An Education in the Blogosphere

By Mary Bogan

As a stay-at-home mom, I had often felt constricted and isolated from the world around me. One day, after hearing about the online journals my friends were keeping, I ventured into the world of blogging. Soon, I moved beyond the electronic page of my own blog and began interacting with other bloggers, many of them in the category of "mommy bloggers." I found in this group others who understood my particular circumstances, who had varying perspectives on parenting, and who were interested in discussing more than dirty diapers and carpools. Individually and collaboratively, we wrote reflectively about our lives. We came to new conclusions informed by the experience of those whose blogs we read and who read ours and commented on them. We encouraged each other on difficult days.

When I began my education as a graduate student in the Reading Department at Cal...
State Fullerton, I never dreamed that my interest in blogging would become a part of my culminating master's project. Two and a half years later, though, I completed my degree by submitting my blogging curriculum for postsecondary classroom instruction as my master's project. A curriculum that strives to provide a place for basic skills students to come together, as individuals and in collaboration, to work with vocabulary contextually, practice good time management, and to reflect on the reading and study strategies they are learning in their class. Instructor and peer interaction, in class through discussion and on the blogs through comments, creates a communal learning space where both teacher and students can become more authentically known.

Early in my reading program, I learned about student engagement, multiple literacies, and the social construction of knowledge. I also investigated college reading programs and discovered the field of developmental reading education, which emphasizes the whole student and not just academic performance. With this foundation, the initial theoretical support for my blog project was established. Later in the process, more research on the Millennial generation of students, computer-mediated instruction, and technology use in developmental education completed that framework.

I liked the idea of using blogs to supplement traditional reading instruction. Blogs are still enough of a novelty in the classroom that I thought students would be more engaged by working in a Web 2.0 environment. Working with technology specifically addresses two areas for underprepared students. First, as part of the current Millennial generation, students today have been raised with personal technology. For many of them, its use is completely second nature and, as such, more likely to hold their attention. However, the potential for students who have not had access to computer technology also exists. These are students on the other side of the "digital divide." Any successful experience that increases their digital literacy helps to prepare them for life beyond the classroom. Blogs also allow for a lot of customization to the page, which would allow students to express themselves creatively—another possible way for students to maintain a sense of ownership for their learning.

When the time came to decide exactly what elements to include, I chose...
three elements of developmental reading instruction: vocabulary, reading and study strategies, and
time management. For the vocabulary portion of the blog, students would choose three unfamiliar
vocabulary words and write a weekly post detailing contextual analysis, including writing their own original sentences. A weekly reflection post would allow students to be intentional about their reading and strategy use in specific relation to their current study load. The reflection posts could also be used for self-discovery of learning styles or personality types. Finally, students would create an online calendar detailing their schedule and noting the times they planned to study. This calendar, while obviously addressing the time management portion of the project, also would involve the student learning how to embed HTML code into a post. Sometimes achieving just a small bit of knowledge in an area leads to a willingness to try more because the intimidation factor is removed. I admit I speak from my own experiences as a secretary at a software development company while still in my teens. Learning word processing, a new technology at that time, gave me confidence to experiment with basic DOS code, try desktop publishing, play with instant messaging, etc. Of course, I accidentally deleted a lot of files along the way, but that just taught me the importance of regular backups!

After completing the design of the curriculum, I had the opportunity to teach the blog project at Fullerton College, first as a short-term visitor and later as an intern. In having access to a college reading class, I learned what worked and what needed fine tuning. In particular, I saw that many students struggled with using their vocabulary words in their own sentences. It was important to make time in the classroom for mini-lessons. By giving prompt feedback on their posts, though, I was able to give incremental nudges to the students. Over the course of many weeks, these little nudges contributed to what I believe to be long-term course corrections. By the end of my semester-long internship, with a news article on the projection screen, I could ask the students for any words that were unfamiliar to them and very quickly, they would find a word and pick out the context clues and derive a contextualized definition.

What turned out to be really fascinating were the unexpected benefits or results of implementing this curriculum in a classroom. While I did expect to learn something of the personalities of the students through their choices in naming and designing their
blogs, I was very much touched by many of their reflection posts. I got the expected glimpses into their beliefs about abilities and their thoughts about their education, but I also read many personal stories. One student revealed that he grew up in the foster care system. Another student revealed her mother’s illness and her conflicts with her brother. I think one of the more powerful experiences I read about was informed by the time I had spent tutoring a particular student. English was not Jesus’ native language and he struggled on his vocabulary tests. I worked with him on approaching vocabulary using the Subjective Approach to Vocabulary. During that session, he revealed to me that sometimes he did not want to know English or speak it well. He felt like he was betraying the people he had left behind in Mexico. Later, on his blog, he ended up sharing about the last time he saw his girlfriend before leaving for the United States. He continued to be torn between his love for his girlfriend and the better future he believed he could make for himself by living in and going to school in America. My eyes were opened up to Jesus’ world and I think I will keep him with me always. I think that Jesus’ story would probably not have been known to me if it were not for the blog project.

John Donne’s famous line, “No man is an island” is, I think, appropriately applied to educational endeavors. My name is on my project, but it would not have come about without my instructors who introduced me to the theories, to a classmate, Debbie Lombardi, who recognized the potential for this curriculum as a culminating project, the guidance of my project committee, Kathi Bartle-Angus and Ula Manzo, and the Reading Department project advisor, Rosario Ordonez-Jasis. I was most fortunate to have a mentor, Angela Henderson, throughout this process acting as consultant, sounding board, and all around encourager. A fellow REG member and Fullerton College reading instructor, Angela helped me by introducing me to college reading programs and helping me with learning outcomes. She allowed me access to her classroom and time with her students. Together, we submitted a proposal to CRLA and presented the project in a concurrent session at the last annual conference in Richmond, Virginia, where it was well-received. And now, the next step?
This semester, I am teaching the blog project in my own class at Fullerton College. Something I am very much looking forward to doing.

