

Book Reports for the 21st Century: Using Book Review Blogs as Real-life Teaching and Learning Tools

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Abstract

The digital age gives teachers and students increasingly flexible options for presenting and experiencing content. One of these new options is the weblog, or blog. Blogging has been an important part of digital communication since the late 1990s (Kent, 2008), and in the last fifteen years, the number and variety of blogs have proliferated. This paper proposes that one particular kind of blog, the book review blog, can be used effectively in the classroom as a way to help students make connections to the real world as they read.

The paper focuses on the book review blog for several reasons. One is the fundamental importance of reading, especially independent reading, for students' academic success. It is argued here that book review blogs can support students' independent reading. Research has shown for decades that independent reading is positively associated with academic performance (Cullinan, 2000). So it is reasonable to suppose that more engagement with books on book review blogs would have a positive effect on students' independent reading and thus, on their overall academic achievement. Another reason to focus on book review blogs is that reading has a very social component; book review blogs allow readers to experience the social nature of reading in a flexible, asynchronous way (Foasberg, 2012).

Book review blogs can serve several purposes in the classroom. For example, they can be used to help students develop real-world critical thinking skills as well as comprehension skills. They can be used to help students make real-world connections to authors and professional reviewers. They can also be used to support students' own reading and reviewing skills and allow them to share their own reviews to a potentially global audience.

This paper proposes the book review blog as a teaching and learning tool in the following way. First, the paper presents a brief discussion of different kinds of book review blogs, their history and their popularity. Following this, arguments are presented that book review blogs can support student success in several important ways, and can be used for a variety of purposes. Next several strategies and approaches for incorporating book review blogs into the classroom at different educational levels are considered and research supporting their use is discussed. The paper concludes with a discussion of several important

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considerations and *caveats* that should be taken into account when integrating these blogs into the curriculum.

References

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