USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM TO ENHANCE MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT OF READING IN MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to create a website by which teachers could readily seek strategies to motivate their middle school readers and in doing so, increase their reading comprehension. The accompanying paper provides a brief review of the literature and a website user guide, with a focus on using blogging as a strategy to increase motivation and reading comprehension in middle school classrooms. The website is an avenue where knowledge accumulated through peer-reviewed research and classroom experience (both personal and that of others) is shared. Research has shown that motivation to read in and out of school decreases as students progress through middle school (Kelley & Decker, 2009). Furthermore, results from grade ten students in Ontario on EQAO assessments have shown a decrease in achievement for literacy across subject areas over the last five years. This new website, Engaging Middle School Readers, is a combination of blog posts, educational book summaries, video modules, and suggested online resources suitable for teachers, students, and parents – all made accessible in hopes to counteract the decrease in motivation, and encourage the frequent use of comprehension reading strategies.
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iii

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................... iv

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1

  Purpose .......................................................................................................................... 4

  Project Overview .......................................................................................................... 5

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................. 6

  Reading Comprehension .............................................................................................. 6

  Motivation ..................................................................................................................... 8

  Reading Motivation ...................................................................................................... 10

  Motivation to Read and Reading Comprehension. ..................................................... 11

  Engaging Adolescent Readers ..................................................................................... 14

    Control and choice. .................................................................................................... 16

    Collaboration ............................................................................................................. 16

    Self-efficacy ............................................................................................................... 17

    Interest ....................................................................................................................... 17

  How Social Media Could Impact Engagement .......................................................... 17

  Social Media Tools ....................................................................................................... 18

    Twitter ......................................................................................................................... 18

    Blogs ........................................................................................................................... 20

  Social Media in Education .......................................................................................... 22

  Social Media to Enhance Reading Engagement ......................................................... 23

    How can social media address student interest in reading? .................................... 23

    How can social media address student choice and control? .................................... 24
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Blogging was really fun! It was great to interact with other students digitally and a lot more interesting than just reading and writing.”

– Margaret Beyere, Former Grade 6 Student

Reading is one of the fundamental skills necessary to participate successfully in society. Someone who struggles with reading likely struggles with day to day tasks. Whether it be playing a game while socializing with friends, reading a medication label, responding to a written message, filling out an application, understanding a product review, or simply following instructions for a new recipe, being able to interpret the text associated with these tasks can be complicated for some individuals. Struggling to read can also have an impact on one’s self-concept and overall attitude towards society. With effective instruction, you begin to break down and understand the components of text in early primary grades. You then have the ability to build onto early literacy skills and continue to grow as a reader both independently and within the school system.

Many of us take the “simple” task of reading for granted, however, as educators we are reminded time and time again, that the “simple” task of reading is not so simple for all students. Students who struggle with reading have been known to develop coping mechanisms within the classroom: “fake reading”, memorization, copying a friend, plagiarism, becoming a “class clown”, distracting others or avoiding work altogether, to name a few (Moreau, 2014). As young students progress through school the academic demands placed on them increase. If academic demands increase and students are struggling to read at grade level, they will likely fall behind (Torgesen, 1998). Avoidance, consequently reading less, as well as the development of other coping skills
only contribute to the growing achievement gap between struggling readers and their peers.

According to results collected by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO, 2018) in Ontario, there has been an increase in the percentage of grade six students scoring at or above the provincial standard on assessments measuring reading achievement (see Figure 1 below). On the contrary, grade ten students participating in the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) during the same time period, show a continuous decrease in the percentage of students successfully meeting the “at or above” provincial standard (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. This graph shows the percentage of grade 3 and grade 6 students at or above the provincial standard for reading achievement in Ontario (EQAO, 2018).

Figure 2. This graph shows the percentage of grade ten students at or above the provincial standard for literacy across subject areas in Ontario (EQAO, 2018).
Recognizing that the OSSLT is assessing more than reading in language arts, the decrease in literacy across subject areas for grade ten students could be due to a lack of reading comprehension in middle school. Figures 1 and 2 imply a disconnect in reading achievement between grade six and grade nine.

The growing number of struggling readers (Moreau, 2014) in middle school classrooms is concerning. Providing opportunities that encourage and excite children to want to read may alleviate some of these concerns and impart motivation towards life-long learning. How can one foster life-long learning? In order to become life-long learners, students must be curious about the world around them as well as have the tools to learn and strategies to do so on their own. Being able to decode, comprehend, and critically respond to the constant flow of information is key to learning independently. Becoming proficient in reading skills takes practice and motivation to do so autonomously. According to Kelley and Decker (2009), motivation to read in and outside of school decreases as students get older. Based on survey data they collected from 1,080 grade six, seven, and eight students after completing the survey portion of the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996), Kelley and Decker found the value of reading decreased by grade level. If the decrease in motivation and value of reading could be addressed in middle school, perhaps the number of high school students successfully reaching at or above provincial standard will begin to increase, as opposed to decrease as seen in previous years.

Over the last few decades, technology has been shown to increase student engagement for educational purposes (Amaro-Jimenez, Hungerford-Kresser, & Pole, 2016; Greenhow & Gleason, 2012; Yang & Wu, 2012). Meeting students’ needs for
competency, self-sufficiency, and connections are often seen as motivating factors for engagement. Jacobs (2013) suggests that it is the social connection and sense of belonging that digital technologies promote that is motivating.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to address the decrease in motivation to read in middle school students and to present blogging, an online discussion platform, as a strategy to counteract this decrease, and at the same time increase reading comprehension. Eisner (2001) summed it up perfectly when he said there was too much *labour* being done in schools and not enough *work*. Eisner defines work “as effort from which you derive satisfaction” (2001, p. 371). Students have to get satisfaction from the learning that takes place. They need to be both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated. Educators must find ways to foster students’ enjoyment for reading. At this very moment in time, students will gladly take out their smart phones and look up a definition, scroll through social media, look at sports scores, chat with online gamer friends, and respond to their most recent Snapchat; they are interested and engaged. Thus, I propose we adapt the way we teach and encourage reading to include social and personal aspects that engage students. As a middle or high school student, I did not enjoy reading. I read because I had to. It took years of university and eventually teaching primary students to read that ignited the passion for reading in me. Now I cannot walk into a Chapters or Scholastic book fair without coming away with a handful of books; books for me, books for my students. For this reason, I believe it is important to pass on this passion to read to as many students as possible.
Through this project, I have explored research in the areas of reading comprehension, engaging middle school students, and the use of social media in order to support the use of blogs in the literacy classroom. It is my hope to help reduce the negative effects of decreased motivation to read through the middle school years and ignite a passion for learning.

**Project Overview**

Over the years I have relied on other teachers for ideas and strategies for planning purposes. Quite often, it is teachers I have found online through sites, such as Twitter and Pinterest that have assisted with my planning. There is something satisfying about how fast and effective a Google search can lead to useful resources and educational strategies. The main objective of this project, therefore, was to review and gather research to support the need to increase engagement in middle school language arts classrooms and to further that by exploring the possibility of using social media as a tool for engagement. To contribute to the area of teacher professional development, I chose to create a website, accessible to both educators and students. The research question that guided my work was: how can educators use social media to foster a love of reading in middle school students? Prior to the creation of the website, I spent time exploring research on the current state of reading comprehension and the effect motivation has on developing reading skills. Geared largely towards educators interested in using blogging to engage students, the website offers blog entries, video modules, educational book summaries, and a list of online resources to aid in the use of social media in the reading classroom.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review will build on three main concepts to offer the reader background knowledge to support the idea of using social media (i.e., blogging) in the classroom to enhance reading motivation. The first concept explores the importance of reading comprehension and its role in what successful reading looks like. The second concept provides an understanding of motivation, more specifically reading motivation, and how reading motivation, in turn, contributes to reading comprehension. The final concept investigates the use of technology to enhance reading motivation, and how social media can foster engagement in reading.

Reading Comprehension

According to Kim and Goetz (1995), “reading is a complex cognitive process in which the reader, through interaction with the text, constructs meaning” (p. 205). Over time, this definition of reading and the way educators teach reading has evolved.

Two suggested models for reading comprehension are the Simple View of Reading (SVR) and the Component Model. The SVR, developed by Hoover and Gough in 1990, views reading comprehension as the product of a reader’s decoding and linguistic comprehension abilities. Whereas the component model by Joshi and Aaron (2000), suggests the product of decoding (D) and comprehension (C) plus processing speed (S) (R = D x C + S), better predict reading comprehension (R). For the purpose of this project, the take away is that you cannot achieve reading comprehension by simply learning to decode. It is not uncommon for middle school students to be able to decode and at the same time struggle with comprehension.
The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) defines reading as “an individual’s capacity to understand, use, reflect on, and engage with written texts, to achieve one’s goals, develop one’s knowledge and potential, and participate in society” (OECD, 2015, p. 31). Reading then, goes even further than decoding and comprehension, reading includes the engagement with written texts and the ability to use text to participate in society. However, in order to engage and reflect, one must first understand what they are reading. The use of blogs to engage students in reading has been shown to increase student engagement with text and book discussions (Zawilinski 2009).

Considering the importance that reading comprehension has on a child’s success, it is crucial to understand the factors that predict reading comprehension growth and achievement (Froiland & Oros, 2014; Taboada, Tonks, Wigfield, & Guthrie, 2009). Taboada et al. (2009) found that intrinsic motivation and the use of cognitive reading strategies (i.e., activating prior knowledge and questioning) contribute to reading comprehension growth. The National Reading Panel (2000) emphasized six strategies that support reading comprehension: activating prior knowledge, questioning, searching for information, summarizing, organizing graphically, and structuring stories. In order to become proficient in the use of such strategies, one must make an effort and practice often. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), individuals that are intrinsically motivated show more perseverance and sustained effort. Hence, students that possess intrinsic motivation to read will be more likely to put in the effort and practice the use of comprehension strategies.
A plethora of research focuses on the positive effect motivation has on reading performance in early elementary students. However, there is minimal literature to support this for students beyond fourth grade (Retelsdorf, Koller, & Moller, 2011). If properly scaffolded, blogging can become a daily routine in a classroom and an effective way to practice using cognitive reading strategies such as questioning, summarizing, and activating prior knowledge. The remaining literature review will address the concept of motivation, its relation to reading comprehension, and interventions that have been utilized in the attempt to motivate and engage later elementary and middle school readers.

