

Prewriting with Blogs: An Exploration of Interactions among Postsecondary Students

Laurie A. Sharp
West Texas A&M University

Abstract

The current state of writing at the postsecondary level has raised many concerns regarding basic writing skills and academic writing skills among all levels of students. Blogs have been identified as an effective digital tool to facilitate collaborative tasks aimed to improve writing during the revising stage. However, there is little existing research that specifically looks at the use of blogs during the prewriting stage of writing. Guided by a sociocultural theoretical framework, this study employed a qualitative research design to explore levels of blog interactions during the prewriting stage of writing among graduate students. Blog interactions were collected and analyzed qualitatively with grounded theory coding processes. Qualitative analyses resulted in the identification of four interrelated domains: static supportive, affective, connective, and dynamic supportive. Among these domains, 15 categories that further described blog interactions were found. Findings were reported for each category by domain and included descriptions, as well as supportive meaning units. Results were discussed, along with limitations and recommendations for future research endeavors.

Researchers have expressed concerns about the current state of writing among undergraduate and graduate students. (Badenhorst, Moloney, Rosales, Dyer, & Ru, 2015; Duchardt, Furr, & Horton, 2016; Singleton-Jackson, Lumsden, & Newsom, 2009). These concerns include lack of proficiency with basic writing skills (e.g., grammar and mechanics), as well as deficiencies with skills associated with academic writing (e.g., interpretation and analysis). At the postsecondary level, this phenomenon is of striking interest because competence with writing is a common expectation for all students (Duchardt et al., 2016), especially among graduate students (Singleton-Jackson et al., 2009). Writing proficiency is of particular importance in graduate education because it is “the vehicle that most graduate programs embrace as the means for reviewing how well students are able to assimilate knowledge and integrate that knowledge into new ideas (Ondrusek, 2012, p. 179).

Writing has been deemed a developmental process, (Dyson & Freedman, 2003) and a number of models have proposed processes associated with acts of writing (Sharp, 2016). Within kindergarten to 12th grade classrooms, these processes are generally presented to students as prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Lacina & Silva, 2011). Unfortunately, the inadvertent codification of these processes has engendered a linear perspective towards the

construction of a piece of writing (Anderson, 2000). Based upon these experiences, students often graduate from high school with cynical perspectives towards writing and lack essential understandings regarding “knowledge of their own [writing] processes,” which “empowers them as thinkers and as writers” (Anderson, 2000, p. 9). Consequently, these inexperienced writers enter postsecondary institutions without the necessary “procedures or heuristics to help them reorder lines of reasoning or ask questions about their purposes and readers” (Sommers, 1980, p. 383).

Review of Literature

One way that many postsecondary instructors have attempted to address issues with student writing is by implementing revision strategies within their instructional design (e.g., Bardine & Fulton, 2008; Feltham & Sharen, 2015; Nelson, Range, & Ross, 2012). A commonly accepted characteristic of the revising stage of writing entails the provision of feedback, which enables writers to review and reformulate their ideas presented in a draft of their writing (Mayher, Lester, & Pradl, 1983). Although this approach has been noted as an effective way to improve the processes that underlie *how* students write, it does not provide guidance for students who struggle with *what* to write (Odom, 2009).

With this in mind, Rohman and Wlecke (1964) attributed quality writing to the use of specific thought processes and behaviors enacted during prewriting. This initial stage of writing is vital for postsecondary students because it promotes the development, generation, and organization of a prewriting plan (Winter, 1996) and writing ideas, which all lead to better-quality writings in terms of style and content (Kellogg, 1990). Unfortunately, many postsecondary students engage minimally, if at all, with prewriting activities (Escorcia, Passerault, Ros, & Pylouster, 2017; Worden, 2009). Although limited, available literature has suggested that the quality of writing among postsecondary students can be improved by providing writers with feedback during prewriting activities (Gebhardt, 1980; Hillocks, 1982; Lee & Tan, 2010).

The significant increase of online postsecondary learning contexts has prompted postsecondary instructors to transform instruction through the use of digital tools, such as blogs, (Wang, Hou, & Wu, 2017). With respect to the use of blogs to support writing among postsecondary students, several studies have explored blog usage during the revising stage of writing (e.g., Chen, 2016; Kitchakarn, 2012; Novakovich, 2016; Pham & Usaha, 2016; Sullivan & Longnecker, 2014; Zhang, Song, Shen, & Huang, 2014). These studies have reported positive findings associated with blog usage, including improvements with subsequent writing products (Chen, 2016; Kitchakarn, 2012; Novakovich, 2016; Pham & Usaha, 2016; Sullivan & Longnecker, 2014) and enhancements with affective qualities, such as writing confidence, motivation, and attitudes (Kitchakarn, 2012; Novakovich, 2016; Pham & Usaha, 2016; Sullivan & Longnecker, 2014; Zhang et al., 2014).

However, only a handful of studies have explored the use of blogs during the prewriting stage of writing at the postsecondary level (Novakovich & Long, 2013; Vurdien, 2013). Although limited, these studies have produced promising findings. For example, Vurdien (2013) noted that the asynchronous nature of blogs afforded students “the freedom to reread their own and their peers’ postings without any space and time constraints” (p. 134). Thus, students had more time to engage in careful thought related to the prewriting stage of writing. Vurdien’s findings also showed that students acquired and applied a more thoughtful application of grammatical structures, register, and vocabulary, and final writing products demonstrated a well-

developed sense of audience awareness. Similarly, Novakovich and Long (2013) observed an enhanced sense of audience awareness among students who participated in blog-based peer feedback activities during the prewriting, drafting, and revision stages of writing. Novakovich and Long surmised that students viewed writing “through an imagined or real perception of an audience’s reactions rather than the narrow lens of the author’s world” (p. 239).

