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Learning English Through Interactive Weblogs:

Student Experiences Blogging in the Secondary ESL Classroom

by

Glori H. Smith

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Theatre and Media Arts

Brigham Young University

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Glori H. Smith

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Glori H. Smith in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials, including figures, tables, and charts, are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

LEARNING ENGLISH THROUGH INTERACTIVE WEBLOGS:

STUDENT EXPERIENCES BLOGGING IN THE SECONDARY ESL CLASSROOM

Glori H. Smith

Department of Theatre and Media Arts

Master of Arts

This qualitative action research project examined the experiences of high school
English language learners as they created personal weblogs and responded to queries on a
class weblog. The data from the project demonstrates that blogging as a classroom
writing activity is effective in helping students to obtain, process and construct the
English language.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I teach English as a Second Language (ESL) in an urban high school in the inter-mountain west. In the twelve years that I have been teaching ESL, the population of current English language learners (ELLs)[1] in our school has increased over 400 percent. Similar increases have occurred throughout our district and state. The influx of new families and students has greatly changed the demographics of our community and impacted our schools. Teachers and administrators have tried to learn, sometimes enthusiastically, sometimes reluctantly, how to provide an equitable, quality, educational experience for *all* the students that come through the doors.

The majority of my ELLs are Spanish-speakers and the majority of those students are from Mexico. However, I also teach Latinos and Latinas from Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Honduras, Peru, Spain, and Venezuela. The second largest language group is from South Korea. Other students are from Brazil, China, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, and Taiwan. Most of my students have immigrated to the United States with their families; during the 2008-2009 school year 18% were exchange students. Occasionally I teach ELLs that were born in the United States, but the majority of my students came to the United States recently, during their adolescence.

The ELLs in our school are similar to the ELLs I read about in the media and in academic literature. They struggle with adapting to new customs while trying to preserve their native culture. They struggle with their parents through the usual adolescent angst, compounded by a new language and culture which they understand better than, and often

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[1] Sometimes the students are referred to as "ESL students," or described as LEP (limited English proficient). Because of its more positive stance, the most popular student designation, and the one I will use throughout this paper, is English language learner or ELL.

must interpret for, their parents. More than most of their American peers, they and their families struggle economically.

The students learn basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) quickly, but they graduate, or drop out, before fully attaining cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 2003). Often teachers and administrators hear them speak and, not understanding the difference between BICS and CALP, assume their low test scores and lack of academic progress are due to laziness and a lack of motivation. However, I hear and see students who want desperately to learn the language and to graduate from high school. Most of them understand the great sacrifices that their parents have made so they could have a chance for a better life, and they feel the pressure to succeed. They want to fit in and make friends, have a chance for post-secondary studies and a challenging career—a chance to grasp their own American dream.

It takes a minimum of five years to reach CALP (Cummins, 2003), but my students don't have that much time. They are enrolled in biology, chemistry, and history *now*. They have assignments to fulfill and tests to pass *this semester*. I am constantly looking for the best ways to help them make sense of their textbooks, communicate with their teachers and peers, and succeed in school. Helping my students is the purpose behind my research.

Though I know that the students do care about their studies and their futures, they also struggle with staying motivated, given the reality of their situations. Learning a new language and becoming bicultural is difficult and there are many factors and distractions working against them (i.e. Arias & Faltis,1993; Brown & Krashen, 2005; Williams, Alvarez, & Hauck, 2002). Therefore, in addition to the best pedagogical practices for

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language learning, I also search for the best motivational strategies. Using electronic media resources provides appeal to many students (MacBride & Luehmann, 2008). The world of today's student is saturated with alluring media images and messages. In the past I have used music and film to engage my students in listening comprehension, vocabulary building, and grammar lessons. I have used internet search activities to draw them into reading. In the fall of 2008 I was ready to add another new technology strategy to my teaching practice. I wondered if the use of weblogs would spark online conversations and improve student writing. Would school assignments about popular media increase their interest and the volume of their writing? Would blogging help English language learners obtain, process, and construct the English language?

This study is about using weblogs in the ESL classroom. Weblogs are online (on the web) journals or diaries (logs) which can have audio and visual media embedded, and often include hyperlinks to other websites. Blog is the common reduction of the word weblog and is used as both a noun and verb in various forms (blogging, blogger, to blog, etc.). Blog was first included in the online version of the Merriam-Webster dictionary in 1999 (BBC, 2004) and the print version of the Oxford English Dictionary in 2003 (USA Today, 2003). In 2004 Merriam-Webster said it was the most commonly accessed word of the year and they finally included it in their print dictionary in 2005 (BBC, 2004). Blogs have become a very popular form of communication and are used to provide personal updates to friends and family and to share information and opinions with the world in general (Boyd, 2006).

I designed an action research project that required my students to blog about both their in-school and recreational experiences with media. At edublogs.org I set up an

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administrator weblog, called *Improving English*. As the administrator, I also set up a blog for each of the students in the class, which they needed to personalize with colors, wallpapers, etc. Each week I posted assignments on *Improving English* for the students to complete on their blogs or questions to answer by commenting on my blog. The student blog assignments often required them to upload a photo or comment on another student's blog. I also posted information about my media use on the class blog, *Improving English*.

The purpose of my study was to determine if blogging as a class assignment would increase the students' ability to *obtain, process*, and *construct* English. These terms are taken from the TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) standards published in 2006. To *obtain* language refers to the receptive skills of reading, listening, and viewing. For the purposes of my blogging project, *obtain* could be reading blogs, listening to audio that may have been uploaded to someone's blog, and viewing images that are uploaded to a blog or accessed through a hyperlink. To *process* language is to decipher and understand the message, whether it be a written text, an audio clip, or a visual sample. Processing or understanding, as in all literacy, goes beyond knowing the dictionary definition. To process a message one must be able to decipher the nuances of allusion and other obscured meaning. To *construct* is to create or build a message. This may be through writing (letters, words, sentences, paragraphs), sound, or images.

It may seem that, based on my understanding of the TESOL documents, I am grasping to come up with new, esoteric, terminology for the traditional reading, writing, and comprehension. But the new literacies required by new technologies, demand it. The phrase *new literacies* refer to the skills needed to negotiate the world of technology that creates communities on the Internet, search engines, webpages and more, some that will

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undoubtedly emerge in the next year or two. The term "multiple literacies" is described by Cope and Kalantis (2000) and Kress (2000) as the multiple modes of meaning-making (i.e. textual, visual, audio, spatial) particularly important in electronic hypermedia. To be multiliterate you must have the ability to access, comprehend, and supply images, sounds, and other sensory experiences that are incorporated in the multimodalities of modern life. The media-saturated world of today is not understood simply through the reading and writing of words on paper (Ohler, 2009). Images and sounds combine with words in interesting new ways, creating new texts. Integrating these multiple forms into a meaningful whole is the task of the literate person of the 21st century.

As with most subjects, to understand the situation, it is helpful to have some background knowledge. Understanding the current situation in the TESOL field, and obtaining at least a rudimentary understanding of its history in the United States, will be helpful.

English Language Learning in the United States

Brief History of Teaching English as a Second Language

The population of ELLs in United States' public schools has grown exponentially in the past thirty years (Flynn & Hill, 2005). According to an article posted on the United States Government Office of English Language Acquisition website, by 2003 there were nearly ten million students for whom English was their second language, an increase of 169 percent from 1979-2003, (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006).The United States Census Bureau has projected that by the 2030s, students whose home language is other than English will be 40 percent of the school-age population (Thomas

& Collier, 2002). As the numbers continue to grow, so does concern about their academic achievement and graduation rates, which are generally dismal (Advocates, 2002).

It does not take official numbers and statistics to tell teachers that ELLs are not learning or graduating at the same rate as the native-English speaking population. In the United States, teachers and researchers have been struggling for more than 100 years to try to find the best way to reach and teach those with limited English proficiency (e.g., Coryell & Chlup, 2007; DeAndres, 2002; Derwing, DeCorby, & Ichikawa, 1999; Fillmore, 2000). Research completed by Auerbach in 1993 found that in the nineteenth century, local school boards often adopted bilingual programs to educate and teach English to the children of immigrants, but by the turn of the twentieth century, new immigrants were subjected to the full-immersion "sink or swim" method (Rennie, 1993). Both in the past and today, such changes often have a political motivation rather than being based on evidence from educational research (Zehr, 2008). The programs of the 21st century still contain elements of the earlier systems, and can be divided into three basic types: instructional methods that use the native language (bilingual), instructional methods that use English only, and content-based, *sheltered* language instruction that uses simplified English and other cues to help the student access the curriculum (NCELA, 2007; NWRL 2003).

In addition to teaching, I am also the ESL coordinator at my school and I deal with these same issues. As our ELL population has multiplied, we have become more aware of the struggles these students have as they attempt to learn English, earn credits, and graduate. Each year we lose some when they determine that the struggle to keep up, or catch up, with their English-speaking peers, is too much and they drop out. I am

constantly reevaluating our program model, trying to figure out if a change would help more students to persevere and succeed.

The Urgency of English Language Acquisition in the Secondary School

Figuring out which program is best for any given situation is crucial at all levels of schooling, but perhaps nowhere more than in a high school charged with teaching English to speakers of other languages. Their time in public education is quickly coming to an end. If they wish to go on to higher education, the need to focus on academic English is imperative. If they intend to go directly into the workforce, this is their last, concentrated opportunity to learn English with no monetary outlay. In either case, for an ELL, learning English, which is crucial to integration and success in the United States, is essential.

The problem is multi-layered and each layer is inter-related. Learning a language is difficult work. Competing with native-speakers while learning algebra, biology, history, and more, in a new language, is more difficult. Becoming bilingual and bicultural during the volatile teenage years adds another layer of difficulty. If the student is not fully literate in his or her first language (L_1), gaining literacy in another language (L_2), is more problematic (Abedi, 2003). The attitudes and dispositions of teachers and other students toward the ELL have an impact (Williams, Alvarez, & Hauck, 2002). The situation at home also affects student learning; if the parents do not know the new language and can offer only limited help, or if the family socio-economic status (SES) is low, there is another obstacle to overcome (Brown & Krashen, 2005; Cobo-Lewis, Pearson, Eilers, &

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Umbel, 2002; Glick & White, 2003). Choosing the best program to help students dealing
with all of these difficulties, is imperative.

Theories of Second Language Acquisition

Program Selection

There have been multiple studies searching for the most effective methods to use
in teaching and *teaching English* to students for whom English is a second or additional
language. The debate rages over whether it is best to immerse students in an English-rich
environment or use prior learning to support the new information in a bilingual
educational program (e.g. Cummins, 1992; Arias, & Faltis, 1993; Klesmer, 1994;
Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1996; Francis, et al. 2006). If you opt for an all-English plan,
it may be supplemented by a "pull-out" or "push-in" components—the students may be
"pulled-out" of their mainstream class for special English-language instruction, or an aide
could be "pushed-in" to the mainstream classroom, offering assistance to the ELL.
Another option is to have the teacher "shelter" the language, using gestures, visual cues,
graphic organizers and other practices that help ELLs learn content material while
learning English (NWRL, 2003; NCELA, 2007).

Bilingual Models

Bilingual programs strive to educate the child in his or her native language, while
he or she learns English. The goals of bilingual programs include fostering respect for,
and continued use of, the native language and developing a truly bilingual individual who
is both orally proficient and literate in two languages. According to the National

Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2007), the use of the native language also allows grade-appropriate content instruction to continue while the student learns the new language. The NCELA and the Northwest Regional Educational Library explain that some bilingual programs opt for a quick transition (two-four years) to an all-English classroom; others allow a much more gradual transition or never have a complete transition, continuing, until graduation, having some instruction in the native language. In the elementary school setting one argument for bilingual education is to help students attain literacy in their L_1 as they are learning to read and write in English (Collier, 1987).This is desirable for many reasons, one of which is that linguistic research indicates that it is very difficult to become literate in your L_2, beyond the literacy level of your L_1 (Cummins, 1992). At the secondary level it is often assumed that students are, or should be, literate enough in their L_1 and it is now time for them to be fully immersed in English (NCELA, 2007; NWRL, 2003).

Many studies posit that bilingual programs offer the best education (Thomas & Collier, 2001) for ELLs, but this is still inconclusive (e.g. Cummins, 1992; Porter, 1996), and many problems exist with implementation. A bilingual program is usually only feasible with large numbers of ELLs of the same native language and it can be difficult to find qualified teachers. The cost is often prohibitive when there are a variety of native languages spoken by the students, or the number of speakers of any given language is small (Freeman, 1998).

Immersion or English Only Models

Programs that focus exclusively on English language development are termed ESL (English as a Second Language) or ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) and can be grammar-, communication-, or content-based. They may allow or even encourage the use of the native language as a bridge to understanding, but they do not offer instruction in that language. Commonly, these programs are of the pull-out or push-in variety. In a pull-out program the children are pulled out of their regular classroom several times a week for special English language instruction. In a push-in program, a teaching aide, often bilingual, goes into the student's regular classroom, assisting both the student and teacher. Some school districts adopt a self-contained model in which all ELLs are sent to an ESL magnet school, where they acquire some basic English before being "mainstreamed." ESL programs are often used when there are few ELLs per school, or when the students come from different cultures and have multiple native languages (NCELA, 2007; NWRL, 2003).