Motivation

Motivation can be categorized as two types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Ryan and Deci (2000) define intrinsic motivation as “the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequence” (p. 56) and extrinsic motivation as “a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome” (p. 60). In other words, if a person is intrinsically motivated they will do something because it is fun, or to challenge themselves, it makes them happy, as opposed to being extrinsically motivated by pressure or a reward (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

It is sometimes suggested that external motivation can undermine one’s sense of intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1971; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Guthrie et al., 2006; Retelsdorf et al., 2011). For example, Deci (1971) conducted an investigation by which 24 psychology students took part in three sessions of puzzle solving. Twelve participants were part of a control group and 12 were part of an experimental group. Both groups went through the same process and the only experimental factor was introduced during the second session. During the second session, the experimental group was rewarded money for each puzzle
they solved. Prior to the third session, the experimental group was told that the money had run out, thus they were solving puzzles again for self-satisfaction, like session one. As predicted, the measure of intrinsic motivation during the third session for the experimental group was considerably lower than the first session, unlike the measure of intrinsic motivation for the control group. The control groups’ intrinsic motivation actually increased slightly from session one to session three. Thus, supporting the idea that extrinsic rewards (i.e., money) can undermine intrinsic motivation. Retelsdorf et al. (2011), found that competition, an extrinsic form of motivation, not only affected intrinsic motivation, but negatively correlated with reading performance.

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), “students can perform extrinsically motivated actions with resentment, resistance, and disinterest, or, alternatively, with an attitude of willingness that reflects an inner acceptance of the value or utility of a task” (p. 55). Therefore, one size does not fit all; what works for one, does not necessarily work for another. Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000) found that external rewards might initially be needed to motivate the academically unmotivated student. They suggest that performance feedback, an external reward, may also help keep intrinsically motivated students engaged longer. Similarly, Deci and Ryan discuss the idea that extrinsic motivation can be internalized (2000). Internalization refers to “the means through which individuals assimilate and reconstitute formerly external regulations so the individuals can be self-determined while enacting them” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 236).

In Bergman’s 2017 article, he describes the motivational journeys of two young adolescent students that were diagnosed early with learning disabilities in reading. One of the participants, Nelson (pseudonym), often mentions that he had to learn to read so
that he would be able to get a good paying job and obtain the material objects that mattered to him. Over the years, his mother had continually reminded him of this. Nelson came to identify with the importance and value in becoming a proficient reader, thus this process of identification provided the motivation to succeed. Identification is “the process through which people recognize and accept the underlying value of a behavior” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 236). In other words, when one sees value in a behavior they are more likely to engage in that behavior for their individual sake, rather than outside pressures.

Perhaps then, a combination of both, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation may be necessary for highest success (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000) in developing reading motivation.

**Reading Motivation**

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) define reading motivation as, “the individual’s personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading” (p. 405). Wolters, Barnes, Kulesz, York and Francis (2016) summarize three assumptions for reading motivation: (1) An adolescent’s engagement, learning and reading performance are highly influenced by motivational factors, (2) Motivation for reading is multidimensional, and (3) a student’s motivation to read is fluid, it can change over time. As a teacher, these assumptions should be paramount in the sense that you have the power to initiate that motivation. If motivation to read is fluid, all children have the potential to gain it in their classroom. As mentioned in the introduction, motivation to read in and out of school decreases as students progress through middle school (Kelley & Decker, 2009). Kelley and Decker (2009) found that at-home reading (reading for
pleasure) declined as grade level increased, and based on a statewide comprehension assessment test, the number of students scoring at the “proficient level” also decreased as grade level increased. These two factors: reading motivation and reading comprehension, are discussed in the next section.

Motivation to Read and Reading Comprehension

Motivation and cognitive abilities, such as activating background knowledge and questioning, have been shown to make independent contributions to reading comprehension performance (National Reading Panel, 2000; Taboada et al., 2009). According to Taboada et al. (2009), motivation and reading comprehension do not act separately; motivation is an energizer for comprehension. In other words, motivation encourages the use of cognitive comprehension strategies. Activating prior knowledge and questioning, as mentioned earlier, are two strategies that readers use to grasp an understanding of a piece of text. Thus, if motivation energizes or initiates the use of such cognitive processes, it makes sense that reading motivation is seen as a fundamental predictor of reading performance (Guthrie et al., 2007; Taboada et al., 2009) and performance growth (Guthrie et al., 2007).

Wolters et al. (2016) studied the impact supportive feedback had on student motivation and, in turn, their reading comprehension. They found that positive feedback increased a student’s sense of perceived control and an increased focus on mastery goals, consequently increasing situational engagement and better performance. Wolters et al.’s findings replicated those of Deci’s in 1971. Deci also found that positive feedback enhanced intrinsic motivation and further, negative feedback decreased intrinsic motivation relative to no feedback. Negative feedback has the ability to foster a
perceived incompetence in readers, consequently discouraging them to make an effort. Social media, a practice in social networking, allows for all sorts of feedback. If implemented successfully, social media could provide positive and constructive feedback by both teachers and students in the classroom.

Logan, Medford, and Hughes (2011) found that intrinsic motivation showed a significant variance in reading comprehension growth for low ability students compared to high ability students in later elementary grades. The lack of variance for students of higher reading abilities might be due to the fact that they are already utilizing strategies to reach their full reading potential, whereas low ability readers, with increased motivation, are more likely to persevere and not give up, thus learning to use such strategies. Despite ability level, as previously mentioned, individuals that are intrinsically motivated show more perseverance and sustained effort (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Behaviours that are intrinsically motivated tend to satisfy an individual’s need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Deci and Ryan found that relatedness came second to competence and autonomy. Relatedness can be defined as “the desire to feel connected to others – to love and care, and to be loved and cared for” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 231). Interestingly, Bergman (2017) focused solely on the importance of connections, making it personal and the impact relatedness had on the motivation of two adolescent readers, and consequently, their reading performance. The higher the utility value for reading, interest level in assessments, and number of connections with their teacher and reading materials, the higher the level of motivation his participants possessed. Bergman’s research was situated as a sound case study; findings were based on multiple interviews, observations, and artifact analyses. Due to the nature of
Qualitative research, his sample size was small. From a larger sample of eight students he only analyzed data from two participants, their parents, and teachers for the purpose of this article. A larger scale study is necessary to further investigate the impact of connections and relatedness within reading motivation.

That said, students with low involvement, efficacy, and interest are less likely to create opportunities to interact with literature (Guthrie et al., 2007), and therefore are less motivated when confronted with a reading task. When readers have background knowledge on a topic and are able to activate their prior knowledge, they tend to be more intrinsically motivated. According to Taboada et al. (2009), readers with a sense of intrinsic motivation have a higher desire to comprehend what they read. This desire to understand encourages engagement in metacognitive thinking and the utilization of various strategies. By using strategies, readers are able to create a fuller text representation (Taboada et al., 2009).

Thus far it appears that increasing intrinsic reading motivation in middle school classrooms is a key contributor to increased participation, increased comprehension, and performance of students. The question now stands, what are some ways that we can increase the intrinsic motivation of students to read in middle school language arts classrooms?

Several studies have found that interventions tailored to student interest, choice, and background knowledge have successfully increased their motivation to read (e.g., Bergman, 2017; Guthrie et al., 2004; Taboada et al., 2009). Researchers (e.g., Hsu & Wang, 2010; Tobar-Munoz, Baldiris, & Fabregat, 2017) have utilized technology and collaboration in their efforts to increase motivation.
Engaging Adolescent Readers

 According to Gambrell (2015), “we have two equally important reading goals: to teach our students to read and to teach our students to want to read” (p. 259). If you can teach your students to want to read, inevitably they will be motivated to read more. Motivation to read positively correlates with reading achievement (Bergman, 2017; Logan, Medford, & Hughes, 2011). It is not uncommon to have more success encouraging primary students to read and to be enthusiastic about reading than the young adolescents in a middle school classroom. This deterioration of motivation was also found in 1991 when Wigfield and his colleagues studied young adolescents’ achievement self-perceptions and self-esteem in four activity domains, English being one of them. The authors suggested the decline was due to social and environmental transitions. The change in classroom environment (i.e., new teacher expectations, different peers) contributed to the initial drop in self-perception of ability. This decrease in motivation has also been found to begin in fourth grade when children are transitioning between the processes of learning to read and reading to learn (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2009). Students who struggle with reading often have negative reading experiences and expect each experience to be relatively the same (Guthrie, 2008). Negative reading experiences are often linked to a lack of motivation toward reading and the reading process. This lack of interest and motivation can be frustrating for educators. According to Guthrie (2008), “Students read too little, and they rarely read for deep understanding. They seldom read to expand their sense of who they are as people. Faced with students who are less than ideally motivated, teachers often attempt to control behavior and get through the day” (p. 1).
Teacher enthusiasm and student motivation have been shown to have a strong relationship (Patrick, Hisley, & Kempler, 2000). A teacher who “attempts to control behavior and get through the day” is not a teacher who exhibits enthusiasm in their classroom. There lies the making of a disastrous cycle. Due to a lack of motivation, the cause of several independent factors, educator effort is instead expended on classroom management as opposed to creating new and engaging lessons. As a result, all students, not just struggling students, like their teachers are simply getting through the day. The cycle must end somewhere. The amount of time middle school students spend reading in the classroom has been shown to correlate with reading achievement (Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990). Interestingly, Taylor et al. (1990) attempted to differentiate the affect reading at home and reading at school had on the overall reading achievement of fifth and sixth grade students. Although disappointed with their insignificant results from the impact reading at home had on reading achievement, they did find that improvements in students’ reading achievement were significantly related to the time spent reading during a 50-minute reading period at school. Even though they collected data on the type of reading that took place (teacher assigned and student chosen), results did not explicitly specify which type was more effective. Regardless, the goal remains clear; students must read more. Not just read for the sake of reading, but also read for a deeper understanding, to explore personal interests, and to expand on their sense of who they are, their identities. In an attempt to reverse some of the negative experiences of reading, environments and teachers must somehow enhance adolescents’ motivation to read. In order to encourage more reading in middle school, Guthrie (2008) and his colleagues
have suggested five teaching practices: make reading meaningful, support self-directed reading, make reading social, build confident readers, and make reading relevant.

**Control and choice.** Not all young students like to make choices about the books they read (Guthrie et al., 2007), but as students get older they often desire a larger sense of autonomy. Student curiosity is increased when instruction allows for choice in books and self-questioning (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Von Secker, 2000). If students are curious, they become engaged. The more engaged they are, the more they participate and gain from their learning environment(s). Being able to voice questions for teacher and peer responses allow students to gain control of their learning.

