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Re-conceptualizing Literature Responses through “Space”

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Abstract

Though the technological tools may change, the human desire for conversation never goes away.

Spaces in today's technological age continue to shift, change, and reshape themselves in response to new ways to communicate. Middle school students featured in this article utilized a threaded discussion board to build a reader-response community in which they responded to each other in writing about literature they were reading. Student conversations, though traditionally transpiring in a face-to-face context, are now being carried out in new spaces afforded by adaptable technologies. Students in this classroom fostered student-led discussions as they wrote questions and dialogued in this alternative, technology-based space. Through those conversations, students developed their own literature discussion community to share their personal experiences and individual responses to the reading. This technological application altered traditional ways in which they had interacted with print and provided new opportunities to share stories, build community, and respond to literature.

Keywords: online book discussion, Thirdspace, online community

Introduction

“I like that I get to talk about the book and we can start our own question. I like that because Mr. Trumbull doesn’t give us all the questions. We get to start our own discussions, discussion about the book, just as long as it is on topic and I like that he trusts us to write about it.”

Olivia, Student Interview

This article details one way in which a small group of fifth grade students shared their literature responses with each other through a web-based threaded discussion. Daniels (2006) invited teachers to consider “the next big thing in student-led discussion, written conversation” (p. 14). In this call, Daniels challenges teachers to consider the power of students writing to each other, back and forth, through notes or letters in which they are engaged in literature-based conversations. However, what this call does not specifically take into account is the way technology, through a new “space,” can motivate students to develop their responses. Students in this classroom engaged in student-led discussion as they wrote questions and dialogued in an alternative, technology-based space.

Technology applications that enhance communications, such as the Facebook, texts, blogs, wikis, emails, and threaded discussions can also enhance motivation and provide opportunities for students to engage each other in these written conversations about their reading (Larson, 2011; Thomas, 2014). However, the possibility for technology to enrich such written conversations has yet to be fully explored. Beach and Anson (2004) state, “in writing and responding to each other, students are creating social relationships through their writing” (p. 252). The social relationships that develop in the on-line, threaded discussion environment hold a great deal of promise in supporting and scaffolding students’

understandings of the readings and in nurturing writing communities across time and space.

This article will explore the reciprocity of this specific reading and writing activity, developed through the students' response process, as well as potential applications for teachers to encourage and augment the literature response opportunities in their classrooms.

Reconceptualizing Space

The understanding of space is shifting from the belief that space is “empty, available, and waiting to be filled up” (Sheehy & Leander, 2004, p. 1) to the re-conceptualization of space that is not situated and is flexible (Albers, Pace, & Odo, 2016; Lefebvre, 1991; Sheehy & Leander, 2004; Soja, 1996). Sheehy and Leander (2004) write that “space is not static . . . it is dynamically relational” (p. 1). This statement illustrates that the spaces in which we live and work fluctuate, change, and adapt. They are not inert and concrete. Spaces develop and vary according to the content and context of the situation and are the “product and process of socially dynamic relations” (Sheehy & Leander, 2004, p. 1). Examining space from this perspective illustrates it not as the outcome of social interaction, but as instrumental in shaping the social practices that form it.

Soja (1996) strives for an understanding of how the social engagements of people shape these new dynamic spaces. Sheehy (2004) writes that “spatial practice (or social practice) involves production and reproduction of relationships between people, people and things, and people and practice” (p. 95). This space, created and shaped through social relationships and social processes, is often referred to as a Thirdspace (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996). As Moje et al., (2004) explain, “Some scholars refer to this in-between, or hybrid, space as third space, explicitly emphasizing the role of the physical, as well as socialized, space in which people interact” (p. 42). The concept of Thirdspace in this work is viewed as a

socially constructed space that results from the process and product of the participants learning together.

Soja (2004) holds that space is made and remade through the people, thoughts, materials and other particulars that are present at an instance in time. As Moje et al. (2004) state, “we call this integration of knowledges and discourses drawn from different spaces the construction of ‘third space’ . . . different or alternative space of knowledge and discourses” (p. 41). As individuals talk, interact, and work together new spaces are formed, and these discourses are “socially constructed knowledges of some aspect of reality” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 24).

In essence this Thirdspace can become a site for socially negotiated understandings of the group to be co-constructed out of the multiple and complex discourses of all those involved. Together, the participants of any conversation come together to create a new “space” or Thirdspace that builds individual understandings to form a shared meaning. As Lefebvre (1991) writes, “Every discourse says something about a space (places or sets of places); and every discourse is emitted from a space” (p. 132). The creation of a Thirdspace can emerge from any social process or production such as a face-to-face interaction or in an on-line environment.

Through a technologically enhanced environment such as an on-line threaded discussion, the possibility exists for the nurturing of conversations that are more reflective in nature. Students in an asynchronous environment may have more time to reflect and deepen their thoughts and responses than an on-the-spot moment in class. They can step back and reflect on the reading, their own response, and the responses of others, then come back to the multimedia application and/or conversation to record their thoughts. Students utilize the

technology of a threaded discussion to write the responses to their reading and to share these written responses with each other. By writing and responding together, students can support and scaffold each other's understandings and thus socially construct their understandings (Almasi, 1996; Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Coffey, 2011; Gavelek & Raphael, 1996; Mazzoni & Gambrell, 1996; Thomas, 2014).

Though many studies have been conducted to examine the multiple ways that students respond to text in group environments, limited research currently exists that explores the technological ways available for students to write their responses to their readings and thus build a writing community through a Thirdspace. Bowers-Campbell (2011) conducted a study examining graduate students and their responses in a virtual children's literature circle. She found that groups actively engaged in socially constructed understandings and 2) that students clearly demonstrated their engagement in the reading process. Albers, Pace, and Odo (2016) have also examined adult online literature discussion experiences that they describe as "communities of practice" (p. 226). They illustrate that knowledge can be shared and effectively built through online social interactions. They also identified that discussions were often "social and fluid" (p. 242). Thomas (2014) explored online literature discussions between middle school students and pre-service teachers. She found that online literature conversations can motivate all participants as well as deepen comprehension.

These studies begin to explore the opportunities that exist for online conversations in a negotiated Thirdspace. However, little research has been done to examine the ways in which middle school students engage and learn with each other in an on-line context. The possibility for technology to enhance these written conversations has yet to be fully explored.

Methodology

Design

The research described in this study went beyond the traditional, “brick and mortar” classroom into a new Thirdspace environment. Participants in this research utilized a traditional face-to-face discussion context, as well as an on-line threaded discussion in which they wrote their responses to the common text that they were reading. In order to examine these elements of the classroom, this study employed a qualitative research design from a constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Context

This study incorporated daily involvement for three hours over a six-week time period in the fifth grade classroom as the students and teacher engaged in a unit of study. The teacher was intentionally selected for this study due to his extensive use of technology, his authentic uses of literature and nurturing of the reader response process, and for his utilization of an on-line threaded discussion board. The researcher engaged in the role of participant-observer as students were observed throughout their daily Language Arts time periods.

This article shares the data and findings from observing a subset of seven students reading the text *Stargirl* over a six-week book unit as designed by the teacher. *Stargirl* focuses upon common high school themes: individuality, acceptance from peers, and conforming for the sake of belonging. Stargirl is the “new kid” at Mica Area High School and makes a memorable entrance. She wears strange outfits, has a rat for a pet, performs anonymous random acts of kindness for people she doesn’t know, and sings “Happy Birthday” to students in the cafeteria accompanied by her ukulele. In the beginning, Stargirl is shunned, but through a variety of events she is eventually accepted, and many in the high school follow her and

adapt her style. Leo and Stargirl fall in love, and Leo is overjoyed at her acceptance among their peers.

However, when Stargirl chooses to cheer for an opposing basketball team at the high school tournament (wanting happiness for everyone) the students turn hostile against her. Leo is unable to leave the security of belonging to the group and tries to convince Stargirl to change who she is to “fit in” within the dominant high school culture. Though Stargirl tries for a short time, she is unable to deny who she is at heart for the sake of uniformity. After a climactic scene at the school’s dance, Stargirl disappears forever and leaves Leo sadly contemplating his own choices.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study were collected using interviews, observations, field notes and document analysis. The 10 group discussion meetings were videotaped and transcribed by the researcher. Time spent by the students working on the computers, writing and posting their responses, were also videotaped and transcribed by the researcher. The teacher was interviewed six times over the 6 weeks. Each interview was audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher. Conversations were held informally as different relevant events occurred over the six-week time period that the researcher wanted to investigate more closely. Each of these conversations was also audio-taped and transcribed. At the end of the six-week study, each student was interviewed to gather additional insights into his or her thoughts and feelings regarding the on-line and group discussion environments as well as his or her perceptions regarding the teacher’s role in the different environments. Extensive field notes were recorded throughout each day of observation.

Documents, such as the on-line responses of the students, their reading packets, and final project requirements, were collected and digitized for analysis. Data were analyzed in which significant patterns, common elements, and specific events were identified and overarching themes developed. A recursive process was utilized in which the data collected, the research questions, and the review of the literature were all incorporated to process the data.

Findings

Findings from this study indicate that the on-line context provided a new opportunity for students to “own” the conversation rather than the traditional authority of the teacher guiding a face-to-face conversation. Introduce the findings that are stated in the subheads in a sentence or two.

Building a Community in Thirdspace

As the students read *Stargirl*, they responded to the text in the on-line threaded discussion environment, as well as the in the face-to-face meeting context to discuss the book. When the students met in the face-to-face context of the room, the teacher asked the questions and the students responded to his questions. Data analysis of the *Stargirl* group’s face-to-face sessions found that the teacher asked over 96% of the questions. Although the students in this environment responded to the students’ questions, the teacher held the ownership of asking the questions and directing the conversation. As we know, students who are familiar with school culture may respond in ways that they know meet the expectations for the rules and regulations that form the procedures of the school culture (Almasi, 1995; Bloome & Green, 1992; Bloome, Puro, & Theodorou, 1989). Though the teacher began the conversations by asking the students what they wanted to discuss, the conversation quickly fell into a pattern in

which the teacher initiated and led the conversation with teacher-generated questions to which the students responded. This finding supports the work of Alvermann, Dillon, and O'Brien (1987) in which they found that when teachers exert too much leadership, the students relinquish their responsibility for taking an active role and expect the teacher to lead the discussion.

In contrast, the on-line threaded discussion environment allowed the students to seize ownership of the discussion, forming their own writing community (Bowers-Campbell, 2011). They composed and posted the questions, responding to each other throughout the study. In this space, the students wrote questions and posted written responses to those questions throughout the six weeks. Additionally, the on-line context gave an opportunity for the students to make individual, personal connections to the text and ask each other to make personal connections to the text. Finally, these personal connections provided a springboard for the students to engage in conversation with synthesis driven questions that applied to deeper aspects of their own lives.

Sharing Stories

Many of the questions that the students wrote in the beginning of the six weeks related indirectly to the text and asked for personal information from one another. Through these questions and responses, the students wrote responses to the text but also developed their own writing community by sharing personal stories. For example, in the following transcript (see Table 1) Grace asks the students to describe a time in which they felt left out and how they felt about it. This question had an indirect relationship to the books as Stargirl and Leo are left out and ignored by the others as a consequence for not conforming to the dominant high school culture.

Table 1: Students share feelings about being left out.

Grace	Have you ever felt left out of something? Tell me about it, what did you feel like (sad, mad...)
Iris	Yes I have felt left out before but not all the time. I felt sad when my friends leave me out.
Mikela	Yes, I have been left out. In second grade one of my friends asked me to play after soccer, but I had to go home and ask my mom. When my mom said yes I called that person, and that they were already playing with someone else, and they didn't think we got along well so we couldn't play. That made me feel so left out. But that day I met another friend that was the good part. But I will never forget that day, but mostly for the bad reason that made me feel so bad. The End
Lea	I have felt left out many times. One time one of my friends came over to play, but some of her other friends showed up, and she wanted to play with them instead of me

Three of her group members responded to this question, detailing a time in which they had been left out and how they felt about it. Mikela provided a specific story from second grade in which she was left out and how bad it made her feel. The other two group members wrote of a time that they had been left out, sharing their experiences in this on-line environment. These responses to the student written question provided a Thirdspace, outside the classroom walls, in which the students could build a community and share their personal experiences through their writing.

On a different occasion, one of the students posted a question to the community members asking if anyone had ever thought that they had vanished and the details of the situation. (see Table 2) The student in her post, answers her own question writing, “I know I haven’t. But if that has happened to you, I would like to here [sic] it!” Olivia’s question also had an indirect connection to the text as Stargirl vanishes towards the end of the text and no one knows where she has gone. In her post, Olivia engages the writing community with her question, answers the question for them from her experience, and encourages them to respond by writing, “I would like to here [sic] it.”

Table 2: Students discuss “vanishing.”

Olivia	Have people ever thought that you have vanished? Did they ever think that you were gone or just disappeared? Or did you just go away for a while and or friends did not know that you were gone? So they thought that you were gone and they would never see you again! I know I haven’t. But if that has ever happened to you I would like to here [sic] it!
Grace	Well I'm not so sure if people thought I was gone forever, but in second grade I was gone for a week and had Laryngitis (that's not how you spell it - lare.en.gite.ist) and when I came in for Valentine's Day, which I would have missed, I started to cry because I missed my classmates so much. : ~ (
Iris	One day in fourth grade I was absent for a week because I had strep throat. My mom was out too. All I can tell you is you don’t want to have STREP THROTE [sic]!!!! When I came back I was so happy to be back. My friends were happy to see me to!

Two of the students' responses are articulated in the above transcript in which they share with the other members of the community their personal experiences when someone thought they had "vanished." These stories provided a common ground for the writing community, building a foundation for sharing experiences, stories, and thoughts.

Writing and Responding to Common Reading

As discussed previously the teacher's intent for the students' use of the threaded discussion board was to write and respond to each other regarding their reading of *Stargirl*. For the first two weeks of the book unit, the students wrote questions that indirectly related to the text such as those described in the previous sections. Beginning in the third week of the study, the students began using their writing community to discuss direct aspects of the text together.

For example, in the following transcript, (see Table 3) Iris engages her community writing the question, "Have you ever liked someone like Stargirl and Leo? If you have, have you been afraid to tell them or someone else?"

Table 3: Students discuss connections to feelings.

Iris	Have you ever liked someone like Stargirl and Leo? If you have, have you been afraid to tell them or someone else?
Iris	Well maybe a little but not to like the whole class. Because somehow it gets out and you get humiliated by everybody.
Olivia	Yes I have had a crush like that before, I just never told him that I liked him. I mean I do not even know if he liked me. But one thing that I do is I tell my friends that I like him. The guy I like I would talk to and eat with but my friends

	would be there too. But I would not act all weird around them I would just be myself.
Helen	Yes. But I have asked him and people think it's funny and laugh at me, and I just want to go back in time and not ask, but I can't. So I just beg my mom to stay home, but the people don't make fun of me, well they do, but I don't feel embarrassed, but I feel like one person in one world.
Lea	Yes, I have liked someone. It was a silly crush because the person already liked someone else.

Five of the six girls responded to this question with personal experiences of whether they had liked someone as Stargirl and Leo had. In four of the responses, the girls share individual experiences of having a crush on someone and how that affected them. Helen, who was observed to be shy and reluctant to share openly in the face-to-face classroom environment, described a personal event in which she was laughed at and “wanted to go back in time.” Olivia playfully describes her experience with liking someone, but not being able to articulate that interest.

In a different written thread, (see Table 4) the students responded to a question posted by Mikela who asked, “Why do you think that Stargirl left? Tell why?” In the book, Stargirl is confronted by a high school girl who is angry at Stargirl for not fitting into the high school culture and for being popular despite her unique personality. After this conflict between the two girls climaxes, Stargirl vanishes, and the story ends without resolving Stargirl's disappearance.

Table 4: Students discuss book's open ending.

Iris	I think that Stargirl left because Leo and all the other kids like Hilary Kimball and all the other kids at Mica High always made fun of Stargirl. For odd reasons like what she wore and other weird reasons. I think she just had enough of every one at Mica High (that) just pushed her to her limit.
Lea	I think she left because she was a Starperson. Archie said that Stargirl was wisely named Stargirl. I think that she really was a star and that she lived in the sky. I think it was time for her to go home.
Tyler	I think she left because she found she couldn't fit in with anyone. I think if just one person (Leo) had accepted her for who she was, she would have stayed. She wouldn't have cared what anyone else thought. She would have put up with it all, if Leo had been nicer to her. Bad Leo! (I'm still mad at him and it's been a year since I read the book!)
Grace	I think that Stargirl left because she felt that she wasn't needed anymore, like what she said to Leo was... "When Peter gets this in a few years, he will really appreciate it. It is probably one of my favorite things to do, make people happy." ...not in those words exactly but that's what she meant. So I sort of think that when she came to Mica Area High School she had a reason to cheer everyone up, just like Peter. That reason was maybe she thought that the school students were too gloomy and they need to be cheered up. Then at the Ocotillo Ball, she had completed her "mission". When *everyone* [sic] joined in on the Bunny Hop, that was her signal.

The girls struggled with this unresolved element in the book, wanting to know what happened to Stargirl. In response to this student's questions, the members of the book discussion group wrote lengthy responses, detailing what they thought happened to Stargirl. Grace, in her quote, utilizes the text to illustrate her argument, providing strength for her written opinion of what she thought happened to Stargirl.

Through their questions and responses, the students were able to write and share their responses to the text together as a community. By writing direct and indirect questions the students were able to share their thoughts about the text, as well as the personal experiences that helped facilitate and enhance their understandings. This process was supported through the use of a new space or "Thirdspace" (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996) that was created outside the conventional school structure. In the traditional school "space" of the face-to-face environment, the students were accustomed to and expecting the teacher's leadership. Previous years of experience have indoctrinated the students in the procedural knowledge that teachers ask and students answer questions.

