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ONLINE READING RESPONSE USING EDMODO™

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Abstract: This study describes how educators can use the online social network of Edmodo in a classroom to create and respond to reading response journals. A fourth grade class drafted their reading responses in a Word Document then copied and pasted their responses onto the Edmodo discussion board. Teacher candidates at a university responded back to the students using a weekly dialogue journal format. The teacher candidates and collaborating teacher were asked what ideas were most important when considering implementing an online reading response format. The recommendations included; creating anchor charts on literacy concepts for students to refer to when writing, have a consistent timeline for when students should post, and research the books they are reading so that the teacher can respond thoughtfully. An additional benefit to using an online social network for reading response also include the potential for students to connect globally with students from other parts of the world.

Upper grade elementary teachers often implement a reader response dialogue journal format during reading workshop. Utilizing a reading workshop approach with response journals helps scaffold the growth of students as they grow to achieve independence in reading and writing. (Oszakiewski & Spelman, 2011). In most cases, the teacher presents the student with a reading response notebook where the students are directed to write a letter to the teacher regarding the book they are reading. Problems that teachers encounter with implementing hard-bound reading response journals include; the amount of time needed to personally respond to each student, the trouble with having to physically transport the journals to grade, and the lack of motivation to get students to write quality responses (Lee, 2008; McIntosh, 2009).

A possible solution to the problems was to use an online reading response method for reading workshop. Edmodo™ was the social network selected for the study because it is a free, secure, online social environment that over four million teachers and students are connected to globally (www.edmodo.com).

The purpose of this project was to explore the benefits and challenges of using an online reading response format with elementary students. During the 2011-2012 school year, a fourth grade class wrote online reading response posts to teacher candidates at a local university who responded back to weekly posts. Edmodo™ was familiar to most teacher candidates in the study because it was similar in design to Facebook™. The fourth grade students were motivated because although they were too young to have a Facebook™ account, it did look like Facebook™ to them, and they were excited to converse with the university teacher candidates.

An Introduction Using Skype

Before the study began, the fourth grade teacher, Ms. Hodges, suggested that the teacher candidates participate in a Skype conversation with her students in order to introduce themselves. Skype was a great way to show the students who they were writing to, and it also allowed both sets of students to ask questions to each other. The teacher candidates asked Ms. Hodges and her class what types of genres and books they were reading. They also were curious about the types of reading levels and reading programs they used. The fourth grade students also asked what genres and books the college students read. They asked the teacher candidates why they wanted to become elementary teachers and were curious about college. The students told the teacher candidates about their aspirations and dreams to attend college one day.

Setting up Responses on Edmodo™

Edmodo™ has a great feature in which a course instructor can create a group that students can join. To simplify the setup and ease of finding each post, Ms. Hodges and the

university course instructor divided the students up into three main groups. Each group had five to six fourth grade students in it. Each one of those students were paired with two teacher candidates.

The teacher candidate pairs were instructed to write an opening letter to their elementary student. They addressed each letter, Dear Elementary Student 1, Dear Elementary Student 2, and so forth. Ms. Hodges had already given each of her sixteen students numbers (from one to sixteen) so it worked out perfectly. The elementary student would find the letter addressed to their number and write back.

Using Standards to Guide Responses

The university curriculum involves instructing the teacher candidates about utilizing the standards to drive instruction. Therefore, the teacher candidates read through the fourth grade language arts standards and suggested five key points that should be included in each response back to the elementary students. The teacher candidates felt that each response should have the following criteria:

1. submitted in a timely manner (once a week)
2. include a text-to-text, text-to-self, or text to world connection
3. ask two comprehension questions (inferring, main idea, visualizing, questioning, etc.)
4. suggest a new book or discuss what you are reading
5. model correct spelling and grammar

Connections to these criteria can be made to the common core standards under the fourth grade, reading literature standards, informational text, and writing standards (www.corestandards.org).

Sample Reading Response Posts

The following is a first post written to a fourth grade student at the start of the project. To respond, the students typed up a draft letter in Microsoft Word, which was then copied and pasted into Edmodo™ with the assistance of Ms. Hodges. Following the teacher candidate's post is the response from the fourth grade student.