**Collaboration.** “Adolescence is a time of social discovery” (Guthrie, 2008, p. 49). Through open, student-led discussions, collaborative reasoning, reading partnerships, and social constructing class management you can support this time of social discovery through reading (Guthrie, 2008). It has also been found that by having students question the text and each other as opposed to responding solely to teacher directed questions their understanding of the text is often stronger and enriched (Beck, McKeown, Sandora, Kucan, & Worthy, 1996). When conducting a longitudinal study on changes in social and reading motivation during the transition from junior to high school, Otis, Grouzet, and Pelletier (2005) found that students who were intrinsically motivated at the end of middle school were less likely to experience negative long-term effects of the transition. However, overall, they found that as social motivation increases, motivation to read decreases. How can we attempt to encourage both social and reading motivation simultaneously?
**Self-efficacy.** Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as an individuals’ perceived notion of their performance capabilities within a particular context or specific domain. Students that exhibit confidence, or have positive self-efficacy, tend to work harder, persevere, and eventually achieve more (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). A student who feels they are continually failing (i.e., struggling to read grade level material everyday) naturally develops a poor sense of self-efficacy. This is why creating tasks that allow for student success is crucial. Tasks should provide an appropriate challenge, easy tasks can encourage over confidence and this is not productive either (Guthrie, 2008; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). In the classroom, educators should strive to “foster positive, but accurate, self-efficacy beliefs” (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002, p. 316) in their students.

**Interest.** Fulmer and Frijters (2011) had 56 students from fifth to eighth grade rate story synopsis’ based on personal interest. After rating the stories students were randomly assigned either their most or least interesting book to read. What the authors found was that interest indeed supported motivation and encouraged students to persist when reading challenging texts. Guthrie et al. (2006) found that stimulating activities activated situational interest. If students read texts they are interested in, they are more likely to create positive experiences of reading.

**How Social Media Could Impact Engagement**

Joosten (2012) defines social media as “virtual places where people share; everybody and anyone can share anything anywhere anytime” (p. 14). More and more students own and utilize mobile devices, which means more students are engaging in social media for personal use. In 2016, Greenhow and Lewin analyzed two studies: (1) a European study that looked at the impact embedding social media into pedagogical
approaches had on the instruction in elementary/junior high classrooms and (2) a U.S. study which examined young people’s voluntary use of Hot Dish (a Facebook application for sharing science-based knowledge). In reference to the first study, Greenhow and Lewin (2016) claimed, “The benefits of appropriating social media were substantial. It supported the development of twenty-first-century skills including collaboration, creativity, and communication” (p. 18). By embedding social media into projects, students gained a greater sense of autonomy and control. Both autonomy and control are desirable in engaging middle school readers. The social aspect of the second study was shown to motivate participation and initiative. Students noted feeling “safer” when commenting and sharing with like-minded group members on Facebook as opposed to other sites. This finding may be important to keep in mind when creating spaces for students to utilize social media for academic purposes. For example, allowing students to choose the work they read and respond to.

Before addressing the power of social media on enhancing teaching practices let us look at two possible social media platforms that have been shown to positively impact students’ educational experiences.

**Social Media Tools**

Twitter, a micro-blogging social platform, and blogging (i.e., Edublog) are two free tools that are readily available online for teachers and students to take advantage of for educational purposes, especially within the language arts classroom.

**Twitter.** Twitter has been shown to positively impact participation and engagement in college reading courses (Amaro-Jimenex, Hungerford-Kresser, & Pole,
Junco et al. (2011) investigated how first year pre-health majors (i.e., future dental and medical students) use Twitter for educational purposes and how their use would affect their course engagement and semester grades. Twitter was utilized throughout the semester for the following: continuity of class discussions, asking questions, book discussions, class reminders, academic and personal support, organizing study groups, and optional and required assignments. Results for both student engagement and GPA were significantly higher for the intervention group. Unfortunately, due to a small sample size and low diversity in sample population it is difficult to make generalizations. With that said, the positive results and further findings from the Twitter activity analysis justify the need for more research in this area. Examination of the Twitter activity (i.e., tweets) suggested that students were more engaged with faculty and peers, book conversations were richer, the depth and amount of cross-communication about the book was significantly a lot higher than typical first year classes, and students were eager to form student groups when given the chance during online conversations.

The social nature of Twitter appears to increase student engagement. Amaro-Jimenex et al., (2016) found that the use of Twitter as a tool for sharing new knowledge and activities supported curriculum creation and provided teachable moments during class time. Sharing new ideas and creations encouraged collaboration, student-led discussions, and authentic learning opportunities (Amaro-Jimenex et al., 2016; Greenhow & Gleason, 2012). Tweets are instantaneous and are not only viewable by the educator, but by fellow classmates and possibly global users. According to Bishop (2016), the
The instantaneous nature of Twitter allows instructors and fellow classmates to gain a stronger understanding of content as well as pick up quickly on misconceptions.

**Blogs.** A blog, basically an online journal, “is an easily editable webpage with posts or entries organized in reverse chronological order” (Zawilinski, 2009, p. 650). Different blogs have different purposes. For instance, blogs can be used for creative writing, literature circles, reflection, displaying work, posting opinions, learning strategies, and sharing news (Morgan, 2014). Several studies have shown a positive impact of the use of blogs for second language learning, in both elementary classrooms (Al-Qallaf, & Al-Mutairi, 2016; Morgan, 2012) and university level programs (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Wu & Wu, 2011). Al-Qallaf and Al-Mutairi (2016) found blogging to be personal, participatory, and productive. Students in their study favored online writing as opposed to traditional journal writing, they engaged longer in the writing process and agreed that reading others’ entries, others reading their entries and teacher comments motivated them to post often (Al-Qallaf & Al-Mutairi, 2016). Teachers often encourage students to respond in the form of writing as they process, reflect, and comprehend texts. If we can motivate students to write and collaborate on the books they are reading, the longer they will spend engaged in the text. The longer they spend engaged in the text, the deeper their understanding should be.

Wu and Wu (2011) studied the reading and writing of blog posts by 49 first-year college students in an English as a foreign language (EFL) reading course. Eighty-two percent of the participants felt that reading blogs supported the growth of their English reading skills (i.e., new vocabulary, fluency, reading comprehension). Although, slightly different than blogging, Kabilan, Ahman, and Abidin (2010) studied students’
perceptions of how social media (Facebook) impacted their English language learning. Survey results showed that participants felt that Facebook increased their motivation to read and confidence to write in English. Given these results, it would be interesting to examine the effects of social media use on the written literacy development of native English language learners. Would the same motivation and confidence be felt in students that speak English as their first language? Would their confidence be directed towards different aspects of reading and writing?

Most of the literature examining the impact of social media on student engagement and motivation has included college students’ academic experiences. Given that this research project focuses on how middle school teachers can use blogging to support their students’ reading skills and reading motivation the following are two middle school study examples.

Zawilinski (2009) highlights Stephanie’s story, a fifth-grade teacher’s experience of blogging throughout the course of a school year. Stephanie began using blogging as an avenue to address higher order thinking among her students. Using a four-step process she had her students activate prior knowledge, share initial thoughts, confusions, changing opinions and predictions, read and synthesis posts of their peers, and appreciate multiple perspectives during the reading of a text. Going through the four-step process seemed to encourage students to think more deeply about the texts they were reading. By allowing students to additionally post about their personal reading, showcase work they were proud of, and ask questions for all class participants to respond to, students were motivated to use their blogs more often.
The grade six students in Morgan’s (2012) small-scale study on the use of blogs were also using higher order thinking skills. Students were encouraged to use a multimodal approach to share and promote a book they had read. The benefit of the interactive nature of blogging was evident within this study; students were responding to the constructive feedback from peers as well as questioning their audiences.

**Social Media in Education**

Limited research has been conducted on the impact of social media use on elementary and middle school students’ academic engagement. However, over the last decade several studies (some already mentioned in the last section) have found that social media can have a positive impact on learning and classroom community in secondary educational institutes (Amaro-Jimenez, Hungerford-Kresser, & Pole, 2016; Hsu & Wang, 2010; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011).

As previously mentioned, Junco et al. (2011) studied the use of Twitter in pre-health collage classes and found that it had a positive impact on engagement and GPA. Amaro-Jimenez et al. (2016) also studied the impact of Twitter, exploring it as a platform for issuing exit tickets (a well-known form of formative assessment) with student teachers at the University of Texas at Arlington. Students were asked to summarize their learning every week and present it in the form of a tweet. This could be a simple line (<140 characters) of text and/or a picture. Open coding by all three authors of course artifacts, tweets, and reflective notes took place, followed by discussions as a group to identify patterns in the findings. The authors of this study found that university students preparing to become future teachers utilizing twitter could help create curriculum and provide teachable moments within the classroom. The immediacy of such a strategy was
shown to be beneficial in the university classroom and has potential in middle and high schools alike. For example, they found that students often shared examples of activities that their cooperating teachers implemented. This made for great conversation during class time. It would be interesting to see if middle school students would similarly embrace the opportunity to instantly post pictures that reminded them of in-class discussions and of the texts that they were reading; if so, would this increase literacy engagement overall?

**Social Media to Enhance Reading Engagement**

In order to address how social media can impact reading motivation and achievement this final section discusses how social media can enhance four elements: interest, control and choice, collaboration, and self-efficacy. These elements are at the core of Guthrie’s (2008) suggested teaching practices. Due to a lack of empirical research on the desired student population, research for this paper had to be conducted outside the scope of peer-reviewed journals and through informal online resources (i.e., blog posts and articles).

**How can social media address student interest in reading?** Bishop (2016) and her colleague Ryan Becker, a public middle school teacher, found that social media could be used to personalize curriculum and cater reading materials to student interest. One hundred and twenty-eight of Becker’s eighth grade students created and utilized a Twitter account for two years. The students were given a list of accounts to follow, encouraged to extend their following list with other profiles of personal interest, and were then instructed to read and tweet often. Despite being a science class, Twitter was found to expand the students’ literacy opportunities. Due to the fact each student custom-made
their own profile, personally interesting text material appeared in their newsfeed, encouraging them to read more. Findings from Becker’s Twitter project and the CORI (Concept-oriented reading instruction) intervention studied by Guthrie and colleagues (Guthrie et al., 2006; Guthrie et al., 2007) were similar. It was found that stimulating activities activate situational interest. Guthrie et al. (2006) suggested that situational interest could manifest into individual interest. Individual interest, like intrinsic motivation, indicates a stronger predisposition to take part and set goals. If the use of Twitter sparks situational interest, students will be more likely to browse often, potentially increasing the likelihood of authentic, positive reading experiences.

