

**Blogging and Online Book Clubs: What Happens When Preservice Teachers Engage in
Digital Reading and Writing?**

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Abstract

This study explored perceptions of the digital experiences of 18 preservice teachers before and after participation in blogging paired with online book clubs. The purpose of the research was to identify participants' reading habits and online practices, examine their perceptions of blogging as an instructional tool when coupled with online book clubs, and ascertain if or how they intend to incorporate this digital pairing into their future educational practice. A 15-question Likert-scale survey was administered to participants, six-member online book clubs were formed, and blogs were created and used by participants to engage in online dialogue over the course of four weeks. Participants again responded to the survey and also provided reflective responses. Findings revealed positive aspects and challenges related to participants' experience. Though this study was narrow in scope and results were limited, it provides a foundation and rationale for future research in an area that is still emerging.

Keywords: blogging, online book clubs, digital literacies, classroom technology, preservice teachers, pedagogy

Introduction

As traditional teaching methods shift and the learning environment pushes beyond the boundaries of the school building, today's teachers and students increasingly participate in technology practices that span the globe and connect diverse populations through the use of digital media. The concept of integrating instructional technologies that are familiar to students in their everyday lives increases the likelihood that every student will have an opportunity to learn according to their own abilities, skill set, and interests (Bond & Bedenlier, 2019; Zahra et al., 2021). This is crucial as "people do not learn anything well unless they are both motivated to learn and believe that they will be able to use and function with what they are learning in some way that is in their interest" (Cazden et al., 1996, p. 85). Therefore, the goal of 21st-century educators should be to provide relevant digital learning platforms—in this case, blogging used in combination with online book clubs—to fully engage students in the learning experience. Beyond the need to grapple with how to introduce varied forms of media into the classroom, educators must also determine how to establish meaningful pedagogic practices within a framework that provides learners the freedom to engage in ways that are personally beneficial, but also meet certain standards. In short, "the challenge...is to enable self-direction, knowledge building, and learner control by providing options and choice while still supplying the necessary structure and scaffolding" (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008). Online book clubs are a contemporary means of bridging the old and the new. Blogging as an instructional tool provides a platform through which students become fully invested and engaged in online book clubs in a manner that is reflective, collaborative, and current.

Though digital technologies have permeated and transformed every aspect of our society, there remains a disconnect between in-school and out-of-school practice that many literacy educators have been slow to bridge (Picton, 2019). According to Stanford University education professor Larry Cuban, “The introduction of computers into schools was supposed to improve academic achievement and alter how teachers taught. Neither has occurred,” (Herold, 2015). Similarly, a 2016 *Education Week* survey of classroom teachers found that “despite an influx of technology in schools, many teachers still mainly rely on digital programs to supplement traditional instructional strategies rather than to support more creative, inquiry-based learning” (Rebora, 2016). Furthermore, the authors’ own experience has revealed that teachers are not fully implementing technology into the curriculum in ways that enhance content acquisition and promote critical literacies. This reluctance on the part of teachers to fully embrace technology in their classrooms is often rooted in feelings of inadequacy due to a lack of time, experience, and training, as well as their attitudes regarding content and how it should be taught (Alswilem, 2019; Klein, 2022a, 2022b; Makhoul & Bensaf, 2021; Picton, 2019; Schleicher, 2020; Strong-Wilson & Rouse, 2013). Regardless of the reason for this reluctance, persistence in employing antiquated classroom instructional techniques often produces unmotivated, disengaged student readers and writers.

The recent seismic shift in educational practice brought about by the COVID-19 global pandemic left many teachers feeling even more overwhelmed by the sudden, albeit necessary, push to incorporate digital technologies and virtual platforms into classroom instruction (Anthony & Noel, 2021; Joseph & Merrick, 2021; Klein, 2022a, 2022b; Schleicher, 2020; Winter et al., 2021). Implementation, mastery, and oversight of these virtual spaces has led to frustration and technology fatigue for teachers, principals, and district leaders (Klein, 2022a).

This emergency use of technology during crisis circumstances (Hodges et al., 2020) is, at its core, utilitarian in nature and, in and of itself, fails to stimulate critical thinking and motivate readers and writers. Reflective of Cuban's 2003 research findings, "[t]he overwhelming majority of teachers [continue to employ] technology [merely] to sustain existing patterns of teaching, rather than to innovate" (p. 134). In today's digital society, it is crucial that learners not only have the tools to support knowledge and skills acquisition, but also opportunities to experience innovative learning approaches that help them become digitally literate citizens (Bunting et al., 2020; Fraillon et al., 2014; Picton, 2019). The merging of two unique digital practices, blogging and online book clubs, embraces the current trends of multimodalities and learner-centric knowledge acquisition and, therefore, has the potential to transform instruction within the classroom and facilitate student engagement and achievement.

The goal of this study was to determine preservice teachers' perceptions regarding blogging as an instructional tool to facilitate engagement in online book clubs. Additionally, the researchers sought to discover how preservice teachers' personal experiences with blogging and online book clubs influenced their perceptions of these technological literacy experiences. The specific research questions addressed were:

1. What are preservice teachers' perceptions of blogging and online book clubs prior to participation in these digital experiences?
2. What are preservice teachers' perceptions of blogging and online book clubs after participation in these digital experiences?

3. What are preservice teachers' perceptions about incorporating blogging and online book clubs into their future teaching practice?

Theoretical Stance

Technological advances are creating new ways of perceiving the world and new landscapes of knowledge which are altering societies' structures and influencing traditional classroom pedagogies. Due to this explosive digital growth, new literacy practices are emerging, making it necessary for individuals to learn how to read and interpret symbols, images, characters, and other elements across synchronous and asynchronous spaces. Nonetheless, as educators grapple with this reality, many are not completely convinced of the merits of investing in multimodal methodologies which are continually shifting and changing, particularly if they are unsure of the justification for such changes (Edwards-Groves, 2011; Öman & Hashemi, 2015; Picton, 2019; Tan et al., 2010; Winter et al., 2021). It is crucial, therefore, to theoretically frame the practice of blogging as an instructional tool through the use of online book clubs, and to attempt to establish the value of its incorporation into classroom literacy instruction. As a literacy tool, blogging can be firmly situated within a multi-dimensional conceptual framework which includes Constructivism, Social Constructivism, Connectivism, and Third Space Theory.