In this classroom, the Thirdspace created an opportunity for the students to ask and respond to questions about the text. This finding aligns with what Sheehy (2004) refers to as spatial practice. Spatial practice incorporates the creation of relationship "between people, people and things, and people and practice" (p. 95). The students raised written questions and responded to each other in the space that developed outside of the traditional school setting, thus creating their own writing community. Through the social production of their writing they responded to the text and to one another. This space was also influenced by the purposeful, limited involvement of the teacher who provided the opportunity for the students to foster their own community by generating questions and responses to each other. The non-

traditional classroom setting created through the socially constructed “Thirdspace” provided an unconventional school context for students to initiate conversations, responding and learning with one other in community. Space is made and remade through the people, thoughts, materials and other particulars that are present at a particular given time (Soja, 2004). The students in this experience created their own space, through the participants’ thoughts and responses, as they wrote and responded to the text and each other (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) and through that experience developed their own writing community.

Conclusion

This article illustrates how this particular group of fifth grade girls developed an on-line writing community in which to share their responses to a common reading through a Thirdspace. Like Daniels (2006), I consider “the next big thing in student-led discussion, written conversation,” (p. 14) as a possible new avenue for students to read and respond to literature by developing a Thirdspace that facilitates student ownership of their writing community and conversations. This Thirdspace experience provided the opportunity for a writing community to flourish. Through their ownership of the space that they created in their on-line writing community, the students composed and posted questions and responded to each other, sharing their personal experiences and responses to literature through their written conversations.

This article illustrates an innovative way that technology can build writing communities in a Thirdspace. The students in this classroom shared their thoughts on-line through writing their responses to texts in conversational threads. Cazden (2001) writes that by conversing through the computer (utilizing e-mail and threaded discussion boards, for example) students provided longer, deeper answers to questions. The teacher seems almost

absent in the discussion, and the students receive more feedback from their peers than in face-to-face discussions. The students in this classroom experienced these benefits in their on-line writing community first hand. As Flood and Lapp (1997) advocate, teachers need to incorporate the communicative arts, including computer technology, into ideas about reader response. Standards from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and from the International Reading Association (IRA) document the importance of utilizing technology in the language arts. Teachers, who are looking for additional ideas on ways to incorporate technology in authentic, meaningful practices that support writing communities, could utilize the ideas presented in this article.

This qualitative study examined one subset of students and the ways in which they facilitated and advanced their individual and group understanding of a text through both a face-to-face and online experience. Future studies should could consider comparing experiences between environments utilizing on-line writing communities to more traditional style teaching environments to explore different experiences in students' experiences and understandings. Supplemental studies could also examine student feedback and personal reflections on the pedagogical implications of the experience. This article focused upon one group's experience with one text. Additional research and analysis should be conducted to explore different students' responses to different types of texts.

Students today integrate technology-based writing communities throughout their daily life as they communicate with each other through text messaging, instant messaging, and e-mail. Students easily have incorporated these technologies into their daily lives. Literacy practices, such as writing communities, are intertwined with technology usage that impacts the ways we read, learn, and communicate in today's society. We know that "new literacies"

(Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) are not about the hardware or digital devices, but rather the shifting of classroom practices (Bomer, Zoch, David, & Ok, 2010) from traditional methods to those with more contemporary relevance. In this classroom, students were impacted positively by responding to literature in a new, innovative way: on-line, student-led discussions. Computer mediated technologies, such as the on-line, threaded discussion illustrated in this article, are one example of the application of technology that can be readily utilized to enhance a reader's response to texts and encourage participants to collaborate and socially co-construct their understandings through different spaces.

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Today's Meet and Literary Analysis: Navigating Human Connections in Digital Spaces

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Abstract

This study examines the intersections of technology and literary analysis for senior students at a Western United States high school. During the 2016-2017 school year, I integrated the web application TodaysMeet into a British literature course during Socratic seminars as part of a study of *Hamlet*. TodaysMeet served students as their main platform for communication and collaboration during the sessions which were inspired by the Youth Lens framework for young adult literature study. Using qualitative research tools, I analyzed data in the forms of observations, interviews, and student-created artifacts to understand how TodaysMeet could facilitate a particular form of literary analysis at the secondary level. Results of the study find TodaysMeet to be an interactive medium for literacy education as well as an effective tool to leverage students' new literacies toward academic achievement.

Keywords: young adult literature, new literacies, literary analysis, literacy leadership

It's not my thing, talking in front of people. I suck at it mostly, and most people don't really listen to what I say most times anyway. Besides, most of my life is online anyway. That's where I talk to my friends. I see them here and stuff, but it's not the same. I just felt like what we were talking about in the book was talking directly to me. I had so many ideas to get out. And typing was good because I'm a way better writer than talker. (Wilson, Interview, April 1, 2016).

Wilson was a student in my British Genres course. Soft-spoken and reluctant to speak up during class, Wilson's voice was one I seldom heard. I struggled to find ways to elicit his reactions to texts and to translate his savvy technology skills into rich engagement during literature study. Wilson describes a feeling of acceptance, an experience of his school tasks matching his preferred methods of meaning-making. With the help of the digital tool, TodaysMeet, he connected with literature in an authentic, personal manner. In 2014, I began experimenting with TodaysMeet in my courses and quickly became interested in how it might enhance learning in a 1:1 Chromebook environment, specifically, by promoting critical engagement with literature in the digital age. The purpose of this study was to explore how TodaysMeet can facilitate literary analysis for different types of learners during literature study at the secondary level. My two primary research questions were: 1) How can a tool like TodaysMeet create spaces for authentic literary analysis in Socratic seminars for high school students? 2 How can new literacies compliment literature study designed in accordance with a Youth Lens philosophy?

A Shifting Landscape of Literacy Practices

The long-assumed inequity of access within the digital divide has been complicated by recent studies that indicate more parity than ever before (Howell, Butler, & Reinking, 2017). Not only do a majority of schools including low-income institutions now have Internet

connectivity (Federal Communications Commission, 2010), but no significant difference exists any longer in smartphone ownership between the lowest and highest income households (Smith, 2013). Moreover, most teens are digitally literate web users including 86% of those from household incomes of \$30,000 or less (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012). While technology usage and access to devices are on the rise, schools are seldom able to employ technology in ways that produce the same level of richness in multimodal communication and meaningful interaction that students demonstrate within social contexts (Warner, 2016). A number of factors contribute to this impasse such as teacher-dominated lecture patterns, outdated approaches to instruction, and print-based, standardized curricula (Kesler, Gibson, & Turansky, 2016; Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2009). While the Internet and communication technologies have the potential to alter the nature of literacy in educational settings, we are still searching for instances where digital practices can expand our notions of literacy learning in schools on a consistent, change-inducing basis (Kress, 2003).

This challenge is marked for literature teachers who must confront the intersections of traditional approaches grounded in print materials and the plethora of new literacies students bring to school (Marlatt, 2018; Lenters, 2016). 21st Century students operate under spatial, visual, audio, kinesthetic, digital, linguistic, and semiotic modes of knowledge construction in classrooms that can reciprocate these literacies via transformative, situated design (Coiro et al., 2009). Current notions of literacy should include alternative meaning-making settings where social and cultural contexts contribute to multiple, coexisting realities, especially those constructed with technology. Evolution of literature study begins by integrating digital practices with traditional approaches, but more research is needed focusing specifically on how particular technologies can facilitate particular forms of textual analysis. For teachers of

literature, the task of implementing technology involves not only choosing the right tool in the right contexts, but also reflecting upon how we approach the literature itself.

21st Century Approaches to Literature

Literary theory in 20th century high school classrooms, along with university English departments, was dominated by New Criticism (Gallagher, 1997). Teachers trained students to examine works of literature in isolation by ignoring social, cultural, and historical contexts to focus only on the meaning rendered between the text's ideas and its structure. Ironically, New Criticism was motivated by a desire to make reading and analysis more democratic. The idea was that as different students saw uniform concepts at work in a text, they would feel validated as readers more so than in a scenario of numerous interpretations and differing perspectives (Gallagher, 1997). Proponents also saw New Criticism as a way to level the playing field in literature study because external factors brought to the text by the reader were supposed to have no bearing on the text itself. As difficult as it might seem to approach today's young adult literature students with the notion of one correct interpretation and one singular way to read a text, teachers continue to resort to this technique (Cochran-Smith, 2008).

In fact, transmissive teaching patterns are alive and well, particularly in literacy settings, where approaches and interpretations to texts are often prescribed and transmitted to passive readers with little critical engagement (Sadoski & Paivio, 2007; Schraw & Bruning, 1999). In our current state of literature study, the teaching of canonical texts is especially impacted by test-preparation curriculum and standards still dominated by print-based approaches (Gatti, 2016). The decision by teachers to utilize technology only partially responds to the needs of digitizing literature study. Rather, cultivating a critical digital

pedagogy involves diversifying instructional techniques in a way that enhances learning experiences. In their recent study on teachers' perceptions of becoming digital pedagogues, Wadmany and Kliachko (2014) challenge educators to, "develop student-centered teaching that enables the students to control their learning processes with the help of the teacher who serves as a facilitator" (p. 26). Teachers should be making decisions about technology implementation with an acknowledgement of the theoretical underpinnings of those decisions as well as their social and political outcomes. A critical approach to digitized literature study steers educators in this direction by inviting us to ask more pertinent questions such as, when do technologies help students engage with and analyze literature in critical ways? Which technologies? Which students? Under what conditions? To what end? These are the questions teachers should explore, and they should also drive research in new literacies integration.

Theoretical Framework

The Youth Lens

The need for a nuanced perspective of young adult literacy is at the heart of the Youth Lens (YL), an approach to literature that combines multiple theories such as post-structuralism and feminism into a complex view that reconsiders representations of adolescence in texts (Petroni, Sarigianides, & Lewis, 2015). The YL stresses that the labels placed upon youth are done so externally by disconnected adult entities, and understanding adolescence as a social construct is important in literacy education because it helps teachers and students observe youth culture. The YL acknowledges that many sociocultural factors affect our assumptions of what youth and adolescence are and challenges the notion that there is any single story for young people. Experiences of immigrant youth, working class youth, and ethnically diverse youth are just a few examples of the diversity within the story of adolescence that the YL

considers. Limited, simplistic conceptions of youth affect not only how teachers approach interactions with students, but also the texts they incorporate and textual analysis strategies they model for readers (Petroni et al., 2015).

To create spaces for this depth of analysis for our literature students, we must ask descriptive questions about characters and model analytic critiques exploring how adolescence figures in the text while encouraging students to search for implications of these connections in society. Our questions can start on the surface level then systematically delve into deeper explorations. These analyses hold numerous possibilities for personal textual connections as well as opportunities for cross-cultural examination of adolescence in a variety of curricula including short stories, novels, poems, films, magazines, advertisements, media studies, and more. Critical literature study has the potential to open doors to inclusive, multicultural literacy learning (Smagorinsky, 2008). As the diversity of YAL in schools continues to increase, it is crucial for both teachers and students to collectively denaturalize normative ideas about growing up and imagine how alternative perspectives might enhance our communities of literacy.

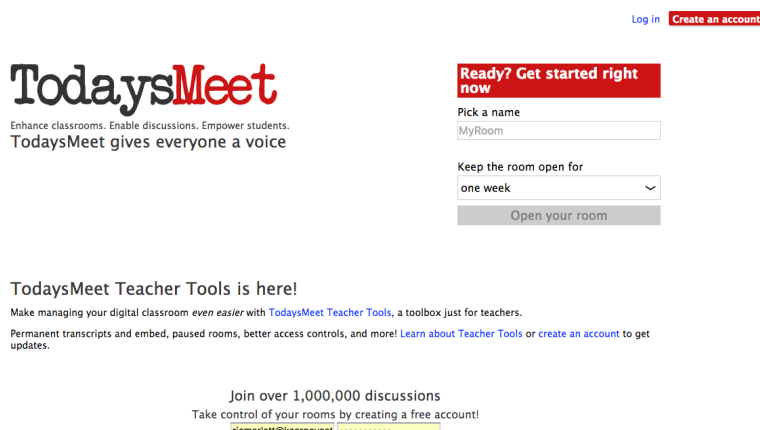
The practice of modeling how to dissect a text critically can be transformative for teachers and students (Reid, 1999). Recognizing multiple contextual factors in communication with one another informs essential questions for course design; shapes thematic units; crafts well-rounded syllabi; and positively impacts programs, departments, and policy. By re-envisioning adolescent experiences, we become empowered to pursue entirely new takes on both canonized and alternative works, all the while dispelling stereotypes, inviting multiple voices, and aiming for accurate representations of what it means to be young. This perspective reminds educators that there are many paths to growing up, and the blueprint for progressing

through literacy, school, and life is subjective. Considering its sociocultural connections between young adult literature study, and new literacy practices, the YL offers an ideal framework for analyzing conditions of a 21st Century literacy classroom, one that is highly digitized and collaborative.

Today'sMeet

While researchers have explored implications of numerous technology tools in literacy settings, Today'sMeet presents a unique set of characteristics and classroom applications (Tolisano, 2014). In a format that resembles a large group text message, Today'sMeet (Figure 1) displays the contributions of anyone who has signed in to the meeting room. As creators of the room, teachers have the ability to post prompts, moderate activity, regulate content, and provide feedback. Students have the power to respond to prompts, collaborate, offer feedback to peers, post links to other sites, add images, embed video, and more. Today'sMeet is deceptively simple. While its physical structure appears to be a tower of sequential text messages, teachers can create any format they wish, and transcripts of the discussion are available for download at any time. As a platform for collaboration, its single running thread and character limit makes interaction within Today'sMeet more immediate and inclusive than in other learning management systems such as Canvas or Blackboard.

Figure 1. Today'sMeet Homepage.



Today's Meet is a relatively new program, and early results of its usage in educational settings appear divided into two categories: as a component of individual lesson plans and as a formative assessment tool. Tolisano (2014) analyzes the use of Today's Meet in an 8th grade humanities class, where the goal of the lesson was to describe the author's utilization of plot, theme, and characterization. As different students were assigned different elements, parallel discussions ensued. For an added layer of collaboration, the live text was displayed through the projector, enabling all students to see the combined text. Tolisano (2014) points out that while students performed different functions within the lesson, they all contributed to the digital discussion.

In his use of Today's Meet as a formative assessment tool, Juarez (2014) discusses its impact on student engagement with course content. According to Juarez (2014), Today's Meet puts the power of learning in the hands of students, and when they "witness my eagerness to see their performance of the curriculum, they are equally enthusiastic to provide support that I can use to enrich and facilitate their learning" (para. 5). Juarez (2014) stresses the application's efficiency and ease; it creates a running feed that educators can use in real time while requiring little to no preparation. Signing in and opening up a room consumes seconds,

and as long as students have some kind of connected device, the landscape for digital communication has been paved.

From a sociocultural perspective, Today'sMeet holds great potential. Its communicative interaction involves far more than creating texts (Perry, 2012). Literacy is not only about the texts we produce, but also very much about what we do with those texts (Gee, 2012). Today'sMeet operates via multimodal literacy; it is part-social media, part-text messaging, and part-interactive discourse. Polls, rotating stories, collaborative poems, crowdsourcing, digital citizenship, video creation, image conglomeration, biographical audio feeds are several activities the program can facilitate. Participation in Today'sMeet can help foster an environment that resembles Gatti and Payne's (2011) definition of a democratic environment, where students and teachers are equally engaged on academic and civic levels. This technology responds to Wadmany and Kliachko's (2014) call to move the center of power away from the teacher and spread accountability throughout the classroom.

21st Century classrooms, where technologies and literacy practices collide, allow for fresh research opportunities of specific operations within literacy learning. Gaps exist in the literature regarding how different forms of technology such as Today'sMeet can facilitate different forms of literary analysis in secondary English. In conjunction with a YL that affords the ability to approach literature in a way that is centered on students' multiple literacies, a tool like Today'sMeet offers a new kind of textual analysis, one that has the potential to impact the education of underrepresented students and language learners alike. Despite the increasing number of case studies involving Today'sMeet, an investigation of its effects in specific literacy settings has yet to be undertaken. By exploring what kinds of analyses students

produce using TodaysMeet, we might better understand its uses and implications for literature study in the digital age.

Participants

A total of 26 students in my British Genres course participated in the study. Names have been replaced with pseudonyms. All participants were seniors, and a few were taking the course as a dual-credit option. As a university prerequisite course, the roster includes students who have either been admitted or intend to enroll at a university following graduation. In general, these contexts make for a broad range of aptitudes and interests, particularly in their tastes for textual activity, not to mention a diverse set of cultural backgrounds and ethnic heritages. What unified the participants was a shared experience in using devices in a 1:1 environment as RCHS had issued each student a Chromebook two years before. In accounting for the potential of TodaysMeet to be a distraction rather than a learning aid, I relied upon participants' prior knowledge of classroom Chromebook expectations. These students were accustomed to supplementing their learning with technology. And while they had utilized a number of programs at school, none were familiar with TodaysMeet until our activities in the course.

Method

Data Collection

Understanding the conditions under which students conduct literary analysis within a YL framework necessitated qualitative inquiry because such a research objective requires exploration of experiences in the field (Creswell, 2008). And to explore and later describe students' everyday literacy practices within the classroom community, I drew from an ethnographic design (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Glesne, 2006). Students participated in

Socratic seminars with the use of a school-issued Chromebook and were largely the designers of the learning environment. My role as a facilitator allowed me to write extensive field notes from my observations and to collect various samples of student work. Using Spradley's (1979) two-fold guide to conducting the ethnographic interview, I interviewed and audio recorded participants regarding their usage of Today'sMeet and referred to texts they analyzed and created as well as other specific literacy practices. After I expanded my field notes, I integrated them with in-process memos and integrative memos to produce a chronological collection.

Data Analysis

After reviewing my collection of artifacts and literature, I followed Agar's (1996) coding procedure by taking words or phrases from transcriptions and field notes and placing them into like categories. I also coded my own integrative memos, grouping similar concepts and ideas together below each entry. The coding phase allowed me to organize simultaneously what I had reflected upon in reviewing field notes and what was said in the interviews by participants. At this point I began establishing emergent themes in the data (Creswell, 2008). Drawing upon the YL theoretical framework, I took the initial codes and their coded data and combined them into categories of theoretical hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009). Table 1 contains a sample of the development of categories which resulted in the identification of themes. I searched for recurring themes in an effort to understand the intersections of technology and literacy as they were revealed in the everyday practices of meaning-makers (Street, 1995).

Table 1. Sample of Development of Categories.