The aforementioned research efforts have shared encouraging findings regarding the use of blogs during the prewriting stage of writing. However, the paucity of available literature calls for more attention to this area. Therefore, the purpose for this study was to explore the levels of interactions that occurred among graduate students who participated in a blog small group activity that was designed to function as a prewriting task.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was anchored in concepts and perspectives related to sociocultural theory. According to Vygotsky (1978), engagement in social learning experiences with other knowledgeable peers develops an individual’s cognitive understandings. These social interactions, oriented as *communities of practice*, are rooted in cultural and historical contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Street, 1995). Along these lines, each individual brings a unique “socially situated identity” that is shaped by “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing” (Gee, 2012, p. 3). As individuals come together to engage in a “task-driven partnership” (Farnsworth, Kleanthous, & Wenger-Trayner, 2016, p. 143), literacy becomes ideological (Street, 1984) and “encapsulated within cultural wholes and within structures of power” (Street, 1995, p. 161). In this study, the social exchanges during the small group blog activity created a community of practice where students worked collaboratively on a task by contributing distinctive ideas that were influenced by their personal experiences, knowledge, and cultural being.

Methods

Context

This study was employed during the Summer 2016 and Fall 2016 semesters in an online graduate course offered in the education department at a regional, public university accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The content of the course focused on methods of research in educational settings, and the culminating activity was the development of a research manuscript written in APA Style that (a) identified a specific educational problem to research, (b) incorporated an introduction, and (c) outlined an appropriate methodology with which to explore their identified problem.

The course was delivered in an eight week format during the summer semester and a 16-week format during the fall semester. The format for course delivery was driven by the university’s academic calendar. Although the summer course was delivered in a shortened format, the same course requirements for the 16-week format were applied. The course consisted of seven lessons that addressed specific course learning outcomes. Each lesson contained a lecture, assigned readings in the course text, a small group collaborative activity, and an individually-constructed writing assignment.

Participants

Students enrolled in the course at the time of the study were sent a recruitment email at the beginning of each semester. Out of 48 enrolled students, 46 students provided consent to participate in the study (see Table 1). Students who provided consent were also queried about their previous academic and nonacademic use of blogs. As shown in Table 1, approximately 70% of participants had no previous experience with blogs in academic or non-academic settings.

Table 1
Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	
Semester		
Summer 2016	19	
Fall 2016	27	
Gender		
Male	17	
Female	29	
Previous Experience with Blogs	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Academic Settings	13	33
Non-Academic Settings	14	32

Procedures

This study sought to explore the following guiding research question: What levels of interactions occur with blog participation during the prewriting stage of writing among graduate students? In order to explore this question, a blog experience was designed as one of the small group collaborative activities. The following procedures were utilized each semester. First, the blog experience was included with the first lesson of the course. Using the blog community tool available in the Blackboard 9.1 learning management system, three different blogs were created. Six to eight participants were randomly assigned to each blog. Once the lesson became accessible, participants completed the lecture and assigned course text readings. Participants were then provided access to their assigned blog and instructed to review the directions and assessment criteria before participating (see Figure 1).

During the blog experience, participants were expected to create one original blog post that addressed the following questions:

- What are potential areas that you are interested in researching?
- Why are you interested in researching these areas?
- What are potential audiences with whom you could share your findings?
- How will your proposed research areas be beneficial within your discipline?

Participants were also expected to add three blog comments to the original blog posts of their small group members. After participants completed the blog small group activity, they completed the lesson assignment, which was a writing extension related to the blog small group activity.

You and your small group members will participate in a blog. A blog is essentially an online journal to communicate your thoughts and ideas. Within your small group blog, you will complete a minimum of one (1) original blog post and three (3) comments. Your activity will be assessed with the rubric below.

Directions for Creating an Original Blog Post

1. Click **Create Blog Entry**.
2. Type a **Title** for your blog entry.
3. In the **Entry Message** box, type text that generates discussion related to these questions:
 - What are potential areas that you are interested in researching?
 - Why are you interested in researching these areas?
 - What are potential audiences with whom you could share your findings?
 - How will your proposed research areas be beneficial within your discipline?

In the **Entry Message** box, you may format the text and add images, links, multimedia, and attachments using the functions in the content editor.

4. When you complete your original blog post, click **Post Entry**.

Directions for Commenting

1. In your small group blog, select a group member's name in the side panel in the **View Entries** by section.
2. Click **Comment** following the user's entry.
3. Type a comment in the **Comment** box.
4. Click **Add**.

Criteria	N/A	Improvement Needed	Proficient Performance	Advanced Performance
Original Blog Post	0 points	0-49 points Original blog post did not and/or minimally addressed one or more guiding questions.	50 points Original blog post thoroughly addressed each of the guiding questions.	55 points Original blog post thoroughly addressed each of the guiding questions and included formatted text, images, links, multimedia, and/or attachments.
Blog Comment #1	0 points	0-9 points Blog comment was minimal in content and fostered little interaction among group members.	10 points Blog comment was specific, detailed and somewhat added to the interaction among group members.	15 points Blog comment was specific, detailed and thoroughly added to the interaction among group members.
Blog Comment #2	0 points	0-9 points Blog comment was minimal in content and fostered little interaction among group members.	10 points Blog comment was specific, detailed and somewhat added to the interaction among group members.	15 points Blog comment was specific, detailed and thoroughly added to the interaction among group members.
Blog Comment #3	0 points	0-9 points Blog comment was minimal in content and fostered little interaction among group members.	10 points Blog comment was specific, detailed and somewhat added to the interaction among group members.	15 points Blog comment was specific, detailed and thoroughly added to the interaction among group members.