Constructivism, as defined by Tracey and Morrow (2006), occurs when individuals integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge, an occurrence which requires the learner to be actively involved in the learning process. Blogging, coupled with online book clubs, fits nicely into this category as a pedagogical component of literacy instruction, particularly when examined through the lens of Engagement Theory (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000) and Inquiry Learning. Engagement Theory focuses on the motivation, or engagement, aspect of educational

practice and supports making instruction meaningful and relevant to the learner (Tracey and Morrow, 2006). It also addresses the social aspect of learning and emphasizes interaction among learners, a fundamental principle of both blogging and book clubs. Dewey's Inquiry Learning Theory focuses not only on the growth and development of the individual, but also on the instructor and the learning environment (Tracey and Morrow, 2006). A successful classroom blogging experience requires an environment that facilitates and motivates student engagement and success as well as an instructor that is fully invested in the process. This problem-based approach encourages critical thinking, conflict-resolution, and self-efficacy—fundamental components of the blogging experience.

Vygotsky's Social Constructivist theory brings social interaction into the mix as it is based on the premise that social interaction is necessary for learning to occur (Vygotsky, 1978). Blogging and online book clubs are inherently social in nature as both are built upon the interaction between reader, writer, and audience. Scaffolding, a component of Vygotskian theory (1978) in which the teacher facilitates, or scaffolds, the learner's intellectual development and progress, supports the need for teacher guidance and encouragement during the blogging experience.

There is no denying the fact that we live in a networked society and, consequently, blogging can be framed within Connectivism (Siemens, 2004) and Third Space Theory (Rosenblatt, 1978) as well. Under the umbrella of Connectivism, learners interact, or connect, across a variety of networks with the potential to reach a global audience. This facilitates currency, encourages a diversity of opinions, and expands the capacity to acquire knowledge (Siemens, 2004). Similarly, Third Space Theory centers on the place where a learner's personal space or discourse (first space) intersects a peripheral space or discourse (second space) and

results in the construction of a completely new space known as a third space (Rosenblatt, 1978). Personalized learning opportunities often spring from these third space environments and enable learners not only to draw upon individual funds of knowledge, but also to expand their knowledge base through interaction with others. Connectivist and Third Space Theory embrace the exploration of diverse interests within the classroom, something afforded by the incorporation of blogging as an instructional tool into online book club interaction. As educators, we believe that a balanced instructional approach incorporating elements of these four theories creates an optimum learning environment that is individualized, differentiated, student-centered, and relevant in today's knowledge-based, ever-shifting, networked global society.

Literature Review

The idea of incorporating technology into classroom practice is often met by hesitation, if not outright resistance, by teachers across the educational spectrum. Research on how classroom teachers regard the use of technology in education reveals that, while most find technology to be useful for academic and collaborative skill development, it is difficult to conclusively determine to what extent they believe its use in the classroom positively impacts academic performance (Barseghian, 2013; Fraillon et al., 2014; Önalán & Kurt, 2020; Picton, 2019). It appears that while many readily acknowledge the value of hands-on learning opportunities and accept without qualm the notion that collaboration is a beneficial means of enabling students to master content, the reality of implementing multimodalities into classroom instruction requires commitment, and as such, a reliance upon research to provide a catalyst. Though the volume of peer-reviewed literature on the subject of blogging in the classroom is growing, there continues to be a gap in the data supporting its usefulness as an instructional tool to facilitate student engagement within

the reading and writing classroom, specifically regarding online book clubs. The literature reviewed in reference to this study clearly delineates the need for further research in this area.

Blogging and Its Potential as An Instructional Tool

Since its inception in the 1990s, blogging has provided a vehicle for writers to create original content or share material obtained from other sources, while connecting to readers with common interests. There is a seemingly endless array of blog types: personal blogs, travel blogs, food blogs, fashion blogs, corporate blogs, fitness blogs, lifestyle blogs, and news blogs, to name just a few. The term ‘blog’ is a shortened form of ‘web log,’ the technical name for this interactive digital platform. Blogs enable writers to “express their writing ideas and share their writing skills online” (Alsamadani, 2017, p. 44), and elicit an audience response. According to activity records for WordPress, Tumblr, Blogger, Wix, Squarespace, and Medium, blogging continues its upward trend with more than 570 million blogs online as of 2021 (Djuraskovic, 2022). Seventy-seven percent of internet users worldwide read blogs, and people living in the United States are three times more likely to read a blog than emails (Sanders, 2022). Due to the continuing relevance of blogging in today’s digital society, there is value in harnessing its educational potential. As noted by Kuehl (2017/2018), today’s students must not only be familiar with current technologies, but should receive instruction that facilitates digital literacy and fosters automaticity in navigating online spaces.

A substantial amount of research has been conducted on blogging as an instructional tool. Many of these studies examine blogging within the frame of writing instruction for foreign language learners (e.g., Huang, 2016; Kitchakarn, 2014; Lin, 2015; Shima & Ghoreishi, 2020; Wong & Moorhouse, 2018; Yousefifard & Fathi, 2021). According to Huang (2016), blogs “provide learner writers with an authentic language environment to reach wider audiences, and

allow teachers and student peers to offer feedback and to promote negotiation for meaning” (p. 38). Yousefifard & Fathi (2021) concluded that greater exposure to language input through posting writing tasks on blogs improved the writing quality of Iranian EFL learners. Alsamadani (2017) states that “blogging has revolutionized EFL pedagogy and methodology” (p. 44). He points to dramatic improvement in writing skills “in terms of content, word choice, style, language mechanics, and the like” (p. 44), and recommends that blogging be integrated into school writing curricula. In these and many other cases, EFL research findings are applicable to the regular classroom as well. Wong & Moorhouse (2018), for example, found during their study of young EFL learners in Hong Kong that students were more motivated to write when their purpose for doing so extended beyond merely receiving a grade. Furthermore, the development of an awareness of the audience by students resulted in greater creativity and engagement during the writing experience. Huang’s (2016) research findings support those of Aljumah (2012) in that writing becomes less boring and difficult for students when they are given the opportunity not only to write about topics of personal interest, but to also benefit from audience feedback.

