Lessons Learned from the Holocaust: Blogging to Teach Critical Multicultural Literacy

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Abstract

This qualitative dual-case study addresses two 21st century teacher education imperatives, technology infusion and critical multicultural literacy instruction. We researched the integration of a blog as a tool to promote technology use in a graduate course on literacy and technology with a thematic focus on the Holocaust. Using a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), we analyzed data sources, including interviews, blog postings, and surveys. We conducted a second analysis using a priori coding schemes to further analyze students' blog posts. Findings suggest that blogging has the potential to enhance knowledge of the ways technology can be harnessed to promote critical multicultural literacy instruction. From an action research stance, we also discuss implications for our future practice. (Keywords: Teacher education, literacy, multicultural, blogging)

In the 21st century, the Internet has become a powerful information and communication technology (ICT) resource at work, home, and school (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). Of the new ICTs afforded by the Internet, weblogs (blogs) have become increasingly prevalent in the field of education. A blog is an asynchronous, social networking form of computer-mediated communication that records personal thoughts published online to a modifiable webpage (Richardson, 2010). Thoughts, which may be updated daily, are typically in the form of reflections and conversations and include multimodal features such as hyperlinks, images, video, and audio podcasts (Richardson, 2010).

ICTs such as blogging and other social networking tools have captured the attention of adolescents and young adults. As an example, a Pew Internet study found that 14% of online teens maintained blogs and 52% commented on friends' blogs (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Wilber (2009) argued that these ICTs can be used in higher education settings to motivate students to engage in collaborative thinking, reading, and writing. Specifically, Mallette and Karchmer (2002) asserted that college faculty could enhance instruction of K–12 literacy education majors with ICTs, thereby demonstrating how they can integrate technology into their own future instruction.

Teacher educators not only have a responsibility to model technology use, they also need to prepare teachers to become critical multicultural literacy educators. In this article, we use the term *critical multicultural literacy* instruction to describe pedagogy that combines an emphasis on critical literacy (Stevens & Bean, 2007) with the notion of culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). When blended, the two conceptualizations overlap with the construct of critical multicultural education (May, 1999). For that reason, we use a broader term, critical multicultural literacy instruction, to describe the topical focus in our research study.

Multicultural literacy education includes making instruction more equitable in the classroom by serving the needs of students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, by incorporating multicultural literature, and by bridging home and school literacy practices. These goals, at the very least, lie at the heart of culturally relevant pedagogy. However, critical multicultural education goes beyond basic tenets of multicultural education by taking into account power, privilege, and oppression that are reflected in and shaped by literacy practices. In addition, critical multicultural literacy educators focus not only on curtailing bias and inequity in the classroom, but also on promoting social justice in society at large (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Stevens & Bean, 2007).

One pragmatic reason for addressing critical multicultural literacy instruction in teacher education relates to the changing demographics in schools. Research suggests that, by 2020, more than 50% of the student population of US schools will belong to an economic, ethnic, racial, religious, and/or social class minority (Brown, 2004). Increasingly, teachers have not come from the same backgrounds as their students (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2003). Thus, enhancing knowledge of critical multicultural literacy issues and practices will better prepare teachers to serve the needs of all students. Critical multicultural literacy instruction that challenges discrimination and intolerance, as embodied in language practices, becomes increasingly crucial to promote educational equity and social justice for all students (Ukpokodu, 2008).

In this study, we researched the integration of a blog into a hybrid graduate literacy and technology course that focused on issues of critical multicultural literacy. The course was structured around a thematic unit, the Holocaust. Students learned about technology integration by using a blog while creating technology-enhanced resources for teachers who integrated the study of the Holocaust into literacy instruction. The blog provided a collaborative space for students to engage around topics related to critical multicultural literacy as well as to reflect on their progress in creating digital resources for teachers. In effect, our research addressed the following: How did graduate literacy students construct meaning about critical multicultural literacy instruction through study of the Holocaust and its teaching while building proficiency in teaching with technology, with a particular emphasis on blogging?

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Literature Review

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Technology and Critical Multicultural Education

Some researchers have perceived the pairing of technology and multicultural education as an "odd couple" (Damarin, 1998; Marshall, 2001). Damarin (1998), however, concluded that practitioners concentrating on technology education and those attending to multicultural education should join forces to align classroom activities within the curriculum to meet common purposes. Moreover, McShay (2005) claimed that the two instructional topics should be taught concurrently because teachers can have difficulty conceptualizing how to integrate technology and critical multiculturalism seamlessly with ongoing instruction. Therefore, K–12 teachers could benefit from observing modeling and gaining practice in a course dedicated to interweaving the two topics. A few research studies have focused on pairing technology and multiculturalism in one course.

