Seeing through the Blog:
A Case Study of the Scarsdale Current Events Blog

Kelly Mendoza
Tracy Pereira
Wen Xu
Jiwon Yoon

Names of the authors are listed in alphabetical order according to the author's last name.

This paper was written as a class project in the course Mass Media & Children, taught by Dr. Renee Hobbs during Spring 2007.

Seeing through the Blog:
A Case Study of the Scarsdale Current Events Blog

Kelly Mendoza, Tracy Pereira, Wen Xu, Jiwon Yoon

Abstract

The use of weblogs and blogging in schools by teachers and students is on the rise. However, it is uncertain how blogs function for teachers and for students, in what context, whether the blog influences students' writing skills, or how blogs are used in relation to curriculum or classes.   Recently, a school has been using a blog for students to share their views on current events.   This case study will examine two areas: the literature on blogging in schools, and the context of the Scarsdale Current Events Blog.   The first section covers the theoretical context of blogging; its history, youth and the Internet, blogs in an educational context, and youth and current events.   The second section discusses the background and the use of the Scarsdale Blog, drawing on interviews from administrators and teachers.   Finally, avenues of future research are recommended.

Key words: blog, Internet, school, education, current events, students

In a technology-rich and driven age, innovation constantly defines and shapes communication, popular culture, lifestyle and increasingly, even learning. Educators are constantly adapting and incorporating technological changes into their classrooms and pedagogy, not just to keep pace with generations who are increasingly adept and qualified to handle such changes, but also to harness the potential of these shifts to better address and reach their students. The Internet is the most recent product of such developments, offering various tools to serve the diverse needs of a worldwide population. Among its various facets is the recent phenomenon of web logs, also known as *blogs*– "user-generated website[s] where entries are made in journal style and displayed in reverse chronological order" (Wikipedia, 2007).

This paper will examine the use of blogs in an educational context, specifically the Scarsdale Current Events Blog. Two areas will be examined: the literature on blogging in educational settings and a case study of the Scarsdale Current Events Blog. The first section covers the theoretical context of blogging; its history, youth and the Internet, blogs in an educational context, and youth and current events. The second section discusses the background and the use of the Scarsdale Blog, drawing on interviews from administrators and teachers. Finally, the paper proposes several areas of future research.

<div align="center">Literature Review</div>

Reasons for Blogging

Studies have been conducted to document this burgeoning phenomenon, some reporting on the various motivations of the people participating and contributing. Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Swartz (2004b) interviewed 23 bloggers in the California and New York areas, and found that people blog to document their lives; to express opinions or to comment; as catharsis; to use these writing areas to express ideas; or to build community forums. Nardi, Schiano, and Gumbrecht (2004a) further nuanced these reasons according to

"object-oriented activities" – to keep others informed about personal activities; to express opinions in order to influence; to seek feedback; to use the exercise of writing for an audience to stimulate more cognitive input; and as an outlet for emotional release.

However, many the reasons for blogging may be, researchers have found that the desire to and the resultant creation of social spaces is the recurring fact or common thread that runs through all blogging activity. Interaction is core to the *blogosphere*, and although many debate the extent of this interaction, it is widely accepted that blogging is anchored by the writer and the reader, both contributing and nurturing the space created. Hence, educators and academicians are building and utilizing this form of interaction to convert these popular social spaces into learning spaces.

David Huffaker (2004) highlights how this new media form can successfully combine storytelling, collaboration, expression and empowerment (key developmental elements in learning) to create powerful environments for promoting literacy – verbal, visual and digital. He argues that this new technology based largely on peer-to-peer dialogue has tremendous potential to not just enrich learning experiences for children, but also to bridge the disconnect "between how they [children] use the Internet *for* school and how they use it *at* school" (p.74). Huffaker posits that these virtual communities develop prosocial behavior through the creation of opportunities for children to express opinions, discuss issues and respond to questions.

Barry McMullin (2005) concurs, claiming that the Internet, unlike other more recent lackluster technologies, has a unique palette of tools to offer the educational field. He posits that tools such as blogging allow for a social constructivist approach to pedagogy, where new dynamics are introduced to the traditional teacher-student interaction. Both McMullin and Huffaker underscore the utility of blogging in creating a sense of personal ownership and empowerment among learners, since the activity of posting to blogs develops "personal

writing skills – in a social, yet still private space" (McMullin, 2005, p. 74). He highlights the three elements that Internet technologies bring to learning spaces: social reflection, collaboration, and construction of knowledge.

Blogging in Academic Settings

The younger generation was born and has lived with ubiquitous digital media technologies. They multi-task, favor graphics over text, and randomly browse web pages. They like to network and seek prompt gratification and reward. Marc Prensky (2001) describes this generation as "Digital Natives" who are "native speakers" of the digital language. As opposed to the younger generation, adults are described as "Digital Immigrants" who do not understand the languages and culture of the natives. The huge gap between digital natives and immigrants is well observed in educational settings. Teachers who belong to the digital immigrant group often have a hard time teaching students whose culture and language are different, and the result is that they do not understand or appreciate students' unique abilities and skills as digital natives, and use old pedagogies (Prensky, 2001).

However, some efforts to satisfy the needs of Digital Natives have been made in educational settings. As cyberspace has provided new ways to communicate, online communication tools, such as e-mail, listserves, and Blackboard, have been widely adopted in educational settings to enrich the learning experience (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003; Glogoff, 2005; O'Donnel, 2005). Nevertheless, while these online instructional delivery systems still put educators in the center and allow them to control educational environments and experiences of students via these communication tools, blogging makes the learning experiences more learner-centered.   Due to its semi-structured format, the blog is seen as a "middle space" between face-to-face learning and other online instructional tools, allowing

the development of individuals' voices which reflect their own characteristics and intellectual approaches (Oravec, 2003).

Despite this increasing interest in uses of blogs in primary and secondary educational settings, most of the studies are about the use of educational blogs in higher education. One of the reasons for this could be the conservative nature of the primary and secondary education, which often follows pre-designed curricula. On the contrary, the nature of post-secondary education is more flexible and innovative and experimental pedagogies are easily accepted. Also, unlike the past era when professors only needed to demonstrate that their courses taught the right topics, many professors these days are asked to demonstrate efficiency of their pedagogy, which puts students in the center of the learning process (Du & Wagner, 2005). Therefore, post-secondary education systems try to invite more novel methods of learning.

Even though most studies have been conducted regarding post-secondary education, some findings from these studies can still be applied as exemplary models to primary and secondary educational settings. This is because rather than focusing on the uniqueness of higher educational contexts, many of these studies focus on how technological characteristics of blogging can encourage a deeper learning experience.

Purpose of adopting blogs in education. The purpose of using blogs in education is to enhance learning by allowing students to experience "computer-supported communication, collaboration, encouragement of reflective practices" (Hermandez-Ramos, 2004, p.1).