A number of research studies emphasize the educational value and opportunities associated with effectively incorporating blogging into regular classroom writing instruction and practice. Some of these studies focus on teachers and their instructional practice (e.g., Carver & Todd, 2016; Lee, 2018; Stover et al., 2014;) while others center on students and their writing craft (e.g., Bakan, 2017; Jordan, 2014; Pilkington, 2018; Tanti, 2012). At least one study (McGrail & Davis, 2014) employs a dual approach, simultaneously examining teachers and students. In that instance, while examining elementary students’ views on blogging, the research team interviewed not only the fifth-grade students at the center of the study, but also their teacher. They concluded that blogging provides an effective means for students to develop

audience awareness and hone their writing and communication skills. Of particular interest and relevance to our study are the findings of Campillo-Ferrer et al. (2021), Lee (2018), Li et al. (2013), and Stover et al. (2014), as their research participants were preservice teachers engaged in blogging practices.

Two researchers in particular chose to expand their analysis of blogging as an instructional tool beyond a single study. Boyd, in her 2013 literature review, focuses primarily on how a pedagogical approach to blogging can challenge and expand traditional technology instruction and fundamentally alter the literacy learning environment. The characteristics of blogs are outlined, as are suggested uses of blogs, possible educational limitations, and the students' and teacher's roles in the implementation of this digital pedagogy. Emphasis is placed on the development of a participatory, learner-centered environment with increased critical thinking and collaboration through the use of blogs. Boyd (2013) encourages teachers to incorporate blogging into the curriculum in ways that align with goals and outcomes, and refrain from incorporating technology merely for the sake of incorporating technology. More recently, Kuehl (2017/2018) compiled a literature review in which she addresses various ways blogging has been integrated into elementary classroom writing instruction. She found that including blogging in the teaching of writing showed promise both as a pedagogical tool and also as a vehicle to strengthen classroom community, and suggested that teachers who want a fresh approach to writing instruction consider incorporating blogging into their practice.

The Impact of Blogging on Student Self-Efficacy in Writing Practice

Bumguardner et al. (2014) suggest that “[s]tudent engagement [lies] at the heart of educational blogging” (p. 33). Likewise, self-efficacy, or “a person’s belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation” (Lopez-Garrido, 2020) lies at the heart of engagement. Studies

have shown that higher self-efficacy positively affects students' writing performance (e.g., Cequeña, 2020; Cequeña et al., 2013; Shah et al., 2011). According to Shah et al., (2011), “strong writing self-efficacy means a strong sense of confidence for the task of writing” (p. 9). Prior research conducted by Bandura (1986), Pajares (2000), and Pajares & Johnson (1996) supports this point of view, with the added caveat that self-efficacy has been revealed as the most powerful motivator with regard to writing performance. The recommendation by Shah et al. (2011) that teachers “upgrade their pedagogical practices” and “develop innovative teaching [approaches]” (p. 11) lends itself well to the incorporation of blogging into classroom writing instruction since it has been shown to facilitate student engagement.

Tryon (2006) contends that blogging “helps students become invested in their writing [and gives] them a sense that writing...matters” (p. 128). Pilkington (2018) concurs, pointing out that blogging can help students realize “writing [can be] an important real-world activity as opposed to a task that is performed exclusively for the classroom” (p. 223). She discovered that such a positive shift in attitude motivated students involved in blog writing to be more conscious of style and essay mechanics even though these aspects were not part of grading criteria” (p. 223). This may be attributed, at least in part, to the knowledge that their writing would be read not only by their teacher, but also by their peers (Sütçü, 2020, p. 349). According to Maloy et al. (2019), blogs allow young writers to share information with readers and, thus, enable them to practice “how to use written language so that others can read and understand it” (p. 123). In that way, “blogging encourages understanding by the writer” (Maloy et al., 2019, p. 123).

In her study of a fourth-grade class, Bakan (2017) found that students were more motivated to respond to texts when writing on their blogs. Sütçü (2020), during her study of university English preparatory students, discovered that those “with positive attitudes toward

blogging are likely to become better writers” (p. 349). Kitchakarn (2014) found that “the process of creating and publishing information on blogs...promoted students’ creative thinking” (p. 49). Findings from Lin’s (2015) study of 18 university-level Taiwanese EFL student writers suggest that the integration of blogging into writing instruction “helps students develop writing skills as well as motivation and self-efficacy” (p. 446). Surprisingly, however, “this enthusiasm did not translate into much actual blogging activity” (p. 446). Research by Bumguardner et al. (2014) found that “agricultural leadership students’ low self-efficacy resulted in lowered behavioral intention to use blogging for educational purposes” (p. 38). As a result, the researchers concluded that a concerted effort would be necessary in order for students to embrace the educational value of blogging.

In their case study of 18 second-grade students, Lapp, Shea, & Wolsey (2010/11) sought to establish a correlation between the writer’s cognizance of the interests and desires of the audience and his or her ability to transfer that knowledge to various types of writing. After posting their work to the blog and receiving near-immediate feedback from their peers, teacher, and family members, students demonstrated an increased recognition of the importance of audience awareness as evidenced by their acceptance of and appreciation for feedback given and their willingness to edit and adapt their writing. This research study demonstrates that blogging can be a useful tool for teaching novice writers how to take ownership of their own writing, connect with an audience, and write for a purpose beyond themselves.

Use of Blogging to Connect In-School and Out-of-School Practice

As early as 2008, McLoughlin and Lee stated that, in this technological age, educators must rethink pedagogy and shift from the traditional brick and mortar mindset to an expanded landscape that encompasses cooperative learning and collective intelligence within more loosely

defined digital spaces in order to create a learner-centric educational environment. Never was this reality more evident than during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools closed their doors and students found themselves almost entirely reliant upon digital platforms for their educational experiences. Jerasa & Boffone (2021) report that this dependence reignited interest and engagement in digital literacies as spaces where, unlike those within the controlled boundaries of traditional school buildings, users enjoyed “freedom to communicate, create, and even collaborate with others” (p. 219). Unlike in days past, today’s students possess sophisticated expectations regarding technology, coupled with an ability to adapt to rapidly changing digital mediums. For that reason, there is a need for educators to use digital tools to facilitate interest-driven, engaging, self-styled learning experiences in which students are given autonomy framed by appropriate structure and scaffolding. Our goal as educators should be to capitalize on what our students do naturally by redefining learning spaces to encompass new technologies and instructional approaches.