**How can social media address student choice and control?** Embracing social media in the classroom has been shown to encourage an increased sense of autonomy (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). With careful scaffolding, students begin to use the platforms in and outside of the classroom on their own time, carrying on discussions that started in class. They also have, to some degree, control over what they read. Take for example, Zawilinski’s (2009) article on HOT blogging. Students are required to post about their reading and synthesis their thoughts, knowledge of the text, and posts of their peers. Students exercise choice and control when they choose which posts to read and respond to.

When setting up personal Twitter accounts, Becker (from Bishop, 2016) had his students follow several predetermined accounts but then encouraged everyone to expand their list, adding more accounts based on their science-related interests. If teachers were to use Twitter in the English language arts classroom they could encourage students to follow a range of accounts, including favorite authors. This not only personalizes
student-reading material but also adds an element of responsibility; students are in control of their accounts and whom they follow.

**How can social media address collaboration?** As educators, we must be cautious not to make the assumption that “youths are inherently drawn to and motivated by digital technology” (Jacobs, 2013, p. 271). As Jacobs (2013) suggested, perhaps it is the membership and participatory culture that digital technologies promote that is motivating. The ability to connect and engage with peers within the classroom as well as globally creates an authentic purpose for collaborating. By reading and having their own posts read and commented on by peers, twelve junior high students taking part in a small-scale research project in Greece, found that they were more attentive to mistakes (Daskalogiannaki, 2012). Their ability to find errors even in their own writing had improved. Despite the fact that Daskalogiannaki (2012) was studying the impact blogging had on EFL students’ motivation and ability to take part in the writing process, the findings also have merit for English speaking students collaborating on their reading. The level of collaboration and interaction that blogging can provide is stimulating for young students. I’ll never forget the excitement on my grade ones’ faces when they got a response from @wonderopolis after tweeting out a question I could not fully answer for them. The interaction with an outside agent and the collective team effort to find an answer was motivating and engaging to them. After receiving that first response, the students often suggested placing our questions and ideas on Twitter.

Morgan (2012) found an element of interactivity in all of the student blogs he analyzed. Students were commenting on each other’s posts as well as responding and making changes to their own as a result of others’ comments. He found that when
students reported on the books they were reading they often included questions directed at the audience (Morgan, 2012). This questioning implies a higher level of engagement and eventually, an enriched picture and overall understanding of the text’s purpose (Beck et al., 1996). It is worth noting that students were asking questions in their online book reports. The scope in audience that their book reports reached was higher and certainly more authentic. They are no longer writing for the sole purpose of a mark in language arts class. The inclusion of other sources within student posts was also an interesting form of interactivity and collaboration. In order for students to link a source to their response, they would have had to read or watch the text, and then deliberately choose to include it. The action of citing and including secondary sources does two things: it gives someone else credit and in doing so, likely boosts the confidence of the blogger because he or she has found supporting evidence and/or something new for their peers. It is a valuable lesson in that students learn to value knowledge and differing perspectives.

Hsu and Wang (2010) found utilizing blogs in the classroom created a stronger sense of community in a first-year college reading course. Instructors found that there was more interaction among peers and teachers and dialogue was richer. In addition, students were more likely to continue with their higher education. Data showed that the blogging group had a retention rate of 97.5% while the control groups had a rate of 86.2%. It is possible that the increase in collaboration and connectivity is what made students feel closer to their peers and gave them a place in the classroom; something traditional classroom instruction may not always be able to do. If this participatory culture, as Jacobs (2013) puts it, is what makes technology appealing to adolescents, then social media, a platform for “everybody and anybody” to share and connect (Joosten,
is the perfect avenue for students to collaborate on books and increase cognitive awareness.

**How can social media address student self-efficacy in reading?** Building an identity online through the use of a social media platform, such as Twitter or a student blog, can allow young adolescents to feel confident and connected to their peers in ways they might not be able to do in a traditional classroom. Students have time to think about how they want to brand themselves, they are not judged according to appearance per se. Those students who may be too shy to speak out in class may also feel more comfortable responding to peers online. Blogging has been found to increase participation; more interaction, feedback, and learning between peers and teachers (Al-Qallaf & Al-Mutairi, 2015; Hus & Wang, 2010). When students receive comments/feedback on their blog posts they feel their work has a sense of purpose, their teacher cares (Al-Qallaf & Al-Mutairi, 2015), their thoughts and opinions matter. By considering teacher and peer feedback, students are often relearning skills and strategies that they are weaker in. The attention to detail and pride in accomplishments encourages effort over performance (Daskalogiannaki, 2012). They take pride in their work.

When students take pride in their work it is a good indication that they have worked hard and feel good about themselves. It positively impacts their self-efficacy. Just like how students in Daskalogiannaki’s study helped each other improve their writing skills and in turn their confidence to write, students who share and collaborate on the books they are reading and the strategies they are using can experience the same positive results.
Social Media, Motivation, and Achievement

Thus far, it appears that social media has the potential to engage and motivate adolescents in taking part in reading activities, and over time increase reading achievement. Through the use of online resources and the sharing of new knowledge through blog posts, students can gain greater background knowledge of texts they are about to read. Through instantaneous tweets associated with a hashtag, students can ask and answer text related questions anytime, anywhere.

Wolters et al. (2016) studied the impact supportive feedback had on student motivation and, in turn, their reading comprehension. They found that positive feedback increased a student’s sense of perceived control and an increased focus on mastery goals, consequently increasing situational engagement and better performance. Al-Qallaf and Al-Mutairi (2009) found that students were motivated to post more when they received feedback via comments attached to their blog from their teachers and classmates.

The research and positive social media experiences of classroom teachers and their students reviewed here have so far been shown to support four out of five teaching practices suggested to motivate adolescent readers: activating student interest, allowing for choice and control, initiating collaboration, and addressing self-efficacy. The one that has yet to be explicitly addressed is making reading meaningful.

Guthrie and his colleagues argue that meaning is motivating (2008); that by providing mastery goals, making tasks relevant, using hands-on activities, transforming text to meaning, scaffolding master motivation, providing reteach opportunities, and rewarding effort over performance students will be motivated to read and more inclined to participate in the learning process. Blogging and/or the use of various social media
platforms could be an excellent avenue to address most, if not all of these teaching strategies. Since students are engaging in social media during their personal time their learning can become more meaningful and relevant through the use of social media. The reading that students engage in via Twitter or a class blogging site is authentic, real. Students share their opinions and ideas while their classmates respond. Depending on privacy settings, students are able to share their thoughts with a much larger audience than the classroom. The shared articles on Twitter are often current; student responses are instantaneous and accessible.

Lastly, the opportunity to instantaneously share thoughts, pictures, and links on reading, anywhere, anytime makes the action of reading meaningful and relatable to day-to-day routines. If something on the way to the park reminds a student of a book he or she is reading, sharing a picture of that something may spark further discussion. That particular reminder of school is no longer just a fleeting thought, it’s a possible conversation starter – it becomes meaningful.

It is important to note that despite the potential that social media has to motivate students to participate, collaborate, and increase reading achievement, there have also been studies conducted on the negative effects (i.e., anxiety) that sometimes can be attached to blogging. Liu (2010) interviewed 26 American and Chinese adult bloggers regarding their beliefs about posting anxiety, negative outcome expectations, and blogging self-efficacy. The most commonly identified fear or anxiety trigger was that of public viewing and receiving negative feedback. Middle school students are often extra sensitive to the opinions and personal judgements of their peers. Simply bringing social media into the classroom is not enough. There must be discussions around digital
responsibility and guidelines put in place to ensure respectful communication between peers and outside participants. Starting with a platform that offers higher security and less participant volume (i.e., Twitucate as opposed to Twitter) may help in scaffolding social media use in the grade 6-8 classroom.

**Final Considerations**

In a middle school classroom, it is crucial to ensure continuous discussions around privacy, digital citizenship, and Internet safety. These issues are at the forefront of social media use. If the use of social media becomes abused (i.e., nasty comments, disrespect towards others’ opinions and ideas) students can become alienated and once again are left with negative literacy experiences. When provided with the appropriate scaffolding and academic support (i.e., reading response expectations, teacher modeling), blog writing has been shown to “allow learners to work and learn by themselves, to reflect on their mistakes, writing progress and difficulties and consequently to take pride in their achievements” (Daskalogiannaki, 2012, p. 280).

Despite ability level, individuals that are intrinsically motivated show more perseverance and sustained effort (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Having an interest in a specific topic or activity, however challenging, is more likely to stimulate problem solving and persistence (Fulmer & Frijters, 2011). If students are continually motivated to post and participate online while taking part in reading activities in and outside the classroom, it is possible that this situational motivation can become individual or intrinsic. As previously stated, behaviours that are intrinsically motivated tend to satisfy an individual’s need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Competence (a sense of self-efficacy), autonomy (a sense of control and choice), and relatedness (a desire to feel
connected, to socialize) are all elements of the teaching practices discussed throughout this paper. If students are engaged and motivated through the use of such practices, students will participate and feel better about their reading situation, and teachers can spend more time on the implementation of engaging, authentic literacy lessons and activities.

The fact that social media has been found to positively impact the learning of English as a second language in elementary classrooms (Al-Qallaf & Al-Mutairi, 2016; Daskalogiannaki, 2012; Morgan, 2012) is highly beneficial in today’s diversely populated language arts classes. It is not uncommon to have English language learners join your English classroom. Knowing that research on the use of social media in academic settings has been shown to increase skill development, confidence, and participation in second language learners (Al-Qallaf & Al-Mutairi, 2016; Daskalogiannaki, 2012), gives educators another avenue to support all students.
CHAPTER THREE: WEBSITE OVERVIEW

A USER GUIDE FOR THE WEBSITE, ‘ENGAGING MIDDLE SCHOOL READERS’

This chapter will describe information available on the website as well as how to navigate the pages, resources, and topics covered on *Engaging Middle School Readers*. As you read through this chapter you will notice that several of the resources (websites, videos, PDFs, and website pages) are blue in colour. These words along with most of the images contain hyperlinks. If you hover over them and click, the resource should open up in a new tab on your browser.

Prior to breaking down the components and pages found on this website, I will first describe my motivation behind its development.