Figure 1. Directions and assessment criteria for blog learning experience.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2014). Data consisted of all blog interactions (i.e., original blog posts and comments), which were collected from each small group. Data were then explored using grounded theory coding techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). After an initial reading of data, open coding was used to separate each datum into meaning units. Next, axial coding organized meaning units into domains. Within each domain,

data were interpreted and constantly compared until categories emerged. After data saturation was attained, a taxonomic representation was generated that portrayed the relationships among categories.

Results

Blog interactions consisted of 18,285 words. After performing grounded theory coding processes, the following four core domains were identified: affective domain, connective domain, dynamic supportive domain, and static supportive domain (see Figure 2). The constant comparative process further revealed the following 15 categories within each domain: affirmations/encouragements, agreements, compliments, well-wishes, professional, personal, topic-to-topic, questions posed, resources, considerations/modifications, acknowledgements, validation/relevance, opinions, commentary, and audience awareness. Each of these categories is presented in Table 2 by their corresponding domain, along with descriptions and supportive meaning units. As shown in Figure 2, the identified domains and categories were interrelated because levels of interactions often demonstrated this overlap. For example, one blog comment contained the following levels of interaction:

- an affirmation (affective domain) – “The topic you are interested in researching is intriguing”;
- audience awareness (static supportive domain) – “To learn about how the environment affect’s student’s learning potential is research that can be utilized among your peers and educators alike minded”;
- questions posed (dynamic supportive domain) – “When you talk about inclusion, what does that look like to you? Are you referring to the students learning with one teacher all day, no pull-outs for other modifications that the students may be required to partake in?”;
- a compliment (affective domain) – “I admire your passion, and I can determine by it that it will drive your research and help your school with what you obtain through it.”; and
- an encouragement (affective domain) – “I am excited to learn from you through this topic of research you have selected”.

In order to understand these levels of interaction better, a discussion of each category organized by domain is presented below in order from greatest to least.

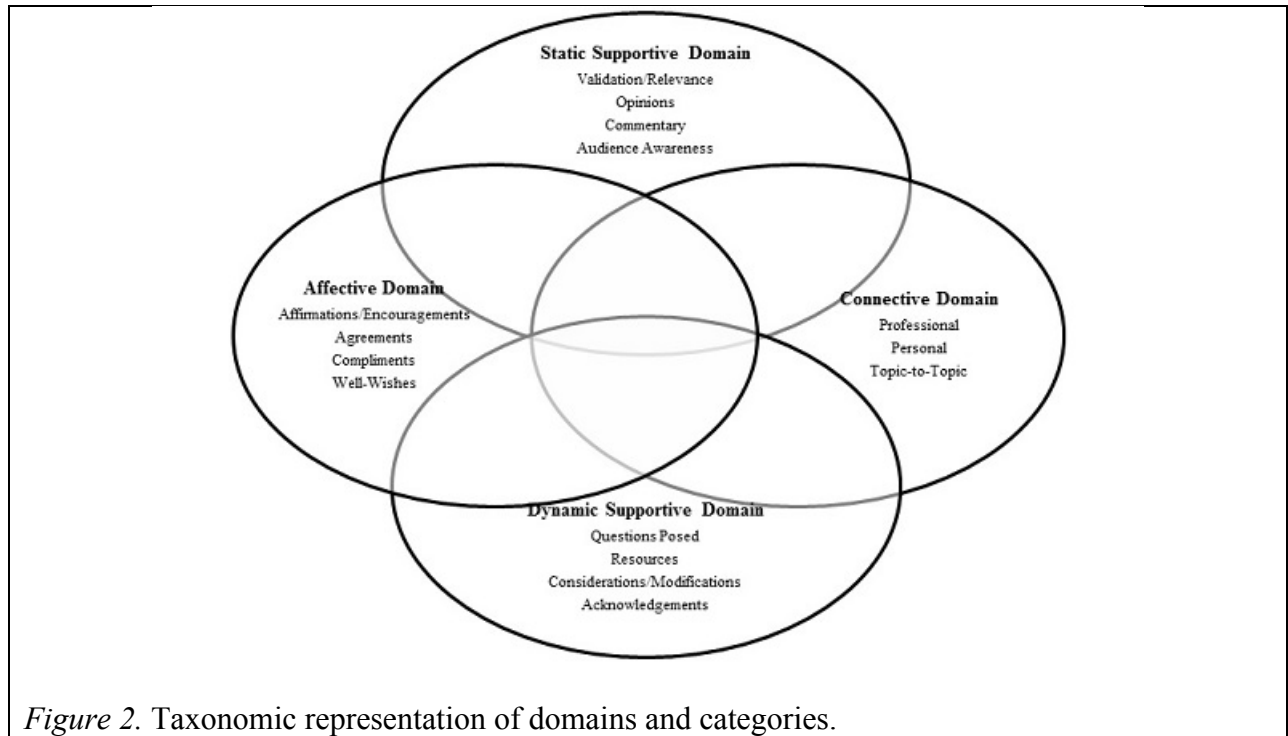


Figure 2. Taxonomic representation of domains and categories.