Brown (2004) attempted to bring these two instructional goals together in a single graduate teacher education course. Brown found that technology increased the depth of the course as students became more engaged and developed a stronger sense of community. Using a discussion board, students were more honest in their conversations and were willing to share researched information.

In a second study, McShay (2005) studied a double infusion model incorporating technology into an undergraduate multicultural education course. Technology integration in this course included the use of video clips, online articles, and electronic journaling. McShay found that Web-based class discussions about video cases encouraged preservice teachers to make meaning of critical multiculturalism and to become more proficient with technology.

Wassell and Crouch (2008) studied the integration of a blog project into an undergraduate preservice teacher education course that focused on multiculturalism. The instructor posted links to articles and reflective questions on the blog throughout the semester. Students read the assigned texts and responded on the blog. Researchers found the blog project exposed students to critical multicultural issues they had not considered, and students' comments evolved over the course of the semester.

Using the Holocaust to Promote Critical Multicultural Education

Although there are many ways to prepare teachers to become critical multicultural educators, Landau (1992) argued that the Holocaust "can civilise and humanise our students and perhaps more effectively than any other subject can sensitise them to the dangers of indifference, intolerance, racism, and the dehumanization of others" (p. 12). Additionally, Holocaust survivors are dying, and deniers are multiplying. Therefore, it makes sense to promote a critical view of the Holocaust to counter claims that the Holocaust never happened (Spector & Jones, 2007). This may be accomplished using the

Internet, which houses extensive Holocaust-related materials. Students can analyze texts, including sound and images, to observe how language can incite discrimination and fuel abuses of power. We also suggest that Holocaust education can be an effective medium for helping teachers develop knowledge and critical cultural awareness for teaching sensitive topics and social justice (Calandra, Fitzpatrick, & Barron, 2008).

Theoretical Orientation

As mentioned above, this research was informed by theoretical and applied work in the areas of critical literacy, culturally responsive pedagogy, and critical multicultural education. Two other theoretical orientations, socio-constructivist learning theory and a new literacies perspective, grounded our work as well.

Socio-Constructivist Learning Theory

Vygotskian socio-constructivist learning theory (1978) posits that learning stems from social interaction. Knowledge emerges through participating in the practices of the group, from observing the thinking of more experienced others, from joint sharing of cultural artifacts and tools, and from receiving socially mediated support. When instantiated in an online learning environment, this perspective translates to an instructional setting in which participants learn through mutual engagement around common goals and technological resources.

New Literacies Perspective

The new literacies perspective acknowledges that the emergence of innovative ICTs shapes literacy practices. Constant technological flux engenders new literacy practices and genres and necessitates the teaching of new literacy skills (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Several principles associated with a new literacies perspective hold particular relevance for our research (Leu et al., 2004):

- On the Internet, learning is socially constructed. ICTs, such as blogs, promote participation, collaboration, and the distribution of expertise and knowledge (Knobel & Wilber, 2009).
- Internet resources allow students to take an active part not just in the consumption of texts, but also in their construction and production.
- The Internet supports global communication, as students have expansive opportunities to interact with people of different races, ethnicities, classes, and religions. Access to diverse social and cultural contexts may encourage students to challenge their assumptions and broaden their thinking.
- Because anyone can publish texts and upload resources to the Internet, students need to learn how to critically analyze the multimodal texts they regularly encounter.

Table 1. Blogging Rating Scale

Richardson's Spectrum of Blogging	Our Conversion
1–3 Not blogging (posting assignments, journaling)	0
4–5 Not really blogging either, but getting close, depending on the depth of the description; a simple form of blogging	1
6–8 Complex writing but simple blogging; real blogging, complex blogging (analysis, synthesis, building on previous posts, links, and comments)	2

Note. Adopted from Richardson, 2010, p. 31

Both theories assert that learning occurs as a result of social interaction. The new literacies perspective is particularly useful in theorizing an ever-changing definition of literacy. These overlapping perspectives guided our study.

Methods

Context of the Study

We conducted this research during the spring 2009 semester in a required graduate-level teacher education course on literacy and technology at a university in the northeastern United States. The professor (second author) decided to reconfigure the course to address the ever-widening gap in her students' knowledge and application of new digital literacies in recent years. In addition, the professor responded to a call in the school to explore the use of technology to deliver alternate forms of instruction. Given these two inducements, the course was restructured as a hybrid class: Half the class sessions were held in person, and the others were facilitated through a blog created using Edublogs (http://edublogs.org).

Students were required to submit a minimum of two thoughtful contributions to the class blog each week. Postings could include questions with associated contextual information, sharing of progress on selected inquiry topics, requests for advice from classmates, elaborated interactions in response to others' postings, reflections on the course readings, and commentary on noncourse printed, media, or Internet resources related to topics covered. Unlike a traditional threaded discussion board, students also experimented with integrating multimodal features to their blog postings. They also were encouraged to work toward Richardson's (2010) notion of complex blogging for academic purposes (see Table 1).

