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Penrod, Diane. Using Blogs to Enhance Literacy: The Next Powerful Step in 21st-Century Learning.

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Penrod, Diane. *Using Blogs to Enhance Literacy: The Next Powerful Step in 21st-Century Learning*. Lanham, MD: Rowman, 2007. ISBN: 1578865662.

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With the growth of technology, anyone can have his or her own blog or can create one in a short amount of time. In *Using Blogs to Enhance Literacy: The Next Powerful Step in 21st-Century Learning*, Diane Penrod extends the definition of blogging beyond simply an entertaining pastime to the area of learning literacy. Considering the rapid growth in the use of blogs, Penrod argues that people should rethink blogs' powerful influence on communication, teaching, and learning. In her book, Penrod provides readers with information on how to use blogs to improve literacy and how to address issues raised among bloggers. The book includes ten chapters: "Why Blog?"; "Blogging and New Literacies"; "Blogs as a New Writing Genre"; "Gender and Blogging"; "Ethnicity and Blogging"; "Blogs and Bullying"; "Encouraging Safe Blogging Practices"; "Integrating Multiple Intelligences and Blogging"; "Creating Classroom Ethics for Blogging"; and "Blogging Matters."

To begin, Penrod argues that blogs are popular because bloggers can easily publish their writing; mix pleasure with information; vary their writing styles; generate different personas; and empower those who are marginalized by class or society. According to Penrod, a blogger's goal is to gain recognition for his or her writing. With blogs, she argues, it is less risky for writers to "publish" their work than in books or journals, which are traditionally critiqued and have higher standards. In the blogging world, students are not judged as good or bad writers by teachers or scorers, and, therefore, have fun with their writing because they can receive feedback immediately and do not fear failure. With blogs, students can demonstrate to real audiences what they have learned about grammar and lexicon to real audiences. In these cases, students still receive "a certain stylistic, rhetorical, or mechanical convention" (12). Blogs also allow students to experience a sense of belonging in an online community because the space provides them with a place in which to express who they are and what they are thinking.

In *Making Literacy Real: Theories and Practices for Learning and Teaching*, Joanne Larson and Jackie Marsh state that "literacy is a critical social practice constructed in everyday interaction" and literacy also is a "more complex social practice than mandated curricula and assessments address" (3). Similarly, Penrod argues that blogging styles are a type of new literacy that includes texts, images, sounds, and graphics. In order to receive feedback, bloggers must design pages that take into consideration the rhetorical implications that each of these literacies will have on the desired audience(s). The act of

learning to blog is socially, culturally, emotionally, and politically situated and requires that bloggers make meaningful information, while developing the critical thinking, writing fluency, and social skills needed to communicate with people. Using blogging in classrooms seems like a beneficial hands-on activity in a co-constructed community and offers students who are socially isolated the opportunity to articulate their agency and voice. Blogging can also bridge gaps between students from different cultural, social, economical, or historical backgrounds. Penrod points out that teachers or parents might assume that blogging is a recreational form of entertainment but that it can also be used as an effective medium to connect multiple literacies. For example, bloggers must learn to respect their audience(s) by using appropriate vocabulary, syntax, register, and style. *Using Blogs to Enhance Literacy* demonstrates how students can reach audiences via the World Wide Web. Finally, Penrod also discusses the problem of plagiarism and confidentiality, with regard to teenagers' blogs.

Using Blogs to Enhance Literacy also addresses the relationship among gender, identity, and bullying. Penrod provides an overview of men's and women's reading and writing styles, finding that the differences can help teachers and parents understand what they are trying to identify themselves. Penrod acknowledges that blogging encourages women to read and write, particularly those who are from a society or culture that does not encourage women to pursue a higher education. In the process of creating a blog, students also develop their identities). Penrod sees that blogs can be used for learning and can help students to achieve their goals of cooperative learning. Beyond gender differences and liberating oneself from social and cultural restraints, Penrod addresses the issue of blogs and bullying. She uses the content of Ryan Halligan's, Gyyslain Raza's, and William Freund's blogs to illustrate how students can be bullied at school. *Using Blogs to Enhance Literacy* also addresses the issue of the safety of blogging. Penrod discusses how to develop students' writing skills, use appropriate language for learning, and portray themselves in blogs. She argues that censorship is not the best way to prevent students from misbehaving in their blogs; rather, parents and teachers should motivate students to learn about being responsible bloggers. In the chapter, "Creating Classroom Ethics for Blogging," Penrod outlines a code of ethics that teaches bloggers how to use respectful language; how to protect personal information without revealing themselves in public; and how to judge in a positive way and with integrity.

Using Blogs to Enhance Literacy is the most up-to-date discussion of blogs and learning. The book points out the powerful, pervasive use of blogging and potential benefits it has for learning. In addition, it provides examples to support how blogging helps students, teenagers, and minority groups establish their identity(ies); have their voice heard; and have access to online community groups. The book also considers the potential problems of blogs and offers guidelines for readers. The audience of this book may include parents, educators, students and all bloggers.