

 Octopus

How do you feel about:









	 YUCK!  MEH  GOOD  AWESOME!
1) The blog project	 I didn't like it (b/c) it's no fun
2) Making posts	 meh, (b/c) I kind of like it and I kind of don't. ? it's not really that fun.
3) Writing comments to others	 good (b/c) I want to know what theirs is about.
4) Getting comments on your posts	 then I can send comments back to them.







	 YUCK!  MEH  GOOD  AWESOME!
5) Using Paint 	 it is osom (b/c) you get to draw your own pictures.
6) Blogging at home 	 i dot do mix blogs at home
7) What would you tell another grade 1 class and their teacher if they were going to start blogging?	how to do it what to do press on the button that has a k
8) How do you feel about Writing for the blog (posts and comments) Vs. Other kinds of writing (Journal, morning messages, Tree book...)	because it's more fun, you don't have to use your pencil.



Name Otter

How do you feel about:

	 YUCK!  MEH  GOOD  AWESOME!
1) The blog project	 because it's fun
2) Making posts	 I never made a post
3) Writing comments to others	 because I like posts better
4) Getting comments on your posts	 I feel happy when I get comments

	 YUCK!  MEH  GOOD  AWESOME!
5) Using Paint	 I like painting
6) Blogging at home	 I did not blog at home
7) What would you tell another grade 1 class and their teacher if they were going to start blogging?	No showing faces!!!
8) How do you feel about Writing for the blog (posts and comments) Vs. Other kinds of writing (Journal, morning messages, Tree book...)	Writing for a blog because when I was 5 I did not know what blog means

Appendix G: Selected Images of Students Blogging



Octopus and Deer



Alligator, Macaw, Nightingale, Iguana



Otter and Deer



Squirrel and Dragonfly



Octopus and Lion



Lion and Alligator



Angelfish



Hedgehog