Dear Fourth Grader Number 14,
Hello, my name is Ms. Amy and I am your reading response pen pal. I am excited to talk to you about reading! I read a lot because I am in college learning to become a teacher. I loved reading the Box Car Children series when I was your age. Do you have a favorite book or series of books? What are your hobbies or interests? Write back soon!
Your friend,
Ms. Amy

Dear Ms. Amy,
I wander were that book that you were talking about is. I wander if it is in the library. I bet it is very old. I like old series like Pippi Longstocking. We read the first one. We got to watch the movie at school. But first we read the book. I bet we are going to do it plenty of times at school this year. I hope you get better and better with your reading . Make sure to write me back.
Your pin pal, #14

At first the reading response posts were very general in nature. Both the fourth grade students and the teacher candidates still needed to get to know his/her reading likes and dislikes.

Student 14's first response had some spelling/grammar errors that Ms. Hodges did not correct. Ms. Hodges chose not to go through the editing process with her students because she wanted the teacher candidates to see what actual fourth grade writing looked

like. Towards the middle to the end of the eight weeks, the students and teacher candidates were able to focus more on literacy skills and strategies in their posts. The following post was from the same teacher candidate and student during week six of the project.

Dear Student 14,
I hope you had a great Thanksgiving! I ate lots of food, and I am still full. Did you travel anywhere? I went to visit my family. Big Nate sounds like a good book. Seven detention slips is a lot! I've never heard of anyone ever getting that many. I read a book over break called Ghosts Don't Eat Potato Chips. It was a mystery book but it was funny, too. I think it is really cool that you got the new Diary of a Wimpy Kid book. Have you started reading a new book? How do you decide what books you want to read?
Your pen pal, Ms. Amy

Dear Ms. Amy
I realy did have a great Thanksgiving. I ate a lot of food to. I have allready finished the knew Dairy of a Wimpy Kid book. There was this funny part that I liked. It was when it was snowing so badly in there naborhood that Gregory's mail box was flooded. Then the snow melted on and made a flood in there basement. Gregory was the first one find out. And his big brother, Rodrick was still sleep and his room was in the basement. They had to wake him up. Then they got something to get the water up. It was cold inside because they didn't know Gregory's little brother cut the power off. But the knew book that im reading is Stink. It's this boy that loved planets. Also I didn't have to travle no where. But I did go to one of my friends house. He's in my class. But he's not in my naborhood. I might even ask my teacher if she knows about that book that you were talking about. I saw this book

that was like five inches tall. It's called the son of Neptune. And my other freind is reading it. Hes all most finish. It's way bigger than dairy of a wimpy kid. Can you beleive a forth grader is reading a book that big? Merry Christmas.
Your pen pal, #14

After six weeks of writing, it was amazing to see the content of the responses expand and connect to the texts the fourth graders were reading. The teacher candidates started to share recommendations for books and asked more questions about the books the students were reading. In the above example, student 14 elaborated on his favorite part of the book he was reading. This student also tried to answer all of Ms. Amy's questions and elaborated on the new book he was reading. Ideas to Consider when Getting an Online Reading Response Format Started

When given a post-survey regarding the Edmodo™ project, Ms. Hodges and the teacher candidates offered advice for teachers who try to implement online reading responses. One key piece of advice was that students need to understand the task and stay on topic in their responses. Although students were excited to know they were writing to a college student, sometimes they wanted to write about things beyond the books they were reading.

Having anchor posters that demonstrate the topics and comprehension skills that should be included in their writing was another tip for teachers. Many teacher candidates found resources and sample anchor charts on Pinterest (www.pinterest.com). A rubric created by the class would also be helpful for the students. As far as the editing and revising skills go, the teacher candidates felt that students could peer edit their responses before "publishing" the final version online.

Teacher candidates also felt it was important for them to read the same books that the students were reading in order for them to

ask additional, specific, higher-level thinking questions. Although it would be difficult for one classroom teacher to try and read all the books the students were reading, having a set of general extension questions would help. Can you make a text-to-self connection, what did you find funny about the main character, and would you read another book by this author, are general extension questions that were suggested. Candidates also found it helpful to search for the book's description online, and also found the amazon.com book previews very useful.

Conclusion

Our younger generation of students are digital natives who are exploring new literacies such as blogs, wikis, and social networking sites (Bittman, Rutherford, Brown & Unsworth, 2011). The online dialogue journal responses provided teacher candidates the opportunity to interact and reply to actual fourth grade reading and writing. The fourth grade students were excited and engaged in writing the dialogue letters, knowing that they were being read by college students.