The Sheltered English Model

Sheltered English instruction, also known as Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) or Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), differs from ESL programs in that it is content-based. Students learn English *in context* as the teacher employs both language and content objectives. The language is made comprehensible through a set of routines that employ visual communication cues. The *primary* goal of the sheltered-English classroom is not English acquisition, but

appropriate grade-level content in science, social studies, mathematics, or other curriculum areas (NCELA, 2007; NWRL, 2003).

Originally, sheltered classes had only ELL enrollment and the students did not compete academically with native English speaking students. Now many sheltered classes are integrated, mainstream classes, with ELLs learning alongside native-English speakers (Thomas & Collier, 2002). In 2006 the Education Alliance reported that the majority of sheltered English programs mix ELLs with their native-English speaking peers.

No matter what instructional model is used, the research-based "best" pedagogical practices that help all students learn, also work well for ELLs (Lim, Rueda, & Velasco, 2000). One reason that sheltered English classes have been integrated is that researchers have found that the visual cues and other SDAIE/SIOP practices help many students comprehend more fully. In addition to specific routines, the teacher needs to establish a nurturing atmosphere, where all students feel valued (Klesmer, 1994; Williams, Alvarez, Andrade Hauck, 2002; DeAndres, 2003).

For ELLs a nurturing environment includes respect for their heritage and language, even if the teacher does not know or teach in that language. Lee (2006) found that constructivist learning activities, which require the student to manipulate the content and create with the language, help the student to make connections between old and new knowledge and develop bridges between language and content.

Program Choices in Practice

My school has never had the resources to consider offering a bilingual program. We have had an ESL program with varying types of sheltered classes. At one time we had multiple sheltered classes that limited the enrollment to ELLs. After several years we determined that academic rigor was lacking in most of those classes, probably due to the limited training the teachers had received in the SIOP or SDAIE methods. Another problem, and for me the biggest reason to make a change (supported by Arias in 1993), was the segregation of the student body. It was entirely possible for the students to spend every class period with only ELLs, never meeting or conversing with a native-English speaking student. The situation seemed to exacerbate the issues of isolation and ethnic grouping. We disbanded all of the sheltered classes and mainstreamed the students.

We began offering in-service lessons to help the content area teachers learn how to "shelter the language" within their classes and to differentiate lessons and assignments. I provide the faculty with a list of all the ELLs and their proficiency levels and I am often asked for strategy suggestions for individual students. The success of this plan has been limited, varying greatly from teacher to teacher.

The only constant in our program has been the ESL classes, which I teach. It is essentially a pull-out program; the students are in a leveled English acquisition class, rather than a mainstream language arts class. Because I have an English teaching endorsement, in addition to ESL credentials, the students receive the English credit required for graduation.

Determining which strategies to use is almost entirely my decision. I look for meaningful, constructivist, language activities (Lee, 2006) that will interest the students

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and help them build on their communication skills. I attempt to provide a nurturing environment that respects the multiple languages and cultures that my students bring to the classroom. These were some of the motivations behind the blogging project. Writing about your own experiences with media is definitely constructivist—there were no set answers that I expected, and the creativity allowed with resources available on the internet was substantial. The students were to write about their own experiences and share personal interests that mattered to them. These are elements needed for a nurturing, culturally respectful, environment.

<center>Literacy</center>

Literacy in the ESL Classroom

Obtaining literacy as an ELL in secondary school is both difficult and complex (e.g. Jimenez, Garcia, & & Pearson, 1996; Abedi & Lord, 2001). On the most obvious plane the student is at a serious disadvantage. He or she must attempt to read, comprehend, and respond to spoken and written, high school-level, academic information in a new language and on subjects from art to zoology. Brown (2007) discusses the difficulties encountered in the directions and story problems of standardized math tests. Another difficult area is biology, where the vocabulary is a challenge even to the native-English speakers (Hurd, Bybee, Kahle, & Yager, 1980; Templeton, Johnston, Bear, & Invernizzi, 2009). In classes such as United States history or government, the ELL's background schema is lacking. While the student sitting next to him or her may have learned about the Pilgrims and the Mayflower in kindergarten, the ELL has no idea that those terms connect with the holiday of Thanksgiving or early American colonists' search

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for religious freedom. Assuming all of this background knowledge, the teacher may, *or may not*, give a cursory review and quickly go on to a discussion of religious intolerance in the New World and the Salem witch trials. There is no time to go back and acquire the background knowledge--ELL students must somehow complete assignments and pass tests quickly as they attempt to accumulate enough of the right credits for graduation. The challenge of this incredible academic hurdle is one that most educators can easily see and with which they empathize. However, empathy alone does not often translate into comprehending how to help the student. This is also not the only literacy hurdle that an ELL must maneuver.

Reading and writing in one's native language is a natural extension of speaking and understanding the spoken word. Reading and writing in your L_2 is a completely different task. Gaining literacy in another language is much more than learning all the words and translating them. In *Appropriating Literacy,* Rodby (1992) writes that language defines and encompasses the way a people thinks and interacts; language represents the social relations of ethnicity. Becoming literate in your L_2 involves initiating a social relationship with the Other, trying on alternative identities and finding places to fit (Rodby).

In a secondary ESL class the literacy instruction may include negotiating common signs and symbols that give meaning to our environment (Rodby, 1992). It often begins with figuring out written schedules and student identification numbers, crucial for many tasks, not the least of which is obtaining lunch. In an adult ESL class the focus may be on life skills: filling out applications, writing checks, making shopping lists, or even typing emails in the workplace. In the high school all of those tasks are important for these soon-

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to-be adults, but state curriculum and high school exit exams also require that students can choose the right verb tense, deduce meaning from a literary allusion, and choose the right answer for a multiple choice question on photosynthesis.

In addition to these traditional educational tasks, teachers are also expected to include ELLs in any new mandates that may be imposed by the greater educational community. Educators are constantly being given new topics and curriculum to address in schools. To the traditional "reading, writing, and arithmetic," we have added sex education, financial literacy, computer technology, values or ethics training, gang prevention, and more. In some educational circles, teachers are now being asked to add media literacy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2005; Thoman, 2003). To many, the need for this is difficult to understand.

Media Literacy

Today's children live in a media-saturated world. They are surrounded by media and often consume it at a greater rate than their teachers or parents. But being immersed in and using the media is not synonymous with comprehension, nor with media literacy, which the National Telemedia Council, as cited by Silverblatt (2001), defines as the ability to choose, understand, question, evaluate, and respond thoughtfully to the media. Media literacy means mindful viewing, reflective judgment, and it includes the ability to create and produce media for communication. It is the natural expansion of the literacy needed when most of our media texts were printed on paper. In "Orchestrating the Media Collage," Jason Ohler (2009) says "Being able to read and write multiple forms of media and integrate them into a meaningful whole is the new hallmark of literacy" (p.9).

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Studies have examined the boost in English proficiency that can occur when students have increased access to the multiple literacies available online. In "What Do We Mean by New Literacies?," Lankshear and Knobel (2005) explore what language arts teachers are doing with new technologies and literacies. They push teachers to do more to embrace the new:

> Consequently, we see new literacies in terms of practices like fanfiction, fan manga, fan anime, weblogging, podcasting, Photoshopping, "flickr-ing," "memeing," participating in 'writing' collective works like Wikipedia, online gaming, and the like. This is because these are collaborative practices, involving distributed participation and collaboration, where rules and procedures are flexible and open to change *"new" literacy. (*p.109)

Jensen (2008) argues that educators must acknowledge and even engage the multiple literacies in the various communicative modes that our students bring to the classroom. Her plea, given specifically to theater arts educators, can be implemented by all teachers who wish to capitalize on the interests and abilities their students already have, in order to teach them new content.

However, not all students have equal access to technology, nor the chance to hone their technological abilities. Though today's American high school students are surrounded by media messages, they do not all enjoy the means that allow control and interaction with the media. While each day seems to bring several news reports about the dangers inherent in children having near constant exposure to the ubiquitous cell phones, iPods, and online social networking sites, not all students have such devices.

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The Digital Divide

A problem for many students of low SES is the *digital divide*, referring to a lack of computer access among economically disadvantaged students. The digital divide can refer to the disparity between those students from homes that have and those that do not have a computer and internet connection (e.g. Becker, 2000), or to the idea that students of low SES are more likely to attend low-resource schools with less technology available for teacher or student use (Valadez, 2007).

By 2002 Valadez found that 99 percent of schools had computers and internet connections; though the ratio was still unbalanced, 4.6 students per computer in the high-resource schools, compared to 5.5 students per computer in the less affluent schools. Some researchers were declaring that the digital divide had been bridged. However, in separate studies, Cuban, Kirkpatrick, & Peck (2001) and Healy (1999) found that just having a computer available is not enough. The work that students did on computers varied between schools, based on socio-economic levels.

Becker (2000) found that teachers in poorer districts and schools were more likely to have received minimal training to use the technology they had in pedagogically optimal ways. In 2007, Valadez and Duran found that the teachers in poorer schools were much more likely to have access to software that allowed only low-level drill and practice routines, while the computer work in the affluent schools was more likely to take advantage of sophisticated software that allowed creative research and interaction.

It is important to mindfully incorporate technology into the classroom. Simply having and using technology is not enough. Mishra and Koehler (2006) found that often researchers look at what technology can do, and not what teachers need to know in order

to integrate it into sound pedagogy and the content of their subject area. They suggest that disappointing returns on the investment of technology in education is the result of not carefully meshing the technology with pedagogy and the knowledge of the course content. Teachers need training to find the intersection between their content, the technology, and effective pedagogy (2006).

Students who lack computer skills struggle to complete computer-related work across the curriculum and, unless they are successful at catching up, have limited options for future study and career choice. Again, due to a higher likelihood of low SES, ELLs are over-represented in the numbers of those affected by the digital divide. A 2002 study by the National Telecommunication and Information Administration (NTIA) found that, of major ethnic groups within the United States, Latinos were the least likely to use computers or the internet.

According to Becker (2000) and Miller (2004), in the 21st century United States, computer fluency is nearly as critical as English fluency. In "Looking to the Future," Miller states that the nation's future depends on all children being prepared to use the information technology available through computers and the internet. Teachers must be at the forefront of helping *all* students access the technology and teaching them to use it.

Media Literacy for English Language Learners

If media literacy is a valuable component of education for our mainstream students, English language learners must also be given this learning opportunity. Schools and teachers should never deny ELLs the curriculum that they deem is important for

others. Additionally, there are special considerations that make media literacy especially useful for someone learning English.

Teaching a language in context is the best way to grasp meaning (Abedi, 2003). The visual, aural, and tactile nature of electronic media make the language and the content very comprehensible (Lee, 2006). In a classroom infused with the multimodalities of new technology, an ELL will not just hear or see the lesson, but hear and see simultaneously. The spoken or written word will be illustrated and animated— with each additional modality, comprehension will be multiplied exponentially.

A final reason for teaching media literacy to ELLs in the United States, or any developed country, is that media is a large part of the culture and English language learners need to become bicultural; becoming bilingual is only a part of that (Kress, 2000). The students will be immersed in media throughout their lives; they ought to learn how to critically analyze it. An ELL may miss, or misunderstand, the verbal component of a media image. The more he or she is taught to pay attention to and comprehend the other signifiers, the further ahead he or she will be (Hawisher, Moraski, Pearson, & Selfe, 2004).

In "L$_2$ Literacy and the Design of the Self," Lam (2000) describes the transformation in language ability and attitude of one Taiwanese ELL who developed transnational, online friendships, based on an affinity for Japanese pop music. In "Academic Language Learning," Cummins (2000) describes the benefits of project-based learning and their enhancement when ELLs use technology to connect with other learners collaborating on the same project. Cummins goes on to explain that researchers such as Corson (1995, 1997), Krashen (1993, 1999), and Postlethwaite and Ross (1992) have

long argued that the amount of reading students do is closely associated with their comprehension, i.e. more reading equals greater comprehension. Cummins suggests that the lure of internet communication and collaboration, using comprehensible input that would be relevant to a learning project, be used to engage students in increased reading and increased proficiency.

Classroom Weblogs as Tools for Literacy

In the last few years there has been an exciting explosion of experimentation with weblogs or blogging in the school setting. Many teachers think there is a possibility of engaging student interest using the newly available technologies. The technology specialists seem ready to help; there has been a similar explosion of education-friendly blogsites with names such as eledblog.com, echalk.com, edublogs.com and more.

Much of this experimentation has been informal and gone unreported, but there has also been some research done with blogging in classroom situations. In "Why Math Blogs?" Pyon (2008) discusses an action research project that used blogging to enhance math instruction in an elementary school classroom. She found this to be an effective way to increase student communication about an academic topic and increase literacy. In "Finding a Voice in a Threaded Discussion Group," English (2007) writes about her experiences blogging with high school literature students. She found that they often wrote more and offered more insightful comments than they ever gave in class discussions. Ware (2004) interviewed college-level ELLs that had participated in threaded discussions and debates and found that those that are often afraid of making usage mistakes or being embarrassed by an unintelligible accent, relish the chance to share their thoughts and

ideas with their classmates in an environment that seems safer to them. MacBride and Luehmann (2008) discuss blogging as a way to "capitalize on emerging technologies" and student interest. They also cited increased exposure time with the content and increased inter-student communication as beneficial to overall learning.