**Why Engagement in Reading?**

Despite ability, I have observed students get excited about a class novel, dying to know what comes next, requesting to hear just one more chapter. From observations like this one, I believe that most students inherently like to read, and those who appear less interested may simply lack the right motivation. A possible reason for this lack of motivation in text material could be low self-efficacy and/or a minimal understanding of what it really means to read. These factors could deter many students from self-identifying as readers. One possible approach to overcome this challenge of disengagement in reading is for educators to use technology to create a positive, motivating, and collaborative reading atmosphere in their classrooms. Intrinsic reading motivation has been shown to increase achievement and student performance (Logan, Medford, & Hughes, 2011). However, research has also shown that motivation to read in
and out of school decreases as students get older (Kelley & Decker, 2009). The use of technology and social media could possibly help counteract this decrease in motivation, and at the same time increase engagement in the reading process.

**Why a Website?**

Being a new teacher during the 21st century comes with its perks. I was lucky to have been exposed to technology very early in life. According to Hertzog and Klein (2005), “digital natives were born into a world where computers are used as every day tools” (p. 24). I started teaching in 2010. Thanks to Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing, I was comfortable typing large quantities at a fast pace. Thanks to my grade nine social studies teacher, I was well versed in how to search the worldwide web. Finally, a huge thanks to my granny, who when I was in grade six, wanted to invest in something that would help each of her grandchildren in school, I acquired a laptop.

As a teacher, apart from getting to know the students, one of the most important resources I have used to date to prepare and plan appropriate lessons for my students is the internet. Whether it is through other teachers’ blogs, Pinterest, research articles, Google for topic and term clarification or YouTube for videos to engage learners, the internet has proven to be an excellent teaching tool. The accessibility of these resources is what motivated the choice behind using a website to mobilize the information and experience I have gathered over the last eight years.

**Purpose**

The purpose of *Engaging Middle School Readers* is to provide a platform for students and teachers to seek information and find resources that can aid in the improvement and motivation for reading through different classroom practices, utilizing
social media at the forefront. There are a surplus of apps and platforms that classroom teachers can incorporate into the curriculum and aid in reading instruction. However, for teachers not well versed in social media there can be an overwhelming amount of information and the decision as to where to start can be difficult. The information presented on Engaging Middle School Readers attempts to narrow down some of these options and give viewers a few starting ideas (i.e., using Twitter to initiate conversations around a class novel).

This User Guide explains how to navigate through the website, what information can be found on it, and where to find it. You will also learn about how and why components of the site (i.e., the videos) were created.

Outline

The Engaging Middle School Readers website has four main pages. This User Guide will go through each of the pages and the main components of each. To access the website, use the following URL:


Upon arrival, you are prompted with a welcome page and brief introduction (Figure 3) of the website’s goal. Selecting the “Explore!” button brings you to the BLOG page, also the website’s homepage. All pages have the same theme, a common page banner (Figure 4). The image used in the banner is a small snapshot of a bulletin board created by students in my English Language Arts classes in the fall of 2018. The students were to recreate the spine of one of their favorite books. The activity was a way for me to learn a little about each student’s reading interests and gain a better idea of the class’ preferred authors. The full image appears in January 13th’s blog post, Choice Matters.
The four main pages are:

1. **BLOG**
2. **Book Summaries (EBS)**
3. **Teacher**
4. **Student**

To access any given page there are labeled tabs at the top of the page that can be clicked for immediate viewing. Three of the four pages have drop down menus that can be used for easier access as opposed to going into the page completely. As mentioned above, the blog page acts as the homepage.
BLOG (homepage)

There are currently eight blog posts. The writing is informal. An informal writing style is used deliberately as it makes the material relatable to a larger audience. It also creates an atmosphere for conversation. The content is a mixture of research based information and first-hand experience from the classroom. The language used for the blog posts is such that all readers should be able to read and gain a strong understanding of the material presented.

The entries posted on the blog started as a way to share new information being added to the website. As it came time to enter back into the classroom and school system in September 2018, the posts became topics that seemed relevant to the site’s purpose and important for classroom teachers looking to motivate and encourage their middle school readers. The following list includes the first eight posts, the ones written prior to the submission of this document. The intent is that this list will continue to grow over time.

- First Post
- Digital Leadership
- Engaging Adolescents in Reading
- Breakfast Views
- Creating Your Own Classroom Library
• Four Great Reads
• Choice Matters
• The Importance of Modelling

The first post (see Figure 6 for a snapshot) welcomes readers to the site as well as explains the motivation behind the website followed by a little background information on the creator. The second and third posts (Figure 7 and 8) are written to inform viewers of new content added to the website. Digital Leadership and Engaging Adolescents in Reading are both educational book summaries (EBS) that will be further explained in the next section.

Figure 6. This image shows a snapshot of First Post! - Blog Post #1.

Figure 7. This image shows a snapshot of Digital Leadership – Blog Post #2.
Breakfast Views, the fourth post published on July 19th, is a written piece sharing and briefly discussing Harry Dyer’s Incorporating and Accounting for Social Media in Education TedxNorwichED talk on YouTube (video file). Dyer reflects on the effects of online and offline communication in education. He acknowledges the controversy over the use of social media in schools, however encourages the flow of different modes of communicating. He urges that we tear down the wall that has been created, and think of ways in which social media can be used to enhance education. The video is embedded in the post, therefore, easily accessible by scrolling down to the post from the homepage and clicking on “play” (option one) or the title of the post to view the full piece of writing and a larger version of the video (option two).

The fifth blog post offers advice on setting up your own classroom library. Focusing on choosing the right books, organizing your library, advertising your library, and sign out procedures, blog post #5 is based on classroom experience. This post could aid in two of the teaching practices Guthrie (2008) talks about in Engaging Adolescents in Reading (see educational book summaries below), the use of interesting and relevant texts and providing choice.
Four Great Reads, the sixth post is a short description of four books that I would recommend middle school teachers to use or make available in their classroom. These books are expected to generate high interest with students and provide great learning opportunities. Within this post you will be introduced to The Misfits by John Howe, Wonder by R.J. Palacio, Mockingbird by Kathryn Erskine, and the graphic novel, Small Things by Mel Tregonning.
The final two posts cover topics about the importance of student choice and teacher modelling. As you know, it can be a challenge to encourage middle school students to read for enjoyment. They may find pleasure in reading their Facebook feed or next Snap Chat message, however reading a novel, not so much fun. Providing choice in what is read and how some texts are read can alleviate some of this negative attitude towards reading. Giving students some choice and control over their reading and ultimately their learning has been shown to engage adolescents (see Engaging Adolescents in Reading – Book Summary #2).

*The Importance of Modeling*, blog post #8, stems from a blogging project that the majority of my language arts students took part in this year. Students were expected to read five independent book choices over the course of four months and create reading responses that were shared through a blogging platform. For many students, this was the first time they would be posting more than a status update on Facebook or a game comment online. The post emphasizes the importance of scaffolding and modelling what is expected of your students.

*Figure 11.* This image shows a snapshot of *Four Great Reads – Blog Post #6.*
As mentioned previously, the intention is to continue to expand on the blog component of the website. The primary focus is to mobilize knowledge and opinions on ways to get middle school readers motivated. However, reading and writing often come hand in hand and despite the high focus on social media throughout the Teacher and Student pages, other ways to incorporate technology and expand on student writing will be added in blog posts to come (i.e., the use of a Makey Makey kit to create interactive stories and personal experiences with writer’s workshop).

**Educational Book Summaries**

To access the Book Summaries (EBS) page, you must click on the appropriate tab at the top of the homepage. Currently, there are three book summaries; each is accessible
through the EBS page or one of the drop-down menu options when you hover over the top tab (see below).

![Figure 14](image_url)

*Figure 14. Accessing the book summaries. This image illustrates the drop-down menu used to access the different book summaries provided on the website.*

Two of the three summaries: Digital Leadership by Eric Sheninger and Teaching the iStudent by Mark Barnes are in PDF format. Engaging Adolescents in Reading by John Guthrie and colleagues is a video summary. Prior to viewing the full summary, the user is provided with a sneak peek (see Figure 15 below for an example). This allows the user to choose whether or not they would like to further explore the topic. Each sneak peek page includes the title, author, a few paragraphs overviewing the book, a link to the full summary and easy access to purchase the book if the viewer so chooses.
During the school year it can be difficult to find time to read, whether it is for pleasure or professional development. By creating book summaries teachers can get a good overview of the main idea(s) in a span of 10-15 minutes. The book summaries are included on the webpage as a source of information. They are not for selling purposes, however, links are provided in case viewers are so inclined. If you click on the Book Summaries (EBS) tab rather than choosing one of the books from the drop-down menu you will be presented with upcoming book summaries and a place for viewers to provide suggestions for educational books to read.

Figure 15. Book Summary #1 Sneak Peek.
**Digital Leadership** by Eric Sheninger (for full PDF see appendix A) focuses very little on the engagement in reading, however it is a great resource to motivate educators to embrace social media, to use it in their classrooms with students, to communicate with outside partners such as parents and community members, and how to use it for professional development. Dyer’s YouTube video highlighted in *Breakfast Views* (blog post #4) would be an interesting watch while reading Sheninger’s summary and/or book. They have similar opinions.

Mark Barnes’ book, *Teaching the iStudent* (see appendix B), is exactly what it claims to be – a quick guide to using mobile devices and social media in the K-12 classroom. Barnes aims to prove the importance of harnessing the benefits of social media and encourages educators to take the risk it is worth. Beginning with an anecdotal story from a grade eight language arts class, the book touches on content curation, blended learning options, advice on how to introduce new tools with students, a list of
apps and activities, and a glossary of terms that would be helpful for both students and educator. The video *Apps in the Classroom* found on the *Teacher Video Modules* page complements Barnes’ book well. I suggest looking at both resources together. Though short, the video provides a visual for some of the apps discussed in Barnes’ chapter six, “Activities and Tools You Can Use Tomorrow”.

Engaging Adolescents in Reading (2008) by John Guthrie focuses less on technology and more on teaching practices that will enhance the motivation of middle school students struggling to engage in reading. Guthrie and his colleagues suggest that incorporating meaningful goals, a sense of choice and control, an avenue to be social and collaborative, developing self-efficacy, and the use of interesting and relevant texts into your classroom you will reach and engage more of your students in reading (see more on these strategies in Chapter 2). This book summary can be located using two different paths. Users can access the video through the book summary drop down menu or through the appropriate blog post (post #3) on the homepage. To view this book’s summary, users must click on the post title to access the full text and embedded YouTube video.