In addition, students maintained personal blogs where they posted one entry each week. These entries were suggested to be reflections on current literacy and technology proficiency, technology goals, theoretical perspectives related to literacy instruction and learning, Holocaust education, or reflections on a current or future role as a literacy and technology leader. Throughout the semester, students worked in small groups on unit plans

focused on teaching the Holocaust through literacy instruction using technology. The intent was to provide students with a model to draw upon when applying such course learning in their future teaching of integrated technology instruction focused on social justice.

Research Stance
Similar to Wassell and Crouch (2008), who studied technology infusion and critical multicultural education, we adopted an action research orientation (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Our goal was to gather information during the semester to inform our future teaching. Thus, we reflected on our practices during planning and implementation, monitored students' progress and perceptions, and considered how our findings could improve future iterations of the course.

Design
We conducted a qualitative dual-case study (Stake, 1995). This approach let us explore the experiences of two purposefully selected participants. We read through all interview data, considered combinations of four pairs, and thought it would be most useful to compare the cases of the two students that shared the most common with contrasting experiences in the course. We realized our focal participants' reactions to the course were rich and would provide an overview of pertinent themes represented in the data. Although each case was complex in its own right, chronicling the contributions of these individuals afforded a more complex representation of their perspectives than if we had studied either alone.

Participants
We selected the two participants from a cohort of 13 future or practicing teachers enrolled in the course. Kayla, an African-American, and Robin, a Caucasian, shared several characteristics (names are pseudonyms). Both were females between the ages of 20 and 25 who had entered the literacy master's program as full-time students directly after their undergraduate elementary education programs. They both began their program of study in fall 2008 and took most classes together, including face-to-face classes, as a result of being grouped as a cohort. These students, with comparably strong academic records, had participated in a selective one-week teacher preparation program at the Houston Holocaust Museum conducted between fall and spring semesters. In terms of class participation, far more than any other students in the class, Kayla and Robin actively posted to the class blog throughout the semester. Despite their common attributes, the two diverged in one key regard: Robin responded far more favorably toward the course than Kayla. Therefore, we decided to explore why two individuals with many similar attributes, compared to other students in the class who did not share as many commonalities, could have experienced the course so differently.

Data Sources

The data sources used in this study were interviews, blog postings, and surveys. We collected these data from all students in the cohort for triangulation.

Interviews. We conducted the first interview mid-semester (see Appendix A, pp. 49–50). We asked participants structured interview questions and encouraged them to elaborate on responses to more fully discuss their experiences. We conducted a second interview with only our focal participants during the last week of class. The second interview was more informal than the first. We asked Kayla and Robin to elaborate on comments they made in the first interview and to discuss overall experiences in the course. This interview also served as a form of member checking to ensure that researcher interpretations, based on initial analysis, reflected participants' actual intentions.

Blog postings. The postings to the class blog throughout the semester constituted the core data source. Between initiated comments and replies to peers or the instructor, 327 posts were made to the class blog. Of these, 81 postings were contributed by the focal participants and were analyzed in this study. Kayla made 36 posts and 22 posts to the class and personal blogs, respectively. Robin made 45 and 13 posts to the class and personal blogs.

Surveys. Students also completed two surveys, at the beginning and end of the semester. The first survey asked students to provide demographic information such as their age range and years of teaching experience. The end-of-semester survey included open-ended questions (see Appendix B, p. 51). To achieve triangulation, interview and survey questions addressed similar topics and were administered at different points in the semester.

Analysis

We adopted two analytic approaches in this study. For one, we employed a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to (a) discern themes raised by blogging in our hybrid course related to technology infusion and critical multicultural literacy instruction and (b) identify key issues based on our participants' experiences that would help us improve instruction in future renderings of the course. Second, we used two a priori coding schemes to understand the nature and quality of blog posts. We describe both analytic approaches in greater detail below.

Grounded theory approach. During the first analytic phase, we read through the interviews, blog posts, and surveys line by line and coded independently. We met weekly to analyze the data together during the open-coding phase, in which we read line by line, chunked the data, and identified preliminary codes using a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As coding proceeded, axial codes emerged among coded categories. We kept cumulative running records of codes, themes, and summative ideas from each coding session. Lastly, we went back and

Table 2. Critical Multicultural Literacy Rating Scheme

Our Conversion	
0	The post did not address any aspect of critical multicultural literacy. Posts that mentioned differentiation of instruction or technology applications broadly did not fit as critical literacy, multicultural pedagogy, or critical multicultural literacy instruction (see findings for examples of posts scored 1 and 2).
1	The post addressed either issues related to critical literacy or to addressing the needs of students from diverse cultural, linguistic, religious, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, posts that included a critical or analytical element, such as an understanding that language and text contains authority and power, were scored 1. Posts that discussed multicultural issues from the students' perspectives, cultural differences, or multicultural pedagogical applications were also scored 1.
2	The post addressed both critical literacy and multicultural issues. For example, posts that blended the aforementioned constructs and dealt with the ability to address issues of bias, transformative in nature promoting social justice, or exploiting power within specific groups over identity were given this rating.

recoded the data using the final version of our scheme and engaged in the process of selective coding to identify higher-order patterns and themes.