Blogs are suggested as promoting "deep learning" rather than "surface learning" (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003; Rosie, 2000). Surface learning focuses only on meeting minimum educational requirements at low cognitive levels, without engaging experiences. Surface learning follows safe traditional conventions avoids alternatives. In this learning environment,

concept and object are directly matched without deep reflection (Rosie, 2000). On the other hand, deep learning provides opportunities to stand back, link the concept and reflect on the learning process (Rosie, 2000). Blogging can offer this deep learning experience as students expand the discussion through developing their own ideas (Rosie, 2000).

The effectiveness of blogging in educational settings is supported by constructionism, which is often defined as "learning-by-making," as opposed to instructionism. Influenced by Piaget's constructivism, *constructionism* states that knowledge is constructed by creation of public artifacts. Blogs are seen as contributing to the development of *constructive* environments, where practices, technologies and interactions are combined with other learning experiences to allow learners to construct meanings actively, consciously, and publicly (Rosie, 2000; Sade, 2005). However, simply including the use of blogs in curricula does not guarantee the formation of constructive environments. In order to encourage students with different levels of academic achievement and backgrounds to be engaged in production and representation, institutional supports should be provided. To do so, having staff members who can deal with the issue of control, access, and ownership is crucial. Personnel who play critical roles in the maintenance and sustenance of blogs are called "gardeners." Gardeners are the ones who deal with all blog maintenance issues. They do not have to be professional programmers or engineers, but need to have some knowledge of software and hardware to respond to the needs and problems sensitively and comprehensively (Nardi & O'Day, 1999; Sade, 2005).

Learning experiences through blogging. Teachers who have integrated blogs into their curricula often expect blogging to offer a collaborative environment where remediation and intertextuality are explored and supported (Sade, 2005). The dialogic characteristics of the blog, allowing users to leave comments and feedback, enable the monological conversation to be broadened and more enriched (Downes, 2004; O'Donnel,

2005).   Blogging can be the venue for the "composition of multi-vocal, networked hypertexts," where individual expression as well as the creation of cohesive community is encouraged and developed (Huffaker, 2005; Kajder & Bull, 2003; Sade, 2005, p.2). Ideally, by participating in blogging, students consider themselves as "meaningful contributors to professional dialogues" rather than passive observers or consumers of information (Hermandez-Ramos, 2004, p. 1). To increase the advantages that can be obtained from educational blogs, Oravec (2003) suggests four different strategies to deepen learning experiences through blogging, summarized below:

1. *Posting student work*: Students can post their writings and get feedback from teachers, their   class mates and from outsiders.
2. *Exchange hyperlink*: Students and educators can exchange new URLs on blogs.
3. *Fostering reflective approaches to educational genres*: Students can share their critical reflections of blogging and other possible educational experiences they imagine.   This often leads to online discussions.
4. *Forming and maintaining knowledge communities*: Blogs can be a venue where important information is stored and disseminated (p. 229).

Through these different uses of blogging, where students can freely share any form of writing, from informal notes, or first thoughts and links, to more refined, formal essays and new discursive norms have been created in cyberspace. New discursive norms have been created in cyberspace called cyberdiscursive rhetoric.   Cyberdiscursive rhetoric is virtual, interactive, continuous and instantaneous, allowing "the concrete rhetoric of orality" and "abstract rhetoric of literacy" to be more dynamic (O'Donnell, 2005, p. 3).   Although the aggregative structure of the oral rhetoric and the hierarchical structure of traditional literacy are surrendering to the new language structure of cyberdiscursive rhetoric, it is still often fragmented and not cohesive.

The way students acquire knowledge through blogging can be explained as

"directive techniques" which focuses on "frequent responses from learners with immediate feedback from the instructor" (Glogoff, 2005; p.1). Due to the public nature of blogs, important information can be equally accessed by all. Not only can students can broaden their knowledge of certain topics, but can also can easily explore additional information through blogs. Since users can easily add a new entry and comment on others' entries, directive learning is well supported and encouraged (Glogoff, 2005; Prensky, 2001).

Problems and challenges. The general encouraging and positive atmosphere that Internet technologies are currently thriving in, is also tempered by those voicing caution, concern and doubt. When using blogs in an educational context, the issues of access, management, assessment and teachers' participation are a challenge for educators (Hernandex-Ramos, 2004). Access and management are related to cultural capitals of individuals and the school district and hiring the right gardener to make blogging experiences smoother and more convenient. However, assessment and teachers' participation involve more complicated concerns.

Due to the relative novelty of blogs in educational settings and the distinct learning experiences provided by blogs, assessment needs to be authentic; both cognitively and contextually (Sade, 2005). Teachers often face anxieties due to the relative novelty of blogs. However, a clear presentation of teachers' expectations and an evaluation rubric in the beginning of the semester would help both students and teachers understand the objectives and directions of blogging when integrated in the classroom (Hermandez-Ramos, 2004). In fact, well established evaluation methods, such as thorough qualitative analysis of students' postings, can help teachers to have a better understanding of their students' writing, analytical skills, and motivation. Since grading blogs often cannot be done by quantitatively summing what has been transmitted from the teacher to the student, but rather requires cognitive and contextually authentic efforts, thorough studies need to be

done to facilitate teachers' grading processes (Hermandez-Ramos, 2004; Sade, 2005).

One of the possible assessment methods is letting students evaluate their own personal learning outcomes (See also Rosie, 2000). Since it is difficult for teachers to observe and understand what students have learned through the process of blogging, giving students a chance to reflect on what they have learned and clarify their learning outcomes can help both teachers and students to have a better understanding and insight into what they have learned. However, teachers should still be able to guide this process by providing students with criteria for learning outcomes.

In terms of teachers' engagement, different teachers show different levels of engagement when adopting blogs into their classrooms. A study by Sorensen and Tackle (2001) on online discussion forums shows that more collaborative dialogue was encouraged among students when blog participation was required by their teacher. Nardi et al. (2004b) as well as Steven Krause (2007) point out two examples of academic blogging that failed to create a learning community space or generate the much-hailed dynamic discussion. The former refers to the case of an undergraduate archaeology course and the latter refers to a graduate seminar on the rhetoric and culture of cyberspace. In both cases, the professors realized that a lack of a specific 'requirement' in the coursework to blog resulted in postings that were vague and did not indicate any presence of reflection or interaction. No dynamic exchange between bloggers was noticed and Krause (2007) posits that it was the structure of the class that was the primary reason for such failure. He explains that in trying to introduce an element of freedom into class assignments, with the offer of open-ended writing, students in fact were unable to "just write" and stated that they required and preferred direction. Although he reiterates that the structure of the course may have primarily affected the success of the blog and clarifies that he does not dismiss the utility and potential of blogging, in his opinion, among the Internet communication technologies,

email lists provide a greater degree of interactivity. Since one of the goals for adopting blogs in the classroom is to encourage students to see their peers as sources of information and knowledge, ways to encourage students to more actively respond to each others postings and comments needs to be investigated (Hermandez-Ramos, 2004). Therefore, the degree of teachers' participation in the online discussion also needs to be examined and compared to other ways to encourage student participation (Fauske & Wade, 2003; Hermandez-Ramos, 2004).