Adolescence is a time of self-discovery and searching for identity. In "Growing Up Online," Bower (2006) explores how the teens of the 21st century are doing this through online communities, discussion boards, and blogging. He suggests that teachers take the opportunity to go to where the students already have an interest, to capitalize on these out-of-school literacy practices. The preliminary research of English (2007), Pyon (2008),Ware (2004), and others, suggest that well-crafted classroom blogging is doing just that.

Will blogging in a secondary ESL class have similar effects? Will ELLs be enticed to spend more time consuming and producing English and improve their communication skills? Bauer and O'Brien (2005) think blogging and other digital communication hold great promise for second language learners. This position is backed up, at least anecdotally, by the case study reported by Lam (2000). My study was designed to begin to answer these questions.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

Action Research, a method within the Qualitative Research Tradition

Qualitative research uses narrative, descriptive approaches to explore the way things are and make meaning of the data. Qualitative approaches can include the gathering of artifacts and the analysis of a setting through interviews, observations, and the recording of interactions. Action research is a method within the qualitative inquiry tradition (Mills, 2000) that seeks to improve professional practice through better understanding of a particular aspect of a situation. It is well-suited to the social sciences, particularly to educational issues where there can be ethical problems experimenting with treatments on students (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In fact, Creswell (2008) states that action research is the most commonly applied, practical research design in education today.

The action research cycle is generally given as a four-step cycle of reflect → plan → act → observe. That is: reflecting on your practice and identifying a problem or concern you have, planning a strategy or intervention that may solve the problem, acting or carrying out the plan, and finally, observing the results or collecting the data.

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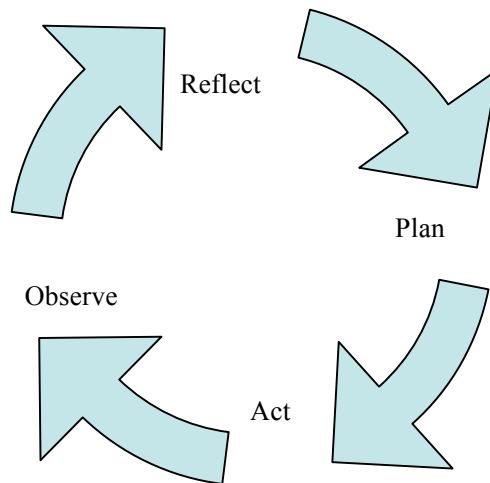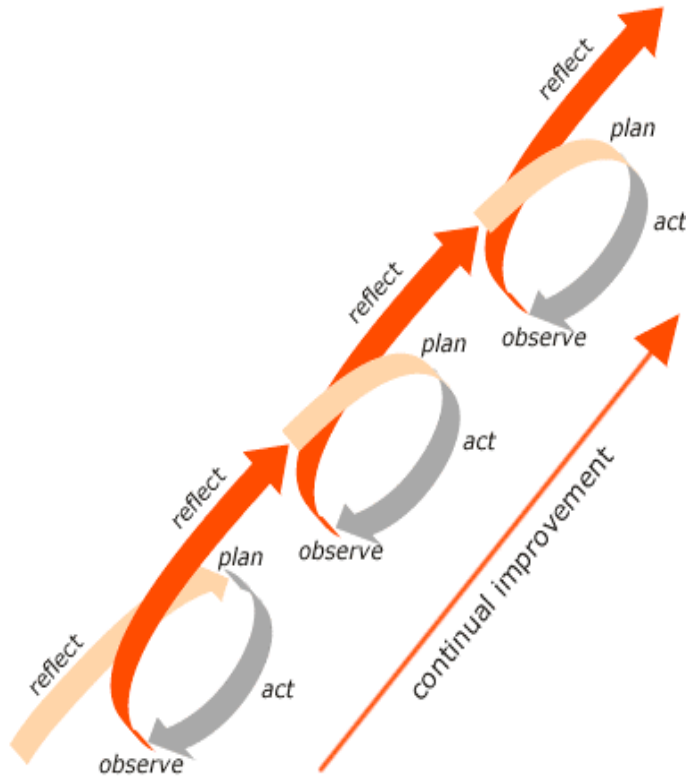
It is common for practitioners to follow the observation phase with reflecting anew, planning and carrying out another intervention, and, again, observing the results, continually repeating the cycle, continually seeking improvement (Higher Education, 2003). The purpose is to effect positive educational change (Mills, 2000). To truly complete the action research cycle, Creswell says practitioners must then share their findings, whether with colleagues at their own workplace or with the wider world in a published journal (2008).

Action research is often conducted by educators within a school or classroom (McFarland & Stansell, 1993). They use qualitative methods to describe what is happening and to explore the effects of a particular educational intervention. In *Qualitative Inquiry in TESOL (2003),* Richards states that action research follows a tradition of the "practitioner-researcher" that is particularly familiar to ESL teachers. He believes that TESOL professionals are more likely than other teachers to be inspired by the desire to "make a difference" and that this makes TESOL a natural fit for this style of research.

The goal of action research is to experiment with making a positive difference in your professional practice as you conduct research. As each new school year approaches,

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conscientious teachers consider their students, curriculum, and past classroom experiences (Creswell, 2008). They reflect on what worked well and what did not, what needs adjustment, and what should be discarded altogether. They also consider what new practices hold promise for the academic attainment of their students. Richards refers to these informal changes that individual teachers make in their practices as "tinkering" and suggests that teachers that engage in such tinkering are often the most satisfied in their careers (2003). If the tinkering is done in a systematic way, following the accepted steps of action research, it moves from informal improvement into the realm of serious research. I needed a formal research project for my master's thesis, which I was completing while working as a full-time teacher. Tinkering with my practice in a logical way, using precise methodology, allowed me to both complete my required project and strengthen the personal satisfaction I feel as a committed teacher who desires to serve her students well.

I looked closely at my teaching practice with my ELLs and wondered what new technique or technology I might employ to draw my students into greater use of written English. I wanted to try blogging with my students and see if it would help them in the pursuit of English proficiency. I designed the blogging assignments and observed the student processes as I gave them classroom time to blog. I was able to interview a small focus group to probe for understanding of their experiences. The blogsite kept record of the students' blog interactions until I was able to download and print them for analysis. The reporting of my study will help other ESL educators make decisions about what classroom practices they may try.

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Why Blogging?

As a teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL), I am concerned with both the academic achievement of ELLs and the digital divide that threatens to limit their futures (Greenberg, Rahmanou, Miller, Kaufmann, Lay, Novelli, Goyer 2004). Like many English language arts and ESL teachers, I have required my students to turn in a weekly reading log. In addition to ESL, I also teach mainstream United States history and government courses, and several years ago I became aware that many of the ELLs were less comfortable with computer use than their native-English speaking peers. In order to facilitate more computer usage, I began requiring them to complete and submit their reading logs online using Moodle, a free course management service that is recommended by our district.

As the 2008-09 school year began, I modified the reading logs once again, to an online *media* weblog, or blog. I expanded the blogs beyond basic reading, to include the multiple literary modes of the 21st century. The students were asked to report on their reading, listening, and viewing of various media and to read and respond to the blogs of fellow students.

Adjusting my students' assignment from reading logs to media blogs was the key to my action research. They were not just asked to report on their reading, but also on their viewing and listening habits. The question I was seeking to answer is, "will blogging increase the students' ability to obtain, process, and construct English?" Under this general question I was also interested in finding out if the interactive aspect of weblogs would result in greater writing advancement. Would the quality of student writing improve when they knew their peers would be reading their work? Would reading

other students' writing inspire more effort and attention to detail in a student's own writing? By using the weblog format, I hoped to engage their interest in both English literacy acquisition and computer applications, but the main goal was to improve their reading and writing skills.

Blogging and English Language Learners

There has been little research done using weblogs with ELLs, yet the opportunity to increase communication between students is an aspect of blogging that holds great promise for an ESL class. Bauer and O'Brien (2005) suggest that online communication may help ELLs make new connections, communicating and sharing with others while being forced to use, and expand their new verbal skills. Teens are typically searching for their identities and Bower says that today's teens are exploring online to find where they belong (2006). For ELLs the difficulties of language learning, becoming bicultural, and making friends during the adolescent years, often drive them to segregate themselves by language and culture. A project that assists students in making connections with other students and discussing the content of the curriculum, could uncover a valuable new tool for teachers. A project that engages student interest and can "create enthusiasm for writing and communicating their ideas" (Lightle, 2008) and is a "valued means of communication among teens" (MacBride and Luehmann, 2008) holds exciting potential as a new tool of education.

I intended that this action research project would engage the students' interest, improve their reading and writing skills, and, incidentally, help to bridge the digital

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divide. This project helped me explore a new strategy for enticing my students into English literacy.

Context and Participants of the Study

This action research project took place in the Intermountain West, in a high school ESL class, beginning on October 27, 2008 and ending on January 15, 2009, comprising the second term of the school year. The school has approximately 1800 students, about 240 students for whom English is their second, or an additional, language, though many of that number are proficient in English. In October of 2008 there were 80 less-than-fluent ELLs enrolled in ESL classes, 24 at the advanced level.

The subjects were all adolescents, ages fourteen to eighteen years, in grades nine through twelve. The course name was Advanced ESL, but in actuality the students' proficiency levels ranged from intermediate to advanced and varied significantly between the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The native languages represented in the class were Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish. There was one student each from Brazil, China (Hong Kong), Columbia, Ecuador, and Japan. Three came from Peru, six from Korea and ten from Mexico.

I am both the teacher and the researcher on this project. I began my education career, at this same school, nineteen years ago, teaching Russian language and social studies (history, geography, and government at various times). In 1996 I volunteered to help with the newly-burgeoning ELL population and inadvertently added ESL to my professional purposes and passions.

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I selected the advanced ESL class for my blogging project because I wanted to reduce the amount of interference from limited language proficiency. Because I expected technical difficulties, I wanted to reduce the other difficulties as much as possible. Though they are not fluent in English, all of the students possess BICS; they can hold a general conversation in English, listen to and understand most simple directions. I knew that technical difficulties were likely because I am a middle-aged, digital immigrant, described by Prensky (2001) as someone who was not born in the digital age, not weaned on the multimodalities of computers, video games, and mp3 players. I am a willing immigrant, trying hard to learn the new language, but my accent is still thick. By dates of birth, my students should all be digital natives (Prensky) but, unfortunately, few of them have had the advantages of the digital lifestyle. Together, we brave this new world.

An additional, and more important, reason for choosing this class was the needs of the students. At the beginning level, the students are struggling to survive. Learning to blog is not crucial when you are still learning the rudiments of interpersonal communication and hoping that the next time you need to use the restroom during class you will remember how to ask and the teacher will understand what you are saying. Even at the intermediate class level, there are more important literacy skills that must be covered. By the time the students are in the advanced course they have the basics down and are ready to delve more deeply into English communication. Also, the excitement of learning a new language has worn off for most. The rapid learning curve of the newcomer is past and further improvement in the language comes more slowly and with greater effort. Exploring a new medium in which to use their English skills may be exciting and enticing, motivating them for the hard work that is required.

As the language arts teacher for our ELL students, I am responsible to help them attain greater ability in English, as shown on standardized tests that proclaim whether or not they have achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP). As their teacher, I also feel personally responsible to help them acculturate to the United States, and prepare for adult responsibilities. As a teacher-researcher I needed their help to complete my project. I incorporated the blogging project into the curriculum, requiring and evaluating the assignments which became a major portion of their term grade. All of the students were expected to complete all of the assignments and their grades reflected to what degree they complied.

Not all of the students in the class were official participants in my study. As part of my application to the Brigham Young University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I created informed consent instruments (see Appendix A) that were explained to the students by another teacher and taken home to parents and guardians for discussion. These forms explained the purpose, procedures, benefits, and limited risks of the study. There was one for the students to sign as willing participants, and one for parents or guardians to sign, giving permission. Eight of the twenty-three students signed and returned the forms[2]. These students were the official participants and formed the focus group for interviews.

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[2] I do not believe that the small number of returned consent forms indicates a lack of trust or cooperation with the teacher or the project, but is simply a byproduct of working with teenagers as subjects. It was clearly explained that the project would be part of the regular class work and that returning the consent forms was strictly voluntary. I was very conscious that I not appear to give any favor or benefit to those students that returned the forms and I made few cursory calls for the forms and no deliberate reminders.

Focus Group Participants*	Nationality	Grade	Time in U.S.	English Proficiency in January 2009
Elisabete	Brazilian	10	2 years	Advanced
Eunju	South Korean	9	9 months	Advanced
Francisca	Mexican	9	2 years	Advanced
Hung	Chinese	10	2 years	Intermediate
Maricela	Ecuadoran	12	2 years	Intermediate
Mei	Japanese	11	4 years	Advanced
Sarita	Peruvian	10	4 years	Intermediate
Shin	South Korean	11	2 years	Advanced

*all names given are pseudonyms

Procedure

The students were required to complete weekly, online, media blogs, enumerating and describing their media consumption from both in and out of school experiences. They were asked to write about movies and television shows that they watched. They were directed to report on their computer use and how they felt about the role of digital technology in our world. Reading, both academic and recreational, online and hardcopy, was also explored. Beyond their own blogging, they were also asked to read and respond to other students' blogs. It was hoped that these topics and activities would engage their interest and encourage them to write more than the explicitly required amount.

The students' blogs were prompted by questions about both their personal media consumption, assigned readings, and in-class viewing experiences (see Appendix Three). The students were expected to blog at least once per week and reply to other

students' blogs at least once weekly. Each week I provided one to three questions as prompts. All the students were graded on their blog participation.