Example of coded data	Initial code	Revised category
<p>“Up until senior year, I hadn’t really even read a book since junior high. I mean I skimmed and did Sparknotes and stuff, but I never really read. I like to read, it’s just that I have to find a book that I’m interested in or I don’t take the time.”</p>	<p>Student emphasizes her desire for authentic relations between her texts and her life.</p>	<p>Student: Beliefs and Approach</p>
<p>“It’s good most of the time. I like when we use it for discussions. People come up with some really good questions that they can just type in and people don’t have to stop the circle or interrupt. It actually makes it kind of fun. It makes you pay attention though because you have to listen and think of what to type at the same time.”</p>	<p>Student describes positive aspects of TodaysMeet including its efficiency and contributions during Socratic circles and literature discussions.</p>	<p>Student: Response to TodaysMeet</p>
<p>“Having the Chromebooks is good because I don’t have to always be worried about answering questions in front of everyone and maybe getting it wrong or whatever. Some classes you get put on the spot. Technology makes this more laid back like you can just do your work.”</p>	<p>Student discusses the positive aspects to teachers using technology to enhance learning.</p>	<p>Student: Reaction to tech integration</p>

Hamlet

I viewed *Hamlet* as an ideal candidate for YL-inspired literature study because the protagonist’s motivations and psychological undertones are ripe with ambiguity, and he also demonstrates conflicting versions of youth and maturity (Golden, 2009). He undergoes a quest to avenge his father’s murder which initially suggests to some readers a hero’s journey. Yet, he arguable does so with a juvenile sense of life, death, and love. At various points in the play, Hamlet behaves childishly and bemoans his plight with long, petulant soliloquies that precede violent outbursts toward friends and foes. While he often portrays himself as a manipulated victim of circumstances, he is at other moments tactful and cunning and appears completely in control of his destiny. This juxtaposition of adolescence/adulthood allows readers to reconsider expectations we place upon coming of age and fulfilling our roles in society. Shakespeare explores realms of sexuality, race, gender, and class--the very issues the YL framework encourages teachers and students to explore.

Socratic Seminars

Socratic seminars allow students to construct and express ideas around a central text through controlled discourse facilitated by course topics (Cuny, 2014). Though modified according to individual teacher preferences, the format of Socratic seminars typically involve a circular structure where students engage in dialogue designed to enrich their understandings. Today's Meet enhanced student participation and engagement in Socratic seminars because the digital interaction gave everyone a purpose as well as a voice. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the shift from passivity to participation in the classroom's structure.

Figure 2. Standard Socratic Seminar.

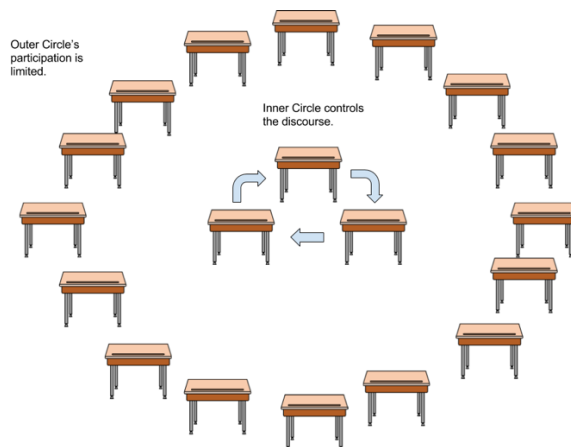
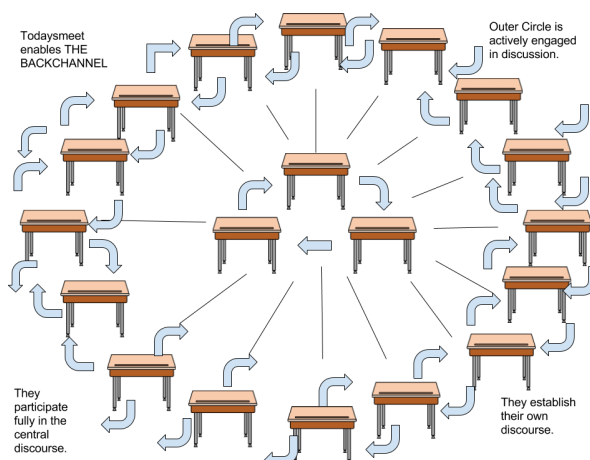


Figure 3. Digitized Socratic Seminar.



While we read the play, students created annotated scene summaries which were used in the seminars at the conclusion of all five acts. One of the primary objectives of the seminars was to create a space where students could consider the youth/maturity paradigm exemplified by Hamlet. Some key questions I asked students to consider included, *What is Hamlet, is he a man, a boy, or something else? In what ways does Hamlet exhibit the demeanor and actions of an adult in the play; conversely, in what ways does Hamlet demonstrate juvenile behavior? Are there instances in the play when Hamlet is performing both roles simultaneously? Does Hamlet ever reach adulthood, and if so, when? More importantly, how?*

Students fulfilled three roles during the seminars. 1) Discussion Directors facilitated the analysis using questions I had provided to get them started. They also used synchronous backchannel discussions on TodaysMeet to decide which direction to take the conversation, which follow-up questions to ask, and which textual elements to emphasize. 2) Inner Circle members answered the director's questions and used them as a springboard for further conversation. 3) Remaining students formed the Backchannel in a ring outside of the Inner Circle, co-constructing ideas and reacting to their peers' responses, all the while guiding the Discussion Director's choices within the discourse. Both the Director and the Backchannel were allowed their Chromebooks for TodaysMeet in addition to their annotated scene summaries, while the Inner Circle could use their summaries only.

Findings

TodaysMeet provided an interactive platform for YL literary analysis in distinct ways. In the following section, I share results from the digitized Socratic seminars. Findings are shown in the form of excerpts from observations and interviews as well as descriptions of artifacts. These findings are presented in three sections: 1) instances when backchannel

discussions bolstered the content and authenticity of literary discourse; 2) moments of personalized experiences in literature study; 3) inclusion of multiple voices in textual discussions.

To Read or to Read Well, That is the Question: The Backchannel

Designed from a YL perspective, the implementation of Today'sMeet in *Hamlet* Socratic seminars enabled opportunities for genuine textual analysis. While the central discussion took place in the Inner Circle, members of the Backchannel used Today'sMeet to post reactions to their peers' statements, suggest follow-up questions for the Discussion Director, and co-construct new meanings within the text. The opening minutes of our first seminar are detailed in the following excerpts and descriptions. We begin with field notes that describe the scene:

Aaron settles everyone down and calls the seminar to order. He addresses the Inner Circle of Roger, Jennifer, and Josie. The rest of the class are circled around them, participating in the backchannel. Aaron asks, "Would you say that Hamlet displays the behavior of an adult or of a juvenile?" After several seconds of silence, Josie speaks first and states that Hamlet acts more like an adult because he has vowed to avenge the murder of his father. Roger argues that Hamlet has not shown the ability to actually go through with his plan, and this weakness makes him more juvenile than adult. Jennifer is silent as Roger and Josie debate whether or not Hamlet will kill Claudius and if that will answer the initial question one way or another. (Field Notes, March 18, 2016).

The Inner Circle considers Hamlet's enigmatic characteristics within the context of stepping into power via the accomplishment a life objective from a position of powerlessness. With readers collectively summarizing key moments from Act I by citing dialogue and plot points, responses to the literature begin at the comprehension level, then gradually increase in

complexity. This interaction bypasses the need for an anticipatory set and launches right into textual discussion. Meanwhile, the Backchannel, featured in Figure 4, carries on a lively conversation of its own.

Figure 4. The Backchannel.



In a traditional Socratic seminar, students in the outer ring are typically silent, perhaps taking notes, but generally not contributing to the discourse. In the digitized seminar, they participate on multiple levels. First, they have a platform to respond to the Director's question, thus taking equal part in the summary and analysis. Second, they have the ability to interact with their peers and respond accordingly. Third, they directly impact the conversation by offering suggestions and feedback for the Director. Finally, the Backchannel takes a leading role in the overall literacy setting by creating content that coheres around fluid collaboration. Members of the Backchannel not only consider the central question, they interject their own reactions while offering inspiration for further Inner Circle discussion while extending their analysis even deeper into Hamlet's psyche.

As the seminar quickly expands, Aaron appears inspired by the Backchannel's web of content and reframes the question in light of the ground that has been covered in both the

physical and digital forums. We see conversation enriched by a number of personal connections in the following excerpt.

Jennifer interjects and says that she believes Hamlet is more juvenile than adult because he is unsure about things. Aaron asks Jennifer if she believes Hamlet is obsessed. Jennifer responds that he is. Aaron asks how different obsessions impact how we see people either as adult or juvenile. Jennifer responds that obsession is a tricky term because she wouldn't say she was obsessed with her car even though she enjoys driving it and depends on it daily, but she would say she is obsessed with getting into college. She adds that one obsession seems juvenile, one seems adult-like. (Field Notes, March 18, 2016).

What began with a single question about the main character and produced a thorough summarization of Act I has transformed into a democratic forum, a chorus of voices orchestrating a web of intertextual associations. The discussion is indicative of digital interaction in that subtopics flourish in a nonlinear fashion, sparking ideas in different directions. All the while, the umbrella topics pertain directly to considerations of youth/adulthood in the text. Josie then wonders if Hamlet can even discern the difference between what is real and what is not. The Backchannel facilitates all of these subtopics, with a range of responses.

Students explore obsession deeply, but with great care to balance their personal connections with adherence to the text. This sustained analysis is difficult to accomplish in a high school class. And yet, students appear to be thriving in this blended environment, with a mix of physical and digital interaction. The Backchannel proceeds virtually on their own devices but also takes their cues from the Inner Circle and its activity. Engagement occurs on multiple levels, as students listen to the discourse in the Inner Circle while simultaneously

tracking the concurrent conversation in the Backchannel, incorporating both nonverbal and verbal communication.

Backchannel activity encouraged engagement from students who actively listened to the central discussion while referring to their notes and sharing reactions to what was said in real time. In this sense, while students were collectively contributing to the main dialogue, they were also constructing their own conceptions of the adolescence paradigm in the text. Because students were bringing their own experiences and understandings to the Backchannel and subsequently affecting the Director's choice of questions, the literacy collaboration was dialogic. While pursuing notions of adolescence/adulthood, readers made connections to texts, co-constructed with peers, and investigated contexts of their own lives.

I was able to further enrich the content for the Backchannel by posting links to scholarly sources and references to Hamlet in popular culture. In one instance, I provided a link to a review of the 1994 Chicago Humanities Festival (Kilian, 1994) which featured Chief Justice Anthony Kennedy and Appeals Chief Judge William Bauer participating in a mock trial designed to determine Hamlet's innocence or guilt in the multiple deaths he both directly and indirectly causes. Although the trial was carried out for entertainment purposes, students were exposed to the cultural weight carried by Shakespeare's work. More importantly, the supplement generated renewed interest and sparked new lines of discussion.

Today'sMeet offered a new kind of literature study experience for students. Many technology interventions ask students to construct a set of ideas about the text, then formally enter the digital space. With Today'sMeet, the digital space was actually the entry point into students' investigations. This technology was more than a tool. Students navigated a digital world in which they created and collaborated, making their analysis a participatory act similar

to their social literacies outside of the classroom (Howell, Kaminski, and Hunt-Barron, 2016). Today's Meet offered academic activity not distinct from their usual meaning-making; it was an extension of their literacy lives.

Monica. I probed the Backchannel further by asking at what point does Hamlet sacrifice his innocence. A fresh wave of responses appeared, but one was particularly gratifying. Monica was an outspoken but polite young lady who had recently been experiencing some attendance issues due to a number of factors including caring for her siblings in a single-parent home, holding a full-time job at a shoe store in the mall, and having just gone through a breakup with her boyfriend of two years. She had been behind in her assignments but was a hard worker who was always able to get caught up. One of the assignments she missed was an overview of Aristotle's tragic hero, a protagonist who possesses a fatal flaw that leads to his own demise as well as those he cares for. Her answer to my question was quick and sharp: "He can never be innocent because he's tragic. He can't make a decision and that's his flaw. When a boy won't commit, that's when you run." Monica's response indicated that she not only completed the assignment she had missed but had thought about its outcome in the play as well as its thematic connection to her life. I had known Monica to be a persistent student serious about carving out a positive future for herself, but I really appreciated her at that moment for who she was and what she brought to the class.

Later, in an interview with Monica, I alluded to Kilian's (1994) article, "Guilty or Innocent, That is the Question--and Hamlet Goes Free." I asked her to what degree she thought Hamlet was innocent. She offered the following response:

At first I thought he was brave. I didn't think about innocence. He did what he thought was right even though he didn't seem like the type to fight. He also acts crazy, so maybe it wasn't bravery but insanity. But our group started talking about

their families and stuff and people who follow their heart can be inspiring. I thought about that, too. But he wasn't trying to be inspiring. He just wanted to live his life and make his father happy. So yeah I think he was innocent. Not like a little kid innocent but like a grownup. (Monica, Interview, April 9, 2016).

Monica's digital interaction allowed her to look deeply into the text and to reconcile her own preconceptions of innocence with how it plays out in the world. The complexity in her analysis, specifically, her reconsideration of what she originally thought was a strategy of resistance when reading. Monica, along with her peers in the seminar, appeared to not merely be reading, but reading well. Their analyses demonstrated thoughtful insight and authentic connections. The combination of critical reactions and interconnected literacy offered an alternative setting where students could go further without leaving the room. It was all right there, happening in real time. And their participation was grounded in real lives.

To Thine Own Self Be True: Personalizing the Experience of Literacy

I wrote the following question on the whiteboard to begin the seminar following Act III: *What does Hamlet want?* This is a complex question that requires reader inference to crack the codes of Hamlet's intricate phrasing and to consider the subtlety of Shakespeare's verbal and dramatic irony. Esther, who was paired with Harry in the Inner Circle, started the discussion swiftly. The following excerpt describes the activity that ensued:

Esther says that Hamlet wants a number of things: to avenge his father's death, to punish Claudius, to return to college, to eventually be king. She adds that it is possible that Hamlet does not know what he wants. As the backchannel's keyboards click in the background, Harry remarks that Hamlet would make a terrible king. This draws laughter from the backchannel. After Esther concedes that Harry is probably correct, Quinn (backchannel member) types "we should talk about that." Forbin (director) then asked, "OK, what makes a good king?" (Field Notes, March 26, 2016)

Quinn. The first wave of students offered rather predictable responses, except perhaps for Quinn, who posted, “Someone who actually wants to do the job.” While the conversation carried into the realm of Hamlet’s credentials (or lack thereof) for the throne, I bookmarked this comment and made a point to ask Quinn about it later.

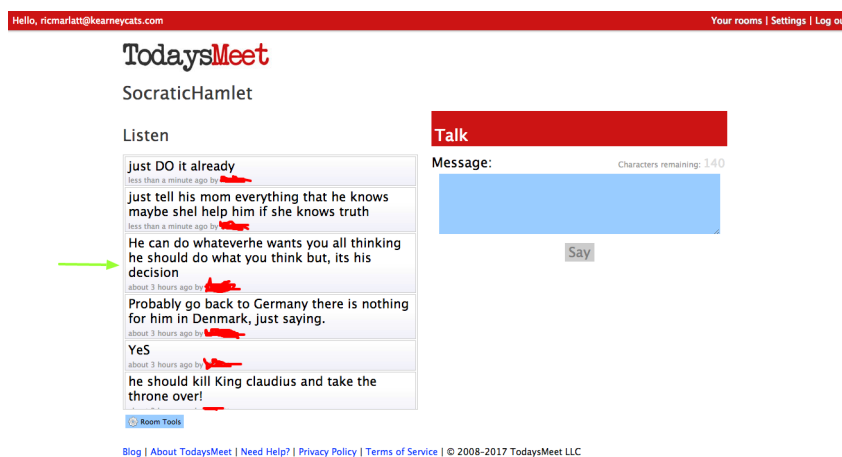
The resulting debate over Hamlet’s fitness to be king was captivating. It featured a variety of topics including the school’s administrative team, the presidential campaigns, student council elections, and responsibilities of step-parents. TodaysMeet allowed for personal analysis from students while serving as a multifaceted tool for myself as both a researcher and instructor. The teacher in me could gauge students’ comprehension of textual elements such as plot and characterization. I could also measure the level of critical insight with which students were navigating the text, as well as their ability to examine thematic qualities embedded in the narrative. The researcher in me observed sociocultural new literacies at work in an organic zone of literacy learning where thoughtful analysis operated via digital interaction.

Later, when I got the chance to sit down with Quinn, I asked him about his idea that a good leader is someone who “actually wants to do the job.” He invoked our earlier study of *Macbeth* by saying that Malcolm (the rightful heir to the Scottish throne) is a good leader because he understands what it takes to be king. When I pressed him further for examples, he said that his father wanted him to work for him after graduation and eventually take over the family plumbing business. Quinn said he didn’t mind the work and could potentially see himself doing it, but he also liked drafting and wanted to study to become an architect. He added that his younger brothers would be around to take over the business if he did not. I asked Quinn if he wanted to follow his own path. He said, “It’s nobody else’s.”

This dialogic conversation in which Quinn connected his prior readings to his current analysis while drawing parallels to the contexts of his life and enriching my understanding of him as a person was made possible by a single remark made earlier in the virtual forum. His statement was brief and in a traditional oral discussion might well have gone unnoticed. Underpinning his comment was an entire sequence of thoughts and considerations that drove his interpretation of the play and revealed authentic interaction with the literature. I later suggested he watch *The Lion King* with his brothers and look for connections to the play. I did this with the knowledge that Quinn was interested in the coming of age storyline, that he spent time with his younger brothers, and that he had reflected upon where his own path might lead him. How gratifying it was weeks later to hear him discuss with peers the similarities and differences between the Disney film and Shakespeare's work. With Today'sMeet, Quinn was able to participate candidly yet comfortably within the parameters of the seminar.

Diego. The concept of being true to oneself also seemed to resonate with Diego, although in an unexpected way. Diego's family is from Mexico and moved to the city after the turkey farm his father managed was shut down due to contamination a year before. Diego is a bright student and had earned a "Success Bound" scholarship to the city's university based on his youth leadership and desire to become the first in his family to attend college. He receives ELL support, and as a supporter of his achievement, I used a variety of scaffolds including alternative texts and multimodalities to empower him toward literacy. While the British Genres placement was perhaps not ideal for Diego, he did need credit for the course in order to enroll in university the following fall. His take on what Hamlet should do with his life caught my attention and is annotated with an arrow in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Diego.



