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## How can using the Internet impact the writing process?

Technology has become a big part of today's society. In the past decade there have been great advances in the way people use computers. The Internet has transformed our lives and expanded the ways people communicate with each other. Today, most people use technology in their jobs or professions, therefore, understanding how to use technology has become very important. This understanding starts with students using technology in the classrooms. Schools are now being recognized as the places where students should be learning the important skills needed to use technology. In the last several years, U.S. schools have spent lots of money equipping classrooms with computers including hardware, software, Internet connections, etc. However, little has been spent on training teachers how to use technology in the classroom. Teachers are faced with an unknown entity in the classroom that many chose to ignore rather than explore due to time constraints with other tasks necessary to run a classroom and lack of knowledge. They need guidance and support in integrating technology into their day to day activities with students. If teachers are not trained, computers will sit in the classroom and remain unused by students. A recent U.S. survey revealed that 80% of teachers do not feel well prepared to use technology in their classrooms. While the U.S. Department of Education recommends 30% of schools' technology budgets be devoted to staff development, only about 6% of this budget is actually used for that purpose (IRA, 2002). Teachers must become more aware of the valuable resources technology brings to the classroom especially pertaining to writing. If teachers are not educated on

implementing technology into their curriculums, students will be at a great disadvantage as they grow and strive to be successful adults.

Writing is a significant part of literacy programs throughout the elementary school years. These years are critical periods where students gain skills for writing in many different forms such as fiction and nonfiction stories, personal narratives, poetry, etc. Many students learn how to write by following the writing process. This process allows students to follow several steps to complete their writings. These steps include: prewriting, writing, revising, editing, and publishing. Each step allows students to expand and refine on their ideas as they write. There are opportunities within each step for students to reflect on their writings through peer conferencing, one-on-one discussions with the teacher, buddy editing, etc. The writing process was carefully constructed so that students are involved in meaningful activities as they complete their writings. There are many minilessons students can participate in to better understand aspects of the writing process. Students can also work collaboratively on writings with other students and the teacher to expand ideas, get constructive feedback, and learn about different perspectives when writing. Many teachers may wonder what role the Internet plays in the writing process. The Internet contains many valuable resources such as websites and connections to other teachers and students that can help students throughout the writing process. Many of these resources remain underutilized by teachers in their lessons. The goal of this research paper is to highlight what the Internet has to offer for teachers and students to use when writing. With the addition of the Internet to the writing process, many students will become more motivated to write and teachers will be acknowledging and utilizing an additional tool for writing today and in the future.

Teacher Roxie Ahlbrecht described the use of technology saying, “That’s the thing about technology. It’s really not supposed to be an add-on class. It’s a tool—just like paper and pencil (Strangman, 2001).

There are many ways the Internet can directly impact the writing process in the classroom. A significant aspect of the writing process is constant feedback, conferring, and sharing of writings with others. Students are able to conference with other students or the teacher to guide thinking as they revise and edit their writings. The Internet provides another way for students to work collaboratively with other students in writing. Collaborative projects allow students around the world to connect with one another and work on projects together. A good example of the use of collaborative projects is with Susan Silverman’s classroom. Susan Silverman is a teacher who has been described as a pioneer in the development of collaborative projects. She has won the Miss Rumphius Award several times which highlights her outstanding work with technology in the classroom. When teaching 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, Susan Silverman created several projects such as Apple Bytes, Stلالuna’s Friends, Bunny Readers, Orphan Train, etc. She would invite other classrooms around the world to join these projects. After participating in the projects, Susan Silverman would create a webpage for all of the participants’ work (Karchmer, 2001). Another example of communication between classrooms can be seen by looking at Roxie Ahlbrecht’s Apple Bytes project. This project allowed her students to write cinquain poetry and a book patterned after *If You Give a Moose a Muffin* by Laura Numeroff. After creating their own internet project, other classrooms around the world contacted Roxie Albrecht’s class and wanted to participate too. The classrooms could view and respond to each other’s writings (Strangman, 2001). These are two great

examples of how connecting with other classrooms can set purposes for writing. Students become highly motivated when they can see what other students have done and discuss their writing ideas together. Besides the projects of Susan Silverman and Roxie Albrecht, there are several other sites that allow teachers to find projects or partners. Classrooms can also advertise their projects on these sites by writing project descriptions when they are seeking collaborating classrooms. Some of these sites include: Global SchoolNet's Internet Project Registry (<http://www.gsn.org/pr/index.html>), Classroom Connect's Teacher Contact Database (<http://www.classroom.com/teachercontact/>), The Global School House (<http://www.gsh.org/>), and Intercultural E-mail Classroom Connections (<http://www.iecc.org/>) (Leu & Leu, 1999).