An early research review by Beach (2012) examined how digital tools are used in Language Arts classrooms to promote student engagement and the acquisition of knowledge, specifically with regard to the remediation of print literacies. It outlines how such tools can be utilized to enhance literacy learning, redefine learning outcomes and classroom spaces, and develop new literacies. The author explores barriers to the use of digital tools in schools, including the disparity between student’s in-school and out-of-school engagement with digital technology, and outlines a number of implications of the research for English Language Arts teachers as well as for researchers. He asserts that the research focus should be on specific types of learning, enabled and facilitated by various digital tools, and how specific tools and their pedagogical implementation result in specific learning outcomes.

Other research from the same period examined the writing preferences of high school students in terms of in-school and out-of-school writing activities, encompassing a variety of text types (Dredger et al., 2010), explored the disparity between students' literacy practices and current classroom strategies, highlighted the disconnect that existed between Millennials' social and academic experiences in today's world (Considine et al., 2009), and addressed a perceived disconnect between student and instructor perceptions regarding the role of digital technologies in instructional practice on the university level (Gabriel et al., 2012). Dredger et al. (2010) found a marked disparity between motivation to write inside and outside the classroom, with in-school writing being primarily driven by grades and out-of-school writing undertaken more for the purposes of self-expression and communication.

The majority of students who utilized multiliteracies in their writing practice did so outside of school, noting that most in-school writing assignments adhered to traditional methods (e.g. papers, essays, reports, and tests). Based on their findings, Considine et al. (2009) expressed a need for educators to seek ways of closing the divide between students' prior knowledge and content instruction through the incorporation of digital technologies, thus facilitating student success in 21st century society. The writers acknowledge the challenge that often exists for teachers as they attempt to present foundational curriculum in ways that prepare students for a future in a technology-driven world, and call for a commitment to mutual respect and understanding between educators and their students. Findings by Gabriel et al. (2021) reveal significant differences between students' and professors' perceptions regarding the role of digital technologies, leading to the conclusion that there is a need for critical dialogue and professional development related to actual teaching practice.

Today, more than a decade later, a disparity remains between students' in-school and out-of-school practices with regard to technology and digital platforms (e.g., Jerasa & Boffone, 2021; Mohd Yusoff, 2019; Rodriguez, 2018), and educators continue to search for ways to bridge the gap. According to Mohd Yusoff (2019), the availability of technology resources in schools is not the problem; rather, "these resources are continuously ignored, undervalued and consistently recast as a problem in schools" (p. vi). It is our responsibility as educators, therefore, to seek ways of incorporating digital technologies into the curriculum in ways that are meaningful and engaging. Vasudevan (2010) believes that acceptance and incorporation of current technologies, including but not limited to blogging, into classroom practice "can be the very thing that shifts a classroom spirit from inhospitable to inviting" (p. 47). Pilkington (2018) points out that although blogging may be a platform with which some students are already familiar, teachers should adapt it to the needs of a particular curriculum and provide appropriate guidance and direction. This would allow students a certain degree of autonomy and freedom while still enabling instructor oversight.

Vasudevan (2010) further contends that educators must rethink language arts instruction and create classroom spaces where "social media and technologies are not feared or dismissed, but rather included with the promise of building on youths' familiarity with them" (p. 47). Jerasa & Boffone (2021) point out that teachers do not necessarily have to reinvent the wheel, but caution that "adolescent affinity spaces...exist...and thrive because they are not affiliated with traditional school practices" (p. 225). This is not to say that teachers should not explore the potential of current digital technologies. Rather, a realization by educators that the majority of students' current technological practices occur outside the walls of the school can facilitate a better understanding of the need to "take into account [these] out-of-school experiences,

interests, and ways of participation...[in order to] draw from them to build knowledge, to push boundaries from non-academic settings to academic ones, and therefore take new directions in research and classroom practices” (Rodriguez, 2018, p. 32).

Online Book Clubs

Many of today’s modern technological advances enable tech-users to interact in non-traditional ways within asynchronous learning environments, facilitating immersion into a new communicative order and a multimedia world (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013). The result is the creation of new literacy practices, or *new literacies*, in which reading and writing are mediated through the use of technological devices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013). When the global COVID-19 pandemic occurred in 2020 and people around the world quarantined to prevent the virus from spreading, technology became a primary means of personal communication and interaction (Lemay et al., 2021). Many individuals, wishing to escape the limitations of isolation during the lockdowns, turned to online book clubs as one way to regain a sense of community and engage in the exchange of ideas (Cumming, 2021). As a result, these online book clubs emerged as a significant way to interact and stay connected.

According to a 2021 Pew Research study, 85% of U.S. adults report daily online activity, with nearly half describing their online activity as “almost constant” (Perrin & Atske, 2021). These statistics are consistent across all racial groups, with increases in online activity reported across every age group since the previous study, with the exception of adults over 65. The 2018 *Pew Report on Teens, Social Media & Technology* revealed that 45% of teens say they are online “almost constantly” (Pew Research Center, 2018). Given this continuing rise in technology use across our society, it stands to reason that students would benefit from the incorporation of

technology with new literacy practices in asynchronous environments that reach beyond the formal classroom.

The fusion of technology with traditional book clubs to form online book clubs has proven advantageous for enhancing literacy practices and promoting literacy development in adults, adolescents, and children (Carvalho, 2021; Smith, 2019). Scharber (2009) contends that “online book clubs are fun, engaging, and convenient activities for preteens and teens and are viewed by both parents and librarians as motivating and flexible” (p.433). The formation of such interactive communities provides opportunities for members to ask questions, offer new perspectives, and engage with the text in new ways” (Smith, 2019, p. 638). The ability to engage across cyberspace in a non-threatening environment and format allows participants to share in the reading experience while engaging in meaning-making, building community, and benefitting from diverse perspectives (Smith, 2019; Robertson & Smith, 2017).