The blogs were set up at http://edublogs.org, a district-approved blogging site designed for educational uses. As the administrator of our class site, I could access their blogs and make technical or editorial changes if needed. As a part of the blogging study, this was never needed for censorship purposes. The only times I interfered or changed settings on their blogs was to help them with technical difficulties; the most common problem was forgetting their password and I reset it for them. To read their work for evaluation and grading, I went to their blogs as their classmates did, through a hyperlink, leaving comments and further questions, as needed for teaching purposes.

Data Collection

The data collection for the research project began in October 2008, when the project began, but no analysis took place until after the final grades for the second term of the school year were submitted on January 20, 2009. This was in accordance with the requirements of the IRB and was intended to protect the students from any preference or disfavor based on their assistance, or lack thereof, with my project, which could have been subjectively reflected in grading.

Three general types of artifacts were collected for analysis. The first were the actual entries that the students posted on their own blogs. The posts of the students include their written words and images they uploaded, and the individual choices they incorporated to decorate their blog site. The text and photos from their blogs were printed

and the hard copies saved for analysis, but the full blog designs can only be accessed online.

The second type of artifact collected were the comments that students posted to the class blog, *Improving English*, and the blogs of their classmates. There were seven specific assignments for students to complete, but many had only a few posts on their actual blogs, opting instead to answer my questions with comments on *Improving English*. In fact, part way through the project I changed the instructions and directed them to answer future questions through comments. These comments, and the comments they left on other students' blogs, were also printed and saved for analysis.

The third set of artifacts are the transcripts of the tapes and notes taken during the interviews with the focus group, formed from the eight students who returned the informed consent papers. Three interviews were conducted with this group. One took place as the blogging project began, one midway through the project, and the final interview was held after the project was completed. In the interviews I was looking for information about their attitudes and experiences with computer technology in general, and blogging specifically. The meetings were recorded on tape and later transcribed. Concerns about comprehensibility of the first interview tape led me to have an assistant also take notes during the second and third meetings. The meetings all took place in my classroom during the noon break in classes. To facilitate a relaxed, open atmosphere, I served lunch and the students seemed to enjoy the discussions, the food, and the company.

The eight students of the focus group were the official participants, and are the only students whose work or comments appear in the results section of this paper

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(identified by pseudonyms). The blogs and comments of the focus group were printed and analyzed for the purposes of the study.

Data Analysis

      To analyze the collected artifacts, I used grounded theory, first developed by Glaser and Strauss in the late 1960s and refined by Strauss and Corbin in 1990. Grounded theory begins when the researcher raises questions which guide the research plan, but which may evolve as the evidence is gathered. The name refers to theory that is developed through close study of the evidence; grounded theory is rooted in observation (Trochim, 2006). This approach worked for my study because I had an idea, a theory-in-embryo perhaps, that blogging with my ELLs might make a positive difference in their attitudes and aptitudes toward writing. This process is similar to what Mishra and Koehler (2006) describe as TPCK (technological pedagogical content knowledge) framework. They discuss the problems of technology being added to classroom teachers' repertoire without careful attention to how it integrates with pedagogical principles and the content of the curriculum. Grounded theory allowed me to begin with a very general question about the effects of blogging on the literacy of ELLs, and move to more detailed questions as the evidence emerged.

      Grounded theory involves several key, analytic strategies, beginning with open coding (Trochim, 2006).The researcher looks at the data and begins to make sense of the information, identifying, naming, and dividing it into initial categories (Borgatti 2008; Richards, 2003). I began by looking for evidence of the students "obtaining, processing, and constructing" English.

Open coding is followed by axial coding, in which the researcher identifies subcategories, and looks for connections between the various categories, emphasizing causal relationships (Richards, 2003). In my project, for example, I wondered if increased enjoyment and engagement evident in writing on the blogs was the cause or the effect of greater comprehension.

Selective coding is the last step in the coding process. The researcher chooses one category to be the core category, around which all other categories will relate. It is the idea of a central story line that drives the analysis and development of the theory. In my project the engagement factor became the core category (Borgatti, 2008).

Memoing is the next step, though in reality, it occurs simultaneous to much of the coding. Memoing is literally writing memos to oneself as you proceed through the data. These are theoretical notes of observations and insights that the researcher has while coding and can be as simple as a margin comment or a post-it note or as detailed as a multi-page paper on the emerging theory. Borgatti (2008, Memos section, ¶1) says memoing often relieves the researcher from the stress of actually working on "the" paper and helps him or her progress toward "processing."

The result of processing is the creation of the grounded theory. Richards (2003) calls this step "building the picture" (p. 279) and Trochim (2006) labels it "integrative diagrams and sessions" (Grounded Theory section, ¶3), but both are referring to pulling all of the details together and pointing toward the emerging theory.

Theoretical Lens

In analyzing the data from the project I looked to other researchers who had experience with ELLs. In *Qualitative Inquiry in TESOL* (2003), Richards explores the multiple ways that teachers are investigating their practice with an eye toward improvement. The examples given were easily related to my work and made the synthesis of ideas more readily accessible. I had similar results using the work of Rodby, *Appropriating Literacy: Writing and Reading in English as a Second Language* (1992). Both gave credence to the special circumstances of analyzing less-than-fluent utterances and writings.

Particularly useful in helping me to see the shades of meaning and implications in ELL student writing was the work of Lam, who, in "L_2 Literacy and the Design of the Self" (2000), reported on the enticing language possibilities of online communication. Almon, the student Lam reported on, discovered an online world of multi-national, Japanese pop music fans. His internet community engaged him in the use of English that was relevant to his interests. Because of his interest, he processed and produced English in more volume than he previously had, greatly increasing his proficiency. This led to improvement in his schoolwork and to an improved attitude about his future.

Human culture is influenced and shaped by language and human beings reflect the languages they speak (Rodby, 1992). Adolescents are still in the process of becoming who they will be. When that process is interrupted and changed by a new language, they become a different person than they would have without the interference. Luehmann and MacBride (2008), focused on how classroom practices that use new technology can energize learning, and Lee (2006), focused on the literacy achievements of ELLs; these

researchers helped to inform my understanding of these student processes and find emerging theories.

I also read and considered the work of Mishra and Koehler, "Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge: A Framework for Teacher Knowledge (2006). My project was exploring the effects of using new technology for language learning, but it was important that I also remembered and used sound pedagogical practices and core content area standards. Teachers must look for where these three elements of teaching intersect and overlap, and frame their lesson plans accordingly.

Limitations

This action research project helped me explore a new strategy for enticing my students into English literacy, but the results and conclusions are not generally transferable to all students. It involved 24 ELLs in a specific ESL course, with a particular teacher. The students are all unique, with specific life experiences that affect their attitudes and progress. Another class of 24 students enrolled in an advanced ESL class would have differing personal situations that would affect them and their learning. I was both the teacher and the researcher and the combined roles may have led me to be less than objective in the analysis and certainly led to greater stress during the project.

Though I feel the project was worthwhile, there is no proof that the students' English skills would not have improved as much with another literacy activity. I will probably repeat the media blogging assignment, because I am intrigued by the results and I am anxious to explore the possibilities of using the multimodalities that are available.

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CHAPTER THREE

Results

The goal of *Learning English Through Interactive Weblogs* was to determine if blogging would assist the students in *obtaining, processing* and *constructing* English. As explained in an earlier section, these terms are taken from the 2006 TESOL standards. To *obtain* language refers to the receptive skills of reading, listening, and viewing; it is the receiving of information. To *process* language begins with deciphering and understanding the message, but moves beyond to analysis and evaluation. To *construct* is the productive skill of creating or building messages, synthesizing the knowledge you have gathered in the obtaining and processing stages, creating new and original information. I utilized a blogging website, edublogs.org, to have ELLs obtain, process, and construct English. I then analyzed the data, looking for evidence on the effectiveness of this strategy.

I have attempted to separate the data to evaluate the project in relation to the three skills, but this is somewhat difficult and artificial. If I read that a student watched an English-language film and he or she reports that it was enjoyed, there is evidence of all three skills. The student obtained English as he or she viewed and listened to a movie. The message was processed to at least a rudimentary level, because the student said that he or she enjoyed the film. Finally, the act of reporting on the watching and enjoyment is the construction of a message. Evidence of the three skills that I looked for are necessarily intertwined. Nonetheless, it is important to try to identify the skills individually and that is what I have attempted to do.

The remainder of this section will closely explore the blogging, and the student and teacher reactions to it, and will be organized as followed. 1.1) Each member of the focus group will be introduced with specific information on their nationality, time in United States' schools, English proficiency, and grade point average. 1.2) An explanation is given of how the data is presented and why I chose do it in this manner. 2.1) I will detail my concerns and motivation for initiating this action research blogging project and my perceptions at the outset. 2.2) The interest, excitement, and anxieties of the students before beginning the blogging project are explained. 2.3) Most of my pre-project worries were realized and the resulting problems are explained in some detail. 2.4) According to the perception of the students in the focus group, blogging is a much better way to do school assignments than with old-fashioned paper and pen. 3.1) The data is presented. 3.2) Evidence of the students obtaining English (i.e. accessing, reading, listening) is presented and explained. 3.3) Student comments and writing that demonstrates processing (i.e. comparing, analyzing, connecting) of English texts is detailed. 3.4) Examples of the student-created English constructions and synthesis will be explored.

Introduction of the Focus Group Members

The focus group consisted of the eight students that returned the signed informed consent papers to class. I was pleased with the diversity of this self-selected focus group. The eight students represented seven countries and five languages. They ranged from intermediate to advanced in English proficiency and they had lived in the United States from three months to three and a half years, though there was not a clear correlation between time in the United States and language ability. I impart their grade point

averages to give the reader an objective measure of how the students are doing across all academic areas. With the exception of their ESL class, all of their other courses have mainstream enrollment. All of the students are identified by pseudonyms, both here and throughout the paper.

- Elisabete, with a 3.8 GPA, is a sophomore from Brazil who had been in the United States for about 18 months when the project ended. She is a friendly, self-starter who has organized an extra-curricular club open to all students, and participates in ballroom dance.

- Eunju, a freshman from South Korea, had been in the United States only six months at the end of the project. She is an excellent, advanced-level, student, who was frustrated with her inability to speak quickly (without thinking carefully and planning what to say) and participate fully in all of her classes, but earned a 3.9 GPA nonetheless.

- Francisca, an advanced-level freshman from Mexico, had been in the United States for approximately 18 months. She has an outgoing personality, is involved in extracurricular activities, and carries a 3.8 GPA.

- Hung is a sophomore from Hong Kong, China at the intermediate level of English proficiency. This is his second year in the United States and his work, and work ethic, improved greatly from year one. He now has a 3.2 GPA. Hung is perhaps the most computer literate student in the group.

- Maricela, a senior from Ecuador, has lived in the United States for less than two years and is at an intermediate proficiency level. Though she has only a 2.1 GPA,

Maricela seems to be an academically-inclined student with some personal struggles that keep her from truly excelling.

- Mei, a junior, came to the United States from Japan four years ago and is at the advanced level, with a 3.1 GPA. Mei has a quiet voice, but has finally gained enough confidence in her ability to be understood, that she is willing to speak often in our class.

- Sarita, a sophomore from Peru, is a very friendly, but not very serious, student with a 1.1 GPA. Sarita has been in the United States for four years and is still at an intermediate proficiency level.

- Shin, an advanced-level senior from South Korea, has lived in the United States less than two years. His involvement in school and community drama productions has undoubtedly helped his English acquisition. Shin, with a 3.6 GPA, moved to a mainstream English class shortly after the project ended.

Explanation of Data Presentation

I have decided to present the students' spoken and written words in fairly long quotations and in the form that they said or wrote them. I have left non-standard spelling, grammar, syntax, and punctuation in place and chose not to mark each irregularity with "sic." This is a project that is about ELLs and their ability with the language—to unnecessarily shorten or change their contributions would distort the reader's understanding of the data and the results of the project. I have made changes for the sake of clarity, but only when it was deemed absolutely necessary; the words I have changed or added are enclosed in brackets.

Perceptions

Pre-project Teacher Perceptions

At the outset of the project I had several concerns. I was worried about technological difficulties that might arise with the blogging itself. I had limited personal experience in blogging and no experience with using the edublogs.org site. I knew that a few of the students were familiar with blogging, but that most were not, and a few had never even heard of blogging. I wondered if they would be able to figure out how to personalize their blogs, how to save, publish, and edit posts, how to upload photos, and much more. As the administrator, I had to set up the student blogs individually, assigning names and attaching email addresses. I had several questions such as, what if the blogging site I chose turned out to be less than satisfactory? What if our computer lab had major crash and we couldn't access the blogs from school? Would the students even remember their passwords? What if my technology skills were not adequate to the task? I was very worried that I would have great difficulty troubleshooting for 24 different bloggers.

I was concerned about the potential for student embarrassment when their non-standard English composition would be posted online and read by their classmates. In my classroom the students are generally willing to ask questions, read aloud, and even write on the board, but I know that they are very hesitant to speak up in their mainstream classes. Other teachers often describe students that I know as gregarious and outgoing, to be quiet and reserved. The students come to me with concerns about oral assignments and the fear, and the reality, of being misunderstood. I am often asked to help them with the

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grammar and pronunciation for presentations in other classes. I assumed there would be similar concerns with posting blogs on the internet.