A priori coding schemes. We conducted second set of analysis to analyze the blog posts. The first coding of data focused on the nature and quality of students' blog posts. This involved using a priori modified version of Richardson's (2010) continuum of blog prototypes. After attempting to apply Richardson's continuum as specified, we realized the scheme did not map perfectly onto the study data. Therefore, we collapsed his scale to better accommodate the diverse types of postings that students actually submitted (see Table 1, page 35). Using the coding scheme in Table 1, the first author rated all 148 posts. The second author randomly selected and independently rated 36 of the blog posts for each student, which constituted 24% of the total number of posts. Inter-rater agreement was 94% for both subsets.

The second scheme used to analyze the blog postings assessed the extent to which the students' comments dealt with issues of critical multicultural literacy instruction. This coding scheme was informed by our review of the literature and theory on critical literacy, culturally responsive pedagogy, and critical multicultural education. Our definition of critical multicultural literacy instruction, at a minimum, included any discussion of challenging and reshaping the teaching and learning of the Holocaust or other genocides, particularly with an emphasis on the role of language in teaching those topics. Using the coding scheme in Table 2, the first author rated all 148 posts. Inter-rater agreement conducted on 24% of the postings was 94% for Kayla and 100% for Robin.

Findings

We organize our findings according to our grounded theory analysis and then by our secondary analysis of blog postings. We articulate our findings on blogging as a medium for learning followed by details related to the nature and content of blog postings.

Grounded Theory Themes: Blogging for Learning about Course Content

Learning about technology is indispensable. Both participants saw technology integration as a teacher's responsibility in the K–6 classroom. For example, Robin stated in one blog post, "Teachers must be prepared to create authentic learning activities that teach students how to think, create, analyze, and evaluate using technology" (March 27, 2009).

Kayla shared these views in a blog post:

The new concepts of Twitter, social bookmarking, Flickr, podcasts, and more have presented me with a new perspective on how students will be able to interact with technology. The concept of using blackboard, weblogs, wikis, and even RSS are considered part of the technological toolbox that we possess as teachers. (January 24, 2009)

Although both participants underscored the importance of integrating technology with literacy instruction, they also cited the importance of technology integration for their students' learning. Kayla emphasized repeatedly that one of the most important functions of technology integration was to motivate her elementary students. In reference to teaching the Holocaust, in multiple data sources, Robin recognized that teaching about the Holocaust necessitates technology to carry on survivors' voices. Technology provides experiences that, further, would not exist for students.

Intention to apply technology in teaching, including blogging. Both participants mentioned in their blog posts that they intended to take what they learned in the course and apply it in their future teaching. For example, technology applications Kayla and Robin planned to put into practice were wikis, podcasts, Keypals, Internet projects, and workshop (Leu & Leu, 2000).

Both participants also claimed they would integrate blogging in their classrooms. Kayla believed that using a blog in her classroom was a good idea; she felt it could be best used for students to keep a reading log online, to transact directly with her, and to post assignments, such as book reviews. She also felt the blog could be used to communicate information to parents: "I definitely want to do one just to parents, like this is the homework for the week, this is when, or it can be a personalized one so if a student's absent you can just come on and check what Miss Kayla wrote. This is your homework" (personal communication, March 18, 2009). Kayla expressed a limited view of blogging.

Like Kayla, Robin considered using the blog as a management tool—a classroom portal to convey important information and serve as a shared space for archiving work and classroom documents for herself, her students, and her students' guardians (January 23, 2009). However, she also recognized the rich potential of blogging to provide an interactive space for authentic exchanges among students to "encourage students to read, write,

and respond around a particular theme or focus. Blogs are a collaborative space in which students share a common language and experience" (April 7, 2009). Robin expected that, as part of this experience, blog posts would include hyperlinks and embedded videos. She described the act of posting with these multimodalities as "straightforward" (personal communication, March 18, 2009).

Perceived benefits and limitations of blogging. Participants' perceptions on how to integrate blogging in their classrooms appeared linked to their course experiences. Without question, Kayla's experience in the course and blogging contrasted markedly with Robin's experience. Kayla recognized only two benefits to blogging: It was a quick way to disseminate information among participants and archive posts. When asked to describe the purpose of the blog as if she had to tell someone about it who was not in class Kayla said, "Um, probably just posting information, whether it is from instructors to students or peers to peers, um, the professor for assignments, for reminders. Us for, you know, updates of what we're doing in the classroom, what we're seeing, resources that we can use" (personal communication, April 8, 2009).