Besides the academic front of blogging, other concerns and issues have been raised about the more personal implications of the nature of blogging. The fact that much of blogging takes the form of private musings that is available to a worldwide public causes alarm for many parents and educators. Most children are unaware that information provided through blogs is at risk of being exploited by online predators. Some schools have had to tighten the reins on blogs to due to misuse of blogs by students to pass negative comments and to participate in online bullying (n.a., 2006 & Pascopella, 2006). Though the right to free speech is often the counter claim to such controls and restrictions, one is unable to deny the serious implications of uninformed and ignorant blogging practices. Sara Grimes (2003) points out how market researches are now mining youth blog sites to garner personal information that can be used as data for business marketing strategies and practices. Besides the concerns of economic exploitation, Grimes also raises the ethical issues of privacy and intellectual property rights of children's online publishing through personal blog spaces. She questions whether claims of empowerment of children through Internet technologies will ever be "interpreted as a civic right that should be defended" (p.3). Grimes argues that true empowerment involves not just providing children with access but also with knowledge of the political and ethical implication of such use. Julie

Frechette (2006) echoes this sentiment, calling for the need for media/digital literacy to accompany these new technological advancements that allow children to "assemble worldwide" and truly become empowered citizens. Lauren Barack (2006) also cites supporters of blogs such as Steve Hargadon, who believes that "overzealous legislation" isn't the solution to the fears of the consequences of blogging, but instead calls for a more nuanced approach to policy that encourages certain kinds of blogging activities such as "edublogs" which have tremendous potential to enhance child development through simple writing skills.

Youth and Current Events

In the U.S., and probably many other countries, equipping students with knowledge of current events has been educators' goals for decades. Knowledge on current events is often considered important to be an enlightened and participating citizen. Due to this link between exposure to current events and issues of being democratic citizens, studies in current events are often recommended in social studies curricula (Dan & Larry, 1982; Libresco, 2003; Lintner, 2006). Also, as social studies instruction has used past world events (history) to help students better understand the present condition of society, it is now using current events to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the world (Anderman & Johnston, 1994). One of the most common ways to introduce current events is using news broadcasting, such as *Channel One* or *CNN Newsroom* in the classroom. Since news clips are not systematically formatted as course materials, the ways teacher uss these news programs heavily influence students' learning experiences. Studies show that students who watch the news in classroom settings are likely increase their news-seeking behavior and have more knowledge about current events (Anderman & Johnston, 1994).

However, still, there is growing concern about the younger (American) generations'

disengagement from politics and civic affairs. Michael Carpini (2000) cites research from various scholars who have raised alarming statistics to numerically illustrate the extent of this disconnect: 19% of youth between the ages of 18 – 29 follow politics "most of the time"; 36% of them claim to follow the news on a daily basis; and can correctly answer only one of three questions on national politics. In attempting to identify the reasons for this decline in civic engagement among young people, Carpini lists three factors that he believes are required for such involvement: motivation, opportunity, and ability. He claims that on all three levels, youth are unfulfilled—there is a general lack of faith in political leaders and issues due to recent scandals and the devaluing of the public sector; most formal institutions tend to ignore and make limited efforts to acknowledge the rights and voices of young people besides providing them with voting rights and opportunities for joining political organizations; and this lack of attention coupled with a decrease in civic education during school years affects the overall ability of these generations to become involved in civic affairs. Carpini, however, qualifies these statements by stating that this widespread apparent detachment isn't due to indifference or disinterest, but instead, is due to a sentiment of alienation from civic institutions and affairs. Surveys reveal that young Americans bemoan the lack of involvement and consideration given to them and are concerned about the state of affairs and the future of the country. Carpini points out the contradiction in such statements and in taking action, but highlights this situation as a state of ambivalence about their lack of connection with public life.

David Buckingham (2000) echoes these claims, stating that perhaps what is considered apathy and cynicism is indeed a "rational response to powerlessness" (p. 202) where young people are "disenfranchised" and "excluded" from political discourse and hence refrain from active participation due to the perceived notion that their efforts are futile. Buckingham posits that youth are also unable to connect the political dimensions of

their immediate lived experiences with the larger more exclusive and official political domains. He calls for a "fresh thinking about the relationship between the 'personal' and the 'political'" (p.218) and is supported by Carpini (2000) who also points out a lack of awareness among young people of the connection between isolated acts that tackle local issues and "the larger world of public policy" (p. 346). Both Buckingham and Carpini beckon to new popular culture media forms – especially the Internet - as offering a more relevant and popular form of politics that can address this problem. Buckingham wonders whether the Internet offers "new, public, democratic spheres" that can bring about more active and participatory citizenship and Carpini similarly lists the possibilities of the Internet in tackling the motivation, opportunity and ability of young people in order to stimulate civic engagement. Carpini illustrates how the technology can address the various groups of political actors – the political elites, the engaged citizens, the interested but inactive, as well as the neither engaged nor clearly motivated.

While both Carpini and Buckingham are cautious about unchecked enthusiasm about this new media form and call for support functions and awareness of all the related consequences of the new information environments thus created, growing number of teachers are exploring and adopting blogs in the classroom to expand their education on current affairs. In fact, studies have shows that wise use of new media technologies in the classroom has demonstrated their effectiveness in creating cooperative and intimate educational environments and teaching current affairs and literacy (Downes, 2004; Evans, 2005; Huffaker, 2005; Kajder & Bull, 2003; Karchmer, Mallette, Kara-Soteriou, & Leu, 2005; Libresco, 2003; Richardson, 2005).

Channel One has been the much-debated attempt to introduce news and current affairs into the classroom. Most of its naysayers are concerned with the effects of the advertising that it brings in conjunction with its 12-minute news broadcast, though much

research has also been conducted to study its potential benefits. In 1993, Bradley Greenberg and Jeffrey Brand studied the effects of Channel One on high school students' knowledge of current events as well as on their general behavioral practices in terms of involvement in public affairs through discussions, agenda-setting or general interest levels in politics. The researchers found that students' watching of Channel One had more direct rather than indirect effects on them, where students who were regularly exposed to the broadcast demonstrated greater knowledge about events covered by the broadcast than those who didn't and extended this awareness to other news issues featured elsewhere, but did not demonstrate any difference in terms of other behavioral practices.

In 1998, Eric Anderman and Jerome Johnston conducted a similar study that measured the effects of Channel One viewership but incorporated other variables such as the context of the viewing practices as well as motivation and goal-orientation theory to better understand the results. They found that students who watched Channel One in environments that were supportive of such viewing and where classroom instruction consciously engaged the students in processing the news being presented, displayed greater knowledge of current affairs and more frequently reported on autonomous news-seeking behavior. Students who also were also more 'mastery-oriented' towards learning (where students engage in learning activities to master the task itself – a more intrinsic goal) rather than "performance-oriented" students, who demonstrated a higher tendency of autonomous news-seeking behavior and hence had superior knowledge of current events.

