

Running head: DID YOU READ MY BLOG?

DID YOU READ MY BLOG?: A CASE STUDY OF BLOGGING IN THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

By

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ABSTRACT

Research supports the claim that as adolescents grow older, they tend to read less and spend more time engaged with technology and social media. One tool that can be incorporated into the classroom to combine student learning with technology and social media is blogging. The purpose of my qualitative case study was to observe how students interacted with each other when responding to Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* through the use of a multimedia blog. My research explored the following research question and sub-questions: How do students interact with each other when responding to Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* through the use of a multimedia blog? (A) How are students interacting with each other through their online postings? (B) How do students' postings reflect the ways in which they are/are not making sense of *The Bluest Eye*? (C) If students do incorporate multimedia into their postings, why are they choosing to do so? The research questions were grounded in Vygotsky's social constructivism theory (1978) and Gavelek and Raphael's Vygotsky Space (1998). I interviewed 13 students and collected and analyzed students' blogs, written responses, and reflections. Using the qualitative software program Dedoose, and constant comparative methods, I analyzed data to identify common themes. Once themes were solidified, I aligned each theme with my research questions. Three findings were discussed: 1) students interacted online by creating an online community of learners where they could ask questions, engage in conversations, and challenge each other's ideas; 2) blogs were supportive tools in helping the students make sense of the novel; and 3) the students were divided on using multimedia, but the ones who did use multimedia explained that it was for entertainment and to add a touch of humor to the assignment. Practical recommendations and suggestions for future practice and research are presented.

Keywords: blogging, multimedia, English Language Arts education, literacy instruction

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My first memory about school is sitting down and talking to my dad about the importance of an education and the importance of going to college. It was the night before I started kindergarten and he was preparing me for the future. I am sure at that moment, neither of us knew the impact those words would have on me. Once I started learning, I never stopped. First, I dedicate this study to my parents who supported me from the beginning. Even when I think I have nothing left inside of me, they give me the strength to dig deeper and keep going. They are my cheerleaders, my shoulders to cry on, and my best friends. Every single day I am surrounded by their love and support and I believe that I can achieve anything with them supporting me.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As adolescents grow older, many tend to become disengaged with reading (Ajayi, 2015; Guthrie, Van Meter, McCann, Wigfield, Bennett, Poundstone, Rice, Faibischi, Hunt, & Mitchell, 1996). There has been a five-minute decrease in time that adolescents spend reading printed materials, such as books, magazines, and newspapers for pleasure from 43 minutes in 1999 to 38 minutes in 2004 (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). While a five minute decrease might not seem that serious, when compared to the number of minutes students spend using different forms of media, there is a big difference. The past five years there has been an increase in adolescents using digital tools (Beach, 2012) and on average, adolescents spend seven hours and thirty-eight minutes a day, seven days a week, consumed with multimedia (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). This was measured looking at how often students watch TV, listen to music, spend time on the computer, play video games, read print, and watch movies (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010).

Students live, and communicate, in a world of instant answers and constant stimulation (Ciolan, 2012; Downes & Bishop, 2012; Prensky, 2001). “For many students, traditional language-based, pencil-and-paper-bound ELA instruction is boring” (Ajayi, 2015, p.69). When students need to acquire new skills, they do not read; they check out videos online on YouTube.com (Downes & Bishop, 2012). If they need a second opinion, they log into social media websites (Downes & Bishop, 2012). Information sharing and communication have changed along with the evolution of technology (Ciolan, 2012; Downes & Bishop, 2012; Prensky, 2001).

Some students want to reach out and share ideas and digital tools, and online communication can provide a means for instant feedback. Collaborative sharing of ideas,

combined with immediate feedback, can increase student interest in given subject matters (Felix, 2008). According to Beach (2012) Students are using

Twitter, Facebook and/or blogs to share information and respond to one another because they can reach larger audiences with whom they might have no personal relationship, but are doing so because they perceive the value of sharing their knowledge with the larger public. (p.48).

Policymakers and researchers alike (Dornisch, 2014; Ellison & Wu, 2008; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010; Roscorio, 2010) are acknowledging that many students today have lived their entire lives not only surrounded by technology, but they are also using it every single day; however, students are not prepared with skills they need to be successful in college (Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009). “Technology and media are intricately interwoven” in the lives of today’s adolescents, but they are still “lacking in the academic literacy skills that are the foundation of further success in school and in adult life” (Considine et al., 2009, p.479). If students can be more involved in their learning, they will learn more (Beach, 2012; Considine et al., 2009).

Students will become more engaged in learning if teachers can provide instruction that allows students to use their knowledge of technology to help make sense of what they are learning, and apply it to their own lives (Beach, 2012; Considine et al., 2009). Considine et al., 2009 states:

To develop a curriculum that is relevant to this generation, educators need to acknowledge and respect the skills, attitudes, and knowledge that students bring with them to school and build on those to ensure success in the academic

disciplines. Thus, students will become engaged and connected to the traditional curriculum while developing crucial technological skills. (p.479)

Even the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts (ELA), adopted by New Jersey in 2010, supports the idea that students need to be in the center of the classroom and that technology can help build their engagement (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The purpose of the CCSS is to make sure that students are learning the skills they need to best prepare them for college and for careers. According to the CCSS a college and/or career ready student fits seven overall criteria: demonstrating independence; building strong content knowledge; responding to varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline; comprehending and critiquing; valuing evidence; coming to an understanding of other perspectives and cultures; and using technology and digital media strategically and capably (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

One specific expectation of the ELA standards for college and/or career ready students includes being able to incorporate technology into the English classroom by being able to complete Internet research, produce and publish writing, and interact and collaborate with one another through online tools such as blogs in order to be able to evaluate information presented in different media and formats (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Blogging is one possible way to structure lessons around the student instead of the teacher. Students create their own blogs, where they not only research and post their own ideas, but also interact with both a teacher and peers in an online setting (Glogoff, 2005).

Since there are so many social, communicational, and technological changes in the world, plus changes in the tools that students have access to, education in K-12 schools must adapt with these changes and provide instruction wherein students can learn to use these changes to enrich their lives. Blogging is a way for students to become more involved in active learning where they are using technology to build their learning, rather than just relying on listening to information and connecting it to what they already know (Kim, Chacko, Zhao, & Montclare, 2014; Mayer & Moreno, 1998). An added layer to blogging can be the use of multimedia in the blogs to help students further engage with the learning process because students learn better when pictures, videos, and multimedia are incorporated appropriately (Ellison & Wu, 2008; Green, Inan, & Maushak, 2014; Kim et al., 2014; Mayer & Moreno, 1998).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to observe how students interacted with each other when responding to Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* through the use of a multimedia blog.

This case study explored the following research questions:

How do students interact with each other when responding to Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* through the use of a multimedia blog?

- A. How are students interacting with each other through their online postings?
- B. How do students' postings reflect the ways in which they are/are not making sense of *The Bluest Eye*?
- C. If students do incorporate multimedia into their postings, why are they choosing to do so?

Within the context of this study, the term “blog” will be specifically understood to mean an online public writing community where students can post their ideas online, and respond to other students’ thoughts by using a commenting feature (Ellison & Wu, 2008; Lee, 2010; McGrail & Davis, 2011). The term “multimedia” will be defined as a broad overview of using more than one form of expression or communication (Merchant, 2005). The term “multimedia blog” will be used specifically to mean using pictures, hyperlinks, videos, or anything more than plain text posted on a blog (Ajayi, 2015; Cook, 2011; Merchant, 2005). (See Appendix A)

Problem of Practice

As an 11th grade English Language Arts teacher at a suburban/urban high school in North Jersey, I am constantly looking for ways to engage my students more with reading. As a classroom teacher, I am aware that my students are engaged with technology. My students constantly have their phones out and are either texting one another, checking out social media, or surfing the Internet. After seeing how much my students are engaged with technology, I wanted to try to combine technology with my lesson plans to engage my students more with reading.

I designed a pilot study around a multimodal approach in my own classroom during the 2013 – 2014 school year. I conducted a small case study of one of my 11th grade Advanced Placement American Literature classes wherein I used multimodal teaching strategies to teach a unit of study based around Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel *The Scarlet Letter*. However, I stretched myself too far. In an attempt to engage my students more, I added a breadth of multimodal tools without providing my students the depth of knowledge on why we were using the tools. My students were blogging, creating

movie projects, listening to music, and watching video clips, without understanding why we were adding digital tools to the curriculum.

Data was collected from observations, interviews, and student and teacher created documents in an attempt to find out what my students' thoughts were about the multimodal approach. Even though I was only able to interview three students in my pilot study, they provided me with positive responses. However, the students were unsure why we were using so many digital tools. When interviewed and asked about the digital tools, they answered that they thought the multimodal approach was interesting and some of the strategies were beneficial to their learning experiences, but they were not more engaged with the literature because of all of these different types of digital tools.

In summary, it is known that students engage with technology more than reading print texts (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). State reforms in education are looking to combine technology with traditional school curricula in order to give students a better opportunity to become engaged in learning and better understand skills they will need to be successful (Beach, 2012; Considine et al., 2009). For these reasons, I believed that incorporating one technology-based skill into my 11th grade American Literature class would help my students engage more with literature and make meaning of the texts they were reading.

Theoretical Framework

This study was designed to examine students' interactions with one another while discussing a piece of literature through an online blog. It explored the choices students made to include or not include pictures, hyperlinks, and video clips in their blogs. In a review of the literature on blogging, Ellison and Wu (2008) found that when learners

interact with their peers through online blogging, they are able to build their own knowledge and share their knowledge with others. I framed my study using central ideas that create the social constructivist theory of learning. Furthermore, I aligned my research with Gavelek and Raphael's (1996) modified Vygotsky Space.

I will first provide an overview of social constructivism because my study examined how students made meaning of a text through the social interaction of online blogging. This will be followed by an overview of the Vygotsky Space which worked as a framework against which I was able to place my study in order to better understand how students moved through different steps of meaning making while reading *The Bluest Eye*.

Social Constructivism

This qualitative case study was grounded in the theory of Social Constructivism because social constructivism is based in making meaning through socialization, and my study examines how students make meaning of a text through the social interaction of blogging. The entire study was focused on examining how students interacted with one another using online blogs, and what decisions students made about what information to include in blogs.

The constructivist viewpoint of learning examines how people make meaning to learn (Churcher, Downs, & Tewksbury, 2014; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Walker & Shore, 2015). Social constructivism is a sociological theory of knowledge developed by Lev Vygotsky in 1978 that looks at how groups construct knowledge collaboratively by creating small cultures of shared artifacts with shared meanings (Churcher et al., 2014; Fessakis, Tatsis, & Dimitracopoulou, 2008; Kong & Pearson,

2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Walker & Shore, 2015). When one is immersed in these small cultures, one is learning all of the time about being part of a culture on many levels. By nature humans have the capacity to learn, but they only truly make meaning through interaction and socialization that leads to learning from one another (Churcher et al., 2014; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Walker & Shore, 2015). Humans learn first through social interaction and then individual learning can occur (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that culture plays such a large role in cognitive development because individual learning takes place because of interactions in a group. Within social learning, humans use the tools of language and culture to communicate and express meaning (Vygotsky, 1978). Language is how humans verbalize thoughts and share them with one another (Walker & Shore, 2015). Culture is the environments that humans create when sharing lives together. Learning occurs when people become a part of a community and are able to collaborate with other learners to develop meaning (Churcher et al., 2014; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Walker & Shore, 2015).

Schools are communities of learners. Students enter school each with the knowledge that they have learned at home and are susceptible to social incentives that come with being part of a group (Vygotsky, 1978). Schools, therefore, have a responsibility to continue to build upon these socially constructed environments (Vygotsky, 1978).

Students share their information with each other and learn from one another and from the teacher. Vygotsky (1978) proposed that

...learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to

operate only when the [learner] is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the [learner's] independent developmental achievement. (p. 90)

Once students are truly part of a learning community, they can socialize and internalize what they are learning.

Collaboration amongst peers, and even collaboration with teachers, leads to the Zone of Proximal Development, which is the distance between a student's ability to perform a task under adult guidance and/or with peer collaboration and a student's ability solving the problem independently (Vygotsky, 1978). In schools, assessments often measure for skills that are already mastered, but Vygotsky (1978) argued that a learner's overall development is stunted when instruction is only aimed at developmental levels already achieved. In other words, it is not just important to understand what a student has already learned, but it is important to put students into environments where they can continue to work socially with peers to continue to build knowledge.

The Zone of Proximal Development measures the relationship between cognition and development independently versus cognition and development with expert guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). Within learning communities, students can be both learner and experts, depending on their levels of understanding. When students learn from each other, there can develop a more knowledgeable other (Green et al., 2014; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). This is someone who understands more on a given topic and shares his/her knowledge with others in the group. At any moment, any student can act as the more knowledgeable other depending on the topic that the students are learning.

Learning from one another and acting as both learner and teacher provide greater overall learning benefits to the students (Green et al., 2014; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). “Developmental processes do not coincide with learning processes. Rather, the developmental process lags behind the learning process” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90). This quote explains that development and learning are not things that happen simultaneously. According to Vygotsky (1978) first a person starts to learn and that creates the development. Once students are submerged into learning communities, they can continue to learn from interacting with one another.

Social constructivism is primarily concerned with ways in which a person connects with and understands his world as a way to learn (Kong & Pearson, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Social interaction informed my research design because I wanted to use blogs to create a way for students to interact with one another in a space outside of the physical classroom. Using blogs for online social interaction is further explained by the theory of social constructivism because learning can occur from anyone who has a better understanding or higher ability level than the learner, or the more knowledgeable other (Green et al., 2014; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Students were able to pose questions and seek clarification from me and from their peers through the online posting aspect of blogging. While the students were all reading the same novel, they each brought personal experiences and academic levels to the online conversations. Sometimes one student looked to another to be more knowledgeable about one aspect of the novel, and then that same student might, in turn, found himself to be the more knowledgeable other on a different aspect of the novel when it came to answering questions on a peer’s blog.

When paired with a more knowledgeable other, students gain greater learning benefits than just learning alone (Green et al., 2014; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978).

While social constructivism laid out the idea that students construct meaning through social interaction, I still desired a specific framework to use to frame my study. I decided to use the Vygotsky Space as my framework because other researchers have successfully used this framework with case studies involved with teaching and education (Gallucci, 2008; Gallucci, Van Lare, Yoon, & Boatright, 2010). While their studies do not mirror my study, the way they discussed their framework and analyzed their data around their framework helped me make sense of how to apply The Vygotsky Space to my research.

The Vygotsky Space

The framework through which I used Social Constructivism is The Vygotsky Space. This is a conceptual framework adopted by Harre (1984) and elaborated and labeled by Gavelek and Raphael (1996). The framework was originally developed to characterize how individual development is realized by engaging in social interactions (Gallucci, 2008; Gallucci, et al., 2010; Harre, 1984; Harre, Clark, & DeCarlo, 1985). It emphasizes features of a social constructivist perspective on learning, particularly the relationship between student-teacher discourse (Gavalek & Raphael, 1996). The Vygotsky Space provides a framework for how to examine student learning both privately and publicly (see Figure 1). The framework shows learning in terms of relationships between collective and individual actions between public and private settings (Gallucci, 2008; Gallucci, et al., 2010; Harre, 1984; Harre et al., 1985). Galluci et al. (2010) state,

Interactions between these dimensions are conceptualized as four phases of a process through which social practices are internalized by individuals, transformed in the context of activity, and then externalized (shared) in ways that others may adopt. The process is cyclical and evolutionary, in the sense that learning and change operate in a cumulative and reciprocal way at both individual and collective levels. (p. 925)

According to the Vygotsky Space (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996), simply sharing language about a text does not help learners comprehend what they are reading; students need to have a chance to engage in conversations about a text, using that shared language, in order to make meaning. The Vygotsky Space explains how learning moves from social to individual and back to social (Kong & Pearson, 2003).

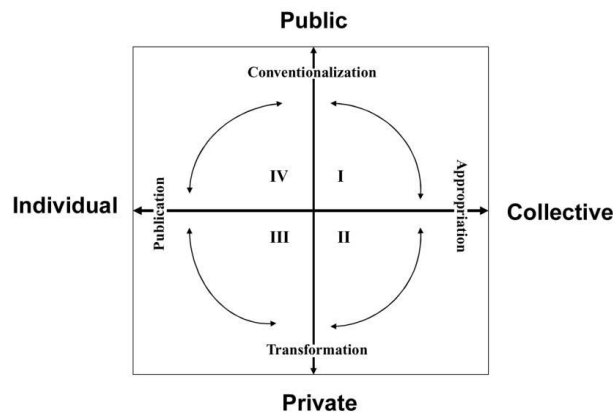


Figure 1. Vygotsky Space (adapted from Gavelek and Raphael 1996; Harre, 1984).

Based on this framework there are four quadrants in which learning occurs: public, private, social, and individual (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996). Learning begins in the public/social quadrant where learners are exposed to cultural practices of community (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996; Kong & Pearson, 2003). This occurs when students socialize and share their knowledge with one another. As a group, students can make meaning together, establish group norms, and expose one another to different viewpoints. Students

are part of a community of discourse in which they participate (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996). In this stage, learners show particular ways of thinking through interaction with others in an attempt to adopt new ideas or concepts (Gallucci, 2008; Gallucci et al., 2010).

Learning then moves to the social/private quadrant of the Vygotsky Space (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996; Kong & Pearson, 2003). In this stage, students are able to take the information that they shared and learned, and adopt and transform that information to meet individual needs. They take away concepts and strategies that were introduced in the group setting and start to make sense of the information individually. Individuals can convert new ideas to take ownership and think about the new ideas or concepts in context to their own work (Gallucci, 2008).

Next, learning moves into the private/individual quadrant of the Vygotsky Space (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996; Kong & Pearson, 2003). It is important for students to be able to take the information that they learned publicly and be able to make sense of it individually. This is really where students make meaning on their own, based on the knowledge they have constructed socially (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996).

The last quadrant of the Vygotsky Space is individual/public where students demonstrate learning in a public space (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996; Kong & Pearson, 2003). In this stage, a student's meanings are made public and adopted into the practice of that individual and/or others (Gallucci, 2008; Gallucci, et al., 2010). In turn, through this last stage of sharing, a student can learn more information as feedback from them sharing their meaning making and the process begins all over. "Activity within and movement cross quadrants is characterized by particular language and activity practices

to support learning, and the cycle through these quadrants is iterative, rather than linear or cyclical” (Hargreaves, 2014, p. 148).

Using a social constructivist theory as my framework was appropriate for my study for many reasons. Using this framework guided me in structuring my lesson plans because I wanted to be cognizant to plan both social and individual assignments for my students. Reading can be a very private assignment for students to complete, but blogging is all about socializing in an online environment. Plus, I made sure to build reflections into my lesson plans to give students some time to reflect on the differences between constructing meaning on their own while reading the novel versus constructing meaning together while blogging about the novel.

In review, using this framework throughout my study provided a clear lens to explore how students interact through a multimedia blog. Social constructivism aligned with my research question because I was interested in learning more about students’ social interactions while blogging, in addition to understanding more about how students made sense of the novel. Finally, I used this theory to analyze my data when I coded and looked for themes. For example, I was aware of “social interaction” and “making sense of the novel”.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the areas that informed my research questions and to situate my study within this research. In this study, I explored three different areas of research. First, I explored the literature base regarding how students respond to one another using technology or how students respond to each other about literacy. Next, I researched studies on the use of multimedia in classrooms. Finally, I looked at studies about blogging.

All of my research was completed using the Rutgers Library website. I used the searchlight tool on the main webpage. This enables the search engine to search through all of the electronic databases that Rutgers has available, rather than narrowing my search down to only a few databases. The key words and phrases utilized were multimedia, student responses, and blogs. I completed many searches using these words in different combinations. When I first began my search, I was also including high school and English Language Arts in my search, but the results were limited so I felt the need to broaden my search. Since blogging is a relatively new tool used in education, it helped to include studies that ranged from elementary school through graduate school to see what scholars were finding about blogs as educational tools. In addition, I limited the results to 'peer reviewed'.

Once I found a total of six studies that fit my search criteria, I began using the reference sections to help me locate additional studies that supported my topic. This process helped me to become familiar with the research base that currently exists. I continued this cyclical process until the same studies began to show up over and over again until I reached saturation (Merriam, 2009). Next, I started to eliminate studies or

move them to different sections of my literature review. I eliminated eight studies because the data collection procedures and analysis were not clearly outlined, or because the findings informed the area of content that was being studied but there was no focus on multimedia. In total, I included 23 studies in the review.

The studies on student responses, multimedia, and blogging were all important to my study. Studies on student responses were chosen to help me better understand how students interact with one another. These studies helped shape my lesson planning, as well as helped when I coded my data. Studies on multimedia were chosen because they informed me on students' experiences with incorporating multimedia into classrooms. These studies outline the benefits of including multimedia in a classroom and students' perspectives on using multimedia, which in turn helped shape my lesson plans and interview questions. Finally, studies on blogging helped inform my study because I was able to understand how teachers used blogs in the classroom, and how they analyzed the data that was collected.

Student Communication

Classroom discussions are no longer limited to being held inside of the classroom, thanks to technology and the internet. Students can collaborate on projects from their own homes just as easily as they can collaborate in classrooms when they are sitting side-by-side (Ajayi, 2015; Du & Wagner, 2005; McGrail & Davis, 2011). Classroom instruction becomes more student-centered rather than teacher-centered when digital tools can be incorporated to help improve student communication inside and outside of the physical classroom (Ellison & Wu, 2008; Zheng & Warschauer, 2015). When completing research for my study, I wanted to look at different ways that students responded to one another,

types of multimedia that helped enhance students' learning, and, specifically, blogging as a tool students could use to communicate with one another that could be used to extend the conversation about literature outside of the traditional classroom. Each section of my literature review builds on one another to form a more comprehensive look at student communication.

Student Responses

Since my study is based around using blogs in the classroom, it was important to have a better understanding of the different ways that students share information and respond to the sharing of information. In my study, students responded to each other using the commenting option on their online blogs. Reviewing the literature on student responses, I looked specifically for studies that focused on how students responded to one another in regards to literacy, or technology. After synthesizing the studies, three major findings from these studies informed my study: audience awareness, feedback and reflection.

Audience awareness. When students share information with one another, and respond to each other's sharing of information, they become more aware that there is an audience who will view their work (Baker, Rozendal, & Whitenack, 2000; Hill, 2013; Smith, 2010). Giving students a chance to respond to each other's work, and not just view it, can create an interactive audience (Baker et al., 2000). This can be defined as "overt participation as an audience member" (Baker et al., 2000, p. 413). Not only are students sharing work with one another, but also they are aware their peers will be reviewing their work and providing feedback to one another.

Peer review during the construction of writing can be just as valuable as peer review that comes when students think they are finished, or near finished, with a product. For instance, Smith (2010) studied 23 middle school students over the span of a year to better understand students' perspectives about how they experienced poetry writing and performance. When students shared their poetry aloud, they learned to think about their audience while writing their poems instead of only thinking of the audience at the moment of sharing their poems (Smith, 2010).

Knowing that someone else is going to be reading and responding to a student's work can affect what topics a student chooses to write about, or how the student chooses to write about certain topics (Baker et al., 2000; Smith, 2010). "Topic selection is affected by opportunities to be audience members (e.g., get ideas) and the knowledge that they could have an audience at any moment (e.g., journal entries)" (Baker et al., 2000, p. 410).

Researchers have found that while some students may be initially worried about sharing their ideas with one another, their worries disappear when they discover how helpful the sharing of information can be (Hsu & Ching, 2013). Hsu and Ching (2013) studied how students in an online graduate class shared ideas on mobile apps, particularly focusing on how peer feedback influenced the learning of mobile app design. While this study was completed with college graduate students, it informed my study because it helped me better understand how students interact and respond to one another in online environments.

Hsu and Ching (2013) found that their students particularly liked reviewing what others were working on, or having difficulties with, because they were able to better

gauge their own progress that way. Plus, once they saw that others were struggling, it was easier to reach out and ask for their own help. Sharing information, and responding to each other's shared thoughts, can help students learn more about one another and learn more about the texts they are writing about which can lead to deeper engagement in literature (West, 2008).

However, not all students enjoy sharing information and responding to one another (Hill, 2013; Smith, 2010). Hill (2013) found that many students dislike public speaking and rely very heavily on the teacher to move them through discussions. Hill (2013) studied how fourth-grade students responded to participating in variations of Book Clubs that produce varying participation dialog and cognitive strategy instruction. Hill (2013) was interested in having her students find a forum for discussing the literature that they read together.

In her study, Hill (2013) found that "students began peer-led discussions that were rife with awkward silences and discomfort with sharing personal details about their family history and background" (p. 160). Sometimes some students may omit sharing personal stories that can relate to what they are studying because they are afraid of being made fun of by their peers or because they are too embarrassed to share their personal stories (Smith, 2010).

This informed my study because my students were writing for their peers when they were blogging and were not always writing with me as their sole audience. When I designed my lesson plans for blogging, I was aware of including specific instructions to help my students become more aware that they were writing for each other and not just for me. Through class discussion, I shared with my students that if they were struggling

to find something to write about in their blogs, they should read some of their peers' blogs for inspiration. I also reminded them this meant their classmates might be reading their blogs for inspiration, reminding them that they are authors as well as audience members.

Feedback. Research found that having audience awareness “allows students to perform identities and create authorial voices for their peers” (Smith, 2010, p. 207) because it allows for audience participation and feedback. Once students are aware that they will be sharing work and providing each other with responses, feedback can be solicited, or even unsolicited, as students grow more and more confident sharing ideas with one another (Baker et al., 2000; Hsu & Ching, 2013; Smith, 2010).

Baker et al., (2000) studied 26 fourth-grade students to see what opportunities were available in a technology-rich classroom for authors to have an audience, and how those opportunities affected the writers and what they wrote. The students were observed for over 400 hours while they completed inquiry projects and process writing with digital tools. Students were aware that they would be sharing not only final projects for peer feedback, but that feedback could be provided at any given time, since they were writing on computer screens that were visible to the entire class. Feedback opportunities provided students with a better understanding about what their audiences did not understand, or needed clarified. The feedback allowed students to make changes to their products so their audience would better understand the points they were trying to express.

Research has found that some students value each other's opinions and think about what feedback they will receive while they are still writing (Smith, 2010). Students no longer need to rely solely on teachers for feedback (Baker et al., 2000; Hsu & Ching;

2013; Nicolaidou, 2013). Sharing information and hearing feedback makes students “value the opinions of their peers, thinking about possible responses from listeners and evaluators” (Smith, 2010, p. 206). However, teachers should give explicit instructions on how to provide feedback, as well as offer ample opportunities to provide feedback (Baker et al., 2000; Boling & Beatty, 2010; Nicolaidou, 2013).

Boling and Beatty (2010) found that student feedback can improve in content when teachers take the time to model feedback for the students. In a seven month study the researchers observed ten students in an 11th grade Advanced Placement English class. The teacher of the class had the students write up assignments on books that were being read in class and post the assignments in an online forum. The students and classroom teacher then posted feedback in the form of comments to one another through the online forum. The researchers found that the students made changes to their own writing based on the feedback that they received. The initial feedback that students provided was merely praises and did not provide detailed feedback to one another. However, the teacher continued to model constructive criticism in her feedback comments and throughout the study, the students began to emulate her feedback and provide one another with more substantive feedback.

From interviews conducted at the end of the study, Boling and Beatty (2010) also found that the students found that they learned from their peers by being part of an online community of writers. Students mentioned that they were aware of writing for a broader audience that, in turn, made them more aware of how they were writing. Students were also aware that the online sharing process helped to create a sense of community. “Other students shared similar comments, leading us to believe that the personal statements and

praise shared through online discussions also helped contribute to this sense of community” (Boling & Beatty, 2010, p. 59).

When work is shared publicly and students have access to each other’s work, feedback can often be unsolicited (Baker et al., 2000). While students are taking the time to view each other’s work, they can also be looking for inspiration on what they want to write (Baker et al., 2000; Hsu & Ching, 2013). Being able to provide feedback to one another makes the students aware that others are also reading and reviewing their work, so they are simultaneously audience members and authors (Baker et al., 2000). Additionally, being able to share information with a greater audience provides more opportunity for motivation since there is a greater chance for more responses (Hsu & Ching, 2013).

Nicolaidou (2013) observed 20 fourth grade students over the course of a year to study how the students’ writing performance, as evidenced in e-portfolios, could change over time, and to observe if the writing improved students’ peer feedback skills. Students were instructed to provide feedback on spelling and grammar mistakes of different narrative essays, as well as feedback on thought development. Over time, students’ feedback became more thorough as students were able to more easily identify spelling and grammar mistakes and provide corrective feedback to help organize thoughts more coherently in the narrative essays (Nicolaidou, 2013).

Unfortunately, not all feedback is positive feedback. Nicolaidou (2013) found that low-ability students received a great deal of feedback but were unmotivated to make any changes, and the high-ability group received very little feedback (Nicolaidou, 2013). In the beginning of the study, many of the feedback was defined as “simple” or “empty” and

offered no actual suggestions to the receivers of the feedback on how to improve their writing skills. However, over a four month period, Nicolaidou (2013) found that “constructive feedback” rose to 64% as students learned to understand how to provide, and accept, feedback (p. 411).

The studies above informed my study because students were asked to provide feedback on blogs. Each student was responsible for writing a total of four blogs. Then, each student had to comment on two group members’ blogs each time a new blog was posted for a total of eight comments. While instructing students on how to provide feedback, we reviewed that feedback was not merely telling someone that they did a good job, or correcting a spelling mistake. Based on the information provided from the literature on this topic, I made sure to review that I was looking for detailed feedback that discussed particular aspects of their peers’ blogs that were strong or weak.

Reflection. I did not initially set out looking for studies on reflection. However, some of the studies that I found on student responses had findings specifically on reflection, even though only Hsu and Ching (2013) had reflection built into their study designs. Sharing student responses, especially through peer feedback, can help students be more reflective when choosing topics to write about or when editing their work for final submissions (Baker et al., 2000; Hill, 2013; Hsu & Ching, 2013; Nicolaidou, 2013; and Smith, 2010). Even students who do not enjoy sharing feedback can be encouraged to reflect about their experiences privately through journaling (Smith, 2010).

Students are sometimes more careful editing their work because they know their classmates will be reading/viewing it (Baker et al., 2000; Green et al., 2013). The ability to quickly edit mistakes on multimedia tools, like blogs or vodcasts, can remove the

negative feeling associated with making mistakes (Green et al., 2013). “Audience members’ comments challenge authors to clarify their intended meanings and these challenges operationalize feedback from an interactive audience” (Baker et al., 2000, p. 412). Additionally, knowing that there is going to be an audience reviewing work can lead some students to pay extra attention to every detail they share (Green et al., 2014).

Through sharing student responses, students are able to make meaning by connecting literature to ideas outside of the classroom because they are allowed the time to reflect on what they are learning (West, 2008). “When the students work on their blog, there is no teacher standing in front of the class” (West, 2008, p. 597). Since students have autonomy when blogging, and sometimes more time than a classroom allows, they are able to take personal ideas and experiences and relate them back to the literature through the reflective process (West, 2008).

Sharing ideas and responding to one another through writing, such as a blog, can lead students to be more reflective because they are thinking back on their experiences, and sometimes frustrations, while they are writing out their responses (Hsu & Ching, 2013; West, 2008). West (2008) studied three eleventh grade students over the course of one school year to better understand the nature of literary response as communicated via blogs. Although students were not explicitly instructed to reflect, West (2008) found that when students did reflect on the literature they were writing, through shared blogs, students were able to engage more in the texts they were reading. “They can talk to characters, reframe events according to discourses they’re familiar with, and express resistance to the prescribed curriculum in ways that they couldn’t or wouldn’t within the bounds of the classroom” (West, 2008, p. 597). West (2008) grounded her study in a

“Discourse model for how literature can be evaluated and interpreted by individuals” (p. 596), and through coding the responses, realized that many of the students were reflecting on the literature and making text-to-self realizations through their on the literature.

