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## Case study: the pedagogical value of blogging in the primary school classroom

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**UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK**

**OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH**

**Case Study: The Pedagogical Value of Blogging in the Primary  
School Classroom**

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**Master of Arts in Digital Media Development for Education**

**University of Limerick**

**Supervisor: Catriona Lane**

**Submitted to the University of Limerick, October 2013**

## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted in whole or in part, by me or another person for the purpose of obtaining any other university award. I agree that this thesis may be made available by the University of Limerick to future students.

Aisling Murray

29<sup>TH</sup> August 2013

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## Abstract

### **Case Study: The Pedagogical Value of Blogging in the Primary School Classroom**

**Aisling Murray**

This study aimed to investigate the educational benefits of blogging, the effect on students' attitude to learning and the importance of an authentic audience.

Blogs offer an opportunity for students to work in a constructivist way, building new knowledge through connecting with others and reflective thinking. Blogging also capitalises on pupils' inherent interest in and familiarity with digital media.

The study involved a fifth class of 29 students from a co-educational rural school blogging for a period of four months. Students posted to the blog and read posts of other bloggers regularly. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gather data.

The study found that pupils had a positive attitude towards computer use and the majority spent time on social media sites. The blog served as a platform and enabled students to become independent learners, facilitated social learning, collaboration and global connections. The blog motivated students to read online and invest more in their writing. The presence of an authentic audience had a significant effect on student motivation and investment.

The use of blogs in the primary classroom fulfils many of the objectives of the primary school curriculum and is an important tool for teachers in light of the new *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011 – 2020* issued by the Department of Education and Skills which affirms the importance of digital literacy and aims to include as part of national assessments, assessments of primary students' ability to read digital material.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

## *1.1 Introduction*

It is widely acknowledged that our current students as well as a new generation of teachers have grown up surrounded by technology. This new generation are notably described as digital natives by Marc Prensky (2004) and also described as Gen-x, Millennials, the Nintendo and Net Generation or the YouTube Google-Eyed Generation (Duffy 2007). Learning will be a more engaging, interesting and intellectually stimulating experience once the learning processes and environment reflect the engagement with technology that young people have in the rest of their lives (Morrissey 2010).

## *1.2 Background*

Many students are already highly socially active online, interacting with their friends and others and creating and publishing material without realising that they are doing so.

The Primary School Curriculum was revised in 1999, the new Primary Curriculum recognised the integration of information and communication technologies as a key issue. It also recognises the increasing importance of technological skills for advancement in education, work and leisure.

*“The curriculum integrates information and communication technologies into the teaching and learning process and provides children with opportunities to use modern technology to enhance their learning in all subjects.”*

(NCCA 1999b,p.29)

Blogging is a suitable Web 2.0 tool for use in the primary school classroom for many reasons. Reading and writing are central to blogging and a blog provides a stage for pupils

to publish their work and interact with an authentic audience something that is a key objective of the English Language Curriculum (NCCA 1999a).

### **1.3 Relevance**

The *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011 – 2020* issued by the Department of Education and Skills affirms the importance of digital literacy and lists as a key target the increased awareness of the importance of digital literacy and the aim to “include assessments of primary student’s ability to read digital material as part of the national assessments of English reading” (2011,p.18). Downes (2004) contends that blogging is concerned with reading and not so much writing and involves interacting with the authors and reflecting, critiquing, questioning and reacting, all higher order thinking skills.

Blogging provides a platform for many objectives of the Primary School Curriculum to be met. Many of the specific content objectives of the English Language Curriculum for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes may be achieved through the use of blogs.

Blogging also has a role to play as an assessment tool in the primary school curriculum. The use of e-portfolios is recommended as a tool for assessment in the Assessment Guidelines for Primary Schools and blogging provides a tool for students to publish and share their work, easily searchable and arranged in chronological order.

### **1.4 Research Question**

The research question being addressed in this study is the value of blogging when used as a pedagogical tool in the primary classroom.

The primary aims of the research are to investigate

- The educational benefits of blogging
- The effect on students’ attitude to learning

- The importance of an authentic audience

## *1.5 Research Context*

The research took place in a rural primary school in the west of Ireland. It is a co-educational school with an enrolment of approximately 300 pupils. The study was conducted with 29 children in a Fifth Class. The students in the primary school chosen are familiar with the use of computers in school for activities such as educational games, typing skills, project work using word processing software and some online research. The students and teacher used the school laptop room when blogging, which is equipped with 34 laptops and a digital projector. The class had two timetabled sessions of an hour in the laptop room per week.

## *1.6 Research Methodology*

This research study will use a mixed methods case study approach incorporating both quantitative and qualitative tools to collect data. Pupils completed a pre-blogging questionnaire in order to establish students' prior knowledge and background with computers and internet use and to investigate the students' attitude towards blogging. A post blogging questionnaire was carried out to discover what students thought of blogging overall, what they thought of having an audience for their work and what they thought of receiving comments on their work. It also investigated whether pupils enjoyed blogging and why and whether they thought it helped them to learn.

Three focus groups, each consisting of four to five pupils, each lasting 10 minutes were conducted. The focus groups were asked their overall opinion of blogging, if they believed blogging had any effect on how they learnt, if they found blogging enjoyable, and finally pupils were asked what they thought about writing on the blog.

A semi-structured interview was carried out with the class teacher and was guided by the research questions under study. The class teacher was asked about her overall experience of blogging with the class, including benefits and limitations, she was also asked about the

effect on students' attitude and motivation and if she thought the blog was an effective tool for learning in the classroom.

## *1.7 Structure of the Research Study*

Chapter 1 presents an introduction to the thesis. It outlines the background and relevance of the research being undertaken and states the research question, context and methodology which will be used in the course of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature in seven main sections. Section one presents the learning theories of behaviourism, constructivism, constructionism, social constructionism and how the Primary School Curriculum incorporates learning theories. Section two explores student motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic and outlines strategies for motivating students to learn. Section three presents an overview of the development of ICT in education in Ireland. Section four discusses the place of ICT in the Primary School Curriculum as it is recognised as a key issue and consideration when the Curriculum was revised in 1999. Section five explains Web 2.0 and the emergence of Web 2.0 applications and their use by the "YouTube Google-Eyed Generation" (Duffy 2007, p.119). Section six explores blogging, and outlines the history of blogs, features of a blog, growth of blogs and the types of blogs. Finally, section seven examines blogs in education and details the types and purposes of educational blogging, the educational benefits of blogging, good practice in educational blogging and then discussed blogging in relation to learning theories and the Primary School Curriculum.

Chapter 3 details the research issue and the research setting including both the physical setting and the online setting of the Kidblog platform. It then outlines the research paradigms, positivist and post positivist and mixed methods research and explains why the mixed methods research paradigm was chosen for this study. The research methods of case study, action research and ethnographic research are explored and the rationale for choosing a case study approach explained. The data collection tools of questionnaire, focus group and interview are then described. Validity, reliability and triangulation are then

discussed followed by ethical considerations. The chapter concludes by outlining the timeline of the research conducted.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the study undertaken. Both qualitative and quantitative data was gathered using questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. This chapter discusses the findings under the following headings;

- Capitalising On Students' Media Literacies
- Ease Of Use
- A New Learning Environment
- Critical And Analytical Thinking
- An Audience for Writing and Student Investment.

Chapter 5 analyses the findings of chapter 4 in light of the literature which was examined in Chapter 2. The chapter begins with an overview of the research undertaken and presents the key findings of the research, It then discusses the findings under the same headings as Chapter 4 namely, capitalising on students' media literacies, ease of use, a new learning environment, critical and analytical thinking and an audience for writing and student investment.

Chapter 6 present recommendations and suggestions for further research in blogging in the primary school.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### *2.1 Introduction*

This chapter will examine behaviourist, constructivist, constructionist and social constructivist learning theories, and the learning theories which underpin the Primary School Curriculum. Student motivation both intrinsic and extrinsic will then be examined.

A synopsis of the development of ICT in education in Ireland will be followed by an outline of the place of technology in the primary school curriculum.

A brief overview of Web 2.0 will be followed by an analysis of blogging, beginning with the history of blogging and looking at the features, types and growth of blogging. The literature on the use of blogs in education and types and purposes of educational blogs will then be examined followed by the educational benefits of blogging and good practice in blogging.

The chapter will conclude by situating blogging within learning theories and its place within the primary school curriculum.

### *2.2 Learning Theories*

Multiple learning theories exist seeking to understand and explain how learning occurs. Behaviourism dominated the educational landscape 20 years ago, while the foremost learning theory currently is constructivism (Boghossian 2006).

This section will provide an overview of Behaviourism, Constructivism, Constructionism, Social Constructivism and conclude by discussing learning theories and the primary school curriculum.

### **2.2.1 Behaviourism**

Behaviourism is based on the hypothesis that a learner's response or behaviour can be altered by repetition and external stimuli and that learning can only be assessed by studying observable, measurable outcomes. Learning is viewed as the process of knowledge being acquired from an outside source, and teaching as the process of delivering knowledge to pupils (Bichelmeyer and Hsu 1999).

The theory that learning is acquired through conditioning was proposed by John B. Watson, founding father of Behaviourism. Thorndike further built on this putting forward his Law of Effect that any behaviour that was followed by a positive consequence is likely to be repeated and any followed by a negative consequence was likely to stop (Forrester and Jantzie 1998).

### **2.2.2 Constructivism**

Constructivism as a theory focuses on how students learn by constructing knowledge and meaning for themselves. According to the theory of constructivism, students must be enabled to discover and create their own learning and only by doing so do they gain knowledge.

*The focus of constructivism, then, is the child as a self-governed creator of knowledge. Educational practices that follow from this focus are designed to facilitate children's learning by nurturing their own, active cognitive abilities.*

*(Strommen and Lincoln 1992, p.3)*

A premise of constructivism is that children assimilate new ideas to pre-existing notions and modify their understanding in light of new information. (Strommen and Lincoln 1992).

Piaget and Dewey are educational thinkers that advocate a constructivist approach to learning and teaching. They believe learners not only process information but build understanding through interacting with their environment (Wilson and Lowry 2000).

### **2.2.3 Constructionism**

Constructionism builds on the ideas of constructivism, holding that learning happens when children engage in active learning, “engaged in constructing a public entity” (Papert and Harel 1991,p.1). Papert, as the inventor of Logo, the programming tool for children, perceived that children’s natural curiosity and desire to understand their world was stifled by the Behaviourist approach to education. He did not support the view of children being passive receptacles for knowledge, he desired for children to be motivated learners, that they would be critical thinkers and that they would learn how to learn. Papert believed that the computer was the tool that would allow children to take ownership of their learning and allow them to construct their own meaning of the world around them (Forrester and Jantzie 1998).

### **2.2.4 Social Constructivism**

Vygotsky, influenced by the work of John Locke and Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, believes that learning does not take place in isolation, that all learning and knowledge is shaped by the use of language (Hardcastle 2009). Vygotsky also considered that language and learning are influenced by social factors and culture, that “consciousness is derived from the prevalent meaning systems in one’s social environment” (Liu and Matthews 2005, p.395). A central part of Vygotsky’s theory is the “role of social collectivity in individual learning and development” (Liu and Matthews 2005,p. 391).

## ***2.3 Learning Theories and the Primary School Curriculum***

The 1999 Primary School Curriculum is based on the constructivist approach to learning and teaching advocated by Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky.

The 1999 Primary School Curriculum builds on the five principles of the 1971 Curriculum.

These principles of education are

- The full and harmonious development of the child
- The importance of making due allowance for individual difference
- The importance of activity and discovery methods
- The integrated nature of the curriculum
- The importance of environment-based learning (NCCA 1999b,p. 8)

The new curriculum of 1999 redefines and integrates these principles into a new set. The initial two principles relating to the full and harmonious development of the child and the importance of making due allowance for individual difference are redefined into wider concepts (NCCA 1999b).

The final three pedagogical principles are expanded and integrated into a broader range of learning principles. The most important of these are outlined below

- the child's sense of wonder and natural curiosity is a primary motivating factor in learning
- the child is an active agent in his or her learning
- learning is developmental in nature
- the child's existing knowledge and experience form the base for learning
- the child's immediate environment provides the context for learning
- learning should involve guided activity and discovery methods
- language is central in the learning process
- the child should perceive the aesthetic dimension in learning
- social and emotional dimensions are important factors in learning
- higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills should be developed
- collaborative learning should feature in the learning process

- the range of individual difference should be taken into account in the learning process
- assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning (NCCA 1999b,pp. 8-9)

A child actively constructing their learning is a fundamental premise of the constructivist theory and is an underlying principle of the curriculum.

Papert's theory of learning, constructionism can also be seen in these principles of learning. Papert's constructionism echoes constructivism and can be seen in the curricular principles of active learning, a process in which pupils build knowledge on their own experience. Constructionism adds an additional layer where knowledge is grounded in contexts and shaped by uses (Ackermann 2001). This additional layer is reflected in the curricular principle which places the child's environment as an important context for his/her learning.

## **2.4 Student Motivation**

*"Motivation is a function of initiating and sustaining goal-directed action."*

(Dennis et al. 2007,p.37)

For many years theorists in educational psychology have held student motivation as one of the most important factors of the learning process. The underlying implication of student motivation appears to exist in how students are taught rather than the content of what they are taught (Christophel 1990).

Motivation typically and naturally is also concerned with the students' desire to participate in the learning process and reflects the reasons that underlie a students' participation or non-participation in learning (Dennis et al. 2007).

### **2.4.1 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation**

Psychologists generally distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Christophel 1990), intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or

enjoyable, and extrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome (Ryan and Deci 2000).

A student who is intrinsically motivated undertakes an activity “for its own sake, for the enjoyment it provides, the learning it permits, or the feelings of accomplishment it evokes” (Leper, 1988 cited in Dennis et al. 2007, p.37-38). Intrinsic motivation is long-lasting and self-sustaining and is driven by fascination with the subject, a sense of accomplishment when mastered and an understanding of its relevance to life and the world (Vanderbilt University 2013).

Conversely extrinsic motivation, which is closely linked with Skinner’s operant conditioning, relies on extrinsic rewards to control behaviour and learning (Deci et al. 1999). Extrinsic motivators can include parental and teacher expectation, tangible rewards such as stickers, gold stars, to high grades which may result in scholarships or the earning potential of completing a course. External motivators may also be avoidance of punishment. Extrinsic motivation is short-term and once the rewards or punishment is withdrawn, student motivation is lost (Vanderbilt University 2013).

## 2.4.2 Strategies for Motivating Students

The Centre for Teaching in Vanderbilt University, (2013) list research based strategies for motivating students to learn.

- **Be a role model.** Display motivation and passion, show why as a teacher you are interested in the lesson content.
- **Get to know your students.** Tailor your teaching to students’ concerns and show an interest in them, their learning and a faith in their abilities.
- **Use examples.** Show why a concept is useful and how it prepares students for future opportunities.
- **Use a variety of student-active activities.** Directly engage students and teach by discovery and co-operative learning activities.

- **Set realistic performance goals.** Assignments should be appropriately challenging to experience and aptitude.
- **Appropriate emphasis on testing and grading.** Tests should show what students have mastered and give every student the opportunity to achieve.
- **Generous with praise and constructive with criticism.** Offer non-judgemental feedback on students' work; look for opportunities for improvement and to stimulate advancement.
- **Give students control over their own education as much as possible.** Let students choose topics that interest them and allow them to show their understanding of a topic in various ways of presentation.

## *2.5 An Overview of the Development of ICT in Education in Ireland*

Initial interest in computer technology in Ireland began in 1971 with the first computer orientated courses provided by the Department of Education. Out of these courses came the formation of the Computer Education Society of Ireland (McGarr 2009).

### **2.5.1 Schools IT 2000**

In late 1997 the first major initiative, by the Irish government, was rolled out. This programme saw developments in three areas: equipment and connectivity for schools, provision of teacher training and pilot programmes known as Schools Integration Projects. This initiative was known as Schools IT 2000 – Policy Framework for the New Millennium (Mulkeen 2003).

In 1998 the National Centre for Technology in Education was established with an aim of implementing the Schools IT 2000 initiative. The remit of the NCTE was also to develop ICT

policy proposals and the provision of ICT policy advice to the Department of Education (Inspectorate 2008).

In 2001 a second policy document, *A Blueprint for the Future* was launched by the Government. This three year policy was to support the continuation of the main initiatives of Schools IT 2000 and build on that progress.

In 2002, arising from the three year strategic plan, the NCTE published *ICT Planning and Advice for Schools* which was designed to facilitate schools to develop ICT plans for their school (Inspectorate 2008).

### **2.5.2 Schools Broadband Initiative 2005**

The Schools Broadband initiative aimed to provide each school with a broadband connection to the Internet, by the end of 2005, allowing faster access to online resources and eliminating worries about usage time and charges which came with the dial up internet it replaced. The creation of the School Broadband Network was part of this initiative which provided centrally managed services such as content filtering, firewall and secure email (Education 2004).

### **2.5.3 Developments from 2008 to Present Time**

In 2008 the Department of Education published two reports, *Investing Effectively in Information and Communication Technology in Schools 2008-2013*, a report from a strategy group to identify priorities for ICT investment in schools and *ICT in Schools*, an evaluation of the impact of ICT on teaching and learning which was carried out by the Department's Inspectorate.

*Smart Schools = Smart Economy* was published in 2009 and was a report carried out by the Joint Advisory Group, appointed by the Minister for Education. The function of this report was to explore possible implementation approaches of the recommendations of the 2008 Strategy Group Report.

These most recent reports outlined a strategy for investment in ICT. They identified areas of concern including classroom and student ICT infrastructure, teacher professional development, the development of digital content and planning for ICT.

At the launch of *Investing Effectively in Information and Communication Technology in Schools 2008-2013*, the Minister for Education pledged a spending of €150 million over the three year period 2009-2012. Significant capital investment took place, including a €22 million grant to primary schools for ICT infrastructure, before major budgetary constraints were put in place.

## ***2.6 ICT in the Primary School Curriculum***

The revised Primary School Curriculum was launched in 1999 and Information and Communication Technologies was recognised as one of the key issues and considerations taken into account in the revised Curriculum.

Within the revised Curriculum, technology is seen as a tool to facilitate teaching, learning and assessment rather than as a subject in its own right. Each curricular document (one for each subject) provides suggestions on how ICT can be used in the subject. Opportunity is provided to use technology to enhance learning in all subjects (NCCA 2004).

In addition, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) developed *Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Teachers* to support the revised curriculum.

In 2007, the NCCA developed *Framework for ICT in Curriculum and Assessment* which outlines the experiences with ICT that a student should be afforded through their primary school years. This covers the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes of students which is realised through the integration of ICT across the curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2013).

The conclusion of the Introduction document to the revised curriculum makes clear that the curriculum takes account of the extent to which ICT has made the

*“accessibility, variety and exchange of knowledge a central element on work and leisure. The potential of such technology in enriching the child’s learning experience is acknowledged in every area of the curriculum”*

*(NCCA 1999b,p. 74)*

The *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011 – 2020* issued by the Department of Education and Skills affirms the importance of digital literacy and lists as a key target the increased awareness of the importance of digital literacy and the aim to “include assessments of primary student’s ability to read digital material as part of the national assessments of English reading” (2011,p.18).

## **2.7 Web 2.0**

Web 2.0 is a phrase that is attributed to O’Reilly Media in 2003, referring to a perceived second generation of web based applications, communities and exchanges (Duffy 2007), that “emphasises active participation, collaboration and sharing of knowledge and ideas among users” (McLoughlin and Lee 2007,p.665).

Web 1.0 is often described as a read-only, one-way experience, and Web 2.0 as a read/write medium which relies on user participation and lets users collaborate and share information online. This highlighting of user participation is a feature of definitions of Web 2.0 offered by most commentators (Thompson 2007).