My blogging curriculum is available for download, in both Word 2003 and Word 2007 formats, at Box.net. You can access the files at the following URLs:

- 2003 format: [http://www.box.net/shared/61btev6lu9](http://www.box.net/shared/61btev6lu9)
- 2007 format: [http://www.box.net/shared/x3t0ybqrb](http://www.box.net/shared/x3t0ybqrb)

If you are new to blogging, the following sites can help you get started:

- Blogger Video Tutorials: [http://www.youtube.com/BloggerHelp](http://www.youtube.com/BloggerHelp)
- Learning 2.0: 23 Things: [http://plcmcl2-things.blogspot.com/#23](http://plcmcl2-things.blogspot.com/#23)

This series of blogging lessons was originally an incentive-based professional development program for the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

**Faculty Footnotes**

By Kathi Bartle Angus

**We’re Going Online:** The big news for the Reading Department is the grant we have received to create online versions of our graduate courses. Dr. Ula Manzo won a grant for the Reading faculty to spend time this semester creating online versions of their graduate courses. We will spend the spring semester writing and transferring curriculum so that we can begin to offer our full master’s degree online beginning as early as fall 2010. Recent demand for online courses nationally and the inherent flexibility and efficiency in delivering programs online has made this an attractive possibility and a way for us to work with teachers all over the state. Of course we will continue to offer our program face-to-face on our campuses and at cohort locations.

**Dr. Erica Bowers:** Dr. Bowers will be the featured speaker at the upcoming breakfast meeting. She joined the faculty in the fall of 2006 after completing her Ed.D. at the University of Southern California in Literacy and Language and is our newest tenure-track faculty member. Her dissertation research sought to determine if struggling readers had a distinct motivational profile. She is continuing to investigate motivation and literacy with a research team at the University of Southern California. In addition, she is working with a team of CSU professors to explore effective
academic vocabulary practices. While completing requirements for the doctoral degree, Erica taught reading methods as a part-time faculty member at the California State University, Long Beach. Dr. Bowers frequently consults with districts all along the west coast and is the current president of the Orange County Reading Association. Dr. Bowers has 17 years of experience as an elementary school teacher and Reading Specialist. REG is looking forward to sharing with the alumni what our current graduate students have already discovered: Dr. Bowers is a dynamic and engaging speaker with much knowledge to share.

**Membership Dues Changes**

REG has consistently attempted to keep dues affordable while fulfilling our dual mission of providing networking opportunities for graduates and supporting the Reading Department in various capacities. After holding annual dues to $20 for well over a decade, the board voted in January to increase dues to $25 per year. We hope that this will not keep any members from renewing and will at the same time allow us to continue our current programs, including member events, newsletters, directories, scholarships, grants and materials for the Reading Center.

The lifetime membership fee will remain $200 for 2010 and will increase to $250 in 2011. We are hopeful that some alumni will take advantage of this potential savings and consider a lifetime membership this year.

Please take a moment to renew your dues, update your member information, and let us know if you want to be included on the Reading Tutor list. A membership form and return envelope is included in this newsletter.

**Committee Leads Effort to Memorialize Dr. Croy**

- *Children struggling with reading problems that prevent them from succeeding in school.*
- *University students realizing that their lack of critical reading skills is impacting their progress toward a degree.*
- *Prospective Reading Specialists searching for ways to improve their teaching and
For nearly fifty years hundreds of children and adults have overcome reading difficulties at Cal State Fullerton’s Reading Center.

As reported in the Fall 2009 *REG Newsletter*, one woman’s vision made the CSUF Reading program a reality. Dr. Hazel Miller Croy not only founded the Masters Degree program in Reading in 1966, but simultaneously opened the Reading Center to provide community children much-needed personalized reading instruction.

A few years later Dr. Croy responded to university requests by establishing developmental reading courses for undergraduate students which continue to meet a significant academic need. Dr. Croy also worked tirelessly with university planners to design the Reading Center (EC 24).

Spearheaded by Reading alumnae A.C. “Pat” Irot (’70) and Dr. Ruth May Siegrist (’75), a steering committee chaired by Dr. Deborah Osen Hancock concluded that a visible memorial to Dr. Croy was needed on campus to recognize her pioneer efforts.

Goal: to raise at least $25,000 and honor this innovative educator by formally naming the facility which is at the heart of the entire Reading program the **Hazel Miller Croy Reading Center**.

The endowment fund will generate financial support for Reading scholarships, center equipment and faculty research and development. Learn more about it at the upcoming REG Breakfast Meeting.

On left: JoAnne Greenbaum, pictured here with President Milton Gordon and Vice-President Ephraim Smith, was honored at a university luncheon in October as REG’s Volunteer of the Year.

She was recognized for creating and maintaining our REG website for the past 15 years.

Visit readingeducatorsguild.com to enjoy the fruits of her labor.
We're on the web!!
www.readingeducatorsguild.org

REG Spring Breakfast 2010
March 27, 2010  9 AM -11:30 AM
Phoenix Club, Anaheim
Keynote Speaker: Dr. Erica Bowers
Silent Auction for Hazel Miller Croy
Reading Center Memorial Fund
(see enclosed flyer for more information)

Items of Interest for REG Newsletter??
We would welcome your submissions to the newsletter. Please send your article via email to lovett.gc@verizon.net. Please type “REG” on the subject line of your email.
Thanks, we’d love to hear from you!
Gena Lovett, Editor