Kayla's discontent was clear: "There is no purpose to the blog. It's kind of pointless and it's just busy work because there's no real interaction and it's just more of extra work…. I am not getting anything out of the blog" (personal communication, March 18, 2009).

In contrast, Robin noted multiple benefits to blogging in the course. Robin noted that the blog was a shared space to communicate and disseminate information, and she appreciated the ease with which the class was able to do this (personal communication, March 18, 2009). She identified the blog as a place to share teacher resources and collaborate. The blog was a place to solicit technology help; students were able to troubleshoot and provide quick feedback for one another.

Moreover, Robin recognized that the blog documented and archived her progress. She felt strongly that the blog held her and each student in the class accountable: "On the blog everybody is there. There are no excuses; you know what I mean like? You can't say that you didn't have time or that you can't meet at this certain time. Everybody participates…" (personal communication, March 18, 2009).

In having equal opportunity to participate, Robin also saw a benefit in the blog in that students who tended to be more reticent to speak in face-to-face classes were active members of the class blog. This is supported in the literature (Killian & Willhite, 2003; Wassell & Crouch, 2008). On a personal note, Robin appreciated the flexibility the blog provided in terms of her time. She experienced a heightened understanding of some of the topics presented by peers on the blog, and then she had time to think and respond more thoughtfully (Mortensen & Walker, 2002; Wilber, 2009):

Table 3. Participants' Level of Blogging

Participant	0	1	2
	Posts ($n = 74$)		
Kayla	36 (49%)	10 (13%)	19 (26%)
Robin	22 (30%)	22 (30%)	30 (40%)

Note. Twelve percent of Kayla's posts are unaccounted for because she repeated posts to the class, strand, and personal blogs. Original postings were only coded once. For example, Kayla posted a comment to the class blog and also put the exact same comment on her personal blog. This happened on nine occasions.

> Melissa had posted the, uh, Anne Frank article about how there was a congressman who wanted her to become a United States citizen. And I personally, when I saw that, I just was like what? I was like, that doesn't make any sense…. That's not what she would have wanted. I just kind of had a closed mindset about it, and Emily was like, no, she's like, it's just—it's symbolic and, you know, it's just she represents so much to so many different people. And, you know, because she was for it and she just took it in a different way so she kind of opened my eyes…. There's been a lot of things that people have brought up. (personal communication, March 18, 2009)

Although Robin's experiences with blogging in the course were more positive than Kayla's, Robin still recognized that blogging worked only if others in the class took active responsibility for submitting quality postings, engaging others in thoughtful exchanges, and directing others to other relevant, multimodal media and links on the Web. Robin recognized that several of her peers often took a less active role in that they were "flying under the radar" (personal communication, March 19, 2009). At times, this situation caused her considerable consternation. In a sense, both students realized that the success of blogging hinged entirely on a shared commitment by members of the group; otherwise blogging devolved into garbage in, garbage out.

Nature and Level of Blog Postings

Table 3 displays findings of the nature and quality of students' blog postings based on Richardson's (2010) continuum of weblog prototypes. It makes clear that Robin not only submitted fewer non-blogging posts, she also posted more synthetic, integrated, and reflective posts than Kayla. Below are examples of these postings.

Blogging as a Medium for Learning about
Critical Multicultural Literacy Instruction

Table 4 displays findings on the level of talk on critical multicultural literacy in the blog posts. Robin posted two more entries than Kayla on multiculturalism or critical literacy. Both participants posted about critical multicul-

Table 4. Blog Posting Evidence of Critical Multicultural Literacy

Participant	0	1	2
		Posts (*n* = 74)	
Kayla	46 (62%)	9 (12%)	10 (14%)
Robin	53 (71%)	11 (15%)	10 (14%)

Note. Again, 12% of Kayla's posts are not accounted for in the table because she repeated nine posts. Original postings were only coded once.

tural literacy 10 times, for a total of 14% of all blog posts during the course of the semester. The blog posts, in a sense, appear to be quite comparable. Examples in this section demonstrate exemplar posts coded according to our secondary scheme, which assessed the extent to which the students' comments dealt with issues of multicultural education, critical literacy, and critical multicultural literacy.

Promoting multicultural education. Just as Kayla and Robin saw the benefit of technology and recognized it as their responsibility to integrate technology in the classroom, they identified their roles as leaders promoting multicultural education in the elementary classroom. Kayla posted to the class blog in response to a previous contribution on "Genocide Today": "We need to not only discuss history in past genocides, but clearly point out to students that there is 'ethnic cleansing' and genocides still going on today" (March 7, 2009).