Finally, I was worried about my ability to keep up with the workload of accessing, keeping track of, and grading their postings and comments to the blogs. In the past, when I had converted their paper reading logs to an internet assignment on Moodle, the course management software, I found it difficult to keep up with accessing and grading the logs. I had heard similar complaints from other teachers who had tried to run paperless assignments. We were happy to reduce the amount of paper used, but grading and giving constructive comments seemed cumbersome and excessively time-consuming.

The only positive anticipation that I had as the project began was the "cool factor." I expected that the students would enjoy it and think that blogging was a very contemporary assignment. I hoped that this would encourage the students to do the assignments with more enthusiasm, resulting in better work, at greater volume. My expectations of student engagement were enough to override all of my concerns and proceed with the project.

Pre-project Student Perceptions

As a group, the students did think the project sounded current and there was peaked interest and some enthusiasm to begin. About half of my students have computers and internet access at home and those students seemed to be most interested in this new way of doing school work. There was some hesitancy on the part of those who had only limited experience with computers and the internet. For various reasons, I think both the students and their parents are often wary of the public nature of the internet. I think this

uncertainty about what was involved, may have contributed to the small number of students who returned the informed consent papers and became part of my focus group.

At the first meeting of the focus group I asked the students about their concerns or fears with the blogging project. Sarita cautioned against putting "too much information, then they can find us." Eunju and Mei were concerned about their internet skills and keeping up with the assignments; they were worried that their grades might suffer with this new project.

I was finally very specific about the intent of my question, saying, "Other students will be able to read your blog. How do you feel about that?"

Sarita: "I like it."

Mei: "I don't care."

I reiterated with, "You have no worries about embarrassment? That was what I was most worried about."

To which Hung clearly responded, "I would like to share my daily life." From the focus group there were no spoken concerns about peer review of work and no other students came to me privately to share concerns. I think perhaps they are not aware of how many convention errors they make and hence, are not concerned about others seeing them. On the contrary, there was excitement about sharing information, particularly through the personalization of their blogs. Personalities were exposed through colors, flowers, and fonts.

Mid-project Perceptions and Reality

Technical difficulties were a reality and began immediately. There was one student who had never used email and we had to establish an account for her. Other students had email accounts, but rarely used them and could not remember their user names or passwords. Once the blogs were established they received emails with an assigned password. The passwords were extremely cryptic combinations of letters and symbols, exceedingly difficult to remember. They could be changed, but the link for changing passwords was not easily seen on the page and involved several steps that enhanced security, but made the process tedious. I demonstrated this, and other processes, by projection on a screen in the classroom, but this did not easily transfer to the students doing it themselves. In many cases I had to help each student individually and it was very time-consuming. This process repeated itself with how to save, publish, find and upload pictures, access comments, and more. Some students did emerge as more proficient than others, notably Hung and Elisabete, and I used them as classroom aides, helping others. Fortunately, the project was scheduled to last nine weeks. We had time to work out the difficulties and we did. Eventually everyone had accessed their blogs, personalized them, and began to post messages.

Tracking posts and grading assignments was cumbersome. Going to each student's blog to look for posts and comments from other bloggers, assessing their writing, and recording a grade seemed very unwieldy. I was juggling between our online grading program and the blogs, and having a difficult time keeping it all straight. I don't really know that it is harder than grading assignments on paper; it may just be new and

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unfamiliar—less comfortable for the digital immigrant teacher who has years of experience dealing with papers.

The students had similar difficulties in tracking their requirements. At first, I was printing the assignments on paper *and* posting them on the class blog. Printing them on paper is clearly a shibboleth of a digital immigrant and I knew I had to end that practice. However, the students were supposed to post their responses on their own blogs and without the paper they had to toggle back and forth between blogs to be sure to address all aspects of an assignment. Some students mistakenly answered the questions not on their own blogs, but by commenting on the class blog. I realized that this was a more efficient way to complete the assignments. The students could read the questions, click on the comment key, and give their response. So midway through the project I changed the directions and asked the students to just reply to the class blog. This change gave them easier access to each other's writing and facilitated comments between students, another requirement of the assignments. It also confused some students who were just barely getting a grasp on the project requirements before they changed. I felt that the only fair thing to do was to accept the assignments wherever they appeared, which added to the grading headaches.

According to my gradebook records, there were some students who did not participate in many of the assignments. One girl did not participate at all. One boy got onto his blog, sent a short greeting, and never personalized his blog nor posted again. Sarita, of the focus group, posted just once, on the same day that she personalized her blog. Several other students, Hung included, only did about half of the assignments. Part

of this can be explained by the students' frustration with the technical difficulties and their lack of familiarity with internet media and blogging in particular.

After the initial set up, I gave the blog assignments as homework. Those who did not complete the work were generally the students who do not have computer and internet access at home. Our school has computer labs available to the students before and after school, and at lunchtime, but for those students less familiar with the technology, doing the assignments on their own was a challenge. I always have a couple of students who have a difficult time completing any homework assignment. Sometimes this is related to working long hours before or after school; other times it seems they just refuse to do the work. This number did not seem greater or less with the blogging project. Nevertheless, the last few weeks of the project I provided multiple hours of class time to complete the assignments. That still did not result in all the students doing all of the assignments. Less than full participation happens with every assignment and project—it was not significantly different with the blogging project. However, full participation is always the goal and I consider that lack to be one of the disappointments of the project.

Post-Project Student Perceptions

The individual questions and writing prompts for the blogging project were no more intuitive or provoking than many other assignments I have given over the years. I have often asked students to write about their perceptions about books and movies. I have asked for their opinion about current events and class assignments. The only thing unique about the assignments from the blogging project is that they were online and made use of the multimodalities in today's media world. It is a new way to engage in the traditional

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skills of reading and writing and to demonstrate understanding. According to those in the focus group it is a good way to motivate high school students. Shin said,

> I think blogging is really good for us because if …you, were to assign to write journals instead of doing blogs, um we would be more lazy because… we are more interested in internet and … so even if [we were to write the same things as in a journal, but we did it in a blog] they would interest us more because its … just media… writing papers, on the paper it would be boring. On the blogs you can do it many other things, like put the pictures.

There was general agreement with Shin's feelings. Elisabete said, "It is better than just do your homework because when you are doing your blogging you can surf the internet and do other stuff that you like." Francisca agreed, "I think its better than doing homework. I can do other things, too. I can check my email and do homework at the same time." And Hung chimed in with, "I think it's better than writing on paper."

The evidence supports what the students of the focus group reported. The "cool factor" resulted in a higher volume of writing and more attention to quality than most other writing assignments.

Data

Obtaining English

Obtaining language refers to the receptive skills of reading, viewing, and listening. I hoped that using a blogging instrument would encourage the students to this end. Just going to the class blog to find the assignments required them to "receive English," but I

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also specifically assigned them receptive activities such as figuring out how to personalize their blogs, reading the blogs of classmates, and searching the internet for images to put on their blogs. Knowing how to access such information is an important step in obtaining language. They also needed to report on receptive activities, such as reading or watching movies, whether it was done for school or recreation. I was looking for evidence of the English messages that the students accessed and obtained.

The personalization of their blogs was generally a successful assignment in obtaining a message, but there was little need for actually using English. Once they were into their blog and identified the design key, it was simple to look at the colors and styles available and select their preference. Most of the students seemed to greatly enjoy this step. Sarita particularly liked the personalization and followed it with a short, autobiographic post. The next time she came to class she was excited to ask me if I had seen the design she had chosen and what she had written.

During the mid-project interview, I asked the students if they thought that the language needed during the blog set-up phase was helpful. My notes from that interview record the question and answers: "The site and instructions are all in English. Do you think that forced you to read more and helped with your English skills?' There was an instant choral response of, "yeah," followed by the following disclaimers.

> Maricela: "Actually, I don't read instructions much. I am curious on how to use internet and technology, so I like to do and see what happens. Sometimes I mess it, but … (laughs)"
>
> Francisca: "I do it too. I'm just clicking everywhere."
>
> Elisabete: "I look and memorize the image."

I asked if they thought the visual and interactive aspects helped with comprehension because they really didn't need to understand all the words, but I got no reply. My notes indicate that at the time I didn't think they quite understood the question. I decided not to rephrase because I wasn't sure they would be able to decipher and analyze their own comprehension strategies that well. However, I think that the answer to my question is likely "yes." That is one of the reasons interactive media is valuable for language learning. If you think you understand a key word, perhaps supported by an icon, you can "click" on it and "see what happens," to quote Maricela. You receive instant feedback and know whether or not you were correct. If not, you can go back and try something else. This is a relatively stress-free way to obtain English.

Though nearly every blog assignment asked the students to read and comment on the blogs of students in their cooperative learning groups, there was very little evidence that this happened. The comments on the student blogs are very scarce and I think this lack of reading each other's blogs is due to several factors.

First, for the students who are less comfortable with multimodalities, simple internet assignments that ask them to go to one website and find information or answer questions are comprehensible. The blogging assignment asked them to find the assignment on the class blog, complete the assignment on their blog, then look at another student's blog and make a comment. For about half of the class, we were in very unfamiliar territory.

Another problem was that the students who quickly figured out how to access the blogs and do the assignments, were discouraged by the slow process of getting everyone in class to the same point. My notes indicate that Francisca and others worried that their

grades would be compromised because the other people at their tables weren't blogging yet and they couldn't make comments on non-existent blogs.

By the time most of the students were blogging, I had made the change in directions and asked them to reply on the class blog. This change was somewhat frustrating to many students who were confused as to just how many of the assignment instructions were altered.

Though comments on the students' blogs are rare, in the interviews members of the focus group sometimes mentioned something they had read on another student's blog. For example Elisabete reported that another student had been urging Sarita to post something. This was apropos because, of all the focus group members, she was the least prolific blogger. It seemed that once she did her personalization and wrote one post, she was done; her final term grade reflected her lack of writing. Elisabete also reported reading a blog and noticing another student's English skills: "and I thought, 'Oh, he writes pretty good' and I think about … 'oh that's so cool'… to see another point of view."

The students did read and comment on the class blog and occasionally mentioned other students' posts. Francisca wrote, "I agree with what [Maria] said on her blog …" and Shin made a similar comment regarding a different student's blog. Additionally, they responded to the comments that other class members had made on the class blog, usually in the same "I agree with …" vein.

Though obtaining English through one another's blogs was less than I had hoped, there is evidence that they increased their access of English through internet searches. In the mid-project interview, Shin said that he thought this aspect of the blogging project

helped his language proficiency the most: " …as I was preparing the assignments, I had to read a lot and surf the internet. So, it helped me to develop my English skills." He repeated this idea in the final interview adding, "It also helps us to do our homeworks in other class."

I was pleased and surprised by Shin's comments. I really hadn't thought that the required internet searching would be a significant source of obtaining English. It seemed minimal to me and I hadn't considered that the students would think it was "a lot." Furthermore, Shin is already quite active on the internet. As evidence to this, my notes show that he complained that the blogging project interfered with the time he could spend keeping his homepage up to date. Also, because Shin is a student of high academic achievement and at this point was ready to move into a mainstream English class, I was surprised that he would consider searching the internet difficult enough that it would result in an increase in his English ability. Now that I know the students enjoy it, and that at least some students see its academic value, I will be sure to overtly include this in future assignments.

The first blog assignment in January asked the students about their media consumption during the recent winter vacation. Most students eagerly wrote about movies, television, music, and video games, but Eunju went a step further. She explained how her media use helps her improve her English listening skills:

> During the break I also watched TV and it was really helpful me to practice listening [to] English. I watched Drama - The secret of American teenager- and it was really interesting and their fast lines were good for practicing real English.

As when Shin explained the value of internet searching, I was pleased to see Eunju could watch a movie for recreational purposes, yet realize that trying to comprehend the rapid-fire dialogue had a language benefit. It showed that she was paying attention to the language, not just letting herself be immersed in the visual experience. Paying attention to the words you hear or read, recognizing differences between different language patterns, is the key to continual improvement. When you already have basic communication skills, it is easy to get complacent and not strive for further improvement. It is clear that Eunju was continuing to focus on refining her English ability.

I wondered if having to create blog messages themselves, a new experience for most of the students, would give them new understanding and comprehension when they saw other peoples' messages. Maricela confirmed this, explaining that now when she "googles something" and comes across a personal blog, she knows what it is and thinks, "I know how to do that." This adds another level of understanding as one obtains messages.

The students responded well to the instructions to "upload an image" to their blog, finding multiple images that corresponded to movies they had watched on their own and to *Persepolis* (a graphic novel about the Iranian Revolution that we were reading in class). When I asked about the election of President Obama, I did not assign them to add an appropriate image, but many did, uploading several of the creative representations of this media-savvy president that are abundantly available online. I had been looking for a way to entice students to do more than the minimum requirements for an assignment and, at least in this instance, it was successful. They were obtaining and sharing information that I had not asked for.

I also noticed that once I posted some images on the class blog, and projected that post during class time, they became more excited about finding interesting or fun images and figuring out how to share them. In contrast, though I mentioned adding music to blogs, I never added it to the class blog, never demonstrated how to it, and none of them put music on their blogs. It is clear to me that seeing and hearing what is possible with the multimodalities of the new technologies may be necessary for some students to begin to imagine what they can do. I need to demonstrate, not just talk, if I want my students to see the value of acquiring these new literacy skills.