Academically speaking, the Chromebook has been a blessing for Diego as he possesses excellent digital literacies, especially typing skills that he relies on far more often than his handwriting, which he refers to as, “sick chicken scratch.” On a personal level, however, Diego dislikes the idea of having to carry his computer with him. In fact, while he is a hard-working, pleasant young man with spirited brown eyes, he is not enamored with the concept of school and actually displayed mixed feelings about his scholarship during an interview later:

Everybody is so excited for me to go here. It would be cool and all that but I’ll probably end up starting my own business like my dad so I don’t even think I need to do college. My mom made me apply for it. I guess I’ll go but I don’t know. School is OK. Reading ain’t bad but I like outdoors. Probably just be my own boss. (Diego, Interview, April 19, 2016).

Out of all my students, Diego perhaps connected the most with Hamlet’s dilemma of deciding what to do with his life. I knew Diego had a passion for his agricultural background and talked fondly of helping his father on the farm, but I was unaware of his reservations about accepting post-secondary plans that weren’t his own plans all along. Diego’s textual connection was direct, and I felt the weight of his anxiety even weeks after our interview. I thought it was

courageous for him to explore the play so personally and to share his story with me. When I asked him about his comment on Today'sMeet, he reiterated the notion that sometimes youth are never asked what they want. I asked if it bothered him when no one asks what he wants. He responded, "It's my parents' job to do what's best for me. But that's my job, too."

Literacy teachers strive for connections--between students and their texts, between textual elements and readers' lives, and among peers. These connections depend upon a discernible level of student engagement with texts which can be aided by digital integration. Today'sMeet was unlike any program I had previously utilized. Students like Quinn and Diego identified multiple points at which their personal lives could not only help them understand deeper elements of the play, but also ways in which their analysis could help them consider their own experiences and futures. The digital space offered a personalized reading experience. Students responded to texts on their own terms and in textual operations that reflected their own methods of meaning-making in social settings. This level of intimacy with literature has implications far beyond success in academic settings and has the potential to steer young adults toward a life in literacy.

The Play's The Thing: Inviting New Voices Through Digital Opportunities

Class discussions about literature often fall into the same two or three students controlling much of the discourse, which contributes to the consolidation of authority while excluding others from the conversation. Prolific talkers dominate discussions because know they answers and enjoy being heard while their peers lose engagement and resort to silence. When teachers accept this as the norm, literacy learning becomes public act of exclusion. Reluctant contributors miss out, not just on the co-construction of knowledge, but also on meaning-making through literature. Today'sMeet offers all students a chance to collaborate,

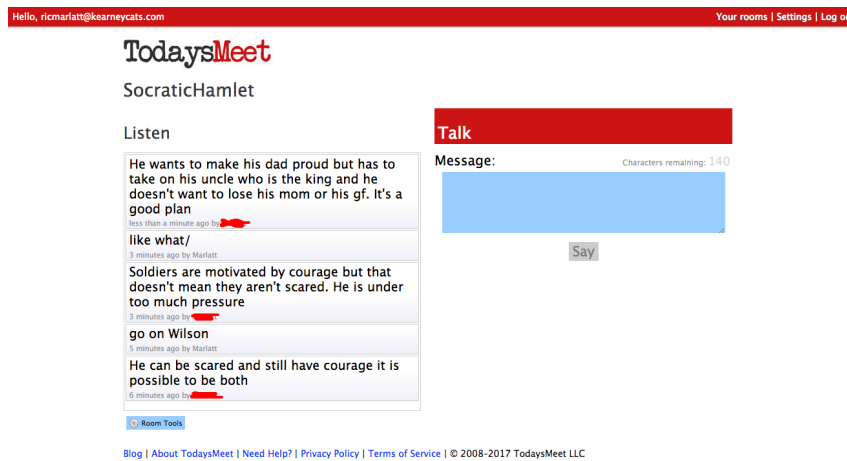
especially those whose classroom operations are more introverted. Our seminar following Act II focused on Hamlet's plot to expose Claudius's guilt in the king's murder. I wanted students to think about the steps Hamlet was taking to discover the truth and consider what those motives reveal about his character. What struck me about the ensuing discussion was that TodaysMeet provided a platform for new voices to contribute.

Wilson. Wilson was a student from whom I did not hear much throughout the semester. He is a bright, pleasant young man, but he preferred to work independently and didn't engage in conversation with his peers. He always had a book with him and would sneak pages in whenever he could, so I knew he at least had some interest in literature. During our first week of class, I asked students for one word to describe themselves. Wilson's response was, "Gamer." He wore headphones often, listening to his Dungeons and Dragons podcast. Rarely did he seem to look up from his book or computer at his surroundings, much less join in on discussions. When activity started, he consistently closed off. And yet, when offered the chance to contribute digitally, Wilson not only exhibited an interest in *Hamlet* and the discussion it produced, but he became a consistent contributor who provided text-based evidence for his opinions. With the use of TodaysMeet, Wilson became a strong member of the literacy community and a valid facilitator of its discourse.

After offering very little in class dialogues or interaction with peers, Wilson demonstrated a new level of textual interest while using TodaysMeet. Much to the surprise of all of us, Wilson was suddenly leading the analyses and spearheading exchanges. For example, after Tela (Director) asked Jennifer and Diego (Inner Circle) how courageous Hamlet is in devising his trap for Claudius, both remarked that they thought Hamlet was more scared than anything else. Wilson took charge of the Backchannel and generated a number of

points propelling the discussion forward. Wilson's initial comment is at the bottom of Figure 6. He then responds to my prompts.

Figure 6. Wilson.



Wilson considers weighty issues of courage and fear, both of which tie in directly with young adult readers' perceptions of their journey toward adulthood. Wilson considers what it means to be in a high-stress situation and connects those reactions with his textual analysis. Based on Wilson's topic, Jennifer and Diego's conversation then transitioned into how civilians view soldiers and our perceptions of veterans, particularly in the contexts of the ongoing War on Terror. Wilson later posted a link to a news article about returning veterans being acclimated back into society while dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

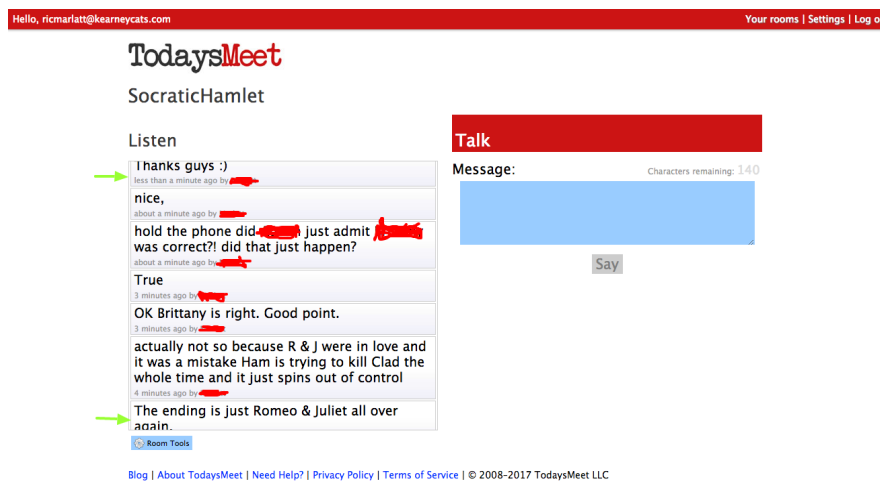
In a subsequent interview, I asked Wilson about his group's discussion. He told me that his uncle had been a Vietnam Vet and had shared stories with him about what it was like to serve in the war and then return home. I told him that he helped spark an important discussion, and I asked him why he hadn't shared ideas like this in the past. The following interview excerpt contains part of his response:

I don't really hang out with anyone in the class. I mean I get along with everyone it's just I've never been a big talker. It was fun to see what people put and then share back. I like the videos you can post. To me this was a good way to talk about Shakespeare. (Wilson, Interview, April 1, 2016).

In the digital space, Wilson made powerful academic strides not only as a serious reader, but as a classroom leader as well. His remarks challenged his peers to complicate their preconceptions of veterans and sparked new understandings of what life might be like for those returning home from combat to re-assimilate into civilian life. The critical thinking about veterans' futures was reminiscent of youth as a symbolic placeholder, the idea that we attach to the concept of adolescence the notion that the future holds high hopes beyond the threshold of adulthood, that there is something greater out there for all of us if we follow a prescribed formula (Petroni et al., 2015). Today'sMeet granted license for a greater number of voices to contribute to the discourse and allowed for discursive literacy learning. For students like Wilson, this was a first. As for me, I had been hoping Wilson would break out all year, and I relished the moment when he finally did.

Brett. While Wilson was originally reluctant to share his voice, Brett was quite the opposite. With a class rank perennially near the top of his peers and a confident, well-spoken command of language, Brett is a student whose academic excellence is obvious. And he is not bashful about his talents. In fact, he often draws consternation from peers for his prolific, elaborate answers. Brett is a nice kid. But he is also a know-it-all, and he knows it. In past discussions, Brett had a tendency to dominate the discourse, to occupy the space almost single-handedly in some instances. Today'sMeet and the Socratic format offered Brett (Figure 7) the chance to continue to demonstrate his knowledge and understanding but to do so in a way that was constructive to the classroom climate.

Figure 7. Brett.



As a member of the backchannel, Brett was forced to confront his unilateral tendencies and regard his peers' ideas to frame his own remarks within the conversation. This was a new skill for him and one that he developed nicely over time. For the first time, Brett appeared to be learning from his peers, and through his interaction, they in turn saw him in a new light as well. Today'sMeet not only facilitated close analysis of the play, it also served to solidify peer relationships. I viewed their analysis as serious and insightful, yet the tone of their work was often playful. This notion of play and creation was rooted in doing things with the literature and was entirely student-led. A range of student voices were invited to participate in the digital activities. From the previously disengaged to those accustomed to controlling academic discourse, Today'sMeet met the needs of all learners and helped to cultivate collaboration among different personalities.

Discussion

Integrated with Socratic seminars, Today'sMeet can facilitate successful literary analysis at the high school level. This research has implications for the fields of literacy and

technology in that it contributes an application of digital pedagogy in a typical classroom, featuring the intersections of textual operations, both print and digital. The study showcases current conceptions of digital tools in action and explores the impact of technology on literacy tasks within the context of literature study. Literacy scholars and educators are discovering how new technologies can be implemented in teaching and learning as smartphones, computers, tablets, and other devices continue to work their way into secondary institutions. These findings could point us toward a framework for technology integration in literature study and literacy practices in 21st Century school settings.

The YL was instructive as the study's theoretical framework and lens through which I designed the Socratic seminars. It also sheds light on a number of interpretations I was able to draw from the data. By complicating the ways in which we ask students to approach literature, we reprogram young adults' notions of what reading can be, as well as what literature can offer students beyond passing a quiz or earning credit for a course. Through individualized literacy experiences, participants challenged both their previous assumptions about reading and their future aspirations. These students operated through the text in ways I had not observed in our prior interactions. This critical awareness is extended to instructors as well. I felt a different sense of urgency in the depths of questions I was helping to facilitate. Searching for answers such as how we think about growing up and what it means to fail weren't merely features of a curricular unit. Rather, the YL asked me to rethink the act of teaching altogether. As an educator, I was surprised at how the framework pushed me to new realms of pedagogy. And as a researcher, I am curious about how the YL can further enhance studies in literature and potentially impact operations in other disciplines as well.

Technology implementation, like all curricular decisions, should be approached critically, with acknowledgement of the theoretical and practical consequences that underpin what we do in education. Researchers and practitioners alike should approach pedagogy by asking *to what end* learning opportunities are designed. Technology, in this case, Today'sMeet *to what end*? As demonstrated previously, Today'sMeet can be an effective tool to facilitate literary analysis for high school students under certain circumstances. Yet, it is likely not an optimal choice in other cases within the English discipline. Formal units measuring skills such as expository writing, research techniques, or composition and rhetoric may not have significant uses for Today'sMeet because of its limits both in textual space and the number of characters it allows.

In addition, because all users can see what is previously posted prior to adding their own text, imitation or plagiarism of ideas is always possible, as is a stifling of students' participation if they view their own thinking as being of a lesser quality than their peers. After we had used Today'sMeet a few times, and I had obtained an understanding of the platform it provided, I was careful with what kinds of prompts I suggested and monitored closely the kinds of operations I facilitated. In these supplemental instances, results were mixed. I found that using it as a traditional assessment tool of their interpretations of a film adaptation for instance was not productive. While a few students freely shared their thoughts regardless of their uniqueness, many students opted to simply paraphrase what their peers had said. In cases like this, Today'sMeet did not yield student-led conversation or free exchange of original ideas. The digitized Socratic seminars were successful because they were designed using a YL to explore a central text. Successful technology integration involves more than the digital tool, but depends contexts of literacy practices and desired outcomes.

Conclusion

During YL-inspired literature study, TodaysMeet facilitated strong examples of literacy collaboration through Socratic seminars that produced interactive text-based activities. Collected data included extensive observations, interviews, work samples, and artifacts of technology usage and literacy practices. The study suggests that TodaysMeet enabled textual analysis centered on constructive literacy learning through engaged literature study. Participants collaborated via multimodal tasks in which they learned from one another, and their activities remained focused on the text. Their explorations of youth and adolescence sparked new analyses of a canonized work. TodaysMeet allowed for human connections in digital spaces through a revered, traditional text. In response to my research questions, I observed new kind of literary analysis. Students guided one another, and they challenged both peers and their instructor to read closer and to dig deeper. TodaysMeet opened up new literacy territory for me as a researcher and educator. As Hamlet might say, I had the chance to pluck out the heart of its mystery and hold it up to the light.

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**Defining New Media: Making Arguments about Literacy Events and
Sponsors**

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Abstract

Multi- and new literacies characterize many contemporary approaches to writing and literacy studies, but the ways scholars define new literacies, particularly digital literacies, contribute to how the field at large understands these literacies. New media is one element of digital literacy that has often been used as a catch-all for various literacies, particularly multimodal and digital literacies. However, scholars' definitions of new media demonstrate what roles digital literacy plays within rhetoric and composition. Scholars define new media in such a way as to emphasize digital literacy events that already take place in the field or argue how the field has or should function as a digital literacy sponsor.

Keywords: new media, digital literacy, multiliteracies, definitions

Alexander Reid (2007) argues there are two virtuals associated with theories of knowledge composition: the virtual-technological and the virtual-actual (p. 4). He says, “if we ascribe to the belief that writing is not simply the recording of preexisting ideas, but instead participates in the composition of knowledge, then we are committing ourselves to exploring these intersections between technology and the embodied mind” (p. 5). Reid articulates an awareness of the virtual-actual as a nuanced theory about technology impacting our ideologies and knowledge construction, taking ideas about multiliteracies and digital rhetoric further than many scholars. Frequently, as I argue throughout this piece, scholars use key terms in new and digital literacies without attention to the conceptual impetus behind the use of those terms, but the arguments they put forward define digital literacies along the lines of literacy events and literacy sponsorship. Multiliteracies have been used to discuss everything from visual literacy (New London Group, 1996; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996) to numeracy (Johanek, 2004) to digital literacies, including those associated with game play (Gee, 2003) and identity building (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Selber, 2004). I look at the use of *new media* as a catch all for digital literacies within rhetoric and composition’s published scholarship. Scholars present different definitions of *new media* from one article to the next—sometimes even within one article. Although such issues may appear to be specific to certain subfields—such as computers and writing—they impact the broader fields of literacy, rhetoric and composition, and English studies as a whole. For example, as Claire Lauer (2014) points out, from 1990-2010, the MLA *JIL* had a 20% increase in job postings for positions related to the use of digital technology in expertise, and positions related to digital technology expertise “increased 410%” between 2008 and 2009 across the overarching field (p. 66). Because these terms have become so prevalent in our fields and our academic careers, knowing what we’re arguing for when we discuss and draw on digital multiliteracies is imperative for scholars and hiring committees. New media is a particularly interesting term because it has such a diverse array of uses, as Lauer (2012) shows.

Although definitional precision is a concern, Lauer (2014) and others argue our *justifications* of certain terms’ definitions are more important than such precision in the use of those definitions (p.

61). Scholars in the field employ specific—if diverse—definitions when discussing new media as a digital literacy, and these definitions carry with them arguments about composing and rhetoric.

Digital literacy events arguments are often enthymematic, suggesting rhetoric and composition scholars apparently, presumably, obviously, or naturally are concerned with new media (the implied premise being that new media is an artifact appropriate for rhetoric and composition to study and produce), and that scholars and students in the field routinely have digital literacy events via new media. *Digital literacy sponsors arguments*, on the other hand, suggest how the field challenges new media's fit in the discipline while arguing for new media as a legitimate object of study and production for the discipline. Scholars who argue for the presence of new media in the classroom, the university, and the discipline's professional development make a case that extends beyond the computers and writing subfield: new media deserves robust inclusion in rhetoric and composition studies. Such scholars clear a path for digital literacy and digital literate practices.

From 2000-2018, scholars have defined the present shape of digital literacy as integrally related to the term new media, even demonstrating that the field now recognizes go-to scholars when considering new media and related ideas (Lauer, 2012). While scholars tend to argue that new media is a type of digital literacy event (that is, they write most about how both scholars and students use digital literacy to read, create, or interact—in short, what digital literacy means from a practical application standpoint), the field has less digital literacy sponsors arguments that epitomize new media and digital literacies as the next stage in a continuum of rhetorical shifts and literacy frameworks fit for the overarching discipline: though the subdiscipline has taken up digital literacies, the larger field still needs digital literacy sponsorship. Joshua Daniel-Wariya (2016) and others argue that

competing definitions [...] may not require absolute resolution, and it may not be necessary for the field to agree on a single definition. Instead, what is needed is an awareness of the functions various definitions serve, what kinds of composing practices they enable and constrain, and well-reasoned justifications for adopting particular

definitions in specific contexts. (p. 37)

The field, then, needs to pay more attention to explaining ideological and epistemological underpinnings for using *new media* in particular contexts (at the very least). I argue the field can achieve such precision in situ by crafting and grounding digital literacy sponsors arguments about digital literacies, demonstrating a robust fit within literacy studies and rhetorical practice.