Despite recognizing it as her role to infuse multicultural education into the K–6 curriculum, Kayla made it clear in interview and survey data that the manner in which the course was structured did not facilitate her learning about multicultural education. She stated, "I don't really think it's that culturally responsive, as a whole, because we're only focusing on the Jewish Holocaust, and like to go back to my other point, it would be more culturally responsive if we could include other genocides" (personal communication, March 18, 2009). In the final survey, she added, "Learning about different ways to teach about a genocide that is discussed so much, that it is put on a pedestal like it was the only genocide in history, is not going to directly benefit our students" (April 29, 2009).

Despite these comments, Kayla actually did use the blog to raise issues that addressed multicultural education throughout the semester. However, she often did not realize that was the case. Kayla was blogging and thinking about culturally responsive instruction even when she did not label her comments explicitly as such. For example, in an interview, she passionately addressed Bigelow's (2001) critique of the "Oregon Trail" CD-ROM:

Should we always have to infuse that opinion on students that you are different, and your group is being marginalized, and that you're never going

to succeed in life because you are not of this race? And I just feel teachers go to extremes to point out differences, and it doesn't always matter to kids. I mean I think you should discuss differences. It is important to know you are different because you are from this culture, but I think it is important that they also bring it back together. We all have something in common now. (personal communication, April 8, 2009)

Connecting the Holocaust to other genocides was an issue that resonated strongly with Kayla. Although the professor intended for students to make connections to other genocides or atrocities in their Holocaust unit plans, Kayla did not realize that she was free to do so, nor did she ask if such an option was available. Despite the fact that Kayla did not address other episodes of victimization in her unit, she did make those links explicit in her blog posts. She made connections to what happened in the Holocaust to current global crises: "Students need to understand, 'Those who do not learn from *history* are *doomed to repeat* it.' We must transfer the atrocities of the Holocaust so that students can understand how to be understanding and contributing members that will not let other genocides last without questioning" (her emphasis, February 4, 2009).

Robin, too, felt that part of her role and responsibility as a teacher meant addressing multiculturalism in the classroom. More specifically, with regard to the Holocaust, she shared with others on the blog about her life-altering experience traveling to the Houston Holocaust Museum and hearing survivors' personal accounts. Robin took away: "It just makes you think of, like I said you know, what is the purpose of, you know, being a teacher? What is our goal here…" (personal communication, March 18, 2009). Robin reiterated on multiple occasions that she saw it as her responsibility to promote tolerance and cultural awareness through the teaching of the Holocaust.

Robin, as noted in her final survey, consistently identified this approach adopted in the course as a worthwhile means to learn about multicultural issues:

We live in a diverse society, which makes imperative that young children are taught to accept and tolerate all people, regardless of their culture, race, religion, sexuality, or gender. During the Holocaust, many people were marginalized and discriminated against because of these factors. In this course we learned various ways to teach students of all ages lessons of acceptance and tolerance using the Holocaust as the prime example of [*sic*] what how hatred, prejudice, and discrimination can lead to inhumane acts. (April 29, 2009)

Promoting critical literacy with technology. Kayla and Robin's blog posts also emphasized the type of knowledge and strategies students require to function effectively as 21st century citizens living in a globalized world, where technology increases opportunities for encountering diversity. Participants

recognized their roles and responsibilities in terms of promoting critical literacy awareness, particularly in relation to multimodal texts available on the Internet. For instance, Kayla addressed this issue in one of her blog posts:

I do believe that we need to incorporate these multimodal pedagogical approaches to provide a more differentiated and individualized learning experience for our students. Although they are considered to be "digital natives," we need to use that background knowledge they already have from daily interactions and further their schemata to application of comprehension skills while using multimodal texts. Rather than just offering the traditional use of textbooks and novels when teaching about the Holocaust, we can take advantage of this opportunity to integrate movies, Internet resources (using a critical lens), streaming videos of survivor testimony, music focused on expressing the emotions of the Holocaust, etc. As a future teacher/specialist, I will challenge students to move outside of their comfort zone or the traditional approach and supplement this information with a multimodal approach. (March 31, 2009)

Kayla recognized the importance of teaching children that not everything they read on the Internet is true. In an interview, she noticed that reading with a critical stance is also a skill she needs to hone in on, as well as having students look at texts from multiple perspectives (personal communication, April 8, 2009). Robin echoed these same sentiments in one of her blog posts:

I believe using the internet in the classroom goes beyond [sic] WHO wrote it to WHAT did they write and FOR WHAT purpose? When teaching a "controversial" topic such as the Holocaust, there are a lot of biased resources available on the web. For example, you do not want your students accessing a "denial" website.... We teach students to be critical "consumers" of Internet information, so we should practice what we preach! (February 12, 2009)

Similar to Kayla, Robin perceived teaching of the Holocaust as an opportunity to examine texts critically from multiple perspectives. Robin posted to the class blog, "I think it is imperative to look at the Holocaust from various perspectives: upstander, bystander, [*sic*] persecuter, and victim. It is important that we as educators show ALL viewpoints and perhaps through critical thinking—discuss WHY certain people chose (or had no choice) in their particular position" (January 30, 2009).