Teacher candidates suggested that Edmodo™ could be used for additional learning as well. For example, a teacher could set up five groups named after the five main characters in a book. Each student would then write letters to the teacher from their given character's point of view. Literature circle groups can also be set up online for students to read and respond to. Edmodo™ and other forms of new literacies have opened up new possibilities for literacy learning and communicating in 21st century classroom.

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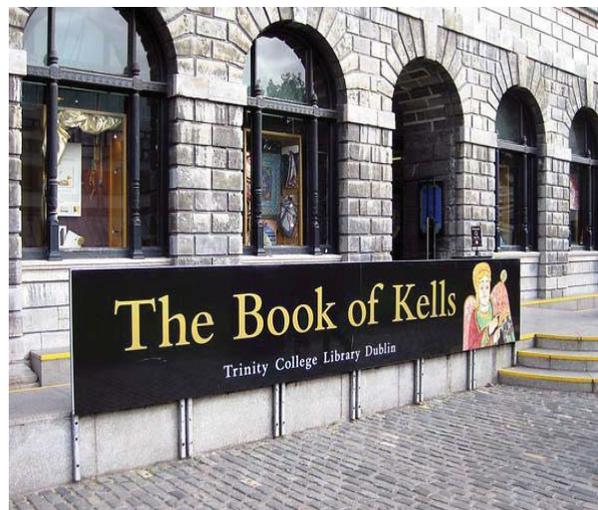
Technology:
Seeing an Original

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"A books, is a book, is a book," is an oft-quoted phrase, but sometimes a book can be more than just the contents of the book. I often talk to others about how I want the content of the book, and often I don't care if it is paper, digital ink, LCD, or mp3.What I usually want is just the story. But, I know that there are differences between the versions that someone may have. A first edition is different (be it digital or paper), and many people travel thousands of miles just to see specific books. There can be something about being in the presence of a book that can evoke feelings. I know that when I was a teacher of science, my students thought me strange because of some of the places that I would go, such as when in Russia I went to find Mendeleev's lab where the first modern periodic chart was created.

For any lover of books, a trip to Ireland would mean that when in Dublin you would have to go to the Trinity College to see the *Book of Kells* (even though you would only get to actually see the pages of the two volumes that they were currently turned to-and only those pages). While it is great that someone can go and visit the *Book of Kells,* it is a big trip for most and an impossible trip for others. Then, too, while you do get to see the *Book of Kells,* there are many other books that only certified and permitted researchers will ever get to see.

Figure 1: Entry to the *Book of Kells* at Trinity College in Ireland.

So here is where technology can lend a hand. While viewing a book online may not be quite as good as actually going and touching a book, it can still add quite a bit to the book experience. A number of resources have been working to digitize their collections and then make them available online, allowing online visitors the opportunity to see books that would otherwise never be available to them. And, while I'm usually all about the content, there can still be much to learn when looking at an original work or how a book was before created.

So even though I could go to Dublin to see a few pages of the *Book of Kells*, I can also go online and look through the entire book online from Trinity Colleges Virtual Library (http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/). This way I would be able to see all the wondrous art within - a wonderful addition to any classroom studying the Bible for example. When reading the epic poem of *Beowulf* (translation of course), would it not be nice to also show the students the work as it was written in Old English around the year 1000? The British Library's Virtual Book collection (http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/virtualbooks/index.html) allows viewers to experience the wonder and fragility of that text - a different kind of book study as you look at books through time.
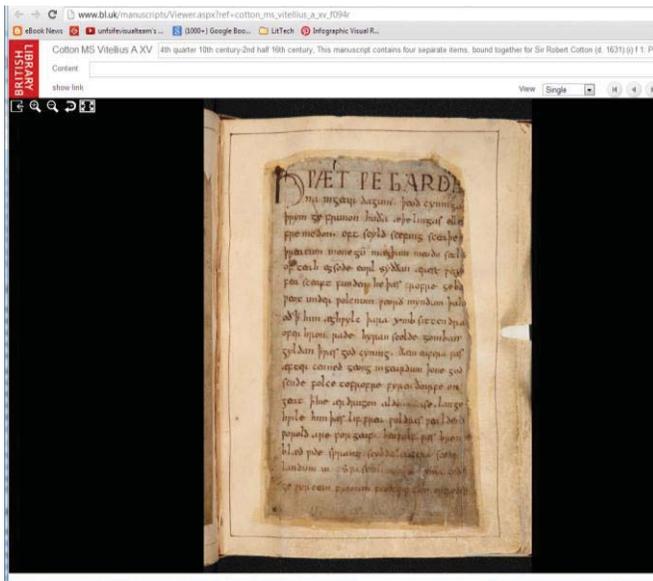
Figure 2: *Beowulf* available online from the British Library