In this essay, I briefly explain the rhetorical nature of definitions before articulating the relevance of a new media case study and my methods of analysis in this case study. The results of the study suggest two distinct definitional arguments, both of which demonstrate a lack of clarity about digital literacies and new media as a digital literacy in particular. The lack of clarity but clear association of a literacy continuum demonstrates the evolution of literacy studies in a technology-saturated society.

Definitions as Arguments

According to Edward Schiappa (2003), definitions are always rhetorical, always contextualized. He argues scholars should approach definitions “as constituting rhetorically induced social knowledge [... or] shared understanding among people about themselves, the objects of their world, and how they ought to use language” (p. 3). Schiappa further explains different definitions might be evoked depending on audience (p. 3). Authors construct their definitions as they would any argument: with a particular audience in mind. For example, scholars writing for a *Research in the Teaching of English* audience define new media differently than those writing for a *Computers and Composition* audience; the definitions reflect an understanding of each journal’s readership and values. Definitions, then, have disciplinary purposes: scholars’ definitions carry arguments about the discipline to the discipline’s different audiences. By putting forth definitions, scholars present arguments that shape the discipline’s development.

Definitions are not simply foundational, declarative statements: the foundation portrayed by definitions is carefully chosen and developed. Still, definitions are often presented as objective constructions: they are meant to appear translucent. According to David Zarefsky (2006), a definition

is: “an implicit argument that one should view the thing in a particular way. But the argument is never actually advanced” (p. 404). This is where the danger lies, particularly where digital rhetoric is concerned. The terms we use—multiliteracy, digital literacy, multimedia, multimodal, new media, digital media, digital composition, social media—are frequently used with implicit arguments based on a “definition [that] is put forward as if it was uncontroversial” (p. 404). Therefore, as Zarefsky shows, definitions are “a kind of strategic maneuvering” used by authors to advance certain arguments over others (p. 403).

In rhetoric and composition studies, scholars such as Susan Peck MacDonald (2007) and Abby Knoblauch (2012) have argued for definitions of integral key terms throughout the field’s history. In the 21st Century, key terms in the field have not changed, but the list has grown to include various terms within the realm of digital literacy. Lauer (2014) underscores the proliferation of such terms within the field and highlights the ultimate problem behind the array of terms: what do they *mean* for the field? Lauer ultimately argues:

by becoming aware of the terms we have been using and by taking ownership over the way we name and define the new composing practices and technologies we have come to value, we will be better positioned to [...] articulate the importance of our work in a way that ensures its continuation. (p. 61)

While Lauer is writing for a computers and writing subfield audience, she suggests the larger field may find wider support in higher education with better articulated definitions of/for digital literacy that, as I have claimed elsewhere, engage in “conversations about what it means to write in the world at large” (Werner, 2015, p. 66); these arguments, then, are about “contemporary types of written products and the composing technologies used to craft such products” (p. 61). Terms central to digital literacy are, therefore, central to the field as the field evolves alongside a digital writing public.

Lauer (2009) also argued for distinct definitions of multimodal and multimedia. She claims multimodal is preferred within the discipline to “[describe] pedagogies that emphasize the process and design of a text” and that multimedia is “the term of choice in non-academic or industry spheres” (p.

231). Although Lauer shows both terms are used interchangeably, she explains concrete differences between production and design (discipline/pedagogy) versus end products (industry). Lauer highlights how scholars have begun to define these contested terms, but she maintains definitions “should be driven [...] by the audience who will encounter and use it” (p. 237). Her argument seems at odds with that of Schiappa and Zarefsky (that definitions rhetorically influence audience understanding and action). Instead, she argues the definitions of multimodal and multimedia depend on an audience’s familiarity with such terms, as if the terms are jargon.

Further, Lauer (2012) examines the field’s definition of words related to—and including—new media. Lauer investigates the definitions of new/multi/modal/digital/media texts, and to do so, she examines the anatomy of their definitions. She goes directly to established scholars in the field who study the concept and related concepts. Rather than discursively analyzing definitional conversations, she asks scholars for their definitions (Lauer, 2012). Lauer argues such “[d]efinitions are important because they help us determine our collective interests and values” (np.). She claims scholars’ definitions are the basis of shared ground, showing her inclination toward definitions as guidelines for the discipline rather than arguments advanced within and for the discipline. She argues the definitions are audience-oriented, contextual, limited, multiple, precise, and relative (Lauer, 2012). By interviewing notable scholars in the field who use these key terms, Lauer seeks definitions that have shaped the field: her analysis demonstrates how one cohort of scholars has used and influenced other scholars’ terminology. Lauer, then, looks at a few definitions in order to:

[help] us figure out what we think, not just the right words for what we already know [...]

The chosen definition] positions us in the conversation, exposes our assumptions, announces our intentions, and helps us explain to ourselves and others who we are and what we believe in. (np.)

Examining our new media definitions is a part of seeking out positions within our discipline.

Scholars’ definitions of new media at the start of the 21st Century are arguments about what the field values—those values are reflected by the terminology used and the definitions bound to

those terms. New media is just one term used in discussions of digital literacies, but, although it is used less frequently now than at the start of the millennium, it has cultural capital in the digital humanities. Throughout this article, I review published research in the discipline, uncovering rhetoric and composition's specific new media definitions, revealing the importance of paying attention to the terms we use, the definitions we rely on, and the concepts we advance to articulate the purview of the field and the impact it has on a digitally-saturated society.

Studying Scholars' Definitions

Because definitions are argumentative in nature, analyzing how scholars define new media within rhetoric and composition's printed scholarship helps the field understand scholars' strategic maneuvers and how such maneuvers influence disciplinary evolution. In order to analyze definitions, maneuvers, and disciplinary development, I looked to published conversations in the field: journal articles, which serve as an important locus of disciplinary power, shaping the discipline even as they are shaped by it. According to Maureen Daly Goggin (2009), "journals have played one of the most important roles in fostering the field of rhetoric and composition" (p. 225). Further, MacDonald (2007) claims, "one way to probe assumptions and values in a profession is to examine the discourse of its [...] publication" (p. 588), and I use journals to probe the field's assumptions with regards to new media: specifically, I review new media definitions from *College Composition and Communication*, *Research in the Teaching of English*, *Kairos*, *Computers and Composition*, and monographs.

As I have argued elsewhere (Werner, 2015; 2017), these four journals have been foundational to the current disciplinary paradigm and further represent the scholarship of the overarching discipline (*CCC*, *RTE*) and the subdiscipline (*Kairos*, *C&C*). For the purposes of this study, I have expanded a previous data set and analyzed the data specifically for definitions of new media within publications

dealing with multiliteracies, both digital and otherwise.¹ I reviewed the monographs and journal articles published from 2000-2018 for key terms regarding new media. Though monographs are more situated on the fringes of a field's development, take longer to publish, and may have less of an impact on the field depending on members' discretionary and/or budgeted funding for such materials, they play a vital role in the advancement of the discipline and afford important lenses through which scholars understand key concepts. As the 21st Century loomed, public discussions of the need for technology, technological literacy, and the marriage of technology and teaching were widely discussed, even by the Clinton Administrations' *Getting America's Students Ready for the 21st Century: Meeting the Technology Literacy Challenge: A Report to the Nation on Technology and Education*. An examination of these early definitions also allows for a foundation with which to understand contemporary and future uses of related terms.

The scholarship at the start of the century sets the tone of the field regarding new media, and arguments made about new media during this time period influence future definitions, discussions, and research. We see the results of that influence in Lauer's (2012; 2014) work, for instance. Of the articles published from 2000-2018, 132 were relevant to this study because they can be described with the key term new media. Of the scholarly monographs published in the field, eleven were relevant (described using new media as a key term). Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media* was also included because the text, published in 2001, is cited parenthetically throughout the data set and mentioned in twelve definitions.

In this article, I rely on Thomas Huckin's (2004) notion of content analysis and the rhetorical nature of definitions (Schiappa, 2003; Zarefsky 2006) to understand the discipline's new media definitions. In the context of this study, a definition of new media consists of a statement in which an

¹ In this piece, I have expanded an earlier data set to include artifacts from an additional eight years, and I've reviewed both journal articles and scholarly monographs. Finally, the current study only analyzes definitions, putting aside other related concerns of the previous study, for a more robust discussion of arguments.

author defines the phrase through explicit use of the term *new media* or reference to it (referent pronouns) coupled with a definitional verb (especially “defines”), to be verb (is, are), or an active, argumentative verb (explain, suggest, attribute):

Definition = New Media/New Media Referent + Definition Verb/ To Be Verb/ Argument Verb.

Further, definitions are not limited to sentence boundaries. Instead, statements consist of one complete discussion of new media. Sometimes, such a statement was only one sentence long. Far more common were definitions developed over a series of sentences (two or more). Statements composed of several sentences did not take up different aspects of new media, but further explained one particular aspect. Authors might also define new media in several places throughout their texts, which I counted as discrete definitions.

Using these definition formula and criteria, only 62 (47%) of the articles and books contained new media definitions. However, throughout these 62 texts, scholars articulated 137 distinct definitions for an average of 2.1 definitions per text. In the 70 texts (53%) without definitions, authors assumed readers shared an understanding of the term.

After reviewing articles for new media definitions, I inductively arrived at a coding scheme to explain the definitions’ content. This initial coding scheme consisted of twelve separate adjective-based codes emerging over a series of critical examinations; I refined these codes by combining closely related codes. After narrowing and refining to seven codes, I solicited the help of an inter-rater and worked with her on 20% of my data. Ultimately, after narrowing and re-labeling argument categories for more precision, six argument types emerged, and the inter-rater and I had a simple reliability of 87% with a kappa of 0.8, which is categorized as very strong. Satisfied, I critically reviewed the codes and definitions with an eye toward overarching trends to understand what disciplinary, rhetorical work these definitions accomplish. I identified two emergent trends: definitions allowed for arguments that contribute to how we understand *digital literacy events* or arguments highlight *digital literacy sponsors and sponsorship*. I returned to the definitions once more, coding for these two types of arguments.

Definitional Arguments:

Articulating Two Overarching Arguments via Six Categories of Minor Arguments

Comparing the different definitions showcases how scholars craft arguments about new media. The majority of definitions are concerned with practical uses of new media (digital literacy events arguments); definitions might explain new media's aspects or attributes or how to use new media (professionally or pedagogically): such definitions are about the application and practice of digital literacy and focus on digital literacy events. Fewer definitions make digital literacy sponsors arguments. According to Deborah Brandt (1998), literacy sponsors "are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 166). Definitions about digital literacy sponsors are concerned with the theoretical position of new media and digital literacies within rhetoric and composition; they are concerned with who has been a digital literacy sponsor in the field and how the field might function as a digital literacy sponsor in the future to its own benefit via cultural capital both in and outside of the academy.

Scholars use new media definitions in two ways. They define new media from a practical standpoint, enthymematically demonstrating a shared assumption that new media is part of the discipline's purview (74% or 101 definitions). New media, then, is clearly a literate practice, and as the field is concerned with digital literacy events, new media should be robustly studied and used. Otherwise, scholars define new media from a conceptual standpoint, describing why or how new media functions within digital literacy sponsors: it is a component of digital literacies, subsumed under multiliteracies, of which the field should be concerned. Such definitional arguments attempt to convince others that new media is fitting content for the discipline, thus arguing for the discipline's role as a digital literacy sponsor (26% or 36 definitions). See Table 1 (below) for the overarching arguments broken down by minor arguments about new media, the arguments' descriptions, and the

percentages of arguments within the data set.

Throughout the six minor arguments, I use several terms that may be variously understood by other scholars. Therefore, articulating my own definitions of these multiliteracies sets a foundation for the categories I identify, allowing readers to understand what I mean when I invoke the terms *multimodal* and *digital*. When I use *multimodal*, I invoke Lauer’s literature review and synthesis of *multimodal* in rhetoric and composition’s published scholarship. Lauer (2009) says multimodal “[describes] our pedagogies that emphasize the process and design of a text,” including the specific use of more than one mode of communication or argument (p. 231). Her argument differentiates this from *multimedia* because media implies the integration of all modes into one digitized means of dissemination. Therefore, I use multimodal to refer to a text that uses more than one mode of communication, whether physical or digital. Digital, on the other hand, I use to refer to those texts that are **strictly produced** using digital technologies (software and hardware) **and disseminated** via these same digital technologies. These terms are integral to many digital literacy events definitions of new media: as noted below, scholars emphasize one over another in their new media definitions. A definition might imply multimodality but emphasize digitality; another might highlight the composing process of choosing modes (even if those modes happen to be digitally mediated).

Table 1: Literacy Events and Literacy Sponsors via New Media Definitions				
Over-arching Argument	New media...	Description	Percent of Data Set	Total Percent
Digital literacy	is digital	Emphasizes digital composition and digital environments over other	26%	74%

events		attributes		
	is part of a literacy continuum	Emphasizes remediation and the re-working of previous, traditional, and linear literate practices	17%	
	is multimodal	Emphasizes multimodal and material components as well as composing activities	10%	
	is interactive, emphasizing conscious audience participation	Emphasizes audience participation or purposeful, conscious interaction	21%	
Digital literacy sponsors	has been defined by other scholars, and drawing on these definitions allows for continuity and understanding	Emphasizes preexisting definitions in the literature	16%	26%
	reflects a particular moment in rhetoric and composition's 21 st Century history	Emphasizes new media as a fitting topic for scholarship, classrooms, and professional development of	10%	

		faculty and students; emphasizes particular “moments” of the field		
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Digital Literacy Events Arguments

Scholarship in the field includes more definitions about how scholars *use* new media as a literate practice. This spectrum of definitions does not provide a cohesive understanding of what new media actually is, though. Rather, scholars suggest new media needs no further explanation for scholars in the field: the discipline already knows about new media. Digital literacy events arguments offer a shared assumption that new media is already part of the discipline: scholars using these definitions argue instead for new or more effective ways to *implement* these disciplinary constructs.

New media is digital is the most frequent type of argument scholars put forth, occurring 26% of the time (35 definitions). Definitions arguing *new media is digital* emphasize texts created in digital environments, using digital technologies, and intended for digital distribution. Arguments that *new media is digital* equate new media with digital composition and digital environments, either by specifically linking the word “digital” with “new media” or by linking “new media” with digital writing technologies including: software, hypertext, and on- and off-line programs. Madeline Sorapure (2006) describes software like Adobe Flash as shaping the creation of new media and argues Flash is the ultimate new media design program and “has come to represent new media in general” (p. 413). The argument that *new media is digital* is so frequent that scholars often conflate the term digital composing with new media, even to the point of using the phrases synonymously. Kevin Brooks and Andrew Mara (2007) group the phrases “digital communication” and “new media” 7 out of 22 times—32% of the time—on the first page of their article alone, demonstrating the conflation of these two terms. David Gillette (2005) says, “When the web first became popular, I taught my new

media courses (then called hypertext courses) through the lens of classical rhetoric” (np.). Gillette identifies and conflates new media with other digital literate practices (hypertext).

Other scholars who argue *new media is digital* suggest new media is tied to computer systems, languages, and networks. Mark Amerika and Jenny Weight (Miles, et al., 2003) equate new media with computerized information systems. Amerika writes that we “(cyborgs all) have been writing code into interactive states of being, which allows us to behave in a society of networked consciousness” when he defines new media (Miles, et al., 2003, np.). Amerika argues new media has to do with how digital writing technologies have become part of Western society (Miles, et al., 2003). Weight likens the “epistemological, structural, and ontological parameters” of new media with that of hypertext (Miles, et al., 2003, np.). She argues new media and the digital nature of hypertexting are related, and she identifies a digital consciousness as an underlying element of new media, strategically placing new media within conversations of both contemporary and future writing technologies.

When authors argue *new media is multimodal*, they emphasize the use of multiple modes over any digital activity that *may* be suggested. These definitions occur in 17% of definitions (23 definitions). Scholars whose definitions draw on multimodality may consider new media digital, or they may consider new media non-digital: the emphasis does not rest on digitality but on the combination of modes. In other words, scholars might describe new media as being both multimodal and digital; however, they emphasize having multiple modes as the defining characteristic (rather than the digital nature of the text). Arguments that *new media is multimodal* focus on incorporating multiliteracies and modes of writing, including sound, visual, video, color, and layout/design. The use of such modes might happen in a digital environment, but scholars still place the importance on the modes themselves rather than the composition’s digital nature.

Definitions suggesting *new media is multimodal* describe new media texts as potentially physical or digital combinations of modes. Jody Shipka (2005) states that a new media text “attends to a much broader range of texts, technologies, and rhetorical activities—those informing the production

and reception of print-based, linear essays, objects-texts, live performances, as well as digital texts” (p. 347), and Cheryl Ball claims, “for students who don’t have access to technology, that they can produce [new media] multimodal texts that are scrapbooks or collages [...] that don’t have to be digital” (qtd. in Lauer, 2012, np.). In Anne Frances Wysocki, Johndan Johnson-Eilola, Cynthia L. Selfe, and Geoffrey Sirc’s (2007) text, Wysocki defines new media, stating: “**new media do not have to be digital**” (p. 15, emphasis in original). Whether new media is physical or digital, the combination and variety of modes used makes new media texts *multimodal*.

Arguments that *new media is multimodal* emphasize the process of composition *and* the final product. Sorapure (2003) suggests that teachers focus “on the effectiveness with which modes such as image, text, and sound are brought together” (np.). Often, definitions use terms such as combine, mix and match (Alexander, 2008, p. 2), or integrate (Halbritter, 2006, p. 318). For both Bump Halbritter and Jonathan Alexander, multimodality comes to fruition in new media where end products use rhetorical contributions of each mode. The strategic maneuvering in these definitions resides on understanding different modes’ holistic rhetorical import for texts.