Another powerful tool that can enhance the writing process in classrooms is e-mail. Just as students are able to view and respond to each other through collaborative projects, e-mail allows students to interact with new people over the Internet. Students can sharpen their writing and thinking skills, increase knowledge, and broaden perspectives through e-mailing. Writing to other students using the Internet is called keypals, which is equivalent to penpals. The awesome capabilities of the Internet today allow thoughts, ideas, information, and suggestions to be expressed quickly and efficiently. Students can correspond back and forth within seconds or minutes (Leu & Leu, 1999). This provides the quick feedback and acknowledgement wanted by students. As stated in *Web Watch: Writing Resources* by Denise Johnson (2002), "Reading and responding to the comments of others compels us to think and to form and articulate ideas in a meaningful way; it urges us to compare our thoughts with those of others and to examine our own understandings and interpretations." E-mail allows students to take

perspectives of a wider audience. This awareness of different perspectives helps guide students into thinking about their audience when writing. Who are they writing for? An example of the connections e-mail provides can be seen in the Hobart-Malang Electronic Mail Project. This project brought together students from two schools in different countries, Australia and Indonesia. The project was recognized as the first school-based electronic-mail link between these two countries (Sullivan & Sharp, 2000). In this case, not only can students sharpen their writing skills while e-mailing, they can also learn about different cultures in the process. There are numerous sites for locating keypals and partner classes such as Keypals Club from Teaching.com (<http://www.teaching.com/keypals/>), Rigby/Heinemann Global Keypals (<http://www.hi.com.au/keypals/>), and eMail Classroom Exchange (<http://www.epals.com/>).

Publishing is the final step in the writing process and is a significant motivator for students. Roxie Ahlbrecht described this motivation in terms of publishing on the Internet. "There is nothing like looking at a kid's eyes when they first see their work come up on a computer. It's like magic!" (Strangman, 2001) Traditionally, students have been able to publish their writings by making books or hanging their writing pieces in their classrooms or the hallway. These days the Internet has dramatically changed the way students can publish their work. After finishing a writing project with students, teachers can take these finished products and publish them on the Web for others to see. The benefits of this expansion of audience are numerous. Not only can family and friends far away see students' writing accomplishments, anyone around the world can take a look. Just like connecting to others by e-mail, the ability to publish on the Web

makes students aware of their audience as they are writing. They can tailor their writings based on who will be reading them (Karchmer, 2001).

Published writings by students abound on the Internet already. If teachers want to start publishing their students work on the Internet, there are some great examples or models to look at on the Web. As stated earlier, the Miss Rumphius award highlights outstanding websites. A collection of these award-winning websites can be found on the International Reading Association's website ([www.ira.org](http://www.ira.org)). After going on to the website and clicking the "technology" link, there will be link to the Miss Rumphius homepage. The websites of the Miss Rumphius Award winners are categorized by school level: elementary, middle school, and high school. These are outstanding models of how students work can be published. Another site to see published work by students is Ed's Oasis' Spotlight on Success (<http://www.classroom.com/edsoasis/Spotlight/Spotlight.html>). This site contains Internet lesson plans that include students' written work, links to classroom web pages, and discussions with teachers about the purposes of highlighted activities (Karchmer, 2001).