The emergence of Web 2.0 applications, such as blogs, wikis, video sharing sites such as YouTube, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, increases the ability of individuals to create and upload content to the web where once web content creation was the province of computer programmers and those with a knowledge of HTML programming codes (Thompson 2007).

It is acknowledged that students today, as well as a new generation of teachers, have grown up in a world of technology. Described as, Gen-X, Millennials, the Nintendo and Net Generation or the YouTube Google-Eyed Generation (Duffy 2007) or more notably by Marc Prensky, 2004 as Digital Natives. Web 2.0 applications are already in use by students and

the use of these technologies must change the learning ecology of education, it is not sufficient simply to use them as an alternative method of content delivery (Duffy 2007).

McLoughlin & Lee also noted that several authors have found that “emergent new Web 2.0...concepts and technologies are opening doors for more effective learning and have the potential to support lifelong competence development” (Klamma *et al.*, 2007 cited in McLoughlin & Lee 2007 p.664).

Duffy (2007) concludes his article on *Engaging the YouTube Google-Eyed Generation*, by reiterating the importance of the social and community aspect of Web 2.0 technologies and how such technologies sit with social constructivism pedagogical theories and recommends that it is incumbent on teachers to embrace such tools as a means to encourage and make visible the social construction of knowledge which is beneficial to both learners and teachers.

## **2.8 Blogging**

This section will outline the history of blogging, features of a blog, growth of blogs and types of blogs and blogging in education will be dealt with in the next section.

Blogging in its original format is defined as “frequently updated, reverse-chronological entries on a single webpage” (Blood 2004,p.53).

### **2.8.1 A History of Blogging**

Weblogging can be traced to the early 1990s and the efforts of National Centre for Supercomputing Applications personnel to maintain chronological lists of useful hyperlinks along with descriptions and commentary (Oravec 2003).

Blogging was originally known as web logging, a term credited to Jorn Barger in 1997 when he coined the term “Weblog”. Jorn Barner was one of the earliest bloggers and defined weblogging as “A Web page where a Web logger ‘logs’ all the other Web pages she finds

interesting” (Blood 2004). The term weblog was shortened to blog with the advent of the web log building tool Blogger. Prior to this programmers created or adapted their own software or individuals hand coded their own weblog using HTML.

In 1998, Jesse James Garrett, editor of Infosoft, began assembling a list of web logs similar to his own as he navigated the Web. Garnett’s weblog lists the only 23 weblogs known to be in existence at the beginning of 1999 (Blood 2000).

In late 1999 several software companies released software for weblogging that allowed anyone to create a weblog without HTML knowledge. The release of Blogger.com, a free online software, which quickly became the most widely used blogging tool, changed Weblog culture, (Blood 2004) and “by the middle of 2006, there were 50 million blogs according to Technorati’s State of the Blogosphere report” (Chapman 2012).

Blogging has moved from reverse-chronological entries on a single web-page, logging web pages to

*“a personal diary. A daily pulpit. A collaborative space. A political soapbox. A breaking-news outlet. A collection of links. Your own private thoughts. Memos to the world. Your blog is whatever you want it to be. There are millions of them, in all shapes and sizes, and there are no real rules. In simple terms, a blog is a website, where you write stuff on an ongoing basis. New stuff shows up at the top, so your visitors can read what’s new. Then they comment on it or link to it or email you. Or not.”*

*(Blogger 2012)*

It is clear that over a short space of time that blogging has evolved from its most basic form, originally a list of links, to a powerful tool which allows individuals to create personal webpages with the same ease as creating a word processing document, while allowing an audience to post comments and engage in online conversations (Boling et al. 2008).

## **2.8.2 Features of a Blog**

Blogging has moved beyond the realm of the personal space and by 2004, political consultants, candidates, and mainstream news organizations all began using blogs more prominently. While political blogs were some of the most popular early blogs, in-depth topic blogs also became popular, delving deeper into current news and pop culture than

mainstream media as well as commenting on what traditional media was reporting (Chapman 2012).

Dave Winer cited in (Du and Wagner 2005) described weblogs as having the following characteristics:

- **Personalised** Designed to be used by a single person, expressing individual personality although may be used in collaboration with others
- **Web-based** updated frequently, easy to maintain and accessible via a web browser.
- **Automated.** Weblogging publishing tools help the author present his/her words without the knowledge of HTML, and may also provide syndication
- **Communities-supported.** Weblogs can link to other weblogs and sites, enabling the linkage of ideas, and hence stimulating knowledge generation and sharing.

However Peter Duffy goes further, showing the evolution of blogging by adding further characteristics such as

- **content filtering**, allowing content to be filtered by date, category or one of many other attributes
- **adding other authors**, whose permissions for creating content and access are easily managed
- **digital portfolios**, blogs provide the opportunity publish students' assignments and achievements
- **extensions** into fully managed content systems (Duffy 2007).

While blogging is generally thought of as a personal publishing space, Oliver Wrede (cited in O'Donnell 2006, p.8), expresses this slightly differently. Wrede draws attention to the fact that while blogging may be an intrapersonal conversation, comments or feedback are not just directed at the author but also at unknown readers, resulting in a combination of two oppositional principles: monologue and dialogue (O'Donnell 2006).

This two way dialogue that characterises blogging simplifies blogging into its two essential components; content posts and commentaries (Jimoyiannis and Angelaina 2012).

### **2.8.3 Growth of Blogs**

In 2005 a study was released reporting that 32 million Americans read blogs, with more than 152 million blogs active by the end of 2010 (Chapman 2012). In a study conducted by Perseus Development Corporation it was found that 51.5% of all blogs were developed and maintained by individuals aged 13-19, Henning 2003 cited in (MacBride and Luehmann 2008).

Although a recent study has indicated that informal blogging (outside of the school system) has declined in popularity, among both teens and young adults, as they move towards other forms of social media, with the rate of blogging in American teens down to 14% from 28% in 2006. However, a significant amount of American teenagers (73%) now use some form of social networking websites (Lenhart et al. 2010).

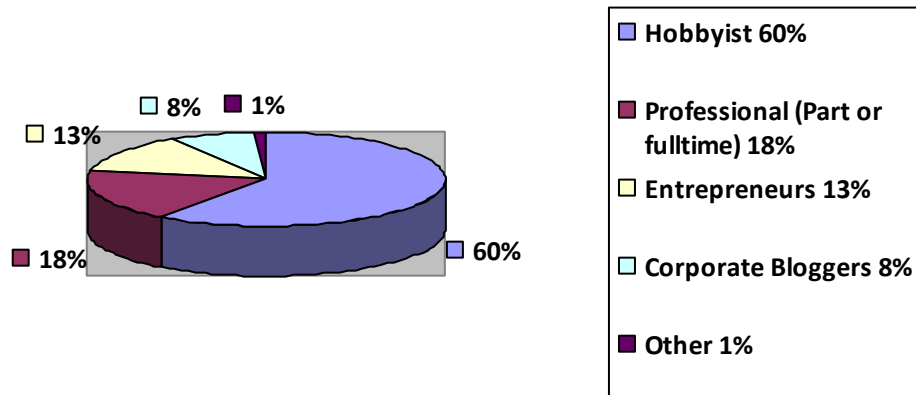
### **2.8.4 Types of Blogs**

Technorati.com, a blog search engine and directory, indexes more than a million blogs. Technorati's State of the Blogosphere has chronicled the evolution and growth of the blogosphere since 2004. The most recent review discusses blogging according to five different categories of bloggers.

The five categories of bloggers as identified by Technorati.com and illustrated in **Figure 1** are:

1. Hobbyist, comprising 60% of respondents to the survey
2. - 3. Professional Part and Full Timers, represent 18% of respondents
4. Entrepreneurs, comprise 13%

5. Corporate bloggers, make up 8% and blog as part of their full-time job or blog full-time for a company or organisation they work for.

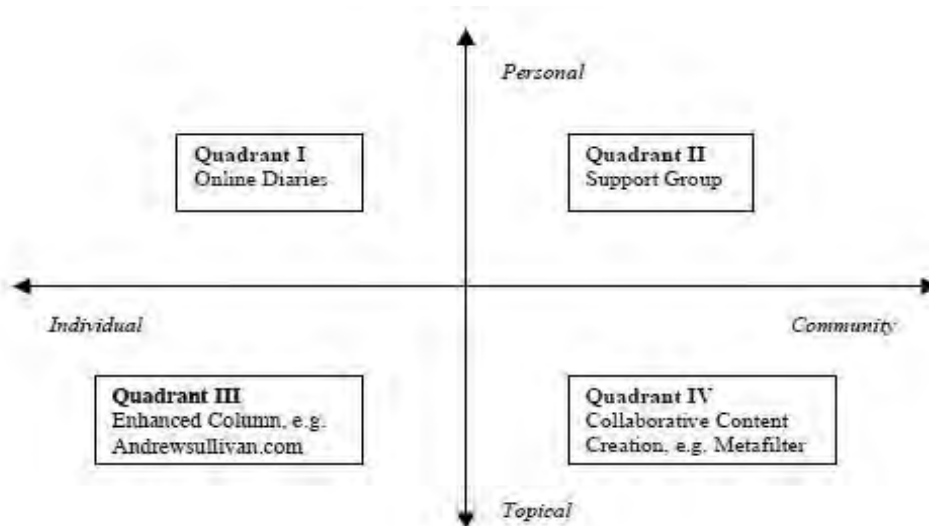


**Figure 1: Categories of Bloggers, Technorati.com**

Technorati’s survey is based on bloggers who have their blog listed with Technorati, which skews the survey to those who are more active bloggers, actively creating content and who are seeking an audience (Technorati.com 2012).

Krishnamurthy 2002 (cited in Herring et al, 2005) proposed a classification of blogs into four basic types based on two dimensions: personal vs. topical and individual vs. community.

**Figure 1** is a reproduction of his schematic representation.



**Figure 2: Types of blogs Krishnamurthy, 2002 (reproduced in Herring et al. 2005).**

## **2.9 Blogs in Education**

The use of blogs in educational settings ranges from primary and secondary education, to higher education and teachers' professional development. Blogs in these settings can offer enhanced opportunities to students to improve their communication skills and construct new knowledge through dialogue and reflective thinking (Jimoyiannis and Angelaina 2012).

The opportunity to construct new knowledge through dialogue and reflective thinking suggests that web based learning logs can promote constructivist learning (Du and Wagner 2005).

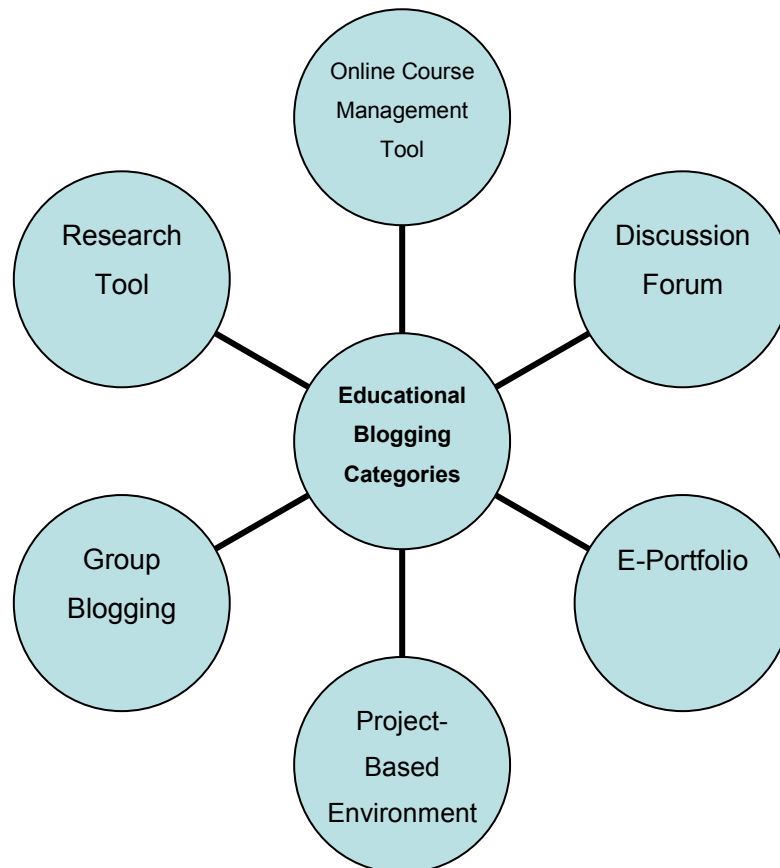
Other studies suggest that blogging can be used "to support student learning by capitalizing on students' interests and familiarity with online communication" (MacBride and Luehmann 2008,p.173).

### **2.9.1 Types and Purposes of Educational Blogging**

A recent literature review by Jimoyiannis and Angelaina (2012) on the educational uses of blogs resulted in the finding of six suggested categories. However it is acknowledged by the authors that most educational blogs combine more than one aspect. These are the six suggested categories as suggested by Jimoyiannis and Angelaina (2012);

- Online course management tool: A weekly topic is posted and each student posts her/his thoughts on the topic, as an assignment by the teacher
- Discussion forum: The blog acts as a forum where students discuss, share, and exchange information, thoughts, and ideas related to the course's subject
- e-Portfolio: Each student has a personal blog set up according to teacher guidelines and posts class or homework assignments, blogs are shared with peers and students can post and receive comments from fellow students.
- Group blogging: Students are grouped and work collaboratively on a group blog, groups can post comments on other groups' blogs

- Project-based environment: The blog can be used as a collaborative content-sharing space to support project-based learning activities
- Research tool: Blogs can constitute a platform for on-going literature review for academic purposes.



**Figure 3: Representation of 6 suggested categories of Educational Blogs by Jimoyiannis and Angelaina (2012)**

Five major uses for blogs in education by Henry Farrell (2003) are outlined by Stephen Downes in his article on Educational Blogging, Jimoyiannis and Angelaina (2012) suggest 6 categories as can be seen in **Figure 3** above, similarities and overlap are evident in these categories. The major uses of blogs in education will now be outlined.

First, the use of blogs to replace the standard class webpage, containing class information, rules, assignments, readings etc. The use of blogs for this type of course management does away with the need for knowledge of HTML.

Second, and this can overlap with the class webpage, the use of the blog to catalogue links pertaining to course content, often accompanied by comments on the content of each link by the instructor.

Thirdly, the use of blogs to facilitate online discussion, providing a space where all students could voice their opinion and develop a community of learners.

Fourth, blogs are used to organise class seminars and to provide summaries of readings and become group blogs, individual blogs authored by a group of people. In some ways this use of blogs is very similar to the final three categories outlined by Jimoyiannis and Angelaina (2012).

The fifth and final use of blogs in education is based on students writing an individual blog as part of their coursework. Their writing was generally an assigned task from the instructor (Downes 2004).

Ratcliff 2004 (cited in O'Donnell 2006) refers to the types and purposes of educational blogging. Ratcliff refers to three purposes for educational blogging; creating a learning community by giving students a space to share their writing; as a powerful tool to teach students about writing for an audience and thirdly to help students take advantage of the Web through the ease of blog software to synthesise information and make connections through their writing.

## **2.9.2 Educational Benefits of Blogging**

*“there is no doubt that blogs have great potential for educational use, both on their own and as extensions of the traditional classroom”*

*(Weiler 2003,p.75).*

This strong statement on the potential of blog use in the classroom was made by Greg Weiler. Weiler made this statement in 2003 when blogs were an emergent technology and

had not yet been the subject of empirical research and this lack of empirical research was reiterated by Jimoyiannis and Angelaina in 2012.

Notwithstanding this lack of empirical research, the scholarly literature available on blogging and the articles written reflecting on the use of blogs in the classroom identify educational benefits of the use of blogs and these benefits will be outlined and discussed in this section.

One of the earliest bloggers and a prominent and much cited advocate of the use of Web 2.0 tools and in particular blogs in the classroom is Will Richardson. Richardson sums up the benefits of blogging in his article on the use of Web Logs in the English Classroom as “an easy and inexpensive way to improve, instruction, facilitate publishing, build community, involve different audiences, and provide a lasting record of learning” (Richardson 2003,p.42). Richardson based his observations on his use of blogging with his own students and was one of the early adopters of blogging, writing his first post in weblog-ed.com in 2002. The benefits of blogging as summarised by Will Richardson will now be outlined.

### ***2.9.2.1 Capitalising on Students’ Media Literacies***

One of the earliest works on the potential of blogs in education is Jo Ann Oravec in her article “*Bookmarking the World: Weblog Applications in Education*” (2002), which demonstrates an understanding of weblogging in its infancy. The introduction to the article refers to educators use of weblogs as a way to “encourage students to access the Internet for useful information; weblogs can also help students to organize the resources they locate” (Oravec 2002,p.616). This is in contrast to other studies that place importance on the use of blogging to capitalise on students’ media literacies recognising that students already possess a comfort with and interest in media communication technology (MacBride and Luehmann 2008), (Duffy 2007) and that “many students are already intrinsically motivated to use new media” (Ellison and Wu 2008,p.101).

The potential for blogging to change the landscape of education is a benefit suggested by Peter Duffy. Duffy comments that many students are already highly socially active in web based environments creating content and interacting with and commenting on one another’s

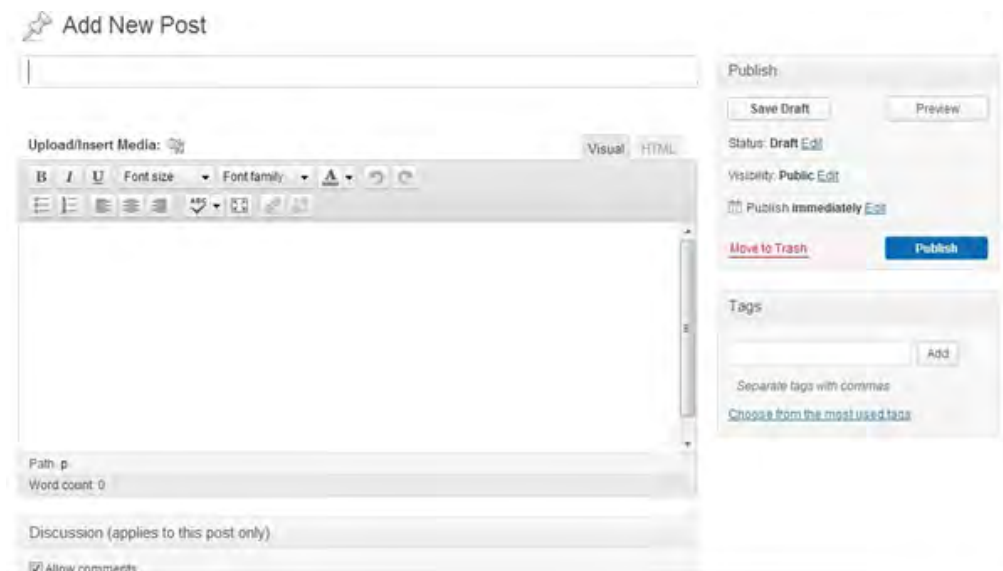
materials without realising they are doing so and that these tools for interaction of which blogging is one, can accomplish “some of the work that students need to do in order to read well, respond critically, and write vigorously” (Duffy 2007,p.123).

### **2.9.2.2 Ease of Use**

The attractiveness of blogs in both the educational community and the Internet at large is their ease of use, that an entry can be edited or updated without worrying about page formats or HTML (Downes 2004).

Pages can be created easily and data and accompanying media is entered through a simple form, (Duffy 2007), in a format similar to that of many social networking sites such as Facebook, Google+. Education specific platforms such as Kidblog.org and Edublogs.org allow for safe, moderated and monitored blogging by students, allowing administrative control to be retained by teacher.

A screenshot of the posting format can be seen in **Figure 4**.



**Figure 4: Screenshot of posting format with Kidblog.org**

### **2.9.2.3 A New Learning Environment**

An important educational benefit suggested is that blogging may “disrupt traditional communication and learning patterns in the classroom” (Ellison and Wu 2008,p.105).