The arguments that *new media is digital* (26% or 35 definitions) and *new media is multimodal* (17% or 23 definitions) together account for 43% of definitions (58). These two categories are exclusive, as scholars emphasize one characteristic over another when defining new media. Although they are exclusive, they are also closely related. Emphasizing the digital nature of new media, Dene Grigar (2005) writes about the use of “new media technologies like ‘websites, virtual worlds, virtual reality, multimedia, computer games, computer animations, digital video, and human-computer interfaces’ [Manovich, 2001, pp. 8-9]” (p. 376). Although many of these technologies use multimodality, Grigar emphasizes the *digital* aspects. Because scholars make these two arguments about new media more frequently than other arguments, these scholars are most interested in situating their work in terms of the digital literacy events associated with new media. Scholars make strategic maneuvers to demonstrate how new media is already a part of the multiliteracies framework: one that relies on print-linguistics *plus*. Scholars’ interests coalesce around discussions about writing

technologies and new understandings of what it means to write and compose: in short, what does it mean to be literate in the 21st Century. These arguments are strategic maneuvers demonstrating a shared assumption that new media is an accepted digital literacy: they point to a commonly held belief about new media's fit in the discipline, at least for one portion of these scholars' peers.

New media is part of a literacy continuum is a minor argument occurring in 21% of definitions (29 definitions). This percentage—nearly one-quarter—suggests scholars are interested in implications of what literacy looks like in our contemporary society. In these definitions, new media is not just the next step in composing; it is instead a remediation of text and text-based literacies. As Jason Palmeri says, “new media is [...] a way of pushing us to try to do new things and to attempt to connect the creative and scholarly traditions” (qtd. in Lauer, 2012, np.). Such definitions are strategic arguments that scholars should include more diverse arrays of digital literacy events beyond a primary adherence to print-linguistic texts. This continuum aligns with Brian Street's (1984) foundational theory of ideological literacy and suggests rhetoric and composition scholars who adhere to primarily print-linguistic literacies align more, perhaps, with autonomous models of literacy than scholars might be comfortable admitting.

Rhetoric and composition scholars are almost as interested in arguing *new media is part of a literacy continuum* (21%) as they are in arguing *new media is digital* (26%) and even more than arguing that *new media is multimodal* (17%), suggesting *new media is part of a literacy continuum* is a significant scholarly maneuver. A movement that embraces earlier modes of writing and conceptions of literacy and allows for new literacies to be incorporated signifies shifts for the field overall. Scholars who argue *new media is part of a literacy continuum* move the field toward new literacy frameworks—and new understandings of multiliteracies—as they argue for paying more attention to digital literacy events and potentially digital literacy sponsors: they attempt to convince the discipline that new media is entwined with literacy.

Scholars also argue *new media is interactive, emphasizing conscious audience participation* (10% of the data set or 14 definitions), a rhetorical move denoting new media as a process or product

with emphasized audience participation and interactivity—readers are asked to be conscious of their experience of the text much more so than, for example, the interactivity required of reading or annotating a single-mode essay. Here, the literate practice becomes especially salient. We might even think of *new media is interactive* as denoting new media as a specific type of literacy event, given a literacy event as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes” (Heath, 1983, p. 93). *New media is interactive* is a demonstration of digital literacy events in that it allows for the digital writing to be bound to interactions and personal and interpersonal knowledge-making. When scholars argue through definitions that *new media is interactive*, they suggest audiences play an integral, embodied role in the development of a text, as do Thomas Rickert and Michael Salvo (2006) when they write, “new media [resonates] with engagement” (p. 296). Scholars contributing to this definitional category argue that audience is the central component of a new media text’s rhetorical situation. Such a definition aligns effectively with traditional rhetorical emphases on audience, allowing scholars to craft strong arguments that new media already belongs to rhetoric and composition, as does the further alignment of *new media is interactive* with Heath’s articulation of literacy events.

Although composers of any text are (theoretically) sensitive to the needs and perceptions of their audiences, composers who craft new media texts are hyper-aware of their audiences because they rely on audience participation to complete the new media text. Grigar (2005) says, “the audience must participate physically in the delivery of” new media (p. 105). Wysocki (2007) says:

New media texts can be made of anything [...]; what is important is that whoever produces the text and whoever consumes it understand—because the text asks them to, in one way or another—that the various materialities of a text contribute to how it, like its producers and consumers, is read and understood. (Wysocki, et al., 2007, p. 15)

Jen Almjeld (2014) further argues, “a new media text [...] foregrounds customization and interactivity” (p. 76), while Aimee Knight (2013) argues, “Clearly, an important direction for

composition and new media studies is inquiry into the aesthetic as a mode of sensory experience—an act of sensory perception" (p. 153).

Audience participation might mean readers use provided software to digitally paint a picture or link two symbols on a screen in order to produce a new image or move the text in a new direction, even bringing new text or images onto the screen. Composers of print-linguistic texts, even simple webtexts, might ask readers to interact by thinking critically and taking notes, not by clicking hyperlinks or adding a new recording. Here, the audience must participate actively in the reading in order to have a literacy event: the digital literacy event is incomplete without added interplay.

Digital Literacy Sponsors Arguments

When scholars argue new media is related to digital literacy sponsors, they suggest digital literacy events within the field and the classroom rest on scholars' previous persuasions that new media belongs within the field's purview: they have persuaded the field to act as digital literacy sponsors. Digital literacy sponsors arguments about new media demonstrate knowledge that only parts of the discipline currently adhere to new media as content—as an appropriate literacy to integrate into the field via study and use; other members of the overarching discipline still need convincing. Digital literacy sponsors arguments aim to convince such members that new media—and, in many cases, digital literacy or multiliteracies in general—is both an appropriate and integral literate practice and artifact for the field, and that scholars and instructors in the field can and should act as digital literacy sponsors.

When authors define new media in terms of the work of rhetoric and composition scholars (teaching and scholarship) and new media's particular moment in history—its adherence to *kairos*—they argue *new media reflects a particular moment in rhetoric and composition's 21st Century history*. They suggest new media is a new, digital literacy, and as such, it is a fitting topic for both scholarship and a classroom curriculum because of its social timeliness and connection to multiliteracy, and they emphasize the practices of the rhetoric and composition community, suggesting opportunities for professional development and the realization that the use of "new media" as a term will ebb and

become mundane. Dànielle Nicole DeVoss, Ellen Cushman, and Jeff Grabill (2005) describe the heart of this concept: “The types of issues commonplace to new media writing spaces [...] are our discipline’s attempts to negotiate, adopt, and script writing with multiple media into its practices” (p. 28). For these scholars, new media changes the face of rhetoric and composition.

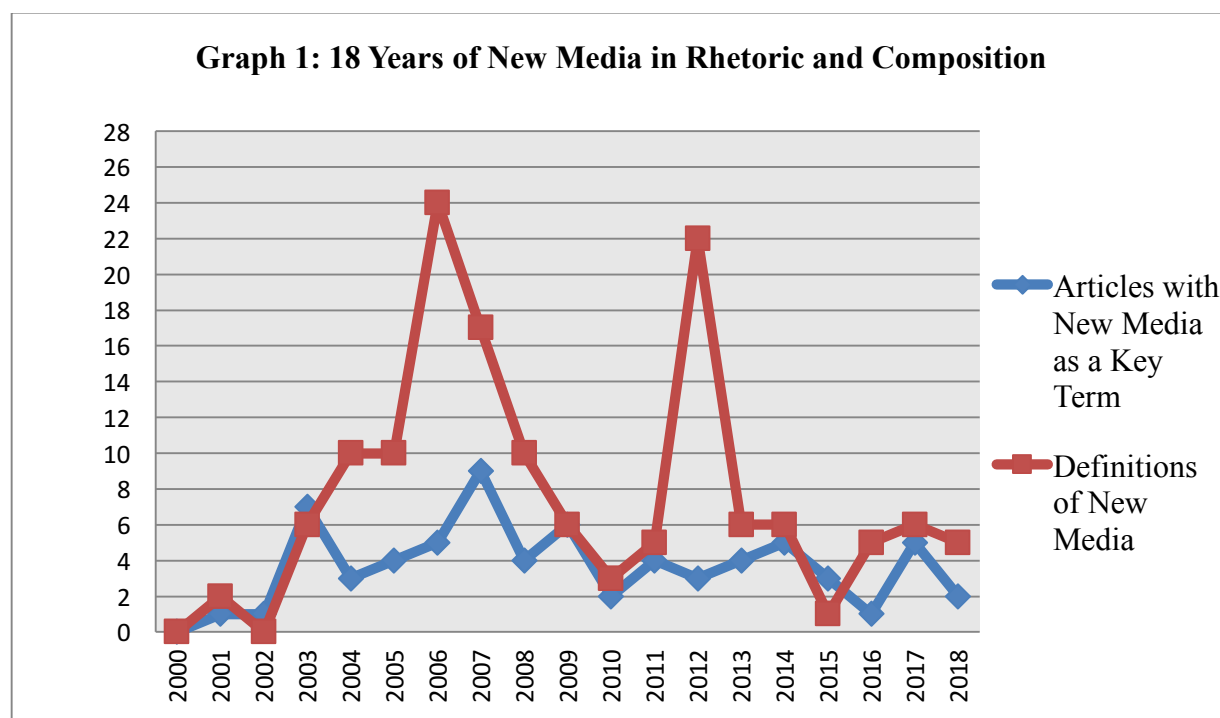
As students are asked to engage contemporary compositions, they are further asked to engage in digital literacies. Scholars who write about new media’s disciplinary importance emphasize the necessity of speaking about new media as a constructive part of such students’ literacy development. Authors arguing new media is important to the field focus on implementation or assessment *rather than* specific activities or events. Sorapure (2003) argues scholars explore why new media matters to the field and to students by exploring “key continuities and differences between composing in print and composing in new media” (np.) Only 10% of definitions (14 definitions) are arguments for more fully incorporating new media into the scholarly and pedagogical work of the field; this low percentage suggests few scholars are interested in *actively* convincing other scholars to incorporate new media into the work of the discipline. However, that there is any discussion of new media’s role or timeliness in the discipline’s development—and that such arguments have been published—marks its importance. Scholars are interested in discussing opportunities to encourage digital literacy practices for both their peers and students, with a clear outcome for the field regarding growth of content, which leads to potential prestige and monetary benefit as course catalogs in English departments are expanded to include digital literacies in general and new media composition in particular.

Becoming more prevalent toward the end of the eighteen-year time period of this study is the argument that *new media has already been defined by other scholars, and drawing on these definitions allows for continuity and understanding*. From 2000-2010, this argument is presented by just 5 definitions, but in the latter eight years, it is invoked 17 more times. Scholars making this argument show new media has already been defined within the field (Daniel-Wariya, 2016, p. 37) or that (re)defining new media is irrelevant in various ways (see Alvarez, et al., 2012). Such definitions

prove that rhetoric and composition has already acted as a digital literacy sponsor, in some capacity. Lev Manovich's (2001) definition in *The Language of New Media* is the most commonly referenced. Although his work is *cited* in numerous articles, scholars in the data set only *invoke* or *explain* his definition eight times. From 2010-2018, other scholars more commonly cite definitions from within the field: Ball's (2004) and Wysocki's (Wysocki, et al., 2007) definitions of new media are regularly referenced, as are arguments by Lauer (2009; 2012) and Sorapure (2003).

New Media's Peak

Another way to view the impact of arguments about new media is by identifying their frequency and timing. Asking when the arguments were made helps to identify other trends in the field of digital literacy: when was new media meaningful, when did scholars use the term but opt not to define it (signaling, perhaps, the belief that the definition was already solidified), and when was the height of the term's use? Graph 1 (below) shows the frequency of the use of new media as a key term in scholarship and the use of new media definitions throughout the journals and monographs in the 18-year time period.



Graph 1 shows that the new media as a key term peaked in 2007. Accordingly, it rose steadily

from 2001 to 2007, and then began to drop off from 2009-2018 (perhaps in favor of other key terms as new media was picked up by the digital humanities). It is also clear that the most new media definitions (24) were crafted in 2006 with a resurgence in 2012 when Lauer asked scholars to thoroughly articulate their definitions in her article “What’s in a Name?”. 2006-2007 was a significant point in the timeline, as both using new media as a key term and the need to define new media peaked and then fell away. In the second decade of the 21st Century, new media is simply referenced in scholarship and is usually not accompanied by a definition, relying instead upon past arguments about new media. In the early years of the 21st Century, scholars needed to articulate their positions more precisely (and the lag in publication pipelines may account for more definitions surfacing in 2006). Although definitions are still articulated and arguments still made about new media, the field does not seem to need them as much as it did at the onset of the 21st Century. Now, new media is one digital literacy term among many.

Conclusions and Implications

Many scholars use the term new media without describing or defining it. These authors use new media “as if it was uncontroversial” (Zarefsky, 2006, p. 404). Such authors, perhaps unwittingly, use a popular approach to arguing for new media’s position in the field: they assume the argument has already been made and adhered to within the discipline at large; theirs is a digital literacy events argument, common in the data set. Still, both digital literacy events and digital literacy sponsors arguments about new media are strategic maneuvers. The definitional trends show scholars in the field are more likely to put forth digital literacy events arguments—examining the new media texts people can produce and how—than they are to put forward digital literacy sponsors arguments—examining what the value of new media is for a field largely dependent on print-linguistic practices. While scholars who use digital literacy events arguments strive to move the field toward a more enhanced understanding of contemporary literacies, they do so at the expense of arguments aimed at theorizing literacy with the potential of alienating disciplinary members who are not yet convinced

multiliteracies (especially digital literacies) truly belong to the overarching discipline rather than certain subfields.

Although scholars such as Reid (2007) demonstrate that digital literacy sponsors arguments are integral to the overarching concerns of the field (what does it mean to compose knowledge? how do technologies function as materialities in pursuing all available means of persuasion? what are the “embodied, cognitive processes of composition” that new media affects? how does new media, as a literate practice, shape our social and literate worlds?) (p. 6-9), other scholars still insist definitions are not as important as they once were (especially devoid of particular contexts and audiences) (Daniel-Wariya, 2016, p. 37). Questions concerning the value of new media for the discipline, especially in terms of faculty relations, university politics, and classroom practices and management, are crucial. Drawing on digital literacy sponsors definitions positions the field to answer critical questions for maintaining a presence on campus and adding to the cohesion of the discipline via member coherence. New media is a new literacy, but it is part of a continuum of digital literacy events that rhetoric and composition is working to claim, as evidenced by the six new media arguments scholars employ.

Scholars’ definitions of new media make digital literacy events arguments 74% of the time and digital literacy sponsors arguments 26% of the time. Because digital literacy events arguments are those with underlying assumptions about new media’s implicit position within rhetoric and composition, scholars making these arguments assume their audiences acknowledge new media texts as appropriate objects of study and production, and these scholars assume new media texts and technologies are already part of the discipline. These scholars, though, forego the much-needed step of explaining *how* new media fits into the research questions and objects of the discipline, assuming rhetoric and composition’s connection to such texts.

Fewer arguments about digital literacy sponsors suggests these arguments are not as integral in the discipline’s development. However, having fewer discussions of new media’s position in disciplinary formation and foundational knowledge—how the field understands and sponsors digital

literacy work—is problematic. Without digital literacy sponsors arguments, there is no common language or common understanding regarding new media: the field's discussions remain imprecise, leaving the field vulnerable from the inside. Without a common language and understanding of new media's position—and, indeed, that of other multiliteracies—within rhetoric and composition and with only assumptions about its positions and discussions of its textual properties, the field is open to insider and outsider critique. Insiders claim digital literacies only concern the computers and writing subfield while outsiders (those in fields with similar areas of study, more new media experience and expertise, or administrative power over departments) can challenge rhetoric and composition across campuses. These outsiders can potentially stifle the field's development by stopping rhetoric and composition scholars from teaching digital literacy in their classrooms, both undergraduate and graduate. Without digital literacy sponsors arguments, the future of digital literacies within the discipline, and students' rhetorical use of new media, is on shaky ground.

On the other hand, scholars who present digital literacy sponsors arguments strategically maneuver rhetoric and composition into the 21st Century by situating new media staunchly in the discipline and by calling the discipline membership to function as digital literacy sponsors. Because digital literacy events arguments only speak to those scholars who share the implied premise that new media and related digital literacies belong to rhetoric and composition, using such arguments predominantly contributes to a further defining of the computers and writing subfield rather than the overarching discipline. Digital literacy sponsors arguments have the power to shift how scholars (both insiders and outsiders) understand literacy as well as the purpose and products of rhetoric and composition studies.

Although a fixed, stable definition for new media would grow stagnant quickly and limit the discipline's development, rhetoric and compositions' teachers and scholars should think critically about how and why they use specific terms, such as new media, because their uses of such terms affect disciplinary development. The line between terms such as multimodality, digital composition, and new media is blurred. The line between multiliteracies, new literacies, and digital literacies is

similarly blurred. In some cases, the blurring is beneficial, helping scholars explore closely related areas in their scholarship and teaching, adding variety and nuance to exciting areas of study. As composing technologies evolve, new media—and its definitions—will continue to evolve. Without explicit, contextualized definitions of new media, rhetoric and composition scholars are frequently discussing different things when they are under the impression they are discussing the same thing: some scholars in the field may even adhere to multiliteracies (such as multimodality) being a part of the discipline's purview without extending that same epistemology to new media. The discipline's cohesion is distorted by these contradictory definitions, making it difficult to continue scholarly momentum because there is a limited common foundation upon which to build. When some scholars confuse new media with digital composing, others insist it is not digital in the least, and still more insist new media must include a large degree of audience interaction and participation, discussions about new media will continue to be broad and potentially confusing and frustrating: the potential to dismiss new media's fit within the discipline grows stronger especially as the foundational arguments in the new millennium cover a diverse spectrum.

New media definitions are strategic maneuvers about the field's position within larger institutions, too. Relying on different arguments moves the field away from English departments and toward communications or media studies departments, where print, speech, the visual, and the digital merge. While building stronger relationships with closely related fields and departments would allow for disciplinary evolution, it is not necessary for the field's growth. With so many definitions of new media, rhetoric and composition could benefit from developing substantive, consistent definitions and arguing more powerfully for new media's incorporation into the overarching field. Currently, the field is still divided regarding whether or not discussions of digital literacies are even relevant for the entire field or just relevant to the subfield: this is perhaps why so few articles about digital rhetoric and new media find their way into journals such as *College Composition and Communication*, *Rhetoric Review*, and *Research in the Teaching of English*. With digital literacy events arguments overpowering digital literacy sponsors arguments, scholars do not make adequate arguments for the

role new media—as one element of a literacy continuum—can play in the construction, evolution, and adaptation of the overarching field. Instead, by using more digital literacy sponsors arguments, new media can be ideologically and epistemologically situated within rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies.

