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Blogging as a Way of Thinking

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WRITING COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY FELLOWSHIPS
Closing Write-up for 2007-08

Researchers' Names: Robyn Rossmeisl and Julia Sapin

Title: "Blogging as a Way of Thinking"

Research Question: How can technology help to establish more open classrooms through writing, thereby affecting who is involved in discussion and how involvement takes place?

Method: Developed questionnaire for blog participants in a variety of Julia's classes. We based our findings on the responses in those questionnaires, supplemented by secondary materials that helped us define terms and technology.

Key Findings:

The goal of this project is to help students improve their learning environments. The courses that incorporate blogging assignments help students with the "hard skills" of learning to do research, the process of research writing, and learning about specific visual cultures. By demanding the skills requiring people to articulate their ideas and provide evidence for their arguments, the practice of the blog also incorporates "soft skills." "Soft skills" are intangible aspects of working through ideas, relating to people, and conversing with people—those skills one needs to enter the liminal spaces in the process of learning. Blogging also provides a different medium of communication; while it is more casual than other forms of writing, it can be more deliberate and thoughtful than communication in class. Having a blogging assignment as part of a class is a way of incorporating informal, "low stakes" writing into a course, using writing as a learning tool for expanding thinking. While we did discover that blogging is an effective tool that helps students digest new ideas in readings and class discussion, it does not necessarily facilitate greater comfort or familiarity between students.

Implications for Further Study:

Our research goals were achieved, so we will not be continuing this project (not to mention the fact that Robyn is graduating!).

Implications for Teaching and Learning:

Our greatest discovery, besides confirming that blogging is an effective tool to generate deep understanding of and interest in class readings, was that in order to take complete advantage of the blogs' effectiveness, I need to change the environment in my classrooms, to make time for more discussion and reflection that the blogs are generating.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Writing Fellows Program 2007-8. It was a fantastic learning experience that will continue to affect the ways in which we approach scholarship and teaching.

Best wishes,
Robyn and Julia