Promoting critical multicultural literacy. Students used the blog as a space to identify and share specific, concrete ways to address the blending of critical literacy and multicultural education in their practice. Blog posts that reflected such thinking emphasized the potential for critical multicultural literacy instruction to be transformative and promote social justice. Kayla and Robin were most explicit about this blending of these two imperatives in their blog posts, as evident in the examples provided below.

Replying to a post on the class blog on "Genocide Today" Kayla wrote:

Samantha and Melissa, you both bring up the importance of teaching our students about the atrocities that occurred during genocides in our world history in order to prevent more deaths of innocent people. The manner in which I perceive genocides is through the media facet as well. However, in my experience I have heard the media making a juxtaposition between the Holocaust, Rwanda Genocide, the current events in Sudan in comparison with the war in Iraq. I take this point as a teachable moment because the terms genocide and war are NOT synonymous! We need to continue to challenge the media attention given to these topics and equip our students with a critical and analytical lens. (February 9, 2009)

Robin added a thread to the initial post titled "Why teach the Holocaust?" on the blog. The whole class was exposed to material on the Web posted by Holocaust deniers. Regarding this, Robin stated:

First of all, let me say that the majority of the comments posted at *Online Times* seemed to come from closed-minded and uneducated people who are not seeing "the big picture." I noticed that many of the comments were comparing the Holocaust to the current political affairs between Israel and Palestine today. Let's be clear—those countries are involved in a WAR. The Holocaust was a GENOCIDE: a planned, strategized attempt to murder homosexuals, romas, blacks, Jehovah's Witnesses, handicapped, and Jewish people…. I believe that teaching the Holocaust using technology is a necessity because soon, the survivor's voices will no longer be with us. How beautiful is it that we can carry on their personal voices, their personal stories using the wonderful advancements of this modern world? (January 24, 2009)

To summarize, multicultural education exemplar posts focused on teaching tolerance and acceptance of differences through the Holocaust. Critical literacy posts promoted examining Internet texts through a critical lens, considering multiple perspectives. The critical multicultural literacy posts emphasized using Internet resources to teach about issues of bias in language and to teach tolerance, promoting social justice. Based on our findings, our discussion provides insights for future iterations of this course.

Discussion

This research addressed two increasingly important areas for teacher development in literacy education brought about by accelerating innovations in ICTs as well as changing demographics in U.S. classrooms. Our research indicated, as in Wassell and Crouch (2008), that a blog could be incorporated in a graduate-level course to increase knowledge of the ways technology can be harnessed to enhance critical multicultural literacy instruction. Although we recognize that a good number of posts did not rise to the level of thinking evident in many of Kayla's and Robin's postings (as noted in Table 4), we

learned that blogging could promote thoughtful reflection about challenging instructional topics (Mortensen & Walker, 2002; Richardson, 2010).

According to the self-reported data, Kayla did not feel that the hybrid course structure supported her learning. Kayla demonstrated palpable discomfort with blogging as a substitute for face-to-face classes. Her comments indicated that, had blogging supplemented face-to-face interaction rather than replaced it, she would have been more receptive to its inclusion in the course. In contrast, Robin appreciated the flexibility and opportunities for innovation that were afforded by the hybrid nature of the course.

Kayla's intended use of blogging in her own teaching was affected by her limited notion of how the medium could be used in the classroom. She planned to use a blog to archive information and to communicate directly with her students. We theorize that because Kayla did not see the purpose for blogging and did not contribute more postings at the higher end of Richardson's adapted continuum, she did not perceive blogging as a tool that facilitated her learning or potentially her students' learning. Without question, Kayla's responses on the blog were mediated by the quality of postings submitted by other students enrolled in the course. However, Robin found a way, despite the quality of other's entries, to engage at a more thoughtful and synthetic level, and she perceived blogging as an important tool in her future teaching.

Despite Kayla's perception that blogging in the course was ineffectual, we observed that she engaged with aspects of critical multicultural literacy over the course of the semester. Therefore, there was ample evidence that both students embraced the need for critical multicultural literacy instruction and engaged in discussion of its importance. Although this study does not answer the extent to which these preservice teachers will focus on issues of critical literacy and multicultural education in their actual instruction, it does tell us that they recognize the importance of doing so when they ultimately begin teaching.