Table 2
Categories by Domain with Descriptions and Supportive Meaning Units

Affective Domain

Category	Description	Supportive Meaning Units
Affirmations/ Encouragements	Expressions of praise, reassurance, or inspiration	<i>I'm really looking forward to your findings!</i>
Agreements	Statements of agreement or disagreement	<i>I really agree that students need positive behavior rewards.</i>
Compliments	Flattering remarks or expressions of admiration	<i>You articulate your thoughts very well.</i>
Well-Wishes	Biddings of success	<i>Good luck!!!</i>

Connective Domain

Category	Description	Supportive Meaning Units
Personal	Personal connections to topics	<i>When I take breaks, I retain the information better.</i>
Professional	Professional connections to topics	<i>In my school, the State does not require pass to promote.</i>
Topic-to-Topic	Connections between topics	<i>I choose a similar research topic as you on student behavior but how to minimize it.</i>

Dynamic Supportive Domain

Category	Description	Supportive Meaning Units
Acknowledgements	Responses to questions, resources, or considerations	<i>Thanks. I definitely need to narrow down my topic.</i>
Considerations/ Modifications	Advice or suggestions	<i>I would expand that statement to include all minority groups, and not just immigrants.</i>
Questions Posed	Questions that sought to clarify or stimulate thinking	<i>What age groups are you planning to study?</i>
Resources	Offerings of specific resources	<i>You might want to add in a resource of "Teach Like a Champion"</i>

Static Supportive Domain

Category	Description	Supportive Meaning Unit
Audience Awareness	Identified specific audiences for a topic	<i>This would help parents, and school administrators.</i>
Commentary	General expansion of ideas	<i>Gluten allergy. That never existed 10 years ago.</i>
Opinions	Beliefs, views, or judgements about a topic	<i>I personally think children in elementary should have a longer recess.</i>
Validation/Relevance	Identified benefits, significance, or value of a topic	<i>Student behavior is a topic I feel is very challenging as educators</i>

Static Supportive Domain

The largest number of meaning units were organized into the static supportive domain ($n = 187$). Four categories were associated with this domain: audience awareness, commentary, opinions, and validation/relevance. A further discussion of these categories and interactions are presented below in order from greatest occurrence to least occurrence.

Validation/relevance. Interactions categorized as validation/relevance consisted of 63 meaning units. These interactions validated the relevance of a selected research topic through the identification of benefits, significance, and importance. For example, one participant validated the importance of a small group member's selected research topic:

I can see where research could be beneficial when considering whether providing Chrome Books to students is a benefit that outweighs the cost. The school districts are in such binds financially but they need to make education as attainable as possible for all students. Financial strains at home may prevent some students from having access to the internet for research and schools providing these devices may prove beneficial.

Similarly, another participant described how results from one of their small group member's selected research topic may help promote related advocacy efforts:

With that information, we can effectively advocate for the abolishment of the [state standardized assessment] given that testing anxiety negatively impacts learners and they are more likely to learn better in day-to-day classroom compared to [state standardized assessment] test prep.

Opinions. Interactions categorized as opinions consisted of 60 meaning units. These interactions consisted of personal beliefs, views, or judgments about a specific topic that were not embedded in a fact-based source. For example, one participant offered the following opinion about the selected research topic of a small group member:

I think to some extent addiction is habitual in some people. However, I think in a portion of the population the addiction is caused by some chemical imbalance in the brain that creates an overwhelming desire or need for the substance.

In a few instances, participants were very candid that their assertions were opinions:

... if [English language learners] ELL's are completely immersed into English classes and denied using their native languages they may be forced into learning English perhaps even faster, but they may later resent being forced into something. Moreover, ELL's in this case may have to deal with two challenges simultaneously: Learning content as well as English language; and that is bound to affect ELL's academic performance. Again, this is just my opinion as I am not a teacher or [English second language] ESL//ELL expert.

Commentary. Interactions categorized as commentary consisted of 43 meaning units. These interactions were general statements that expanded on ideas related to selected research topics. For example, one participant expressed interest to a peer whose research aimed to study fatigue with shift work in the railroad industry. They commented:

With a recent tragedy that happened close to home, I was not aware of the damage a train wreck could cause. I often hear about them in the news but when it was so close to home I saw the affects it had on everyone like any tragedy. Trains are something I see every day and hear and it never crossed my mind that there is an actual human being in there conducting the train.

Audience awareness. Interactions categorized as audience awareness consisted of 21 meaning units. These interactions identified specific audiences for selected research topics. The

majority of audiences identified were educational stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, counselors, administrators, and students.

Affective Domain

The affective domain contained the next highest number of meaning units ($n = 182$). Four categories were associated with the affective domain: affirmations/encouragements, agreements, compliments, and well-wishes. A further discussion of these categories and interactions are presented below in order from greatest occurrence to least occurrence.

Affirmations/encouragements. Interactions categorized as affirmations/encouragements consisted of 116 meaning units. Most of these interactions were affirmative statements regarding selected research topics and their related descriptions (e.g., “I think this is a great research topic!”). However, a large number of encouragements were also offered among small group members (e.g., “I look forward to seeing what you may discover about your area of research as well as about yourself along the way.”).

Agreements. Interactions categorized as agreements consisted of 31 meaning units. These interactions were mostly statements of agreement (e.g., “I completely agree with you that when we educate refugees, not only do we empower them so they may be independent and productive but we also help their communities and possibly their home countries by extension.”). However, these interactions also encompassed a few statements of disagreement (e.g., “I’m not sure that I agree with your concept of addiction being purely a habit.”).

Compliments. Interactions categorized as compliments consisted of 23 meaning units. These interactions reflected flattering remarks and expressions of admiration. For example, several participants praised peers for their “passion”, “vulnerability”, “positivity”, and “ambition”. Specifically, one participant stated: “I hope one day an educator is as driven as you are to help change the children’s lives at my own child’s future school.”

Well-Wishes. Interactions categorized as well-wishes consisted of 12 meaning units. These interactions were fortuitous comments (e.g., “May your journey be a fulfilling one through your topic of research in this class!”).

Connective Domain

The connective domain contained the third highest number of meaning units ($n = 130$). Three categories were associated with the connective domain: personal, professional, and topic-to-topic. A further discussion of these categories and interactions are presented below in order from greatest occurrence to least occurrence.

Professional. Interactions categorized as professional consisted of 73 meaning units. These interactions encompassed professional connections that participants made to the selected research topics of their small group members. The majority of professional connections related to specific, classroom-level descriptions of prior teaching experiences:

We learn best when we use more than one of our senses at a new task. This is especially true of autistic children. I use every form of information delivery imaginable with my students. We use hundreds of pictures a day, technology, videos, and acting out ideas and scenarios with our whole bodies and toys. Last year I had a student who could speak less than 10 words total as a 4th grader. He never learned my name and called me “teacher.” We had a big flood last spring and our district was closed for a week. Lots of homes and apartments flooded to the point of furniture floating around. When we came back to school this non-verbal student flew excitedly around the room acting, gathering

pictures, and using his communication device to tell me about how his apartment had lots of water and that there were frogs in the kitchen. He was so happy and couldn't stop "talking" about it for the whole week! I confirmed the story with his parents who were equally excited that he had been able to relay this information to me so successfully.

Several professional connections also related to broad, campus-level descriptions:

My first 5 years of teaching I was very lucky to work in a district that was very advanced in the technology department and was very committed to keeping up with new advancements. I didn't realize how lucky I was to not only have the technology but also the team that helped me make learning so much more enjoyable for my students! When I moved to my current district they thought an overhead projector was advanced and still believe to this day that they are in the top percentage within our state for technology.

Personal. Interactions categorized as personal consisted of 36 meaning units. These interactions encompassed personal connections that participants made to the selected research topics of their small group members as individuals, parents, and as members of a family. For example, one participant relayed their personal experiences with test anxiety:

I did not realize I had developed test anxiety until about my junior year of high school and it definitely took a toll on my grades as well as my self-esteem. When I started my bachelor's degree, I had to work with my professor as well as an on campus counselor in order to help me study and pass my way around it. It was a difficult time but well worth it. I found that my peers made me nervous, I would sit and see people turning their tests in and wonder if I was moving too slow. That would then trigger these negative thought processes and then I would crumble under my own pressure.

Another participant expressed a frustrating experience as a parent who navigated processes related to their child's behavior improvement plan (BIP):

The big issue I have personally seen as a parent with BIPs is they tend to be cookie cutter one size fits all for broad target behaviors. I have gone rounds with the behavior specialist on my children's that I do not feel it is individualized enough. You can google BIPs and see it almost exactly word for word on many sites. Then in a manifestation [Individualized Education Plan] IEP the parents are expected to take the word of the staff that the BIP was followed but they do not track the data showing it was implemented correctly. Sorry this is a personal hot topic for me...

As a member of a family, one participant described the trauma that they experienced from living with an abusive father:

I remember being about 5 and worrying that my dad would argue and push my mom around while I was away at school. I distinctively remember making myself sick and vomit just to go home and check on my mom. My dad scared me so much and I just wanted to keep my mom safe, that I did not care about school. My teachers started to notice but my mother was too embarrassed to allow them to know just what my fear was. It was not until junior high that my school counselors became aware of the domestic violence I had witnessed all my life. I think if someone would have known my elementary and intermediate school days would have been so much different.

Within this category, a few interactions were personal connections that described second-hand portrayals of the personal experiences of others. In other words, these personal connections were not experienced first-hand by the participant. Rather, they were experienced by friends or family members. For example, one participant depicted challenges that their cousin experienced with employment:

I also have a cousin who received educational job training in high school but has not been able to find employment since high school. There is a business that will employ him but it is about 30 miles from home, he has to be driven there, and the \$2.00 an hour that they would pay him probably wouldn't even be enough to pay for the gas it would take to get him to and from work.

Topic-to-topic. Interactions categorized as topic-to-topic consisted of 21 meaning units. These interactions were connections that participants made between their selected research topic and the selected research topics of small group members. The majority of these interactions stated a likeness between selected research topics (e.g., "I too am so interested in Bilingual Education."). However, some interactions first identified the similarity between the two topics, and then pinpointed how they were different (e.g., "I choose a similar research topic as you on student behavior but how to minimize it.").

Dynamic Supportive Domain

The dynamic supportive domain contained the lowest number of meaning units ($n = 64$). Four categories were associated with the dynamic supportive domain: acknowledgements, considerations/modifications, questions posed, and resources. A further discussion of these categories and interactions are presented below in order from greatest occurrence to least occurrence.

Questions posed. Interactions categorized as questions posed consisted of 30 meaning units. These interactions included questions that sought clarification or promoted additional thinking with a topic. Some questions were general questions where participants requested additional information from a small group member related to their selected research topic (e.g., "I never heard of this disorder so googled it and this is what I got: A disorder in a child marked by defiant and disobedient behavior to authority figures. Can you educate me on this disorder?"). However, most of these interactions queried a small group member to revisit ideas related to their selected research topic (e.g., "Are you looking to find what the most prevalent issues are [what impacts a community the most] or maybe what best practices are for counselors or educators?").

Resources. Interactions categorized as resources consisted of 12 meaning units. These interactions included recommendations for external resources related to the selected research topics of small group members. Resources included book titles (e.g., "I'm listening to [Audible] Kelly Brogan's book, *A Mind of Your Own*. She's a psychiatrist who believes many mental disorders can be traced to diet and nutrition."), websites (e.g., "I do have one piece of advice on a technology tool you may or may not have heard of to help you out. Check out Trello Boards <https://trello.com/>."), professionals (e.g., "You might reach out to come of the counselors at [school district] as [school district] seems to be more understanding of the LGBTQ+ community than some of the smaller school districts."), or specialized trainings (e.g., "[Education service center] does a training on co-teaching; how to implement it and what it should look like in many ways.").

Considerations/modifications. Interactions categorized as considerations/modifications consisted of 11 meaning units. These interactions offered advice or suggestions pertaining to specific considerations with ideas to prompt modification with selected research topics. For example, one participant encouraged a small group member to think more broadly about their selected research topic: "Although this information is student specific, there can also be school-wide instances where the special education teacher is either giving too much or too little

assistance to those that are in need of their services.” Another participant cautioned a small group member about the feasibility of eliciting participants for their selected research topic: “It would be extremely difficult for a graduate student find a sufficient number of participants for a study on PTSD.”

Acknowledgements. Interactions categorized as acknowledgements consisted of 11 meaning units. These interactions encompassed responses that participants made to posed questions, recommended resources, or suggestions from small group members. For example, one participant acknowledged a recommendation given for a specialized training: “Thank you for the suggestion that I look at Region 16 as an additional resource. The training you described sounds just like what I need. I will definitely look into it.” Another participant expressed gratitude for a professional connection provided by a small group member:

Because co-teaching is going to be new to me and our school, I don’t have personal experiences to draw from. Your suggestion that we will need to base the decision to co-teach or not needs to be based on the students need was something I needed to hear. This will really help me keep the student as my top priority and make sure that we are doing what is best for the student. Thank you again for your input.

A few participants posted acknowledgments that recognized input provided by a small group member, but also defended their initial ideas with additional insight and explanation:

Hi [name], thanks for commenting. I am certain that my research could be applied to students that are verbal as well. However, I think that the approach is different when you can speak to someone and when you cannot. In the beginning of my career I had many Autistic student who were verbal. They often had challenging behavior, but it was very easily managed by tweaking the approach that I would use with any child that is acting out. When a verbal student and I speak to each other and work together it is relatively easy for me to assess their understanding. When they don’t understand my words, and don’t say anything to me, it is a whole different world. I believe that this is a million times more frustrating for the child than it is for the adult, resulting in the anxiety and frustration driven behaviors that I would like to address.

Implications

Findings from this study have provided valuable insights regarding levels of interactions that occurred with blog participation during the prewriting stage of writing among graduate students. These insights have added research-based understandings to this under-represented area of literature, which is of critical importance for two reasons. First, much literature has highlighted impending concerns regarding the current state of writing among both undergraduate and graduate students (e.g., Badenhorst et al., 2015; Duchardt et al., 2016; Singleton-Jackson et al., 2009). Second, the proliferation of online learning necessitates the identification of digital tools, such as blogs, that promote better writing among postsecondary students (Wang et al., 2017). With this in mind, reported findings from this study have pointed to three implications for current postsecondary instructional practices.

First, the majority of blog interactions were organized into the static supportive domain, which represented interactions that were superficial contributions intended to move a writer forward with their presented ideas (Flower & Hayes, 1981). The least number of blog interactions were organized into the dynamic supportive domain, which represented interactions that prompted additional engagement with presented ideas among writers (Hayes & Flower,

1986, 1987). Within the prewriting stage of writing, dynamic supportive interactions are more desirable because they encourage writers to extend and possibly “radically restructure” their formulating ideas (Hayes & Flower, 1987, p. 23) through the processes of “probing” and “discovery” (Rohman, 1965, p. 107). Rohman and Wlecke (1964) asserted that these processes are essential for quality writing because they empower a writer to develop understandings about the topic, as well as their own personal connection to the topic. Findings from this study have indicated the need for postsecondary instructors to structure collaborative small group prewriting tasks in a way that stimulates curiosity, exploration, inquiry, and query with the related writing topic among students within online learning contexts.

In a related manner, a number of blog interactions were classified into the connective domain, which represented interactions regarding professional, personal, and topic-to-topic connections. As participants made these connections, they learned “with and from others” by engaging in reflective thought processes (Alterio, 2004, p. 322). These types of interactions demonstrated how blogs have the potential to become online communities of practice that enable students to critically reflect on and critique their own experiences among a small group of peers, as well as examine what shaped their perspectives. Findings from this study have also pointed to the importance of postsecondary instructors ensuring that collaborative small group prewriting tasks foster opportunities for students to engage in critical reflection.

Finally, a large number of blog interactions were categorized into the affective domain, which represented interactions that sought to facilitate feelings of respect, trust, and commitment among small group members (Fung, 2010). Affective interactions are a vital part of successful collaborative tasks because “having the right attitude and motivation for group success” is as important as the “language ability” of each individual (Fung, 2010, p. 28). Moreover, enhanced levels of cohesion (i.e., commitment of group and closeness with group members) and sociability (i.e., interpersonal relations) have been evident among small groups that share a history of experiences and longevity (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2016; Anderson & Simpson, 2004, Rose, 2004). Findings from this study have further corroborated these claims and highlighted clear advantages associated with the use of static small groups for collaborative small group prewriting tasks within online learning contexts.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

As with any research endeavor, there were a few limitations with this study. First, participation in this study was limited to graduate students enrolled in an online course. While this population was intentionally chosen for the scope of this study, it is recommended that this study be replicated among other groups of postsecondary students, such as students enrolled in developmental or undergraduate courses. Another limitation was related to data collection and data analysis methods. This study collected data from original blog posts and comments in order to explore the levels of interaction related to the prewriting stage of writing. However, future studies might also look at how these levels of interaction affected final writing products, as well as future efforts with the writing process.

Conclusion

Technology is ubiquitous and has ushered in new ways of learning within postsecondary institutions. The prevalence of online learning has challenged traditional learning contexts, such as the “embodied classroom” where “learning takes place within authentic communities of inquiry with physical others” (Emig, 2001, p. 273). This evolving landscape of postsecondary learning has compelled instructors to actively seek and implement evidence-based methods and strategies that foster student success within online contexts (Finger, Sun, & Jamieson-Proctor, 2010).

Within online learning contexts, the use of blogs has been identified as a valuable way to facilitate collaborative tasks aimed to improve writing among postsecondary students during the revising stage of writing (Chen, 2016; Kitchakarn, 2012; Novakovich, 2016; Pham & Usaha, 2016; Sullivan & Longnecker, 2014; Zhang et al., 2014). However, few studies have explored the use of blogs during the prewriting stage (e.g., Vurdien, 2013; Novakovich & Long, 2013), which is a fundamental stage of the writing process (Emig, 1971; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Graves, 1983; Murray, 1968; Rohman & Wlecke, 1964). The stage of prewriting provides a writer with time for discovery, exploration, and planning with their ideas (Rohman, 1965; Rohman & Wlecke, 1964). Findings from this study have suggested that the use of blogs provides a collaborative community among peers that support a writer’s prewriting efforts to revisit, reshape, and refashion their ideas before moving forward with the task of writing. As noted by Howard (2014):

... blogging practices supporting by freewriting invite both right and left brain thinking - an integration of the heart and mind that allows students to be creative and logical, academic and organic; it invites the whole learner into the classroom for a more meaningful learning experience. (p. 97)

References

- Akcaoglu, M., & Lee, E. (2016). Increasing social presence in online learning through small group discussions. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 17(3), 1-17. doi:10.19173/irrodl.v17i3.2293
- Alterio, M. (2004). Collaborative journaling as a professional development tool. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 28(3), 321-332. doi:10.1080/0309877042000241788
- Anderson, O. (2000). "The" writing process rejected. *Journal of the Virginia Writing Project*, 21(5), 6-9. Retrieved from <http://nvwp.org/journal-of-the-virginia-writing-project-22/>
- Anderson, B., & Simpson, M. (2004). Group and class contexts for learning and support online: Learning and affective support online in small group and class contexts. *International Review of Research in Open & Distance Learning*, 5(3), 1-13. doi:10.19173/irrodl.v5i3.208
- Badenhorst, C., Moloney, C., Rosales, J., Dyer, J., & Ru, L. (2015). Beyond deficit: Graduate student research-writing pedagogies. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 20(1), 1-11. doi:10.1080/13562517.2014.945160
- Bardine, B. A., & Fulton, A. (2008). Analyzing the benefits of revision memos during the writing and revision process. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 81(4), 149-154. doi:10.3200/TCHS.81.4.149-154
- Chen, P. (2016). Learners' metalinguistic and affective performance in blogging to write. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 29(4), 790-814. doi:10.1080/09588221.2015.1068813
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Duchardt, B., Furr, P., & Horton, S. G. (2016). A comparison of a progression of writing competencies in online undergraduate and graduate courses: Results and implications. *College Student Journal*, 50(4), 467-476. Retrieved from http://www.projectinnovation.biz/college_student_journal
- Dyson, A. H., & Freedman, S. W. (2003). Writing. In J. Flood, D. Lapp, J. R. Squire, & J. M. Jensen (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (2nd ed., pp. 967-992). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Emig, J. (1971). *The composing processes of twelfth graders* (Research Report No. 13). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Emig, J. (2001). Embodied learning. *English Education*, 33(4), 271-280. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/journals/ee>
- Escorcía, D., Passerault, J., Ros, C., & Pylouster, J. (2017). Profiling writers: Analysis of writing dynamics among college students. *Metacognition & Learning*, 12(2), 233-273. doi:10.1007/s11409-016-9166-6
- Farnsworth, V., Kleanthous, I., & Wenger-Trayner, E. (2016). Communities of practice as a social theory of learning: A conversation with Etienne Wenger. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 64(2), 139-160. doi:10.1080/00071005.2015.1133799
- Feltham, M., & Sharen, C. (2015). "What do you mean I wrote a C paper?" Writing, revision, and self-regulation. *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching*, 8, 111-138. Retrieved from <http://celt.uwindsor.ca/ojs/leddy/index.php/CELT>