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**Re-Imagining Collaborative Composing: Insights from a Text-Based Role-
Play Game Forum**

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Abstract

The purpose of this investigation was to gain a deeper understanding of participants' composing behavior in a text-based role-play game (RPG) forum. Within the context of socio-cultural literacy practices, two central questions were addressed: (1) In what ways does an online text-based RPG forum provide adolescents and emerging adults opportunities for sharing their writing and for shared writing; and (2) What can forum postings tell us about participants' involvement in new forms of web-based collaborative writing? From analysis of records of participants' interaction, we share the ways the forum provided affordances and opportunities for what we are calling enhanced collaborative writing. In our elaboration of collaborative writing, we share forum postings of participants' involvement in construction of story threads and accompanying elaborative social texts in this online, fan community. Findings from this study illustrate how participants engage in collaborative composing while navigating and manipulating popular culture and technology.

Keywords: composing, role-play-game, online learning, collaborative writing

“...in all role-playing games, ...the more you play and the more you have accomplished, the higher the level of your character, in terms of his or her skills. Higher-level characters can do more and go more places than can lower-level ones.” (Gee, 2003, p. 172)

This understanding of role-play relies on characters interacting in the same game competitively. What if characters were instead living within a rich, text-based interaction that is noncompetitive and exist in an online space? How do these differing circumstances in a role playing, semi-canonical shared online writing environment that is text-based change these notions of expertise in digital writing? For that matter, how do participants know they are collaborating in a unified writing genre that is defined by their practices and outcomes (Miller, 2014) in contrast with “just playing a game”?

Historically, studies of collaborative writing have been positioned in opposition with researcher presumptions regarding independent authoring. Yet, certain other studies have shown that collaborative writing may foster unique processes such as shared reflective thinking, particularly when learners explain or defend their ideas with peers (Higgins, Flower, & Petraglia, 1992; Keys, 1994). More generally, Vygotsky’s (1978) notion of collaboration envisions learners’ exposure to meaningful input from partners through shared practice and provision of effective linguistic feedback for learners on productive and receptive sides of the collaboration. The context, tools and participants within the learning environments are seen to mediate collaborative learning (Arnold & Ducate, 2006).

With the emergence of the Internet, and more directly, social media, research examining composing processes has experienced a paradigmatic shift. Technology advances have increased the social aspects of composing. With this in mind, online collaborative spaces may enhance output simply because participants are provided more opportunities for

practice (Oxford, 1997).

The purpose of this investigation was to gain a deeper understanding of youths composing behavior in an online text-based role-play game (RPG) forum (see appendix B for definition). Drawn from our analysis of records of participants' interaction, we share the ways the forum provided affordances and opportunities for what we are calling *enhanced collaborative writing*. In our elaboration of collaborative writing, we share forum postings of participants' involvement in construction of story threads (appendix B) and accompanying elaborative social texts in this online, fan community.

In the RPG forum, *Trelis Weyr*, participants scaffolded each other's writing development in multiple ways in order to: (a) move the narratives of role-play, (b) construct codes and styles of language that supported role-play, and (c) develop a discourse of collaborative composing that facilitated role-play. To accomplish these discursive initiatives, participants utilized their shared knowledge of a particular fantasy literature written by Anne McCaffrey and deployed communication resources, such as social media networks and chat functions, to support their developing understanding of emerging collaborations that resulted in compositions. Additionally, forum participants were actively involved in reading and writing across multiple texts infused with the discourses of *Pern* fandom (McCaffrey, 1967).

Two central questions were addressed in this study, within the context of socio-cultural literacy practices (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007):

1. In what ways does an online text-based role-play game forum provide participants opportunities for sharing their writing and for shared writing?
2. What can forum postings tell us about participants' involvement in new forms of web-based collaborative writing?

Theoretical Framework

The nonlinear approach we take to describe writing processes in this RPG forum involves collaborative interaction grounded in the social-constructivist paradigm of language learning. From this perspective, “learning is a social, dialogical process of construction by distributed, multidimensional selves using tools and signs within context created by the various communities with which they interact” (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996, p. 181). In contrast to one-way delivery of knowledge from a teacher, and in writing for that teacher, learning understood from a socio-constructive perspective involves members in a community who share and build knowledge together to accomplish a writing task (e.g., Bakhtin, 1981, 1986; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, meaning is co-constructed through negotiation and self-reflection (Higgs & McCarthy, 2005). Yet, other than in verbal protocols (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995), data examining meta-text, such as the participants’ commentary in these types of RPG forums, has been scarce. The text-based, RPG forum in this study, as both an asynchronous and synchronous form of computer mediated collaboration, provides this illusive type of data.

Our understanding of this RPG forum was also informed by close analysis of participants’ interactions as social dialogue, in which writing is seen as a medium of expression and to communicate ideas. RPG forum interaction fosters critical thinking through a multiplicity of voices and perspectives (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986), as participants collectively contribute through text-based role-play. Bakhtin (1981, 1986) shared people learn genres through these social interactions. Consequently, the content and process of these interactions within communities, such as this RPG forum, contain an entire “repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow” as participants’ interactions become more complex (Chapman, 2002, p. 24).

Dyson (2003) used Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia - voices of others - in her

studies of young children's conversations during the writing process. In this context, heteroglossia referred to the multiple variations of language, and the ideas or perspectives within those languages; the different ways people speak to each other, and how each person appropriates another's speech or ideas and attempts to make it their own. According to Bakhtin, these ways of thinking and communicating are distinctive because of class, gender, culture, dialect, accent, demographics, and so on. Dyson's research indicated students draw on many voices surrounding them when they write (e.g., songs, play, games, sports), and these appropriated voices enter into their talk and texts during writing. Dyson's work helped us anticipate and understand how participants engaged in this RPG forum appropriated voices from their daily lives to form ideas, to frame talk, and ultimately to write.

Theories addressing how communities interact also assisted in our analysis of this RPG forum. A "community of practice" is defined as a group of individuals who engage in a process of collective learning and maintain a common identity defined by a shared interest or activity (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Communities that generally fall under this definition tend to organize around forms of work or folk practice they have in common. However, communities also play through language. Pearce's (2009) "community of play" offers a counterpoint to "community of practice". Pearce suggests play practices may warrant their own understanding of "how communities form and are maintained, a subject that becomes particularly pertinent in the context of technologically mediated play" (Pearce, 2009, p. 5; Vasudevan, 2015). We find Pearce's suggestion particularly compelling for our study of this RPG forum as a community of practice *and* play, offering insight into how the forum functioned collectively; how participants, in ludic manners utilized "knowledge, methods, tools, stories, cases, [and] documents, which members share and develop together" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 3).

Literature Review

To connect our study with relevant discourses in the research, we examined related literature to inform our theoretical and practical understanding of collaborative writing (e.g., Sengupta, 2001; Sotillo, 2002; Storch, 1999), online fan communities (e.g., Baym, 2000; Jenkins, 2004; Stein, 2006; Tobin, 1999), online gaming and role-playing (e.g., Gee, 2004, 2008; Henry, 2003; McGinnis, 2007; Steinkuehler, 2008), and genre as social action resulting in textual products (Miller, 2014) within adolescents' everyday out-of-school literacies (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Gee, 2004; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007).

Collaborative Writing

Research indicates collaboration in writing contributes to increased complexity of the writing and a willingness to utilize the feedback peers provide (Sotillo, 2002). Increased grammatical accuracy, overall quality of writing (Storch, 1999), and learners' reflection on their own language production while creating meaning (Swain, 1995) can also be realized. Further, collaborative writing may encourage a pooling of knowledge about language, which Donato (1994) termed "collective scaffolding." This thinking aligns with understandings regarding the social process of language learning, where participants in a community collectively construct knowledge to achieve a task (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). However, some of these claims are premised on understandings that predate much of electronic communication and were offered as rationale for "legitimizing" collaborative authorship in its historical binary with more "real" independent composing behaviors, not taking into consideration the affordances for collaboration in online spaces.

In more recent, online contexts, research suggests participants are actively engaged in online collaborative writing activities that share the affordances mentioned above. In

addition, participants in online contexts may also relish this interaction because of its shared nature, a sense of greater opportunity for sharing of information, and their own sense of accountability (Sengupta, 2001). In what could be described as a contained sense of “the social,” writing partners may experience an increased sense of public exposure or audience reception, while maintaining some sense of control, or partial privacy.

Unlike many previous studies on collaborative writing that have focused on pair and small group work, this study investigates a text-based RPG forum supporting a many-to-many form of collaboration within an online, self-selected context. In so doing, our perspective works outside the notion of the “solitary author” as a starting point. To date, very few studies have investigated the nature of such collaboration when participants produce a jointly written text; particularly this type of online space within an out-of-school, non-adult mediated context. These contextual factors re-envision composing from the perspective of those who choose to collaborate in their writing, specifically in online fan communities engaged in role-play.

Online Fan Communities

One place where shared writing occurs is on sites devoted to fan activity. Online fan communities develop meaningful friendships between interested participants, though they may never meet face-to-face. Baym (2000) described how strangers became friends while participating in a newsgroup as they exchanged messages analyzing and commenting on episodes and characters in a favorite daytime soap opera. In these fan-based, textual communities, participants exhibited an “ethic of friendliness” (p. 121) constructed through various social norms developed when participants posted their messages in the Usenet newsgroup. However, these friendships often extended beyond the newsgroup, evident by the personal messages exchanged between participants in times of celebration and tragedy.

Tobin (1999) also addressed this notion of friendship in his exploration of what constitutes a “real” friend while studying his son’s interaction in the online game community, *Warhammer 40,000*. Tobin expressed concern about his son’s belief these online interactions were meaningful friendships, questioning his definition of friendship because these relationships were solely online. In fact, Tobin’s son saw no need to know personal information about his online friends or meet them face-to-face to consider them true friends. Isaac, Tobin’s son, stated, “Those things have nothing to do with our conversations. I know the people I write to from what they write to me and the list. That’s all that matters to me” (Tobin, 1999, p. 122). Isaac was composing “new” friends.

In addition to facilitating friendship, such online communities function as collaborative learning environments. In many cases, youth engage in more complex literate activities in online spaces than those they experience within the classroom (Jenkins, 2004). Analyzing a student’s experiences creating and editing a fictional school newspaper for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry from *Harry Potter*, Jenkins stated, “Through online discussion of fan writing, the teen writers developed a vocabulary for talking about writing and learned strategies for rewriting and improving their own work” (Jenkins, 2004, n.p.). When students discussed *Harry Potter*, they made comparisons with other literary works, making connections through philosophical and theological traditions, debating gender stereotypes, citing interviews with the author, and reading critical analysis of the original work. In other words, the students’ popular culture and online participation in these fan fiction sites had educational merit, improving writers’ language skills, as well as developing sophisticated, literate and social skills.

Fan communities also support the development of multimodality, or the integration of multiple modes such as visual, linguistic, and audio representations within one text. The New

London Group (1996) posited all texts are multimodal to some degree – even the ones that appear to be produced in a single mode. Several researchers have considered the multimodality of fan communities often centered on single, bounded online spaces where fans have gathered. Multiple studies have examined the engagement of participants in collaborative, hybrid forms of role-playing and fan fiction, shedding light on how participants in these communities consider that “writing crosses a range of online and offline spaces, and extends into the production of multimodal texts” (Thomas, 2007, p. 160; Stein, 2006). The creation of fan art and fan-based songs also extended participants’ posts in a mode described as mono-polymorphic, similar to a single description that adapts and navigates “a range of media, styles, genres, and time to become a single rich and complex narrative” (Thomas, 2007, p. 160).

Other studies (e.g., Baym, 2007; Tobin, 1999) have noted fan spaces may consist of numerous interconnected websites, discussion boards, email lists, and listservs, supporting participation through a distributed, “quasi-coherent” network of sites, instead of a centralized online group. Reference to coherence suggests writers are following some kind of structure. Some time ago, Miller (1984) hypothesized that this structure is genre, which she explicitly related to social action or processes. It is clear that understandings of processes and texts drawn from fan writing sites have much to offer our inquiry.

Online Role-Playing Games

Online role-playing games are rooted in the earlier tradition of role-playing, which can be traced to 16th century Europe and traveling players who performed improvisational theatre, as well as 19th and 20th century board or parlor games and miniature war gaming (Rilstone, 1994). Through role-play, participants take control of a character and play through that character’s thoughts, actions and motivations in an unfolding narrative. Researchers have

approached role-playing games from different perspectives. Koster (2002) and Mackay (2001) examined them from a performance point of view, Copier (2005) considered their place in fantasy subculture and ritual, and Fine (1983) used participant observation to examine the interactions between players. Tychsen, Newman, Brolund, and Hitchens (2007) looked at players' enjoyment and engagement in the game. Research also included a focus on game play style (Edwards, 2001), and the examination of narrative and storytelling as aspects of role-play (Henry, 2003; Kim, 2003; Padol, 1996). However, the majority of research has focused on massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG, see appendix B) due to an assortment of inherent literacy practices. Researchers reported that game-related literacy practices involved cognition, scientific reasoning, and collective intelligence, exceeding standards for reading, writing, and technology in comparison to in-school literacy activities and national literacy standards (Steinkuehler, 2008).

Online text-based role-playing games, the type examined in this study, precede MMORPGs and date from the 1980s with the creation of Multi-User Dungeons (MUD, see appendix B). These systems use multiple types of media (e.g., Internet forums, email, social networking websites), drawing heavily on the traditions of fanzines (e-magazines for fan groups) and off-line role-playing. Rather than following gameplay in real-time, players post messages in story format and other participants post role-playing responses. All responses are gathered into the evolving narrative called a story thread.

The events in this type of play-by-post (PBP, see appendix B) role-playing are not handled by software; instead, moderators (see appendix B) and participants make decisions or improvise. Players create their own characters and descriptions of events, as well as the setting for play; however, creation may be derived from fandom (see appendix B) surrounding novels, TV shows, movies, and such. Play-by-post RPGs are written in the third person

perspective because players share scenes (i.e., single role-play session in the same setting); plot is typically advanced when players read the latest post and create an open-ended response, allowing others to contribute to the ongoing story by taking turns.

Trelis Weyr, the forum we examined, is a play-by-post RPG forum, embedded in fandom related to Anne McCaffrey's (1967-2011) *Pern* young adult fantasy literature series. Many works have been developed related to *Pern* in response to interest generated by a large fan population. To avoid duplicating *Pern* canon and trademarks, role-play forums typically create a particular location and timeline different from the established history of *Pern*. *Trelis Weyr* is a semi-canonical *Dragonriders of Pern* RPG forum. In fiction, *canon* refers to text accepted as officially part of the story. The term was first used when referring to the Sherlock Holmes novels written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle when comparing his work to similar works of fiction by subsequent authors (Haining, 1993). This notion of canon has been applied since then in many ways, including the world of fan fiction where *canon* is defined as the original fiction created by the author of text the fan group is writing about. *Semi-canon, or partial canon*, describe texts that utilize information from sources other than the original fiction, but within the constraints of what could exist in the world created by the original author in that text. In contrast, *Fanon* (Parrish, 2007) is almost never regarded as canonical. *Fanon* describes text where fans write outside the canon completely, including ideas in their writing that would not have existed in the original author's text.

The *Trelis Weyr* forum operated on ProBoards, a host of free forums on the Internet, for approximately eight months of play. The *Trelis Weyr* administrator first created the site, and then advertised via ProBoards and messaged players in similar fan communities to share the opportunities available for players. Interested fans were asked to join and create characters for play. Within the first five days, nine participants joined the site and either created new

characters or brought existing characters from other *Pern* sites they had created and began to engage in role-play. At its height, *Trelis Weyr* engaged 27 participants in active play, creating story threads across four story arcs (i.e., continuous progression of a story's dramatic arc).

Social Action Resulting in Textual Product

Miller's (1984) classic writing suggests that genre can be defined as "social action" or impact of a text on the community. More succinctly, in this current instantiation of the theory as applied to *Trelis Weyr*, the genre is construed *as* the social actions that result in a textual product. It is a slight, but profound shift in the focus of Miller's original theory. Interpreting genre in ways that match a social-cultural approach to literacy practices, social actions of the writing community *are* the genre. In an update of her earlier thinking, after the emergence of the Internet, and after several studies of digital texts, Miller (2014) now points out the work of genre:

- Characterizes communities
- Offers modes of engagement through joint action and uptake
- Connects the flux of experience to the past and future
- Makes recurrent patterns visible
- Provides satisfactions and pleasures

From her vantage of 30 years of perspective, Miller (2014) is cognizant that the texts in her earlier work, based on a study of environmental protection texts, from her perspective, failed to coalesce into a genre. In retrospect, she believes one of the prohibiting factors was the authoritarian context of the content area. Whereas, she points out that much of the uptake for her 1984 theory of genre as social action was in linguistics, composition, literacy studies, and education. She reasons the difference is the client focus. In the latter group, the focus is

on the learner. Miller stated, “Another major difference among disciplines is the kind of category genre is taken to be. Does it belong to the research/researcher critic or does it belong to the communities of users” (2014, p. 66)?

This review of literature implies we have a research-based understanding of youths’ literate practices inside of schools, which is often used as a basis of comparison for e-activity. However, we are lacking a large body of research addressing adolescents’ everyday out-of-school literacies to connect our study with relevant discourse (e.g., Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2004; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). Though these literacy practices may be mediated through fans’ interpretations of media and popular culture, this small body of scholarly work clearly indicates interaction in fan practices appears to lend itself to literacy and social development and calls for further exploration.

A lack of focus on this area may be due in part to a tendency in educational research to dismiss popular culture, scorning it and the media as frivolous uses of time that distract youth from more worthy pursuits, like reading literature, studying, and learning about “high culture” (Jenkins, McPherson, & Shattuc, 2002). The result of this marginalization of what youth might consider authentic content further alienates struggling students who rely on this type of unofficial cultural capital in social exchanges (Black, 2008). Ultimately, this type of dismissal prevents educators and researchers from recognizing potential opportunities within popular culture and affinity spaces for the sort of learning and abilities becoming increasingly more valuable for students in the future (Black, 2008).