Though it was not perfect and there were some shortfalls, I think the blogging project was largely successful as an exercise in obtaining English. In the entire class of 24 students, there is evidence that all but two went to my blog and read and viewed what I had posted. All of the students managed to get their blogs up and running, though one never personalized his. Nineteen of the students demonstrated evidence of being able to access websites about specific topics and upload images to support the topic. Five students were even able to identify how those activities resulted in improved English skills.

Processing English

As previously stated, the skills of obtaining, processing, and constructing English are usually intertwined. All of the blogging assignments that required students to obtain English, also asked them to process and explain their experiences. This is not only a goal in an ESL class, but is also a common assignment in a language arts class. For example,

some questions and tasks for students reading (obtaining) Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, as found on the Enotes website, include:

> Why did Twain use a young boy as narrator?
>
> Compare and contrast the personalities of Huck and Tom.
>
> Name a major theme of the novel.

It is easier to identify examples of processing the language or message, rather than just obtaining it, because that is usually overtly assigned and must be presented by the students.

Every blogging assignment asked the students to process their media experiences. I was looking for understanding, not just of word definitions, but of messages embedded in the media. I wanted to know what they had learned about the world through books and movies. I asked about their personal experiences with current events in the media and how the students connected with the messages. I wondered if they could identify how various formats helped or hindered their English comprehension. I was asking the kind of questions that I have asked many times as prompts for informal writing assignments. (See Appendix C for the full list of questions.) I was encouraging the students to process their media experiences and asking for evidence that they had done so.

Examples of my questions include, "What has been your experience in reading *Persepolis*? Does knowing that this is a true story affect your reaction to it?" The student responses to these and other questions were sometimes quite basic. About the novel *Persepolis*, Shin wrote, "As I've been reading Persepolis, I was able to understand about Iran and the situation in the country. I think the cartoon was easier for me to understand it very well." Mei demonstrated more processing as she explained how the graphics helped

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her comprehend the story and how the story helped her both understand and gain an interest in another part of the world:

> This graphic novel helps me alot. Like…Some times I didn't understand word, but I saw picture I can understand. Some times hard to understand only letters, but with picture I can able to understand. I know more about Iran community and culture. Before I read Persepolis, I didn't intrest about Iran, but now I am intresting about Iran more.

I like how Mei began by explaining how the graphic format helped her with the basic understanding of the language and then moved on to a greater understanding of the world. Francisca found a connection to the author through their common humanity. She wrote,

> I realized that Marji and I have a lot of things in common, i really liked it. Every time I started a new page, before reading anything I just looked at the pictures, so what I was reading could make sense. Persepolis was true story, and that meant a lot to me becuase it made me see that there is people (real people) that has been through hard things, but they just kept going, and I really liked that too.

Francisca may have mixed her higher and lower level processing together in her explanation, but it is clear that she did both and understands that two separate levels of understanding were present.

   Not all reactions were positive. "I didn't like the Graphic Novel so much!!!" wrote Elisabete. Though Elisabete is an excellent student, she does not like reading stories. She did eventually make some connections:

> I like the idea of a Biography like that and the Historical parts [so] I don't
>
> know why I felt really bad after reading it. I learned a lot was really
>
> interesting to read. One time in Brazil [there was a time] that you couldn't
>
> talk about government, sing some songs etc, people were torture[ed] was
>
> a really sad time my mom were around 4 or 5 years old!! So was good to
>
> see that I'm so luck to born where and when I did!!

Connecting your reading (or other messages) to information gained in other areas of your life, is a hallmark of a good reader and learner. Such connections deepen one's understanding and increase the chances that you will remember the information.

I think the most revealing personal message came from Eunju. She explains how she once felt about Islamic people and why. She goes on to explain that she now realizes she was wrong:

> … I had some prejudices about all of the islam countries ; the people who
>
> live in the islam countries might be all extremnists and I would never visit
>
> that countries. Why don't they resist against unreasonable regulations? etc.
>
> After reading the "Persepolis" , I regreted for my prejudice and became
>
> really sorry for islam people including Iranian people. Also, I [came to
>
> know] that there were many people who died against unreasonable system
>
> of society and for the democracy of the country.

It strikes me that Eunju's processing resulted in a huge personal leap in her consciousness. I am thrilled that she chose to share this.

When writing about their personal movie choices, the students sometimes demonstrated their ability to manipulate information that is found online. Though it was

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probably a simple task of highlighting and copying text and then inserting it into her blog,
I was impressed that Mei wanted to visually share her language and culture with us. "My
favorite DVD is *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (風の谷のナゥカ *Kaze no Tani no
Naushika*). This movie was make by Hayao Miyazaki, he is most famous Japanese anime
director." Mei goes on to explain the timely message of this movie and recommend it.

> This movie's setting is the future, after the big war, world is … Sea of
>
> Decay (it's a forest, which has poison plants.) … But Nausicaä (a heroine
>
> of this movie) knew human made Sea of Decay (by pollution), human
>
> made insects bigger. …this movie telling about enviroment and polution.
>
> This movie's big [messages] are "eco-[friendly]" …which is telling us
>
> about important things for us. ... I recommended to you watch this
>
> movie!

Mei has processed the story and understood its message. Though she undoubtedly
watched this movie in Japanese, she had to write the summary, translate the message, and
give her recommendation all in English.

I am always looking for and hoping to find cross-cultural connections between my
students and I was pleased when Eunju, wrote that her favorite movie is *The Mission*. I
found it interesting that she had seen this movie in South Korea and sought it out at the
local university library to watch during the winter break.

> This story, in short, is about the priests and south American tribe-
>
> Guarai. The priests of Jesuit visit the territory where the Guarais live to
>
> serve mission and there are big changes to Gurais' lives after their
>
> mission. At the same time, the Spain & Portugal intend to occupy the

> Guarai's territory. And the priests try to protect them from it. Finally, it
>
> tells about the value of the love and how the love is important & powerful
>
> in the whole world.

When Eunju first obtained and processed this film it was in Korean; now she has gone to some length to obtain and process it in English.

While Eunju blogged about a very serious film, Francisca's preferences are more typical for a teenager. She liked the newly released *Twilight*, but ended with, "it was good, but not as good as I was expecting, because I read the books, and they were different…I liked the books better." That Francisca has read Stephanie Myer's *Twilight* series goes a long way toward explaining how someone who has been immersed in English for such a short time, is doing so well academically. I asked Francisca about this and found out that she read these books in English, which tells me she is undoubtedly highly literate in Spanish. As stated in the section on English language learning, and supported by Abedi (2003), a person literate in their L_1 finds it much easier to acquire literacy in their L_2. The skills acquired in one's first language readily transfer to their second language.

Two boys, Hung and Shin, both wrote about another popular movie of 2008, *Eagle Eye*. Shin did a minor compare/contrast analysis between the main actor and other movies in which he had starred.

> I really liked this movie because the main character in the movie is the
>
> guy from the movie 'Holes', and 'Transformer'. His name is Shia
>
> Labeouf. When I was watching 'holes', he was just a little kid who is
>
> trapped in the middle of a desert, and in this movie, Eagle eye, he is

basically trapped by someone, which I can't tell because it might explain

the whole story of the movie.

Unfortunately, Hung's explanation of Eagle Eye was essentially an example of plagiarism from an online site. This is a common problem that teachers have been fighting for centuries, exacerbated by the ease of internet-accessed information. Beyond the ethical problems and the consequences of plagiarizing, there is no evidence of the student's processing. I know what someone else made of the movie, but not what Hung thought and why he chose it for his blog post.

I also asked the students to compare their feelings about a movie they chose to their feelings about *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a movie that we had watched in class the previous term. Comparing and contrasting are two useful strategies that help students to process similarities and differences. Mei summed her feelings up very well.

> To *Kill a Mockigbird* and three movies (which are I saw my self)
>
> are ,really different. Like *To Kill a Mockingbird* is sirious movie, talking
>
> about [laws], racism, and judgment. But three movies (which I saw) are
>
> comedy, [are] funny and talking about love between the man and woman.
>
> But both have many conversations. When I finished *To Killa*
>
> *Mockingbird* I felt "I (learned something)." But when I finished Three
>
> movies (which I saw) I felt fun.

Not surprisingly, it seems that Mei found mostly differences between the serious drama from 1962 and the romantic comedies that she enjoys today. However, her line, "both have many conversations" may have been her attempt to find some similarity. Perhaps she was saying that they both include plenty of dialogue. Her processing of what she

gained from the widely varying films, knowledge and fun, is valuable as it will help her to decipher her motivation for watching films in the future.

Eunju compared *The Sound of Music* to *To Kill a Mockingbird.* She was able to compare and contrast the two films and find connections with what she has learned in history class. Though it is not overt, I believe her discussion of family love and returning to one's country, reflect a self-to-text connection:

> This movie also contains social background at that time like a " To kill a mocking bird" ; Austria became governed by Germany and the family also got in trouble. Otherwise to the "To kill a mocking bird", however, which reflects & accuses the unreasonable system of the society, "The sound of music" shows more positive phase through the process of overcoming with family's love. Also, it emphasizes the hope, expectation of returning the country.

Eunju, who once said to me, "Our generation is visual. We want to learn through graphics and images," finished this blog with "movie always gives me new facts and realization. It makes me happy, sad, serious, and nervous. I see the variety of life and be moved each of the life (through) movies. That's why I love movies and enjoy them." Eunju's English skills are not yet equal to her deep-thinking and poetic nature, but her internal processing is obvious and I think her meaning comes through nonetheless.

As a teacher it is my job to help students make sense of the world. As a teacher of ELLs, I feel a need to make sure they know what is happening in the world, since so many of the serious, important media messages are largely verbal or textual. Though teenagers are notoriously self-centered and may not have an overt interest, we often talk

about current events in class and I help them process the information. In the fall of 2008, we spent some time discussing the United States presidential election and on the class blog I asked, "Now that it is over, give your opinion of the results. How might your life be affected? Maricela wrote,

> I [thought that] Obama was the one who was going to win because there was a lot of young people who likes him and his ideas of change. He use (resources like) internet cellphones and media for his [campaign] that was very wise because he use the media.

A little further in the post, Maricela revealed more personal processing when she wondered how this election might "effect countries like Congo my dad`s [native land]."

Francisca's thoughts were both interesting and insightful. She processed the news on both a national and personal level, and went on to evaluate the expectations:

> The results were OK, to be sincere I was very confused, and it made me nervous not knowing who the new U.S. president was going to be, Im really happy that Obama won the elections, I think his ideas for the U.S. are good, even though they are kinda scary, because his ideas are somehow unrealistic… his ideas are so wonderful, that is hard to believe that they can come to world of reality…so that kind of scares me.

I find it impressive that Francisca would be able, in just five lines, to explain that she had been nervous and why, and was happy with the election results, but mature enough to know that promises and expectations were perhaps unrealistic and possibly problematic.

Hung, who had obviously been paying attention to the news of popular reaction and commentary, addressed the issue of race.

> Obama has beaten McChain to be the new president. But some white (people) still think obama who is black, can not lead United State to a good direction, but also a lot of (people) asians, [Polynesians], black even white is supporting him. Anyway he is our new president so we get to respect him and give him what he need and give him a chance to change the United States.

On the idea of how this change of administration might affect her, Eunju did not understate:

> As the action and policy of certain president of the United States, the whole world's economy, education system, job, and the flow of the politics start to change. It will affect to each person in the whole world. So the [affect] for me will be also huge. My condition of investment, plan for university & major, even where I live might change!

These students had all processed the information about a new president in the United States in a personal way. The processing of current issues and events will be important to them throughout their lives as they make decisions of action or reaction.

On one of the final blog assignments I decided to explore the students' attitudes toward computer technology. I wondered what they would say about their experiences with computer use. I also asked, "What is your favorite thing to do with computers?" This was prompted by my interest in their computer access, or lack thereof, and how it

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may affect them. This has been a concern of mine since long before I knew the phrase "digital divide."

Many of the students admitted that they used computers for schoolwork when necessary, but did not feel entirely comfortable or proficient. Some explained that they did not have a computer or internet access at home and this led to difficulties with school assignments. Several students expressed concerns about internet safety. Though she is one of my most prolific computer and internet users, Elisabete does not consider herself completely computer savvy. She reports that her older brothers are much more skilled than she and she relies on their help. Nevertheless she greatly enjoys computer use:

> There are many cool and good stuff on the internet! Internet has a great resource of information for study, research and entertainment! Sadly some times people use this resource to do bad for people and get advantage like when people get other people's passwords and money that's bad and really unsafe. Everything has your good and a bad side we just need to choose which one you want to [follow].

Elisabete has processed the many types of online messages well. Though we can see from her writing that she enjoys the varied content, she has heard of, or perhaps come into contact with, some of the dangerous uses of the internet and acknowledges that they exist. She expects people to make their own decisions, do their own processing, then make their choices.

As usual, Francisca's friendly, out-going personal voice comes through, despite her less than perfect grasp of English. She is also able to demonstrate a level of comfort with the popular uses and lingo:

> I love computers they are very useful, 90% of my homework is probably
> done in my computer, I don't know if my grades would be the same
> without computers existing..! LOL
> -My favorite thing to do with computers is chatting with my friends,
> actually Im talking to one right now, that's what I like the most about
> internet, that you can do a lot of things at the same time, for instance, now
> Im talking to my friends in México, doing homework, playing, and
> listening to music, and it's all in the computer..!