In a study conducted by Colwell et al., (2018), 12 adolescent participants voluntarily enrolled in a summer online book club, receiving limited guidance from adults for the duration of the eight-week reading program. After selecting their own texts, participants engaged in asynchronous online discussions on a threaded discussion board. Findings revealed that participants’ spontaneous discussions resulted in active listening, sophisticated communication skills, and relationally and socially interactive engagement with books.

Robertson & Smith (2017) examined the participation of a single preservice teacher in an online book club in which members read and discussed a professional trade book. The researchers were interested in understanding how the experience influenced their participant’s pedagogic beliefs. They concluded that she engaged with the text, learned from the discussions

with other group members, began to think of herself as a teacher, and gained knowledge that influenced both her pedagogical beliefs and her future instructional goals.

Other aspects of the online book club experience have garnered research attention as well. During their study of an online book club partnership between 12th grade language arts students and college students, Schreuder & Savitz (2020) found that text self-selection directly affected motivation and engagement. This is not surprising as research has long recognized choice as a fundamental element of reading motivation (Gambrell, 2011; Guthrie et al., 2007; Reed et al., 2004; Reeve, 1996). Of greater interest was their conclusion that “teachers need to move away from seeing technology as an add-on to pre-established curriculum [and instead view it] as transformational to the foundation of curriculum design and implementation” (Schreuder & Savitz, 2020, p. 272).

Wyant and Bowen (2018) found that a book club’s structure and format directly affect its success, and conclude that “book clubs are an effective pedagogical tool because of their flexibility and ability to foster student engagement and higher-level thinking” (p. 270). A study by Hales et al. (2021) revealed that students who participated in their book club not only expressed enjoyment, but also “grew professionally from reading and having the opportunity to collaborate and discuss ideas” with other members of the group (p. 142). Researchers also observed that participants exhibited increased professional interpersonal communication, even when expressing an opposing or dissenting opinion.

There is a marked lack of research and documented classroom practice directly connecting online book clubs with the use of a blogging platform, and the consequent educational possibilities. It is, therefore, important to explore the pedagogical opportunities

inherent in a relationship between the two. This study examines how the marriage of formats is perceived by preservice teachers and to what extent their own participation and experience influence their perception of the pairing.

Methodology

Participants

Participants in this research study included 18 undergraduate students enrolled in a Literacy Methods Block at a southeastern university in Texas. The course, which focused on reading, writing, and assessment instructional methods, was taken by these students in partial fulfillment of the requirements for EC-6 and/or 4-8 teacher certification; the first and second authors were instructors for the course. The third author also taught a section of the same education course. The class met two times each week, Mondays and Wednesdays, for approximately three hours per day. Of the 18 students, 13 were female and 5 were male. Participants, also referred to as preservice teachers, were previously admitted to the educator preparation program and, therefore, were selected for participation in this study as part of a purposive and convenience sample.

Instrumentation

Surveys used for this investigation were developed by the researchers for data collection purposes. Pre-participation and post-participation surveys were piloted with a similar population of preservice teachers before administration to the research population, and construction of each survey was discussed with experts in the field of quantitative research prior to use. For purposes of this research study, “survey refers to a group of quantitative data collection techniques that involve the administration of a set of questions or statements to a sample of people” (Mertler, 2016). The survey consisted of 15 quantitative questions and 5 qualitative questions. The

quantitative component of the pre-participation survey was administered using a four-point Likert scale of strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree, in order to establish a baseline regarding students' perceptions of blogging and online book clubs prior to targeted classroom blogging instruction and participation in online book clubs. The qualitative component of the pre-participation survey included five open-ended questions with related sub-questions intended to enable participants to elaborate and expound upon the information given in the quantitative piece. The format of the post-participation survey was consistent with the pre-participation survey; however, some questions were reworded to collect information from participants based on their participation in online book clubs and classroom blogging instruction.

Procedures

Research was conducted during the regular semester for the duration of an instructional unit covering blogging and online book clubs, as well as throughout students' participation in two sessions of online book clubs; this included two weeks of classroom instruction and six weeks of online book club participation with one week between instruction and participation to discuss course requirements and treatment implementation and to ensure students adequate time to obtain copies of their chosen titles. Blogging instruction and participation in online book clubs comprised a small component of the overall course requirements for the Literacy Methods Block. Students were not graded on surveys, blog posts, or any written or oral component of this research study. They did, however, receive participation points as with all other course requirements. Researchers thoroughly explained the process and the guidelines that participants would follow during the intervention. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and were made aware that no identifying factors regarding their participation or responses would be included in the final write-up. Participation in the study provided evidence of consent; such was clearly

stated on the pre-participation and post-participation surveys. Though participants were given the opportunity to opt out of the study, all students enrolled in the course chose to participate.

Administration of the pre-participation survey occurred three to four weeks after the beginning of the 14-week semester, and was followed by introduction to online book clubs, targeted classroom blogging instruction, and participation in online book clubs and blogging. In the timeline below, Week 1 refers to the first instructional unit, which was Week 4 of the semester.

Timeline.

Week 1. Administered pre-participation survey and completed instruction about online book clubs. Students made book selections and were assigned by instructors to online book clubs based on their book choices.

Week 2. Completion of blogging instruction.

Week 3. Discussion of implementation and time for students to acquire copies of their book selections.

Weeks 4-6. Students participated in the first round of online book clubs.

Weeks 7-9. Students participated in the second round of online book clubs.

Week 10. Post-participation survey was administered to students.

Participants were assigned to online book clubs based on their selection of two books to read from a list provided by the instructors. Book choices were novels written for children that are appropriate for elementary-aged students and were placed on the selection list based on their literary merit as determined by awards received, professional journal reviews, and librarian recommendations. As elementary education teacher candidates, participants are expected to

incorporate this type of literature into their future classroom practice and, as such, were required to purchase copies of the two books they would read as part of the course requirements.

The actual selection and assignment protocol for each 3-week online book club session followed this procedure: 1) students were introduced by the instructor to each potential book selection, 2) students listed their book selection choices in order of preference and submitted to the instructors, 3) instructors sorted student book choices in order of preference by title, and randomly selected five student names for each book title, beginning with first choices and moving down the list for each title until all students were assigned for each session.

