

## Student Blogs: How Online Writing Can Transform Your Classroom



Anne Davis and Ewa McGrail

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Book Review

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Derived from the authors' year-long research study of a fifth-grade classroom's experience with blogging, this work suggests that integrating student blogs into a curriculum is an effective way to promote student writing. According to the authors, requiring students to blog not only enhances their written communication skills by making writing a priority, but it also increases student investment in learning by providing a space for them to share their opinions, build content literacies across the curriculum, and learn in conversation with one another.

Overall, this book provides educators with an accessible guide to incorporating student blogs into the classroom. It is divided into six chapters, plus a brief review of relevant works in digital literacy.

In the first two chapters, the authors focus on how to integrate blogging. Chapter 1 highlights several important decisions that educators interested in teaching with blogs must consider – namely, how will student blogging contribute to one's overall learning goals, what blogging platform to use, and whether the student blogs will be public or private. Once the answers to these questions are in place, Chapter 2 suggests effective methods for introducing students to the practice of blogging, as well as the importance of creating guidelines and procedures for safe and responsible online writing.

Chapters 3 and 4 look at student blogging in action, suggesting that when students can practice and experiment with their writing in a low-risk environment they become more effective writers. Whereas Chapter 3 gives an inside view of the blogging instruction and learning that occurred in the authors' fifth-grade classroom, Chapter 4 considers the importance of creating an interactive learning community that encourages dialogue and fosters

student excitement for writing. Because digital spaces require students to engage with an audience beyond their teacher or peers, the authors contend that students are better able to engage their ideas in conversation with others and to see value in their writing.

Finally, Chapters 5 and 6 outline several logistical concerns around student blogging. In Chapter 5, the authors cover basic tenants of copyright and fair use issues to help prepare teachers and students for the responsible use of the copyrighted works and images created by others. Following this discussion of digital citizenship, Chapter 6 discusses the importance of offering formative rather than evaluative feedback throughout the blogging process. The authors claim that regular, low-stakes assessment is foundational to supporting and developing successful student writers.

Given the authors' focus on elementary school writers, this book is perhaps most useful for K-12 educators who wish to begin incorporating student blogs into their classrooms. Nevertheless, those in higher education who are aspiring to improve student writing will also be able to glean sound pedagogical reasons for incorporating student blogs into our classrooms, as well as a helpful framework for how to do so. Unfortunately, several of the activities and examples provided by the authors throughout the book will be unhelpful given their primary and secondary school context.

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