Like Elisabete, Francisca recognizes the need to process the content, "even though Media Consumption is very helpful, you need to know how to use it" and recognizes some of the less-savory online content: "there is a lot of bad stuff on the Internet such as Pornography, or maybe meeting dangerous people [during] on online conversations"

Maricela reported very practical needs and uses of the internet and it is obvious that she regularly obtains and processes English online:

> Well I have family in 3 continents the internet for me is a cheaper way to
> communicate with my cousins and my family in South America, in Africa
> and Europe, with my friends in my old school in Ecuador, my friends here
> in Provo and Canada. For me the computer is the Best I will die without
> the internet ,I don't watch TV so that's all my entertainment I also like to
> listen music and buy stuff I love to use it and also if I have a question I
> use Google for answers . In this world that we live right now seems like a
> lot of things you do it on line. I was applying for a job and the hiring

> process is actually on line so that`s how it works for most of the
> employers. My Mom also likes to talk with my (cousins) in Ecuador and
> some time look for recipes in the internet may help us with preparing a
> special [dinner].

Like the other girls, Maricela went on to express an understanding of the dangers. "I hear that some girls (start) chatting with guys on the internet and they get kidnap or killed ... I never give social security number and I don`t use it to meet guys or (to chat)."

Shin was brief in explaining the positive and negative aspects of our technological world. "Pros: It's useful, easy to use (at least to me), and fun! Cons: It's so interesting that you might get addicted to it."

To process English is to understand a message on both the surface and deeper levels; it is analyzing and evaluating a message. In their blog posts the students demonstrated their understanding and gave analyses of books, film, news stories and of electronic media itself. They made intertextual connections contrasting films of different genres and films with the same actor. They made multiple connections between themselves and various texts as they found similarities between their lives and the lives of authors or characters. They explained the historical precedent of news information and conjectured as to how it may affect their lives. They even explored their feelings about the value and dangers inherent in one of their most popular media sources and evaluated its worth. They processed multiple English messages during the blogging project, but the processing wasn't actually on the blogs; it took place internally, within each student. What we read on their blogs is evidence of the process. To demonstrate that processing occurred, they had to construct coherent messages.

Constructing English

All of the evidence that demonstrates obtaining and processing of English, relies on the construction of a new, synthesized message. As the students reported on their use of receptive English activities or explained the meaning and connections they made from their various media experiences, they were necessarily constructing new messages. When Mei explained that before she "didn't intrest about Iran, but now I am intresting about Iran more" she is synthesizing her experience and sending out a new text to the world. Eunju has also sent a valuable, personal message with "I regreted for my prejudice…" Elisabete synthesized her experience reading with an image of an Islamic girl that she found through a websearch, to construct a new text with new meaning. Though there are many deviations from standard English, the new constructions can be comprehended by other English speakers who may gain new understanding and synthesize their own new texts.

Some of the constructions were short and to the point, like Shin's message about computer use in the previous section. Others were rather cryptic: "I agree with [Maria]" or maybe a bit more explanatory: "I agree with what [Min] said on his blog …" In general, however, the students wrote more than I am used to seeing when they are assigned informal writing in response to a prompt I have written on the board. Increased volume of writing was perhaps most noticeable in the posts of Eunju. She is a very quiet girl who rarely volunteers to answer questions or share information in class. But her posts averaged nearly 200 words--I had no idea she had such deep thoughts or such a poetic spirit before I had the opportunity to read her blog. Though it was not a component of my

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original project plans, this discovery led me to compare the blog posts to the paper and pencil journal writing they did in class. Unfortunately, Eunju's journal was no longer available, but in comparing other students' journals, I found that their blogs were much more prolific.

I examined the notebook journals of four of the focus group members and found an amazing 68 percent increase in the volume of writing. It was not a scientific, quantitative comparison, but I selected journal entries that were responses to prompts similar to the prompts for the blogs. I then counted and compared the average number of words written in each. Hung's was the smallest difference, with an average of 43 words on paper and 57 on his blog, a 25 percent divergence. Maricela wrote 46 versus 147 words, paper to blog, for a gain of 69 percent. Elisabete wrote an average of just 38 words per journal entry, but 144 per blog post, a variation of 74 percent. And Mei wrote an average of 25 words per journal entry, but 125 per blog post, an incredible 80 percent increase. Hung may have understated their feelings about blogging when he said, "I think its better than writing on paper."

Before the project began I worried that the online postings would cause stress and embarrassment to the students, but I was also hopeful that the public nature of the project would effect greater care in the students' writing. According to the focus group participants, this was realized. Maricela explained her thought processes as she completed assignments:

> …it's like, public space, everyone can see it. If you just write something
> in your journal, you are the teacher, you are the only one who can see.
> But, if you write it on the internet, you'll be like, "oh, I cannot put some

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[not] serious stuff. I need to search for something like smart, so people can see I am smart person."

Shin admitted that after awhile this effect wore off and he "kinda got lazy," but said, "I cared at first, because I just wanted to look good and everything cool." Mei said that she "tried to … spell really correctly and I tried to write correct grammar." This concern extended to images they uploaded. Elisabete explained her ambition when I asked them to "find a picture on the internet of something to do with Iran and upload it to your blog."

> I want a really cool picture, of the girls there. So I was searching about it and I found that really cool picture with the … jail thing. So its like … you wanna put cool things. It's not just, okay, I watch it, I read Persepolis, cause my teacher said so and blah, blah, blah. No, you want to put cool and fun stuff.

The image that Elisabete uploaded was a close-up of a young woman's eyes looking through the opening in a burqa, the traditional garment worn by Islamic women. The opening has vertical bars, as if it were a jail cell. I don't think many people would call this photograph "fun," but she certainly succeeded in finding a startling, provocative image.

Other than the one incident of plagiarism, the construction of original English messages happened throughout the project. The constructions were necessary to show evidence of obtaining and processing English.

The blog posts were somewhat longer, more creative, and closer to standard English than other writing assignments that the students did during the school year. In

this way, the goal of constructing English was met and the blogging project was successful.

Plans for Future Blogging

The blog quotes that were presented showed ample evidence of students obtaining, processing, and constructing English. The individual blogging assignments were not much different than many I have used in class over the past fifteen years, but the format utilized the multimodalities available with new technology and there is evidence of increased, more careful, writing.

I will definitely blog with my students again. The benefits of increased motivation are real and will continue to help my students in obtaining, processing, and constructing English. Additionally, I have decided that giving my students experiences with digital media, preparing them for the world they already inhabit, overrides technical difficulties and other considerations. Next year I plan to have a class blog for both my intermediate and advanced classes.

I will change the assignments somewhat to simplify completion and tracking. I will have the students answer questions or respond to media experiences that are common to all the students by commenting on the class blog. Since I value the idea of promoting student-to-student communication, I will try again to have the students read and reply to their classmates writing. I will probably assign the students to respond to a set number of other students' comments on the class blog.

Adding their thoughts and comments to a threaded discussion will accomplish the student-to-student communication that I value, but does not allow the students the

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creativity available with the multimodalities of the new literacies. Pyon (2008) addressed this by having her third-graders take turns creating the initial post that began each new discussion. I may do that or I may also assign the students to have their own blogs. If I do, that will be added after they are comfortable with the class blog and after they have seen many examples of the interesting upload possibilities on the class blog. It will be a separate, unrelated activity, to avoid confusion with the requirements of each assignment. It is there that they will process their personal media experiences. If I do assign individual student blogs, I will also assign the students to access and comment on those of other students.

My next classroom blogging experience will not be a project, but the beginning of a standard routine in my class. I know that I will have to devote much class time to this activity, but I feel the benefits will justify the investment.

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion

This blogging project has some implications for other teachers of ELLs. Students may enjoy the writing experience, and therefore write more, when they are given the opportunity to complete class work in an online, interactive forum. Students may strive with more diligence toward standard English conventions when their work will be seen by their classmates and others. The opportunity to enhance communication and provide students with a forum for discussion cannot be dismissed. Beyond improvements in obtaining, processing, and constructing English, there is value in using online, interactive, technology, and helping to bridge the digital divide.

Student Learning

Obtaining, Processing and Constructing English

The blog quotes and interview notes that were presented show ample evidence of students obtaining, processing, and constructing English. The individual blogging assignments were not much different than many I have used in class over the past fifteen years, but the format utilized the multimodalities available with new technology, attempting to capitalize on the interests of many 21st century teens. As the results section indicates, there is evidence of increased, more careful, writing.

Educators have long known that tapping into student interest is a great way to motivate learning. When teachers introduce or allow topics that evoke curiosity and passion in students, the students are more willing to invest the time and energy to learn such topics, more likely to be engaged and to persist in learning (i.e. Corley, 2005;

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Coryell & Chlup, 2007). Teachers often try to tap into what matters to the student to encourage more prolific writing. Bower (2006) suggests that teachers take advantage of the opportunity to go where the students are, to online communities, discussion boards, and blogging. MacBride and Luehmann (2008) believe that classroom practices that use new technology will energize learning. They suggest that the collaborative nature, the flexible rules and procedures, and the anarchic tendencies of the new literacies are what entice and empower the students. Lee (2006) added the ELL component and found that ESL teachers that utilized technology "infused with constructivist pedagogy" found that student literacy gains were deeper, and more ingrained. My students were willing to invest more time in their thinking and writing. The increased volume of writing led to profound processing as they made meaning from their experiences. In Lam's 2006 case study of one ELL high school student, she found that his self-directed interest in a particular form of music led him to find an online group with which he communicated. His interest led him to obtain, process, and construct English at greater levels, leading to increased proficiency. This led to improvement in his schoolwork and his attitude about his future possibilities.

There is some indication that the public forum of the internet may inspire students to explicitly take more care with the English conventions of spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc. Similar to my observation of high school students who indicated a desire to construct interesting posts "so people can see I am smart person," or "tried to … spell really correctly and … tried to write correct grammar," Ware (2004) found that college-age ELLs took great care with online writing forums and appreciated the chance

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to present their ideas. Pyon (2008) found the same motivations with elementary school students, including the ELLs in her class.

Improved communication and student-to-student connections are valuable for learning and adding to a student's comprehension and processing of new information. Quiet or shy students are often anxious to share, but intimidated by face-to-face conversations. English (2007) found that blogging often elicited extensive, reflective contributions to threaded discussions on literature from high school juniors who rarely spoke in class. I found similar results from Mei and Eunju who seldom shared lengthy comments aloud and wrote short responses in their journals, but wrote the longest blog posts of the entire class. They are typical of ELLs who worry about errors that they might make or that others won't understand them because of their accents. It seems that for students of all ages and life situations, the chance to converse online and share ideas with their classmates is exciting, especially to those who may never take the opportunity in person.

A major goal of my blogging project was to facilitate conversations between students and this was largely unrealized, but there is ample evidence elsewhere that this is a valid expectation, that valuable discussion threads can and do occur. Pyon's third graders (2008), English's high schoolers and Ware's college students (2004) did have online discussions that were positive experiences. In both cases the students generally enjoyed the experience, increased their literacy skills, and improved their comprehension of the curriculum.

My students' demonstrated the ability and willingness to write thoughtfully, even poetically, at times. This will serve them well in their next blogging or otherwise

interactive discourse, whether it be teacher or self-initiated. They also obtained

knowledge of online possibilities, specific skills related to multiliteracies and

multimodalities, and increased ability with English that will be a benefit in their future

academic and personal endeavors.

Teacher Learning

Helping Students Bridge the Digital Divide

The digital divide is real. It is the gap between those who have, and those who do

not have access to, nor ability with, the new technologies, and it threatens our students'

futures. To fully acculturate into society, ELLs need to be conversant with the technology

of their peers. They also need to see the positive uses of a technology that they or their

parents may not understand. Teachers must help all students become technologically

multiliterate (Becker, 2000; Lee, 2006; Miller, 2004). Classroom blogging is one way to

help students gain the needed proficiencies.

Blogging is useful because it has great flexibility to serve multiple content areas.

My students blogged about their media literacy experiences after reading questions I

posed, or reading and viewing examples that I posted about my media experiences. Pyon

(2008) had children discuss how to solve math problems, offering each other suggestions

and solutions. The students of English (2007), a high school literature teacher, developed

threaded discussions about their assigned reading. A social studies teacher might post

articles on a class blog and ask students to comment, creating an online discussion. Or,

students may create their own content, learning to retrieve and upload materials, on a

personal blog.

Though classroom blogging is useful and increasingly popular, it is certainly not the only way to help students connect with the new technologies. Lankshear and Knobel, in "What Do We Mean by New Literacies?," encourage teachers to embrace the possibilities of the new literacies and introduce their students not only to weblogs, but also to practices like fanfiction, fan manga, podcasting, online gaming, flickr-ing, writing collective works like wikis, and more.

The new technologies will also help ELLs to comprehend the curriculum. ELLs often need visual support or other scaffolding to grasp a new concept and many of the new literacies offer such. I was reminded of this when I noticed that the students began uploading images after seeing some that I had put on the class blog. They never added music, but then, I had only talked about that possibility, never demonstrated it. With online literacies, if they see and hear what can be done, many will be inspired to figure it out. With other content and curriculum, there are many options from which educators may select that will best deliver the information. While we are bridging the digital divide, we are also constructing bridges to understanding.