Connections to present study. When I was designing my study, I included reflective writing pieces where students would be able to reflect on their entire blogging experiences (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996). Based on the findings on student responses and reflection, I allowed my students the option of either posting their reflections to their blogs where they would be publicly shared with their classmates, or they could write their reflections privately and share them only with me. This aspect of the literature and reflection aligns with my theoretical framework because it allows the students the opportunity to write for the public, as well as for the private (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996). In the next section of my literature review, I examined studies that specifically looked at classrooms that used multimedia since my study was based around student responses provided through a multimedia blog.

Multimedia

Literacy is constantly evolving. However, literacy curricula in the United States has adopted an increasingly conservative and traditional line, emphasizing the importance of basic skills that are more commonly associated with print texts (Ajayi, 2015; Beach, 2012; Considine et al., 2009; Merchant, 2005). There are many different ways to incorporate multimedia into classroom instruction, but not every type will cause the same degree of improvement in comprehension and improvement of understanding (Cook, 2011). While I did not narrow the studies I used specifically around literacy in Language

Arts classrooms, I did look for studies that used multimedia to help improve students' reading skills and writing skills across content areas.

Multimedia tools “easily extend a student’s ability to create tangible representations of his or her ideas, conveying enormous variety in skill” (Green et al., 2014, p. 297). By incorporating multimedia into classrooms, teachers can help students make meaning of what they are learning, build positive self-image as learners, and develop a sense of authorship over things they write and create (Hull & Katz, 2006; Merchant, 2005). A sense of authorship can also help build a positive self-image (Hull & Katz, 2006).

Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robinson, and Wiegel (2006) asserted that adolescents are “highly motivated and engaged in literacy practices such as sending emails, uploading stories/videos on social networking sites, surfing the Web, blogging, and studying driver’s manuals” (as cited in Ajayi, 2015, p. 67). Use of multimedia in the classroom can lead to students either making meaning of texts they are viewing, or can lead to deeper understandings of meanings that students already understand (Ajayi, 2015; Merchant, 2005). The technology needed to help embed multimedia in a curriculum can start quite basic (Merchant, 2005). In fact, multimedia can be as simple as incorporating visuals for students to look at (Cook, 2011). Oftentimes multimedia can be used in a classroom to help students create products, like digital stories, which can help students better understand the skills utilized to create the product (Chisholm & Trent, 2013).

English Language Arts teachers who use “innovative approaches to create possibilities for the students assume much more agency in using multimodal resources for interpretation of the plays” (Ajayi, 2015, p. 95). In other words, students are able to make

more sense of literature when they are able to use multimedia tools in order to better understand and interpret the original works. Potential influences for the construction of meaning can come from different sources of multimedia (Smagorinsky & O'Donnell, 1998). Multimedia tools, like blogs or digital stories, "extend the meaning-making modes through which students can develop concepts" (Chisholm & Trent, 2013, p. 316). When students are discussing literature, and attempting to make meaning from what they read, multimedia tools like pictures and visual graphics can assist students in drawing connections (Smagorinsky & O'Donnell, 1998). Engaging with multimedia can also lead some students to make connections with out-of-school experiences, which lead to deeper understanding of meaning (Merchant, 2005).

Merchant (2005) found that students were concerned not only with the meaning of their words, but also the visual impact of the messages when they used web pages in the classroom. Over the course of six weeks, Merchant (2005) studied eight students between the ages of nine and ten in order to better understand what it is like to be a young writer growing up in the age of digital communication. Students embedded pictures and emoticons into research presentations to help add meaning to their written pieces. Since they were aware that people would be viewing their information on web pages, instead of just reading information in a paper, they were more conscious of how they presented their information. "It became quite apparent that the children were consciously adapting their writing style, particularly when they engaged in interactive digital communication" (Merchant, 2005, p. 58). This heightened level of thinking about their presentations, lead to them having a deeper understanding of their subject matters (Merchant, 2005).

In another study Cook (2011) found that high ability students needed just as many visuals as low ability students because the visuals helped all students learn the concepts better. Over six weeks, Cook studied seven high school science teachers' classrooms to investigate how they were using visual representations to help their students better understand the content matter. One teacher interviewed claimed the visuals merely helped the low ability students "keep the interest" while another teacher said that more complex visuals used with high ability students helped "learn the concepts" (Cook, 2011, p. 181). Finally, a third teacher stated that he found he used less visuals when he recognized that students were already familiar with topics.

Connections to present study. The studies mentioned above informed my study because the literature supports the use of blogging as a multimedia tool. The literature states that students can make meaning, or understand meaning more deeply, by using multimedia. Not only are blogs a multimedia tool, but one of my research questions is designed to look at students' incorporation of multimedia into their own blogs. I was interested in better understanding why students did or did not add video clips, pictures, or hyperlinks to their blog posts to help them better understand *The Bluest Eye*. In the final section of my literature review, I focused on studies that used blogging since this was the main multimedia tool that my students used in my study.

Blogging

Blogging is about communication and interaction (McGrail & Davis, 2011). "Depending on the author's wishes, blogs can include features such as links to other blogs, information about the author, and, most importantly, comments (feedback) from readers" (Ellison & Wu, 2008, p. 105). Writing skills are critical to blogging because

there is the potential for students to be reading and responding to opposing viewpoints which calls upon analytical and critical writing skills (Ellison & Wu, 2008).

When blogging is grounded in a school curriculum, and is about students' thinking critically, it needs to be viewed as an academic practice which is different than someone blogging for personal reasons (Boling, 2008). Research states that when teachers help students create blogs and use them academically, they can be effective, especially when it comes to having students reflect on their own writing (Ray & Hocutt, 2006). Merchant (2005) asserts, "academic blogging provides a space for modeling and developing the literacy processes, critical thinking, reflection, questioning, and social practices engendered by this communicative technology" (as cited in McGrail & Davis, 2011, p. 416).

"Blogging can represent a new space for learning that connects to the traditional classroom experiences and allows opportunities for discussions, exchanges of passions, teaching others, and learning from others, beyond the classroom" (McGrail & Davis, 2011, p. 433). Since everyone is encouraged to participate in posting and responding through blogging, it changes the dynamic of the traditional classroom where students wait to receive information from the teacher and instead creates an environment where students learn by sharing information with one another (Ellison & Wu, 2008). Zheng and Warschauer (2015) found that if a teacher is involved in blogging, then the teacher plays a bigger role in the beginning of the blogging, but as time passes, the blogs become more student centered as students become more comfortable with commenting on each other's blogs.

Since blogging is interactive, students become aware of their audience and can become empowered and motivated (McGrail & Davis, 2011). Research has found that reading each other's blogs and commenting to one another is one of the most interesting aspects of blogging to students (Ellison & Wu, 2008; Lee, 2010; Papastergiou, Gerodimos, & Antoniou, 2011). Research has also found that students find blogging more engaging than writing traditional papers (Ellison & Wu, 2008; Lee, 2010).

Blogging is an activity that can be completed outside of the classroom, but still allows all students a chance to share their thoughts and ideas (McGrail & Davis, 2011; Ray & Hocutt, 2006). "Weblogs let students become more active outside the classroom including activities such as review of course materials, explication of knowledge, and seeking of outside resources" (Du & Wagner, 2005, p.7). In this manner, blogging can boost students' self-confidence (McGrail & Davis, 2011) because all students have an opportunity to be heard (Ellison & Wu, 2008).

Blogging also lends itself to supporting reflection because it gives students a chance to read what they wrote and compare it to what other students have written to see if their ideas correspond or not (Ray & Hocutt, 2006). Lee (2010) found that students like to look back at their own writing chronologically to see how they improved with time. Over the span of one college semester, Lee (2010) studied 17 students in an Advanced Spanish class in an attempt to create an interactive community where students share and exchange ideas with each other through social networking and to enhance critical thinking through peer comments and language awareness through expert scaffolding. Overall, students reacted very positively toward the blog project and agreed they benefited from creating and reading blog entries (Lee, 2010). More than 50% expressed

their enjoyment of using personal blogs to share ideas with peers, and more than 80% preferred blogs to writing on a piece of paper (Lee, 2010, p. 219). Students made comments about how they could reflect by looking back at their writing chronologically and see where they improved.

Since the students' thoughts are the center of blogs, researchers have found that response comments correcting grammar, spelling, and style can be kept to a minimum so students will not feel discouraged (McGrail & Davis, 2011). One study found that students believed that the comments they received helped them to identify their mistakes and improve (Fessakis et al., 2008). Fessakis et al., (2008) studied seven student volunteers in a math class over the course of one college semester in order to better understand if blogs can efficiently support the communication and information management requirements of learning by design activities in such a degree that participating students can have increased opportunities for: meeting high quality learning experiences; communicating and interacting with peers and teachers; getting feedback info in order to review and revise their designs; and developing a dialogue relative to the content. Students in general believed that the comments they received helped them identify their mistakes and improved their designs (Fessakis et al., 2008).

However, the commenting feature of blogs does have some negatives. Research shows that sometimes feedback is not substantial, and can be repetitive or empty of any helpful feedback (Ellison & Wu, 2008; Fessakis et al., 2008). Fessakis et al., (2008) found that not all comments are informative or helpful. Some students are not comfortable providing feedback to one another (Ellison & Wu, 2008). Blogging and commenting on each other's blogs can also demand a lot of time (Papastergiou et al.,

2011). Some students tend to write a lot because they know they are being graded, rather than producing organic responses (Mompean, 2010). Research shows that teachers should provide explicit instructions on how to give one another feedback before blogging begins (Ellison & Wu, 2008, Fessakis et al., 2008).

Connections to present study. This area of literature informed my study because it validates the use of blogs in an academic classroom. Blogging aligns with my theoretical framework because it provides students an opportunity for public writing because they are sharing their ideas on their blogs (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996). Since blogging does not touch on private writing, I made sure to include reflective writing pieces that would be shared only with me.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

The focus of this research is to observe how students interact with each other when responding to Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* through the use of a multimedia blog. In order to achieve this goal, a qualitative case study was conducted to explore and understand how students used the blog to interact with one another when discussing this piece of literature (Creswell, 2009). The chapter will start with a reminder of the research questions that guided the study followed by a description of my role as a teacher-researcher, a description of the research site, and a description of the participants. Next, will come an explanation of the unit design and implementation. Then, there will be discussions on data collection, data analysis, and validity and reliability. The chapter will close with a discussion on limitations of the study.

Research Questions

How do students interact with each other when responding to Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* through the use of a multimedia blog?

- A. How are students interacting with each other through their online postings?
- B. How do students' postings reflect the ways in which they are/are not making sense of *The Bluest Eye*?
- C. If students do incorporate multimedia into their postings, why are they choosing to do so?

Researcher Role

For this case study, I decided to take on the role of teacher-researcher, using my own class of students for my case study (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). As a teacher researcher, I am intentionally asking questions about my own practice and seeking

answers to those questions (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). This decision was made for practical purposes. At the time of this study, I was a full-time English Language Arts teacher who taught five literature classes every day. I did not have the time in my schedule to get into another teacher's class, co-design lesson plans, and introduce students to the idea of blogging while still teaching my own classes. In addition, since I was the teacher, I was able to get a better understanding of all of the students and was present when the students were introduced to blogging and started blogging so I could make adjustments, as I deemed necessary.

Research Site

Research for this qualitative case study was conducted in a mid-Atlantic state at Bayside High School, which is a pseudonym for the name of the actual school. Bayside Township is a suburban community. There are over 47,000 people residing in the town. The high school has approximately 2,000 students and over 150 classroom teachers. Twenty-eight percent of the students enrolled are entitled to free and reduced lunch. Bayside is ranked a DE district on a scale of A-J on the District Factor Grouping Scale, with A being the lowest socio-economic rating and J being the highest. Eighty-eight percent of the graduating class continues with their education at two or four-year colleges. The student body is 33% white, 33% black, and 33% Hispanic.

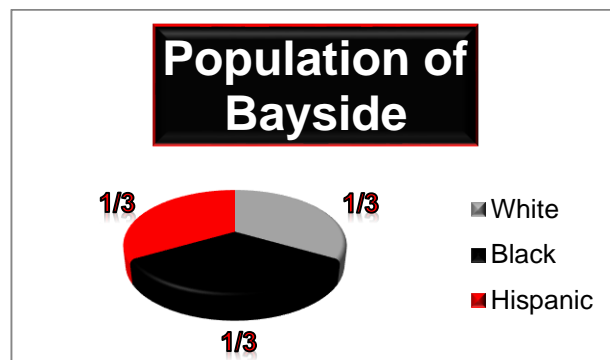


Figure 2: Student Body Ethnicity Breakdown of Bayside High Students

Participants

In Bayside High School, in the 11th grade, there are three different levels of English classes that students can choose to take. The majority of the students take College Prep English III. Students who wish to be challenged a little more take Honors English III. Finally, students who are looking to really be challenged take Advanced Placement English III. I only teach College Prep English III and Advanced Placement English III. Based on prior teaching experience, I randomly selected one of the two Advanced Placement 11th grade English III classes that I was assigned to teach for this study. In previous years, I have found that my College Prep students do not take schoolwork assignments as seriously as the Advanced Placement students, and I wanted to choose students who would complete all of their work and be able to stay after school for interviews.

All students enrolled in the class were invited to join the study as part of a convenience sampling since I had no control over which students were assigned to my classes (Merriam, 2009). All of the students were given consent forms (see Appendix B). Out of the 29 students enrolled in the class, 17 guardians and 17 students granted permission for their children to be study participants. Since I am a teacher-researcher, in order to help avoid bias, I assigned one student in the class to collect all permission slips and seal them in an envelope that we kept in the classroom. I was unaware of which students had chosen to participate in the study until after I had graded them on this unit.

Though the entire class participated in the unit, because of time and resource constraints 13 individuals were selected as study participants from the 17 students who returned permission slips (see Table 1). There were four students who returned

permission slips, but were not included in this study for the following reasons: one switched out of the class and then back in to the class, but missed a few weeks worth of work; two switched out of the class completely; and one decided that she did not want to participate in the study after she had previously granted permission.

Table 1
Student Participant Profile

Name	Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Alice	Female	16	Hispanic
Alex	Male	16	Caucasian
Amelia	Female	17	Caucasian
Avarice	Male	16	Asian
Barbara	Female	16	Indian
Cindy	Female	17	Caucasian
Daisy	Female	17	African American
Frank	Male	17	African American
Jeb	Male	17	Asian
John	Male	17	Indian
Lala	Female	17	Caucasian
Lizzie	Female	17	Hispanic
Roxie	Female	17	Caucasian

Unit Design and Implementation

As a teacher researcher, I am aware of the realities of available materials when designing my lesson plans. *The Bluest Eye* was chosen as the piece of literature for this study because it is on the school approved curriculum and enough copies were available for all of the students. It is also a novel that is already divided into four distinct sections, which made it easy to break up the reading and blogging assignments over the four weeks I allot during the school year to teaching this novel. The overarching essential question to the unit that guided the students' blogs and responses was: What is the relationship of the individual to the community?

Unit implementation started on Monday, September 15, and concluded on Friday, October 16 of the same year. Prior to beginning the unit, students were given the opportunity in class to view various blogs, and they were provided with a copy of my blogging expectations (see Appendix C) in order to have a further understanding of what was going to be expected of them when writing their own blogs. The sample blogs that the students viewed in class all included multimedia in the form of pictures, hyperlinks, and/or video clips in their posts and/or responses. As a class, we discussed how the multimedia added to/detracted from the blog. However, students were never required to use multimedia in their own blog posts or responses.

Additionally, students were each given a copy of *The Bluest Eye*. It is important to note that I discussed the mature themes of the novel with the students prior to them reading the novel. All students were given the opportunity to read an alternate book, Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, if they were uncomfortable reading *The Bluest Eye*. The alternate book was chosen because it still has the same overarching guiding question as *The Bluest Eye*. While none of the students in my study chose to read the alternate book, there was one student in the class who chose the alternate book. Next, each student received a copy of a calendar that listed all due dates for blog entries. Class time was provided to set up blogs using the school's provided email through Microsoft Outlook.

During the first week of the unit, students were each randomly assigned by me to a blogging group consisting of three to four members of the class. Students were grouped to keep their discussions focused and to ensure that everyone in the class received equal feedback.

Over the course of four weeks, students were assigned pages to read independently in the novel before writing and posting four 300-500 word blog posts on their own blogs. Each week, students were also responsible for responding to a minimum of two group members' blogs by using the comments features on the blogs for a total of eight blog responses. Students were not required to use pictures, hyperlinks, or video clips in either their blog posts or their blog responses.

Throughout the four weeks of the unit, students also completed four reading quizzes, four reflective writing pieces, and one final paper on the novel. The quizzes were all given in class and were short multiple choice and short answer quizzes designed to check reading comprehension of the novel. The reflective pieces were all typed, one-page essays that were submitted to me via email. There was no prompt provided for the students for their reflections. They were simply asked to think about the blogging experience as positive and/or negative and provide personal thoughts on the process. While I instructed students to email me their responses, some students wanted to share their reflections with one another and were granted permission to post their reflections to their blogs. The final paper was written in class, and the question was designed to mimic the structure of an AP rhetorical analysis essay question: Support, challenge, or qualify Toni Morrison's assertion that Pecola's community is responsible for her psychological downfall in the novel.

Data Collection

To ensure that I fully understood the answers to my research questions, I collected two different types of data: interviews and documents. Interviews allowed me to enter into my participants' perspectives (Patton, 2002). Documents allowed me to examine

artifacts that the participants created in an attempt to see if the students were making sense of the readings and assignments (Patton, 2002). Each type of data helped answer one or more of my guiding research questions. In the following sections, I will take a closer look at how I used each type of data. The section will end with a discussion of how I used a researcher journal to help organize my thoughts during data collection.

Interviews

I conducted interviews with 13 of the students in order to get an in-depth understanding of students' thoughts on their participation with this unit. Each student was interviewed once. Some interviews were conducted in my classroom on Wednesdays in the three weeks after the unit was completed during the 30-minute school scheduled activity period. Other interviews were completed after school on other days. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Interviewing the students individually aligns with my theoretical framework because it allowed me to ask students questions about their individual, private learning (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996). However, it is understood that once students started sharing, their thoughts were no longer private. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow some structure to the interview while still allowing the students to talk freely and express themselves (Merriam, 2009). Since I am a teacher in the classroom, I wanted to encourage the students to be as honest and forthcoming as possible in their answers. By having a semi-structured interview, it allowed some structure to the questions, but I also allowed for greater flexibility in the conversations with the students (See Appendix C). I also prepared a variety of probing questions to ask the students follow-up questions if needed. For example, when students simply provided one-word answers to my questions,

I had copies of their blogs in front of me and I was able to ask them questions to prompt longer, more detailed responses

Documents

Student artifacts in the form of blog posts, blog responses written in the form of comments on the blogs, reflections, quizzes, and final papers were collected and analyzed according to my research questions (Merriam, 2009). Documents allowed me to examine student artifacts, like student blogs, in an attempt to see how students were interacting and to see whether or not they were including other forms of multimedia. By having access to students' thoughts in this way, I was able to see how they shared their thoughts publicly and socially (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996).

In addition, I examined other student documents, for instance their short, reflective writing pieces, to have a better understanding of what students thought while they were blogging. One of the aims of blogging is to extend the academic conversation outside of the classroom. "The asynchronous and semi-anonymous aspect of blogging enabled interactions that might not have happened in traditional classrooms" (Ellison & Wu, 2008, p.113).

Research Journal

Throughout the study, I maintained an online research journal created through Google Docs. The research journal allowed me to examine my own thought process as I moved throughout the entire unit of data collection (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). I kept detailed notes on all decisions that were made. This was a place where I could record my thoughts and questions and keep an audit trail as I moved through the different stages of the study. An audit trail is when I recorded careful notes about decisions that I

was making throughout each stage (Merriam, 2009). This was helpful to have because when I was unsure of a choice that I made about a preliminary code, or a developing theme, I was able to trace my thought process back through my detailed, organized notes.

It was also important for me to have time to reflect on the overall data collection process so I could make informed decisions about my data moving forward. For instance, when I was collecting data, I did not know which students had agreed to participate in the study, so I kept detailed notes about which students I wanted to interview. Then, after the study was over and I found out who was participating in the study, I was able to make quicker decisions about whom I chose to interview.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an ongoing process that involves continually reflecting on the data, asking questions about the data, and writing memos on the data (Creswell, 2009). There are six steps to analyzing data: (1) organize and prepare the data, (2) read through all of the data, (3) code, (4) develop categories/themes for analysis, (5) determine how themes will be represented, and (6) interpretation (Creswell, 2009). These steps will be explained in further detail below. To ensure validity, findings were triangulated across the interviews and documents.

Organizing the Data Set

It is important to organize the data set because the organization of data can help you figure out what you are going to be analyzing and how you are going to analyze information (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014).

Interviews. Upon completion of each of the 13 interviews, interviews were transcribed verbatim using the transcription company Rev.com. First, I reviewed each

transcript for accuracy. Then, I used member checking to ensure that the transcripts reflected what the students remembered saying during the interview (Merriam, 2009). Finally, I uploaded all transcribed interviews into the online qualitative program Dedoose. Each interview was uploaded as its own Word document and given a title and date. In addition, all personal information was removed from the documents in order to protect the privacy of the participants. Dedoose offered the option of not only storing and analyzing the data, but also the option to create memos in the margins of my transcribed texts on my thought process (Merriam, 2009).

Documents. Students' reflections, which were originally written in Microsoft Word and submitted to me via email, were also uploaded into Dedoose. All identifying information was removed from the reflections to protect the students' identities, and each student was assigned a pseudonym. In addition, reflections were printed out and the date of submission was handwritten at the top of each reflection. Once again all identifying information was removed and the hard copies were stored in a binder organized first by the student who submitted them, and then in chronological order in which the reflections were submitted.

Next, I viewed each student's blog and copied and pasted his or her blog entries in to Microsoft Word documents. Each blog was saved as a separate document and uploaded separately into Dedoose. When applicable, student responses were also copied and pasted into separate Microsoft Word documents and uploaded individually into Dedoose. Blog posts and responses were printed and stored in the same binder as reflections and were also stored first according to student, and then chronologically within each student's designated section. For students who added pictures, hyperlinks, or

video clips to their blogs, I took detailed notes in my researcher's journal, keeping track of who used it, and what it was.

Coding

The next step in analysis was to create codes (Creswell, 2009). Coding is a process of taking the data and sorting it into small pieces in order to help find meaning to the data (Creswell, 2009). Before the transcripts were uploaded in Dedoose, I completed a preliminary coding of the data by hand. I read each document several times while looking for patterns in the data that helped me draw conclusions (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). When I piloted the research questions, prior to starting my study, I developed specific codes guided by my theoretical framework and my literature review.

The preliminary codes were developed from my theoretical framework, research questions, literature review, and my transcriptions. First, I reviewed the four key components of my theoretical framework, and I assigned each component to be one of my preliminary codes based on a codebook developed by Gallucci (2008) and Gallucci et al., (2010). For instance, Appropriation/Interaction is a code developed and used by Gallucci (2008) and Gallucci et al., (2010) that I adapted to fit my study. (See Table 2).

Next, I analyzed each of my research questions and pulled out the key elements that I was looking to answer. For instance, in my research question 1A, "How are students interacting with each other through their online postings?", I pulled out the word "Interaction" and aligned it with my codes from my theoretical framework (See Table 2). Then, I further aligned those codes with codes adapted from McGrail and Davis (2011). Finally, upon my initial readings of my transcriptions, I developed a few independent

codes that I felt were necessary to my transcriptions, but that I did not already have a code for.

Table 2
Preliminary Codebook

Code Name	Sub-Code(s)	Origin	Definition	Example
Appropriation / Interaction (A/I)			Theory - Adapted from: (Gallucci, 2008; Gallucci et al., 2010); Research Question 1a	Particular ways to think as shown through interaction with others
	Asking Qs (AQ)		Theory - Adapted from: (Gallucci, 2008; Gallucci et al., 2010); Research Question 1a; Literature – Adapted from McGrail & Davis (2011)	Students asking questions for clarification about the text or about the assignment
	Students Addressing Qs (AdQ)		Research Question 1a; My Transcriptions	Students answering or talking about qs

After analyzing the preliminary data codes, I had several peer debriefing sessions with a group of peers in the doctoral program to help me finalize my coding scheme in preparation for identifying themes. We read and re-read the data looking for commonalities. As I reviewed the data, when relevant commonalities occurred that did not seem to fit in with my initial codes, I added these codes to my codebook. Reading and re-reading the data for consistent codes was an on-going process.

While narrowing down my final coding scheme, it was important to make sure that my codes had substantive significance (Patton, 2002). I determined the substantive

significance by addressing questions about how consistent the evidence was, how the findings could increase and deepen the understanding of what I was studying, how the findings were consistent with other knowledge, and how the findings were useful for its intended purposes (Patton, 2002). For example, in earlier editions of my codebook, I had “Recommendation on Blogging” as a separate code, but once I started to really analyze my codes, I realized it made more sense to nest it under the broader code of “Reflection on Blogging” which was already nested under the main code of “Publication/Reflection”.

I constantly examined my codes in conjunction with my research questions in an effort to make sure that my findings were providing me with a more in-depth understanding of how students interacted with one another around *The Bluest Eye* while using multimedia blogs. To help with validity, I triangulated my data because I am utilizing multiple forms of data sources (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). When I confirmed my findings, I looked across data from 13 interviews and documents to assure that my codes held consistency. After my codes were finalized, I created the final version of a qualitative codebook to help me keep my codes organized. Then, I sent my codebook to two peers in the doctoral program, along with a selection of my collected data and asked them to code it using my codebook for inter rater reliability. Once we reached 85% agreement of codes, I knew my codebook was complete because other people could code with the same codes on my data and have almost all the same results that I found

After my codebook was finalized, I sorted my data, using the qualitative software program Dedoose, by code. This means that I took information from the interviews and blogs and rearranged them in new documents by common codes in order to look at relationships and synthesize similarities in the data. Within each document, I summarized

the transcriptions looking for similarities and differences. To strengthen my summaries, I included direct quotations from the data. Finally, I reflected on how all of my data sources related to my literature review so that I could draw conclusions to my research questions.

Writing The Report

I went through several drafts of narrowing down my themes. I sent the drafts to colleagues in my doctoral program for feedback, as well as to my adviser. Throughout the study, I continued to share information with members of my doctoral program for peer debriefing sessions (Creswell, 2009). My colleagues would read through my work and ask questions for clarification. This process helped enhance my interpretation of the accounts because my colleagues were outside of my study and could provide me with insightful feedback that informed my revisions. Once the themes were solidified, I aligned each theme with my research questions in an attempt to make the final report easier to follow for my readers. I wanted to make sure that my readers had a clear understanding of each finding for each research question.

Validity and Reliability

Since I am a teacher researcher conducting this study in my own classroom, it is important to make sure that my data is valid and reliable (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Validity is when the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Reliability is making sure that the researcher's approach is consistent (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Following the case study design, multiple measures were used to ensure validity (Creswell, 2009). The measures include: member

checks; triangulation; peer debriefing; keeping a researcher's journal; and by keeping an audit trail (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

Member checks helped to ensure the validity and reliability of my study because, as I mentioned earlier, after I had preliminary findings, each student whom I interviewed was given a transcript of his/her interview to read over and check for to ensure that the transcript has captured the essence of the interviews (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). I wanted to make sure that my study participants agreed with me about how the interviews looked when they were transcribed to make sure that they represented what the students had shared during the interviews. Also, to help with validity, I triangulated my data because I utilized multiple forms of data sources (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). When I confirmed my findings, I looked across data from 13 interviews and documents to assure that my codes held consistency.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study that could pose a threat to the validity and reliability of my findings. First, I am a teacher-researcher in my study, so there is the possibility of bias. Since I am a teacher researcher in my own class, I have intimate knowledge of the problem of practice, my school district, and my participants. In addition, keeping an audit trail in the form of a digital journal of how data was collected, how codes were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry helped with the validity of my study as well (Merriam, 2009). Since I was the teacher researcher in this study, there is always the possibility of bias and errors in coding. As I mentioned, I tried to eliminate many of these possibilities by using member checking, inter rater reliability, and triangulation, but it is impossible to eliminate all bias.

Because I was the teacher-researcher, I was the one who interviewed the students. Each student said that he or she enjoyed blogging. However, since they were my own students, and they were all aware that they were involved in a study to help me better understand blogging in the classroom, there is the possibility that not all of the students were honest with me in their responses.

Another limitation of being a teacher-researcher is that I controlled the culture of learning in the classroom. As the classroom teacher, I was very enthusiastic with my students about blogging. I wanted them to enjoy blogging and see the academic benefits to blogging. My enthusiasm could have influenced how the students thought about blogging.

Next, another limitation is that my students were Advanced Placement students. They are high-achieving students who chose to take the most rigorous level of English offered in the 11th grade at Bayside High School. They do not reflect the general population of students. Additionally, the novel I chose can be looked at as a limitation because it is a novel with many mature themes that can lend itself to many interesting discussions. If the students were reading a novel that they were not as interested in, they might not they might not have been as interested in blogging.

Finally, my study is a small case study with findings that are unique to these particular students on this particular unit of study. While my actual case study cannot be replicated, the methodology of how I completed the steps of data collection and data analysis can be replicated (Merriam, 2009). Since my case study is so small, it would be beneficial to others to be able to replicate the methodology of my study with other groups

of students to find out their perceptions about using a multimedia blog in conjunction with a piece of literature.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The primary goal of this study was to better understand how students used multimedia blogs as tools to help them make sense of Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*. I organized this chapter into three sections by research questions: (1) How are students interacting with each other through their online postings; (2) How do students' postings reflect the ways in which they are/are not making sense of *The Bluest Eye*?; (3) If students do incorporate multimedia into their postings, why are they choosing to do so? Under each section there is a discussion of themes that I found after analyzing my data.

I begin with a discussion of my findings around student interaction. I found that students asked questions to prompt deeper thinking, start conversations, make predictions, and ask for help. Then, I proceed by discussing the findings around my second research question. I found that students attempted to answer one another's questions and were not afraid to challenge one another. I conclude by discussing the findings on my final research question, where I found that student opinions were divided on incorporating pictures, hyperlinks, and video clips into blogs.

Student Interactions

As evidenced in the review of the literature in chapter two, it is no surprise that students interact with one another through using blogs (Ellison & Wu, 2008; McGrail & Davis, 2011; Merchant, 2005). Student interaction was based largely on asking and addressing questions. Through analyzing my data, it became evident that students asked questions to prompt deeper thinking, start conversations, make predictions, and challenge one another to think about the text. When students wrote their blogs, it was evident that they were aware of their audience when they tried to engage their readers by addressing

them directly. Students were able to share ideas and make connections to things outside of the novel. Overall, blogging was very student centered and not very teacher-centered.

Students Challenged One Another

From my analysis of the student interviews and student documents, it was evident the students used blogs to challenge one another by asking questions. As a classroom teacher, I know that when many students are confused about a book that we are reading in class, they come in to class and ask me questions for clarifications. Through blogging, since the majority of the discussion about the novel took place on the blogs, students interacted on the blogs by asking one another questions. While some of the questions overlap, it was interesting to see how the different types of questions prompted different forms of student interaction on the blogs.

Prompted to think more deeply. Students challenged one another to think more deeply about the literature when they posted rhetorical questions to one another. Oftentimes, when students were writing their analyses of a section of the novel, they would pose a rhetorical question. Research supports that when students are aware their peers are going to be reviewing their work, they are more conscious of how they present information (Baker et al., 2000). Some students posted rhetorical questions to prompt the readers of the blog to think more deeply about something that occurred in the novel. Lizzie started the analysis to her winter blog when she wrote the following rhetorical questions:

Is it really a coincidence that the section "Winter" offers the most brutally chilling fact in our lives: that our physical appearance actually does matter? That we aren't

blind to how we look, that we will always hold some sort of judgment to others?

That, no matter what we do, the perception of skin color will still be with us?

In her interview, I asked her why she used rhetorical questions to start the winter blog, and she explained that she wanted to give her readers “something more to think about and respond to in their responses.” She went on to explain in her interview that it was not enough to just ask other students about the plot of the novel, but she wanted to really “make them think about the main ideas behind the novel.” While not all of the students asked questions in all of their blogs, I found many of the students started asking questions in their third and fourth blog posts. Since students were both writing their own blogs and responding to other peoples’ blogs, they were aware that they should give their group members something to respond to.

Some students posted rhetorical questions to add emphasis to ideas they were analyzing in the reading. By adding emphasis, they called for their audience to think more about the subjects they were writing about. For instance, in the spring and summer sections of the novel, a 12-year-old girl named Pecola is raped by her father, and women in the town blame Pecola for the rape. Several students, when discussing this in their blogs, posed rhetorical questions to their readers to emphasize their outrage at this. On Alice’s blog she posted:

Are you KIDDING ME? You really think that a twelve-year-old girl is to blame for being raped? Especially by her father? Even if a daughter tried to seduce her father, no grown man in [his] right mind would have sex/rape his daughter.

Amelia also expressed outrage through rhetorical questions on the same subject when she posted, “Did Pecola ask to get raped? No. Did she have any control over the situation?

No.” In Cindy’s post she asked, “Does Pecola deserve any of this? Does anybody ever deserve bad things to happen to them?” And, when Daisy was responding to Lala’s blog on this topic Daisy asked, “Why on earth is Pecola to blame?” Most of the students seemed to understand that it was not Pecola’s fault that she was raped by her father and were instead expressing outrage against the women who thought Pecola brought the rape on herself. They were challenging each other to think about how Pecola’s community treated the news of her rape.

Students’ use of rhetorical questions was an important part of interaction because they were exhibiting their ideas about the novel to one another and stimulating each other to think more deeply about certain aspects in the novel. They were challenging each other to look for more than just a surface reading of the novel. This is something that I do when we read a text together in class, but the students were able to do it independently of me.

Connections and engagement. Students started conversations with one another by posing questions to one another on their blogs. By asking questions, they were creating a dialogue that would extend through the commenting features and not just end with the original analysis post. Students were aware that blogging was a form of social interaction and they were able to use the blogs as a form of conversational communication because they used the blogs to discuss the literature in place of having a classroom discussion (Du & Wagner, 2005). Students interacted online by posing questions to one another in an attempt to start a dialogue about something that happened in the novel. Similar to the students using rhetorical questions to prompt one another to think more deeply about the novel, students would post questions on their blogs to encourage a conversation in the commenting section. However, the questions were not

always rhetorical. Sometimes they were straightforward questions about the interpretation of the novel. This showed me that students were aware that blogging did not just end with them posting their analyses of the novel and moving on.

Throughout Daisy's blog, she constantly addressed her audience directly, as if they were listeners to a radio show that she was hosting. She would greet them with each blog and within her blogs, she would ask them direct questions. Sometimes she would ask her readers a general question, "Question to all of you guys that read this section, did you like it?" (Daisy, Winter Blog). Other times, she would ask her audience specific questions about the reading. "What's your opinion on Pauline's hobby? Do you see it in a different light than I do?" (Daisy, Spring Blog). She was aware that blogging is interactive and she was trying to provide her group members with something specific to respond to in her blog posts. Occasionally, she would even post a question that looked for a more personal reaction to the book. "What would you guys do if you met someone in Pecola's situation?" (Daisy, Summer Blog). During her interview she explained that sometimes she read her classmates' blogs and was unsure how to respond. "When it [her classmates' blogs] was just a summary of the chapter, I was like, yeah and now what do I say?" This is why she posed direct questions to her audience. Later in this chapter, I discuss how reading strategies that I model during class influenced how students shaped their blogs.

Other students seemed to post direct questions to help their readers make connections to things outside of the novel. In Jeb's winter blog, he posted:

A question I would like to pose is: In what ways do you think society has progressed from the time of *The Bluest Eye*? Additionally, if you believe that the United States is still a racist country, do you think we will ever outgrow it? During his interview, I asked why he posted this question. He responded he thought it was important to “draw attention to the time period in which the novel was set (1941)” and he wanted to challenge his classmates to think about “how, or if, America has changed since then.”

Amelia also prompted her group members to think about the racism in society when she asked, “Does this harsh mindset still come to life in the 21st Century?” By asking questions that looked for specific answers, students were aware that they were writing for an audience and interaction was part of blogging. They were not merely sharing their opinions on the novel; they were looking to engage their audience in more of a conversation on the novel through asking conversational questions.

Made predictions. Students made predictions about the novel while interacting online. As an English teacher, I am constantly modeling reading strategies for students. For example, whenever we read a text together in class, I pause during the reading and I pose prediction questions to the students. I explain to my students that it is important for readers to engage with the text they are reading, and one way to do this is to make prediction questions about what is going to happen next in the novel. There was evidence in the blogs that students used this reading strategy.

Students were aware that they had an audience for their blogs, and they tried to post questions to share what they were thinking about the characters and the plot. In Jeb’s autumn blog, he asked, “How will the community react when news of her [Pecola] being

sexually abused is out? Would it be best to keep it [the news of the abuse] in the family or condemn these actions to the whole neighborhood?” And in her spring blog, Barbara questioned, “Will this be the breaking point of the family, or will Pauline finally do what is best and end it with Cholly, as her first steady employer had suggested?”

By sharing these questions with their readers on their blogs, students are showing one another how they actively read when they are reading independently. They are aware that there is an audience reading their blogs, and they are trying to include their audience in their reading and analysis processes.

Student-centered learning. It is no surprise that I found that students asked one another for help when they interacted online because research supports this finding (Hsu & Ching, 2013). Students interacted by asking one another clarifying questions. When students were reading the novel and they became confused about something they read, many asked questions on their blogs.

Some parts of the novel seemed to confuse many of the students in the class. For instance, several students in the study asked for clarification about to whom a character is talking at the end of the novel. In Alice’s summer blog, she wrote, “The thing that was confusing to me was Pecola’s friend. Who was her friend? Was this ‘friend’ real or imaginary?” Similarly, in Roxie’s summer blog, she wrote:

During the second half of the ending, I was very confused, so if someone could clarify that would be great! I couldn’t figure out who Pecola was talking to? Is Pecola talking to a real person or is it a figure of her imagination?

Since I have taught this novel before, I was anticipating that students would be confused about this section of the novel. In the past, students would come to class and ask me for

clarification. However, in their blogs, many of the students posed the question to one another in hopes of receiving different answers or explanations of interpretations in the forms of responses on their own blogs rather than relying on only my interpretation of the text. Blogging helped make the questions more student-centered rather than teacher-centered.

During John's interview, he reflected on how he felt about asking questions. He explained that in the past, when he was reading for school and had a question that he wanted clarified, he would usually have the class or a teacher help him make sense of the part of the novel he was unsure about it. He mentioned that he liked posting questions. "I didn't want to have to wait until school to find out what was happening, so I would post a question and hope that one of my group members would answer it when they commented."

Some students communicated with one another by asking clarifying questions in response to someone else's blog. Sometimes this happened simply because they did not understand the original post that a classmate made. For instance, Barbara asked Amelia, "Amelia, did you mean did *Pecola* feel like she deserved the beatings and this life was because she wasn't born 'pretty'?" I believe Barbara was asking for clarification on a statement that Amelia used on her blog using the pronoun "she" and Barbara was asking for clarification on who "she" was in Amelia's statement. It was interesting to see that the students were able to identify mistakes in grammar and ask one another about them, even if they were not directly stating their questions as grammar questions.

Other times, students asked clarifying questions because they were interested in finding out more about what a particular student thought on a particular subject. For

instance, in Lala's winter blog, she posted about a particular sex scene with a character in the novel. When Daisy commented on Lala's blog she wrote, "I have a question though. What do you think Toni Morrison wanted readers to feel and understand when she wrote those sexual scenes and stories?" On a different blog post Daisy also asked Lala to expand her thoughts on a character in the comments section of Lala's blog. Daisy posted, "Lala, out of curiosity, you made your blog based on how Pecola's community see her views on beauty, but what are your thoughts based on how Pecola feels? Like, for example, should she continue to think this way?" Daisy interacted with Lala through the postings by asking her to expand her original thought. It was significant to see that students were comfortable posting clarification questions because they were using their blogs to help them making meaning of the novel without having to rely on me, the teacher, to answer their questions. This strengthens my earlier findings in the chapter when I discussed how students were learning to rely on each other instead of always relying on me.

To summarize, it was important that students were asking questions on their blogs. Students were able to challenge one another to thinking more deeply about the novel and they shared ideas about the novel that enabled one another to make connections to outside events. Blogging became more student-centered than teacher-centered, especially when students were aware of their audience and took steps to try to engage their audience with what they were writing. This learning is supported by the Vygotsky Space because learning is a cyclical process (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996). Since students are making meaning in private spaces, like reading the novel independently, and public

spaces, like commenting on each other's blogs, they are moving through different quadrants to help them make meaning of the text.

Students Shared Interpretations

From my analysis of the student interviews and student documents, it was evident students addressed questions on the blogs. Sometimes students directly answered the questions that were posed, while other times students simply addressed that questions were asked, even if they did not have a specific answer to the question. Many times, students addressed questions by sharing their own interpretations of the novel in an attempt to help their classmates make meaning. Research supports that students find it useful to review each other's work in addition to receiving feedback on their own work (Hsu & Ching, 2013).

Sometimes students offered direct answers to questions. For example, when students were posting questions asking about whom Pecola was talking to at the end of the novel, other students commented with their interpretations of the scene. Lala posted:

You asked why Pecola had an imaginary friend? Well, despite all of this heinousness, Pecola is able to elude it by escaping into her mind, her own world free from the demeaning looks and hurtful words of her peers. Through the actions of her society, Pecola is able to rid herself of their pressures by creating her own friend.

Similarly, Avarice posted:

I think you are wrong. I think Pecola found solace in an imaginary friend, not a real one. Pushed towards isolation and ignored by practically everyone, she imagined someone who "loved" her, someone to tell her she was pretty, someone

to tell her she had blue eyes, and that they were bluer than anyone else's. Even then, her friend wasn't enough. Trapped within her own false reality, Pecola was so used to having no one, so accustomed to being alone, that she imagined her only "friend" leaving her.

Answering questions that others posted was significant because it means that students were making meaning of the novel and sharing their own interpretations with one another to help each other understand the novel from different viewpoints.

Sometimes, students did not answer questions, but just addressed that the questions had been asked. For instance, as mentioned earlier, Daisy posed many questions on her blog in an attempt to engage her readers in a conversational tone. Both of her group members mentioned how they enjoyed this in the comments section on her blog. Alice commented:

First, let me start off by saying I really loved how you asked questions to me, the reader, throughout your post. It made me feel as though we were sitting together, chatting about the book rather than posting it to the Internet.

Her other group member, Lala, also addressed Daisy's questions when she commented, "I did like this section of the book! Thank you for asking!" And, at the end of her comments, Lala also wrote, "I love your blog! I think it is wonderful that you ask your readers' questions! I can't wait to read your next blog!" Both Alice and Lala continued to post appreciative comments on Daisy's blog throughout the blogging process.

During Roxie's interview, she explained why she felt the comments were so important. Roxie posted a few questions on her blog that she had about reading and during her interview explained, "I liked the blogs because I had a couple of questions,

and they were answered, but I really liked when my group members asked me questions.” She went on to explain that during the first round of reading her group members’ blogs, she did not find any questions to answer. “When I went to comment on their blogs, I wasn’t sure where to start since they hadn’t asked any questions.” During the interview she mentioned that she talked to her group members about adding questions to their blogs to help prompt readers with something to write about. “The second time around, and all the times after that, I was happy to see that one of my group members had asked a question so it was easier to start my responses to her because it gave me a place to start.” In my study, Daisy’s group was the only blogging group that seemed to ask more questions with each blog with the intention of engaging one another more.

To summarize, sharing their own interpretations on the blogs was beneficial to the students because even if they could not answer a question, this gave them a place to start thinking about how to respond to their classmates through writing. It helped students to think more clearly about the literature because they were open to hearing multiple interpretations of the text and were not only relying on a teacher’s perspective (Hsu & Ching, 2013). Once again, this aligns with my finding that in my study the activities surrounding blogging were student centered.

Audience Awareness

From my analysis of the student interviews and student documents, it was evident the theme of students addressing one another directly evolved. Blogs allow students to understand their audience better and help develop a sense of community (McGrail & Davis, 2011). When students were writing their blogs and posting their comments, they

were aware that they were interacting with one another directly and not just writing down an analysis for me, the teacher, to read.

A few students in the study started to address their audience in their actual blog postings. As mentioned previously, Daisy was very aware of her audience. She would start most of her blog posts with “Hello blogger people of Bayside High!” She included weekly questions asking her bloggers for their opinions on the assigned readings and usually ended her blogs with a message thanking her “loyal readers” for reading her blog that week. John was also very aware of his audience and started to greet his readers with a message at the beginning of his blogs. He also ended his blogs with a message to his readers. For example, on his autumn blog he wrote, “Well, that’s about it from me for now. Hope you guys had an interesting and fun read! :D”

Many times, students directly addressed one another in their blog posts. These types of comments usually came in the form of praise. Students were eager to tell one another how much they liked their group members’ blogs, even though sometimes the comments were void of actual feedback. Since students were writing to peers and not their friends, they tended to start their comments with affirmative empty responses. Research supports that students will use affirmative empty responses to start written communications when they are unsure of what to say to one another (Nicolaidou, 2013). Alex started a few of his responses to Cindy with general praise about how she was doing a good job. For instance, on her first blog, Alex posted, “Oh damn Cindy, that ending gave me chills, girl.” But he started to follow up his general praise with more specific praise. On her winter blog, he posted, “You made a great connection with altering the definition of ‘blue’ to fit her life entirely.” While this is still praise, it was interesting to

see how the praise became more specific to the analysis of the novel. Many of the students developed in the same pattern of starting more general and getting more specific in their blogging comments.

In my study, several students received comments from their group members thanking them for different things that they posted on their blogs. Lizzie commented on Cindy's blog, "Thank you for the entry, it really helped me put a feeling I've had about the novel for a while into words I just couldn't find myself." Students were also grateful when another student's blog helped them understand the novel better. Alex commented on Lizzie's blog, "Thank you Lizzie. After reading your blog, I realize why we are reading this novel in the first place." And, both of Lala's group members thanked her by commenting on her blog. Alice wrote, "After reading your blog, Lala, it honestly changed how I viewed reading the section Autumn. You point out many important facts on how Pecolas' views herself as part of the community." Daisy commented to Lala:

Thank you Lala. While reading your blog, I enjoyed the fact that each statement was backed up with details from the book. Reading your blog was like talking to Toni Morrison while she explains her views on why she wrote Autumn the way she did.

In summary, it was significant for students to acknowledge their audience and understand that they were helping one another make meaning rather than just relying on a lecture in a classroom from me, the teacher, about the novel. While I did not specifically model these types of conversations before we started blogging, I do model active reading for the students when we discuss literature in class. I show them how to pause while

reading and ask prediction questions, and I engage them in conversations about their interpretations of the reading.

Opposing Viewpoints

From my analysis of the student interviews and student documents, it was evident the theme of students addressing opposing viewpoints developed. When students are interacting in a classroom, there are always different viewpoints since each student is coming from a different background. Many students know how to discuss different points of view in a verbal conversation. However, in a written communication, like a blog, students must navigate their way around opposing viewpoints through writing. Ellison and Wu (2008) found that students can sometimes feel uncomfortable providing one another with feedback or that the feedback students receive is not substantial. However, in my research I found that some students were not afraid to discuss opposing viewpoints in their online discussions and interactions.

Some students were able to interact with these differences very easily. When Alex was responding to Lizzie's blog, he wrote:

I understand where your lack of sympathy towards Pauline and Cholly are coming from. However, I can't help but think about what Ms. Watkins added. Can you really blame them if they don't know and never knew any better? We have to keep in mind that they weren't exposed to the same things, family, and morals that we were.

The language he used was very straightforward, yet still respectful to his classmate's idea. He was willing to question her opinion and not just accept it. Similarly, in a follow up comment on his own blog, Jeb wrote, "This week, I see myself holding somewhat of a

different view on the topic of racism from my group members.” He was comfortable being the only person to read the novel from a different perspective, and he was willing to share his differences and explain his thoughts to his group. During the interview, he explained that he was the only member of his blogging group who was not black, and he was not aware of the tension between “light-skinned black people and dark-skinned black people.”

To summarize, it was important students felt comfortable being able to disagree with one another through writing because it means that they were listening to other peoples’ interpretations of the novel, and matched those interpretations up against their own in an attempt to draw conclusions about the novel. This is a significant finding because research shows that usually students do not challenge one another or counter ideas, but instead make either affirmative responses or responses void of any substance or actual feedback (Baker et al., 2000; Ellison & Wu, 2008; Nicolaidou, 2013; Smith, 2010). In my study, student interactions did not have to be all compliments and agreeing with one another, and it was important that students could discuss differences through writing. Research shows that students often give unsolicited feedback (Baker et al., 2000), but often the feedback is more generic and agreeable (Baker et al., 2000; Nicolaidou, 2013; Smith, 2010).

Making Sense of *The Bluest Eye*

In my study, one purpose of using blogs was to give the students a tool for analyzing *The Bluest Eye*. As an English teacher, it was very important for me to see if the students were able to make sense of the novel and, if they were making sense of the novel, how were they doing so. I found that the students were making sense of the novel

by making personal connections to the novel and sharing those connections on their blogs. This study supports research that has found that students relied on one another to make meaning of the novel (West, 2008). Blogs helped to organize and support students' ideas on the novel. Finally, there was one outlier to my findings. One of my students used outside sources to help him make meaning of the novel, which I discuss at the end of this section.

Personal Connections

From my analysis of the student interviews and student documents, it was evident the theme of personal connections developed. *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison is a novel about a poor, young, black girl named Pecola who is growing up in the 1940s who desires to obtain white beauty. The novel contains many mature ideas including sex, rape, incest, and racism. Since the novel was so mature, I found that students were able to understand the book more by sharing broad connections to their lives, and the blogs provided them a forum to interact and share these thoughts. Research supports that students feel more comfortable experimenting with texts when they blog because they are writing less formally than they would in a classroom (West, 2008).

Some students were able to make meaning of the novel by discussing their childhoods. In his final blog, John expressed, "One thing I learned from this book is to be thankful for many things, such as my background, my innocence as a child, and the friends that I have." Similarly, Cindy was also able to reflect on her own childhood after reading the novel. In her third blog, Cindy noted:

Sidenote: I noticed the sexual explicitness towards little girls in this chapter, which is a really careful and touchy topic to talk about. Growing up, I've always

thought adults including my parents nowadays are too overprotective, but after seeing what happened a lot, especially to little girls, I see how necessary this protectiveness is. I understand now.

Cindy was able to connect the abuse of little girls in a fictional novel that takes place in the 1940s to her own life. Even though Cindy did not write about abuse in her own life, she was able to understand why her parents were so protective.

Another student, Alice, shared a personal story about her own desires when she was young when she responded to Lala's blog in an attempt to try to better understand the desires of the girls in the book:

I remember as a young girl I would lay awake at night and think about my future. Would I find someone who loved me? Would we get married and have children? Or would I be a failure who was never loved and grew old alone. It's simple. I was raised in a society where being loved was so common that all the little girls couldn't wait to find their own person who loved them. We were curious. We all wanted our own 'Prince Charming'. If society hadn't made me believe that a young girl needs to be interested in love, then I wouldn't be.

When students think about the novel on a personal level, they are using literary analysis skills they have previously developed in the more formal classroom writing setting (West, 2008). It was a struggle for some of my students to understand what the characters in the book were going through because, luckily, they did not share stories of abuse.

However, they were still able to understand some of the loneliness and societal pressures that the characters experienced, even though their own experiences were different from the societal pressures that the characters in the novel faced. For some students, being able

to make personal connections to the novel was a way to make the novel more modern or relevant (Ajayi, 2015).

Students in my class are from different races and cultures, and not every student feels comfortable vocalizing his/her opinions about race in class. In an interview with Alex he explained, “As a white male, it would have been hard to talk to some of the black students in class about the differences within the black race.” In his interview, he explained that he felt more comfortable using the blog to bring up questions he had about race. “When I posted something on my blog, I could really take the time to think about approaching a sensitive topic.” He explained to me that he had a hard time understanding the tension between light-skinned characters and dark-skinned characters in the novel and felt that the blog was a good place to ask his questions.

In a response to Alex’s blog, Lala also discussed the same topic. She wrote, “I, too, always assumed circumstances were between whites vs. blacks. I even assumed Maureen Peal (a character in the novel) was white at first. It wasn't until I reread the section to annotate did I realize Maureen, who was considered ‘better’, was black as well.”

To summarize, since the students were sharing their thoughts on blogs, they had the time to carefully express how they were making meaning of the novel and ask one another for help. They were applying tools of formal literary analysis to a more informal form of writing (West, 2008). The blogs helped the students make meaning around sensitive subjects, modernize the text by drawing personal connections, and start conversations that might not have been addressed face-to-face in a classroom (Ajayi, 2015).

Students Relied on Each Other to Make Meaning

From my analysis of the student interviews and student documents, it was evident blogging with others, and reading others' responses, helped students read more critically. As mentioned earlier, in previous years, when I have taught novels in class without using blogs, most students would bring their questions in to class and ask me for clarifications so all of the discussions existed inside of the classroom. With blogging, the students found themselves not only posting questions they had, but also answering other students' questions on their blogs which extended their conversations outside of the physical classroom. This aligns with Du and Wagner (2005) who found that blogs are beneficial in extending conversations outside of physical classrooms. I found that students liked being dependent on one another rather than feeling like they had to always rely on me for clarification. Once again, this aligns with my earlier findings that blogging can be student-centered and not teacher-centered.

Not only were students not afraid to pose questions to one another, they were also very vocal about learning from one another. In his interview, Frank explained, "I even found myself venturing outside of my group to go see what other people had written. This was in part for inspiration and partly out of curiosity." Multiple students even mentioned other students for whom they were thankful because reading other blogs helped them understand what they were reading. In Alice's autumn reflection, she wrote "I had not thought twice on the role of love in Pecola's life until I read Lala's blog."

When I asked Alice about her appreciation for reading other people's blogs, she explained that she really learned a lot about the novel from reading her classmates' thoughts. "There were a lot of points that they, like I said, brought up that I just

completely missed or thought about but not completely analyzed all the way and just thought about.” She went on to explain that when she read the novel independently there were certain parts of the novel that she just read, instead of reading critically. When she went and read what her classmates were saying, she realized that she needed to go back and read for deeper meaning to the text.

In summary, students made sense of the novel really from one another through asking, answering, and addressing questions. They were able to think of new ideas and make connections to the novel that they were not making independently. While I spoke of this in detail earlier under ways in which students interacted, it was important to mention here again because one of the main purposes of using blogs in this study was for students to be able to use them as tools to make sense of the novel they were assigned to read. This aligns with my theoretical framework as well because it shows that while students are able to make meaning independently when they are reading and writing their original posts, they are able to extend their understanding of the novel when they move their learning into a public space of commenting with blogs (Gavelek & Raphael, 1998).

Blogs Helped Organize and Support Ideas

Through analyzing my data, it was evident the theme of using the blogs to organize and support ideas in the novel developed. Instructions for blogging, in my study, required students to use quotes from the text in their blogs. As a veteran teacher, I am aware of the importance of teaching students to use contextual support to back up their opinions about a novel. I also wanted to require proof that students had read the novel and could reference specific details from the novel in order to stop them from talking in generalizations.

Students found benefits to annotating on their blogs. In her interview, Barbara shared, “Blogging about the sections and sharing my opinions helped me sort through all the little details and events.” Alex took it one step further, and in his first reflection he wrote about how much he enjoyed blogging. “I annotate not to get an annotation grade, but rather to organize the ideas I want to put into my posts.” When I asked him about his excitement over blogging during his interview, he explained, “Blogging did help me quite a bit because it turned into this database of notes and ideas that I could refer to anywhere I had internet connection.” Students were aware of the personal benefits of organizing and sharing their thoughts online.

Blogging also allowed students to organize how they used their quotes for support of their opinions of the novel. While all students used quotes on their blogs, many of the students used the same quotes. The two most popular quotes were “Nasty little black bitch” which was used by nine out of thirteen of the students and “black e mos” which was used by six of the thirteen students. It was interesting to see many students using similar quotes to support different interpretations of the novel. It was important that students used contextual support as evidence to support these different interpretations.

In summary, blogging provided the students a place where they could share their opinions with one another and use support to show they were reading and attempting to understand what they read. The blogs gave them a way to organize their notes on the novel and provided them a way to share their supported ideas. Lee (2010) found that students liked using blogs because it allowed them to collect their thoughts in one place and look back at them chronologically. In my study, at the conclusion of reading the novel and finishing their blogs, students were assigned to write an analysis paper on the

novel. In the interviews, many students explained that the first place they started when they went to write their final papers was their blogs because they had already laid out many of their ideas, interpretations, and contextual support on their blogs so it made writing the final analysis papers easier.

The Outlier

There was one outlier finding in my research. In his blogs, Jeb incorporated hyperlinks that he felt connected outside resources to the reading. By sharing these hyperlinks with his classmates, he felt that he was helping students make deeper connections to the literature. In his interview he explained, “I knew there were specific topics that were pertaining to themes that we were reading about ...I’m using prior knowledge to make connections and I knew that there’s probably articles about it. I researched them.” It was interesting to see the extra work that Jeb was willing to do in order to find extra information to share with his classmates on his blog. In his interview he explained that he did not think of it as extra work, but looked at it as a way to connect meaning. He explained that students today “live in a world where they are completely connected” and he felt that students would benefit from being able to link to outside sources.

In his winter blog, Jeb included a hyperlink to statistics of black on black crimes. He wanted to draw parallels between events that occurred in the novel with statistics from real life. “Racism within the black community seems to be more apparent than racism against it, which is an interesting take on the topic.” In his interview, he explained:

I knew there has to be some sort of statistic to put things in perspective from now to back in that time, the 1940s. The hyperlink has a global aspect to it and it

shows that in the world today, there are certain things that are remnants from the time in which the novel took place.

It was important to Jeb to point out to his peers that the racial issues that occurred in the 1970 novel, though set in the 1940s, are still prevalent in today's society. He encouraged the readers of his blog to really think about these issues by posting questions such as, "In what ways do you think society has progressed from the time of the *The Bluest Eye*?" and "If you believe that the United States is still a racist country, do you think we will ever outgrow it?"

In addition, Jeb posted another hyperlink on his spring blog that connected to a public service video that the White House endorsed in an attempt to educate the public about victims of sexual assault. In his interview, Jeb explained that he used it because he felt that it had a powerful message, and the first time that he saw it, he immediately thought of Pecola. "It just so happened that (this video) pertained to what we were reading and I decided to share it because it was topical" (Jeb, Interview).

Finally, Jeb went on to explain that he felt that being able to share hyperlinks on his blog was more powerful than just mentioning these things in class. He admitted that he would not have done as much work to find extras to talk about if we were merely having a class discussion. In his interview, he explained "If I thought about something, I would mention it in passing, like the video, but I would just mention it in passing and no one else would be able to see it." Unfortunately, Jeb was the only student in my study to go to such lengths to bring in outside sources as a way to help make deeper connections with the book.

Multimedia Divide

Research shows there are benefits to including multimedia tools into classrooms (Ajayi, 2015; Green et al., 2014; Merchant, 2005). Students in my study all were required to use a blog, which is a digital tool. However, in my instructions to the students, I encouraged them to include multimedia in their blogs in the form of pictures, hyperlinks, and/or video clips. My hope was that more students would act as Jeb did and include links to outside sources that would help students understand the novel on different levels and even draw parallels between the novel and their personal experiences or between the novel and things that happening in the world. However, student opinions on creating multimedia blogs varied greatly, which influenced students' decisions on whether or not to include these things on their blogs. In the following sections I discuss how some students felt that the multimedia on the blogs was distracting and felt forced, so they did not use any at all. Then I discuss how other students felt that the addition of multimedia to blogs made the blogs more entertaining and helped them make deeper connections to the literature. I end this section with a discussion on how many of the students who chose to include multimedia did so for the sake of adding humor to their blogs.

Multimedia is Distracting

Since *The Bluest Eye* is a novel that covers so many mature themes, some students felt that creating a multimedia blog detracted from the tone of the novel and did not use pictures, hyperlinks, or video clips in their blogs. Many of the students who did create multimedia blogs tended to use them to bring humor to their blogs and to entertain their peers. In his interview, Alex explained that he felt that adding pictures actually detracted from the tone of the novel:

I just felt that *The Bluest Eye* was one of those books that I had a lot of feelings about and I best expressed them through a word medium. I couldn't really find pictures that would express my ideas without kind of ruining the tone that I was going for.

When I asked him if he merely struggled finding pictures, he clarified that he did not think there were any pictures he could have included and that he preferred his blog without multimedia. Lala agreed with Alex and felt that many of the multimedia blogs felt forced. In her interview, she stated, "I didn't use [any multimedia] because anything that I would put in would be forced. I didn't want that because it wouldn't help my writing. It wouldn't help others to understand my writing." She felt that her words were strong enough to convey her message and that she did not need to incorporate anything extra to do this.

One student in particular, Lizzie, did not create a multimedia blog and was very vocal in her interview about her distaste for multimedia blogs. She explained that she hated watching videos or looking at pictures to describe emotions. Instead, she preferred to express herself only through words. In her interview she stated, "I feel like if a book can describe an emotion in words, that's amazing." She further went on to explain that she felt that something personal was lost by looking at a picture found on the Internet to explain the depth of emotion that Morrison created in her characters.

In summary, the students who were outspoken against multimedia blogs in their interviews did not use anything except text in any of their blogs or their comments on other students' blogs. Since they thought that the multimedia blogs felt forced or were distracting, they chose to only use text on their own blogs. However, none of the students

who were outspoken about not using multimedia blogs had anything negative to say in the commenting sections of group members' who did use multimedia blogs. Instead, they chose to focus on leaving comments only about the words posted.

Multimedia is Helpful

While some students in my study did not like multimedia blogs, others really thought there were benefits to using it. Ajayi (2015) found that using multimedia to help teach a piece of literature can give students' ownership over the novel because they are able to interpret it by comparing it to other types of media. In my study, during Frank's interview, he explained that he found multimedia on the blogs made the blogs more enjoyable not only to read, but to write. He liked the creative aspect of going beyond the novel to connect it with images he could find on the internet. Frank explained, "I definitely don't like reading long blogs, so I tried to help people out. Media, in a sense, pictures and videos, can convey a lot without having to type a lot or read a lot." He also seemed to think that reading multimedia blogs was less work than reading printed words.

In Alice's interview, she explained that she thought one particular image that she used was helpful in conveying positive messages to readers, even though the book had some harrowing plotlines. In her last reflection, which was posted to her blog, Alice included a picture of Marilyn Monroe with a quote that she supposedly said. The quote reads, "To all the girls that think you're ugly just because you're not a size 0, you're the beautiful one. It's society who is ugly."

Alice was not the only student who felt that it was important to reference outside sources as a way to connect to *The Bluest Eye*. In Avarice's summer blog, he used hyperlinks to different songs that he was listening to while he was writing the blog. In his

interview, he explained, “As I was writing the last one, I made each paragraph relevant to the quotes I said, which were all from the songs I was listening to. It would provide some sort of idea and topic. It would provide insight into it.”

Cindy was the other student in my study who referenced music in one of her blogs. In her Spring blog, Cindy inserted a hyperlink to a music video of The Who’s song “Behind Blue Eyes”. She felt that the emotions in the song, helplessness and fear, were emotions that she felt while journeying through the novel with Pecola, so she felt the song was relevant to share. In her interview, she mentioned that she would have never thought to bring up the song in class, but since she was able to take the time to share her thoughts at home, on her blog, she was able to make stronger connections to outside sources.

In summary, some students really thought that using multimedia added value to their blogs. They felt that multimedia blogs were more interesting to read, and these students made an attempt to use some multimedia in their own blogs. They also made comments to their group members who had multimedia blogs about how much they enjoyed each other’s pictures, hyperlinks, and/or video clips. They felt that the multimedia had the ability to lighten the tone of the novel and make difficult discussions a little easier.

Multimedia for Humor

The majority of students who used multimedia blogs included pictures as humorous touches. In her interview, Cindy explained that she did not like the negative feelings that the book sometimes left her with so she tried to be the one in her group to try to “lighten things up”. She used memes in her blog to attempt this. In her spring blog,

Cindy was trying to describe how one of the novel's characters, Soaphead Church, was a social outcast, and she included two memes to illustrate outcasts. The first was a picture of an album cover from the band Outkast where the band members are looking happy and cool. The other meme was from an awkward looking character from a television show that was sniffing his hand. Underneath the pictures she wrote, "He was such an outcast! And not a cool Outkast like these guys, but an awkward one like him!"

John also used many pictures or memes in his blogs for humor. In his interview, he explained why he included pictures in each blog. "Mainly, what I did was once I finished a section, I would understand that a lot of people find constantly reading something boring." He further went on to explain that after he finished writing each small section of his blog, he would put in a picture that related to what he had just written. "Right after I finished a paragraph, I would go to Google Images, and try to find an image that best suits what I just wrote. Then, input that." Many of his pictures or memes were on the difficult subjects that the characters were facing in the novels, but they took on a lighter tone with the images he chose to include.

In his blogs, John openly addressed the fact that he was choosing to use pictures for humor. When writing his autumn blog, he addressed his readers about why a section of his blog was missing a picture. He was referencing Maginot Line, a character in the book who is a prostitute, and he wrote, "I was going to put up a picture at the end but something tells me that googling, 'trio of prostitutes talking to little girl' would not be the best idea."

In summary, many of the students who included pictures did so to entertain their audience and engage them with humor. Research supports that if students are aware that

peers will be reviewing their work, they are often more careful about the information they include because they are aware of their audience (Baker et al., 2000). Since students were both bloggers and audience members, some tried to include things that they would have liked to read in their classmates blogs. These students wanted their group members to enjoy reading their blogs and provide them with things to write about in the commenting sections of their blogs.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Research shows that adolescents spend less time reading and more time with multimedia tools as they grow older (Beach, 2012; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). For this reason, it is important to find new ways to teach literacy at the high school level so students can be more interested in what they are learning (Considine et al.; 2009; Ellison & Wu, 2008). The aim of this qualitative case study was to better understand how students used a multimedia blog as a tool for discussing the novel *The Bluest Eye*. As a teacher, I was interested in finding out if students were more engaged with independent reading while using blogs to discuss the literature outside of the physical classroom. The research addressed the following question and sub-questions: How do students interact with each other when responding to Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* through the use of a multimedia blog? (A) How are students interacting with each other through their online postings?; (B) How do students' postings reflect the ways in which they are/are not making sense of *The Bluest Eye*? and (C) If students do incorporate multimedia into their postings, why are they choosing to do so? These research questions helped guide the discussion of my findings that are presented in this chapter. Next, I will briefly discuss the methodology of my study. This will be followed by implications for practice from my study and then suggestions for further research. The chapter will end with a discussion for educators who want to implement blogging as a learning tool in their classrooms.

Described in chapter three, data collection took place over a six-week period with 13 students in my own classroom. Participants completed four blog posts, eight blog responses, and three reflections while reading the novel. After the unit was completed and students had received their grades, I conducted interviews after school. In addition, I

collected documents in the form of blog posts, blog responses, and reflections. Lastly, I kept a research journal where I recorded my own observations, reflections, and further interactions with the participants. After reading the data multiple times, coding, and identifying patterns and themes, interpretations were made. Findings were written by theme to highlight the understandings of how students used blogs to interact with one another.

There were three major findings to my study. Each finding aligns with one of my research questions. The first finding is that blogging was a tool that helped students challenge one another to think more deeply about the novel. Blogging allowed the students to play a larger role in the discussions of the novel since they were the ones asking and answering most of the questions rather than relying on me, their teacher, to guide them through discussions and interpretations.

This finding is significant because it shows that my students created an online learning community when they were blogging. They were able to put themselves in the center of the learning and not rely on me, the teacher, to guide and support them through the reading of the novel. Students were aware of their audience and were able to reach out to one another and discuss the literature together, which aligns with earlier research on blogging (Baker et al., 2000; Hsu & Ching, 2013).

However, it is important to note, that unlike previous research on blogging, my students were able to push each other to think more deeply about the novel. While they were aware that they were talking to their peers, they were also able to provide some critical questions and insight into the novel. Boling and Beatty (2010) found that in their study that online feedback started as praise and only became more substantial after the

teacher modeled constructive criticism. While I model feedback for my students on the papers they write in class, I did not model any types of feedback for the blogs.

Ellison and Wu (2008) also found that students were not always comfortable providing one another with substantive feedback, but my students had no problem challenging one another and expressing opposing viewpoints. Students were able to understand that some of their peers might interpret things differently in the novel, but then they would share their own ideas as well. Since my study was completed with Advanced Placement students, they are more confident in their own ideas and interpretations of the novel. I do not know if other levels of students would be so open to sharing their ideas if they felt that others did not agree with them. In summary, it was interesting to see that the interactions were not all compliments and praise and that students were able to use their interactions to challenge one another's ideas and interpretations of the novel.

The second finding is strongly related to the first. Students were able to use the blogs to make sense of the novel. Many of the students used the blogs to help organize their ideas. Plus, students were able to discuss their own interpretations of the text together in an online forum, rather than having to wait until they were in class with me to have me guide the discussion. Students were independent in their learning and understanding of the novel because of their online interactions.

These findings align with the Vygotsky Space because using the blogs allowed the students multiple opportunities to make sense of the novel (Gavelek & Raphael, 1998). First, students were reading the novels independently and interpreting the novel in ways that made sense to them. Then, the students were sharing these interpretations on

the blogs and giving and receiving feedback on each other's interpretations. Students had the chance to review their original interpretations of the novel and make changes to the ways in which they were making sense of the novel as they progressed through the blogging activities. Many students vocalized how they switched their opinions of what was happening in the novel as they read their peers' blogs.

Consistent with other research (West, 2008) blogging allowed the discussion of the novel to become student-centered instead of teacher-centered because the students relied on each other to make meaning. Students were using their blogs to discuss the literature with one another, rather than just simply writing reactions to the literature and sharing them only with me. Through these discussions, students were able to make connections to the novel and share them with one another. Consistent with other research (Ajayi, 2015), sometimes sharing the connections helped students make more connections, which in turn led to an even deeper understanding of the text.

To summarize, it was evident that the blogs were a useful tool in helping students make meaning of what they were reading. While some students mentioned using blogs to help organize their notes on the novel, other students used the blogs as a discussion forum to share ideas and challenge one another's interpretations of the novel. Students shared personal connections on their blogs that led to deeper discussions of the novel. The blogs were student centered, which permitted the students to rely on each other for making meaning and asking and answering questions.

Finally, I found students in the study all shared similar experiences of using the blogs to help them make sense of the novel; however, students were divided on the usefulness of incorporating multimedia into their blogs. While some students felt that

multimedia blogs detracted from the message of the novel, other students felt that multimedia blogs were more interesting and some even used humor in their blogs on purpose to lighten the tone of the novel.

I was surprised to see that my students' opinions were divided on using multimedia in the blogs. Since research does show that students are using multimedia tools every day (Beach, 2012; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010), I assumed that the majority of my students would enjoy creating multimedia blogs, but that assumption was incorrect. It is noteworthy to find that many of the students found the multimedia blogs to be distracting even though research states that incorporating multimedia can be beneficial to student learning and understanding (Ajayi, 2015; Merchant, 2005; Smagorinsky & O'Donnell, 1998).

Some of the students in my study still enjoyed using and reading/viewing multimedia blogs, but there was a significant portion of students that refused to use anything except text, and all these students were very vocal in their interviews about not wanting to use multimedia. I have to think more deeply about why I want the students to use multimedia blogs and then be able to convey that understanding to the students. The outlier to my study, Jeb, really allowed me to see the importance of making connections from the novel to life events in an attempt to understand the relevancy of the literature. However, I think making this kind of connection needs be modeled by me for the students in an attempt to help them understand the importance of using multimedia blogs for this purpose. The overall findings of this study suggest that there are benefits to using a blog in a high school English classroom as a tool to help students make sense of reading a novel independently.

Implication for Practice

Since the completion of my research study, I have continued blogging with the students in my classroom. They are continuing to use blogs to discuss literature outside of the classroom and are challenging one another's thoughts and ideas about the different pieces of literature that we read. However, as we continue to blog, I continue to make changes in my directions to the students in how we are using the blogs. These changes are all based on findings from this research study.

For instance, I have become a more involved blogging participant. In my study, I merely observed how the students were blogging, but I did not post anything on my blog, nor did I post any comments on the students' blogs. During the study, I really wanted to study the students' interactions without interfering. However, now I take turns joining a different group each week so I am a part of the blogging process. I decided to become a part of the community because I wanted to see if the students' writing styles changed once I joined their blogging groups. Even though it was not one of my research questions, I noticed a difference in tone and style between students' writing on their blogs and students' writing reflections to me. I was interested to see if their tone and style changed on the blogs once I joined their blogging groups as a participant instead of just an observer.

Additionally, I have altered the blogging instructions to the students and I am now asking them to include at least two questions to their initial blog posts so their group members have something specific to respond to when leaving comments. Through the interviews, I found that the students really enjoyed when they asked one another questions because it helped guide their comments to one another. Finally, I have started

to build more classroom conversations into my lesson plans. Students are still spending a majority of the time discussing the literature on the blogs, but I have built in classroom discussions for any students who might not truly enjoy the blogging process, or feel that they are missing something from face-to-face communications.

Since I have been teaching at Bayside High School, blogging has been incorporated into the curriculum. However, the instructions simply state that as a teacher, blogging is an option that we have for assessment with the students. My research shows, in my school, the curriculum needs to be revised to have more specific instructions and/or assessment exemplars for the teachers about how to incorporate blogging into the curriculum. If teachers have a little more direction about different suggestions on using blogs in the classrooms, they might be more likely to incorporate blogging. I do not think there is only one way to blog, but perhaps if the curriculum included more examples of how teachers could incorporate blogging more teachers would be open to the idea.

In my study, I found that students were divided on using multimedia blogs. While all of the students expressed that they liked using the blogs as a digital tool, they were divided on whether or not they enjoyed incorporating pictures, hyperlinks, and video clips into the blogs. Moving forward, I take this into consideration when planning how to use my blogs in the classroom. Teachers should be aware of this finding when planning to use blogs so they can either provide alternatives to students who do not want to use multimedia blogs, or provide substantiation to the students for why they want other forms of multimedia incorporated. It is important for teachers to help students understand the value of using multimedia for learning. If students can better understand the value of

learning through using multimedia, students might be more likely to want to create multimedia blogs.

Developing the curriculum at Bayside High School to incorporate more specifics about teaching blogging also lends to the idea that professional development is needed so teachers can learn more about different ways to incorporate blogging. Since my study, I have had other teachers in school approach me about wanting to try blogging in their classrooms. They are hearing about the blogs from my students and want to be able to try similar ideas in their own classrooms. I think professional development training would benefit teachers.

After completing my study, I think professional development workshops would be beneficial to teachers where they would have the opportunity to sit down together, with an expert, and learn different types of blogging formats. For instance, teachers might be able to look at a sample blog where the students are assigned small groups and are discussing the novel independently. They might also look at a sample of a blog where a teacher is more involved in the blogging and guides the students more with questions. I think it is important for teachers to be able to set up their own blogs during professional development sessions and try using them, even if they only try them out with other teachers in the group. If teachers can see personal benefits of blogging, they might be more likely to incorporate blogging in to their lesson plans.

I recommend that all teachers try to introduce blogging in their lesson plans. If teachers are reluctant to start blogging, it would be beneficial for them to join small professional learning communities (PLC's) with other teachers where they could talk about the pros and cons of blogging with other teachers who are using blogs. Blogging is

also a great way to have classrooms become more student-centered, instead of teacher-centered. However, it is important to note that blogging might not be an effective tool for every teacher. If a teacher is hesitant to use blogs in the classroom, or hesitant towards using technology in general, that teacher might not find blogging to be an effective tool. While research supports that students are more likely to become engaged with subject matters when they collaborate ideas and have instant feedback (Felix, 2008), teachers have to make sure that they are creating a classroom learning environment where blogging is supported. If the teacher is unsure about blogging, or even feels negatively about blogging, there is a chance that blogging with the students might not be successful.

Blogging allows students to learn outside of the physical classroom. Students have ownership over how they are sharing their ideas when they blog. They can take their time to formulate what they want to say and every student has a chance to be heard, unlike the classroom when sometimes a few students tend to dominate the conversation. As my findings suggest, it is important to provide students with the opportunity to create online learning communities where they can learn to rely on each other to ask questions and push each other to think more deeply instead of always relying on a teacher.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study indicate multiple opportunities for other possible research studies about using blogs in the classroom. More studies investigating different types of blogging in the classroom would strengthen the validity of my findings.

Throughout the study I found that students really enjoyed blogging. Many of the students in my class had previously become disengaged with reading and uninterested in their English Language Arts classrooms. Blogging was something new to them and

piqued their interests. More studies could be conducted to see if more students become more engaged with reading because of blogging. As mentioned earlier, one of the limitations of my study was the fact that my students were all Advanced Placement students. For the most part, they are students who are intrinsically motivated to do well in school. When they are given an assignment, they complete the assignment regardless of whether they are interested in it or not. It would be beneficial to attempt this study with different levels of students to see how students of different academic standings tackled using the blogs. However, it is important to note, that even if lower achieving academic students do not succeed in blogging, blogging could be an important tool for the higher achieving students. More studies are needed with different levels of students to see how they use and respond to blogging. It would be beneficial to run these studies using control groups of students who do not use blogs to see what kinds of differences would emerge between the two groups as far as classroom conversations, quiz grades, and final assessments on the novel were concerned.

More research is also needed on how to assign students to use the blog. There are many more questions to be explored including: Would students find blogs as useful if they were not required to provide contextual annotations? Would students continue to use the commenting feature on the blogs if it were not required? How would the results of students' enjoyment of blogging change if the directions they were provided differed?

In my study, I was surprised to find that the students were divided on using multimedia blogs. It would be interesting to see if the students would be more apt to use multimedia in conjunction with blogging on a novel that did not have such a serious tone to it, or even a piece of literature that the students did not enjoy reading. If students were

blogging about something that had a modern multimedia translation to it, like a Shakespearean play for instance, I wonder if the students would be more inclined to create a multimedia blog to help add relevancy to the play. Additionally, blogging might not be as successful with a teacher who feels uncomfortable with blogging, or does not have enthusiasm about blogging. Even if a teacher has the enthusiasm, it is important that teachers are knowledgeable about blogs and have the skills to use blogs in order to make them more effective tools for the students to use.

While I was analyzing my data, I found that some students were able to make connections to the literature by making personal connections and sharing them with me through reflections. However, my research questions only focused on student interactions through online postings, and the reflections were an additional assignment that the students wrote and shared only with me. I felt that what I found was significant and worth including, even though it does not address my research questions directly.

According to my theoretical framework, the Vygotsky Space, people learn both publicly, and privately (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996). Since my framework guided my study, when I designed my unit plan, I had students write reflections on the blogging process. Students were simply told to reflect on the novel and the overall blogging process and to either email me their reflections or post their reflections to their blogs. Only one student in the study, Daisy, chose to post her reflections to her blog. Once thoughts or ideas are shared, they move into the public realm (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996). However, for the purpose of my study, students were asked to write private reflections that were shared only with me. Aside from Daisy, the other students emailed me their reflections knowing that I would be the only one to read them.

Through my analysis of the blogs and the reflections, I found that students did not always choose to share the same information with the class through their blogs that they shared with me through their reflections. Some students were very generic in their connections. Some students shared much more personal connections they had to the novel with me privately than they did through their blogs. Two students in the study, in particular, shared very personal stories with me that they chose not to mention in their blogs.

One student, Lizzie shared stories about being bullied when she was younger because of her ethnicity. In her autumn reflection, she wrote “Many of my classmates would tease me endlessly about my foreign last name, and I was insulted on numerous counts. I felt like Pecola in this time period: I genuinely felt ugly.” She further went on to explain that she felt that if she had an English name or lighter hair or vibrant eyes that she would be more accepted. “This section (of the novel) helped me realize that most of my childhood was made up of this false idea of people with lighter skin, much like Pecola, Frieda, and Claudia’s childhood was.” However, Lizzie never mentioned any of the bullying in her blogs. The most personal connection she ever shared on her blog was a general statement on her Summer Blog about her life. “Overall, this book has taught me to appreciate the little things in life and to humbly accept and be grateful for the life I have now.”

Another student, Jeb, also connected to Pecola regarding issues of racial identity. In his winter reflection Jeb wrote, “I, myself, am of Filipino heritage and of Spanish and Portuguese descent, but I never considered myself a true member of any of these groups.” When I asked Jeb during the interview why he did not share these thoughts on his blog,

he explained to me that he considers himself an American, and when he says that, “I seem to offend these three groups by not staying ‘true’ to them”.

To summarize, it was important that students were able to show they were making meaning of the text not just by being able to summarize what happened in the novel, but by being able to draw personal connections to the novel (Ajayi, 2015; West, 2008).

Students were not assigned a particular topic for their reflections. Some reflected on the novel, some reflected on the blogging process, and some reflected on their classmates. It was interesting to see that these two students shared such personal connections with the novel, but chose not to share the connections with their class. My suggestion for future research is that researchers include a question about student reflection in order to study the difference between what students are sharing with the classmates on their blogs, and what students are sharing privately with just the teacher.

Conclusion

This research provides insight into how a blog can be used with high school English Language Arts students as a tool to discuss literature. The findings of this study can help improve my teaching practices, as well as provide information to other teachers who are looking to strengthen their teaching practices. As teachers, we are aware that many high school students lose interest with reading. I was looking for a way to help engage the students more and keep them interested in independent reading.

Based on the findings of this research, I feel that I have been successful in engaging at least some of my students. During Alex’s interview he stated, “I’m, in all frankness, a little overwhelmed that after years of despising English I can reconvene in an environment that supports my interests and learning style. I’m sorry if my explanation of

the importance of the blogs doesn't show how striking they are.” As a teacher, I am aware that I might not be able to help every single student retain his or her interest in reading.

However, I am going to continue to do what I can to engage as many as possible.

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APPENDIX A

Glossary of Terms

Blog will be specifically understood to mean an online public writing community where students can post their ideas on their own blogs, and respond to other students' thoughts by using the commenting feature on the blogs (Ellison & Wu, 2008; Lee, 2010; McGrail & Davis, 2011).

Multimedia will be defined as a broad overview of using more than one form of expression or communication (Merchant, 2005).

Multimedia Blog will be used specifically to mean using pictures, hyperlinks, videos, or anything more than plain text posted on a blog (Ajayi, 2015; Cook, 2011; Merchant, 2005).

APPENDIX B

Consent Form for Students and Guardians

Susan T. Watkins
Rutgers University Doctoral Candidate
160 Broad Street
Bloomfield, New Jersey 07003

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

You are invited to participate in a research study about students' perceptions on blogging based on the novel *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. The research study is being conducted by Susan T. Watkins, who is a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education Department at Rutgers University. The purpose of this research is to determine what students think about using blogging in an English classroom.

Participants will include students in my 11th grade AP American Literature classes who voluntarily choose to participate in the study. You were selected as a possible participant because you are enrolled in my class and I would like your help in finding answers to questions I have about blogging.

As a student who has been blogging in my class, I would like to interview you about your thoughts on the blogging process. Interviews may be recorded using a digital voice recorder. During interviews, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

Interviews are voluntary and you do not have to choose to participate. In the event you decide not to participate, that decision will not affect your future with this class. There will be no extra work for the students who agree to participate in the study. However, I will only use data collected from students who agree to participate in the study.

Any information obtained in this research study in which you can be identified will remain confidential. The data will be treated confidentially and none of the data will be personally identifiable. Your privacy will be protected and confidentiality of information is guaranteed. Any data collected from you in this study will be aggregated and only available to the research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers. Please note that I will keep this information in a secure location for a period of three years. Your name will not appear in any report, publication, or presentation resulting from this study. By signing a copy of this form you are granting your permission to participate in this study.

Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and voluntarily agree to participate in this study. To minimize the risk you will be assured of privacy, confidentiality and your participation will not be reflected in any way on your grades. It will be my role as the researcher to establish and maintain good rapport, and model good listening skills with all participants.

The results of the study have the potential to identify factors that contribute reading motivation that benefit all students. The study will provide information that can be beneficial to the school district, and the administration. In addition, this study will contribute to the existing research base on reading motivation and may provide a resource for teachers who are interested in including blogging in their classrooms.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact Susan T. Watkins. Email: swatkins@bloomfield.k12.nj.us

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-0150
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Parent/Guardian _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C

Blogging Expectations

Directions for Blogging with *The Bluest Eye*:

1. You will each be assigned a blogging group with other students in your group. The reason that you are grouped is to keep your discussions focused, to become aware of your audience, and to ensure that everyone is receiving equal feedback.
2. The novel is written in 4 distinct sections that follow the seasons of the year – starting with Autumn. For each of the 4 sections, you will be writing a blog post and 2 blog responses (see below for definitions).
3. Each Blog Post must contain contextual support (again, see below for definitions).
4. You will each receive a calendar of due dates for this project. Blog responses are due ONE THE DATE ASSIGNED and posted no later than midnight on that day. I will NOT give credit to any blogs that are posted late. You will simply receive a zero.
5. All Blog Posts and Blog Responses must be original to you and may not be copied, cut, and/or pasted from any other sources.
6. Audience is important! Think about what you considered to be a “good” or “interesting” blog from the samples we looked at. You want to keep your classmates interested in what they are reading! Plus, you have to read theirs so you hope theirs will be just as interesting!
7. Remember, these blogs are your forums for discussing literature. While we are all aware that we are part of an AP English class, this is a place for you to express your opinions about literature. This novel contains some very sensitive ideas that will, hopefully, cause you to really think/feel. What matters here is your development of thought. You will NOT be graded on grammar and spelling.

Definitions:

Blog Post: your initial response to the literature. This is your chance to communicate your ideas/thoughts/reactions/questions on the reading to your classmates and me. Remember to keep our essential questions in mind when responding to each of the 4 sections of the novel. Your posts should focus on the community of the novel. Pecola is a member of many different groups within her community. What responsibility, if any, do these groups have to Pecola’s well-being? However, remember this is an AP class and it is not just about opinions. Each blog post must contain a minimum of 2 cited quotes from the novel to support your opinions. Each blog post should be a minimum of 300 words and a maximum of 500 words.

Blog Response: your response to your classmates’ ideas/thoughts/reactions/questions to the assigned reading. Responses must be thoughtful and meaningful. Responses such as “good job” or “well-written” are NOT acceptable in an AP class. You can answer/ask questions in your responses, point things out that your classmate might have missed, argue a different side, and add your reactions to what your classmates have written. Each response should be a minimum of 150 words and a maximum of 300 words.

Blog Reflections: your personal reflection on the blogging process. Think about what you posted for your Blog Post, what your classmates' responses were, what your classmates' posted, and how you responded. Remember, blogging helps us take your educational experience outside of the classroom. This is AP English III and I am here to facilitate discussion, but not lead discussions. Blogging allows you and your classmates to move your way through the novel having authentic experiences with reading the novel on your own and placing you with others who are reading the same book at the same time. You are all going to experience this novel differently because you are all bringing different experiences to the table when you read it. Each reflection should be approximately one typed page. Use some of the following questions to help you get started on your reflections:

- How is blogging helping you understand the novel?
- How is blogging hindering your experience with the novel?
- Why is it helpful to read what your classmates' experiences with the novel are?
- What do you think you are missing from the "traditional classroom" reading of a novel?
- What do you like/dislike about the overall process of blogging?

Grades:

- Blog Posts are considered 1 Minor Assessment (MA) = 4 in total
- Blog Responses are considered Homework (HW) = 8 in total
- Reading Quizzes are considered Minor Assessments = 4 in total
- Reflection

Rubric for each Blog Posts:

- Within word limit
- On topic with a clear understanding of the assigned reading
- Minimum of 2 cited quotes
- Personal reactions/connections to the literature
- Audience Awareness

5/5 = A
4/5 = B
3/5 = C
2/5 = D
0-1/5 = F

Rubric for each Blog Response:

- Within word limit
- Insightful/thoughtful feedback

3/3 = □+
2/3 = □
1/3 = □-

Rubric for each Reflection:

- Within word limit
- Insightful reflection – not just a regurgitation of steps

3/3 = □+
2/3 = □
1/3 = □-

APPENDIX D

Sample Interview Questions

*Describe what it was like blogging while reading *The Bluest Eye* and how you felt about blogging?*

Tell me some of the things that you liked the most about the blogging?

Tell me some of the things that you liked the least about the blogging?

Tell me about how you felt, and the kinds of things that went through your mind, when you read your classmates' blogs.

Describe to me some of the responses that you received from your classmates on your own blog.

Part of your assignment was to respond to your classmates' blogs. Describe to me how you felt when you gave these replies. (Prompt for likes and dislikes if not answered)

In general, tell me how responding to your classmates' postings did or did not help you understand the novel. (Then prompt for specific examples if they can give them.)

Knowing that your classmates were going to be reading your blogs, how did that change the way in which you responded to the literature?

Possible Follow Up Question: I noticed that you mentioned things in your reflections that you did not mention in your class blogs (insert what I noticed here). Why did you choose to omit that thought/feeling/idea/emotion from the blog that your classmates would read and only share it with me?

When we reviewed "good" examples of blogs at the beginning of the unit, as a class, we discussed that one of the elements that made a "good" blog was the use of multimedia (ie: use of video clips, music, pictures, etc):

I noticed that you chose to use multimedia in your blog.

Please list for me the kinds of multimedia you chose to include in your blog.

Please explain to me why you made the choice to include these types of multimedia into your blog.

OR ... I noticed that you chose not to use multimedia in your blog.

Please explain to me why you made the choice not to include multimedia in your own blog?

Follow up questions:

Tell me about your experience using multimedia in your blogs. Provide an example.

Why did you use them? How was your use of multimedia similar or different from your classmates?

APPENDIX E

Codebook (6th and final version)

BLOGGING IN AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

By Susan T. Watkins

How do students interact with each other when responding to Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* through the use of a multimedia blog?

- a. How are students interacting with each other through their online postings?
- b. How do students' postings reflect the ways in which they are/are not making sense of *The Bluest Eye*?
- c. If students do incorporate multimedia into their postings, why are they choosing to do so?

Theoretical Framework

Social Constructivism – Vygotsky Space

I coded sentences and complete thoughts so some codes cover entire sentences, while other codes just cover parts of sentences

Code Name	Sub-Code(s)	Sub-sub-code(s)	Origin	Definition	Example
Appropriation / Interaction (A/I)			Theory - Adapted from: (Gallucci, 2008; Gallucci et al., 2010); Research Question 1a	Interacting with others had an impact on their thinking	"Reading other classmates' blogs helped me make thorough connections to the outside world."
	Asking Qs (AQ)		Theory - Adapted from: (Gallucci, 2008; Gallucci et al., 2010); Research Question 1a; Literature – Adapted from McGrail & Davis (2011)	Students asking questions for clarification about the text or about the assignment	"Was the 'friend' real or imaginary?"

	Students Addressing Qs (AdQ)		Research Question 1a; My Transcriptions	Students answering or talking about qs	“As for what would become of Pecola if she had fairer skin? Call me a cynic but I think she would...”
	Directions to Audience (DA)		Research Question 1a; Literature – Adapted from McGrail & Davis (2011); My Transcriptions	Students ask/tell their readers to do something in order to prove a point	“...let’s go to pp. 38-39 in the book”
	Addressing Group Members Directly (R2G)		Research Question 1a; My Transcriptions	Students specifically direct comments to one another in their blogs.	“Hello Blogger people of Bayside!”
	Opposing Viewpoints are Addressed (OVA)		Theory - Adapted from: (Gallucci, 2008; Gallucci et al., 2010); Research Question 1a	Students express opposing viewpoints	“I am going to have to disagree with you.”
Affirmative Empty Responses (AER)			My Transcriptions	Comments praising others without content specific responses	“Good job!”
Transformation / Making Meaning (TMM)			Theory - Adapted from: (Gallucci, 2008; Gallucci et al., 2010); Literature – Adapted from McGrail & Davis (2011); Research	Ownership of thinking in context of one’s work or understanding / Students generate ideas, opinions, concepts, and	“To blame a young child for something as horrific as this is heinous.”

			Question 1b	thoughts about the literature	
	Paraphrasing Text (PT)		My Transcriptions	Students paraphrase text for summary, but don't add any of their own thoughts	"Pecola was raped twice"
	Quoting Text (QT)		My Transcriptions	Students include quotes from text to support their ideas	"nasty little black bitch"
	Text to World Connections (TWC)		My Transcriptions	Students make sense of the literature by making text-to-world connections	"There is no universal standard to how one must feel about the members of their community."
	Text to Self-Connections		My Transactions / Literature – Adapted from McGrail & Davis (2011); Research Question 1b	Students make sense of the literature by making text-to-self connections	"I am of ...heritages and I never felt like I fit in to either group..."
	Text to Text Connections		My Transcriptions	Students make sense of literature by making text-to-text connections	"now imagine she's white" (A Time to Kill, 1996)
Publication / Reflection (P/R)			Theory - Adapted from: (Gallucci, 2008; Gallucci et al., 2010); Research Question 1b	Evidence can be seen that a new understanding is demonstrated	"They blogs in fact are helping me understand the book as well as my classmates individually."

	Reflection on Blogging (RB)		My Transcriptions	Students reflect on the blogging process	“When it comes to the blogging process itself, I am enjoying the change of pace from typical English class discussions.”
		Recommendation on Blogging (Rec)	My Transcriptions	Students make recommendations to help improve blogging	“I do wish though that we changed blogging groups with every section of the novel so that I am able to interact with more of my classmates.”
	Reflection on Class (RC)		My Transcriptions	Students discuss how the class is run – things that are not specifically about blogging	“I can’t help think about what Miss Watkins said in class”
	Reflection on Self (RS)		Literature – Adapted from McGrail & Davis (2011); Research Question 1b	Students think back and evaluates on ideas and writing	“As a teenage girl, I am able to connect with Pecola when it comes to the public’s view of beautiful.”
	Reflection on Literature (RL)		My Transcriptions	Students reflect on the piece of literature	“I now understand why the sex scene on pp 84-85 was written”
Conventionalization (C)			Theory - Adapted from: (Gallucci, 2008; Gallucci et al., 2010); Research Question 1c	Students show their understanding of the text by being able to make connections to outside sources/medi	"...now imagine she's white." (A Time to Kill, 1996)... “ Now, there is the brutally chilling idea "Winter" has to offer us, and the single thought that

				a	ran through my mind while reading this section: now imagine if Pecola were white.”
	Multimedia (MM)		My Transcriptions	Students use or discuss multimedia as a means to show understanding of the text	“It would have been to the degree of ‘I once saw this video’ (classmates) wouldn’t actually get to see the video.”
		Pictures (MMP)	My Transcriptions	Students use or discuss pictures/discuss pictures	“I would like to put a picture either before or after what’s basically summarizing what the paragraph meant.”
		Hyperlink (MMH)	My Transcriptions	Students use or discuss hyperlinks/discuss hyperlinks	Hyperlink to a statistics on black crime (Jeb)
	Quotes from Other Sources (QOS)		My Transcriptions	Students include quotes from outside sources in an attempt to show understanding	“now imagine she’s white” (A Time to Kill, 1996)
Audience Awareness (AA)			Literature – Adapted from McGrail & Davis (2011)	Students are aware that they are writing for an audience	“Before you say I’m crazy...”
Attitude (Att)			Literature – Adapted from McGrail &	Students mention an emotion/	“During this section I felt...”

			Davis (2011)	feeling in their blogs	
	Positive Emotions (PE)		Literature – Adapted from McGrail & Davis (2011)	Students express feelings of anticipation or joy	“I was happy...”
	Negative Emotions (EM)		My Transcriptions	Students express feelings of sympathy or disgust	“...I found myself becoming more and more angrier”
Positives About Blogging			My Transcriptions	Students express positive comments / thoughts about blogging	“It was really cool seeing what actually stood out or meant the most to one personally.”
Negatives About Blogging			My Transcriptions	Students express negative comments / thoughts about blogging	“The blogging process was more stressful for me this time around...”