Most research and scholars seem to indicate and stress the need for the incorporation of current affairs into the classroom and highlight its potential benefits on engaging youth into participation in civic affairs and public policy. They are encouraging of new media forms that can more effectively address the young generations, but however simultaneously underscore the need for supporting this introduction of current affairs with

conscious instruction that sustains independent news-seeking behavior and that can stimulate civic engagement.

A Case Study: Current Events Blog in Scarsdale School District

As blogging has been touted as an innovative pedagogical practice, and academicians have stressed the need for exposing students to current events, this section will focus on the Scarsdale Current Events Blog. Since February 2006, the Scarsdale School District in Westchester, New York, has attempted to use blogging as a new way to incorporate current events into the classroom. The blog is connected to the school's website (available at http://pfolkemer.googlepages.com/scarsdalecurrentevents). The current events blog has gained popularity with students and teachers, and changed some teachers' instructional methods. In order the better understand the conditions that have made this blog possible and largely successful, two areas in the following sections will be covered: the background of the Scarsdale School District, and interviews with teachers and administrators about the blog's development and use.

Scarsdale School District

The Scarsdale public school district is one of 47 districts located in Westchester County, New York. According to the U.S. Census (2000), Scarsdale Village houses a population of 17,823 and 5795 households. This area is one of the wealthiest in the country, where the median household income is $182,792 and the median house value is $708,000. The per capita income of Scarsdale Village residents is $89,602—higher than the average per capita income of Westchester County at $36,726, and four times higher than the national per capita income of $21,587. Scarsdale School parents are made up of 82% White, 15% Asian, and less than 1% African American. This population is highly educated—31% of parents have a bachelor's degree, 29% have a master's degree, and 24% have a professional school degree. Seventy-seven percent of Scarsdale parents have

management or professional occupations.

Scarsdale is known for its high academic quality. Scarsdale consists of five primary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The average class size is about 20 students. This is a school district with low student needs in relation to district resource capacity. According to the University of the State of New York and The State Education Department (2005a), the annual attendance rate was 97.4% and student suspensions were 1% during the 2002-2003 school year. There are approximately 1,300 students in the high school. At least 96% its graduates go to 4-year College. From 2000-2003, district-wide total expenditure per pupil was $18,828, compared to New York State public schools' total expenditure of per pupil, which is $13,085 (University of the State of New York & The State Education Department, 2005b). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2005), Scarsdale Middle School ranks the 26th of 693 New York public middle schools (see Table 1).

Table 1

Scarsdale Middle School Ranking

Rank* (of 693)	School	District	Total students (2005)	Student/ Teacher Ratio (2005)	NY State Assessments, 8th Grade Math (2005)	NY State Assessments, 8th Grade English Language Arts (2005)	NY State Assessments Combined**

26	Scarsdale Middle School	Scarsdale School District	1120	11.9	93	81	174

(* Rank is determined by the summation of the two NY State Assessments scores. The school with the highest combined score is ranked #1. ** The values used in the NY State Assessments columns are % met standard.   Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

Scarsdale is described by Paul Folkemer, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, as a "progressive school district" that has some of the highest achievement numbers in the country. This allows the district to "take a different position regarding instruction" where, for instance, they boycotted state tests because parents all supported the boycott, and because they believed state tests had a negative impact on the instruction of the school. They may soon drop all Advanced Placement (AP) designation because they can offer courses that are of higher level than is AP.   Rather than focus on achievement scores and standardized tests, the number one goal is that "students will love learning" (P. Folkemer, personal communication, January 26, 2007).

Interviews with Scarsdale Teaching Community

It is clear that the Scarsdale School District is a progressive, high-ranking district with many available resources.   To explore the conditions that have allowed the Scarsdale Current Events Blog to emerge, understand how it has thrived, and to understand how teachers are using the blog, the next section shares information from interviews with the blogs' creators, technical experts, and middle school teachers.   Interviews with eight teachers, two technical experts, and three separate interviews with Folkemer—the blog's mastermind—reveal an intricate story of the blog's birth, support that was needed for its

creation, and the advantages and disadvantages teachers face in using the blog in their classes.

   Emergence of the blog.   The Scarsdale Current Events Blog would not have been possible without the support of teachers and administrators, however, the mastermind behind the blog is Dr. Paul Folkemer.   The blog format has been used for approximately one year, but Folkemer has been providing teachers a means to bring current events into the classroom for several years.   Although he has always had a passion for the news, especially from his previous experience as the Executive Vice President for Education at *Channel One News* network, it was the events of the Iraq war that sparked his desire to provide a way for elementary teachers to talk about the war with their students (grades 3-5).   On March 24, 2003, he emailed the first story about the Iraq war to teachers.   Everyday he would email teachers a story of a current event with lesson plans and questions framed for an elementary student audience.   A link to the story was also included on the school's website.   If teachers wanted to, they could then distribute the story to class and have a discussion.   Eventually the stories expanded to other topics in addition to the war, ranging from politics, human rights, research studies, and other current events Folkmer thought would be of interest to students.

   The previous format in which Folkemer emailed teachers a news story was not extremely successful (M. Pincus, personal communication, February 8, 2007; J.Crisci, personal communication, February 5, 2007) with teachers moderately using it (M. Rothman, personal communication, February 27, 2007).   Pincus claims "people didn't grab on to the idea until the blog."   One teacher noted "[Folkemer's] previous method of emailing one story a day was too 'flat'" but the blog format was more interactive and that is when she started incorporating the daily articles into class (E. Wixted, personal communication, February 2, 2007).

Michael Pincus and Jerry Crisci helped Folkemer give birth to the blog. Pincus, the Technology Teacher at Scarsdale's Quaker Ridge Elementary School, approached Folkemer with the idea of turning the daily news story into a blog. Pincus learned about blogging from his brother-in-law, and was also inspired to use the technology after attending a seminar about how to use blogging in the classroom, led by David Warlick (education blogging guru) at the MacWorld conference. The aspect that excited them was that the fact that students could not only easily get a daily news story, but could also have a discussion about. Pincus was in charge of the technical ends of things. He initially looked into blogging software, but what was available at the time was too costly and complicated. After consulting with his brother-in-law, Pincus discovered Blogger (www.blogger.com), a facet of Google. Using Blogger was an important decision because this allowed Pincus to use the Blogger interface on the Scarsdale school website without links to advertisers or outsiders. On February 15, 2006, the first story on the blog was posted. At first the responses were slow, but once Folkemer and Pincus promoted it to teachers, they showed it to their students, who shared it with other students, and it took off. Pincus said Folkemer was "like a celebrity" and before, students did not really know who Folkemer was, but now they know him as the blog man.