**Teachers and Students**

The *Teacher* and *Student* pages are broken down into two main components: video modules and online resources. If the user hovers over, for example, the *Teacher* tab they will be presented with the two options (see Figure 17). The *Student* tab works in the same way.
Video modules. At the time of publishing, there were seven video components on the website. Four of these videos were created with teachers in mind. One, an overview of John Guthrie’s (2008) book, Engaging Adolescents in Reading, is available on the Educational Book Summaries page. It was created with the hopes of encouraging more teachers to teach with reading in mind. To teach reading not only in English Language Arts but in subjects such as Science and Social Studies as well, using strategies supported by research. Three videos, Apps in the Classroom, Utilizing Twitter in the Classroom, and HOT Blogging, were all created to support teachers in using available technological devices and social media tools. Often teachers are aware that there are tools that could enhance learning in their classroom, however it takes time to research and learn the best ways to go about utilizing them. The videos are meant to be a quick overview for teachers new to these tools and technologies.

Apps in the classroom. This video briefly describes the uses for the following apps: Edmodo (content sharing, assignment distribution, parent communication, etc.), Blogger (Google’s blogging app), Animoto (video creation), Instagram (photo sharing), Trello (similar to an old fashion student agenda), Twitter (a micro-blogging platform) and Google Apps. Sandwiched between a brief introduction and conclusion, each 10-20
second summary of an app gives you a practical way in which it can be used in the classroom. The video is intended for teachers with limited experience using social media features like those listed above.

**Utilizing Twitter in the classroom.** The second video available on the Teacher Video Modules page provides a more in-depth explanation of how the micro-blogging app mentioned in the first video, Twitter, can be used in the language arts classroom. Strategies such as encouraging students to live tweet about the books they are reading, ask questions, share final assessment products, inform others of new blog posts, and follow academic and personal interest profiles can help teachers engage their students. By viewing the video, users will also see examples of these five strategies.

**HOT blogging.** The final teacher video is an introduction to blogging, examples of popular educational blogging platforms, as well as a quick overview on how higher order thinking (HOT) blogging can be used to increase student understanding and communication on reading materials. *Please note:* Despite being mentioned in the video, after trying Blogger, Google’s blogging app, I can say I would not use it again in the classroom. I chose to use Blogger this year due to the fact it is free and very easy to set up as the students already had a Gmail account assigned to them. As a teacher, it was very time consuming when it came to reading and assessing blog entries. There was no way of knowing whether or not a student had posted or commented unless you visited every one of their URLs. Next year, I will spend the extra money and go with something like KidBlog – the blogs are connected and you can receive notifications when students post.
Interested in Utilizing Apps and Social Media in the Classroom?

Look for a place to start by viewing one of the videos below:

**Figure 18.** Teacher Video #1. This image shows what you see when you visit the Teacher’s Video Modules page.

**Figure 19.** Teacher Video #2.

**Figure 20.** Teacher Video #3.
The final three videos were created for the student audience: Setting up a Twitter Account, Safe Blogging Practices, and Comprehension Strategies. Teachers who are implementing the concept of blogging in their classrooms could use the first two videos as instructional resources, depending on the blogging route they have chosen. Twitter, being a micro-blogging platform, and easy to use in the classroom could be set up by students at home. At home, students can also review safe blogging practices and comprehension strategies. The videos were created as independent teaching modules that students can view at their own pace.

**Setting up a Twitter account.** This video goes through the steps of creating a personal Twitter account. Using my dog Cari as an example, I go through the process of creating an account, minor personalization of the account, and how to find and follow other users. The video can be easily viewed at home by students. That way they have the option of pausing it at any time during the creation process. Keep in mind, the student videos are created with students in mind. Since the goal is to engage with the students about the topic, the delivery is more conversational.

**Safe blogging practices.** When introducing the concept of blogging in the classroom, safety and responsibility are key! The second video available on the student page of this website is one that focuses completely on social media safety. The video focuses on two sides of safety: keeping yourself safe and keeping your friends/peers safe. When discussing personal safety, topics such as a secure password, personal information, and the types of pictures you share are covered. When thinking about friends and/or classmates the video walks through the concepts of naming friends, sharing photos, making comments, and copyright infringement/plagiarism. This is an excellent resource
for any teacher to share or use when looking to introduce blogging. I recommend using it to initiate a discussion on blogging responsibly. For instance, assign the video for students to watch, either in class or at home. In a follow-up conversation ask them for their experiences with social media thus far and ask if they have any tips to add to the video.

*Comprehension strategies.* The final student video is dedicated to the most important component of reading in middle school – reading comprehension. I believe that students need to spend more time thinking and talking about the strategies that they use when they are reading independently (i.e., reading at home, advertisements in public). This video focuses on five strategies: making inferences, making connections, visualizing, summarizing, and asking questions. Each strategy is introduced and then explained further using an example. During the viewing of the video, students are expected to follow along and interact with it by taking part in activities and reflecting on questions posed. If a teacher is going through the different strategies in class one at a time, I recommend assigning only a portion of the video for students to watch. For example, if the teacher is reviewing making connections first, they could have their students watch the introduction from 0:00 to 1:50 and 2:24 to 3:14.

These three videos are accessible through the drop-down Student > Video Modules tab or by clicking on the Student tab at the top of the page and then entering via the “Videos” link on the page itself. The *Teacher* page works in the same way.
Figure 22. This image shows a screen shot of what is seen when you visit the Student Page. By clicking “Videos” you will be taken to a page displaying the three videos.

Set up a Twitter account

Figure 23. Student Video #1.
All videos were personally created using iMovie, an available app on all Apple devices. Like the blog posts, the material presented in the videos is a combination of research and personal experience. The videos could be used with any audience, however keep in mind that they were created for a specific demographic.
**Online resources.** A final component of *Engaging Middle School Readers* is a collection of online resources that can be used by teachers, students, and parents. The resources are found, like the videos, on either the **Teacher** or **Student** page. They can be accessed through the page or by the drop-down menu when you hover over the appropriate tab at the top of your screen. Above you seen an image titled “Student Hub”, you will find a very similar screen when you visit the **Teacher** page. The right-hand box will allow you to access the online resources (see below).

![Online resources](image)

*Figure 26.* This image shows a screen shot of what is seen when you visit the Teacher page. By clicking **Online Resources** you will be taken to a page displaying three online resources.
**Teacher online resources.** The teacher resources include links to Edublog resources, Common Sense Education, and a student blogging challenge hosted by Edublog.

Edublog, a large blogging platform for educators and students, offers a plethora of resources for teachers looking to introduce blogging into their classroom. Users will find free self-paced courses, tips for student blogging, reasons why educators should blog, how to involve parents in the blogging process and much, much more.

By visiting the Common Sense Education link provided, users will find 30 recommended apps and websites for middle school readers. Among these are the following free websites: A Harry Potter Reading Book Club (link found on student online resources page), LitPick, Wattpad, and Smithsonian TweenTribune.

Lastly, a link to Edublog’s student blogging challenge is included in this section. Since 2008, Edublog has hosted a student blogging challenge twice a year, starting in October and March. Each week tasks are presented and students are expected to take part. The site also provides a list of student blogs, which could be neat for your students to check out!

Also available at the bottom of the Teacher Online Resources page are links to the resources (see Figure 27) mentioned in the first teacher video: Apps for the Classroom. Clicking the title of your choice will open up the resource in a new tab in your browser. You will find links/URLS for these four resources in Table 1 along with the first three resources briefly summarized above.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ONLINE RESOURCE</th>
<th>URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edublog Resources</td>
<td><a href="https://www.theedublogger.com/resources/">https://www.theedublogger.com/resources/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Blogging Challenge</td>
<td><a href="http://studentchallenge.edublogs.org/">http://studentchallenge.edublogs.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apps for Education</td>
<td><a href="https://www.educationalappstore.com/app-lists/apps-for-education">https://www.educationalappstore.com/app-lists/apps-for-education</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networks for Students &amp; Teachers</td>
<td><a href="https://www.commonsense.org/education/top-picks/social-networks-for-students-and-teachers">https://www.commonsense.org/education/top-picks/social-networks-for-students-and-teachers</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Best Apps for Teachers and Educators</td>
<td><a href="https://www.digitaltrends.com/mobile/best-apps-for-teachers-education/">https://www.digitaltrends.com/mobile/best-apps-for-teachers-education/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. This table lists the online resources presented on the teacher page along with the corresponding link.

Figure 27. This image shows the links found on the teacher resource page. These resources were mentioned in the teacher video, *Apps for the Classroom*. 
Student online resources. The student resources include links to Wonderopolis, National Geographic for Kids, Harry Potter Reading Club, and Sports Illustrated Kids. You can find corresponding URLs in Table 2 below.

Wonderopolis, also available as an app or widget, is a website where students can keep their curious minds curious! With a wonder a day, the website covers questions from “What is a font?” to “How do metal detectors work?” to “Can you turn peanut butter into a diamond?”. Children can ask their own questions on the website or even through a tweet. Wonderopolis will work to find an answer for them. With over 2300 wonders, there is a large enough variety that any student should find something that interests them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ONLINE RESOURCE</th>
<th>URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wonderopolis</td>
<td><a href="https://www.wonderopolis.org/">https://www.wonderopolis.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Geographic KIDS</td>
<td><a href="https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/">https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry Potter Reading Club</td>
<td><a href="http://hpread.scholastic.com/">http://hpread.scholastic.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Illustrated KIDS</td>
<td><a href="https://www.sikids.com/">https://www.sikids.com/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. This table lists the online resources presented on the Student page along with the corresponding link.

National Geographic for KIDS is another interactive website with plenty to explore: science experiments, space, animals and more. Information is presented in different forms (i.e., videos, articles, photo essays), thus appealing to a variety of students. Harry Potter Reading Club, a website by Scholastic is geared towards students who gravitate to the Harry Potter series. The website might also help engage students who are less motivated to take part in a whole class reading of one of the books.

It is important for children to see writing by other students, like themselves. The last student resource accessible from the website is Sports Illustrated KIDS. The site
compiles a collection of sports articles written by students. Kid reporters are hired, celebrated and showcased each year. The website is presented in a blog style, with new articles written for kids by kids on current sporting events. This is a great resource to pull up whether you are starting to blog with your students or simply looking to engage more students in reading. Surely, you’ve got sports fanatics in your classroom!

Next Steps

This concludes Chapter Three: A Website User Guide. Everything you need to know regarding topics and how to navigate resources on the website can be found above. I look forward to building on Engaging Middle School Readers. Over the next year, stay tuned for fresh blog entries, new educational book summaries and who knows, maybe even another video!

