

**[Recording starts 0:00:00]**

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Rayna Freedman:

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Vicki Davis:

*The Ten-minute Teacher podcast with Vicki Davis. Every week day you'll learn powerful practical ways to be a more remarkable teacher today.*

VICKI: Happy Tech Tool Tuesday, we're talking to Rayna Freedman (Her Blog: <http://msfreedmanagent24.blogspot.com/> ) about blogging in the elementary classroom. So Rayna, how can we blog with kids that are younger?

RAYNA: You can blog with kids, really, about anything they want. (Rayna's Student Blogs: <http://jjsecretagents.blogspot.com/> ) I mean, I started with the younger ones, the third and fourth graders with some more structured questions like "if you had a super power what would it be and why?" "What would you do with that super power?"

At that age they really need some more structure with 5<sup>th</sup> graders. My students are picking their own topics, they are writing about anything from how they made their own pasta sauce to American-Ninja warrior to things in the news, to opinions about things they see on TV or here. It really gives them a voice. The students use Google Docs <http://docs.google.com> to write their blog post and that platform really does allow me a chance to really give feedback and work with the student during the week.

They express their feelings an opinions in an authentic way and I really do find that these young students really want a voice in the world and this is really their way to really show it.

VICKI: So Rayna, is this being shared publicly? And if so, on what platform?

RAYNA: It is. So I actually use Blogger <https://www.blogger.com/> for the student blogging. The students actually don't have their own blog because they're elementary, I didn't think that they should be using their own blogs. So we used my blogger that I have set up. And what I do is I just copy and paste their work into their blogger and then it's shared in multiple ways.

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The first thing is obviously, I send an email to the link to the student and the parent. And then I actually post it in our Google Classroom <https://classroom.google.com/> because that's become an online community where the students respond to their classmate's blogs which has been pretty neat

because I didn't expect that to happen. And then it shared on our Twitter page and our Facebook page.

VICKI: Wow. So you're sharing it everywhere. Now, are you pre moderating it? Pre-looking at it before it goes live? Or how are you doing that?

RAYNA: Yes. So in the Google Doc, the blog won't go live until almost everything is ready to be published. So that includes grammar, so the editing piece, the sentence structures, the punctuation. And then that also includes revision. So for example, I had a child that wrote – and I don't know if you're familiar with Peter Reynolds <http://amzn.to/2oxdhEM> but he's an author and he owns a local bookshop around the corner for me and he gave us the blue bunny. <http://www.bluebunnybooks.com/> And he asked my kids to blog about the blue bunny but from the blue bunny's point of view. So if a student writes it from their own point of view then we kind of work together because point of view is a hard concept for a child. So we kind of work together on the blog post to understand that the "I" is the bunny versus who else it is. (See: <http://jjsecretagents.blogspot.com/2017/03/the-blue-bunny-blog-by-archithagent23.html> )

I also have times where I'll write, this is a compound sentence or this is a run-on sentence. And what 5<sup>th</sup> graders are really going to know with that is – and I really teach me that if you can't answer a question on Google you need to go on Google to find an answer. So my kids have actually learned a lot of strong writing skills through using Google and just my prompts. So I actually will not put their draft of a blog post into my Blogger until it's ready. The other piece that I do is that if a child what's to include an image they have to use Creative Commons <https://search.creativecommons.org/> and cite the source, they cannot just put a random picture.

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VICKI DAVIS @COOLCATTEACHER

They cannot just put a random picture. Though, I have found that it's evolved where kids are taking their own pictures and actually taking videos and then uploading them to their YouTube station and then we can embed the video and the pictures right into their blog.

VICKI: Cool. So what do the parents think about this?

RAYNA: My parents love it. It started off as something I did in school when I was teaching fourth grade and I found that I really wanted to bridge it out to the community and I wanted the kids to be able to write more and I was looking for some different alternatives to my regular spelling homework. So this is the alternative. And out of 23 kids, I have 15 to 16 kids blogging every week. The parents have seen growth in their students writing and their confidence and their communication which is huge. And in some other cases, their creativity depending on what voice they're putting into their writing and what images and

what videos they're putting into their writing. Because a blog post doesn't just have to be writing.

And I'm really big on equity and I understand digital equity. And so any student who wants to blog but doesn't have a computer at home actually handwrites the blog and we work together on the paper and then for morning work they type it out.

VICKI: Awesome. Okay, let's say, Rayna, you have a student who really struggles with writing, how do you kind of keep the flow from all of your students going up there even though some may take longer to write a piece?

RAYNA: They only have until Friday, it's a Monday to Friday thing.

VICKI: So every week they're all blogging - each week.

RAYNA: Yes.

VICKI: Wow, that's a lot of blog posts.

RAYNA: Yeah, it's a lot of reading.

VICKI: It is. So does that wear you out? That pace of publication just overwhelms me.

RAYNA: No, I love it. The kids love it but I don't think they realize how much I do the backend but I think as a teacher for me, it's easier to type than it is to write. So for me to give them feedback – I mean, it literally takes me two to three minutes to go through each child's post the first time. And then we have running conversations on right side. I don't want the students resolve the comments, I want the conversation there.

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Because if a parent says to me, how is my child doing with 'X'? I can actually pull up their blog post so we can actually look at the conversation I've had with the child about their writings.

VICKI: So there are no privacy concerns?

RAYNA: No. If the public was going to comment on the blogs, I have that set that I have to approve them.

VICKI: Okay.

RAYNA: So you personally, if you wanted a respond to a child's blog, you could. But it goes to me first and then I have to approve it. And then as far as the kids are replying, they're all in Google Classroom which is a safe space for them. And I find that it really teaches them about digital citizenship as well because they're learning how to communicate and collaborate online which reminds me that I just went to collaborative blogs. So the some other students, I if they want to they can write

a blog post together and I can actually check the revisions history to see who wrote what.

VICKI: What's the hardest problem or the most difficult issue with blogging like this?

RAYNA: I think for elementary, if you're talking about just the blogging in general is educators realizing that it's an authentic and valuable tool for students to write, that they don't have to give the spelling worksheets, they don't have to just give a regular writing paragraph, it's just another way to communicate. I think for student, one of the hardest things is for them to be comfortable and confident with choosing their own topic. I do give them a direction packet and, like, a list of 30 things that they could blog about if they were stuck for ideas.

And I think one of the things I've heard is "starting my blog" which I think is a common thing for kids at this age is "how do I start my piece?" And so that's a great time for me to be able to give feedback and kind of have this idea exchange with students right online. And I can do that anytime, anywhere because of Google.

VICKI: It just seems like you have so much together here. So I want to give like a 30 second pitch to teachers who teach writing about why they should use blogging in their classroom.

RAYNA: So I think elementary teachers should let students blog because it allows students to take risks with their learning, it stretches their thinking and motivates them. It provides an authentic purpose. And from what students have told me it relieves homework stress, it creates partnerships, builds communities and offers a chance for students to not only collaborate with each other but with their teacher.

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VICKI: Awesome. So teachers, consider blogging no matter what age a student is. It really is a way to improve writing through authentic audience. And you have a lot more power and control than you think you do to protect kids and be safe and blog. This is not something new but this is something that we should all be doing in our schools. So get out there and be remarkable and consider classroom blogging.

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