Jerry Crisci, Director of Technology for the district (and Pincus's boss) also played a role in the blog's birth. Crisci claims he "takes people with technology ideas and implements them," including helping teachers to set up their own blogs (J. Crisci, personal communication, February 5, 2007). To allow for the blog on the school website, Crisci freed up some web space on the server and worked with the Blogger interface to seamlessly integrate it on the site. Both Pincus and Crisci are interested in the Web 2.0 initiative and how this can impact education. Web 2.0 is a term for new uses and applications of the Internet. For instance, websites are now incorporating software use within a website itself

rather than on separate software applications on a computer.   User-generated content is increasing, where users can read and write on the web, post videos, work on projects together, and collaborate.   Crisci was one of only 50 teachers from the East Coast to be accepted to attend the *Google Teacher Academy* and become a Google Certified Teacher in the use of innovative technology in the classroom (Google Teacher Acadmy, 2007).   Once Folkemer learned how to use Blogger from Pincus and Crisci, they were not really involved unless technical assistance was needed.

   Managing blog content.   Although Folkemer had help getting the blog up and running, he takes responsibility for posting daily stories.   Everyday, he browses through the headlines and decides on a story for the blog.   He then reads about the story from several news sources, ranging from *CNN*, *MSNBC*, *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *National Geographic*, and *PBS*.   After gathering information from multiple sources, he writes a news story in a conversational way that children can understand, reworked for an elementary school audience.   He takes a "what don't they know" point of view in order to write the story: "When I read stories, I have a good sense of what kids need to know" (P. Folkemer, personal communication, February 1, 2007).   Folkemer is described as always checking his Blackberry, where he receives student blog responses and approves them before they go "live" on the blog site (Pincus).   He chooses the stories based on two factors: if they connect to the curriculum, and if they exemplify what students would find exciting to know (P. Folkemer, personal communication, January 23, 2007).

   Folkemer's passion for current events is an important factor fuelling the blog, as he says, "everyone knows I care a great deal about current events as a topic" (January 26, 2007).   Others know about his passion, claiming he "gets very obsessive about it" and "He sees it as a calling" (Crisci).   He even works on evenings and weekends to post new stories (Folkemer, January 26, 2007).   One teacher reflects on the transition of his

daily teacher emails to the blog:

> Teachers all know that current events are important to Paul. The articles were there, but they [teachers] chose not to use them because of the inflexibility. But Paul didn't give up on it; he kept hammering at it until he came up with the idea of the blog—and the kids can tap into it, and they get to pick the articles they're interested in. (Wixted)

Another reason for the blog's success is that its use is not required of teachers. All teachers are looking for unique ways to engage kids, but Scarsdale is a "locally autonomous environment" where teachers have a high degree of freedom (Folkemer, January 26, 2007). The blog is optional for teachers because, as Folkemer says, "that's our culture, everything's optional" (February 1, 2007). Thus, the birth of the blog was possible due to one person's dedication combined with knowledge and resources of new technology initiatives, set within a locally autonomous environment.

Once the blog was up, Folkemer saw "phenomenal response" (January 23, 2007), but not from his target audience of third through fifth graders. Although some elementary school students were using the blog, administrators and teachers noticed the blog had been taken over, so to speak, by middle school students, yet no students were required to use it for class. This means that middle school students picked up blogging on their own. Teachers heard stories of students blogging with their parents, talking about the news around the dinner table, and being engaged beyond their homework by using the blog. Due to its popularity, many middle school teachers started using the blog in class.

For these reasons, a group of eight middle school (sixth through eighth grade) teachers were interviewed about how they use the blog in class. Their subjects range from

history, social studies, English, and humanities. Six female and two male teachers were interviewed, ranging from 1 ½ years to 36 years of teaching experience at Scarsdale. The following teacher responses regarding the blog are drawn from semi-structured phone and email interviews (see Appendix A: Interview Questions). Their responses are divided into two sections: teachers' use of the blog in their classroom, and problems with the blog. The first section on teacher use covers three areas: 1) How teachers use the blog, 2) overall positive benefits, and 3) convenience for teachers.

How the blog is used. Of all the teachers, five use the blog often in class (at least once a week), two use it moderately (once a month or less), and one teacher has never used the blog. Two of the teachers using it often, however, just started using it this year. Most teachers require that students post to the blog a certain number of times per quarter. This provides students a choice as to which story they will respond to, so long as they complete a certain number of responses per quarter (the average amount required averages out to approximately two postings per week). All of the teachers who use the blog do so for two reasons: 1) to keep up on current events; and 2) to connect to their curriculum. The moderate-use teachers would use the blog more if the stories connected better to the material they are teaching. One teacher noted she only discusses the blog in class if it is relevant to what she is teaching (Wixted).

Although students have access to computers within the school, most of them interact with the blogs from their home computers (J. Milliken, personal communication, February 26, 2007; S. Scharf, personal communication, February 27, 2007; Wixted). Whereas some teachers graded students simply on whether they posted or not, other teachers required students to use proper grammar and spelling, or make "an earnest effort to participate" (Scharf), or require at least a paragraph long response (M. Lahey, personal communication, March 1, 2007). No teachers graded on the opinion of students, but one

graded on "logical errors" in their statements (Scharf). Quality of student writing was a concern for some teachers and will be discussed in the next section on problems that have emerged from the blog.

The blog serves to engage students in class. One teacher noted how she uses the blog to draw students into the discussion, and discern understanding or misunderstanding of the material (Wixted). She brings in students by referring to their blog posts, for instance, "I noticed you agreed with this issue on the blog." She brings in lower level or introverted kids into class discussion through the blog by asking them, "What did you say on the blog?" (Wixted). She also uses the blog to discern if students have completely missed the connection to the material taught, and she then can readdress the material in class.

The teachers who taught in the CHOICE (Cooper House Option in Contemporary Education) program seemed to use the blog more than other teachers. The CHOICE program is an alternative school within the social studies program that has more flexibility in the curriculum (J. M. Castiello, personal communication, March 1, 2007). CHOICE's interdisciplinary feature is *World Conference*; a twelve-week long program where students learn and model the United Nations (Scarsdale Middle School, 2007). This program has a heavy focus on current events, and the blog is used as a tool in keeping up with and discussing current events (Castiello). The CHOICE program also has a heavy technology focus. In one class, all of the students have their own video-capable iPods (Rothman). Students in the CHOICE program are required to make their own podcasts and videos, so the technology focus could be another reason for increased use of the blog. For example, one teacher going through the *World Conference* program, which requires an intensive unit on international current events, noted, "While we were preparing for the *World Conference* the students used the log [sic] everyday. They were also required to keep a news journal with news stories that related to their countries and region" (Castiello).

On the other hand, one of the teachers interviewed said she never used the blog. Rather, she incorporated current events into class by providing students articles from the *BBC*, *USA Today*, and the *New York Times*. Students would read the article and respond to the "5 W's" (who, what, when, where, why) in class. She preferred using *New York Times* articles rather than the blog stories because the higher level of writing of the *Times* provided students a better opportunity to increase vocabulary. In addition, she was concerned with the quality of student writing on the blog, and that the blog was not directly related to her unit of study. In addition, she felt she had little time to refer to the blog during class.