The Rare Book Room (http://www.rarebookroom.org/) site provides access to hundreds of book that have been digitized. This digitized process allows online visitors to see works from Shakespeare, Benjamin Franklin, medieval illuminated manuscripts and even works from Galileo and Copernicus. When studying Shakespeare

students can also explore the writings from the *First Folio* (1623), or for interdisciplinary study, you could look at the work of Galileo's observations of the moon in *Starry Messenger*.
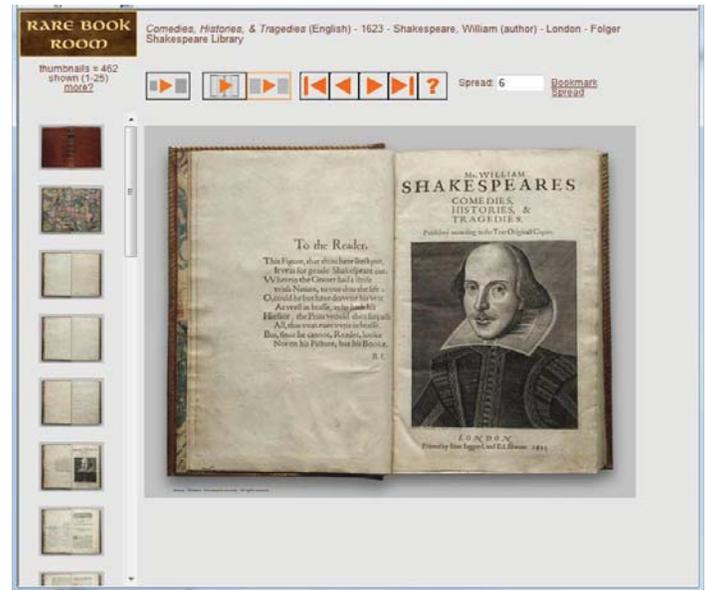

Figure 3: Shakespeare's *First Folio* available through the Rare Book Room.

If you are looking for something more for elementary students you can look at the Rare Books & Special Collections Reading Room's collection of digitized children's literature (http://www.loc.gov/rr/rarebook/digitalcoll/digitalcoll-children.html). This collection from the Library of Congress includes works such as the 1903 version of the *Three Bears*,Peter Newell's 1910 version of *The Slant Book*, and the 1900 edition of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

The University of Florida has its own digital collection of over 1000 historical children's literature titles within the Baldwin Library (http://ufdc.ufl.edu/juv).

The Children's Books Online: the Rosetta Project (http://www.childrensbooksonline.org/) has an extensive collection of illustrated antique books that can be read online. The

Rosetta Project has it collection indexed by reading levels.
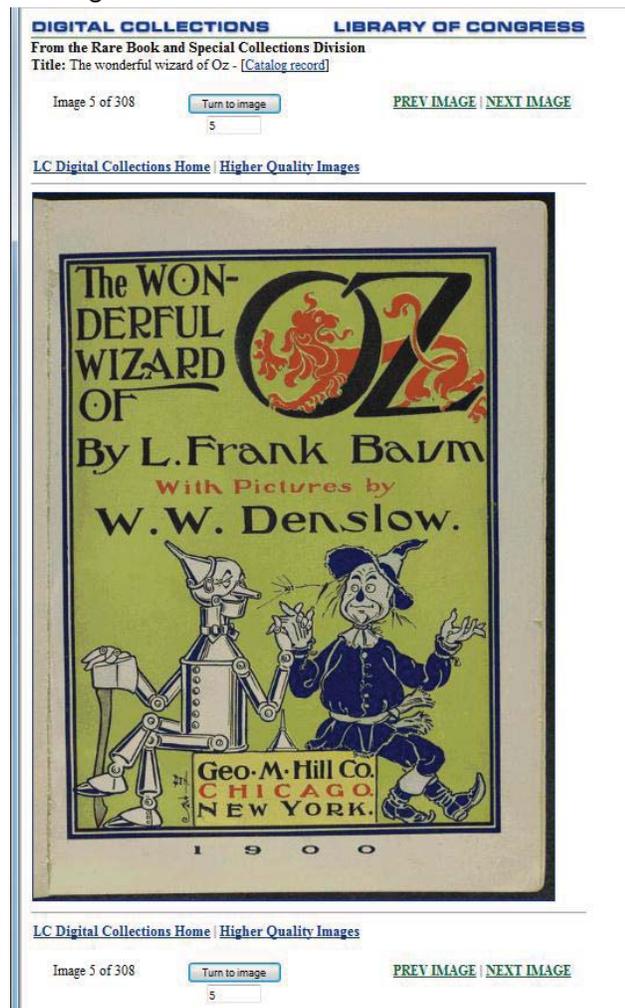
Figure 4: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz available through the Library of Congress' Rare Book and Special Collections.