Implications for Our Future Practice

Given our action research stance (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Wassell & Crouch, 2008), conducting this research helped us to focus on the aspects of teaching we would change in future iterations of this required graduate-level course on literacy and technology.

Provide more choice. Although the professor had hoped that students would make more connections to other social injustices, atrocities, or genocides in their Holocaust units, Kayla did not avail herself of this opportunity because she thought she was restricted to Holocaust education. She expressed a desire for more freedom within the thematic topic of the Holocaust to truly be "innovative" in a technology course. As such, the next time this course is taught, students will select their own thematic topic related to social justice instead of contributing to one class theme. We suspect students will make deeper connections to critical multicultural literacy instruction if they study a broad social issue of personal interest.

Promote deeper reflection. Both students expressed a frustration with the quality of postings submitted to the class blog. In most cases, neither thought the blog contributions pushed them to think over and above what would have occurred in a face-to-face setting. In future iterations of this course, more attention will be paid to the types of prompts necessary to stimulate responses that approximate Richardson's notion of complex blogging. Perhaps providing carefully crafted prompts for blog posts in the beginning of the semester will give students the necessary scaffolds or guidance they need to self-monitor the quality of their entries. Further explicit discussion and models for improving contributions throughout the semester may be needed as well.

Like Wassell and Crouch (2008), we will provide students with a rubric that specifically details expectations for blogging. Students will "self-rate" the level of complexity of their own blog posts and those of their peers relative to synthesis, analysis, and reflection. In addition, we will facilitate specific discussions, whether in face-to-face or blogging contexts, on the nexus of technology and critical multicultural literacy.

Limitations

Our participants were both females who came from similar backgrounds. However, they differed in terms of race. Some of the findings suggested that focusing from the outset on participants' experiences as they related to issues of gender, social class, or race might have yielded some important findings. For instance, Kayla identified race as a factor in her learning, as she expressed that she did not always want to be read as "other." Kayla stated:

> …as a black person, a black woman, I loved Oregon Trail, and if somebody didn't point out to me that it's, you know, marginalizing women's roles … they are all cooking that kind of a thing, and it's you know the black people are slaves or they are servants. And I didn't see that and I don't care that I didn't see it. It doesn't matter like you don't tell me that it affects me, 'cause it doesn't. (personal communication, April 8, 2009)

Given the fact that we did not conduct a sociocultural study from the outset, one limitation of this study was our inability to address how identity markers, such as race, influenced Robin or Kayla's experiences in the course. A second limitation related to our decision to focus on only Kayla and Robin. Although these two individuals' experiences reflected many of the issues we observed in other students' data, it is possible that including additional participants might have led to more nuanced findings.

Conclusion

Although the body of research on using blogs to facilitate instruction with younger students is growing, far fewer studies explore the role of blogging in teacher preparation courses, particularly for literacy educators. Furthermore,

teaching students to interrogate the texts they read, whether they appear in print or in media/digital format, is a key and growing concern for both instructional technology and critical multicultural educators. We maintain that future and practicing teachers will be less effective at promoting these dual foci unless they explicitly attend to them in teacher preparation programs. To us, that means providing students with plentiful opportunities to practice using technology tools, such as blogging, in the courses that also forefront critical multicultural literacy instruction.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. What do you think is the purpose of this course?
2. Tell me about your participation in this course and your work online with the blog.

3. How do you feel your learning style fits with the format of the course? With working on the blog?
4. Tell me about how you work with and manage your blogs.
5. Do you find it hard to navigate the postings?
6. What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of contributing to a blog in class?
7. What do you think of the hybrid nature of this class?
8. What was confusing or difficult about having a blog added to this course?
9. Do you think it makes sense to focus on the Holocaust in a course in which technology and literacy learning are the primary focuses?
10. If you were to teach a unit on the Holocaust, what would you take away from this class?
11. What do you think about the use of a blog to support literacy instruction?
12. How might you apply what you learned about technology in this course to your current or future teaching?
13. What role do you see technology playing in your role as a literacy teacher/specialist?
14. Has the blog helped you think about any issues in education?
15. In what ways has this course on technology and the Holocaust helped you to think about multicultural education and culturally responsive teaching?
16. In what ways has this course on technology and the Holocaust helped you to think about critical literacy?
17. Do you feel technology does anything to enhance the teaching of multicultural education/critical literacy? In what ways?
18. What specific supports have helped you the most to deal with confusion/difficulties with participation in the blog, course structure and requirements, and content of the course?
19. Do you think the blog has encouraged you to reflect deeply on topics raised in this course? Why or how?

Appendix B

Survey Questions

For each question below, please support your comments with concrete and specific examples.

1. Was this a worthwhile way to learn about multicultural education?
2. Was this a worthwhile way to learn about critical literacy?
3. Was this a worthwhile way to learn about multiliteracies?