Positive benefits. Thus, the blog seems to be used primarily as a graded, supplemental means to enhance curriculum. Previously, some teachers would incorporate current events by having students bring in newspapers or online news articles and share the articles in class by answering the "five W's." One teacher found students were not bringing in articles that were newsworthy, and that requiring students to cut out articles was "more cumbersome than rewarding" (Rothman). One teacher required CHOICE students to keep a current events journal, where students had to write news stories based on that week's topic (Castiello). She found that the blog helped them with this assignment. Although the blog is supplemental, several teachers noted that they and their students occasionally still bring in a news articles (Wixted).

Thus, for three teachers in particular, the current events blog has changed the way they teach current events. Blogging has helped develop a habit of reading the news daily (Castiello; Lahey). One teacher mentioned her students are excited to share news stories daily, as they would exclaim, "Did you hear what happened?" "Can you believe that this happened?" and "Can we talk about this?" (Castiello). Another teacher noted the impact of the blog on her teaching:

When the students did a research project on the legacy of the Declaration of Independence and had to find a current issue that reflects one of Jefferson's ideals, they were advising each other to use the current event/blog site to get ideas. That was the moment when I realized that the current events component of my class was working. The students did not see it as a burden, but as an interesting and enjoyable part of their social studies experience. (Lahey)

Another teacher reflected on how he wants students to know what is happening in their lifetime. In reflecting on his own life, he noted:

I was a teenager during the Rwandan genocide, and, yet, I had no idea it even occurred until I started studying history as an adult. What I had lived through as *current events*, I had to later learn as *history* [emphasis his]. I hope to help my students overcome the insular ignorance that I had of the world when I was a teenager. I want to use the blogs to aid my students in this regard. (Scharf)

On a lighter note, another teacher took a "fun" approach to learning about current events: "My goal in using the blogs has been to get kids to read news for the fun of learning cool stuff that's going on in the world" (Milliken), and another an "entertaining" approach, as the blog is a "new means to entertain and educate your students, and not feel too overwhelmed by it" (Rothman).

Several teachers who use the blog often note its overall benefits include increasing the likelihood that students watch or read the news outside of school (Rothman), helping students understand hard news stories and reading for details (Castiello), and looking at themselves with an "outside lens" (Wixted). The blog also provides a means to communicate for this age group, as Rothman mentions, "blogging helps this generation because it makes it easier for them to communicate their feelings—it's valuable."

Teachers report that most of their students' reactions to the blog have been positive.

The public aspect of students seeing their name on the blog and having others respond to their posts piques their interest, offers them a chance to interact, and increases the "coolness factor" (L. Tavelli, personal communication, February 26, 2007).   One teacher who often used the blog exclaimed:

> The kids love to blog!   They often will blog many more times than they are required to.   The blog site also allows them to interact with each other and share opinions.   Some of my students will respond to other comments they have read on the story.   It also gives them the freedom to choose the articles they are interested in just as most adults do when they read the paper.   This is teaching them skimming skills and allowing them to connect to the issue/article they are reading.
> (Lahey)

Because students can choose the stories they want to respond to, it provides them a sense of choice in contrast to a requirement that students all do the same thing: "If they were forced to do it, then it would be negative" (Tavelli).   This falls into the "locally autonomous environment" culture earlier mentioned (Folkemer).   In addition, the blog offers a new form of homework that is appealing, as one teacher put it, "blogging beats most homework" (Milliken).

Convenience.   Another reason teachers enjoyed the blog is for its convenience and function as a time saver.   Blogging allowed less time for students to look for articles (Rothman), and provided teachers a way to cover current events without having to spend time during class reading articles or discussing them extensively.   One teacher liked the blog because he could not always devote sufficient class time to the day's news (Scharf).   The blog also allowed teachers to monitor student use in tracking who posted and when.

Even though there has been largely positive feedback on the blog, there are some problems.   Four major problems that emerged from the interviews include: 1) Concerns

with quality of writing; 2) lack of teacher control, 3) new problems with the multiple-story format; and 4) practicality.

Quality of writing. Teachers fall into two camps: those who are concerned with writing quality on the blog, and those who are not as concerned. This concern has to do with whether a teacher is required to teach English. One teacher who covers social studies and English asks students to edit their writing for form (grammar, punctuation, spelling) before posting to the blog, and prefers that students write in a formal tone (Rothman). On the other hand, teachers who do not teach English are more concerned with self-expression on the blog rather than form. This camp of teachers believes that students are using "this generation's way of communicating" where they write to get out their thoughts rather than for perfect form (Tavelli). One teacher called this type of writing "right from the gut" (Tavelli). In fact, one teacher worries that grading on form may limit a student's openness in expression: "if a kid is going to agonize over writing and grammar, it will slow them down" (Wixted). These teachers seem most concerned with the thought and expression of a response. Blog writing is connected to the way students think through thoughts and gives them "an opportunity to think about it on their own time" (Tavelli). Even Folkemer, who browses over the student responses before he posts them "live" on the website, is comfortable posting those with weak form.

Lack of teacher control. A second problem that has emerged is teachers' level of comfort in letting go of control in how students blog and what they say. One teacher mentions that she has had to give up some control, as "with the blog you're a little more hands off as a teacher" (Rothman). Another teacher that uses the blog often mentioned that the blog reflects what goes on inside a classroom and can reflect the teacher as well. She speculated that, due to this lack of control, some teachers either do not send their kids to the blog, or they make students write a grammatically perfect blog (Wixted).

Problems with multiple-story format.   The third problem has to do with the recent multiple story format of the blog.   Whereas previously the blog included one story per day, in January Folkemer decided to post multiple news stories per day (Folkemer, January 26, 2007).   He eventually would like to expand the site into a news website for kids, and perhaps that is why he is adding multiple stories (Folkemer, February 2, 2007).   Thus, now the blog has several sections and stories, according to its description:

> Keep up to date on what is happening in the world and share your views on current events with others. The current events page includes stories about world news, U.S. news, New York State news, science and technology news, health news and two special features--You Be the Judge and Life in America. Stories are updated daily.
> (Scarsdale Public Schools, 2007)

The new format with multiple stories has been confusing to students (J. Crisci), and it has proven more work for teachers.   Regarding the new multiple-story format, one teacher lamented, "there's so much on there that it's overwhelming" for her and for her students (N. Collins, personal communication, February 27, 2007).   Another teacher who often uses the blog noted, "With many students and so many blogs, I cannot possibly track each student's individual postings" and that the multiple story format "was taking way too much time on a daily basis and was detracting from my lesson planning" (Scharf).   Another teacher observed that "The kids liked blogging, but only will do it if it 'counts.'   The format needs to be more teacher friendly, so that we can zero in on our student's work in a fairly efficient way" (Milliken).   Although the total amount of posts have not decreased (they are just spread over several stories), one teacher found it was easier for kids to have a discussion in class if they have all read the same article, so she prefers the single story format for that reason (Rothman).

