How do second graders perceive blogging?

Jenny Tanaka
University of Hawaii, Manoa
Honolulu, Hawaii
United States
kjenny@hawaii.edu

Abstract: An action research study was conducted at a public elementary school in Hawaii, where second grade students' perceptions of blogging for the first-time were gathered. Prior to the implementation period, students were introduced to basic computer skills that are necessary for blogging. Field notes and observations, daily reflection, a small group interview, and a post survey were used to collect data. Results revealed that students were very receptive and positive toward blogs. In fact, although blogging was not required outside of class time, some were blogging at home and even on vacation in another state and country. The students were not afraid to share their work, which portrayed a sense of authorship and ownership of their work, rather than apprehensiveness. However, some students encountered challenges with some basic computer skills, such as keyboarding and computer navigation. Despite some setbacks, this action research project yielded valuable feedback that could help the researcher and other educators to integrate blogging throughout many content areas.

Introduction

In the past, there were not as many tools, resources, or opportunities for educators to integrate technology into their classrooms. Today, it is encouraged for educators to experience what technology has to offer for themselves as well as for their students. Unfortunately, "education has been slow to adopt the new potentials of technology," (Richardson, 2010). Communication tools such as wikis, blogs, and social networks not only breaks down the four walls of the classroom, but "allows us to make connections that were not possible a few years ago," (Richardson, 2010).

Finding the right technology tools that are both age-appropriate and complies with educational standards can be a challenge. One widely used tool that meets these educational standards for second graders is blogging. More research in the educational field needs to be conducted to determine both the effectiveness and perceptions of blogs by young audiences. Therefore, the purpose of this action research project is to evaluate second grade students' perceptions of blogging as an accompaniment to a health lesson at a public elementary school in Kailua, Oahu.

Project Description

The students in this second grade class use computers in the school computer lab on average every six days. During this time they use software like IXL for math, Accelerated Reader for reading, KidBiz for reading, and Starfall for reading. Students are using these programs for what they are designed for, but students do not appear engaged, and if the software is not assigned, students do not use it.

The researching teacher wanted to expose her students to technology that might be more engaging and to incorporate social aspects that would promote positive and appropriate use of technology. Through blogging, she hoped to integrate other content areas such as reading, writing, collaboration, online publishing, multimedia creation, and technology skills in general by using a health lesson about nutrition.

Because of this the following questions guided this study: 1) will the students perceive blogging as a likeable tool, 2) will the students perceive blogging as something they can use, and 3) will the students perceive blogging as something they would like to repeat?

Research Information and Project Participants

The researcher of this study is the second grade classroom teacher at this public elementary school. The participants consisted of 21-second grade students between seven and eight years of age. Of the 21 students, 11 were males and 10 were females. The students are all part of a heterogeneous, general education classroom. Four of the students receive Special Education services or learning accommodations (e.g.; educational interpreter, FM systems, small group instruction, or use of visual aides). All participants are part of the same classroom for health and technology education.

Technology Skills and Instructional Materials

The students of this study are somewhat familiar with diverse technologies, such as software programs that were purchased by the school, which serve the purpose of reinforcing students' reading and math skills, and keyboarding practice. However, by visiting the computer lab once every six days, these skills are not practiced or accessed daily. Students are also exposed to overhead projectors or computer projection and student response systems (SRS). Of the 21 students, 20 have computer access at home and are able to use it for assignments. The school computer lab is equipped with 32 Macintosh computers and an overhead projector for teacher instruction. Based on the *Summary of Models of Stages of Adoption of an Innovation,* the students of this study are at stage two. Meaning, they are aware and learning the process of different technologies and are "developing new skills" (Toledo, 2005).

Blogging Procedures

With over 133 million blog sites (Richardson, 2010), many of them are not kid-friendly, secure, or accessible from the Hawaii Department of Education (DOE) network. Upon receiving approval from the technology coordinator, principal, assent from students, and consent from parents and the DOE, a blog site called kidblog.org was chosen.

The first pre-lesson was on October 21, 2011, where no data was collected. During this time, students were given guided instruction to familiarize them with blogging. They were given a visual handout with the steps to publish a post or to upload an image. Each handout was designed with screen shots of the icons to click on in order to complete and publish their post. Some of the pre-lessons required students to post a blog about, *"What you look forward to this weekend, "What you learned in Social Studies, "I am grateful for…"* as well as upload an image of a concept they learned about in Social Studies. By exposing students to blogging prior to implementation, the researcher could focus on taking field notes and observations rather than constantly assisting students.

The first day of implementation was on January 23, 2012, which consisted of three days to blog over a course of two weeks. A standards-based health lesson about nutrition was delivered on January 20, 2012. The purpose of the lesson was for students to identify high quality bodybuilding foods based on the Hawaii Food Guide, which included calcium and protein foods. Next, they had to come up with a bodybuilding recipe and draw an illustration or take a photo of their snack. The first blogging activity required students to publish a post by answering the following questions: *1) What did you learn from the health lesson and 2) What is your favorite bodybuilding food based on the Hawaii Food Guide?*

The second day of blogging was on February 6, 2012. Students posted their recipe on their blog page and commented to a peer's blog. The final day of implementation was on February 15, 2012. Students brought an illustration of their recipe, which required the researcher to scan the photos into the class folder. The illustrations were accessible from any computer in the computer lab. Students uploaded their illustration into their post then commented on at least one of their peer's blog. As a reference, students were given the visual handouts they used prior to implementation. The researcher interacted with students by commenting and editing their posts. Although there were only three formal requirements of the assignment, students were able to freely blog at home or on their free time.

Research Methods

Gathering students' perceptions required the use of multiple methods to adequately evaluate the results of this study's problem (Patton, 2002). Field notes and observations were collected based on verbal feedback from student responses and interactions while blogging, a post survey was given to all the students, a small group interview was conducted, students' posts were analyzed, and daily reflections by the teacher were recorded.

Field Notes and Observations

Field notes and anecdotal observations were taken. The researcher observed and asked predetermined questions and recorded their responses and attitudes. Both revealed similar trends, such as students' comments, the technology issues they encountered, and

their attitudes and engagement. The students' perceptions of how they liked blogging and their ability to use the tool were considered.

Daily Reflection

A daily reflection journal was used to identify more themes and trends that were not addressed by the other collection tools. It gave the researcher another opportunity to identify issues or comments that might not have been recorded. It was also used as a method to reflect on revisions that could improve the next blogging lesson (e.g.; technology issues or reoccurring problems).

Analysis of Students' Posts

The researcher read all the posts and comments published by the students. It was used to assess understanding of the lesson and to confirm 100% completion of the blogging assignment. The administrative settings of the blog site allowed the researcher to receive an email for every blog published by the students. When students were blogging outside of the class sessions it gave the researcher another perspective of the students' perceptions, but in a different setting (e.g.; at home).

Post Survey

The post survey had five Likert-scale type questions and one open-ended, qualitative question. The three ratings were based on cartoon-like facial expressions: "Yes I agree," "Hmmm… Kind of Agree," and "No Way, I do not agree." The facial expressions and terminology made the survey age-appropriate. The open-ended question was a fill-in the blank cloze response. The Likert-scale addressed the three questions asked in this study, which related to likeability, usability, and their desire to repeat blogging. The cloze response required the students to complete the sentence: Blogging was _____ because _____.

Small Group Interview

A small group interview was conducted to get more feedback from the students, allowing them to elaborate on their perceptions. Before starting the interview, the researcher set rules that the students were encouraged to follow. First, the students were told they did not have to answer the questions asked, secondly, they must have the "talking stick" to respond, and lastly, they should be honest in their responses. The predetermined questions are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Post-interview questions.

Question Types	Questions
Likeability Perceptions	1. What did you like most and the least about blogging?
	2. What was your favorite part about blogging?
	3. How did it feel blogging in school to show your

	understanding of the health lesson?
Usability Perceptions	1. Do you feel blogging is a useful tool to help you learn in school? 2. How did using a blog in health help you learn more about the lesson? 3. What were the challenges you faced using kidblog.org? 4. How could this blogging assignment be done differently?
Desire to Repeat Perceptions	1. How could blogging be used for other school subjects?

Results

The Likeability of Blogging

The field notes showed that students were engaged and excited, which was evident in the way they used exclamation points in their titles, portraying excitement and enthusiasm about their experience. In addition, the researcher walked around the classroom, asking predetermined questions. The students' responses are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Likeability field notes and observation questions.

Question	Student Responses
Do you enjoy blogging?	"Yes, I like to be able to describe things you want, like, or wish." "Yes, I think I like blogging because I like technology." "I like it because you can tell people about the things you want to talk about."
Do you like your classmates viewing your blog?	"Yes, it's cool because others can see my recipes or make other peoples recipes." "I feel happy because I'm comfortable with it." "It makes me happy knowing people responded."
What do you like most about blogging?	"Sharing my ideas with others and what I've done and experienced." "Writing on my page and getting comments." "Being able to blog at home." "Making my own post about my own topic rather than answering certain questions."
How do you feel using your own blog?	"Good because I like blogging." "I like blogging because it's fun and I get to show people what I write and did."

The consistent and reoccurring responses shown in Figure 2 validated how they liked blogging because they enjoyed sharing ideas and experiences, getting comments from their peers, and feeling happy about posting on their own blogs. One comment that stood out was their opportunity to blog at home or like two students who were blogging while on vacation. Although not assigned, students were blogging outside of school and unrelated to the assignment. They were mostly sharing their thoughts, daily activities, and responding to their peers' posts.

In the post-survey positive outcomes for likeability were discovered. For the first question: *Would you like to use blogging again in school?* 16 of the students agreed, four were unsure, and one disagreed. The second question: *Did you have fun using your blog to share your work?* 18 students agreed and three were unsure. The open-ended question showed that all, but one student thought blogging was *"fun," "awesome," "great,"* or *"good."* The one student stated that blogging was *"hard because we had to do a lot of blogging."*

The last evaluation was the post-interview. The first question was, *what did you like most about blogging?* The students' responses showed that they enjoyed posting a picture, the interaction with their peers, and expressing themselves. The second question was, *what did you least like about blogging?* The students' responses showed that they were interested in technology and were hopeful in getting better at it. They were also asked, *what was your favorite part about blogging?* Their responses revealed that they liked the social media component, such as responding, reading posts, sharing pictures, and the ability to communicate with people in different places. The final question was, *how did it feel being able to blog in school to show your understanding of the nutrition lesson?* The students' responses showed that this medium of learning was beneficial because they were able to learn from their peers and practice what they learned through technology.

Usability

The second question of this study was: *Will the students perceive blogging as something they would like to repeat on their own?* The results in Figure 3 show the students' responses to the questions asked.

Figure 3. Usability field notes and observations.

Question	Student Responses
Are you having any challenges?	"Writing and spelling." "Remembering where certain tools are. "Using the keyboard."
What are you currently doing on your blog site?	I am posting a recipe of what I made in health." "I am uploading a picture into my blog." "I am writing what I learned in health."
Do you feel comfortable using your blog?	"I'm getting more and more comfortable." "I feel confident and comfortable." "It was easy." "The handout is helpful."

In the post survey all of the students felt comfortable using their blog. However, the question about ease of use was not parallel. Eleven agreed that it was easy for them to blog and ten were unsure.

The next tool was the post-interview. The first question was, *do you feel blogging is a useful tool to help you learn in school?* The responses were all "yes" with similar

explanations, such as getting better with the computer, future technology expectations as they get older, and the demands of technology to communicate. These were great responses that the researcher hoped to instill in the students. The next question was: *how did using a blog in health help you learn more about the lesson?* They expressed the benefits of learning from their peers and getting more out of the lesson by reading their peers' posts to get more ideas and remembering content vocabulary.

 The next question was, *what were the challenges you faced using kidblog.org?* They expressed that there were many steps to blogging, which made it difficult to remember some of the tools, but felt the more they blogged, the easier and better they will get at typing, keyboarding, and computer navigation. In addition, they felt the handouts were helpful. They especially liked kidblog.org because they felt safe using it since it had the word "kid" in it. Despite the technology challenges, the students endured through the process and were ultimately successful. The last question was, *how could this blogging assignment be done differently?* Although one student did not think anything should be done differently, other comments affirmed that students were curious about exploring more multimedia tools associated with blogging and were eager to try something new, such as using it in other subjects (e.g.; math, science).

Students Desire To Repeat Blogging

Although not expected, mentioned, or initiated, the students took it upon themselves to blog outside of class. Be it at home or on vacation, one student was on vacation in Canada and shared her skiing adventures on her blog. Another student moved away and sent a post to the class about his new school. Many of the students were blogging on the weekend, sharing what they got for their birthday, commenting on their classmates' posts, or sharing a positive experience about school, the weather, or their extracurricular activities.

Based on the field notes and observations, the students were eager to publish their posts so they could make comments on their peers' blog. The students that finished first were commenting to more than one of their peers' posts, outdoing the requirement of one. Although most of the field notes focused on usability and likeability, the researcher was able to ask, do you think blogging could be used in another subject? Students responded with comments like: *"we can use it in math," "it's a good education tool because you can use it to practice writing,"* and *"you can use it in science."*

In the post survey, the question was, *do you hope your teacher does another blogging activity?* Seventeen of the students agreed, three were unsure, and one student disagreed. Figure 4 shows a combination of the questions for each perception based on the rating of the post survey results for likeability, usability, and their desire to repeat their blogging experience.

Figure 4. Post survey results.
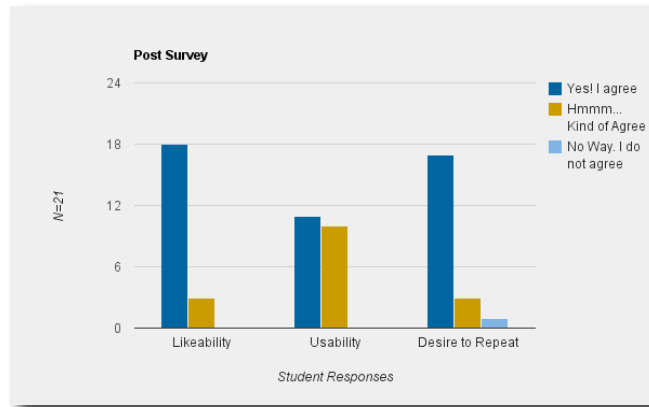
The students provided a wealth of ideas in the post-interview about how blogging could be incorporated in other learning experiences (e.g.; math, science, social studies, math). In the post interview, students were asked, *how could blogging be used for other school subjects?* The students' responses are shown in figure 5.

Figure 5. How can blogging be used in other subjects in school?

Subject	Explanation
Art	"I can show my feelings about art, my favorite thing about art, and maybe upload a picture that I drew to show others.
Writing	"Typing is similar to writing, but it's on the computer." "Writing because typing about my thoughts and ideas is fun."
Science	"Post experiments to show others." "Post an experiment you did, like the steps we did for our recipe and then other can do the experiment too."
Math	"You can write to the class about what kinds of problems you learned or a way to reflect about what you learned in math." "Telling others how you solved a math problem."

Discussion

Overall, students were positively impacted by the implementation of an educational technology tool like blogging. It promoted enthusiasm, engagement, and the elements of writing such as publishing, authorship, reading, and editing, as well as multimedia creation, collaboration, and technology skills that none of the students had prior experience with. Since this was the first implementation of social media for the researching teacher and students, a longer period of research could have benefited the overall results of this study.

In terms of likeability, the students were very receptive and eager to use the tool. Educators know that when students are enthusiastic and given the right tools to be successful, positive learning outcomes will unfold. All the data collection methods

proved that the students enjoyed sharing their work and had fun using blogs because they liked using technology. As digital natives, the students caught on very quick to the blog site and were able to complete the tasks.

Majority of the data collected proved that all the students felt comfortable using their blog. However, the post survey revealed that half of the students agreed it was easy to use, whereas half were unsure. These results are conflicting because if you are comfortable with something then it is usually easy to use. This could be a reflection of the computer challenges that the students experienced. For example, keyboard functions and computer navigation sparked challenges. Even with the step-by-step guide, the basic computer skills may have affected their ease of use.

The final perception was the students' desire to repeat the blogging experience. Based on the field notes and observations, students could not wait to make comments to their peers. Rather than doing the minimum of one response, they did at least two or more. In the post interview, majority of the students strongly agreed that another blogging activity is a great idea. The post interview allowed students to elaborate on their explanations of why they would use it again. As shown in Figure 4, students were eager to use blogging throughout the classroom curriculum, sharing great ideas for future implementation.

Since it was the first time implementing a social media tool, there were many concerns going into the study. The researcher thought the students might be too young, there would be too many challenges with technology, and they would not be able to use their blogs without constant guidance. However, the students' skills were underestimated. With great planning, modeling, and use of visuals, the students caught on very quickly. Blogging also became a means of communication for students to share about their social life outside of school and to access their learning in health from any computer. Therefore, blogging has many educational purposes, such as teaching across content areas, a communication tool, and enhances computer skills.

Conclusion

Now that the researching teacher is aware of the students' perceptions, the implementation of this tool for educational purposes was validated as a possibility. It was clear in this study that social media such as blogs can be an option for educators of the 21st century learner. The students' natural ability to use tools sets them up for success, while meeting them where they are. In the near future, these learners will be required to learn or use similar tools. Therefore, educators should be providing a place where students receive guidance with technology rather than prohibiting it in schools because some day they will be using it "out there" in the world, (Richardson, 2010). A simple, yet effective technology like blogging has many educational uses, educators just have to try it.

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