Believe it or not, people of all ages have been blogging for decades. I’ve just finished my first year of implementing the process in a middle school classroom. I look forward to what next year’s blogging adventure has in store. With the information provided in this chapter, along with the website, I invite you to join the exciting world of blogging. Start small, use Twitter to initiate dialogue on a topic in and out of the classroom. Then build on that, introduce HOT blogging while reading a class novel.
CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

Reading is an essential skill to acquire early in a child’s life in order to successfully navigate through the school system, social situations, and later as an adult in the workforce. Unfortunately, many students struggle to read at grade level and often avoid academic opportunities that will help them develop these skills. As mentioned previously, the use of cognitive strategies and intrinsic motivation have been shown to contribute to reading comprehension growth (Taboada et al., 2009). Students appear to be intrinsically motivated to engage in different social media platforms; such as Snapchat, Facebook, and/or Instagram. The use of blogging throughout reading instruction and practice may also capture the attention and engage students of the twenty-first century. Remember, to effectively implement the blogging process, it is vital that educators model and scaffold activities (i.e., how to blog, how to respond to others’ blogs, how to question what you read, how to activate your prior knowledge, etc.) in order to allow students to feel safe and embrace this collaborative reading opportunity.

Future Intentions

To ensure the information gathered throughout this research project is shared with the intended audience the goal is to begin making the videos more accessible. By changing video settings, YouTube and Google users will be able to search key words and the videos should be suggested as opposed to needing a specific URL. Through Twitter, past blog posts and website resources will be shared throughout the months of September and October. The purpose of sharing resources throughout the fall will be to encourage educators to think about the use of social media in their own classrooms during the
current school year. Many teachers are looking for new ways to engage their students, especially in September!

**One Final Thought**

I always encourage my student writers to leave their readers with a lasting thought. While listening to a TEDx Talk by Kayla Delzer, something she said really stuck with me:

“Furthermore, as educators it is now our job to be champions of digital citizenship. 93% of employers now use social media in some way to either recruit or hire employees. That means that if our students leave us with a neutral or a negative digital footprint they have just a 7% chance of getting a job. Seven percent.” (TED, 2015)

It is our job to prepare the leaders of the future to be successful in a forever changing society. Let us start by ensuring they can decode, comprehend, and critically respond to the written environments, both on and offline.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Digital Leadership Book Summary

Eric Sheninger

Digital Leadership
Changing Paradigms for Changing Times

“[The driving question we should be asking is] how we should use the technology that is available to us to improve what we do instead of why we should use it to improve what we do.”

Book Summary

Sheninger combines his own success story at New Milford High School with those of others to present, what he calls, the seven pillars of digital leadership. Digital leadership is a transformational leadership in which educators begin integrating technology into the traditional ways of doing things. Social media, Twitter, blogging and Facebook for example, are at the forefront of digital leadership. With the use of social media, public relations increase, establishing a brand is easier, globally connecting with like-minded educators for professional development becomes an option, school and leaders become transparent, and creating learning spaces/environments where your students can become engaged and connected using devices they use in their everyday lives is achievable.

Throughout the book, you’ll find steps to create social media profiles. In addition, Sheninger has included several appendixes to help make becoming a digital leader a little easier. He includes samples of letters to parents and examples of ways to incorporate technology and develop essential literacies in and out of the classroom.

Inside the Issue

- About the Author
- Potential Roadblocks
- The Seven Pillars
- A Successful BYOD Initiative
- Reflective Questions
- Critical Summary

More inside!
Time for Change

As Sheninger sees it, “[the system] produces students who lack creativity, are fearful of failure, work extremely hard to follow direction . . . and are leaving schools with obsolete skills in a postindustrial society”.

It’s time for change. Sheninger references Fullan’s (2008) six secrets to change:

1. Love your employees
2. Connect peers with purpose
3. Capacity building prevails
4. Learning is the work
5. Transparency rules
6. Systems learn

These six secrets to change are evident throughout Sheninger’s writing and digital leadership approach. As with any big change, you must be ready for …

Potential Roadblocks like

1. This is too hard.
2. I don’t have the time for this.
3. Lack of collaboration.
5. Hierarchy in schools.
6. No support.
7. Fear of change.
8. The naysayers and antagonists.
9. Poor professional development.
10. Frivolous purchases.

Roadblocks as such, must be acknowledged throughout the change process and addressed appropriately!

About the Author

Eric Sheninger is an award-winning principal who led instrumental, sustainable change at New Milford High School in Bergen County, New Jersey.

He has two Bachelor of Science degrees and a master of education in educational administration.

Eric firmly believes that “effective communication, listening, support, shared decision making, and the integration of technology are essential elements for the transformation of school cultures”.

He has written/co-written several books (see last page for list) and won many awards; some of which include: 2012 PDK Emergent Leader Award and Google Certified Teacher. Eric is a blogger for the Huffington Post and was named to the National Schools Boards Association “20 to Watch” list in 2010 for technology leadership. For more information, follow him on twitter @E_Sheninger or check out his website ericsheninger.com.

FINALLY,
The Seven Pillars of Leadership

1. Communication
2. Public Relations
3. Branding
4. Student engagement/learning
5. Professional growth/development
6. Re-envisioning learning spaces and environments
7. Opportunity

READ ON TO EXPLORE THESE PILLARS!
Communication

“For school leaders, communication and community relations have been identified as one of the nine most important skills to master”
- Hoyle, English, & Steffy, 1998

Despite the negative shadow that is often cast on social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter there is a growing need for the 21st century school admin to adapt its communication methods to include some of these. There is no doubt that communication with parents/community is essential in building a positive school culture. “Digital leadership demands that we reach our stakeholders through the use of tools and special spaces that they frequent, as they have become accustomed to and dependent upon 24/7 access to information.” (Ch. 5) Be prepared, communication should be a two-way street. Encourage parents to comment, like and share posts.

Four Key Principles for Communicating Effectively with Parents


Strategies to help:
1. Make your professional email and Twitter accounts available.
2. Create your own website and include contact information, your availability to meet with or speak to parents, extra help hours, student assignments, press, etc.
3. Hold training workshops for parents.
4. Call home on both positive and negative issues.
5. Share as many student and teacher accomplishments and success stories as possible.
6. Set up a separate phone number for parents using GoogleVoice.
7. Make resources readily available for parents using a social bookmarking service such as Delicious or Diigo.
8. Always return parent phone calls and emails in a timely fashion!
9. Invite parents into your classrooms and schools.
10. Develop a school Facebook page to advertise events and provide up-to-date school information.
11. Institute a positive referral policy and make parents aware when their child is recognized.
12. Start a blog; let parents know about it, and encourage them to comment on your posts.
13. Look for other ways to reach stakeholders.

Public Relations

“If we do not tell our story, someone else will.” (Ch.6)

Sheninger stresses the importance for leaders to become “Chief Storytellers.” Often the negativity around schools comes to light rather than the “many great things happening within and beyond the walls”.

Sheninger states in chapter six: “digital leadership is about building the capacity to create a solid foundation for positive public relations using social media that complements communication efforts”.

Before the good stories came from only those that could afford printing and circulating the information. Now, despite how big or small, near or far you are, free social media tools, like Twitter, allow everyone and anyone to share their story, gain positive support and create networks.

Important to Note

- Regardless of what forms of communication you choose, your core beliefs should not change and face-to-face communications should be priority!
- “Digital leadership is about transforming schools into exciting and stimulating institutions of learning where students are actively involved in applying and mastering concepts both in traditional ways and through the use of educational technology”

Don’t replace face-to-face!
**Essential Skills**
- creativity
- collaboration
- communication
- critical thinking and problem solving
- entrepreneurship
- global awareness
- technological proficiency
- digital media literacy
- **Digital Responsibility, Citizenship, and Footprints**

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**Student Engagement & Learning**

"Our students want to be creative, collaborative, utilize technology for learning, connect with their peers in other countries, understand the messages that media convey, and solve real-world problems." (Ch. 9)

Here are few of many activities that could be used:

1. Make a video of a field trip, post it
2. Have students view a free podcast
3. Create a class blog
4. Use cellphones for polling devices
5. Bring in a guest speaker via Skype
6. Have students collaborate using Google docs
7. Use Twitter and hashtags in the classroom

In order to capture our students and improve their learning school must resemble real life. Technology is a major part of their outside life, it’s time to effectively bring it in.

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**Branding**

By combining communication and public relations educational leaders can build a (professional and school) brand. In the hope of a “greater sense of pride in the leaders’ work and/or school function”, digital leadership focuses on establishing a positive brand presence. A positive brand should benefit three educational outcomes:

1. **School Culture**
2. **Student Achievement**
3. **School funding/resourcing**

Sheninger includes the following table in chapter 7. Use it to reflect further on the idea of YOUR brand.

### Brand-ed Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Build</th>
<th>Vision</th>
<th>Personality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where do I stand as an educator?</td>
<td>How I use my brand to benefit</td>
<td>What’s my unique selling proposition (USP)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My values</td>
<td>• School culture</td>
<td>• One word that illustrates my Brand-ed view for my community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My unique perspective</td>
<td>• Student achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Funding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Rebranding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Brand-ed Pillars of Action (ACE—Associate, Create, Engage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associate</th>
<th>Create</th>
<th>Engage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Become relational</td>
<td>• See yourself as a product</td>
<td>• Be transparent to your comfort level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Join diverse communities</td>
<td>• Market your value across community</td>
<td>• Join daily conversations online and in real time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support groups</td>
<td>• Develop real-time and online interests</td>
<td>• Be a connector of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Balance real-time with online connections</td>
<td>• Create and share content</td>
<td>• Give before you get</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Choose causes that reflect your brand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Key Components of a Successful Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Initiative:**

- It’s a tool for learning
- Attach learning outcomes
- Be aware of who has and who does not have their own device
- Have support structures in place
- Provide professional development to teachers
- Deal with unacceptable use (have a code)
- Promote use of student-owned devices outside of class for academic learning

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*Source: Copyright © Trish Rubin (2013, March). Adapted with permission. www.trishrubin.com*
Re-envisioning Learning Spaces and Environments

If you were to walk into a lot of high school classrooms now, you'd still see rows of desks, the only difference from years ago, is that they're probably facing a whiteboard rather than a chalkboard. A shift in philosophy and practice requires a shift in learning environments also.

- Establishing a better vision
- Strengthening and opening up the wireless network
- A choice to teach and learn a different way
- A new building construct
- Creating a real-world space
- Strategic partnerships

It's not enough to just create a bright new space and obtain the latest gadgets and think you have everything covered. The shift in the way teachers and students teach and learn is crucial!

Opportunity

"Bold leadership is needed to continue to move schools forward while increasing engagement, enhancing learning and improving student achievement."

In times of low budgets and a high level of uncertainty, leaders must always be looking and jumping on opportunities. They must build their brand, keep on top of public relations and create partnerships with the outside community. Sheninger mentions strategic partnerships, university, experiential learning, corporate/community, and mental health partnerships.

"These opportunities will build a greater sense of community pride in the innovative work being done in education" (Ch.11)
Discussion Questions

- Are schools preparing students for success in a global society?
- Where do you see yourself in respect to digital leadership?
- As a digital leader, how do you find the balance between work and personal/family time?
- There is definite degree of risk associated with using social media as a platform for growth, how do you feel about the idea?

Critical Evaluation

Eric Sheninger’s *Digital Leadership* is a fantastic read, not just for educational administrators but also for any teacher interested in incorporating technology into their classroom and teaching techniques. I’ve used tools such as Twitter, for professional development and engaging students in the classroom but I never thought to use hash tags in the classroom; such a great idea to get students collaborating and engaged outside of the classroom.

An informative, easy to read text. However, as engaging as it was with the great success stories, I couldn’t help but find myself thinking as I read, when is too much? When do you lay the devices down and spend time with family? I was glad to see Sheninger address the issue in the last chapter when he said:

“The job of the digital leader is not just to model the art of being connected; it’s also to model the art of human conversation and unplugging the devices.”

I respect the fact that he thought about the what-ifs, covered the bases that people usually question in regards to technology. Sheninger provides a lot of steps for those who are new or unsure of the tools available.

*Key to this transformation is the integration of authentic learning experiences and technology that engage students of all levels and make learning meaningful.*

*Digital Leadership* is an excellent resource for principals and teachers alike, to become more connected, effective, life long learners in today’s ever changing society.

In chapter 8 Sheninger mentions a professional growth period (PGP) that he implemented in his school, though I did not cover it in this summary, I think it would be an interesting piece to explore. It certainly initiates a high degree of trust in his teachers and addresses in part my concern of work/personal life balance.

I don’t see how you could lose, communication, public relations, branding, student learning, professional growth, learning environments, and opportunity are all key in a sustainable educational development. Don’t miss out on all the great stories and ideas within, I suggest if it calls to you at all, read the full book!

**Like what you read? Check out more of Eric Shenenger!**
Appendix B: Teaching the iStudent Book Summary

Mark Barnes's book, Teaching the iStudent, is exactly what it claims to be - a quick guide to using mobile devices and social media in the K-12 classroom. Barnes aims to prove the importance of harnessing the benefits of social media and encourages educators to take the risk it’s worth. Beginning with an anecdotal story from a grade 8 language arts class, the book touches on content curation, blended learning options, advice on how to introduce new tools with students, a list of apps and activities and a glossary of terms that will be helpful to an iStudent but also you, their educator. Barnes includes several useful tidbits for teachers, my favourite being the alternative search options for photos that students may need during the creation of a piece of work. Provided below is a brief summary and if it peaks your interest, check out the whole book.

What's Inside

Chapter 1 - Understanding the Age of "i"
Chapter 2 - Content Curation in the 21st Century
Chapter 3 - Why You Can't Afford to Ignore Social Media
Chapter 4 - How Mobile Learning Changes Everything
Chapter 5 - Blending the Learning
Chapter 6 - Activities and Tools You Can Use Tomorrow
Chapter 7 - The Language of "i"

What is an iStudent?

"The iStudent, beginning in third grade, walks into school with some kind of device, whether it's an iPod or other music player, a smartphone, an eReader or, in rare cases, just some type of headphones. (chapter 1)"

3 Causes That Lead to Disconnect Between Technology & Learning

1. A school’s or district’s Acceptable Use Policy (AUP)
2. Educators’ inexperience with using the technology for teaching & learning
3. Students’ misunderstanding of how to appropriately use the technology at their fingertips for learning
Content Curation

"Content curation is how people in today's society create, manage, and share information on both a personal and professional level."
- Mark Barnes, Chapter 6

One of the most daunting tasks, for even I - a university Master's student - is to synthesis the articles and resources that I read to create a true reflection to share. As a teacher, it can be frustrating to observe your students learning from material on the web but then rather than rewording new information they copy and paste it to assignments. They spend time reading and learning but might have very little skills in rewording. Navigating and sifting through the vast amount of information provided on the web requires skillful literacy strategies (i.e., digital literacy skills, information literacy skills).

A part of content curation is the organization, filtering and the choosing of what is appropriate, trustworthy and worth sharing (chapter 6). This takes modelling and constant conversation with students. They may seem tech-savvy when they walk into your classroom, they may be able to download an app and navigate the web, but finding and using information online to best suit their learning needs has been shown to need explicit instruction and lots of practice (chapter 6).

It is also crucial for students to learn how to respond to opposing thoughts and opinions. As well as how to deal with and feel about negative comments directed at them. The story of girls like Hannah Smith (chapter 6) and Amanda Todd demonstrate how content curation can be an awful thing, however, “educators must emphasize the incredible power of appropriate curation”, rather than teaching only of the dangers (chapter 6).

“We are obligated to teach our students how the information they curate may ultimately define them and may impact innumerable people in their society” (chapter 6).

Why You Can't Afford to Ignore Social Media

- Students MUST understand how powerful social media is, they must recognize the consequences (both positive and negative) of what they create, maintain, and share.
- Students are motivated by the force of social media, a high percentage of students utilize it frequently.
- The benefits of digital collaboration cannot begin, unless we allow it!

Blending the Learning

"At the risk of appearing brash, my first suggestion is to eliminate the workbook pages entirely."

- Chapter Five

Rotation Model

The students (in groups) take turns rotating to the computer station. The teacher often provides instruction to one group, while the others are working on a technology-driven activity.

Flex Model

With several devices available, students spend a majority of their time on technology-driven activities, while teachers take on more of a coaching role, focusing on individualized/small group instruction.

Lab Model

When students visit the computer lab several times a week to work on a particular project, i.e., an online learning module, textbook supplement program or technology-driven assignment.

Blended learning is a combination of traditional instruction and the use of technology and social media, emphasizing interaction and collaboration between students, the teacher and others across the web.
Activities and Tools

**Buffer** - an app that allows you to share content across several social networks with a single click.

**Kidblog** - a safe blogging site for students. Could be used for exit cards or a simple journaling platform. *Although noted as free in the book, there is now a membership fee.*

**Feedly** - another app for gathering, maintaining, and sharing information. Students can add sites that interest them, along with peer blogs. It’s like their own personal library.

**Animoto** - an online video maker. Available as an app too, students can create and share short videos. Animoto provides photos, graphics and even music that students can use. No need for a camera!

**Trello** - an app that acts like the old fashion school agenda! Suitable for grades three and up, by creating to do lists, Trello helps with organization & planning.

**Twitter** - a social media site that can allow for all students to converse online simultaneously.

“…”You may want a different tool for a similar task, or you may want the same tool for a different task; the key is to consider the learning outcome that you want your students to master.” - Mark Barnes (Chapter 6)

**The Language of “I”**

**Apps** - web-based or downloadable systems that direct a computer to provide various information and interactive tools to perform useful tasks that can be employed for multiple functions.

**AUP** - Acceptable Use Policy. A document that is usually signed by students and parents that explains what is and is not acceptable when using computers, devices, and the Internet.

**Blog** - a web-based journal or diary

**Browser** - sites that help you navigate the Internet, ie. Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, and Safari.

**BYOT/BYOD** - Bring Your Own Technology/Device, students are encouraged to bring their own mobile devices to school.

**Cloud computing** - Google Drive, Drop box, or iCloud - cloud-based platforms that store files.

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**About the Author**

Mark Barnes
@markbarnes19
A veteran classroom teacher with over 20 years of experience, Mark is now an international presenter, the author of six books, the publisher of Brilliant or Insane: Education on the Edge, founder and CEO of Founder Times 10 Publications and more. For a further list of experience, check out the following link: www.brilliant-insane.com/work-mark-barnes. For titles and links to his books, see page 4.
EdTech - Education Technology, often used as a hashtag to share education technology websites and tools on Twitter.

Embed/embed code - a code that can be copied and pasted on another website, allowing material to appear the same in both locations.

Flipped Classroom - an approach to instruction where students review videos at home on new concepts, thus class time is utilized for exploration, discussion, and practice.

Hashtag - any word or phrase with a pound or number sign in front of it

HTTP/HTTPS - What they stand for is not overly important, however students should know that HTTPS means a site is secure. Knowing this aids in responsible Internet use.

ISTE - an organization that offers a variety of resources

Link - a noun and a verb. It could be a link you click to open a new site or an action (verb) in which you link something to something else, such as a page to your blog.

Navigation - moving from one place to another within a website, blog or other place on the Internet.

NETS - National Education Technology Standards - designed to help educators set standards of excellence when instructing with technology.

PLN - Personal Learning Network/Professional Learning Network. A network of people (locally, regionally, and globally) that have conversations and share resources through multiple social media platforms.

URL - Uniform Resource Locator. Who knew? Not important, but might be fun to share with students.

Wiki - a website host that allows multiple users to collaborate on a single page.

**Critical Evaluation**

Mark Barnes does a great job at pulling together some of the important things you should know as you embark on the journey of teaching in a 21st century classroom. He also suggests several apps and websites, many of which I have not used or even heard of. The video making site, Animoto, and Trello (the organization app) are the first two I’d like to try with my students. Students love to make videos, having an online resource/app that is accessible at home and school would be great. As for Trello, we’ve all seen students struggle to remember things, well except for their device...if an app that will be on them all the time can help with organization, I’m willing to try it! The downfall with resources (i.e., Barnes’ book) that share available apps and websites, is that it’s only relevant if the tools and links provided are still accessible. Teaching the iStudent was only written four years ago, however two of the resources, Celly and Today’s Meet, mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter 6 are no longer available. It’s difficult to read a piece of work, knowing early on that all resources mentioned may not be usable. Unfortunately, that is the nature of online tools and resources. It would be impractical to expect authors to continually update their work. My second and final critique is one of research and reliability.

There are some researchers that would caution you in making the assumption that all adolescents are drawn to and motivated by digital technology. According to Barnes, “the iStudent is always ready to jump on a computer, tablet or mobile device; it’s in his or her nature” (chapter 4). Although I’m inclined to agree, making statements as such may deter readers with different opinions from taking the book seriously. Overall, a worthwhile read with several hidden gems along the way.