Practicality problems.   Because of these reasons, a fourth problem has emerged:

a concern from teachers of the practicality and ease of use of the blog. Although teachers enjoyed some conveniences from the blog, problems include the blogs' connection to the curriculum, and difficulty in teacher tracking and grading. One teacher admitted she would use the blog more if stories connected more directly to her curriculum:

> Frequently, the current events site doesn't pick up items that we're dealing with in the curriculum. For instance, recently I spent 4 days teaching the Armenian genocide at the exact time that Hrant Dink was assassinated by a Turkish nationalist, but this story didn't appear on the current events site. (Milliken)

Some students do not enjoy being required to post to the blog, as one teacher mentioned a student said, "I love reading the articles but I don't like *having* to respond to them" (Scharf). And finally, two teachers vented that the blog is causing greater strain on planning and grading time. The first teacher noted,

> My greatest frustration with my use of the blogs in my classroom is that this seemingly simple learning activity has, in practice, become immensely complicated and time consuming. . . .I hope to better use the blogs, and, most important, to efficiently use the blogs as a more integrated, seamless part of my course. (Scharf)

This teacher likes the benefits for the blog system, but wants to develop an easier way to hold students accountable for responding to the blog in a timely fashion—to "streamline the entire process" (Scharf). A second teacher commented on the impracticality of use: "I'd require the blogging again if it were easier to administer. Is there some way student responses could be fed to a particular teacher, so I wouldn't need to scroll through hundreds of responses to find one of my student's responses?" (Milliken).

In fact, four of the eight teachers articulated ideas for improving the Current Events Blog. One improvement is that the stories more directly connect to issues in the curriculum (Milliken). Another suggested a system where he could track and monitor

students' responses, for "it is somewhat time consuming and inefficient for me to track the daily participation of 86 students to up to 10 blog articles" (Scharf). Pincus suggested that stories could be divided by grade level and expanded to high school students. Teachers should be able to post their own stories on the blog, and expand it to different pages for different subjects, another teacher recommended (Collins). And finally, one teacher wanted more student dialogue and creation of community on the blog (Rothman).

On the other hand, there was a teacher who experienced no such problems with the blog, but she also had a complex system in place for grading and checking students' posts. In this system, she requires students to email her a copy of their response on E-Board (an online teacher-student communication device) every time they post. She then reads the responses and sends them a note indicating they have received credit. As she reads their responses, she sometimes sends back a more personal comment (Lahey). Another teacher has students submit a typed packet of their blog entries for quick review, but he is not satisfied with this method (Scharf). Thus, it is clear that although the blog has had an overall positive impact on this group of teachers, it is not without its problems.

To sum up the story of the Scarsdale Current Events Blog, the conditions that made the blog successfully develop include a technologically innovative support staff, a school culture of innovation and freedom, the dedication of a passionate person who keeps the blog running, and teachers and students who are actively using it. Teachers are finding it useful, with positive benefit, and in some ways convenient, but they also are facing issues with quality of writing, lack of teacher control, problems with the recent multiple-story format, and troubles with the practicality of its use.

<div align="center">Avenues of Future Research</div>

Based on this information, several avenues of research are necessary to further explore the Scarsdale blog phenomenon—for administrators, teachers, and students.

Future research could reveal whether student blogging is an innovative way to educate and engage students, whether it improves or decreases their writing skills, if it increases their consumption and understanding of current events, and if it truly creates a community of learners. For instance, the content of the blog itself could be explored. What are students writing, when, how often, and what patterns can be found in their blog posts? A content analysis would be an effective way to explore these questions.

Another avenue of research is examining students' reactions to the blog and their self-reported blogging behavior. Although most teachers enjoy the blog, do students feel the same way? What are their attitudes towards blogging? Have students become more interested in current events? Have they been more engaged with their classes? A self-report survey of students would be a way to explore these issues. Furthermore, in order to better facilitate teachers' integration of blogs in their classrooms, issues of teacher engagement in the blogging process and how teachers evaluate blog entries need to be investigated.

Since February 2007, three separate blogs have been added to the Scarsdale School's webpage in addition to the Current Events Blog. The Scrabble Challenge is a virtual scrabble-board challenge that requires students to post a word; the Science Challenge Blog encourages students to solve scientific brainteasers; and the Math Challenge Blog offers students problems to solve regarding math in real-life situations. The effectiveness of these blogs in helping math, science, and English teachers and students, for instance, has yet to be explored.

In conclusion, the Scarsdale Current Events Blog has been fairly successful, however, dealing with some of the problems reported by teachers will improve the blog and perhaps increase its use across other grade levels and subject areas. When asked what he wants kids to learn from the blog, Folkemer answered, "Read. Think. Write" (February

1, 2007).   In keeping with this mission, the effectiveness of blogging in schools must be investigated so that it does serve to help students read, think, and write.

Appendix: Interview Questions

Scarsdale Teacher interview Questions

Temple University's graduate level *Media and Children* class is doing a mini-research project on the Scarsdale Current Events Blog.

There is no judgment as to whether you use the blog in your class or not—I'm interested in examining conditions that surround the blog use, and exploring administrative, student, and teacher response to it.   Please do not feel as if you have to answer all of these questions—they are just jumping points for your response.

These responses are anonymous—your name and any identifying information (other than "teacher" and grade level "elementary" or "middle") will not be connected to your

comments, nor shared with administrators, other teachers, parents, students, etc.

*   *   *

1.   Please provide brief information on what subject and grade level you teach,   and how many years teaching (overall and at Scarsdale).

2.   Tell me about how you use the blog* in class.

   *If you use it, I'm interested to how you incorporate it into class.   Some questions to consider: How long you've been using it? Is it for credit or an assignment? How often do students blog?   Do they do it outside/inside of class? Do you tie it to curriculum?   What have student reactions been like?   How has the blog added to (or taken away from) your class?   What do you want students to learn, or what do you think they're learning from the blog?   Are you surprised by anything?

   * If you don't use it, tell me about your reaction to the blog.   Do you feel it doesn't fit into your class, or your teaching style, just not really interested, or something else? Any comments welcome here.

4.   Would you like to see any additions or changes to the blog, or its use?

5.   Please share any other feedback/comments.

*   *   *
Thank you!

References

Anderman, E. M., & Johnston, J. (1994). Achievement goals and current events knowledge. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Orleans, LA.

Anderman, E., Johnston, J. (1998). Television News in the Classroom: What Are Adolescents Learning? *Journal of Adolescent Research, 13* (1), 73-100.