Once teachers become familiar with publishing student work on the Internet, they will be able to start publishing their own students' writings. As outlined in Rachel Karchmer's article *Gaining a New, Wider Audience: Publishing Student Work on the Internet* (2001), there are 3 main ways students can publish: putting traditional writing assignments on the Internet, collaborative writing projects, and multimedia presentations. These three publications vary in difficulty, time, and energy. Putting traditional writing assignments on the Internet is the easiest form of publication. This is taking exactly what

students have done in the classroom and transferring it to the Web. Teachers must have some knowledge of using an HTML to begin publishing traditional writings. As mentioned earlier, collaborative projects get students involved with other students around the world. Whether exchanging newsletters, poetry, stories based on literature, etc. these writings can be published on the Internet also. Usually, the project coordinator is in charge of posting the students' work on the Web. Lastly, a more involved opportunity for publishing is multimedia presentations. These presentations include graphics, hyperlinks, and even digitized speech. Many teachers who have used multimedia presentations find these components allow students to bring new meaning to their writings (Karchmer, 2001)

The Internet provides many websites where students can publish their writings. Some of these websites provide an outlet for publishing while others provide additional tips or suggestions for publishing. For example, KidPub (<http://www.kidpub.org>) provides students with opportunities to see their writing published on the Internet. The process for getting works published is easy as directions are clear and concise. Writings are published within 3 days of submission. Another neat component of this site is called Kid Pub Publisher's Picks link. This feature allows the publisher to write reasons for choosing stories, poems, etc. so students can see what makes a piece of writing good. Submissions on KidPub can be made by individual students or by teachers of their students' writings (Sullivan & Sharp, 2000). Another good website is Kid Authors (<http://www.realkids.com/club.shtml>). This site contains lots of different links where students can meet authors, write teachers, meet some kid authors, gather tips/facts about writing, join a critique group, enter a writing contest, and get started with their own

writings. Students can read stories and poems by others for inspiration. There are also websites that cater to publishing poetry. One such site is The Poetry Zone (<http://www.poetryzone.ndirect.co.uk/index2.htm>). This poetry site offers students an outlet for publishing their poetry and viewing poetry galleries of other published poems by students. It also provides guidance for teachers when using poetry in the classroom. The Poetry Zone gives recommendations to teachers about poetry books to use and writing activities to implement with students.

There are a few notable websites that should be mentioned to help students as they write during the writing process. Students write in many different forms throughout their school years. Many have opportunities to write fictional stories, poetry, essays, nonfictional stories, letters, biographies, etc. There are many companion websites to specific genres of writing. For example, The Biography Maker (<http://www.bham.wednet.edu/bio/biomaker.htm>) is a website that highlights the creation of biographies. This site guides students through the process of making their own biographies by using questioning, synthesizing, and storytelling strategies. These strategies include the use of word processing and Internet resources (Johnson, 2002). Another website allows students to create their own newspapers. This site is called CRAYON: Create Your Own Newspaper (<http://www.crayon.net/>). A step-by-step process is involved to create the newspaper. The directions are clear and easy to read. Students are not only involved with the writing contained in the newspaper, but also the layout of the newspaper. An exciting website for elementary students is The Flat Stanley Project (<http://flatstanley.enoreo.on.ca/index.htm>). Inspired by the book *Flat Stanley* by Jeff Brown, this website contains information about the project and additional resources

that can be used. Using this project in the classroom provides students with another reason to write. Students make paper Flat Stanleys and begin a journal about him for a few days. Then Flat Stanley and the journal are sent to another school where students there treat Flat Stanley as a guest and complete the journal. Flat Stanley and the journal are then returned to the original sender. Students can plot his travels on maps and share the contents of the journal (Johnson, 2002). This is an exciting way to teach about and use journals in the classroom.

There is a wealth of resources on the Internet that can help students as they move along in the writing process. These resources include websites and connections to other students all over the world. The Internet is a tool that can motivate students to write, revise, edit, and publish. Teachers must take time to investigate the websites mentioned above and other websites. As teachers begin incorporating technology into their writing curriculums, they can find and use one or two sites to use. As time goes on, teachers can expand their repertoire as they become more familiar with what the Internet has to offer. As stated in *Web Watch: Writing Resources* (2002), “A quality writing program also recognizes that strong reading and writing skills help prepare students for their futures outside of school.” This is very true as technology plays an ever increasing role in our lives. Teachers should make opportunities for using the Internet available to students now more than ever. Simple advice to other teachers by Roxie Albrecht during a *Teacher’s Voices* interview sums up the use of technology nicely. She stated, “Don’t be afraid to try it, and it’s a lot of fun and well worth the effort.” (Strangman, 2001)

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