Bridging the Digital Divide for Ourselves as Teachers

Educators, too, need to be technologically capable. In the past two decades there has been a tremendous infusion of technology into schools. By 2002, 99 percent of schools had computers and internet connections (Valadez, 2007), but just having computers and introducing the new technology is not enough (Cuban, Kirkpatrick, & Peck, 2001, and Healy, 1999). Teachers need to understand the technology and what it can do for them and their students. Teachers must have adequate training to understand

how to link pedagogy, content, and technology into sound educational practice (Mishra and Koehler, 2006). Unfortunately, this takes a great investment in time and money and in many cases, if teachers want to use technology, they can and must educate themselves.

It is not particularly easy, but it can be done. My knowledge, through both study and practical experience, told me that finding a way to encourage my students to think more deeply and write more prolifically would be sound pedagogical practice, leading to improved literacy. My experiences with students and my reading of educational literature informed me that there is a digital divide. I am not a particularly digitally-adept person myself, but I believe that such skills are important. In trying to choose a blogsite, I sent an email out to my entire district, asking for the advice of experienced educator-bloggers. I received several replies, did some preliminary investigation and began to blog. It was not a smooth beginning, but sometimes you just have to start. As Maricela said, just "do and see what happens." I think that may be part of the previously mentioned "flexible rules and anarchic tendencies" of the new technologies.

Most of the technical difficulties in the blogging project were not related to problems on the blogsite, but to problems with the bloggers, myself included. I could have been more familiar and more comfortable with the blogging instrument before introducing it to the students. If I had posted several times on the class blog, with various elements and uploads, before I showed the students, it would have accomplished two important feats. I would have been forced to learn more about the details of how to organize a blog and I would have had some examples with which to entice the students into figuring out how to blog. As it was, I had only personalized and posted one, text only, message. Most of the students knew little or nothing about blogging. My anemic

demonstration, followed by one digital immigrant teacher trying to connect 24 students, was less than inspiring. Beyond the work of a few technically adept, computer literate students, there were a lot of half-hearted attempts and long waits for help.

Though I would recommend that other teachers learn from my mistakes and figure out more of the details before they introduce blogging, this action research project was successful. Having been inspired by examples such as English (2007), Pyon (2008), and Ware (2004), I knew this could be a valuable project and I persevered. The learning curve was steep. I received a bit of technical assistance from a colleague and I figured out how to blog and how to assist the students in blogging. For me as a teacher, the blogging project was not an easy, nor comfortable, classroom activity, but I believe its value overrides my difficulties.

For teachers, as well as for students, the ability to use online technology is vital for full participation in the 21st century. The understanding and use of digital technology is not a luxury--it is essential for young adults moving into higher education or careers in our global economy. Who else but teachers will lead the way?

Improving Our Practice

Teachers must not let technical difficulties discourage them. We, too, have to learn and continually strive to improve our practice and better serve our students. Teachers should take the opportunity to read professional literature and see what other teachers are doing. The experiences of other teachers and students provide "rich, descriptive, and individualized accounts, available to instructors through case-based studies and teacher research, provide access to a broader range of student perspectives,

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which can be useful when crafting technology" (Ware, 2004, p.463). I would add that such accounts are also useful when crafting our lessons and designing our teaching strategies. The experiences of other teachers can help inspire us, just as communication between students empowers them.

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Conclusions

The need for all students, ELLs included, to gain familiarity and proficiency with the multimodalities of today's world cannot be disputed. The value of educators capitalizing on student interests is well-documented (i.e. MacBride & Luehmann 2008). One of the best ways to become a better writer is to read and write more; if inviting students to do so online will increase their willingness to do so, then teachers should definitely take advantage of this.

Further research, in the form of case studies, individual profiles, or action research, should be done to explore the various ways to use and learn the multiliteracies. We need ethnographic research that explores online social interaction in cultural and multicultural contexts. Is there a marked difference in the literacy gains or interactions of students from various backgrounds and experiences? Can online exploration and communication take place devoid of a vital classroom atmosphere, or is it dependent on dynamic human contact? There is some concern that the digital natives' reliance on technological communication is making them less comfortable with face-to-face communication. Do silent ELLs, and other quiet students, who relish a chance to carefully craft thoughts and communicate with their classmates, eventually find the strength to speak out in person, or do avenues such as threaded discussions make them

content to communicate from afar? Would ELLs obtain or process as much or more English if they worked with fanfiction, podcasting, or other forums that allow students to explore the new modalities? What form of interactive communication will help the constructions of ELLs to not only get lengthier and more discerning, but also closer to standard English conventions? The opportunities and calls for further research are as multiple as the new multiliteracies.

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APPENDIX A

Learning English Through Interactive Weblogs

Parent or Guardian Consent for Minor Child to Participate as a Research Subject

Introduction
This research study is being conducted by Glori H. Smith, a graduate student, and Amy P. Jensen, PhD, at Brigham Young University to explore how English language acquisition can be improved through the use of interactive weblogs, or blogs. Your student was selected to participate because he or she is an English language learner, currently enrolled in the advanced level course of English as a Second Language at Timpview High School.

Procedures
This project will take place from October 29, 2008 to January 30, 2009. As part of the regular classroom activities and requirements the students will be required to keep a weekly blog, outlining their media use during the previous week. Each week there will be a specific assignment with questions to answer. The students will also be asked, as part of the regular classroom assignments, to read and respond to other students' blog entries. Students who volunteer for the research study may have their entries and responses selected for specific study, looking for improvement in their reading and writing ability. Several volunteers will be interviewed by the teacher who will ask questions about the blog experience, their perceived use of English, increased English language ability, and computer use.

Risks/Discomforts
There are minimal risks for participation in this study. Students may feel some anxiety knowing that other students will read their blog entries, however this will be a course requirement and not specifically limited to the volunteers for the study. The analysis of the data (writing excerpts) will take place after the term grades have been reported. This will prevent any benefit or penalty based on evidence for the study. Since volunteers know the teacher well, there will be minimal discomfort in the personal interview situation. The interview will require that the volunteers choose to miss another class, lunch time, or stay after school. If they choose to miss another class, they will not have an attendance penalty.

Benefits
There are no specific benefits to the volunteer subjects, but, as with all classroom activities, it is hoped that this weblog will help in English language acquisition. Volunteer participation will help the researchers learn more about how to encourage ELLs to use English for communication.

Confidentiality
All information provided will remain confidential. If background information, interview material, or writing excerpts are used in the research report, volunteers will be identified with a false name. All data, including questionnaires and tapes/transcriptions from the focus group, will be kept in a locked storage cabinet and only those directly involved with the research will have access to them. After the research is completed, the questionnaires and tapes will be destroyed.

Compensation
There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Participation
Participation in this research study is voluntary. Although students will be expected to complete normal class assignments, refusing to participate or withdrawing from the research project will not affect their grades in the class or standing at school.

Questions about the Research
If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Glori H. Smith at 801-221-9720, gloris@provo.edu Amy P. Jensen at 801-422-1886, amy_p_jensen@byu.edu

Questions about your Rights as Research Participants
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact Christopher Dromey, PhD, IRB Chair, 422-6461, 133 TLRB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, dromey@byu.edu

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to allow my child or ward to participate in this study.

Signature:_____Date:_____

Learning English Through Interactive Weblogs

Consent to be a Research Subject

Introduction
This research study is being conducted by Glori H. Smith, a graduate student, and Amy P. Jensen, PhD, at Brigham Young University to explore how English language acquisition can be improved through the use of interactive weblogs, or blogs. You were selected to participate because you are an English language learner, currently enrolled in the advanced level course of English as a Second Language at Timpview High School.

Procedures
This project will take place from October 29, 2008 to January 30, 2009. As part of the regular classroom activities and requirements you will be required to keep a weekly blog, outlining your media use during the previous week. Each week there will be a specific assignment with questions to answer. You will also be asked, as part of the regular classroom assignments, to read and respond to other students' blog entries. Students who volunteer for the research study may have their entries and responses selected for specific study, looking for improvement in your reading and writing ability. Several volunteers will be interviewed by the teacher who will ask questions about the blog experience, your perceived use of English, increased English language ability, and computer use.

Risks/Discomforts
There are minimal risks for participation in this study. You may feel some anxiety knowing that other students will read your blog entries, however this will be a course requirement and not specifically limited to the volunteers for the study. The analysis of the data (writing excerpts) will take place after the term grades have been reported. This will prevent any benefit or penalty based on evidence for the study. Since you know the teacher well, there will be minimal discomfort in the personal interview situation. The interview will require that you choose to miss another class, lunch time, or stay after school. If you choose to miss another class, you will not have an attendance penalty.

Benefits
There are no specific benefits to the volunteer subjects, but, as with all classroom activities, it is hoped that this weblog will help your English language acquisition. Your participation will help the researchers learn more about how to encourage ELLs to use English for communication.

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with the research will have access to them. After the research is completed, the questionnaires and tapes will be destroyed.

Compensation
There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Participation
Participation in this research study is voluntary. Although you are expected to complete your normal class assignments, refusing to participate or withdrawing from the research project will not affect your grade in the class or standing at school.

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I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Signature:_____Date:_____

APPENDIX B

Interview questions for focus group meetings

Pre-project interview

- Had you heard of weblogs or blogging before I announced the project in class? If yes, have you ever read someone's blog? Have you ever blogged? Explain.
- What excites you about this project? What scares you about it? Why?
- Other students will be able to read your blog. In fact, they will be required to read it. How do you feel about that?
- Do you have any other concerns or questions about the project?

Mid–project interview

- Tell me about your blogging experience.
- Has blogging been harder or easier than you thought it would be? Is it fun?
- Do you like commenting on other peoples' blogs?
- What are other people saying when they comment on your blog?
- Do you have any other concerns or questions about the project?
- How is blogging affecting your English reading or writing?

Post-project interview

- The blogging project is over--how do you feel about the experience now?
- Comment on your blogging and on reading someone else's blog.
- Besides a class grade and practicing English, did blogging help you in any other way?
- If you blogged outside of class what would you blog about?
- Why might blogging be a good way of sharing your ideas?
- What aspects of blogging helped you to learn?
- Would it be good to blog in another class?
- Any final comments, thoughts, or questions on the project?

APPENDIX C

<u>Student Blog Assignments</u>

Media Blog #1

> We have started reading *Persepolis* in class. Did you know anything about the Iranian Revolution before we learned about it in class?
>
> Find a picture on the internet of something to do with Iran download it to your blog. Give it a caption.
>
> Do you have a question about the book or the Iranian Revolution? Ask it here.
>
> What do you think of this "graphic novel?"   Please comment.
>
> Reply to the *Persepolis* blog of *at least* the other people at your table. Try to answer their questions.

Media Blog #2

> What has been your experience in reading *Persepolis*? <u>How</u> does the cartoon format help you understand?
>
> How does knowing that this is a true story affect your reaction to it?
>
> Find a picture on the internet about the *Persepolis* book or movie and download it to your blog.
>
> Reply to the *Persepolis* blog of *at least* the other people at your table.

Media Blog #3

> Recently I saw *Kung Fu Panda* and an old movie called *The Sterile Cuckoo*. *Kung Fu Panda* was a fun movie. One of the messages is "if you really want something, you will work hard for it.," but it isn't a serious movie that makes you think much. *The Sterile Cuckoo* is a serious movie. It was interesting and made me think, but it isn't a fun movie.

<u>List</u> three movies you have recently seen. If you can't remember their names, identify them by topic or actors.

<u>Summarize</u> one of the movies and give your opinion of it. Be sure to tell why you have that opinion. Find and upload a shot from the movie to your blog.

Compare your feelings about that movie to your feelings about *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the movie that we recently watched in class.

Reply to the movie blog of *at least* the other people at your table.

Media Blog #4

We talked in class about the U.S. presidential election. Now that it is over, give your opinion about the results.

How might your life be affected by who is president of the United States?

What is your opinion about U.S. elections in general? Write at least one positive and one negative thought about the election process in the United States.

Reply to the election blog of *at least* the other people at your table.

Media Blog #5

What media did you consume over the holiday break?

I watched some fun children's movies with my grandchildren: *Enchanted, Meet the Robinsons, Cars, Kung Fu Panda,* and *The Tale of Despereaux.* Have you seen those? What did you like or dislike about them?

I watched a movie that is 50 years old—*North by Northwest*, made in 1959. I had seen parts of it before, but I had never watched it fully. I am really glad I finally did, because it was excellent. I had to pay attention to figure out what was going on. It has a lot of suspense, action, and a love story.

What media did you consume over the holiday break? What did you watch and enjoy on television, DVDs, or at the movies? Was there anything you watched that you really didn't like? Explain.

Did you go online to update your blog or comment on mine? Did you use the computer or internet for any other reasons? Explain, please.

Media Blog #6

For this blog assignment, go to your own blog, answer these questions, and upload and image. Then be sure to go to the blogs of the other students at your table and comment on one of their posts.

What is your experience with using computers?

What is your favorite thing to do with computers?

Explain the positive and negative aspects of our technological world.

Download an image that you like.

Reply to the computer/technology blog of *at least* the other people at your table.

Media Blog #7

Final Blog Assignment for 2nd term!

Post a comment about something someone else said or did on the blogs. You can read what people have said in comments on my blog (ex: "Mario, when you said … I thought of …" or "Eunju, I agree with …. "). You could also go to another person's blog and comment on their design, posts or media (ex: "Wow, Hung, how did you do …? or "Sarita, I disagree …")

Even if you have already responded earlier, this is #7, you need to make another response to someone else's work or words, dated between 1/12 and 1/16/2009.