Instruction about online book clubs included an introduction to the format, guidelines and best practices, and introduction to select children's literature. Blogging instruction included the basic fundamentals of blogging, an overview of various blogging platforms, instruction in blogging etiquette, and how to incorporate blogging into online book club participation. The blogging platform, Edublogs, was selected by the instructors for use during this study.

Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from the pre-participation and post-participation surveys allowed researchers to determine whether a shift in perceptions of blogging as an instructional tool to facilitate engagement in online book clubs occurred after participation.

Data Collection

This study focused on participants' perceptions of blogging in conjunction with online book clubs, both as a pedagogical tool for their future instructional practice and during their current experience in Literacy Methods Block. Researchers employed a mixed-methods pre-and-post-survey design to collect and analyze data for the study. Questions on the pre-participation and post-participation surveys were intended to determine participants' perceptions of reading, book clubs, social media usage, and blogging as an instructional tool. "Pre-test/post-test designs

are widely used in behavioral research, primarily for the purpose of comparing groups and/or measuring change resulting from the experimental research” (Dimitrov & Rumrill, 2003).

In addition, participants responded to five open-ended questions at the bottom of the survey. Questions to which participants responded were:

1. Would you consider incorporating blogging in your future classroom instruction? Why or why not?
2. Would you consider incorporating online book clubs in your future classroom instruction? Why or why not?
3. Would you consider pairing blogging and online book clubs in your future classroom instruction? Why or why not?
4. What were the positive aspects of this experience for you?
5. What were the negative aspects of this experience for you?

Quantitative Data Analysis

For the quantitative data analyses a database was created in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze responses to the Likert scale questions; researchers used the *t*-test for dependent samples with a statistical significance of .05. Salkind states “a *t*-test for dependent means indicates that a single group of the same subjects is being studied under two conditions” (2014, p, 218). There were no statistically significant differences in scores; however, after comparing mean scores for each item, both positive and negative differences were revealed on several survey items.

Although there were 15 Likert scale questions on the survey, we chose to only include items for discussion in which a difference was revealed in responses between pre-and-post-participation. Presented in Table 1 are the descriptive statistics used to measure and analyze

shifts in perceptions based on the quantitative data obtained from participants on the pre-and-post-survey.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Pre and Post Survey Responses

Survey Item	<i>n</i>	Pre <i>M</i>	Pre <i>SD</i>	Post <i>M</i>	Post <i>SD</i>	Differences in pre and post
I enjoy discussing the books I read with people.	18	3.06	0.80	3.33	0.69	0.28
I like to write about books I read.	18	2.00	0.77	2.17	0.86	0.17
I believe I know a lot about blogging.	18	1.94	0.80	2.56	0.62	0.61
I believe I know a lot about online book clubs.	18	1.56	0.51	2.50	0.71	0.94
I am interested in blogging.	18	2.44	0.62	2.17	0.86	-0.28
I would like to be involved in online book clubs.	18	2.44	0.78	2.28	0.89	-0.17
I would use blogging as an instructional tool in my future classroom practice.	17	2.82	0.39	2.89	0.58	0.07

Discussion of Quantitative Data Analysis

Though not much was revealed in the responses to the pre-and-post survey scale, a few items did have some noteworthy change. The greatest difference in pre-and-post responses was noted for the survey item, ‘I believe I know a lot about online book clubs’, with an increase in

response of 0.71. This indicates that, after participation in online book clubs, participants feel more knowledgeable about the process. A similar difference was revealed for ‘knowing a lot about blogging’, which supports increased awareness through the opportunities to participate in these experiences. In addition, there was a small increase in participant responses to ‘enjoying discussing books with others’. The increase in these responses reveal through their experiences and participation preservice teachers learned more than they thought initially about blogging and book clubs. However, conversely, scores decreased for the idea of continuing to participate in blogging or online book clubs.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) “divide [qualitative] coding into two major stages: first and second cycle coding” (p. 73). From the participants’ responses, the researchers generated inductive codes. “A descriptive code assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase...the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Miles, et al., 2013, p. 74). During second-cycle coding, the researchers employed thematic analysis, categorizing codes into themes. “Themes in qualitative research are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 186).

Guided by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013), the first and second researchers divided qualitative coding into two stages. During first cycle coding, they repeatedly read, studied, and discussed the 18 participants’ responses to the five open-ended survey questions until naturally occurring patterns and categories began to emerge. These inductive codes, drawn from the actual language of participants, were highlighted by hand and transferred to a table

format, where they were categorized as positive, negative, or neutral responses to the post-participation survey questions.

During second-cycle coding, the first and second researchers employed thematic analysis to combine these initial codes into six broader, more comprehensive categories (Cresswell, 2013). Those categories were then placed into two overarching themes: Positive Aspects and Challenges regarding participation in blogging and online book clubs (see Figures 1 and 2 below). The third researcher reviewed the data analysis process and verified the themes, then pulled significant quantitative findings and worked with the first and second researchers to triangulate those with qualitative themes and participant responses. Triangulation continued as the three researchers met multiple times via Zoom to further discuss and solidify research findings.

Figure 1: Positive Aspects of Blogging and Book Club Participation

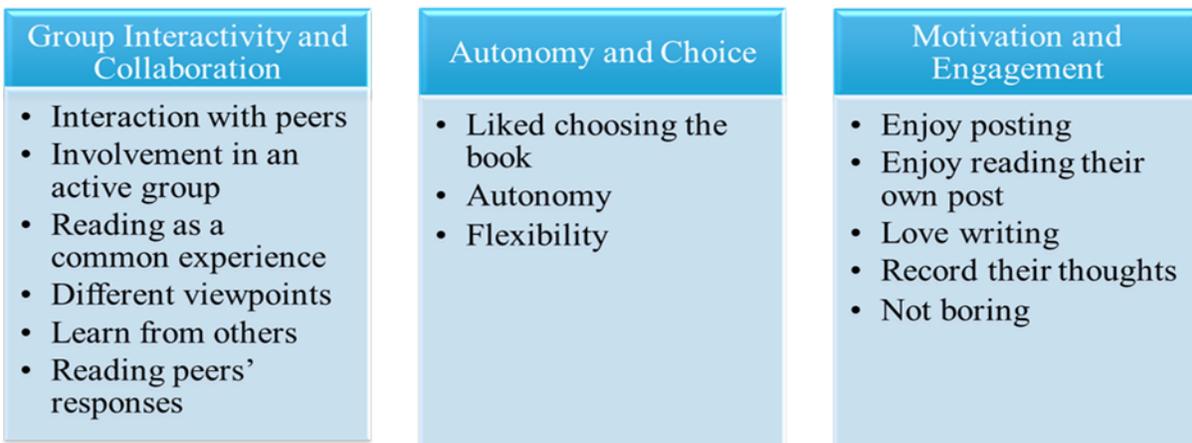
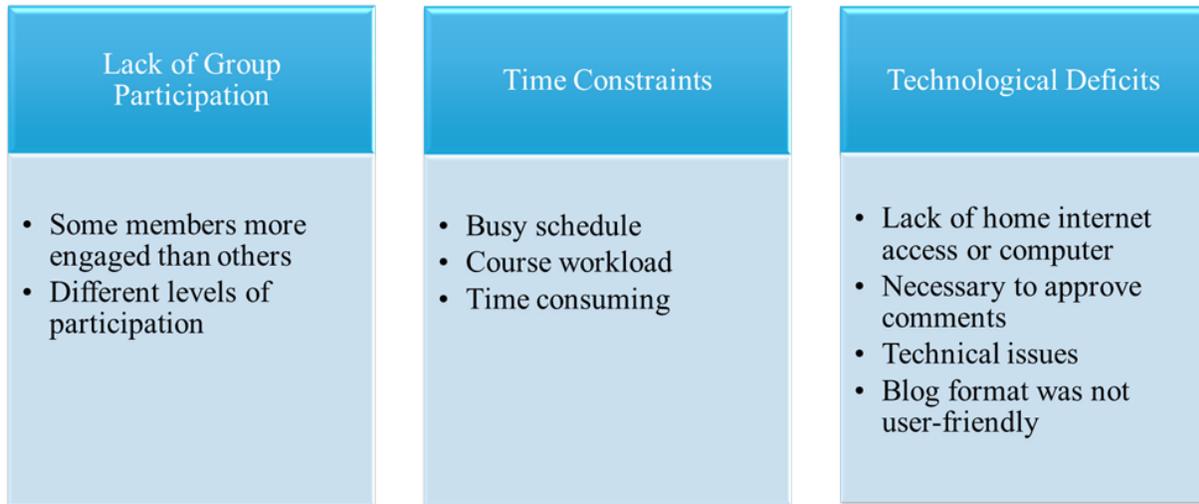


Figure 2. Challenges Participants Expressed



Results

All 18 participants responded to every question on both the pre- and post-participation surveys, and the overall response was positive as seen in Table 2 below. The first three of five post-participation open-ended survey questions were two-pronged in nature: first, students were asked a yes or no question, then were asked to elaborate on their answers. Tables 2 through 4 present participant responses to the survey questions, highlighting specific comments based on themes identified.

Table 2 *Post-participation Survey Responses to Q#1*

<p>Q#1: Would you consider incorporating blogging into your future classroom instruction?</p>	<p>Yes 11</p>	<p>No 4</p>	<p>Maybe 3</p>
<p>Open-ended responses</p>			
<p>Positive: “I think it is a great way to do journals and being online is fun and engaging for students.” “It is a great way and an interactive way to keep the class engaged with the reading. It doesn’t even have to be about reading. It can be used for many different aspects of the class.” “It is a way to [provide] uniform instruction while allowing for creative freedom and is an easy way for differentiated instruction.” “I would consider. It is a good way for students to chat about similar interests.” “I think blogging is a great tool for the classroom.”</p>	<p>Challenges: “The busier I was, the less motivated I was. I believe this would be true if my students were really busy.” “Blogging is something that you really want to do for it to be successful. I wouldn’t have done it if it wasn’t for a grade.” “The amount of interaction is too superficial because of the loss of face-to-face interaction.” “Students can post whatever they want, and even if you tell them to keep it appropriate, you have no way to control what they post. Also, some kids may not have access to a computer at home.”</p>		

Table 3 *Post-participation Survey Responses to Q#2*

<p>Q#2: Would you consider incorporating online book clubs into your future classroom instruction?</p>	<p>Yes 7</p>	<p>No 3</p>	<p>Maybe 8</p>
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Open-ended responses	
<p>Positive: “You get to know your classmates a little better and get to have some say on what book you want to read.”</p> <p>“I think the communication back and forth is a great idea.”</p> <p>“Online book clubs are very convenient. They can be done from anywhere without having to meet up.”</p> <p>“Depends on what grade I teach. If I taught fifth or sixth grade I probably would.”</p> <p>“It would help students become better writers...”</p>	<p>Challenges: “Not enough engagement.”</p> <p>“I would rather do it in person to see who actually is doing the reading.”</p> <p>“I do not plan on doing online book clubs because I plan on teaching kindergarten.”</p> <p>“I would consider it, but I think I would rather the students meet in class in their groups to discuss the book.”</p>

Table 4 *Post-participation Survey Responses to Q#3*

Q#3: Would you consider pairing blogging and online book clubs in your future classroom instruction?	Yes	No	Maybe
	11	4	3
Open-ended responses			
<p>Positives: “It incorporates technology, convenient for busy students, and gives them the freedom to write/blog about anything they want with the book.”</p>	<p>Challenges: “It’s something that I am not interested in.”</p> <p>“I would want my students to really engage and I feel that if they have to engage online they will limit the discussion, whereas if</p>		

<p>“It will allow students to read books of their interest, and in response they will be able to have more elaborate conversations.”</p> <p>“I believe they are a great interactive tool to get children motivated to read. It is also an activity which is out of the norm.”</p> <p>“I would possibly consider, but would more likely use the blog exclusively.”</p> <p>“They work very well together, I think.”</p>	<p>they talked in person ideas and thought may flow easier for them; less formal.”</p> <p>“The amount of elapsed time from one post to another is too long.”</p> <p>“It depends on the grade I teach. Most students will not participate and may not have technology at home to do this on.”</p> <p>“Some kids might hate it.”</p>
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The remaining two post-participation open-ended survey questions addressed participants’ thoughts on the positive and challenging aspects of their own experiences with blogging and online book clubs during the Literacy Methods block. Table 5 presents a representative selection of participant responses to those questions.

Table 5 *Participant Responses to Personal Experiences with Blogging and Online Book Clubs*

<p>Q#4: What were the positive aspects of this experience for you?</p>	<p>Q#5: What were the negative aspects of this experience for you?</p>
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“I never have really enjoyed reading, but I really enjoyed this book! Giving freedom to work at my own pace and no guidelines/questions that must be answered was a relief. I could read without the stress of looking for answers to questions.”

“I was able to get to know others more and how they experienced the reading differently from me. Each of the other group members made great points on my blog that I did not think about.”

“I love writing so being able to have a blog to jot down a few thoughts was a nice experience.”

“It was nice to have people who read the same book as me. In my own context, I got to choose when I would post on my blog.”

“I enjoyed reading the posts and making my own.”

“The positive aspects were: quick feedback to discussions, could write about my book at any point, did not have to meet in person.”

“Having to post on the blog, I ran low on time and it just became a drag having to post.”

“The blogging was something I am not interested in so I felt it was a chore.”

“I had so many technical issues with this blogging experience.”

“Time consuming and hard to find some bloggers.”

“Group members not giving their all in their responses and waiting until the last minute to post.”

“I was not able to read a book of my choosing. I felt rushed to make posts. All the posts were out of order. Discussions were not as in-depth as in person.”

While post-participation results indicate that a majority of participants were likely to pair blogging with online book clubs in their future classroom instruction, some participants indicated an unwillingness to implement this combined approach. Some noted that doing so would depend on the age of their students and the availability of technology. For others, the loss of in-person communication was a recurring concern, as was the time required for implementation and execution.

Discussion of the Findings

The results of the pre-and-post surveys indicate that participants' perceptions were mixed regarding blogging and online book clubs. There was a notable disparity between qualitative and quantitative findings, which may be attributed to participants' ability to provide more thoughtful, in-depth responses to the open-ended questions on the post-participation survey, as opposed to only the brief Likert-scale survey format of the pre-participation survey.

Post-participation survey results reveal that most pre-service teachers enjoyed reading and discussing their ideas through their blog posts and comments. Although, initially, some of the participants did not enjoy reading, book choice was shown to be a key factor in their increased reading engagement. This is consistent with previous research findings which reveal that text selection directly affects motivation and engagement (Schreuder & Savitz, 2002), and choice has long been recognized as a fundamental element of reading motivation (Gambrell, 2011; Guthrie et al., 2007; Reed et al., 2004; Reeve, 1996). Several participants enjoyed reading and discussing books, but the online experience was not desirable for all. This was most often rooted in frustration over time constraints, technological issues, and a perceived lack of full engagement on the part of fellow group members.

With regard to their future classroom teaching practice, the majority of participants noted concerns about blogging and online book clubs which included grade level taught, access to technology, and student motivation and engagement. They also expressed concerns over the amount of time required by the teacher to oversee and monitor students' online blogging activity. While quantitative findings indicate hesitation to commit to the implementation of blogging and

online book clubs, through their open-ended responses participants noted more positive aspects than challenges, with a majority responding favorably to the pairing.

Interestingly, responses both for and against incorporating blogging and online book clubs into future classroom practice addressed the interactivity aspect. While some participants felt that blogging about books allowed for greater interactivity, others viewed it as more limiting than face-to-face discussion. One positive aspect, however, is that even though online book clubs may not be considered the most popular way to interact with others for purposes of discussing literature outside the classroom, participants still perceive reading and discussing books as valuable. Of significance, Cumming (2021) noted the vast growth in online book clubs and blogging during the pandemic. Forced isolation paved the way for people to connect online when they were not able to in person.

Implications

Through personal experience with blogging and online book clubs, preservice teachers developed a new understanding of this educational pairing and its effectiveness as an instructional tool. Personal participation enabled them not only to experience this pairing firsthand, but also to assess its value and feasibility in their future educational practice. Boyd (2013) supported the use of blogging as a pedagogical approach versus minimal or less intentional technology use to engage students. Blogging in conjunction with online book clubs is a promising teaching tool if aligned with students' interests, time availability, and technological possibilities. It is crucial, however, that teachers facilitate student buy-in by enabling a degree of literary choice, providing clear guidelines for participation and interaction, and allowing students adequate time to familiarize themselves with the blogging platform of choice.

Limitations and Further Research

This study is limited by a small sample size of 18 participants and a brief timeframe of 10 weeks, which may not enable a definitive determination of preservice teachers' perceptions of blogging as an instructional tool to facilitate engagement in online book clubs, or to what extent their personal experiences impacted their perceptions. In addition, a single blog platform was used, and students were required to choose books from a limited selection of texts stipulated by the instructors. Participation in this study was required as a component of the Literacy Methods Block in which participants were enrolled. Of consideration, it may have been the setting and instructional requirement that may have deterred some participants. Given the opportunity to participate in the process through personal choice and individual time may support more positive connections from the majority of participants.

Technological deficits were a concern for a number of participants as well. Not only does interaction via online platforms such as blogs or Zoom hamper face-to-face interaction in the basic sense, it potentially presents a whole range of additional complications including delayed response time, hesitation to verbalize thoughts in a digital setting, and breakdown in communication flow. With regard to their future teaching practice, participants voiced concerns over classroom technology issues and student internet access.

The same study could be repeated with a larger sample of preservice teachers, and greater autonomy over book selection and blogging platform could be considered. Additionally, a similar study may include graduate students or inservice classroom teachers to encourage implementation with their students. Lastly, implementing blogging and online book clubs with students, especially at the middle to secondary levels would be of significance to determine their

engagement in reading and writing with the use of technology. Such a study could be expanded across universities and schools in different geographic locations; specifically, across other languages and/or culture groups for the purpose of determining how, where, and why results do or do not hold up.

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