Barack, L. (2006, July). Bully for Blogging. *School Library Journal.* Retrieved February 2, 2007   from http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6348394.html

Bartlett-Bragg, A. (2003). Blogging to learn [Electronic Version]. The Knowledge Tree, 4. Retrieved 2007. 2. 5. from http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/knowledgetree/edition04/html/blogging_to_learn_intro.html.

Buckingham, D. (2000). *The Making of citizens: young people, news and politics.* London; New York: Routledge.

Carpini, M. (2000). Gen.com: Youth, Civic Engagement, and the New Information Environment. *Political Communication, 17,* 341-349.

Downes, S. (2004). Educational Blogging. *EDUCAUSE Review*, 39(5), 14-46.

Evans, A. (2005, May 6). Bloggers' delight. *The Times Educational Supplement*, 6.

Fauske, J., & Wade, S. E. (2003). Research to practice online: Conditions that foster democracy community, and critical thinking in computer-mediated discussions. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 36(2), 137–153.

Fleming, D. B., & Weber, L. J. (1982). Teenage news knowledge and media use. *Newspaper Research Journal* 4(1), 22-27.

Frechette, J. D. (2006) Critical thinking for the cyberage. In P. Brown & G. Schwarz (Eds.), *Media Literacy: Transforming Curriculum and Teaching (Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*). Malden, NJ: Blackwell Publishing Limited

Glogoff, S. (2005). Instructional blogging: Promoting interactivity, student-centered

learning, and peer input [Electronic Version]. Innovate 1. Retrieved 2007. 2. 9

from http://www.innovateonline.info/index.php?view=article&id=126.

Google Teacher Academy (2007). Google for Educators. Google. Retrieved March 2,

2007, from http://www.google.com/educators/gta.html

Greenberg, B. & Brand, J. (1993). Television News and Advertising in Schools: The

"Channel One" Controversy. *Journal of Communication, 43* (1), 143-151.

Grimes, S. (2003). All About the Blog: Young People's Adoption of Internet Technologies

and the Marketers Who Love Them. *ACM SIGCAS Computers and Society, 33* (1).

Retrieved February 3, 2007 from http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=966500

Hermandez-Ramos, P. (2004). Web logs and online discussions as tools to promote

reflective practice. *The Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 3(1), 1-16.

Huffaker, D. (2004). Spinning Yarns Around the Digital Fire: Storytelling and Dialogue

Among Youth on the Internet. *Information Technology in Childhood Education*

Annual, 63-75.

Huffaker, D. (2005). The educated blogger: Using weblogs to promote literacy in the

classroom. *Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education Journal*,

13(2), 91-98.

Kajder, S., & Bull, G. (2003). Scaffolding for struggling students: Reading and writing with

blogs. *Learning & Leading with Technology*, 31(2), 32-35.

Karchmer, R. A., Mallette, M. H., Kara-Soteriou, J., & Leu, D. J. (Eds.). (2005). *Innovative*

Approaches to Literacy Education. Newark, DE: International Reading

Association.

Krause, S. (2007). When Blogging Goes Bad: A Cautionary Tale About Blogs, Email Lists,

Discussion, and Interaction. Retrieved February 3, 2007 from

http://english.ttu.edu/kairos/9.1/praxis/krause/

Libresco, A. S. (2003). Current events matters...for elementary social studies methods

  students. The International Social Studies Forum, 3(1), 273-276.

McMullin, B., (2005). Putting the Learning Back into Learning Technology. In G. O'Neill,

  S. Moore & B. McMullin (Eds.), *Emerging Issues in the Practice of University*

  Learning and Teaching. (p. 67-76). Dublin: All Ireland Society for Higher

  Education.

n.a. (2006, March 10). <u>Your space? some Schools ban student blogs</u>. *Current Events*.

  Retrieved 01 Feb. 2007 from

  http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0EPF/is_21_105/ai_n16089186

Nardi, B. A., & O'Day, V. L. (1999). Information Ecologies: Using Technology with Heart.

  Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Nardi, B., Schiano, D., Gumbrecht, M. (2004a). Blogging as Social Activity, or, Would You

  Let 900 Million People Read Your Diary? *Computer Supported Cooperative Work,*

  6 (3), 222-231.

Nardi, B., Schiano, D., Gumbrecht, M., Swartz, L. (2004b). Why we Blog.

  Communications of the ACM, 47 (12), 41-46.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2005). *NewYork Middle School Rankings*.

  U.S. Dept of Education, and NY State Education Department.

O'Donnel, M. (2005). Blogging as pedagogic practice: Artefact and ecology. Paper

  presented at the Conference Name|. Retrieved Access Date|. from URL|.

Oravec, J. A. (2003). Blending by blogging: Weblogs in blended learning initiatives.

  Journal of Educaitonal Media, 28(2-3), 225-233.

Papert, S., & Harel, I. (1991). *Constructionism*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing

Corporation.

Pascopella, A. (2006, January). Beauty of Blogging: But is it Too Much Information?

District

      Administration. p. 18.

Prensky, M. (2001). *On the horizon*. NCB University Press, 9(5), 1-6.

Richardson, W. (2005). Blog Revolution: Expanding classroom horizons with Web logs

      [Electronic Version]. TechLearning. Retrieved 2007. 01.30 from

      http://www.techlearning.com/shared/printableArticle.php?articleID=171203059.

Rosie, A. (2000). Online pedagogies and the promotion of "deep learning". *Information*

      Services & Use, 20(2/3), 109-116.

Sade, G. (2005). Weblogs as open constructive learning environments. Paper presented at

      the BlogTalk conference paper, Sydney.

Scarsdale Middle School.   (2007).   Social Studies.   Scarsdale Public Schools.
Retrieved

      March 4, 2007, from http://www.scarsdaleschools.k12.ny.us/ms/socstud.html

Scarsdale Public Schools.   (2007).   Current Events.   The Scarsdale Blogs for Kids.

      Retrieved March 4, 2007, from http://pfolkemer.googlepages.com/home

Sorensen, E., & Takle, E. (2001). Collaborative knowledge building in web-based learning:

      assessing the quality of dialogue Paper presented at the World Conference on

      Educational Multimedia, Hypermedia and Telecommunications Palo Alto, CA.

University of the State of New York, The State Education Department. (2005a). *New York*

      State District Report Card Comprehensive Information Report. Retrieved February

      15th, 2007, from http://emsc32.nysed.gov/repcrd2005/cir/662001030000.pdf

University of the State of New York & The State Education Department. (2005b). *Overview*

      of District Performance in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science and

      Analysis

      of Student Subgroup Performance for Scarsdale Union Free School District.

Retrieved February 15th, 2007, from

http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/repcrd2005/overview-analysis/662001030000.pdf

U.S. Census. (2000). *Census 2000 School District Tabulation (SPT2)Data*. Retrieved

February 15th, 2007 from

http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sdds/Master.asp?geo=districts&id=P50&state=36&distr

ict=97025950&type=P&T=1&u=3&et=5

Wikipedia (2007). "Blog". *Wikipedia.* Retrieved on February 5, 2007 from

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog