

Handbook of Research on Digital Tools for Writing Instruction in K–12 Settings

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Chapter 5

Connecting In and Out– of–School Writing Through Digital Tools

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ABSTRACT

This chapter considers issues and possibilities for connecting the writing students are doing in digital environments outside of school to developing writing ability within school. It presents theoretical frameworks consistent with exploring that connection, including New Literacy Studies and participatory culture. The authors offer a rationale for linking in and out-of-school literacies and give specific examples of the types of writing that connect these two cultures with digital writing tools. Finally, the chapter discusses implications for teaching.

INTRODUCTION

There is a fundamental tension in the teaching of writing between what is standard and what is individual (Kress, 2003). On one hand, teachers guide students to engage in conventional writing that follows specific rules and formats. However, writing is also a means of individual expression, highly creative and situated in the context of the learner (Gee, 2007). That dichotomy is reflected prominently today in students' in-school and out-of-school literacies, which is the topic we address in this chapter.

In an information age texts are ubiquitous in and out of school, appearing in a mélange of media, formats, and contexts that include conventional printed materials in school and a variety of electronic devices often more common outside of school. In the contemporary world, new digital forms of writing permeate a broad swath of students' lives outside of school, and these new forms have little resemblance to the conventional writing that remains entrenched within many schools. Consequently, digital forms of communication and writing may not be recognized, validated, or integrated productively into formal writing

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instruction. In fact, a 2008 study of students' in- and out-of-school writing practices revealed that, although all teens write for school and 93% write for their own pleasure, 60% do not consider their electronic communication as writing (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, & Macgill, 2008). Further, 49% reported enjoying the writing they do outside of school, whereas only 17% liked the writing they do in school (Lenhart et al., 2008). Why do students not identify their more informal, digital communication as writing? What implications does that disjuncture have on students' self-efficacy and motivation to write? How can in-school writing connect to the enjoyment students' have in out-of-school writing? These are the questions we address in this chapter.

The value students find in writing for themselves outside of school, often today in digital spaces, has important implications for the teaching of writing within schools as well as the skills needed for students to thrive in the 21st century. Because writing with digital tools is part of the culture in which students live outside of school, we begin with a discussion using New Literacy Studies (NLS) to examine how this context is tied to literacy (Gee, 2011), and how that culture has become more participatory (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigal, 2006). The essence of the latter perspective is that contemporary writing means blurring the boundaries between students and their teacher as mentors and between formal and informal writing with an emphasis on creativity that makes room for popular culture. Then, we offer a rationale for linking in and out-of-school literacies and give specific examples of the types of writing that connect these two cultures with digital writing tools. Finally, we discuss implications for teaching.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Sociocultural Definition of Literacy

We no longer live in a world that relies mainly upon books for information and writing for communication. Instead, use of the Internet is pervasive, especially among young people, with 93% of teens and young adults going online for information (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). This connectivity changes basic literacy skills. For instance, information is constantly updated and is disseminated in multiple modes. Similarly, authorship is no longer privileged because online students can create and publish their own information for a broad, diverse, and immediately accessible audience (Yancey, 2009). In this networked environment of literacy, students are increasingly socially connected with reading and writing more explicitly and immediately social when compared to conventional writing (Gee, 2007; Kress, 2003). Gee (2007) explained the social nature of literacy as follows: "Like reading and thinking, learning is not general, but specific; like reading and thinking, it is not just an individual act but a social one" (p. 7). Many scholars have discussed how literacy is expanding, and how society's definition of text is broadening. Kress (2003) described the changing nature of literacy as reading and writing become a visual act occurring across various modalities. Scholars associated with the influential New London Group defined the literacy practices occurring today with an ever expanding definition of "multiliteracies" (Cazden et al., 1996). As one of those scholars, Gee (2011) was instrumental in identifying a framework for studying literacy not as an exclusively individual, cognitive process but more of a social one that is affected by the socio-

cultural context drawing on Vygotsky's ideals of sociocultural theory (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). His theory of New Literacy Studies (NLS) views literacy skills and multiliteracies through the perspective of a sociocultural lens, thus broadening the definition of text to include social aspects of literacy (Gee, 2011).

New Literacy Studies and Digital Technologies

A teacher viewing literacy from the NLS framework would see literacy as a practice connected to students' society and culture, not an individual set of cognitive skills (Gee, 2011). Using the NLS theoretical lens, technology can be viewed as a tool, essential to contemporary literacy. This perspective differs from those who have dismissed or argued against technology as antithetical to the reflection inherent to literacy. Digital technology has been portrayed as detrimental to reflection, over-stimulating students and rendering them unable to focus on meaningful content for sustained contemplation. Proponents of this view include popular commentators such as Bauerlein (2008) who has argued that students today are so bombarded with information and technology that they are unable to sustain concentration, incapable of quiet reflection. Similarly, Spandel (2005), in her book *The 9 Rights of Every Writer: A Guide for Teachers*, considers reflection to be a right of every writer, and she portrays technology as an inhibitor of this reflection:

We worry whether our children can read with full engagement and understanding. We worry that they do not listen carefully or thoughtfully or for extended periods. We fear that they do not think about what they have read or learned or try to envision how it applies to their lives. Our answer? To design schizophrenic technology... (p. 3)

Instead of viewing technology as a part of students' culture that is separate and detrimental to student literacy, frameworks such as the NLS, embrace where students are, and inevitably will be in their lives out of school, allowing consideration of how the existing culture connects to academic learning. The NLS considers it as essential to expand literacy beyond what Gee (2011) described as the "essay-text literacy" (p. 76). In fact, to avoid a divide in which some students are encouraged to cultivate technology toward enhancing their traditional literacy skills while others are not given such opportunities, Gee (2011) argued that it is essential to embrace the social aspect of both literacy and technology. Students live in a digital world; technology is a part of their social context. That is a given. Thus, technology should not be portrayed as antithetical to or separated from literacy practices because technology today is inextricable from literacy. In fact, historically there has always been a reciprocal relation between the affordances of the technologies for writing and reading and the broader socio-cultural landscape (e.g., Reinking, 2009). Gee (2011) argued that "Literacy has no effect—indeed, no meaning apart from particular cultural contexts in which it is used and it has different effects in different contexts" (p. 78). Thus, if digital tools are completely rejected as irrelevant to literacy practice in schools, teaching without them is at best inconsistent with literacy as it is practiced in the larger cultural world, and at worst might be considered malpractice.

The NLS as outlined by Gee and others is central to the perspective we take in this chapter and arguably underlies the rationale for this book. Literacy practice as it exists outside of school, cannot be ignored, but integrating it into instruction raises many questions and challenges for teachers and those who support their efforts. For example, how does student writing change when students are in a more informal space than traditional schooling

affords? In addition, the NLS is relevant to the study of writing with digital tools because these tools allow students to connect their writing in an immediate and vital way to others and is thus more inherently social than traditional writing. The social aspect is intertwined with students' writing with digital tools in ways that need to be examined further, such as how the immediate audience associated with digital forms of writing affects students' motivation to write. Several researchers studying writing with digital tools, such as the narrative created through Facebook or fan fiction writing, identify their work with the NLS (Black, 2009; Davies, 2012).

Participatory Culture

The perspectives that NLS offers are echoed in other theoretical perspectives. For example, Jenkins et al. (2006) introduced the idea of what he called participatory culture, which he defined as “a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices” (p. 3). Participatory culture is particularly important to the writing that students do online because that writing often takes place in informal spaces where students engage with and learn from others in order to produce new creations. For example, fan fiction sites allow students to collaborate, review, and share ideas in order to create their own versions of stories in popular texts or other media (Black, 2009). Similarly, when engaging in blogging or online journaling, students are authors, but viewers can comment on their creations; thus, these tools allow students to freely express themselves while also engaging with and learning from others (Brodahl, Hadjerrouit, & Hansen, 2011; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005).

Such examples illustrate how students' writing online, often outside of school, can be considered

as engaging in a participatory culture. However, in these informal spaces in which students collaborate with one another to create and express their ideas in diverse media and formats, peers or other advocates of the respective technology are helping students navigate their learning in these informal, digital spaces. Although such collaboration is positive because it extends and reinforces the conventional concept of audience, it raises the issue of how reliable and helpful such feedback is. Thus, there may be a need for teachers to guide writing in online environments. That need is particularly important when students synthesize information to support their opinions (Black, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2006). Teachers seem to recognize that need. In a Pew Research Center report, 91% of the teachers surveyed stated that students' ability to evaluate sources and information was a skill they prioritized for their students' future (Purcell, Heaps, Buchanan, & Friedrich, 2013a). There is evidence that even direct instruction aimed at developing the relevant skills, strategies, and dispositions may not lead students to internalize such skills and use them outside of carefully monitored activities (Colwell, Hunt-Barron, & Reinking, 2013).

To bring a productive, valid, efficient, and appealing participatory culture into the classroom, it is likely that a shift must occur in sanctioned authority in the classroom. Authority must no longer reside with the text and with the teacher (Alvermann, 2002, 2008). For example, more traditional models of teaching in which the teacher is the expert who delivers information for the students to learn are less likely to be consistent with the participatory model, which emphasizes that everyone has knowledge to share and content to create (Alvermann, 2002; Jenkins et al., 2006). Even when teachers use technology in their classrooms, it is often used to support a model in which the teacher controls the learning, such as directing students to research Websites to answer prescribed questions or simply using technology to present information to students. For example, in a recent

survey of teachers who taught Advanced Placement courses or were members of the National Writing Project, 95% of the respondents reported that their students use technology to conduct research, but less than half allowed students to use technology to develop, create, and share their own work online (Purcell, Heaps, Buchanan, & Friedrich, 2013a, p. 37). Likewise, in a national survey of language arts teachers, we found that most teachers considered using technology to be integration of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), rather than teaching about how to use them (Hutchison & Reinking, 2011). The integration of ICTs in that study was more technological than curricular—more assimilation rather than accommodation. A more participatory model goes beyond simply using technology in the classroom as a digital means of continuing a transmission model of teaching and learning. Instead, the participatory model calls for teachers to more authentically integrate digital forms of communication into teaching and learning (Jenkins, 2013). In addition to changing the mode of instruction, views of texts must also change in order for literacy classrooms, in particular, to be more participatory. Alvermann (2002) argued that in participatory classrooms, texts are no longer the authority of knowledge; rather, texts are means to form ideas and create new content.

IMPERATIVES FOR DIGITAL WRITING IN SCHOOL

Supporting the theoretical perspectives outlined in the previous section are reports (Lenhart, et al., 2008; Purcell, Buchanan, & Friedrich, 2013a, 2013b) and published studies (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Hansen & Kissel, 2011; Witte, 2007, 2009) documenting the discrepancy between the learning and writing that is occurring inside and outside of the classroom and how writing is being defined. Further, Purcell et al. (2013b) reported that although teachers saw digital tools

benefitting students' writing by allowing them to collaborate and enhance creativity, many students exclude technology from their definition of writing: "But most [teacher participants] agree that among *students*, 'writing' continues to be defined as assignments they are *required* to do for school, as opposed to textual expression they engage in on their own time" (p. 14, italics in the original). Thus, students, too, seem to separate the writing they do inside and outside of school, arguably creating an inappropriate disjuncture. And, many of them find writing in school less motivating. For example, in another survey conducted by the Pew Research Center: "Half (49%) of all teens say they enjoy the writing they do outside of school 'a great deal,' compared with just 17% who enjoy the writing they do for school with a similar intensity" (Lenhart et al., 2008, p. vii). With the aid of technology, students approach learning and writing outside of school with greater motivation and enthusiasm. For example, Gee (2007) described a case of a student who wrote so much programming and coding in his desire to create video games that he had mastered most of the skills of his college computer science classes before ever taking them. Black (2009) discussed English language learners whose immersion in the world of fan fiction allowed them to explore themes of identity, religion, and sexuality that they may not have felt comfortable addressing within the more formal strictures of schooling.

However, writing, especially writing with technology in online environments, may pose risks when it is left for students to explore independently without guidance. Research suggests that students lack discernment about what they should share online and what information is reliable (Black, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2006). Arguably, schools may be the best source of needed guidance, providing relevant skills, strategies, and dispositions for engaging in online reading and writing outside of school. Further, schools may bear some responsibility to prepare disadvantaged students for learning and writing in digital environments

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because they potentially have less access to digital tools outside of school (Alvermann, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2006).

On the other hand, students' enthusiasm for out-of-school learning and writing might be harnessed meaningfully for academic pursuits (Alvermann, 2008). Tapping into students' digital interests may help teachers use their students' skills and interests in the realm of digital reading and writing as a resource for classroom learning. Technology provides a potentially rich resource considering that 78% of teens have a cell phone, 23% have a tablet, and 93% have a computer or are able to use one at home (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). Thus, excluding digital forms when teaching writing in schools seems increasingly anachronistic and unreasonable today. That conclusion is supported, for example, by Judith Langer's (2000) investigation of English classrooms and what distinguished higher- and lower- performing programs. Of the six distinguishing characteristics, one was that "teachers make connections across instruction, curriculum, and life" (Langer, 2000). Instead of dismissing students' use of technology outside of school as purely social, teachers may use the writing increasingly common outside of school to engage their students in topics for writing, different modes of writing, and publishing for audiences beyond their peers and teacher. Such uses, as the theoretical positions outlined in the previous section suggest, also reinforce the view that all learning is socially constructed and shaped by socio-cultural influences.

Using students' interest in writing with digital tools outside of school to engage them in academic learning is just one reason teachers may decide to incorporate digital forms of writing into their instruction. Another reason is to prepare their students for their futures in an increasingly digital twenty-first century. Jenkins et al. (2006) expressed that sentiment as follows:

Literacy skills for the twenty-first century are skills that enable participation in the new communities emerging within a networked society. They enable students to exploit new simulation tools, information appliances, and social networks; they facilitate the exchange of information between diverse communities and the ability to move easily across different media platforms and social networks. (p. 55)

Incorporating digital tools into writing instruction may also help prepare students for the workplace and for citizenship in a world that increasingly uses them for communication. In their book discussing how education must change to meet the demands of the 21st century, Crockett, Jukes, and Churches (2011) discussed that, for the current economy, creativity has displaced the factory model. In other words, in a global, competitive market, only those skills that cannot be outsourced or computerized will be valued in new employees: "creativity, lateral thinking, and problem solving dealing with nonroutine cognitive tasks" (Crockett et al., 2011, p. 11). Thus, the literacy skills that need to be honed in students are those that help them to create original content, similar to the types of writing they are doing outside of the classroom, which are likely to be relevant in a job market where creativity is increasingly valued. In addition, writing, in particular, is a skill valued in the marketplace. The National Commission on Writing (2004) surveyed 120 corporations, and the results suggest that writing was a skill valued in hiring and promotion as well as a skill that they perceived a majority of their employees needed in their daily work. Furthermore, as this report suggested, writing ability is associated with the type of position students will be able to attain, and employees must be facile in diverse modes of communication including email and digital presentations. Other research reinforces the importance of writing with technology for students'

success in the 21st century (Lenhardt et al., 2008; National Assessment Governing Board [NAGB], 2010; NCTE, 2009). Thus, students are likely to benefit from instruction that helps them use and adapt traditional writing skills across modes, audiences, and technologies.

Although they have been criticized for lagging behind the digital curve (Leu, 2006), standards and the assessments used on a national level for education are increasingly reflecting the connection between technology and writing and are showing students' need to be proficient at both skills simultaneously. For example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, an ongoing standardized assessment of students' achievement in basic school subjects in the U.S., plans to computerize their assessments for grades 4, 8, and 12 to reflect the increasingly digital nature of writing (NAGB, 2010). In addition, technology and writing have also been incorporated into the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) across subject areas (Council of Chief State School Officers & National Governors Association [CCSSO & NGA], 2010). Some of these standards connect the forms of writing students are doing in online writing outside of school. For example, writing standard six in the CCSS Anchor Standards for Writing, grades 6-12, emphasizes the following connection between writing and technology: "Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others" (2010, p. 41). These developments have not gone unnoticed by professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). In a policy research brief (NCTE, 2009), the organization takes the following position: "Students who show little engagement with school-based writing can be highly motivated by out-of-school writing projects, developing skills and insights that remain unknown to their teachers" (p. 1).

TYPES OF WRITING USING DIGITAL TOOLS

Lenhart et al. (2010) reported that 93% of teens (12-17 years of age) report going online; 38% of Internet connected teens share content they create online; and 21% of teens remix content online for their own creations. What digital tools and applications are students using for these activities outside of the classroom? Beach et al. (2011) identifies digital, or what have been termed Web 2.0 tools, and characterizes how they are being used by the present generation of students: "...digital video/storytelling, social networking sites, cell phones, blogs, wikis, podcasts, etc., that involve both accessing *and* [italics in the original] producing knowledge in ways that move beyond passive consumption to active construction of knowledge mediated by hyperlinks, interactivity, multi-modality, and social networking" (para. 5). These new ways to write suggest that writing, as a technology available in schools, has evolved from being a means of assessing students in the 19th century, to process writing in the 20th century, to an inclusive and pervasive means of democratic expression with unlimited potential for garnering an audience (Yancey, 2009). The following is a discussion of a few representative examples of digital tools for writing today, focusing on technology that fosters collaboration and its effects upon writing quality and engagement. Each example reflects the participatory culture of writing in online environments outside of school and how they might be connected to writing instruction and activities inside of school. However, each example also illustrates the new, and sometimes challenging, issues associated with making those connections.

Blogging and Online Journaling

Although blogging has decreased among teens over time (Lenhart et al., 2010), bloggers have a passion for writing out-of-school and, when it has been allowed and encouraged, in-school (Lenhart et al., 2008). Blogs or online journaling allow participants to share content online with chronological posts and allows feedback and reactions from readers who can post comments (Brodahl et al., 2011). Some research suggests that students who are avid bloggers also tend to be avid writers. For example, Lenhart et al. (2008) found that 47% of bloggers compared to 33% of nonbloggers write outside of school on a regular basis. In addition, bloggers write in a variety of forms, write more often, and believe that writing is more important than other nonbloggers their age (Lenhart et al., 2008).

Two relevant studies illustrate how blogging might bridge writing in school and out of school. Witte (2007) developed a blog for students and pre-service teachers to collaborate in discussing their reading of novels. After the students and pre-service teachers had read the assigned novels, they would blog their response to each other weekly. When an administrator at the school became concerned that the blog was too revealing of student information, the blog was shut down. In their written response to the administrators, the middle school students revealed how engaged and invested they were in their writing with this digital tool: One of Witte's (2007) student participants wrote, "By taking away our access to the Talkback Project blog, you have taken away my voice" (Witte, 2007, p. 95). This study reveals the potential power of making classroom writing more participatory. The students in this study were clearly engaged with their writing and connected to both their purpose for writing and their peer and teacher audience. On the other hand, technology and online environments can decrease teacher or administrator control, and, as in this case, teachers and administrators may need to negotiate

some unknown terrain when implementing such powerful online tools to keep students safe while also encouraging them to be participants in 21st century skills.

Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) explored a different kind of blog in their case study of two Advanced Placement students, who were both participants in an online journal, similar to blogging. As in Witte (2007), students were drawn to write on blogs for the immediate feedback they received from blog readers' comments, forming a strong bond with an authentic audience. They concluded that (a) blogging gave students an authentic audience, which motivated writing and (b) students resisted combining their in-school and out-of-school writing. The latter finding raises an important issue. Witte (2009), too, reported a student's comment that incorporating digital forms of communication into the classroom trespassed on an activity in the students' domain. Similarly, the two participants in Guzzetti and Gamboa's (2005) study were wary of teachers adopting online journaling for a fear that the enjoyment of a digital activity outside of school might be decreased if teachers appropriated it in school (see also Lewis & Fabos, 2005).

Social Networks

A statement from a student in Davies (2012) study of Facebook communication illustrates the power of social networks in the lives of adolescents: "You have to go on (Facebook) otherwise its like you don't exist. If you are not on there, then where are you?" (p. 24). As the preceding quotation suggests, social networks are integral in the lives of many students. Lenhart et al. (2010) found that 73% of teens connected to the Internet use social networking Websites. Social networking sites are typically characterized by a user creating a profile, maintaining a list of connected friends in the network, and posting brief updates (Beach et al., 2011). Although social networks such as Facebook or Twitter do not encourage or permit lengthy writing, they may have value in fostering literacy

practices. However, the research addressing that issue is limited in scope (Beach et al, 2011). The Davies (2012) study is one exception. It addressed the question: “Can literacy practices on Facebook be considered new literacy practices?” (p. 19). One finding was that although the length of writing on Facebook is shorter than other online spaces, the participants attended to voice, tone, and audience to create narratives that affected offline actions. For example friends created posts about their relationship status or their daily activities that they may later elaborate on when they met their friends outside of the social network, in other contexts of friendship (Davies, 2012). Buck (2012) conducted a case study focusing on the literacy practices of an avid social media user. It documented how the research participant navigated social networks and the writing practices he used to shape his online identity. Both of these studies found that the writing online often transferred to actions offline and that writing on social networking sites was a daily routine in which writing affected the formation of social identity (Buck, 2012; Davies, 2012). In fact, Ronnie, the participant in Buck’s (2012) study, created multiple identities adopting several screen names on social media sites. He changed his writing style and voice to target various audiences, to display different interests, and to evaluate the effect on his audience. In fact, audience was a pivotal motivator for writing in each of these studies and thus connects to Spandel’s (2005) claim that an “appreciative audience” is “the one thing no writer can resist” (p. 21). Thus, including social media in instruction may have potential to advance at least some aspects of conventional literacy practices addressed in academic environments. Further, Buck (2012) suggested using literacy practices on social networking sites as a springboard to understanding writing practices in online environments.

Google Docs and Document Sharing

Google Docs and similar applications such as Etherpad (n. d.) are free digital writing tools for collaborative writing that allow multiple writers to write and/or edit at the same time (Brodahl et al., 2011). A defining feature of these applications is the opportunity to obtain immediate feedback from peers. Brodahl et al. (2011) studied these tools to determine if they encouraged university students to collaborate productively in their writing. However, their preliminary findings were disappointing. They reported that “47.6% of the students were not motivated to use the tools for collaboration” (Brodahl et al., 2011, p. 84). They speculated that students’ unfamiliarity with the tool or problems with using the tool may have accounted for this finding. Unlike social networking, where the challenges of instruction may be more related to bringing informal writing into an academic context, digital tools for collaborative writing may require systematic and methodical use over time and a planned development of a participatory culture of writing in the classroom (Jenkins et al., 2006).

One example is Wood’s (2011) use of Google Docs to allow students in an introductory physics course to write their lab reports collaboratively. He found that approach effective although it introduced new instructional issues such as how to assess the individual contributions, which he resolved by using the revision history available in Google Docs to assess the participation of each of his students. When he surveyed his students, he found that they reacted positively to Google Docs for conventional academic tasks. His successful integration of this digital tool into his instruction also addresses the current emphasis on writing across the content areas reflected in the Common Core State Standards (CCSSO & NGA, 2010).

The affordances of these tools are also consistent with findings that collaboration can increase

the quality of writing (Graham & Perin, 2007). Yet, in a recent Pew Internet report surveying Advanced Placement (AP) and National Writing Project (NWP) teachers, 36% of the respondents reported having their students edit *their own* work using an online platform such as Google Docs, and 29% had students edit *others' work* or provide feedback via an online collaborative tool such as Google Docs (Purcell et al., 2013a) perhaps because only 18% felt more confident than their students regarding technology. In addition, Wood (2011) found that his students were using Google Docs more outside than inside the classroom. The latter finding suggests that even if the technology is available within schools to support collaborative writing through digital tools such as Google Docs, teachers may need to grapple with their unfamiliarity in using such tools to scaffold effective collaboration for students writing online.

Fan Fiction

When students write fan fiction they use a premise or storyline from some form of media—movies, music, popular fiction, and so forth—which they adapt or extend creatively online (Black, 2009). For example, students who are fans of the Harry Potter novels, may rewrite endings, attempt to resolve a conflict between the characters, or extend the adventures of a favorite character. Alvermann and Hagood (2000) studied students' 'fandom' of the music industry and discussed that this trend is no longer limited to or conceptualized as a practice of over zealous, adoring fans. Rather, fan fiction is an increasingly common online activity, and it entails highly literate skills, such as close reading, analyzing, creative remixing, and writing.

Although several scholars advocate the practice of using fan fiction and other popular out-of-school activities such as gaming to better understand students and to bridge students' in and out-of-school literacies (Anderson, 2010; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Gee, 2007), scholars have also suggested that adopting students' out-of-school

literacy practices in school may cause students to lose some of their excitement for the activity (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Guzzeti & Gamboa, 2005). Thus, there seems to be agreement, in this case, that guidance is necessary to effectively consider bridging students out-of-school and in-school literacy practices (Black, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2006).

Fan fiction also raises controversial issues of legality, opening up opportunities for a discussion of issues such as intellectual property and copyright. Such discussions seem important given that digital media undermine many of the assumptions about who controls dissemination of and access to information. Further, many AP and NWP teachers identify that area as needing more attention. For example, Purcell et al. (2013b) found that "... the skill for which these AP and NWP teachers give students the lowest rating is 'navigating issues of fair use and copyright in composition' and most of these teachers also rate their students 'fair' or 'poor' on their ability to 'appropriately cite and/or reference content'" (p. 42). In that regard, Lewis, Black, and Tomlinson (2009) argued that fan fiction is legal mainly because it falls under the fair use clause of copyright law. The Center for Social Media (2013) stated that one of the key factors establishing fan fiction as legal under the fair use policy is that the student transforms and repurposes copyrighted work for new purposes. Jenkins et al. (2006) described one of the new media literacies as appropriation, which they defined as "the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content" (p. 4). Jenkins (2013) also proposed that remixing content for original purposes is not only legal, but that it has historical precedent and that remixing has literary value "if it is generative and meaningful rather than arbitrary and superficial" (p. 109). Thus, fan fiction need not be approached timidly in classrooms for the sake of legalities.

But, does fan fiction benefit students' writing? Several studies have found benefits including teachers learning about their students (Alvermann

& Hagood, 2000; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003), students developing literacy skills such as synthesizing and the writing process (Anderson, 2010), and bringing marginalized students such as English language learners (ELLs) into the mainstream (Black, 2009). In addition, Curwood (2013) recently discussed the online affinity spaces related to The Hunger Games trilogy. She found that these spaces allowed students to more deeply understand literature as well as to provide motivation and an authentic audience. In their study of fandom related to music, Alvermann and Hagood (2000) reported the case of a student whose out-of-school interests in music entailed critical thinking and creative products. As they stated, "Using fandom of popular cultural texts such as music to explore these multiple meanings may be a way to get students interested in school literacy practices while providing teachers with insight into students' out-of-school lives" (p. 445). Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) echoed these findings when they studied two middle school students, who wrote fan fiction inspired by *anime*, Japanese animation. They concluded that without knowledge of these students' involvement in fan fiction that it would be difficult for their teachers to fully understand their in-school academic writing. In addition, the researchers speculated that these students' fan fiction might have benefitted from explicit instruction, such as how to use word processing software specifically to write and edit such texts. Another important point was that these students valued fan fiction more than academic writing. Writing from the perspective of an English teacher, Anderson (2010) described media as a gift to his English instruction. Specifically, he discussed using fan fiction in his classroom and described the literacy skills his students used as they synthesized the content of primary sources in order to use that material to engage in creative writing of fan fiction. He discussed the writing process involved in fan fiction as his students not only wrote their own content, but also commented upon and evaluated the writing of their peers.

Black (2009), in a study of three ELLs, discussed the need for teachers to develop skills that students use in fan fiction in order to develop skills such as evaluating both the information they read and the information they publish. She found that engaging these sometimes marginalized students in writing fan fiction led them to increase not only their English language abilities, but also their writing skills and level of comfort with writing. Specifically, fan fiction allowed these students to use their prior knowledge and experiences to create content in an online community where they could learn from their peers about other cultural traditions. Similar to the Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) study, Black also found that these ELL students needed formal instruction in their informal fan fiction practices. The ELL students did not have a fully developed understanding of what voice to project in their fan fiction writing, often using too personal a voice for such a public forum. Furthermore, these students needed guidance on how to question and evaluate the sources they were reading. As an example of subject matter that students did not question, Black found that several stereotypes, such as gender, went unquestioned in the fan fiction network, which suggests the needs, the benefits, and the opportunities that incorporating such digital forms into school instruction might incur.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The skills needed for writing are familiar even if the technologies for writing are continually evolving. The teaching of writing has long included teaching students to write for a purpose, which means students need to consider who their audience is and how best to convey their message. Similarly, discernment of sources is another skill traditionally associated with teaching writing as writing teachers guide students with which sources are acceptable to use in their composition. These two traditional skills of writing reoccur as themes

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throughout the discussion of writing in new, digital environments. Students now have access through digital tools, such as blogs and social networks, to an immediate, public audience, which seems to motivate their writing (Alvermann, 2008; Guzzeti & Gamboa, 2005; Witte, 2009). Similarly, just as students have always needed to evaluate sources before using them to support their compositions, they also need to be taught how to discern reliable from less reliable content and sources within the constant flow of immediate, connected information presented online (Crockett et al., 2011; Jenkins, 2006). However, to make these traditional skills relevant to students in an increasingly digital age, we believe the time is ripe for research and practice to systematically address bridging the gap between in-school literacies and out-of-school literacies. The Common Core State Standards may be providing another imperative to move forward as several of the reading and writing standards call for writing for a variety of audiences, evaluating multiple modes of content, and using technology to create content (CCSSO & NGA, 2010). Thus, the standards are in place to guide writing with technology for multiple purposes and audiences, a skill students are already using in their out-of-school writing.

Will educators connect to this informal writing to serve learning goals inside the classroom? The answer may lie in turning from the expert model in which teachers and texts are disseminators of knowledge to a more participatory culture in which teachers and students collaborate to create knowledge (Alvermann, 2002; Jenkins, 2006). As studies such as Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) and Alvermann and Hagood (2000) demonstrate, such a participatory culture in which teachers and students embrace writing with new technological tools has the potential to aid both teachers and students. Teachers gain a more comprehensive view of their students' knowledge of digital tools, which may affect the tone, voice, and content of student writing, when teachers allow students to bring their knowledge of digital tools outside of

the classroom into their more academic writing. On the other hand, students may need guidance in the writing they are doing in informal, online spaces. If teachers were more aware of not only what digital tools students are using, but also how to use them within the classroom, students are likely to gain needed skills such as evaluating texts and sources and developing a voice to their writing appropriate to conventional as well as online genres of writing.

As we have noted in regard to the Purcell et al. (2013a) report, teachers may not be using the digital tools in classrooms that allow their students to create content collaboratively whether that be because the teachers are unfamiliar themselves with the tools, whether they do not have the self-confidence to teach them to more digitally attuned students, or whether they have these tools blocked by Internet filters in their school districts. However, some teachers, in the research we have summarized in this chapter, are bringing digital tools and new digital genres of writing into their classrooms. As Purcell et al. (2013b) noted, "50% of these teachers [AP and NWP teachers who were participants] (across all subjects) say the Internet and digital tools make it easier to teach writing, while just 18% say digital technologies make teaching writing more difficult" (p. 5).

In our current, on-going work with writing teachers, we find that they are receptive to the digital tools students use outside of school, even when they have not previously used such tools. For example, in the context of conducting professional development sessions with writing teachers, we introduced Pinterest as a potential tool for brainstorming ideas for writing. Even though 40% (n=20) of the teachers had never used Pinterest for their personal use, and 90% had never used this application in the classroom with their students, the teachers readily generated ideas for using Pinterest in their teaching. Many went beyond the ideas we suggested. For instance, teachers proposed having their students use Pinterest to recommend books to one another or give one another feedback to ideas

posted on these virtual pinboards. Thus, our current work demonstrates that teachers are creative and capable of meaningful integration of technology into their curriculum. However, more research is needed to investigate the process of integrating such tools into instruction including understanding the barriers teachers face in their attempts to do so (e.g., Hutchison & Reinking, 2011).

Finally, in thinking about digital tools and their effect on student writing, teachers may need to carefully consider how these tools are incorporated into academic settings. Even if digital tools for writing are seen as advantageous for academic settings, research is needed to investigate how teachers can use them in their classrooms without students losing the pleasure and interest that drives their more informal digital writing outside of school. Research presented in this chapter (e.g., Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Witte, 2009) found that although digital tools may motivate students to write with an authentic audience, that motivation risked being lost once schools began “trespassing” (Witte, 2009, p. 24) in the spaces students claimed as their own. That research echoes Gee’s (2007) caution that technology cannot simply be placed within the classroom and then expected to seamlessly have the same influence it does outside the school’s walls. As he stated, “We have to be careful not to co-opt young people’s cultures for our own purposes” (p. 216). Rather Gee implicitly suggests that young people should be consulted about how technology might be used to enhance their learning in school. Thus, a consideration of how digital tools outside of school might be connected to writing instruction in school must, we believe, be predicated on a respect for, not just an understanding of, the types of digital writing in which many students are already engaged outside of school. We hope this chapter has contributed to building that understanding and respect towards inspiring educators to incorporate these digital tools into their teaching.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Collaborative Writing Tools: Digital tools, such as Google Docs, that allow students to write together, often simultaneously, and respond to one another's writing.

Fan Fiction: The practice of transforming established storylines or genres to fit within personal interests or creations.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs): Digital forms of communication including tools available on the Internet, such as blogging and email, as well as computer software, such as Microsoft PowerPoint and Word.

Multiliteracies: Associated with the New London Group, multiliteracies expand the traditional, more narrow definition of literacy or reading and writing. Multiliteracies is associated with multiple modes and an expanded definition of what constitutes text (Cazden et al., 1996).

New Literacy Studies: The theory of New Literacy Studies (NLS) views literacy skills and multiliteracies through the perspective of a sociocultural lens, thus broadening the definition of text to include social aspects of literacy. James Gee has written a great deal about New Literacy Studies (Gee, 2011).

Participatory Culture: Associated with Henry Jenkins and the New Media Literacies, this culture emphasizes decreased barriers between students and their mentors, less dichotomy between formal and informal learning, and increased student creativity and creation (Jenkins et al., 2006).

Web 2.0 Tools: Tools that allow students to create and publish their ideas rather than merely consume information, such as Google Sites and Blogger.