

It's a Bird. It's a Plane. It's a... Blog?

One of the benefits that we hold today is the ability to voice our own ideas and opinions on certain topics. Something that I have learned from being an elementary teacher is that even the smallest people in the room sometimes have the biggest voices. One of the things that I am developing while completing my masters in education is providing instruction to help students in grades 3-5 create digital portfolios through Google Sites. This will assist students in showcasing their learned skills throughout the academic year. I believe an effective way to have them display their learned skills is through blogging. I wanted to provide opportunities for my students to be exposed to blogging and receiving feedback from their classmates. I believe I have found a safe and purposeful way for many students to blog and share their reflections through Padlet and Google Sites.

Purpose of Blogging

A great way for students to appropriately communicate socially and with technology is through blogging. In grades 3-5, students begin to comprise their thoughts into written form. One of the biggest pitches for blogging in my opinion is increasing the learner's work to be purposeful. In a standard classroom students will be encouraged to showcase their learning in a distinct way. However, the realization that all students learn in only one form just does not seem to be true. For learning, much of it happens socially. Lamonica (2010), details that elementary students who are continually developing their skills in language and literacy, social interaction is the key to helping them share and communicate their ideas. Stacy also details that students in elementary don't necessarily get the opportunities to have much choice due to standardized testing to showcase their learning. However, through blogging students are encouraged to share their own voice while also reflecting on what they have learned. Blogging allows students to connect the dots of learning objectives in their own unique way. Bolin (2008), explains that when teachers act as moderators and create blogs, they provide opportunities for students to safely connect their thoughts and what they have learned with an authentic audience. In its true form, blogging provides the

opportunities for students to take ownership in how they show their learning with methods such as writing, recording video or audio, and images.

Blogging with Padlet

One of the first things I thought of when I began searching for ways for students to blog was safety. Presently, there are so many threats and factors that need to be considered to ensure the safety of our students. A friend of mine, Stacy Macias, a Digital Learning, and Assessment Coordinator for Galena Park ISD, provided me with a suggestion to use Padlet as a way for students to blog for their digital portfolios. In my interview with Stacy, she describes that social media for this generation is very prevalent and that although students in elementary grades should not be allowed to be on platforms because of age requirements, they are still aware of the terminology and structure associated with the applications. When students create their blog on Padlet, they are provided opportunities for them and their classmates to "like" and comment on what they thought of their post. With Padlet students are able to create a blog using the "wall" option and include small boxes that can serve as their writing space. Students will click on the "plus" symbol on the bottom right of the page and will be able to type the subject (which is typically the question or topic) and then type away in the text box to add their response. The way that Padlet becomes an interactive blog is by the commenting option included in the program. Therefore, it would provide opportunities for students to chime in on their classmates' reflections and responses, and give the poster instant feedback and reaction. By utilizing Padlet as a way to blog, it gives off the social media vibes that many learners are familiar with. I have come to learn that many students love that feature and compete for who has the most likes and comments. Stacy also mentions that from her experience with websites like Flipgrid and Padlet, students are driven by the amount of "likes" and reactions they receive, which continues to increase motivation for students when creating blogs and posting responses.

So Now I've Blogged, What's Next?

I mentioned earlier that my overall goal is to have students create their own digital portfolios. Blogging would be included as a feature of their overall presentation of the digital portfolio. Unfortunately, Google Sites does not offer a blogging option included in the features as it stands presently. Let's keep our fingers crossed that one day that will happen! Therefore, blogging within Google Sites seems almost impossible. However, Padlet offers an embedding option to share the students' creation onto a page on Google Sites. To embed a Padlet into the student's Google Site is to begin by clicking the share button. Next, the student will need to click "Embed in your blog or website". After clicking, they will see the embedding code in which they will need to copy into their Google Site while in edit mode. While in edit mode students will then click insert, and paste the html code. After selecting "Publish" students will now have their Padlet displayed on their page and their classmates may view, comment, and interact with their blog page.

Conclusion

What I have come to learn is that blogging creates better opportunities for students to make their own reflections on the skills and information that they are learning. Not only does blogging build upon students' creativity, but it also promotes opportunities for self expression. In a world where technology is within easy grasp, educators should continue to push the envelope and encourage their students to put their own spin on how they showcase their learning. We should expect nothing less of today's learners.

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