Knowledge sharing becomes increasingly student to student and student to instructor rather than the traditional sage on the stage approach to teaching. Blogs provide an opportunity for a “student-centered learning environment” (MacBride and Luehmann 2008,p. 179) which allows students to learn from each other. Blogging allows for learning to be shared and provides a valuable link between home and school, providing an opportunity for parents to become an audience and interact with their child.

### **2.9.2.4 Critical and Analytical Thinking**

At an early stage of the blogging genre it was identified that the development of blogs can cause students to become more analytical and critical as they respond to Internet material. Blogging may also result in students defining their own views in the context of others’ writings. (Oravec 2002).

One of the first empirical studies was carried out by Du and Wagner in 2005. The effect on learning was a key component of their research. Du and Wagner identified that the use of weblogs could facilitate active learning in three ways; keeping a weblog requires active construction of meaning and organisation of thought by the students, the on-going use of weblogs promotes incremental improvement or continuous learning rather than exam focussed and web logging promotes self-reflection, helping students identify what they have learned and areas in which they need to improve.

This however is not unique to web logging and these benefits can also be seen in traditional learning logs. Du and Wagner recognise this and distinguish the difference between weblogs and traditional learning logs as the opportunity to participate in collaborative learning where “students can easily post thoughts, ideas and opinions, and interact with other students” (Du and Wagner 2005,p.3) and also have the opportunity to create a blog collaboratively as a group.

The association of blogging with writing is disputed by Stephen Downes, he argues that blogging as a practice is more about reading than writing and states “blogging isn’t really about writing at all” (2004,p.24). Blogging is firstly about reading and engaging with the content and with the its authors and involves reflecting, criticising, questioning and reacting, all higher order thinking skills. Downes concludes that this process of reading online and engaging with the authors and then reflecting on it, is a process which brings life into learning (Downes 2004).

### **2.9.2.5 An Audience for Writing and Student Investment**

Weblogs can work as a tool to motivate students to write and research over an extended period of time and provides a stage for students to analyse the Internet materials they obtain in the course of their study (Oravec 2003).

*The blogs give us a chance to communicate between us and motivate us to write more. When we publish on our blog, people from the entire world can respond by using the comments link. ... Blogging is an opportunity to exchange our point of view with the rest of the world not just people in our immediate environment.*

(Downes 2004,p.14)

The importance of an audience for writing, whether it be of peers or the wider internet audience, is also identified as potentially making students more invested in their writing, (Ellison and Wu 2008) making writing a more meaningful activity for students and resulting in an improvement of the quality of students’ writing (MacBride and Luehmann 2008).

The positive effect of an audience for student writing is one of the most prolific benefits identified across literature. In fact the study by MacBride and Luehmann in 2008 suggests that the decision of the teacher to keep pupil blogs private or to make them public has a significant effect on student motivation and the quality of writing produced. Students are motivated not only by the use of technology and the ability to type, but also by the audience they have when writing online (Poling 2005).

### **2.9.3 Good Practice in Educational Blogging**

Research carried out by Jimoylannis and Angelaina (2012) into educational blogging resulted in recommendations suggested to promote good practice in educational blogging.

The authors recommend that the instructor should give opportunities to the students to become familiar with blogging principles by providing examples of good blogs. It is also recommended that the blog should be designed and organised both technically and pedagogically and that the instructor should consistently monitor the blog and read and interact with students through posting comments, questions and alternate views. Instructors are recommended to encourage all students, especially those with low participation, to engage by supporting them technically and cognitively. It is also suggested that mandatory writing assignments be posted to ensure all students participate and that assessment is a constitutional dimension of the blog (Jimoyiannis and Angelaina 2012).

### **2.9.4 Blogs and Learning Theories**

Dewey, Piaget and Vgotsky advocate a constructivist or meaning based approach to learning, emphasising the learners' role in constructing meaning, building understanding through interaction with their environment (Wilson and Lowry 2000). Papert is also a constructivist in that like Piaget, children are viewed as builders of their own cognitive tools and knowledge is a personal experience to be constructed (Ackermann 2001).

As already highlighted, blogs are useful teaching and learning tools because they provide a space for students to reflect and publish their thoughts and understandings and they provide opportunities for feedback and potential scaffolding of new ideas. Hyperlinking is also a feature of blogging which helps students to place knowledge in context and also help in knowledge construction and meaning making (Ferdig and Trammell 2004).

Blogging provides an ecology of learning that highlight the "knowledge construction" processes of the learner and reflecting Vygotsky's theory of education, the social communication aspect of blogging develops "meaning making". The provision of an

authentic opportunity to publish knowledge, that students' have constructed and assimilated, makes blogging an effective vehicle for providing a constructivist environment for students.

### **2.9.5 Blogging and the Primary School Curriculum**

The Primary School Curriculum was revised in 1999, coinciding with the start of the growth of blogs. The new Primary Curriculum recognised the integration of information and communication technologies as a key issue. It also recognises the increasing importance of technological skills for advancement in education, work and leisure.

*“The curriculum integrates information and communication technologies into the teaching and learning process and provides children with opportunities to use modern technology to enhance their learning in all subjects.”*

(NCCA 1999b,p.29)

Blogging provides a platform for many objectives of the Primary School Curriculum to be met. A look at the English Language Curriculum Objectives for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes reveals that many of the specific content objectives may be achieved through the use of blogs.

The presence of an authentic audience can fulfil a number of content objectives set out in the curriculum; blogging enables the child to see his/her writing valued, to write for an increasingly varied audience, to receive and give constructive responses to writing and motivates students to choose a register of language appropriate to subject and audience and to choose a form and quality of presentation appropriate to the audience.

The expression of reactions to personal experiences, experiences of others, of reading, of other poetry, literature, music, artwork, films, television programmes and videos, also form a large part of the senior class curriculum (NCCA 1999a). Blogging provides an ideal stage for students to express their reactions and to discuss them with their peers and a wider audience.

Blogging also has a role to play as an assessment tool in the primary school curriculum. The use of e-portfolios is recommended as a tool for assessment in the Assessment Guidelines for Primary Schools. As discussed earlier, e-portfolios are an ideal use of blogging. Blogging

provides a tool for students to publish their work, in chronological order and share their progress with their classmates, parents and a wide audience.

## *2.10 Conclusion*

This chapter has examined behaviourism, constructivism, constructionism and social constructivism. The place of learning theories in the 1999 Primary School Curriculum and the pedagogical and learning principles of the curriculum was outlined.

Student motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic was explored and research based strategies for motivating students were outlined.

An overview of the development of ICT in education in Ireland was given and followed by an outline of the place of technology in the primary school curriculum.

A synopsis of the second generation of web based applications (Web 2.0) was followed by an analysis of blogging, beginning with the history of blogging and looking at the features, types and growth of blogging. The literature on the use of blogs in education and types and purposes of educational blogs was then examined. The educational benefits of blogging and good practice in blogging as identified in literature were then outlined.

The chapter concluded by situating blogging within learning theories and its place within the primary school curriculum.

Chapter 3 will describe the research approach and data collection methods chosen for this study.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### *3.1 Introduction*

This chapter presents the research methodology used in this study. The research issue is explained and the research setting and target population detailed. The research method and data collection tools are described and their selection justified.

### *3.2 Research Question*

The research question being addressed in this study is the value of blogging when used as a pedagogical tool in the primary classroom.

The primary aims of the research are to investigate

- The educational benefits of blogging
- The effect on students' attitude to learning
- The importance of an authentic audience

### *3.3 Research Setting*

#### **3.3.1 Target Population**

The target population for this study was a 5<sup>th</sup> class group of 29 pupils, 15 boys and 14 girls. All of the pupils have access to computers at home and have regularly used the laptop room in the school. All pupils have acquired basic computer skills.

The target population was chosen as it is within the researcher's school and were easy to access.

### **3.3.2 Physical Setting**

The research took place in a rural primary school in the west of Ireland. It is a co-educational school with an enrolment of approximately 300 pupils.

The target population used the school laptop room when blogging, this room is equipped with 34 laptops and a digital projector. The class had two timetabled sessions of 50 minutes a week in the laptop room.

### **3.3.3 Online Setting**

The online setting used was [www.Kidblog.org](http://www.Kidblog.org) which was chosen as it is a free to use, advertisement free software, designed for use in classroom settings, and allows teacher and researcher full administrative control.

Students were provided with individual blogs which they accessed with their own login and password. The students' blogs are public in line with recommendations of MacBride and Luehmann (2008), Ellison and Wu (2008) and Poling (2005). All content on the blogs, both posts and comments are moderated by the class teacher and the researcher before being published to ensure a safe experience for the pupils.

In line with good practice in educational blogging, identified by Jimoyiannis and Angelaina (2012), examples of good blogs were identified and shown to pupils. Mandatory writing assignments were assigned as well as encouraging voluntary posting, in order to ensure participation of every pupil. Both the teacher and researcher monitored the blogs and provided feedback and encouragement through posting comments.

Some of the mandatory posting assignments required reflection on classroom learning and provided an opportunity for pupils to publish knowledge that they have constructed and assimilated and thereby provide a constructivist environment for pupils.

The importance of an audience for the pupils' writing was identified as an important aspect of the blogging experience, (Ellison and Wu 2008, MacBride and Luehmann 2008, Poling 2005) and this was addressed by using Twitter to request visitors to the blogs using

#edchatie a hashtag commonly used by educators of all levels in Ireland. A formal project was also undertaken, the 100 Word Challenge <http://100wc.net/>, which provided a weekly prompt for creative writing but also accomplished an aim of the project; to provide an audience for children's writing. A team of teachers leave comments for each child and children are encouraged to visit the blogs of other children and leave a constructive comment on their writing. An additional incentive is the showcasing of a few selected posts on the 100 Word Challenge website.

### ***3.4 Research Approach***

"Research is a process of discovering essential questions, gathering data and analysing it to answer those questions" (Shagoury and Power 2012,p.2).

This section will describe the background of research paradigms and a variety of research methods.

#### **3.4.1 Background of Research Paradigms**

Two approaches to investigations are generally accepted and have been labelled positivist research and postpositivist research reflecting the epistemological assumptions of each type of research (Gall et al. 1996). A third approach, the mixed method combines both previous types of research and is increasingly being used in social, behavioural and human science study (Creswell and Clark 2010).

##### ***3.4.1.1 Postivist Research***

Positivist research also known as quantitative research is based on the theory that "features of the social environment constitute an independent reality and are relatively constant across time and setting" (Gall et al. 1996,p.28).

Quantitative research methods were originally developed in the natural sciences to study natural phenomena (Hohmann 2006). Quantitative data collection methods include surveys, tests, formal interviews, laboratory experiments and non-participant observation, an important feature of quantitative research is that it is highly structured and produces data that is suitable for statistical analysis (Wilkinson 2000).

#### **3.4.1.2 Postpositivist Research**

Postpositivist research, or qualitative research as it is more commonly referred to, reflects the assumption that “features of the social environment are constructed as interpretations by individuals and that these interpretations tend to be transitory and situational” (Gall et al. 1996,p.28).

Qualitative research methods were originally developed in in the social sciences for the study of social and cultural phenomenon (Hohmann 2006).

Qualitative research is defined as “a way of knowing in which a researcher gathers, organises, and interprets information obtained from humans using his or her eyes and ears as filters” by Lichtman (2012,p.5). Qualitative research often consists of in-depth interviews and observations of people in natural and social environments (Lichtman 2012).

#### **3.4.1.3 Mixed Methods Research**

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie in their attempt to place mixed methods as a third research paradigm, formally define mixed methods research as “the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study” (2004,p.17)

The combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods allows for the strengths of each method to compensate for the weaknesses of either, this is a fundamental principle of the mixed methods approach (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004).

#### **3.4.1.4 Research Paradigm Chosen for this Study**

A mixed method research paradigm was chosen for this study combining qualitative and quantitative research approaches.

### **3.5 Research Methods**

#### **3.5.1 Case Study**

From the early 1970's the case study began to be acknowledged as a research approach in its own right. Simons proposed that the use of research that is both creative and scientific is more likely to produce findings that can make a major contribution to educational change (Simons 1996).

A case study strives to portray participants' experiences, thoughts and feelings about situations, looking at a case or phenomenon in real life context and usually employ many types of data (Cohen et al. 2007). Stake (1995a) contends that a good case study is patient and reflective, and that qualitative researchers are noninterventionists who try to "see what would have happened had they not been there" (p.45).

According to Yin (2011), the case study method is an appropriate form of enquiry when

*"investigators either desire or are forced by circumstances (a) to define research topics broadly and not narrowly, (b) to cover contextual or complex multivariate conditions and not just isolated variables, and (c) to rely on multiple and not singular sources of evidence"*

(Yin 2011,p.xi).

One of the advantages cited for case study research is its uniqueness, its capacity for understanding complexity in particular contexts (Simons 1996,p.225).

### **3.5.2 Action Research**

Action research is a form of self-reflective investigation undertaken by participants in order to improve the justice and rationality of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out (Carr and Kemmis 2004).

Kurt Lewin, the main pioneer of action research, associated action research with doing field experiments rather than in a laboratory (Reason and Bradbury 2001).

The main characteristics of action research are that it is practice based and is about improving practice, creating knowledge and generates living theories of practice. Action research is usually undertaken by practitioners within a social situation, the researcher is inside the situation and therefore their presence will inevitably influence what is happening (McNiff and Whitehead 2009).

### **3.5.3 Ethnographic Research**

Ethnographic research “is the study of social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations, and communities” (Reeves et al. 2008,p.512)

Ethnography is based on the assumption that it must first be discovered what people actually do and the reasons for doing it before the researcher applies their own subjective interpretations. Ethnography as an approach is scientific and investigative, and uses the researcher as the primary tool of data collection (LeCompte and Schensul 1999).

Ethnographic studies gather data through participant observations and interviews, with the researcher immersed in the social setting in order to generate a rich understanding of the social action which occurs (Reeves et al. 2008).

## ***3.6 Research Method in this Study***

The case study approach was chosen for this study. The rationale for choosing the case study approach and limitations of the case study approach are outlined below.

### **3.6.1 Rationale for Choosing a Case Study Approach**

The case study approach was chosen as it is a method which allows for the boundaries of space and time that the researcher is limited by. The researcher is limited by a short time frame, and so chose a target population located within her own school, so that they are easily accessible.

Students are familiar with the researcher and the presence of the researcher while classes undertake various ICT projects is not uncommon. The presence of the researcher therefore should not be a major disturbance to the ordinary activity of the class, which fulfils the suggestion of Stake (1995a), that ordinary activity should not be disturbed when undertaking a case study approach.

A case study approach also allow for multiple methods of data collection in order to triangulate data and theory and to approach the intricate processes and interactions occurring within the organisation chosen (Cassell and Symon 2004). A mixed methods approach to data collection allows for both quantitative and qualitative data to be collected and increases validity and reliability (Cohen et al. 2007).

## **3.7 *Data Collection Tools***

The data collection tools used in this study were questionnaires, focus groups and interview. Each method will be outlined below.

### **3.7.1 Questionnaire**

Questionnaires are composed of two main question types, closed questions and open-ended questions. Highly structured, closed questions are useful for generating quantitative data which can be subjected to statistical treatment and analysis. They are quicker to code and analyse and are often more focused than open-ended questions.

Open-ended questions are more appropriately used in site-specific case study as they can capture the specifics of the case. Open ended questions are useful if all possible answers are unknown or would require a long list of options. They are also useful when used in a pre-test which generates items subsequently used as closed questions in a later questionnaire (Cohen et al. 2007).

The researcher used such open-ended questions in a pre-test questionnaire to establish students' prior knowledge and background with computers and blogging and to investigate the students' attitude towards writing.

### **3.7.1.1 Questionnaire Design**

Alice Bell makes some important recommendations in her article *Designing and Testing Questionnaires for Children*. Bell argues that survey research can be feasibly undertaken with children. Carefully adapted questionnaires may be used to gather data from children from approximately seven years of age although the degree of adaptation required is greatly reduced with children from the age of eleven years on.

Simplicity is the key to questionnaire design for use with young children, using short questions and straightforward syntax. Unambiguous language is essential to questionnaire design. Questions with a complex structure, double barrelled, hypothetical or with a negative formulation should be avoided as these tend to cause difficulties in comprehension for children. This recommendation to avoid negative questions is in direct contrast to the standard formulation of adult questionnaire where an equal balance of negative and positive questions is thought necessary to ensure the quality of the data (Bell 2007).

The researcher used questionnaires in this study to establish how students felt about blogging, in a confidential manner, without fear of judgement from their peers or teacher.

A pre-blogging questionnaire was designed, piloted by the researcher's colleagues and distributed to pupils in order to gather information on students' background and experience of technology and internet use and their attitude to blogging before they began use of the

blogs. The preblogging questionnaire consisted of 10 questions and is a mixture of closed and open-ended questions (see **Appendix C**).

A second questionnaire was designed and piloted with a selection of pupils from another class within the school who also blog and are of a similar age group to the target population. This questionnaire consisted of both open and closed questions and its objective was to gather students' views on blogging in a confidential manner. The post-blogging questionnaire contains 24 questions and is a mixture of closed and open-ended questions (see **Appendix D**).

### **3.7.2 Focus Group**

Focus groups are group discussions exploring a specific set of issues in which participants are encouraged to talk to each other instead of asking questions of each person in turn (Barbour and Kitzinger 1998). Discussion takes place under the guidance of a moderator, who facilitates the discussion in a non-directive and non-biased way, using predetermined questions (Gibson 2007).

The focus group is a suitable method of data collection with the target population based on findings of Horner (2000), who summarises that children aged eleven to fourteen years have the necessary cognitive, language and social skills to successfully participate in a focus group.

Heary and Hennessy (2002), identified advantages and limitations of using focus groups with children. The emphasis on the adult-child relationship, present in one to one interviews, is removed and the child may be less likely to respond in the way they believe the researcher desires, thus increasing the validity of the data gathered. Unlike an interview the focus group removes the pressure from the child to answer and can continue if a child does not respond. The acknowledgement of the participants as experts is a further important advantage when the aim is essentially to discover the children's view of their world. This results in data that has a high validity. A final advantage of focus groups is their flexibility and ability to combine well with other methods of data collection.

The limitations of focus groups, identified across literature, are outlined by Heary and Hennessy (2002). The major limitation is that focus groups are not useful for testing hypotheses in traditional experiment design, nor are they appropriate for drawing inferences about larger populations or research which requires quantitative findings. Quality of findings is also inextricably linked to the skill of the moderator. Caution must also be exercised when conducting focus groups with children as they may not offer their own opinion rather they may adopt a view previously raised by others (Heary and Hennessy 2002).

The researcher chose to use focus groups as a tool to collect data as it is convenient for both researcher and target population and also gives an opportunity to delve further into responses provided from the questionnaire data.

Single sex groups were used as recommended by Mauthner, who found that “single sex groups can be more successful than mixed ones where boys who often talk more, more loudly and determine the conversation topics tend to overshadow girls” (1997,p.23). Three focus groups, each consisting of four to five pupils, each lasting 10 minutes were conducted.

The focus groups were asked about their overall impression of blogging, if blogging had any effect on how they learnt, was blogging enjoyable, and finally pupils were asked about writing on the blog.

### **3.7.3 Interview**

The aim of the qualitative research interview is “to contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees” (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006,p.314).

Interviews are classified in many ways, with the most common being structured, semi-structured and unstructured (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). Unstructured interviews generally equate to guided conversations, with questions evolving as the interview unfolds. Structured interviews are highly regulated, consisting generally of closed questions, with the same questions presented to participants in the same order. Semi-structured interviews, use open-ended questions based on the central research question of the study, where the

interviewer although has questions prepared, they remain open and flexible allowing individual participant experiences to be probed in more detail (Knox and Burkard 2009).

A semi-structured interview model was chosen by the researcher, as the target population for interview was the class teacher; therefore a uniform approach to the interview was not required, although the interview was guided by the research questions under study. The class teacher was asked about her overall experience of blogging with the class, including benefits and limitations, she was also asked about the effect on students' attitude and motivation and if she thought the blog was an effective tool for learning in the classroom.

### ***3.8 Validity, Reliability and Triangulation***

#### **3.8.1 Validity**

"Validity refers to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, correctness, and usefulness of the inferences a researcher makes" (Uzunboylu and Ozdamli 2011).

Validity can be analysed in a number of ways, internal validity is concerned with the relationships between cause and effect and external validity is concerned with the extent to which this relationship can be generalised to other contexts (Bassegy 2000). Internal validity concerns how accurate the researcher is in describing the phenomena being researched (Cohen et al. 2007). In terms of participant responses it must also be noted that research findings will be based on these and respondents, particularly children, are subject to the influences of context and setting and may make an attempt to please, impress when answering (Bell 2007). Considerable care was taken when preparing the questionnaires and focus group questions in order to elicit good quality data from the pupils.

Concurrent validation is powerfully demonstrated by using triangulation, particularly in qualitative research. Concurrent validity is demonstrated by data from one instrument correlating highly with data gathered from another instrument. In this study three methods of data collection were employed in order to achieve triangulation and enhance the validity of the research.

As a case study is a study of a particular phenomenon and is chosen due to its particular interest to the researcher, it is not chosen as a typical example and findings are not generalised to other contexts therefore issues of external validity are not relevant (Bassey 2000).

A number of strategies were undertaken in order to enhance the validity of the study. Guidelines for effective questionnaire and interview design were followed in order to minimise bias on the part of the interviewer, respondent and question bias and also to ensure that questions were clear and unambiguous. Questionnaires and interview questions were piloted before use and recommendations incorporated.

### **3.8.2 Reliability**

Reliability is concerned with the dependability, consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents (Cohen et al. 2007). Reliability is an important aspect of quantitative data collection and less so in qualitative research as approaches such as the case study approach explore a particular phenomenon or unique experience in detail. Qualitative research does not seek to generalise findings however it is argued that that the data gathered still needs to be reliable, that if gathered and analysed by different researchers using the same methodology the same findings should be generated (Willig 2008).

The questionnaire is a more reliable instrument than the interview or focus group, given that it is worded identically for each participant and is answered at approximately the same point in time by every participant.

### **3.8.3 Triangulation**

“Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour” (Cohen et al. 2007,p.195).

This research was a mixed method study utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection in order to increase validity and reliability. Three methods of data collection were utilised, questionnaires, pre-blogging and post-blogging, focus group interviews and a semi-structured interview with the class teacher.

### **3.9 Ethics**

“Ethical behaviour represents a set of moral principles, rules or standards governing a person or a profession. We understand that to be ethical is to “do good and avoid evil” (Lichtman 2012, p.54).

Cohen et al. (2007) offer further conditions for school based research project which encompass anonymity of participants, confidentiality of data, interviewees afforded the chance to verify their statements, participants given a copy of final report, permission for publication and the research if possible should be of benefit to the school and participants.

Privacy of those pupils who took part in this study was maintained and no information was revealed in this thesis which would identify the school or individuals who took part in this research. Consent for the research to take place was given by the Board of Management of the school (see **Appendix A**); parents were informed of their children’s participation in the study (see **Appendix B**). The research and the aims of the research were explained to both pupils and parents and the interviewee was afforded the chance to verify her statements. A copy of the thesis will be made available to the school. The researcher strongly believes that the research was of benefit to the school and participants. With a further four class levels within the school now participating in blogging the study provides an important resource for teachers to be aware of good practice in blogging and understand the pedagogical and motivational benefits of blogging.

### ***3.10 Timeline***

November 2012	Thesis proposal submitted
December 2012 – February 2013	Chapter 2 literature review drafted.
February 2013	Research methodologies researched and data collection methods chosen. Pre-Blogging questionnaire distributed.
March 2013	Blogging began with target population. Draft of Chapter 3 Research Methodology begun.
June 2013	Post blogging questionnaire distributed, focus groups and interview with class teacher conducted
July 2013	Data from the findings correlated. Chapter 4 Findings drafted.
August 2013	Chapter 5 Discussion, Chapter 6 Conclusion and Chapter 1 Introduction drafted.
September 2013	Final draft submitted to tutor
October 2013	Thesis submitted for grading.

### ***3.11 Conclusion***

This chapter has detailed the research approach and methods utilised in this study and the research tools used to gather data. The research will be a mixed methods case study using both quantitative and qualitative tools. Chapter 4 will present the findings from the questionnaires, focus groups and interview undertaken.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### *4.1 Introduction*

This chapter will present the main findings of the study undertaken. The study was conducted with 29 children in a Fifth Class in a rural primary school in the west of Ireland. The class used the Kidblog platform to host individual blogs as well as a teacher's blog for the duration of the study over a 4 month period. Both qualitative and quantitative data was gathered using questionnaires, focus groups and interviews.

The primary aims of the research are to investigate

- The educational benefits of blogging
- The effect on students' attitude to learning
- The importance of an authentic audience

This chapter will discuss the findings under the following headings;

- Capitalising on students' media literacies
- Ease of use
- A new learning environment
- Critical and analytical thinking
- An Audience for Writing and Student Investment

#### **4.1.1 Overview of Research Undertaken**

The class consisted of 29 pupils. 25 pupils were present when the pre-blogging questionnaire was distributed and all 29 pupils completed the post blogging questionnaire.

Three focus groups, each consisting of four to five pupils, lasting 10 minutes each were conducted and a semi-structured interview was carried out with the class teacher.

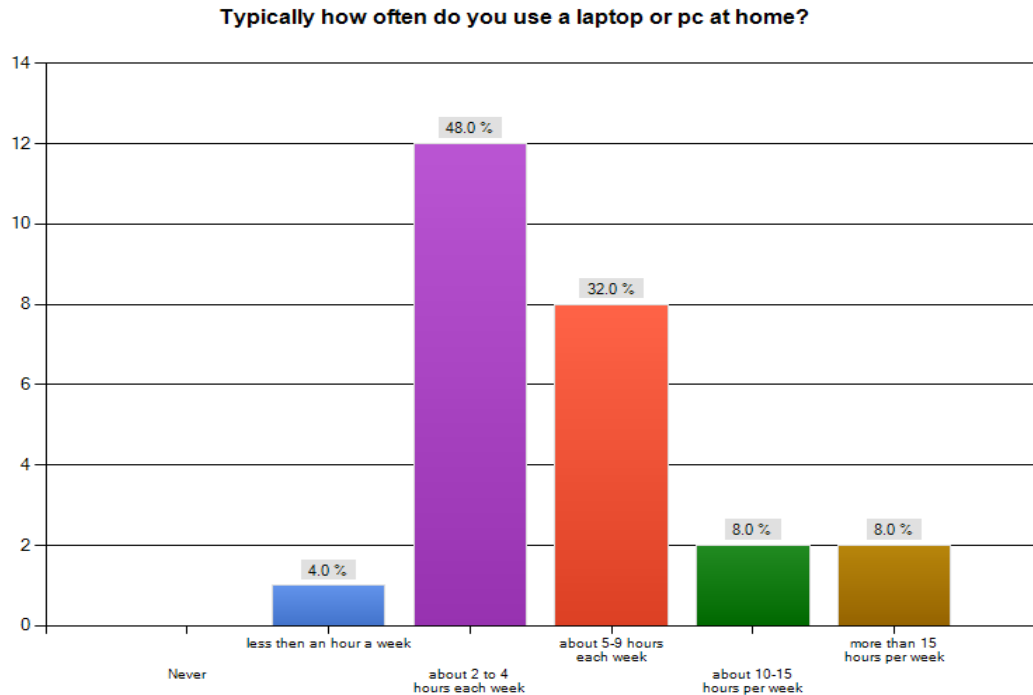
## *4.2 Capitalising on Students' Media Literacies*

### **4.2.1 Students' Attitude towards Computer Use in School**

The preliminary questionnaire found that all students had a positive attitude towards use of computers in school with 64% reporting that they enjoyed using computers at school all of the time, 32% enjoyed using computers most of the time and only one student (4%) indicated that they enjoyed using computers in school some of the time.

### **4.2.2 Students' Home Access to PC or Laptop**

All students had access to a laptop or PC at home, as illustrated below in **Figure 5**. Most students (48%) spent typically 2-4 hours each week using a laptop or PC at home, 32% typically spent 5-9 hours per week on a laptop or PC, two students (8%) spent 10-15 hours on a laptop or PC per week and two spent more than 15 hours per week using a laptop or PC. Only one student spent less than an hour a week using a laptop or PC at home.



**Figure 5: Pupils' typical weekly use of laptop or PC at home**

### 4.2.3 Common Computer Usage

When students were asked about what they spent most of their time doing on the computer, web 2.0 tools featured strongly with 92% of students choosing Youtube as one of the things that they spent most of their time on when using the laptop or PC, games were the next popular choice (68%), followed by Facebook (44%).

8% of pupils reported that they did not use social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, 40% of pupils spent between 2-3 hours per week on social networking sites, 16% spent up to an hour, 8% spent 4-5 hours per week, and one student (4%) spent from 6-7 hours per week on social networking sites.

32% of pupils have created and published material to the web, mostly citing uploading videos to Youtube, posting pictures to Facebook and using Instagram.

#### **4.2.4 Student Familiarity with Internet**

The class teacher also remarked in the interview how the pupils experimented with different things on the blog such as inserting media into posts and that they showed no fear or difficulties with the medium of blogging. She attributed this to the fact that pupils have grown up using the internet and sites such as Club Penguin, Moshi Monsters and other such social networking sites for young children and this has made them comfortable connecting with others no matter where in the world they are.

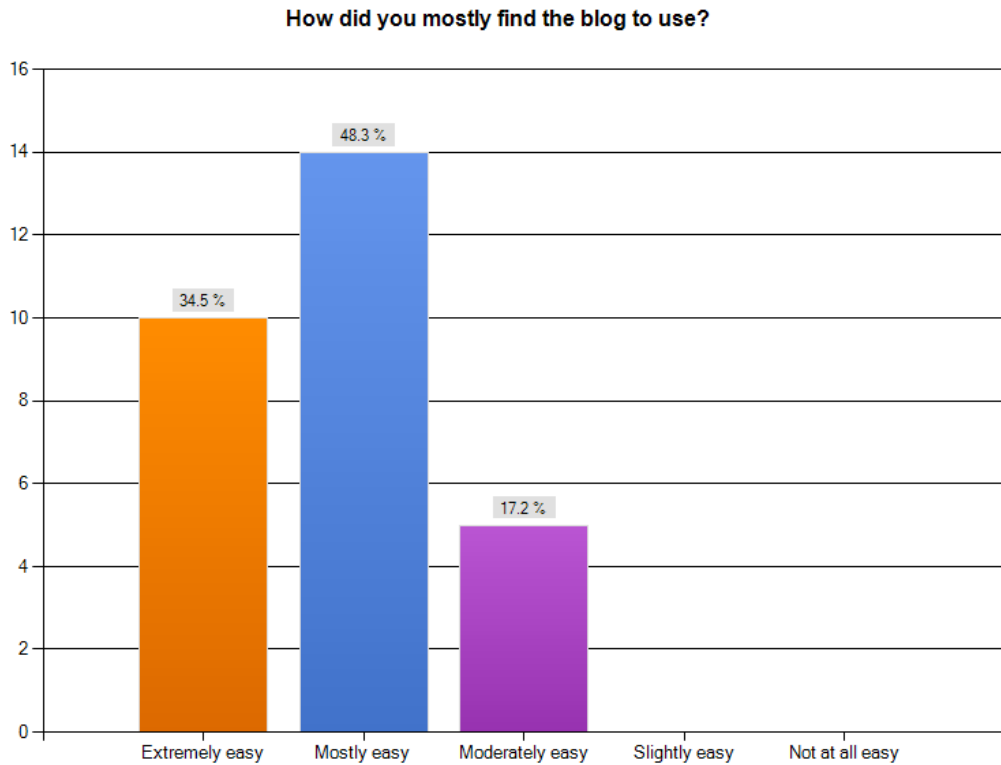
The class teacher also noticed that when pupils were unsure of how to do something or even a spelling that they were automatically “googling” how to do it and were used to using the internet as a resource.

### **4.3 Ease of Use**

This section will describe whether students and teacher found the blog easy to use and how this facilitated continuous learning.

#### **4.3.1 Ease of Use**

As can be seen in **Figure 6**, 34.5% of students found the blog extremely easy to use, 48.3% found the blog mostly easy to use and the remaining 17.2% found the blog moderately easy to use. No student reported any difficulty in using the blog when answering the questionnaire but one child in the focus group reported that “it was hard at first and then it got easier”.



**Figure 6: Ease of use**

The class teacher reported that she herself found the blog difficult to use at first but as time passed it became much easier to use and by the end of the study it had become second nature and the teacher reported that she was now looking for a platform with more scope for development.

When speaking about how the pupils found using the blog when blogging began in the class the class teacher reported that “they found it easy enough”. She described how as the pupils are so used to technology in their everyday lives, the blog seemed like an extension of this and “without thinking about it or analysing it in anyway the blog, twitter and web quests became an extension of themselves which they embraced with open arms never questioning its existence in their lives”

The pupils also experimented with personalising the themes of their own blogs, avatars and using different font types and colours.

### **4.3.2 Continuous Learning**

The blog displays pupils' learning in an easily searchable, chronological fashion which is also easily organised by tags. Posts are easily editable and can be accessed from home so pupils can update posts with further learning.

The class teacher identified ease of access as important as it gave pupils the opportunity to build on the work they had done, generating ownership of their work, allowing them the freedom to go back and add more information or ideas to posts as they thought of them. A pupil also mentioned that it was helpful to be able to access the blog in the evening time at home and continue working if they did not get their post finished at school.

## ***4.4 New Learning Environment***

It is suggested that blogging changes the traditional communication and learning patterns in the classroom, with knowledge sharing becoming increasingly student to student and student to teacher.

### **4.4.1 Knowledge Sharing**

The pupils in the focus groups when asked about blogging and why it was important to them responded by saying "it was a different way of learning", "I think it's fun, it's fun online, it's making work fun, sometimes it doesn't feel like work when you are working on the blog"

Many mentions were made of reading other children's blogs both in the classroom, in other classrooms and other schools across the world. The frequency that the pupils read posts by pupils within their school and posts on blogs external to the school is illustrated in the tables underneath.

#### 4.4.1.1 Reading posts

All pupils reported reading posts written by other pupils in their school, 44.8% reading posts once a week/fortnight and 34.5% reading posts 2-3 times per week.

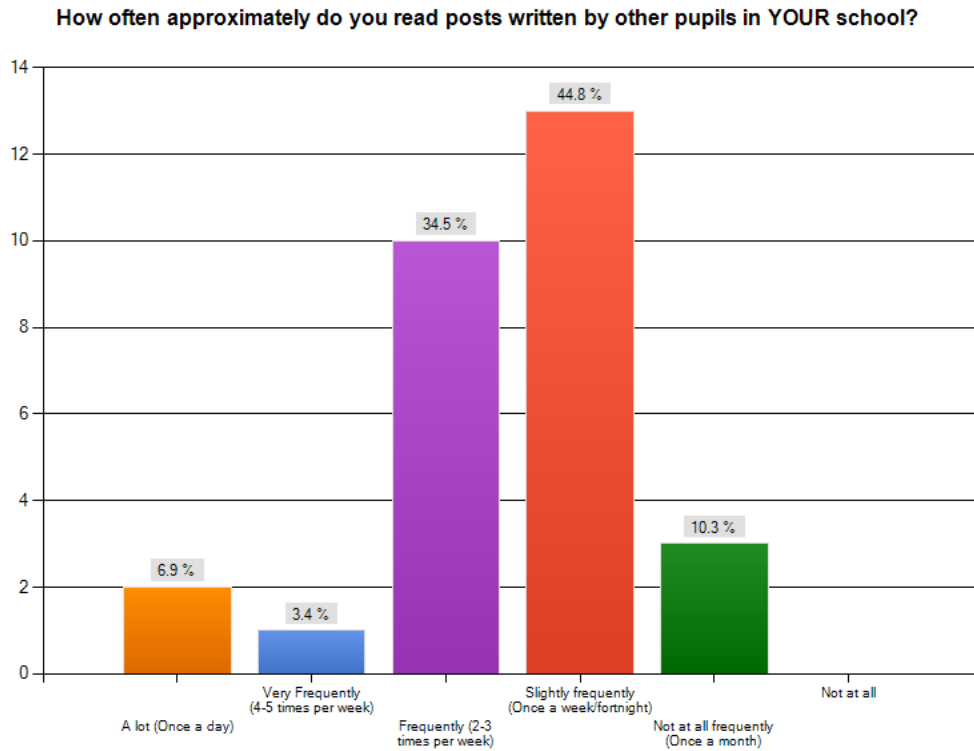
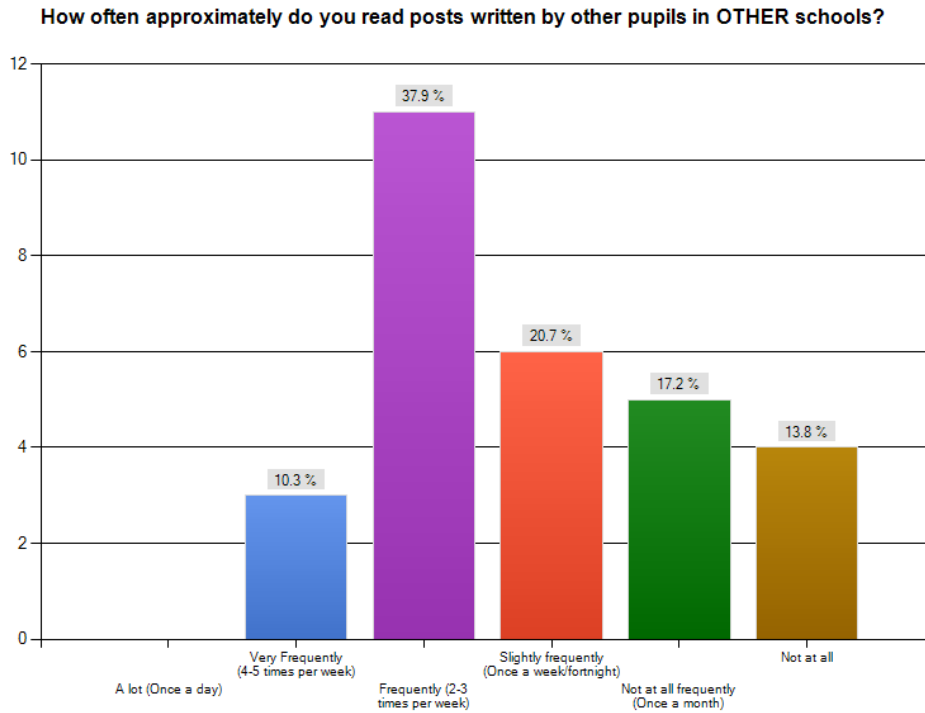


Figure 7: How often approximately pupils read posts written by other pupils in their school

Figure 8 illustrates how often approximately pupils read posts written by pupils in other schools, whether in Ireland or internationally. 10.3% of pupils read posts written by pupils in other schools very frequently (4-5 times per week), 37.9% of pupils frequently (2-3 times per week) and 20.7% slightly frequently (once a week/fortnight). 68.9% read posts by children in other schools at least once a week, 31% read posts by children in other schools once a month or not at all.



**Figure 8: How often approximately pupils read posts written by children in other schools**

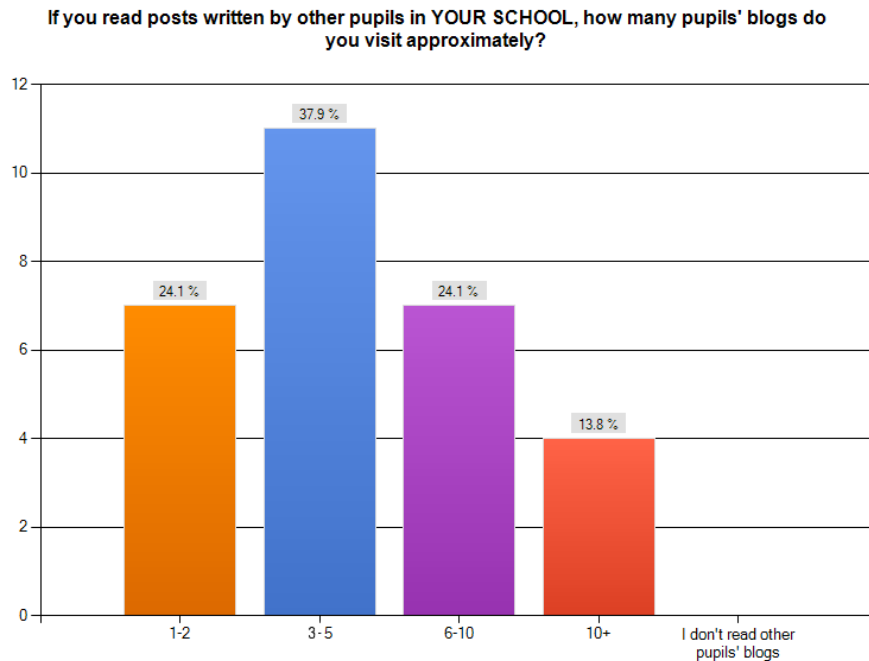
#### **4.4.1.2 Visiting blogs**

Children were also asked how many blogs approximately they visited both within and outside of their school. 75.8% visited at least 3 blogs within their school, with the remaining 24.1% visiting 1-2 blogs within their school. 82.8% visited at least 3 blogs outside of their own school, 3.4% visit 1-2 blogs outside of their school and 13.8% do not visit any blogs outside of their school.

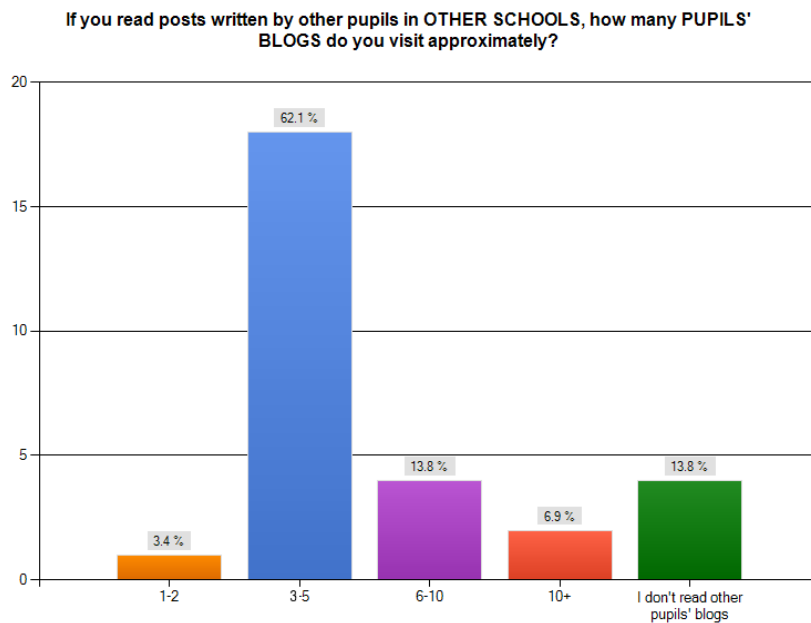
In the open-ended questions in the post blogging questionnaire children identified the benefits of reading other pupils' blogs. They mentioned benefits such as finding ideas, getting "good information and good ideas," the ability to comment on others posts and ask questions.

"I like reading other people's blogs to get ideas for my own blog, finding out what other people are doing, commenting, and basically just learning."

The graphs following show how many pupils' blogs approximately, children in the class visit within their own school and in the second graph how many blogs approximately pupils visit from other schools.



**Figure 9: How many blogs approximately pupils visit within their school.**



**Figure 10: How many blogs approximately pupils visit from other schools.**

Children identified in the open-ended questions why they enjoyed reading blogs from other schools. One child stated “you get to see what other pupils in schools all over the globe are learning about”, another commented that “it allows you to find out what they’re doing and their ways of learning and being able to connect with them”.

Pupils acknowledged that reading other blogs helped them learn. In a focus group a pupil commented that “we read everyone’s posts and we learn stuff from our posts and their posts and everyone’s post”.

The class teacher described the pupils were reading each other’s blogs and how reluctant readers have also engaged with reading blogs of their peers. She described reluctant readers of actual physical books were not intimidated by reading posts on the blog and how she knew from speaking with them “that they read their peers, their own classmates work, they read 100 word challenges”. She also outlined how reading posts on the blog probably allowed them to read at a comfortable level and the difficulties in choosing a physical book, that is at the correct level, was an interesting subject and also not an obviously easy book that their peers would be aware of, were not an issue.

*The Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011 – 2020* issued by the Department of Education and Skills affirms the importance of digital literacy and lists as a key target the increased awareness of the importance of digital literacy and the aim to “include assessments of primary student’s ability to read digital material as part of the national assessments of English reading” (2011,p.18).

#### **4.4.2 Disruption of traditional communication and learning patterns**

There is evidence of a disruption of the traditional communication and learning patterns in the classroom. Traditional communication methods such as comments in copybooks and pupil teacher conferences were replaced by private teacher to pupil comments through the blog. Web quests were used as a method of students learning and as one student remarked in the focus group “it was a different way of learning”.

#### **4.4.2.1 New methods of communication**

The blog also provided a forum for interaction and conversation between teacher and pupils in both public and private comments.

Private comments allowed for individual writer conferences and enabled feedback to be given unknown to a pupil's classmates while still viewable by pupil, teacher and the pupil's parents.

Comments enabled praise and encouragement to be received from a variety of sources; teacher, classmates, parents, grandparents, teachers from other schools, other sectors of education such as second and third level. Comments enabled a link to be established between classes in other schools as described previously in this chapter.

The blog also facilitated the pupils in sharing their work with parents, grandparents, other relations as well as a classmate who was living in Germany for some of the duration of the research. This pupil was able to follow what was happening in the classroom and contribute to a blog of her own.

Comments also allowed pupils to voice their opinions and give suggestions, creating a forum for open discussion within the classroom.

An example of a public comment between pupil and teacher is shown below in **Figure 11**, pupil and teacher names have been removed.



**Figure 11: Sample comments between teacher and pupil.**

The blog also enabled a link to be established between the class and a third level Information Technology class and their lecturer which culminated in the class visiting the university to present the story of their blogging journey to Information Technology students and the lecturing staff of the Department of Information Technology. **Figure 12** is an example of the certificate each student received in recognition of their presentation.



Figure 12: Certificate presented to students by the National University of Ireland, Galway

#### 4.4.2.2 New learning patterns

Pupils identified that blogging changed the way they learned and how it has changed. The comments below taken from the answers to question 22 in the post blogging questionnaire (see **Appendix D**) illustrate how the pupils believed blogging has changed how they learn;

“I think blogging has helped me learn because I have learned how to find the information myself and I think you learn a lot more this way”.

“You learn how to take the information you find interesting through a web quest unlike everyone reading the same textbook. You can then write about that information in the blog so everyone’s personality comes through.”

The class teacher also identified when interviewed, how blogging had impacted on her teaching methods and professional development.

“I’ve been learning; I’ve become a teacher who is learning all the time, with the kids, through the blog and I’m doing exactly what they are doing; I’m reading other teachers blogs and learning from them”.

“It came to a stage where they were teaching me, if someone in the room was having a problem with something on the blog, it might freeze or something, one of the others would sort it out.”

Pupils became independent learners and problem solvers. The class teacher described how this happened in the interview;

“From the start of our class blogging experience I noticed that a majority of children in the class were ‘googling’ how to do something if they were unsure about an issue.”

“They learnt from each other as well, things like changing fonts and putting in images as well as reading each other’s blogs.”

## ***4.5 Critical and Analytical Thinking***

### **4.5.1 Active Learning**

Pupils participated in active learning through the use of web quests. The questionnaires and focus groups identified how pupils found learning through the blog and how they responded critically and analytically to internet material. Pupils were enabled to learn independently, to research online and to choose what to learn and write about becoming critical and analytical thinkers. The quotes below taken from the focus groups illustrate how the pupils view learning on the blog.

“I think it has made learning easier because you take in what you want to take in, you learn more because you get to choose what you want to learn but there’s loads of stuff on the internet so it’s not just like a page in the Bun go Barr you can only look at that page, there’s loads of stuff you can learn online.”

“Its independent, you are not doing the same as everyone else, when the teacher tells us to do a blog post it’s what you think about whatever we are doing.”

The screenshot below is an example of a history webquest on the blog.



Here is an article about children's lives and how they played during the 17th century. It comes from <http://www.thepdt.org.uk/rwh1697/schools/childrens-games-of-the-17th-century/>

While reading it - think about answering these questions and how you might use the information in your blog post on the 17th century

Can you list the games played by children and how they were played?

Why was it difficult to play on your own?

Do you think life was easy for children in the 17th century? Why / Why not?

How do you think the games played by children in the 17th century helped them in later life?

### Children's Games of the 17th Century



Figure 13: An example of a history web quest on the blog

The class teacher echoed what the pupils had said in their answers to the questionnaire and focus group interviews. She described how the blogging facilitated the web quests allowing her to put up links to information and allowed the pupils to find the information themselves and explore the information that interested them. The class teacher identified how children would also find their own sources of information and write their post based on that and then share it with the rest of the class and also described how after sourcing their own information the children were able to present what they had learnt to the class and showed an understanding of what they had written about.

The image below is a sample post from a pupil written on 16<sup>th</sup> Century Ireland and England.

## HISTORY 16TH CENTURY IRELAND AND ENGLAND

Tags: [16th Century](#) [History](#) Categories: [Blog](#)

MAY 30, 2013 @ 1:54 PM

[4 Comments](#)

### Tudor Times

The Tudor times didn't stop children from having fun. They would usually play conkers and clay, you know, cheap materials. They would blow up pig's bellies and use them as footballs!

### Flight of the Earls

In the sixteenth century many Irish counties were controlled by Gaelic chiefs and their families known as clans. At the end of the 16th century a small fishing town in County Donegal witnessed a key event in Irish history - the end of the old Gaelic order. In 1607 a small ship left for Spain. On board were the chieftains of some of the leading Gaelic families of Ulster, including the O'Donnells and the O'Neills. Those chieftains who could not live with the new English order sought refuge with England's main enemy, with the hope either of making a new life for themselves, or of living to fight another day.

They had eventually given in to Queen Elizabeth I who was the daughter of King Henry VIII and Queen Anne Boleyn. She was Queen of England for 45 years. People called it the Elizabethan Age. It was a time of great achievement for England. English sailors went around the world and discovered many things. The country became rich. The Elizabethan Age was famous for writers and musicians.

Elizabeth had many enemies. The King of Spain sent his Armada of ships to invade England but her sailors defeated them. Some people in England plotted to kill her but they were all caught and executed.

Figure 14: Sample Pupil Post

### 4.5.2 Collaborative learning

Critical and analytical thinking, active learning and continuous learning are not unique to weblogging and can be seen in traditional learning logs, but it is the opportunity to participate in collaborative learning and interact with other students is what sets weblogging apart from a traditional learning log (Du and Wagner 2005).

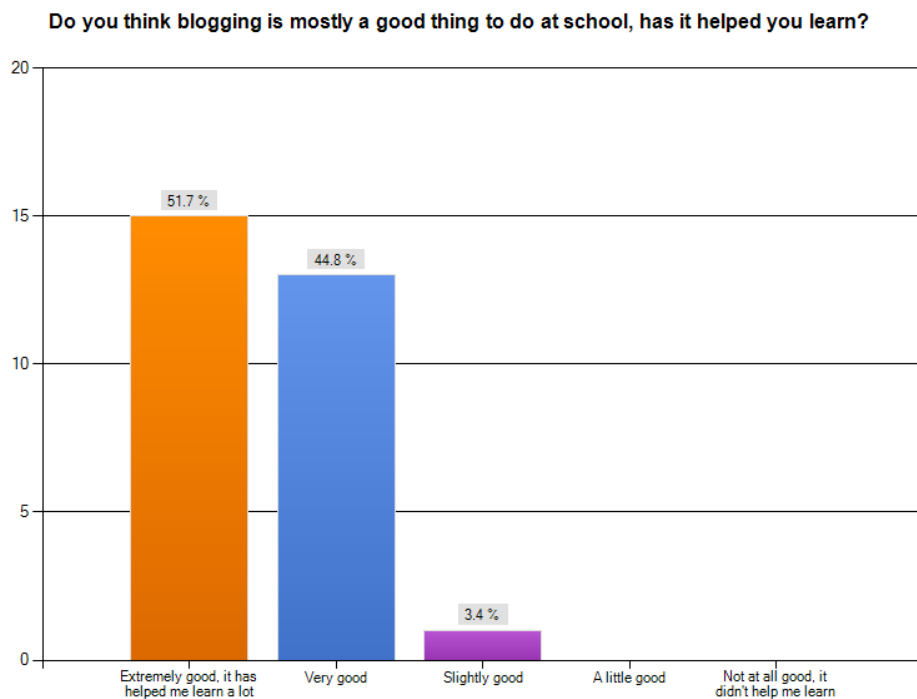
The blog provided a platform for pupils to interact and participate in collaborative learning both within the classroom but also with other schools in Ireland and with students and schools around the world.

The opportunity to work collaboratively with others was a motivator for students and made their writing and learning more meaningful. The comments below are taken from the answers to question 4 of the post blogging questionnaire (**Appendix D**).

“I enjoyed using the blog because of the coments and looking at blogs all around the world, and conecting with other class's's.”

“One of my favourite things about the blog, this was people reading your posts and getting lovely comments from your class mates and from all over the world!”

As can be seen in the following table 96.5% of students believed that blogging was extremely good or very good at helping them to learn, the remaining 3.4% believed it was slightly good.



**Figure 15: Blogging and Learning**

## 4.6 *An Audience for Writing and Student Investment*

### 4.6.1 **Public vs. Private**

The decision for the class blogs to be public and open to everyone was made by the class teacher and researcher in line with recommendations of MacBride and Luehmann in 2008 and Poling in 2005.

The blog attracted an audience from around the world as can be seen in the visitor statistics map below. The statistics shown were as of the 15<sup>th</sup> August 2013 and show an overall total of 163,396 views, from within Ireland and from places as diverse as Wellington New Zealand, New Delhi India, Ontario Canada and right across America.



**Figure 16: Visitor Statistics**

Pupils identified that having the blog public was an important feature and one that differentiated blogging from writing in copybooks, a pupil remarked in a focus group that “there’s not really much point in having a blog that’s private because blogs are on the internet for a reason instead of just like copies in the classroom.”

Two reasons that it was important that the blog was a public blog came to the fore in both focus groups and questionnaires. One was that it motivates and encourages pupils to make their best effort, conscious that their work would be viewed and commented on by others and secondly what they saw as the importance of sharing work with others and interacting with people on a global scale.

The following comments taken from the focus groups illustrate what the pupils thought of having the blog public.

“Public is better, its better public because the children in the classroom feel very motivated by the other people that thinks it’s good”

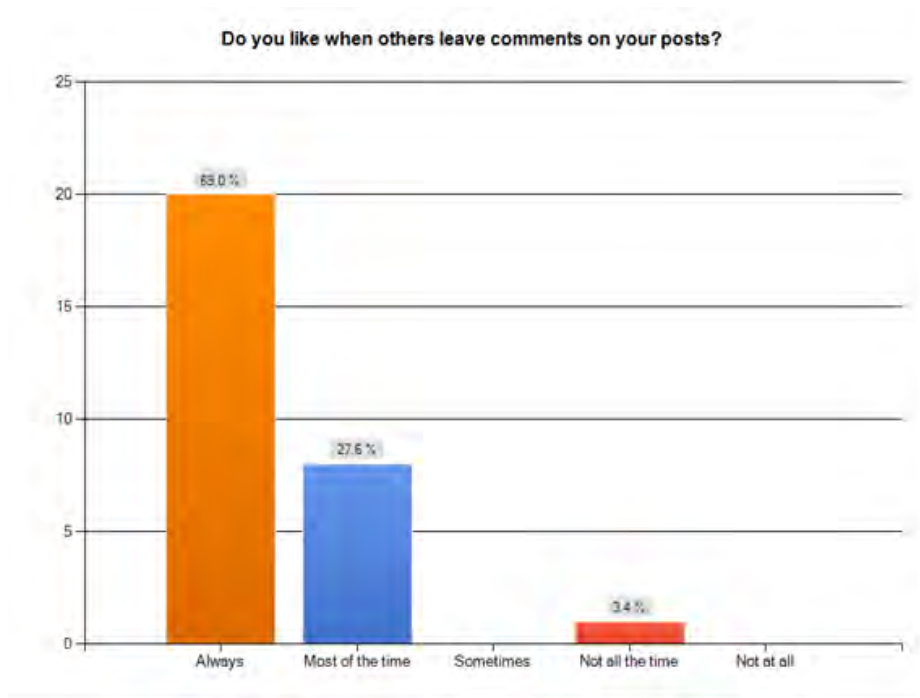
“It makes you feel proud and stuff because people are seeing it, then they learn from it and they use it in their classroom and so you are kind of making a difference as well.”

#### **4.6.2 Comments**

Through the comments made in the questionnaires and focus groups it was clear that comments had a threefold impact. They allowed for questioning, developing of interaction between both pupils themselves, between pupil and teacher and pupil and the wider world. The comments were a source of motivation and encouragement and lastly they were often a source of constructive criticism.

“You get a thrill when you get a comment from another country because you know they have read your post and they’ve liked it because they’ve commented.”

**Figure 17** illustrates whether the pupils liked or disliked comments being left on their posts.



**Figure 17: Are comments on posts liked or disliked by pupils**

Most students when asked if they liked when others left comments on their posts were extremely positive about it, as can be seen in **Figure 17**, 69% always liked when others left comments, and 27.6% most of the time liked comments being left. This was echoed in the focus groups and also in the answers to Q.14 of the questionnaire, an open-ended question which asked participants to expand on why they did or did not like comments being left on their posts.

The class teacher also reiterated the importance of comments when interviewed referring to them as “crucial, the comments were the icing on the cake and there was great excitement when they received comments, particularly when they started getting comments from Australia, Alaska and America they seemed to find that really exciting, they like connecting with the rest of the world, making a connection”.

### 4.6.3 Student Investment and Motivation

Poling (2005) suggests that students are motivated not only by the use of technology and the ability to type, but also by the audience they have when writing online.

Pupils were asked what makes writing in a copybook different to writing on the blog in an open-ended question in the questionnaire. In their answer to the question pupils made reference to having an audience for their writing and also some pupils made reference to physical effects of handwriting as opposed to typing. Some pupils remarked that their hand and wrist gets sore when writing in a copybook and that it was faster and easier to type than to write. Pupils also described how it was easier to read over their work and edit on the blog and to correct and easily edit their work as they write. This was reiterated by the class teacher in the interview when she described what a morale boost it was to a struggling pupil to see their work edited and published without corrections being evident or lots of rewriting needed as would usually happen when work was handwritten. This was a motivator to the pupil especially when this was consolidated with positive comments on the post.

The presence of an authentic audience for the pupils writing in line with the recommendations of the objectives of the English Language Curriculum for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Classes, motivated pupils to work to the best of their ability and allowed pupils to see their writing valued. The class teacher cited an example of two pupils who began writing poetry on the blog, that may not have written to such an extent in their copybooks, and for whom the blog was a great opportunity to have their poetry published. The reaction from others to their poetry through the comments gave a great boost to their self-esteem. The screenshot in **Figure 18** illustrates some of the comments left.

## 6 Comments



Mrs S - Team  
100wc (Guest)

MAY 17, 2013 AT 7:37 PM

Well done [redacted] you have given a great flavour of your favourite book for the hundred word challenge. Is this an extract from the book or did you write the poem yourself? An interesting 100 word challenge [redacted] – keep them coming!

Reply



MAY 21, 2013 AT 11:49 AM

Thank you for your lovely comment  
no I it isn't an extract from a book I wrote it myself I love writing poems and I especially love writing poems for the 100 word challenge so that everyone can see them .

From Lily

Reply



(Guest)

MAY 17, 2013 AT 9:41 PM

Hi [redacted],

this is a great poem it describes Charlie and Lola so well! I love all your poems, they're great. I like when you said she hates the rain but loves the drizzles, she would like a dog called sizzles 😊 Keep writing super poems!

Lots of Love [redacted]

Reply

Figure 18: Screenshot of comments (names of pupils have been removed)

The presence of an audience motivated students to be more invested in their writing. Pupils recognised that they put more effort into their work both in their questionnaire answers and in the focus groups. Pupils acknowledged that they tried harder on the blog because they were aware that not only were their peers reading it, but their parents and people from all over the world.

The comments from others were valued by the pupils and were a source of motivation for them. “I like comments being left because it makes you feel good about your work and it means that someone has taken the time to read and comment on your post.”

The research based strategies for motivating students to learn listed by the Centre for Teaching in Vanderbilt University (2013) can be seen reflected across the findings.

- **Be a role model.** The class teacher maintained her own blog showing an interest in both blogging and the content of the blogs

- **Get to know your students.** The voluntary posts enabled the pupils to share their interests and the comments allowed for interaction between teacher and pupil.
- **Use examples.** The usefulness of blogging in creating connections and generating an audience was evident to both teacher and pupils.
- **Use a variety of student-active activities.** As was previously detailed in this chapter guided discovery and active learning methods were employed and engaged the students.
- **Set realistic performance goals.** Pupils were enabled to complete assignments appropriate to their aptitude.
- **Appropriate emphasis on testing and grading.** Formal testing did not take place on the blog but the blog served as an e-portfolio of the pupil's work which an assessment tool recommended in the Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum; Guidelines for Teachers (2006).
- **Generous with praise and constructive with criticism.** The comments allowed the pupils to learn how to give and receive constructive criticism and also became a source of generous amounts of praise from peers, teachers, family and people from other schools.
- **Give students control over their own education as much as possible.** The web quests and guided discovery approach taken on the blog allowed students to choose topics which interested them and present their work using a variety of media. Pupils in the questionnaires mentioned that one of the benefits of the blog was the ability to embed images into their posts.

#### 4.6.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the research carried out using a mixed methods case study approach. The tools used to gather the findings were questionnaires and focus groups

with the pupils and a semi-structured interview with the class teacher. Chapter 5 will analyse these findings in light of the literature that was reviewed in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### *5.1 Introduction*

In Chapter 4, the findings of the case study were presented, in this chapter the findings will be analysed in more detail and discussed in relation to the literature which was examined in the literature review in Chapter 2.

The chapter begins with an overview of the research undertaken and presents the key findings of the research. It then will then discuss the findings in light of the literature review under the following headings;

- Capitalising on Students' Media Literacies
- Ease of Use
- A New Learning Environment
- Critical and Analytical Thinking
- An Audience for Writing and Student Investment

#### **5.1.1 Overview of research undertaken**

The study undertaken utilised a mixed method case study approach using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This study set out to examine the pedagogical benefits of blogging in the primary classroom and took place in a rural co-educational primary school in the west of Ireland. It is a co-educational school with an enrolment of approximately 300 pupils. The target population was a group of twenty nine students in Fifth Class.

The students were all familiar with the use of computers with all students having access to a PC or laptop at home which the majority used for at least two hours a week. The students

used the school laptop room when blogging, this room is equipped with 34 laptops and a digital projector.

The pupils had timetabled access to the school laptop room with individual access to a laptop, twice a week for 50 minutes each time. The online setting used was [www.Kidblog.org](http://www.Kidblog.org) which was chosen as it is a free to use, advertisement free software, designed for use in classroom settings, and allows teacher and researcher full administrative control.

Data collection tools consisted of questionnaire, focus group and interview. In order to establish students' prior knowledge and background with computers and internet use and to investigate the students' attitude towards blogging pupils completed a pre-blogging questionnaire. This was followed by a post blogging questionnaire which was carried out after four months of blogging. The post blogging questionnaire aimed to discover what students overall impression of blogging was, their opinion on having an audience and receiving comments on their work. The post blogging questionnaire also investigated whether pupils enjoyed blogging and how they thought it helped them to learn.

Three focus groups, each consisting of four to five pupils, each lasting 10 minutes were conducted. The aim of the focus groups was to develop further the pupils' thoughts on blogging, guided by the answers to the questionnaires. Pupils were asked their overall opinion of blogging, if they believed blogging had any effect on how they learnt, if they found blogging enjoyable, and finally pupils were asked what they thought about writing on the blog.

A semi-structured interview was carried out with the class teacher and was guided by the research questions under study. The aim of the interview was to gather data on the teacher's overall experience of blogging, its benefits and limitations, the effect on students' motivation and if the blog was an effective pedagogical tool.

### **5.1.2 Key Findings**

- All students had a positive attitude to computer use at school prior to the study and the majority of students used computers at home for at least 2 hours a week. 92% of

students spent time on YouTube and 44% spent time on Facebook. 8% reported that they did not use social networking sites.

- All students and the class teacher reported that they found the blog easy to use
- The blog served as a platform enabling students to learn in different ways, become independent learners, facilitating social learning, collaboration and global connections. It also served as an e-portfolio of their learning.
- Students became critical and analytical thinkers, reading a variety of texts and selecting relevant material for their posts.
- The decision to make the blog public and in doing so generate an authentic audience attract comments had a significant effect on student motivation and student investment in their writing.

## *5.2 Capitalising on Students' Media Literacies*

More than ever students are becoming more media literate, Jo Ann Oravec in the infancy of weblogging visualised educators' use of weblogs as a way of organising the resources that students had located on the internet (2002). This research has shown that the blog under study was more than just a way of organising resources that students had located on the internet.

The blog in this study provided a platform for pupils to reflect on their learning, with posts organised in chronological fashion with the added benefit of tagging which allowed posts to be categorised by the students themselves. Students quickly learnt how to add relevant tags to their posts such as using 'Cross Border Orchestra' to collate the posts reflecting on their performance with the Cross Border Orchestra.

The class teacher's use of web quests allowed her to organise links to resources online for pupils to access as was shown in **Figure 12** in Chapter 4. The blog roll feature allowed for links to other schools to be accessible from the sidebar of the blog and this enabled students to easily access blogs from other schools and resources of interest to the class.

The Kidblog platform did not provide a feature for a list of links to be collated on the sidebar so the class teacher utilised the blog roll as a method of organising important links. The tags and blog roll can be seen in the following screen shots (**Figures 19 and 20**).



**Figure 19: Tags**



**Figure 20: Blogroll**

Recent studies have realised the importance of capitalising on students' inherent comfort and interest in media communication technology (MacBride and Luehmann 2008) and that students are intrinsically motivated to use new media (Ellison and Wu 2008).

The findings have shown that all students were familiar with computers and communication technology. Only one student spent less than an hour a week using a computer at home, all other students spent at least two hours a week using computers at home, this is on top of

scheduled use of the laptop room at school where each student has individual access to a laptop.

Students approached the task of blogging without fear. They did not question the introduction of the blog or appear intimidated when using it. Researching online and writing posts came naturally to them, they automatically use their smart phones to “google” something in everyday life and they were now applying this to their learning. The use of the blog as a digital platform also allowed them to use the internet as a resource, information was only a tab away at all times and students navigated back and forth as they wrote their posts.

Literature suggests that students are already highly socially active in web based environments, creating content, interacting and commenting on one another’s materials unconsciously (Duffy 2007).

The study found that social media sites Youtube (used by 92% of students) and Facebook (used by 44%) ranked in the top three uses of the computer at home by students.

32% of pupils have created and published material to the web, mostly citing uploading videos to Youtube, posting pictures to Facebook and using Instagram. This is a relatively low figure when literature suggests that students are already using Web 2.0 applications (Duffy 2007). This can be somewhat explained by the relatively young age of the pupils but the findings show that the students prior to blogging were digital content consumers rather than creators.

The research did not investigate pupils’ prior use of junior social sites such as Club Penguin and Moshi Monsters nor did it investigate whether pupils interacted with others when playing on games consoles such as Playstation and Nintendo and programming games such as Minecraft which now facilitate online communication between players. Exploration of how pupils interact on these technologies would provide further background on students’ online social activity. These technologies however were mentioned by the class teacher when she explained how pupils found interacting and commenting on others material a normal and

automatic activity. This supports the literature that students are inherently comfortable using media technology ( MacBride and Luehmann 2008).

### *5.3 Ease of Use*

The literature suggested that the attractiveness of blogs in the educational community was their ease of use (Downes 2004). The research bore this out in that all students found the blog easy to use and had no fear experimenting with inserting media such as images and video, using different fonts and colours. The sample post which follows (**Figure 21**) shows one of the brighter posts on the blog with a timeline image inserted at the bottom of the post. The posting format mirrored many of other social media platforms which students are comfortable with. Students also shared knowledge informally, demonstrating to each other how to insert media if any were unsure and also contributing ideas to the class teacher when any issues arose with the blog such as inserting new forms of media like Scratch projects they had created using Scratch programming software.

When King Louis XVI came to the throne his predecessors had left him a large debt to pay off. In order to pay this debt he decided to tax the 1st and 2nd estates, but they refused to pay. In 1789 he called a group made up of the 3 estates to meet him in Versailles. This group was called the Estates-General. He had called them to discuss the matter of taxes. However the Estates-General had other plans. They wished to take power from the king.

King Louis XVI ordered a vote to be put in place but the 3rd estate were locked outside and were unallowed to vote because of their numbers. It was then that they became the National Assembly and made the Tennis Court Oath.

The King fearing a revolution placed more troops on the streets and around the palace. The supporters of the National Assembly feared that the king was going to use his troops to kill off the National Assembly. So they stormed the Bastille in order to protect them. They took all the weapons and ammunition. This officially started the revolution.

In 1793 King Louis XVI was put to death by guillotine for being guilty of not wanting the people to have freedom.

And in 1799 Napoleon Bonaparte became Dictator of France.

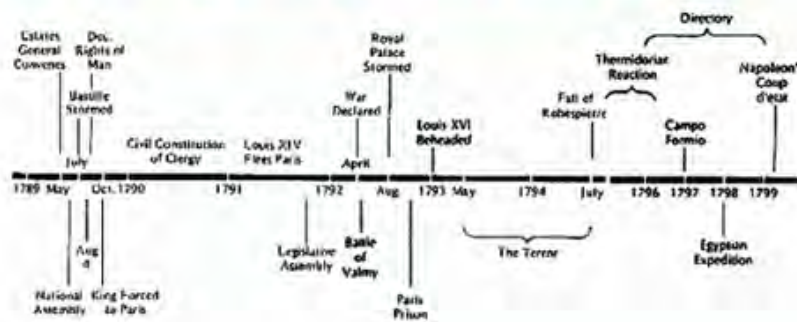


Figure 20: Sample pupil post

The class teacher also found the blog easy to use and the ability to retain full administrative control and moderate all posts; this was an important feature of the blogging platform chosen as the online safety of the pupils was paramount. 63

As stated by Will Richardson a weblog provides a lasting record of learning (2003). It is an electronic portfolio of pupils' work which is easily accessible to both pupils and their parents, this is an assessment tool that is recommended in the Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum; Guidelines for Teachers (2006). The blog is an effective way to collate students' work in chronological form which is easily searchable and organised with the tagging system of the blog. The findings have shown that the blog is easy to use and access by both

students and teacher and allows parents to easily view their child's work. This facilitated continuous learning for students.

## ***5.4 A New Learning Environment***

An important educational benefit suggested by the literature is that blogging may “disrupt traditional communication and learning patterns in the classroom” (Ellison and Wu 2008,p.105). The blog provides a learning environment that is student centred (MacBride and Luehmann 2008) and enabled active learning thus incorporating the constructivist approach to learning on which the Irish Primary School curriculum is based.

The findings showed that the blog facilitated social learning, collaboration and enabled the pupils and teacher to create global connections.

### **5.4.1 Knowledge Sharing**

The social constructivist approach is based on Vygotsky's theory that learning does not take place in isolation and that social collectivity has a role in individual learning (Liu and Matthews 2005).

Knowledge sharing moves from the sage on the stage approach to an increasingly student to student and student to instructor approach and this reflects Vygotsky's social constructivist theory of learning

Pupils frequently read posts written by other pupils in their class, and in doing so shared knowledge. Pupils also posted comments to ask questions, to express interest and enjoyment of a post. Pupils also read posts written by pupils in other schools both within Ireland and from overseas schools. As was outlined in the findings pupils identified how reading other pupils' blogs helped them to learn.

*The Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011 – 2020* lists as a key target the

increased awareness of the importance of digital literacy and the aim to “include assessments of primary student’s ability to read digital material as part of the national assessments of English reading” (2011,p.18). As can be seen above blogging provides an opportunity for pupils to engage in regular reading of digital material.

#### **5.4.2 Disruption of traditional communication and learning patterns**

The principles of the Primary School Curriculum are based on a constructivist and social constructivist approach to learning. The constructivist approach is based on the theories of Piaget and Dewey and its fundamental premise is that children construct knowledge and meaning for themselves as active learners (Strommen and Lincoln 1992).

The research found that blogging enabled students to learn in different ways, become active and independent learners. 96.5% of students believed that blogging was extremely good or very good at helping them to learn

The blog was a platform which enabled the use of web quests and a project based approach to guide learning and discovery, rather than a didactic teaching approach, which is in line with the constructivist approach of the Primary School Curriculum (NCCA 1999b). The findings showed that the pupils learned how to learn and became active learners which are important goals of the curriculum. A guided approach to learning and the students being active participants in their learning created a student centred learning environment in line with MacBride and Luehmann (2008).

The research found that blogging allows for learning to be shared and provided a valuable link between home and school, providing an opportunity for parents participate in their child’s learning.

The private comment facility was very beneficial allowing private two way dialogue between teacher and pupil. This dialogue generally comprised of feedback from the teacher which in order to protect pupils’ self-esteem was better delivered in private.

## *5.5 Critical and analytical thinking*

At an early stage of the blogging genre it was identified that the development of blogs can cause students to become more analytical and critical as they respond to Internet material. Blogging may also result in students defining their own views in the context of others' writings (Oravec 2002).

The findings have clearly shown that through the use of web quests and guided discovery, pupils became critical and analytical thinkers carefully reading and selecting relevant material from various internet sites and using that information to write posts of their own. Students were critical of the information presented to them, seeking to discover their own source of information if the initial websites were not suitable.

Pupils also assimilated knowledge from other pupils' posts and used this to improve their own writing. Pupils commented constructively on each other's posts, reflecting on what they liked and asking questions when interested.

### **5.5.1 Collaborative Learning**

Du and Wagner distinguish the difference between weblogs and traditional learning logs as being the opportunity to participate in collaborative learning using weblogs (2005). It was evident that this was a central feature of the blog, certainly an aspect that the pupils embraced and were motivated by. The findings reflect that the pupils enjoyed learning from each other and working with pupils in other schools and countries. Students enjoyed connecting with different schools and were very motivated by the collaboration with others.

The research undertaken found that the opportunity to work collaboratively with others was a motivator for students and made their writing and learning more meaningful.

## *5.6 An Audience for Writing and Student Investment*

### **5.6.1 Public vs. Private**

The decision to make the blog a public blog was an important decision when beginning the study. Informed by the recommendations of MacBride & Luehmann (2008), Poling (2005), Ellison & Wu (2008) and Downes (2004), the researcher with the support of the class teacher made the decision to make the blogs public. When making this decision it was noted that it was important to educate the pupils about the importance of online safety and maintaining pupils' anonymity online. The positive findings of this study are influenced by the fact that the blog was made public.

The blog with the presence of an audience worked as a tool to motivate students to write and research over an extended period of time and provided a platform for students to critique and analyse the material they obtained on the Internet in the course of their study. This was in line with the findings of Oravec (2003).

Ellison and Wu (2008) identified that the importance of an audience as potentially making students more invested in their writing. This was borne out in the findings of this study where it was shown that students are motivated to make their best effort conscious that their work would be viewed by others.

The findings also showed how the students were motivated the audience they have when writing online which reflects the findings of Poling (2005).

### **5.6.2 Comments**

The research undertaken has shown that having the blog public was instrumental in achieving many of the benefits associated with blogging and the comments was one of the ways of achieving these benefits. As seen in Chapter 4 the comments had a threefold impact, they allowed for questioning and developed interaction, they were a source of motivation and encouragement and lastly they were often a source of constructive criticism.

An example of a constructive comment left by a retired teacher on a 100 Word Challenge post written by a student is shown below in **Figure 22**.



**Figure 21: Sample Constructive Comment**

In line with Oravec (2003), the comments, and constructive criticism therein, worked as a tool to motivate students to write and research over an extended period of time. The comments were tangible evidence to the pupils that the audience was reading their posts. These comments encouraged and motivated students to invest more in their writing, conscious that others around the world would read what they wrote. 96.6% of pupils liked

comments being left on their posts and this was echoed by the class teacher who described them as the “icing on the cake”.

### **5.6.3 Student Investment and Motivation**

Poling (2005) suggests that students are also motivated by the presence of an audience as well as by the use of technology and typing.

The importance of an authentic audience for writing is outlined in both the English Curriculum (NCCA 1999a) and MacBride & Luehmann (2008), Poling (2005), Ellison & Wu (2008) and Downes (2004). The blog attracted an audience from all over the world and this was a motivating factor for students with many students enthused by the presence of a global audience and making connections with others.

The importance of an audience for writing, whether it be of peers or the wider internet audience, is also identified as potentially making students more invested in their writing (Ellison and Wu 2008). The findings of this study have shown that it has made students more invested in their writing. The study correlated with MacBride & Luehmann (2008) that blogging makes writing a more meaningful activity for students and as a result the quality of their writing improves.

The study also found that some students reported it was faster and easier to type than to write and as was suggested by Poling (2005), students were motivated by the use of technology and typing. The blog made editing and correcting posts easier for pupils and motivated them to correct their work and add to it. There was also evidence that because students work could be corrected and edited without corrections being evident to others or intensive rewriting occurring that this was a morale boost and motivator for the weaker student.

The strategies for motivating students by The Centre for Teaching in Vanderbilt University (2013) were listed in Chapter 4 and it was identified how each strategy was implemented through the blog. Here each strategy is further discussed in light of the findings of the study.

- **Be a role model.** The class teacher maintained her own blog showing an interest in both blogging and the content of the blogs. This was an effective method of demonstrating the teacher's interest in the blog and thus a role model for the students. The class teacher also demonstrated how she learnt as the study progressed, establishing professional connections with other teachers globally.
- **Get to know your students.** The voluntary posts enabled the pupils to share their interests and the comments allowed for interaction between teacher and pupil. This generated informal exchanges of ideas and information. Some students used the blog to post diary entries and share their interests and pastimes.
- **Use examples.** The usefulness of blogging in creating connections and generating an audience was evident to both teacher and pupils. Visiting blogs of other students was an effective way for students to explore examples of other students' blogs, posts and different forms of writing.
- **Use a variety of student-active activities.** Guided discovery and active learning methods were employed by the class teacher when using the blog and this engaged and motivated the students. The use of active learning and guided discovery is a constructivist approach to learning and a fundamental principle of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum.
- **Set realistic performance goals.** The study found that pupils were enabled to complete assignments appropriate to their aptitude. This allowed for all students to achieve and achieve their best work. Students' performance was observed to progress over the course of the study as they learned from each other's work.
- **Appropriate emphasis on testing and grading.** The study found that although formal testing did not take place on the blog, the blog served as an e-portfolio of the pupil's work which is an assessment tool recommended in the Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum; Guidelines for Teachers (2006). This is an effective way of collating students' work in an easily searchable, chronological form. The blog format also allows for parents to view their child's work on a regular basis.

- **Generous with praise and constructive with criticism.** The research found that the comment facility on the blog allowed the pupils to learn how to give and receive constructive criticism and also became a source of generous amounts of praise from peers, teachers, family and people from other schools. This praise and constructive criticism was a key component of the success of the blog and had a positive effect on student motivation and engagement. The pupils were excited by comments left on their blog and enjoyed receiving praise from other pupils, teachers and other visitors to the blog. Constructive criticism was found to be generally welcomed by the pupils as an aid to learning.
- **Give students control over their own education as much as possible.** The findings have shown that the guided discovery approach taken on the blog allowed students to choose topics which interested them and present their work using a variety of media. The ability to choose, research and present their chosen topic was motivating for the students; they also enjoyed using a variety of media in their posts such as images to illustrate their posts.

It is clear that blogging is an effective motivational tool for students to learn, the study was allowed each motivational strategy to be utilised effectively through the blog.

## ***5.7 Conclusion***

This chapter has discussed the findings of this case study, outlined in Chapter 4, in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

The key findings of the research were presented and then discussed under the following five headings; capitalising on students' media literacies, ease of use, a new learning environment, critical and analytical thinking and an audience for writing and student investment.

The study has shown that students are inherently comfortable with using technology and that blogging capitalised on this resulting in both students and class teacher finding the blog an easy tool to use.

The blog facilitated a guided discovery approach to teaching and active learning by the students. It enabled students to become independent, motivated learners and was a platform that facilitated social learning, collaboration with others and global connections.

Critical and analytical thinking were developed through the blog, the use of guided discovery and active learning encouraged students to research online, to choose what to learn and what to write about.

The importance of an audience was evident in the study, it motivated and encouraged pupils to do their best and also the pupils became more invested in their work due to what they saw as the importance of sharing work with others and interacting and connecting with people globally.

Chapter 6 will conclude this thesis by outlining the outcomes of the study and recommendations for further research.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### *6.1 Introduction*

This study aimed to investigate the value of blogging when used as a pedagogical tool in the primary classroom. The research took place in a rural co-educational primary school in the west of Ireland with a fifth class group. This chapter will provide a summary of the outcomes of the research and give recommendations for the use of blogging in primary school classrooms and further research in the area of blogging in the primary school classroom.

### *6.2 Outcomes of the Investigation*

The research question addressed in this study is the value of blogging when used as a pedagogical tool in the primary classroom.

The primary aims of the research were to investigate

- The educational benefits of blogging
- The effect on students' attitude to learning
- The importance of an authentic audience

The findings based on these objectives will now be outlined.

#### **6.2.1 The educational benefits of blogging**

The educational benefits of blogging were identified as capitalising on students' media literacies, ease of use, a new learning environment, critical and analytical thinking and an audience for writing and student investment. The findings have shown that students were already inherently media literate and the use of blogging capitalised on this. Blogging is flagged as a platform that is easy to use and this was validated by the findings. The findings also indicated that the blog provided a new learning environment; encouraging active

learning and guided discovery and students applied critical and analytical thinking when working on the blog. The blog provided an audience for writing which generally resulted in a greater student investment in their work.

### **6.2.2 The effect on students' attitude to learning**

The findings indicate that students were more motivated to learn not only by the use of technology and the ability to type, but also by the audience they have when writing online.

The findings have also shown that strategies for motivating students can be effectively implemented through the blog.

The use of active learning and guided discovery through technology fulfils the some of the aims of the Primary School Curriculum and these strategies also had a positive impact on students' attitude to learning.

### **6.2.3 The importance of an authentic audience**

The findings have shown that the presence of an authentic audience was an important feature of the blog, increasing student investment and motivation, a source of praise and encouragement and enabled constructive criticism from sources other than their teacher. The fact that the blog was public was a defining component of the research.

## ***6.3 Recommendations***

### **6.3.1 The use of blogs in the primary school classroom**

This section outlines some considerations for the use of blogging in the primary school classroom.

- An important consideration when blogging in the classroom is the availability of computers for pupil use. Pupils need regular access to a computer in order to make best use of the blog.
- The investment of teacher time was a large and crucial part of this project. Comments and posts were moderated frequently by the class teacher and feedback provided to the pupils through the comments. The teacher who undertakes blogging with their class must be motivated and committed to invest time into the blog.
- In order to generate an audience for the blog other than pupils within the school, the blog needs to be publicised and an audience generated through participating in projects such as the 100 Word Challenge and through asking for comments using other social media sources such as Twitter.

### **6.3.2 Further research**

A number of further areas may be considered for future research on blogging in the primary classroom.

- Investigate if blogging had a measurable impact on students' reading levels.
- Carry out a longer study to confirm if student investment and motivation is maintained over a longer length of time.
- Carry out a larger study to see if the results can be replicated with a larger target population.
- Investigate if blogging can be used successfully with younger classes and what learning gains they achieve from using a blog.
- Compare learning gains achieved using only traditional teaching methods, copybooks and print material to those achieved using blogging.
- Investigate the impact of teacher motivation and investment in the blog on the successful adaption of the blog by students

## ***6.4 Conclusion***

This study has found that students are more motivated and invested in their work when publishing online for an authentic audience. The blog was easy to use and students were more engaged and experienced more enjoyment than when working in the traditional way in their copybooks.

The blog enabled pupils to become independent learners, facilitated social, collaborative and active learning and in doing so increased students' skills as critical and analytical thinkers. Blogging capitalised on students' inherent media literacies and the skills of writing and learning online is something that will be of benefit to them in the future as digital literacy becomes more and more important.

The study has shown that blogging was of great pedagogical value to the students and teacher involved in the research.

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## Appendix A: Permission letter to the Board of Management

Dear Principal,

I wish to ask permission of the Board of Management to conduct a research study within the school. The research study is part requirement for a Masters in Digital Media Development for Education as part of my study at the University of Limerick.

The overall aim of the study is to investigate the pedagogical value of blogging in the primary school classroom. It will involve fifth class pupils and teacher maintaining blogs until the end of the year. In order to investigate the value of the blogs, I intend to distribute pre and post blogging questionnaires, to interview some students as part of focus groups and to interview the class teacher.

The identity of the school, teacher and participants will remain confidential and will not be identified in the final report.

Yours sincerely,

Aisling Murray

## Appendix B: Permission letter to Parents

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As part of my study for a Masters in Digital Media Development for Education in the University of Limerick, I am undertaking a short research project on the benefits of blogging in the primary school. I will be conducting the study with fifth class and they will be using an education specific blogging platform Kidblog.org which will be completely moderated and supervised by both myself and the class teacher. Children's' safety online will be a priority and all students will be taught how to keep safe online.

The class will complete two questionnaires and some students will be asked to participate in a short focus group about their experiences using the blog. Anonymity and confidentiality of the pupils will be maintained at all times during the study.

Please feel free to interact with the students on the blog but in order to maintain pupils' safety online please do not use your surname when posting, a suggestion would be to sign as "your child's name Mum" "your child's name Dad).

Please feel free to contact myself or Ms \_\_\_\_\_ class teacher if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

Aisling Murray

## Appendix C: Pre Blogging Questionnaire

### Blogging Pre-Questionnaire

**\*1. Do you enjoy using laptops at school?**

- Yes, all of the time
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Never

**\*2. Do you enjoy writing, whether it is short stories, personal writing e.g diary, factual writing, project based, poetry?**

- A great deal
- A lot
- A moderate amount
- A little
- Not at all

**\*3. How many home computing devices has your family (include smart phones, game consoles, laptops, tablets etc)**

**\*4. Typically how often do you use a laptop or pc at home?**

- Never
- less than an hour a week
- about 2 to 4 hours each week
- about 5-9 hours each week
- about 10-15 hours per week
- more than 15 hours per week

## Blogging Pre-Questionnaire

### \*5. What do you spend MOST of your time on the laptop/pc doing?

- Research/Schoolwork
- Email
- Facebook
- Games
- Educational Games such as Mangahigh
- Blogging
- Word processing (Word documents etc)
- Youtube
- Programming e.g Scratch, Minecraft
- Other (please specify)

### \*6. In a typical week, about how much time do you spend using social networking websites e.g Facebook, Twitter?

Hours

Minutes

### \*7. When you're on social networking websites, e.g Facebook, about how much of your time do you spend posting things about yourself?

- All of it
- Most of it
- About half of it
- Some of it
- None of it
- N/A

### \*8. Do you ever create and publish material to the web, e.g youtube videos, blogging, website

- Yes, please specify
- No

What content have you created and published?

## Blogging Pre-Questionnaire

**\*9. Have you any experience of blogging? If yes, please detail below.**

Yes

No

Other (please specify)

**\*10. What do you think blogging in school will be like?**

## Appendix D: Post Blogging Questionnaire

### Post Blogging Questionnaire

#### Blogging and You

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out what you think about blogging; what was good, what wasn't, did it help you learn, what should be changed to make it better and is it worth doing at all.

Please take your time answering the questions, I look forward to reading your answers and hearing what you think.

Ms Murray

**1. What is your gender?**

Female  Male

**2. How did you mostly find the blog to use?**

Extremely easy  
 Mostly easy  
 Moderately easy  
 Slightly easy  
 Not at all easy

**3. Did you mostly enjoy using the blog?**

Enjoyed a great deal  
 Enjoyed a lot  
 Enjoyed a moderate amount  
 Enjoyed a little  
 Didn't enjoy at all

**4. What did you enjoy or not enjoy about blogging and why.**

## Post Blogging Questionnaire

### Blogging and other people

**5. Do you read blogs from other children in your school?**

- Yes
- No

**6. How often approximately do you read posts written by other pupils in YOUR school?**

- A lot (Once a day)
- Very Frequently (4-5 times per week)
- Frequently (2-3 times per week)
- Slightly frequently (Once a week/fortnight)
- Not at all frequently (Once a month)
- Not at all

**7. If you read posts written by other pupils in YOUR SCHOOL, how many pupils' blogs do you visit approximately?**

- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-10
- 10+
- I don't read other pupils' blogs

**8. Do you read blogs from other children in other schools?**

- Yes
- No

**9. How often approximately do you read posts written by other pupils in OTHER schools?**

- A lot (Once a day)
- Very Frequently (4-5 times per week)
- Frequently (2-3 times per week)
- Slightly frequently (Once a week/fortnight)
- Not at all frequently (Once a month)
- Not at all

## Post Blogging Questionnaire

**10. If you read posts written by other pupils in OTHER SCHOOLS, how many PUPILS' BLOGS do you visit approximately?**

- 1-2
- 2-5
- 6-10
- 10+
- I don't read other pupils' blogs

**11. What is good about reading other people's blogs do you think?**

## Post Blogging Questionnaire

### Comments

In this section, I would like to know if you like getting comments from other people in your school and what you think about getting comments from people not in your school.

**12. Do you leave comments for others when you read their posts?**

- All of the time
- A lot of the time
- Sometimes
- Not very often
- Never

**13. Do you like when others leave comments on your posts?**

- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Not all the time
- Not at all

**14. Why do you like or not like comments being left? Think about comments from your friends and from people you don't know when answering this question.**

**15. Do you leave comments for other students? If yes, which one of these reasons would most make you leave a comment.**

- I find the post interesting/funny/enjoyable
- To ask a question
- To encourage or leave a compliment
- Because my teacher told me to!
- Other (please specify)

## Post Blogging Questionnaire

### Blogging and Writing

In this section I would like to know if writing on the blog has changed how you feel about writing. Do you enjoy writing stories and about what you have learnt more now or do you feel the same about writing?

**16. Do you find writing on the blog harder or easier than writing in copybooks and workbooks?**

- A lot harder
- Slightly harder
- Not any different
- Slightly easier
- A lot easier

**17. What makes writing on the blog different than writing in a copy?**

**18. Do you think blogging has improved your writing?**

- A great deal improved
- A lot improved
- Slightly improved
- A little improved
- Not at all improved

**19. Do you enjoy writing on the blog more or less than on paper.**

- A great deal more
- Slightly more
- No different
- Slightly less
- A great deal less

## Post Blogging Questionnaire

### Blogging and Learning

In this section I would like to know if you think you have learnt any more or less through using your blog and reading other people's blogs. Has learning for you been different since you started using the blog at school?

**20. Do you think blogging is mostly a good thing to do at school, has it helped you learn?**

- Extremely good, it has helped me learn a lot
- Very good
- Slightly good
- A little good
- Not at all good, it didn't help me learn

**21. How much do you like or not like using the blog TO LEARN?**

- Like it a great deal
- Like it a lot
- It's ok
- I like it a little
- I don't like it at all

**22. How do you think blogging has helped you learn, that's special only to blogging?**

**23. Would you continue blogging even if it wasn't done in school anymore?**

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Why?

## Post Blogging Questionnaire

**24. If another teacher was thinking about blogging with their class, would you advise them that it is a good idea or not. Why?**

- Good idea
- Not a good idea

Explain why to the teacher

## Appendix E: Questions for Focus Groups

### **Blogging**

This year you started blogging – what are the things that come to mind when you think about blogging?

- What were the good things?
- How important was that do you think?
- Why was it important?
- What wasn't good?
- How important was that?
- Why?

### **Learning/Motivation**

Did blogging have any effect on how you learnt this year?

- Did blogging make it easier or harder for you?
- How was it different?
- Do you think this is important/good/bad?

Talk to me about enjoyment-was it fun? Did it make you feel more interested in learning?

### **Writing**

You've done a lot of writing on the blog now – how did you find it?

- What were the good things?
- How important was that do you think?
- Why was it important?
- What wasn't good?
- How important was that?
- Why?

Do you think any differently about writing now?

## Appendix F: Questions for Interview with Class Teacher

1. Tell me about your experience of blogging with your class?
2. What do you see as the advantages of blogging? Was there anything in particular that made a difference to your teaching/students' learning? (*link to home, international links, audience*)
3. What do you see as the limitations of blogging? Was there anything in particular that stood out? (*Time consumption, technical difficulties etc*)
4. Did you see any effect or change to students' attitude and motivation towards learning? Why do you think this was?
5. Did you see any effect or change to students' attitude and motivation towards writing? What do you think was the reason for this?
6. Do you feel it is an appropriate tool to be used in the classroom? *Did it help you to deliver the curriculum?*
7. Will you continue blogging with this class or others in the future?
8. Any other thoughts or experiences that you think are important to note?

## Appendix G: Screenshots from the Blog

**17**  
MAY

### Australia: The Great Barrier Reef

Tags: [Australia](#)

Categories: [Blog](#)

May 17, 2013 @ 9:22 AM [0 COMMENTS](#)

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#### The Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is in the Coral Sea on Australia's north eastern coast. The Great Barrier Reef is an extremely ancient enormous host of living things. It is also known as one of the Seven Great Wonders of the World. The Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest living organism and is a place of remarkable natural beauty and diversity. Its size is larger than Switzerland, Holland the United Kingdom combined. In Australia its area is larger than Tasmania and Victoria together.

You can swim, snorkel, dive and sail in it. It is so big it can be seen from outer space. It has long warm and sunny days in all seasons and is a popular holiday destination all year around. The tropical wet season lasts from November to March. It stretches more than 2,300 kilometres along Queensland coast, and its situated from the mainland town of Port Douglas to Bundaberg.


#### Some interesting facts about the Great Barrier Reef

It is the world's largest reef system. It's composed of over 2,900 individual reefs. It has over 900 islands. The tourist to the area generate approximately AUS 4/5 billion per year. Thirty species of whales, dolphins and porpoises have been recorded in the Great Barrier Reef. Six species of sea turtles come to the reef to breed. 215 species of birds (inc. 22 species of seabirds and 32 species of shorebirds) visit the reef or nest or roost on the islands. Seventeen species of sea snake live on the Great Barrier Reef. More than 1,500 fish species live on the reef. There are at least 330 species of ascidians on the reef system.

There are a diverse range of tourism operations in the Great Barrier Reef including day tours overnight and extended tours. It has a wide range of activities and is the very best experience possible.

Some of the famous Australians are Paul Hogan (Crocodile Dundee), Olympic Gold Medalists Cathy Freeman, Actress: Nicole Kidman to name but a few.

(Information for this post found at <http://es.innovativesdiventures.com/reef-info/where-is-the-great-barrier-reef-located/>)



Sample Post on Australia

- 1848, In 1848 Francis O'Neill was born in Tralibane near Bantry Co.Cork, on the 28th of August
- 1865, When he was 16 his family sent him to be a priest but he ran away to sea and he became a cabin boy on an English merchant vessel. He travelled all over Europe.
- 1866, In 1866 he travelled to New York, America on a ship called "The Emerald Isle", on "The Emerald Isle" he met Anna Rodgers, whom he later married in Illinois.
- 1870, In 1870 he married Anna and they had ten children.
- 1873, In 1873 he became a Chicago police man, then he became chief of police in 1901 until 1905.
- 1936, He died on January 26th in Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A when he was 87 years old.



This entry was posted in [Blog](#) and tagged [Francis O'Neill](#)

[« Seeking Information - Francis O'Neill](#)

[Information Seeking - -Francis O'Neill »](#)

## 2 Comments



Ms [redacted]

MARCH 5, 2013 AT 6:04 PM

I really like how you have presented this using a timeline. Well done

Ms [redacted]

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

[Reply](#)



[redacted]'s Mom  
(Guest)

MARCH 7, 2013 AT 9:16 AM

Really interesting [redacted] How did you find all this information?

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

[Reply](#)

## Sample Post and Comments



## My Memories of Fifth Class My Hopes for Sixth Class

TAGS: MEMORIES AND HOPES CATEGORIES: BLOG JUNE 19, 2013 @ 6:14 PM 1 COMMENT

This year has been great because we have done a ton of work, yet it hasn't felt like work. For example we have done the Hundred Word Challenge. Did you know this is our 35th Hundred Word Challenge this week?! That is a lot of story writing. When you think about it, 3,500 of the words we have each typed are Hundred Word Challenges and if you multiply that by 29 (people in our class) that makes 101,500 words altogether from our class for the hundred word challenge. The hundred word challenge is run by @theheadoffice.

We have done web quests for homework and at school. Web quests are fun because Ms. [redacted] will put up the link to a website on the blog and we will go onto it and take our own information from it. The good thing about web quests is that everyone takes their own information from it.

We have also skyped Mill Creek school in Chicago (<http://kidblog.org/MC55R2012-2013/>) even though they are in a completely different time zone. We would be about to go home when they would have just come into school. We connected with them through our blogs as well. I think Ms. O'Keeffe found Mrs. Roman on Twitter. Mrs. Roman helped us a lot with things like voice thread and stuff like that. Speaking of voice thread, we did a huge project about a man called Captain Frances O'Neill. We set up a wiki about him with Chicago as well.

Captain Frances O'Neill was born in Tralibane in County Cork. His family wanted him to become a priest, but he didn't so he ran away. He went on a ship where he met his wife and then moved to Chicago. From there he became the chief of police in Chicago. We did the project together because there is a huge link between Ireland and Chicago because of him. He brought lots of Irish music with him and collected lots more in Chicago. On one of our skypes to Chicago we played some Irish music for them and then they sang their national anthem for us.

Also this year we have connected with classes in other schools and different countries through another wiki called data to make sense of the world (<http://data2makesenseofworld.wikispaces.com/Home>) where we put up pictures of things like animals, land forms, plants and things like that.

3 TAGS

16th Century 17th

Century 100WC

100wc6th Animals

Antarctica Anti-

Bullying Book

Reviews Catherine

Cronin's Visit

Christmas Coole

Park County Blogs

Cross Border

Orchestra First Few

Weeks in 5th Class

Geography

Halloween History

Homework

Impact100wc

Learning Online

Memories and Hopes

Our Stuff Science

SCRATCH Showcase

100wc space Spain

Student Voices The Silver

Sword

3 CATEGORIES

• No categories

RECENT POSTS

### Sample Reflective Post

## County blogs! Galway

Tags: County Blogs Categories: Blog June 6, 2013 @ 10:30 PM 3 Comments

We are doing county blogs which is where you blog about your county and ours is Galway!!

Here are some facts about Galway!

Galway is located in Connacht and is the biggest county in Connacht and is even the second biggest county in Ireland! It is in the west of Ireland. Guess how many islands are inhabited in Galway?? There are actually 18!! Including the Aran islands.

Killary Harbour makes part of the border between Mayo and Galway. It is 16 kilometres long and it gets 45 metres deep in parts of the harbour. In 1996 the population of Galway was 57,241 but then in 2006 it was 72,414 so it is known to be one of the fastest growing counties in Europe!!!! The population grew a big amount - by 1/4 in only ten years. Isn't that amazing!!!!

Would you have ever guessed that there are 43,000 Irish speakers in Galway! Galway has the largest number of Irish speakers in Ireland!

I hope you have enjoyed reading about Galway and I can't wait to share more about Galway with you and learn about your counties!!

[Leave a comment](#)



The image shows a screenshot of a blog post. On the left side, there is a vertical teal bar with a spiral binding graphic. At the top of this bar, it says 'March 24'. The main title of the post is 'Coole Park Visit'. Below the title, it says 'Posted by:' followed by a blank space. Then it says 'Tags: Coole Park' and 'Categories: Blog'. Below that, it says 'March 24, 2013 @ 8:39 PM' and '0 Comments' and 'Edit this Post'. The main body of the post contains two paragraphs of text. The first paragraph describes a visit to Coole Park on March 14th, 2013, mentioning tour guides Hilda and Raymond (with Áine as a substitute), a class of 32 split into two groups of 16, and various activities like learning about animals, a library, and a quiz. The second paragraph expresses the author's enjoyment of the visit and their desire to return.

March 24

### Coole Park Visit

Posted by:

Tags: [Coole Park](#)

Categories: [Blog](#)

March 24, 2013 @ 8:39 PM 0 Comments [Edit this Post](#)

On the 14th of March 2013 we took a visit Coole Park. Hilda and Raymond were our tour guides but Raymond was not there so Áine was there instead. Our class of 32 was split into two groups of 16. One half of the class started inside the visiter center and the other half started outside. The visiter center was called Me and Nu in there we learned about some animals like swans, squirrels, pine martins, some birds and more, we also learned a bout Lady Augusta Gregory and her life there was a bit about her sister Catherine (nu) also. Then upstairs we went into the library it wasn't a real library with loads of books it was more about authors and poets. Outside we were given types of trees and types of birds to look out for we also did a quiz when there was a sheet of paper with quistions to answer. The questions were based on Lady Gregorys childhood and stuff it was great fun. Then we walked down to the river and the water had only just gone down because in the winter the water rises very very high and in the last few years it has been flooded.I am sure I haven't said everything so check out this website to see more <http://www.coolepark.ie/>

I had a great time there at Coole Park and would love to go again it is a great place to go for a walk and there is loads of information there.

### Sample Posts

## If trees could talk

Categories: Blog

March 7, 2013 @ 10:40 PM 5 Comments [Edit this Post](#)

They're all arriving. Everything is going smoothly. Oh no! the red coats are coming, they don't know.

I can't warn them. Suddenly I hear everyone panicking. They are all climbing up on me. Ouch! That was my favourite branch. They're all shaking but all so still at the same time. I wish I could do something.

The next moment they are all climbing down with their hands in the air. They are all begging for something but I'm not sure what.

I can feel the long, narrow twine, winding round my strongest, longest branch. This isn't right. Why me?

The priest is being fitted to suit the twine and up he goes. All of his followers are crying and praying for him.

He has been taken off the twine and they lay him on the ground. All I can hear is the sound of the redcoats' horses galloping away from the scene.

His body has been buried beside me and a small stone put on top to remember his grave. Gradually, all his followers leave except one.

He is a young boy. He is just sitting there staring. Suddenly he jumps and removes the stone that marks the grave.

He moves it along the grass and up onto the mass rock. He leaves it upon the mass rock and runs away.

What has he done?

Sample post of a story incorporating prior learning about the Famine in Ireland.



*June 7, 2013 at 11:29 AM*

Brilliant story :!  
It gave me shivers up my back!!!!  
It leaves me wondering how will this baby vampire destroy everything???

My favourite part is We all knew that the vampires would be rushing home at this time, with their victims underneath their capes, because it gives you this picture in your head and you could imagine it all. I love the way you said "monstrosity of a building" instead of just saying outside the building 😊😊  
I really really enjoyed reading this story you should make it into a book!

Reply



*June 11, 2013 at 12:26 PM*

Hi Molly  
Thank you for your lovely comment!

Reply



*June 7, 2013 at 12:01 PM*

Hi ,  
Excellent story!  
You had a really good idea for it and you set a good plot.  
You set a brilliant picture as I could imagine it all so clearly.  
It's quite a freaky and creepy story but I like this type of story.  
Your last sentence was a fantastic way to end a story because it left you on a cliff hanger. It didn't matter if we liked it or not there was still one of them left, it could destroy us all.....  
I'm wondering if the baby will do anything, or was it a trick and they somehow changed an adult into a baby, or maybe when the baby was going to grow up and take over the world, I'm not sure.  
Brilliant story again,  
- 😊

Reply



*June 11, 2013 at 12:25 PM*

Hi  
Thank you so much for your lovely comment!

Reply

### Sample comments



(Mrs.  
Vilas's Fabulous  
Fourth Grade  
Writers)

JUNE 6, 2013 AT 9:18 PM

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

O....M....G! You first sentence was OFF THE HOOK! I as soon as I read it I was like, "Wow I have to keep reading this because this is getting good!" and I think readers should have an expression like that on ANYONE'S blog! I give you a star for that one!

Another think I liked was that your story was very exciting like for example where you stated, "I take out my bow and arrow and aim for his cruel heart. My hand is shaking. Will I shoot or will I let him get away with it?", when I read that I was wondering, "Will she shoot him?" That part of the story was REALLY exciting!

The only recommendation I have for you is to just simply add a picture just like what Cayla said so I could better visualize this amazing story! I hope you will continue blogging and making these unforgettable, outstanding yet amazing stories!

Yours truly,

ps-come visit my blog too!

<http://kidblog.org/MrsVilas/author/ae45c3f5-648f-49e0-ac50-a0b5d28dbd85/>

Reply



(Mrs.  
Vilas's Fabulous  
Fourth Grade  
Writers) (Guest)

JUNE 7, 2013 AT 12:03 AM

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I loved it. It was amazing. You used a great vocabulary that stands out and that is at a high level. I also liked that it was very exciting. I remember when you said I ran through the forest my heart pounding and my chest closing in like the dense trees. That is great writing and I was reading on to see what was happening. You must be an amazing writer and blogger! I wish you added a picture to show what was happening and how it looked like.

From \_\_\_\_\_:

Ps: you can visit me at <http://kidblog.org/MrsVilas/>

Reply



JUNE 7, 2013 AT 12:11 PM

I'm speechless \_\_\_\_\_! That was a fascinating story, and scared the living day lights out of me, but it really made my day! You really deserved to get showbassed and I cant wait for your next 100 word challenge!

\_\_\_\_\_ 😊

Reply



(Guest)

JUNE 8, 2013 AT 12:48 AM

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

After I read this story all I could say was wow. This post scared me a bite. It made me think. And when you do that it is a good sign. Could you imagine being in a situation like that???

I love your vivid description of how your hands were shaking. I imagine feeling scared because I'm chasing a killer and I have a chance of succeeding and failing. My hands would be shaking the way you described it.

I wish you would tell me more about what happened with the killer and your brother. That would be quite interesting. I want to know more so I could understand more why you wanted to kill that killer killing your brother in general. Maybe you can describe what happened like on the show: First 48. I also wanted to know why the killer murdered your brother.

## Sample comments

## Appendix H: Sample Comments from the Post Blogging Questionnaire

### Question 4: What did you enjoy or not enjoy about blogging and why.

I enjoyed using the bolg because of the coments and looking at blogs all around the world, and conecting with other class's
the blog was a lot of fun because we got to connect with other students from all around the world.
I enjoyed connecting with classes all over the world and letting them see my work and comment on it.
I enjoy the 100 word challenge because it challenges you're creativity
I enjoyed reading other peoples posts from around the world.
i enjoy using the blog because you can read other blogs and people can read your blog
I enjoyed blogging because I was allowed to write what I like.
I enjoyed it because it was fun and easy
I liked blogging because it was easy to do and it thought me something about making a website too.
I liked doing the hundred word challenges because it's a good way to do and improve creative writing which I like doing very much.
I enjoyed blogging because it was fun but I didn't enjoy it when I didn't know what to write
I enjoyed the way you could observe other peoples work and comment on them.
i enjoyed gettin comments because people are saying good things to you
I enjoyed being able to put about some of the stuff that I like and being able to comment on somebody else's page if I like their posts!

I liked writing about the different projects because it was good finding out the information and also because you could design it anyway you like and you take in the the information easily and it improves your typing too.
liked doing the 100wc
I enjoyed blogging because, I got to experience what it is like to blog! and it was fun!
I enjoyed it because I got to learn alot
I enjoyed writing about things that I like and I liked learning about new things.
designing the projects on it and looking at other people blogs
i enjoyed the 100 WC a lot.
i enjoyed blogging because it was cool to post things
I enjoyed blogging because you could be as creative as you want.
I liked linking with other school I do admit though I am getting a little bored
I liked the 100 WC and I liked sending comments and receiving comments.
The 100 Word Challenge, and getting lots of comments.
I enjoy the blog because we were introduced to the 100wc and got to do it every week
I really enjoyed blogging this year because we got to connect with schools all the way in Chicago! I also like the 100 word challenge! One of my favourite things about the blog, this was people reading your posts and getting lovely from your class mates and from all over the world!
Really enjoyed the 100 word challenge, getting comments from all over the world, blogging projects with Millcreek School Chicago Illinois, what I didn't enjoy - checking for plagerism

**Question 11: What is good about reading other people's blogs do you think?**

You can comment and talk to other people around the world
I like reading other people's blogs to get ideas for my blog, finding out what other people are doing, commenting, and basically just learning!
That you learn that there is many schools out there that has school blogs and also your always learning while reading peoples blogs from around the world
You can get ideas from reading other peoples blogs.
You get really good ideas and learn new things.
It's good to read other blogs because you can learn lots of information.
You get to see what other pupils in other schools all over the globe are learning about.
It allows you to find out what they're doing and their ways of learning and being able to connect with them.
You are able to get good information or good ideas from other people's blog posts.
it is good to read other people's to find out what they are learning.
i like to read other peoples blogs because it gives me ideas about what to write on my own blog.and the 100 word challenge.
You learn new things and intresting facts and you can comment on their work.
I think reading other people's post is good because you get good ideas for your own posts.
It gives you ideas and info for you're posts
i like reading other peoples blogs because you can see what they had written up about other people and there facts
It's good to read other people's blogs because you can find out more about them and what they like.
It is good because you get to see their opinion on things

I get to know something about them or learn something
They might give you ideas and inspiration for some of your own stuff.
The good thing about being able to read other peoples blogs is that you can learn more about whatever topic their writing about and comment
Its good because you get to see what other people think about different things.
It's good reading other pupils blogs because its interesting to see what they like when they write a story or a project even though i don't do it that often.
It gives an idea about what they learn and study in different parts of the world/country
Finding out how other pupils are learning in other parts of the world, get good ideas, get to connect with classrooms all over the world
It lets you get an idea of what they're learning.
I think it's good to read other peoples blogs because you learn lots of information and
You learn from them.
it's good to read other peoples blogs because you get to see what they write about
Reading other peoples blog's is good because you learn alot from what they have wrote. When I would read Millcreeks schools, blogs it was interesting to see what they were learning and how different it was to how we were learning!

**Question 14: Why do you like or not like comments being left? Think about comments from your friends and from people you don't know when answering this question.**

<p>I like comments being left because it makes you feel good about your work and it means someone has took the time to read and comment on your post.</p>
<p>I like getting comments on anything and from anyone as its lovely to think that someone else has read and appreciated your work.</p> <p>When people leave questions I try my best to answer them as best I can, and I leave questions on other peoples blogs as well.</p> <p>Its not as nice when you get a negative comment but I'm sure the other person is just trying to be helpful!</p>
<p>I love when peple give me nice comments like complimenting my work and I would try to go back on to their blog to give them a comment but sometimes people dont give as nice comments and that is not really that nice</p>
<p>I like when people comment on my blog because it makes me feel happy</p>
<p>I like when people leave comments on my posts because it makes me feel good about myself and my writing</p>
<p>I like getting comments on my posts especially on the 100wc because then I know that people enjoy my stories, I like them from people around the world because I feel that they mean it.</p>
<p>I really like comments being left for people because it gives them encouragement to write and read on the blogs.</p>
<p>i like comments beacause they give you a congrats on how well you did on writing the post and the mistakes you made but could not see.</p>
<p>I love getting nice comments because they make me feel happy.</p>
<p>I like getting comments because it makes you feel good about yourself</p>
<p>I like comments being left because I get to know what things other people like to read.</p>
<p>I like when people leave comments because it means are reading it and that they like my blog.</p>

I like comments because i would like to know if other people liked it or not to make it better next time
I like it because I know that people are interested in my work
I like when people comment on me because it means that i can change different things on my next blog depending on the comment.
I like when people leave comments on my blog because the you know people have liked or enjoyed reading my blog
I like getting comments, because it feels that I have done well,made an effort, and that other people like my posts. I do not really like comments being left in my posts also because, It makes me feel a bit too open to ( Strangers).
I like comments being left because they tell me what other people thought of my work.
What I like about comments being left is that if it says what I could change or do better I could take that on board and if it's a question or something I could reply back to them with the answer
I like it because I get to see what other people think of my blog psts
i like comments being left by other people so i can see what they think of my blog
I like it because to get to see what people think of it.
I like comments because they make you happy
I like getting comments from others because people always say lovely things and if they think I could improve something they always say encouraging things
I like getting comments from other people because i like to see do they like my work and what can i improve on.
i like it when they like my posts
To know people are reading my posts and to get tips on how to make my posts better.
Sometime's when people leave comments they say what you did wrong but it's only to help you. I like comments because they make you happy and also give more confidence.
I really like comments being left on my blog, because it means they have read my post and

have liked it soo much to give me a comment!

**Question 17: What makes writing on the blog different than writing in a copy?**

I think writing on the blog is different than writing in your copies because it is easier. Writing in your copy could cause your hand to get sore.

If you make a mistake you just do backspace but if you do it in a copy you have to rub out and if you don't have a rubber that ain't easy

It is different because you use a labtop

When you write in a copy your hand gets a little sore and only you and a few other people can see it but when you write on the blog then everybody can see it

Using the blog is different than writing in copies because people from all over the world can read your posts and it's not only your teacher seeing it.

Writing on the blog is much better than writing in copy in my opinion because

-Its quicker

-You get better at typing

-you are still learning, even though it does NOT feel like work

-You can edit quickly

In a way I can't explain It but one of the main reasons Is that more people can see what you are writing, but if you write in copies only the teacher sees them

it is different because your not using your hand as much

It makes it feel as if you can write as long as you can. But for copy books I just want to get it finished and I dont want to do it anymore but for the blog it's completly diffrent

On the blog you get to learn and write about things that interest you, while in your copy you have to write the same as everyone else. You also do better if you learn what your interested in.

In a copy the only one seeing your work is your teacher whereas on the blog anyone can see my work and overall its just more efficient

Its faster, easier and you learn how to type faster.

your hand never gets sore. Also everyone all ovr the world can see it.

on the blog you can spell check your misspellings and it is easy to type
It doesn't make your hand sore and mostly because its fun
if you write on the blog your work is easier to correct and it is also easier to find out things on the internet then in your dictionaries.
Your hand doesn't get sore. And if you want to find the spelling of a word you can spell correct it.
Everyone everywhere can see your work other than just the teacher.
Your wrist never hurts. And when your typing it doesn't really feel like work.
it is different because it is easier to read over your work and edit
because you can find more information and you can see what other people think of it
I think it is easier because it is easier to read over and easier to change things if you don't like it
i think its more creative when you write on the blog because you can create it anyway you like whether you like it colorful or just plain black with a good picture to set the scene.
when you make a mistake you can just push a button and its gone
I have resources on the net and typing is quicker than writing.
People all over the world could read it and then they comment their feedback.
You can correct your work, easily you can edit as you write, you can other people see your work other than the teacher, it's good to have practice on the keyboard, when you're writing on the blog it doesn't feel like work but we get lots done. everytime you don't know how to spell a word you can use the online spellcheck instead of having to look up the dictionary, either way it's all more efficient
In your copy its only read by your teacher whereas on the blog anyone can see it
When you are writing on the blog it doesn't feel like work because you are typing and researching and you also try harder on the blog because you know other people from all over the world might read it!

**Question 22: How do you think blogging has helped you learn, that's special only to blogging?**

I think blogging helped us learn because our teacher writes the blogs and put links into the blog that brings us to a website.
I've had comments half way around the world which I would probably never have if I had just written in my copy
When people leave comments, sometimes they correct me and that helps me a lot
I learned Internet safety and how to make projects and to be honest the things you learn online are endless, but there is some bad things you learn on the internet too
I think blogging has helped me learn because I have learned how to find the information myself and I think you learn a lot more this way other than using books.
Blogging has helped me to learn a lot, because of web quests, And also we are not all doing the same thing like we would if we were using text books.
On the internet you can search to learn as much as you want but if you are writing in text books you only have learnt about 25% of what you could learn on the internet.
I think its special because if you were using a textbook you would be reading the same thing and you wouldn't be able to have your own opinion
it has helpedd me to learn by reading all of the other posts with all the information.
blogging has helped me to learn allot about creative writing. the 100wc has been a great way for me to write my own storys and for other people to see them.
It means I can learn intresting things from other peoples blogs.
Well on Web Quests you get to choose what information to take in and how you want to put it into your own words if your doing a blog post about it.
The blog helps you learn about anything but its more enjoyable.
it has helped me on writing storys and it has helped me on my spellings
It's helped me use my imagination and with spelling.

That I learn things that I probably wouldn't learn at school work
blogging is easier a little to learn
by reading other peoples blogs and posts.
It helped me learn because it made me express my opinion on other peoples blog.
Blogging has helped me learn because reading other peoples blogs gives you a lot of information
When learning on the blog you can comment and if you don't understand it or something you could just ask the author of the blog.
Its much easier to take in information from the blog for some reason ?
because I am finding out more information
its easier to understand it when another child is writing it. And usually only the bits that you need to know are in it.
It comes from people and there honest opinion instead of books
It has helped me to learn about the different styles of writing. in a blog its not answering questions or copying stories off a board. Its gathering your own information and putting it down in any way you like. whether it be past tense, present tense, future tense or a mixture of all three. It has also helped me to see where my grammar has been failing because the letters are bigger and there's spell check..
It is good that alot of other children can see your work made me more enthusiastic about my work.
you learn how to take oin the information that you find interesting through a webquest unlike everybody reading the same textbook. You can then write about that information in the blog so everyone'spersonality comes through - the same with the 100 word challenge
Its helped me learn howto type faster! Its also helped me to give nice compelments to people, from giving comments!