- Finger, G., Sun, P., & Jamieson-Proctor, R. (2010). Emerging frontiers of learning online: Digital ecosystems, blended learning and implications for adult learning. In T. T. Kidd & J. Keengwe (Eds.), *Adult learning in the digital age: Perspectives on online technologies and outcomes* (pp. 1-12). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 32(4), 365-387. doi:10.2307/356600
- Fung, Y. M. (2010). Collaborative writing features. *RELC Journal*, 41(1), 18-30. doi:10.1177/0033688210362610
- Gebhardt, R. (1980). Teamwork and feedback: Broadening the base of collaborative writing. *College English*, 42(1), 69-74. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/journals/ce/>
- Gee, J. P. (2012). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Graves, D. H. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Hayes, J. R., & Flower, L. S. (1986). Writing research and the writer. *American Psychologist*, 41(10), 1106-1113. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.41.10.1106
- Hayes, J. R., & Flower, L. S. (1987). On the structure of the writing process. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 7(4), 19-30. Retrieved from <http://journals.lww.com/topicsinlanguageorders/pages/default.aspx>
- Hillocks, G. J., Jr. (1982). Getting the most out of time spent marking compositions. *English Journal*, 71(6), 80-83. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/journals/ej>
- Howard, K. N. (2014). Composing online: Integrating blogging into a contemplative classroom. In K. E. Pytash & R. E. Ferdig (Eds.), *Exploring technology for writing and writing technology* (pp. 77-99). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Kellogg, R. T. (1990). Effectiveness of prewriting strategies as a function of task demands. *The American Journal of Psychology*, 103(3), 327-342. doi:10.2307/1423213
- Kitchakarn, O. (2012). Using blogs to improve students' summary writing abilities. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 13(4), 209-219. Retrieved from <http://tojde.anadolu.edu.tr/>
- Lacina, J., & Silva, C. (2011). *Cases of successful literacy teachers*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, MA: University Press.
- Lee, C. C., & Tan, S. C. (2010). Scaffolding writing using feedback in students' graphic organizers: Novice writers' relevance of ideas and cognitive loads. *Educational Media International*, 47(2), 135-152. doi:10.1080/09523987.2010.492678
- Mayher, J. S., Lester, N., & Pradl, G. M. (1983). *Learning to write/writing to learn*. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook Publishers.
- Murray, D. M. (1968). *A writer teaches writing: A practical method of teaching composition*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Nelson, J. S., Range, L. M., & Ross, M. B. (2012). A checklist to guide graduate students' writing. *International Journal of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education*, 24(3), 376-382. Retrieved from <http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/>
- Novakovich, J. (2016). Fostering critical thinking and reflection through blog-mediated peer feedback. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 32(1), 16-30. doi:10.1111/jcal.12114
- Novakovich, J., & Long, E. C. (2013). Digital performance learning: Utilizing a course weblog for mediating communication. *International Forum of Educational Technology & Society*, 16(4), 231-241. Retrieved from <http://ifets.ieee.org/>

- Odom, J. M. (2009). Heuristics in the English classroom: Working the problem of drafting the research paper. *CEA Forum*, 38(1), 1-4. Retrieved from <https://journals.tdl.org/ceaforum/index.php/ceaforum>
- Ondrusek, S. (2012). What the research reveals about graduate students' writing skills: A literature review. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 53(3), 176-188. Retrieved from <http://www.alise.org/jelis-2>
- Pham, V. P. H., & Usaha, S. (2016). Blog-based peer response for L2 writing revision. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 29(4), 724-748. doi:10.1080/09588221.2015.1026355
- Rohman, D. G. (1965). Pre-writing the stage of discovery in the writing process. *College Composition and Communication*, 16(2), 106-112. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/cccc/ccc>
- Rohman, D. G., & Wlecke, A. O. (1964). *Pre-writing: The construction and application of models for concept formation in writing* (Cooperative Research Project No. 2174). East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.
- Rose, M. A. (2004). Comparing productive online dialogue in two group styles: Cooperative and collaborative. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 18(2), 73-88. doi:10.1207/s15389286ajde1802_2
- Sharp, L. A. (2016). Acts of writing: A compilation of six models that define the processes of writing. *International Journal of Instruction*, 9(2), 77-90. doi:10.12973/iji.2016.926a
- Singleton-Jackson, J. A., Lumsden, D. B., & Newsom, R. (2009). Johnny still can't write, even if he goes to college: A study of writing proficiency in higher education graduate students. *Current Issues in Education*, 12(10), 1-39. Retrieved from <https://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu>
- Sommers, N. (1980). Revision strategies of student writers and experienced adult writers. *College Composition and Communication*, 31(4), 378-388. doi:10.2307/356588
- Street, B. V. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Street, B. V. (1995). *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education*. London, UK: Longman.
- Sullivan, M., & Longnecker, N. (2014). Class blogs as a teaching tool to promote writing and student interaction. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 30(4), 390-401. Retrieved from <https://ajet.org.au/index.php/AJET/index>
- Vurdien, R. (2013). Enhancing writing skills through blogging in an advanced English as a Foreign Language class in Spain. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 26(2), 126-143. doi:10.1080/09588221.2011.639784
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wang, S., Hou, H., & Wu, S. (2017). Analyzing the knowledge construction and cognitive patterns of blog-based instructional activities using four frequent interactive strategies (problem solving, peer assessment, role playing and peer tutoring): A preliminary study. *Educational Technology Research & Development*, 65(2), 301-323. doi:10.1007/s11423-016-9471-4
- Winter, J. K. (1996). Student perceptions of the value of a prewriting problem-solving plan. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 59(4), 47-55. doi:10.1177/108056999605900405
- Worden, D. L. (2009). Finding process in product: Prewriting and revision in timed essay responses. *Assessing Writing*, 14(3), 157-177. doi:10.1016/j.asw.2009.09.003

Zhang, H., Song, W., Shen, S., & Huang, R. (2014). The effects of blog-mediated peer feedback on learners' motivation, collaboration, and course satisfaction in a second language writing course. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 30(6), 670-685. Retrieved from <https://ajet.org.au/index.php/AJET/index>.