My favorite though, would be being able to read Lewis Carroll's book title *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* (later re-titled *Alice in Wonderland*). The British Library (http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/virtualbooks/index.html) has a free online application that displays the book and provides an number of great tools as you read the book using the museum's "Turning the Pages" system. The book itself is composed of detailed scans of the original text hand-written by Lewis Carroll with his own drawings based on the story that

he told the original ten-year-old Alice on a boat trip. Using the library's tools, not only can you read the text you can also explore the images with the Magnifier tool, read the text as print, and even listen as someone with a great voice reads it aloud to you.
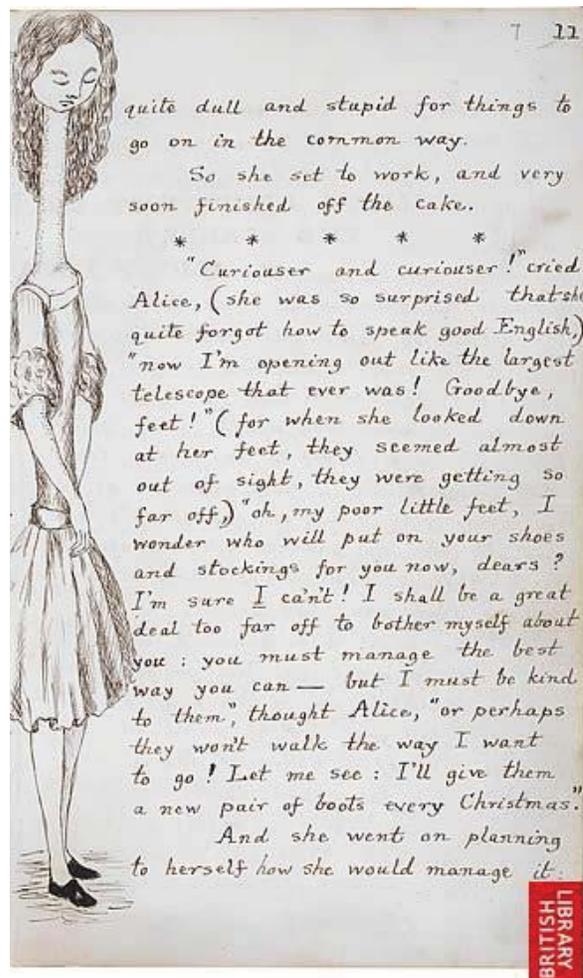
Figure 5. Lewis Carroll's original *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* written in his own handwriting which later became *Alice in Wonderland*.

I found that just reading Carroll's handwriting to be its own experience. Shown here is the first page of the whole book in a booklet form with page numbers on each page and areas where he had added his own drawings. While I'm sure that there are drafts of each section, just looking at what he did in making the book was very interesting exploration on its own.

For all of the resources mentioned here, the book are image scans, allowing you to explore the images in full color and often providing additional features, such as the ability to zoom in or get a translation of the text (very useful for reading in other languages). Here are a few online libraries for you to begin your book exploration:

- **Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature:** http://ufdc.ufl.edu/juv
- **British Library's Virtual Books**: http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/virtualbooks/index.html
- **Children's Books Online: the Rosetta Project:** http://www.childrensbooksonline.org/
- **Digital Collections of Trinity College Library:** http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/
- **Rare Book & Special Collections Reading Room - Children's Literature:** http://www.loc.gov/rr/rarebook/digitalcoll/digitalcoll-children.html
- **Rare Book Room**: http://www.rarebookroom.org/