Methods

This research study is a part of a larger investigation; a descriptive case study bound by the context of the *Trelis Weyr* online text-based RPG forum as a whole, focusing on the

interactions and composition within the group, and the artifacts and knowledge co-constructed by participants collectively. Selection of *Trelis Weyr* as a research context for this study was made due to convenience, since the first author was knowledgeable regarding this public forum because her daughter was the administrator for the site. The first author had discussed online virtual environments that teens were involved in with her daughter, who shared examples of text-based RPGs and explained them. After considering ideas for research related to RPG forums, the first author next spoke with the leadership of the *Trelis Weyr* forum (three moderators) and asked if they would be agreeable to having their forum as a context for research. The first author's daughter (site administrator) and the leadership team (3 moderators) unanimously agreed to allow access to resources on the site for this research study.

Participants

Twenty-seven participants were engaged in role-play on *Trelis Weyr*. We secured IRB approval for this study, but we are unable to speak with certainty about the identity of these participants due to the nature of self-reported information on social media sites on the Internet. Data collected from member profiles and during interviews indicated most participants were female (n=25) between 14 and 24 years old. Most were citizens of the United States, though two self-reported they were Canadian. During observations of play on the forum, the first author noticed participants posted comments to the forum discussing in- and out-of-school interests, homework, and so forth. She also looked at links to participants' other fan interactions in spaces like *Deviant Art* and other role-play forums, and the anecdotal evidence reinforced participants' self-reported adolescent identities. Conversations with the university IRB committee guided our thinking as we dealt with ethical and logistical issues during research of this role-play space.

Participants were motivated to become involved in role-play on *Trelis Weyr* because of their interest in Anne McCaffrey's (1967-2011) *Dragons of Pern* literature series, and more specifically interest in *Pern* fan-related practices. These 27 members made up the body of role-players throughout most of the eight months of play, though approximately 10-15 individuals could be found playing online at any given time during this period. Beyond this information, we do not know specifics regarding participants' demographics as this information was not shared in member profiles or readily available without surveying all members of the site, which was not possible retrospectively. Additionally, we are not able to verify the information that was self-reported by members of *Trelis Weyr* due to the virtual nature of their participation.

Forum Leadership. Forum leadership consisted of the site administrator and three moderators. The forum administrator (first author's daughter) was the original creator who developed the site, including navigation and communications systems and basic governing documents. She then advertised the forum and generated interest, so others would participate in role-play with her. The three moderators of the *Trelis Weyr* site were female, in keeping with the general self-reported demographics of the space. Additionally, these moderators ranged in age between 16 and 24 years. The site administrator was 17 years of age.

Trelis Weyr promoted its moderators from within, periodically soliciting applications from members interested in serving in a leadership capacity. Moderators' role-play posts displayed their titles as Senior Staff, thus making their leadership role visible on transactions within the community. Moderators served in this space as idea-generators, contest managers, order-keepers, and teachers. As idea-generators, *Trelis Weyr* moderators created and communicated new story ideas and activities for the group and played a central role in redesigning the forum periodically. Moderators also managed site contests, developing rules,

collecting submissions, and tallying votes to announce winners. Additionally, moderators were responsible for monitoring the forum to ensure members posted in the correct areas, following governing rules established by the community when founded. As well, moderators served as teachers within the community, offering advice and how-to instructions for those participating in the *Weyr*.

Focal participants. To recruit three focal participants to interview, the first author used purposeful sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As she viewed story threads created by role players, she identified the usernames of members who created the characters being role-played and looked at their member profiles. Through these channels, the first author identified 17 potential forum members who had consistently participated in role-play during the eight months the site was active. She next asked the site administrator to send an invitation letter with attached consent, assent and parental permission forms to these 17 members' email addresses so interested individuals could contact the first author directly. Among these potential volunteers, six individuals contacted the first author as possible interview subjects. After multiple emails she obtained the required consent forms and secured three focal participants who were representative of the variety of participants on *Trelis Weyr* (e.g., length of play on *Trelis Weyr*, role on this forum, background RPing on other forums). One of these participants was the first author's daughter, the site administrator.

Researcher-Participant Positioning

In her relationship with the focal participants who served as experts, the first author positioned herself as a fellow researcher looking at the collaborative writing phenomenon occurring in the forum. She intentionally shared her lack of knowledge about role-play-game activity in text-based role-play game forums in order to minimize the perception that she had a privileged position as a researcher. She encouraged all three focal participants to disagree with

her or contest her understanding of events because they were helping to paint a more representative picture of their experiences on *Trelis Weyr*. The first author deliberately positioned herself as a partner in the research process, explaining what she was unable to confirm was just as important as what she could confirm. The first author also made every attempt to accommodate focal participants' schedules and respect their time, as well as to provide interactive opportunities that were most comfortable for them (e.g., email, private message, Skype, phone call, etc.).

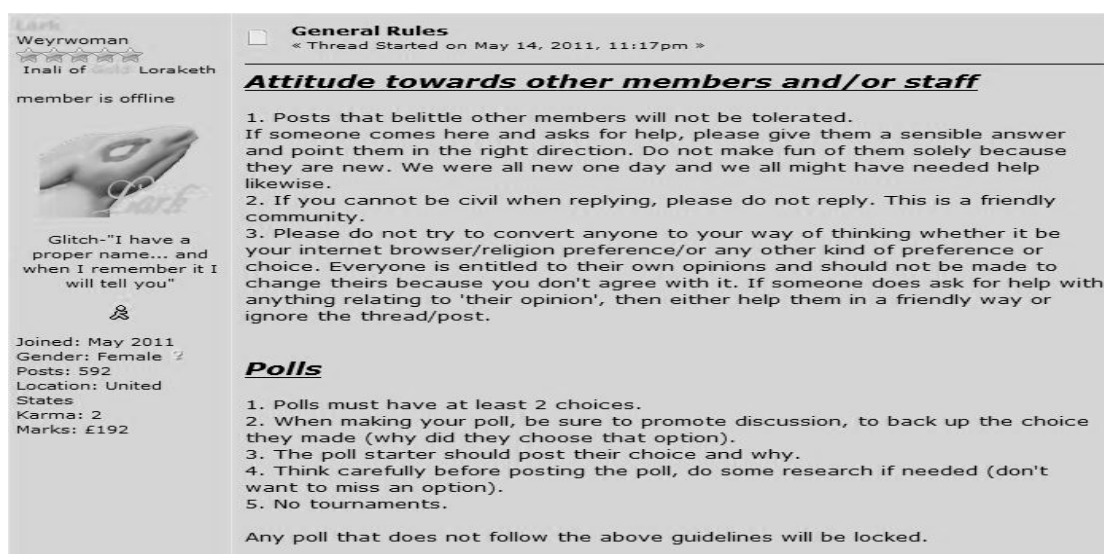
The first author let participants know if she approached them with questions during a time that was not convenient, they were more than welcome to let her know it wasn't a good time for them. The participants often didn't respond for several days or a week to questions, showing they were comfortable with responding when it best suited their situation and was most convenient. If the first author ever sensed resistance, she always offered participants an opportunity to talk with her at a later time or not to talk, as they chose to do moving forward. She reminded participants often that they were under no obligation to continue to talk with her as well, and that they could drop out of the research study at any time if they chose to.

Data Collection

For this study data was gathered from multiple sources: (1) artifacts from the *Trelis Weyr* forum, including moderator-created governing documents, character descriptions, and story threads created during role-play; and, (2) transcripts of semi-structured interviews with three focal participants. Additionally, entries in the first author's reflective journal noting the various processes involved in creating characters and stories while role playing, informed our understanding during data analysis.

Governing documents. Moderator-created governing documents (figure 1) from *Trelis Weyr* helped to better understand how members interacted and were regulated within

this community. Moderators set the norms for participation in part by creating governing documents with rules and parameters for what should and should not be posted. These unique forum posts were pinned (i.e., permanently attached to the top of the page) to most areas throughout the site, and prominently displayed at the top of boards to provide members with point-of-need guidance. These titles were intended to draw members' attention to the directions before they posted in a forum area.



The screenshot shows a forum post titled "General Rules" with a sub-header "Attitude towards other members and/or staff". On the left, there is a user profile for "Weyrwoman" with a signature and statistics. The main content includes a list of five rules for behavior and a section for "Polls" with five rules. The post is dated May 14, 2011.

Weyrwoman
Inali of Loraketh
member is offline

Glitch-"I have a proper name... and when I remember it I will tell you"

Joined: May 2011
Gender: Female
Posts: 592
Location: United States
Karma: 2
Marks: £192

General Rules
« Thread Started on May 14, 2011, 11:17pm »

Attitude towards other members and/or staff

1. Posts that belittle other members will not be tolerated. If someone comes here and asks for help, please give them a sensible answer and point them in the right direction. Do not make fun of them solely because they are new. We were all new one day and we all might have needed help likewise.
2. If you cannot be civil when replying, please do not reply. This is a friendly community.
3. Please do not try to convert anyone to your way of thinking whether it be your internet browser/religion preference/or any other kind of preference or choice. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions and should not be made to change theirs because you don't agree with it. If someone does ask for help with anything relating to 'their opinion', then either help them in a friendly way or ignore the thread/post.

Polls

1. Polls must have at least 2 choices.
2. When making your poll, be sure to promote discussion, to back up the choice they made (why did they choose that option).
3. The poll starter should post their choice and why.
4. Think carefully before posting the poll, do some research if needed (don't want to miss an option).
5. No tournaments.

Any poll that does not follow the above guidelines will be locked.

Figure 1. Screenshot of general rules posting.
Retrieved from <http://trellis-anewdawn.proboards.com>. Reprinted with permission.

Profiles. Member profiles (see appendix B) and the character descriptions participants created also served as a source of information (figure 2). When participants joined *Trellis Weyr* they created a profile with a username, an avatar image/icon, their location, birth data, and contact information including email address, website, and instant messenger information. Members could also include a signature, which might be multimodal and contain hyperlinks to the user's story threads in the forum, as well as outside websites hosting *Pern* creations. To enter role-play, participants either adopted an existing character created by someone in the forum, or they created their own original character. Once a forum moderator approved a

character description, a member could enter play as that character, and participation took the form of role-play-game postings that created story threads.

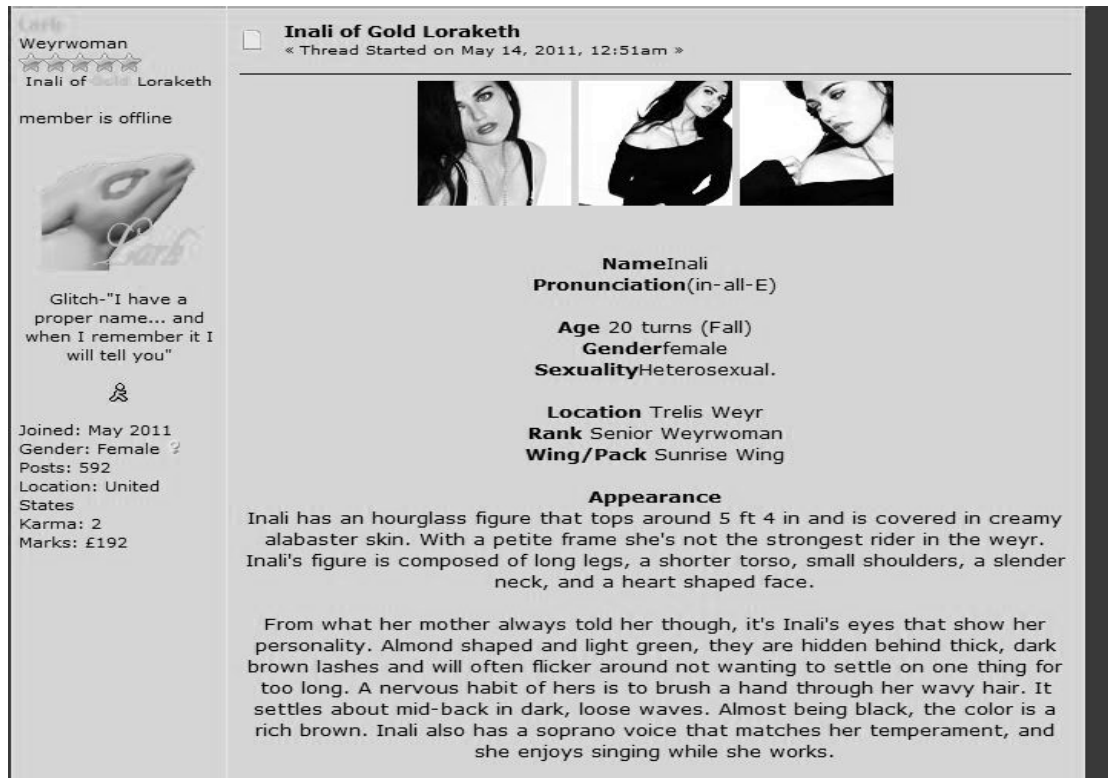


Figure 2. Screenshot of character description post.
Retrieved from <http://trelis-anewdawn.proboards.com>. Reprinted with permission.

Story-threads. Most previous studies of collaborative writing have focused on face-to-face or computer-mediated communication, and limited meta-talk of learners as they progressed through collaborative writing tasks. This study relies instead on the data provided by the text-based RPG forum itself, rather than face-to-face observation. Over the course of 8 months of role-play in *Trelis Weyr*, participants' co-constructed 4 story arcs, including 24 total story threads (or story lines; figure 3). Across these 24 story threads, between 2 and 11 members actively role-played to create these collective narratives, and threads ranged in

length between 4 and 18 pages when downloaded to a single-spaced Microsoft Word document (224 total pages).

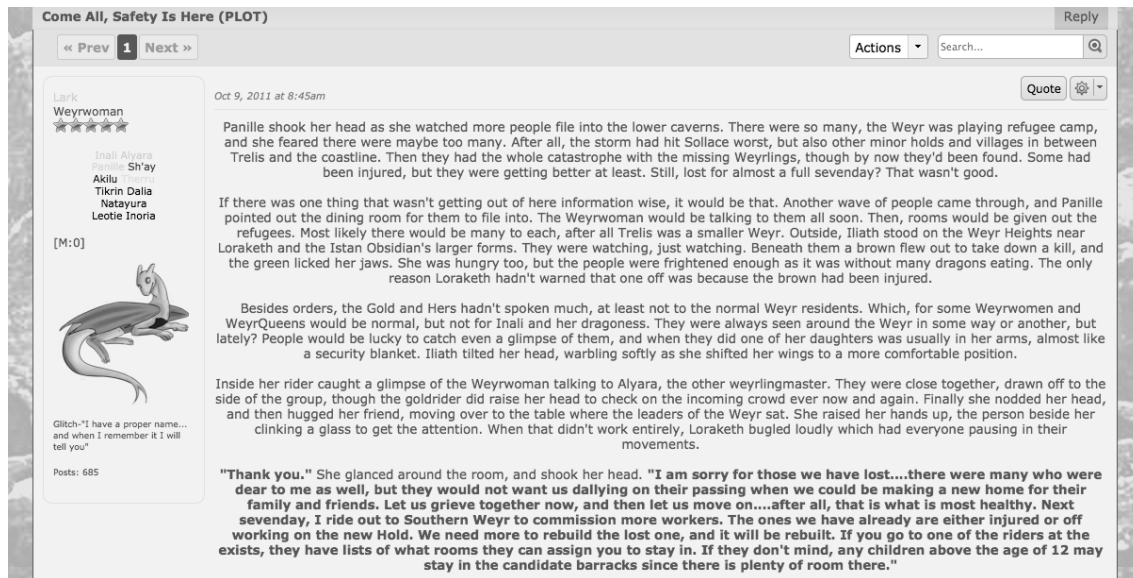


Figure 3. Excerpt from a story thread posted by Lark.
Retrieved from <http://trelis-anewdawn.proboards.com>. Reprinted with permission.

The first story arc, named *The First Clutch and New Colors*, involved what Lark shared was “the starting point for the storyline when the site first opened”. Within this arc, 5 story threads were created exploring the hatching of the first clutch of dragon eggs and the emergence of a new senior queen dragon, Weyrwoman, and Weyrleaders. Participants roleplayed following a play-by-post protocol to describe the interactions of their characters in a selected setting. This type of play follows a format similar to traditional relay writing or shared writing experiences. These interactions created collaborative works of fiction; third person exchanges to further plot movement, contribute dialogue, etc. However, unlike roleplay where someone wins, text-based play-by-post RP does not have a goal of winning.

Instead, the goal is to move the story forward by collaboratively playing and writing. No one wins, and everyone wins, as long as the story moves forward.

Interactions in these 5 story threads took place for the first 2 months of the site's existence. Three additional story arcs developed over the remaining 6 months of play, including: a story arc named *The Gather* (3 threads, 40 pages of text), another about the existence of a hidden clutch in *Ista Weyr*, named *The Hidden Clutch* (6 threads, 45 pages of text), and a final arc about a storm that devastated one Hold and caused increased development in *Southern Weyr* (10 threads, 96 pages of text), named *The Storm and Southern Weyr*.

For this particular analysis, we used eight of the twenty-four story threads (or story lines) co-constructed by at least three participants. To select these eight story threads, we chose the two most active threads based on number of participants engaged in play, and the length of thread, from each of the 4 story arcs we identified. These eight story threads represented the most active play across the 8 months participants were engaged in role-play on *Trelis Weyr*.

Interviews. Focal participants were interviewed three times over a three-month period (see appendix A for sample interview questions). Lark, the administrator of the forum, was interviewed an additional two times to provide clarity when questions arose during the data analysis process. This is primarily due to proximity and ease of access with the first author, as Lark was the first author's daughter and co-habited with the researcher. However, all three focal participants were consulted for member checking. We used discourse-centered online ethnography (DCOE) procedures (Androutsopoulos, 2008) to examine the relationships among participants of *Trelis Weyr*, noting various processes involved in creation of characters and stories through collaborative composition during role-play in this community. DCOE

procedures include practice-derived guidelines for systematic observation: examining relationships and processes rather than isolated artifacts; moving from core to periphery (from interaction to interview); using repeated observation; maintaining openness; using all available technology; and, using observation insights as guidance for further sampling. Additionally, DCOE procedures specify guidelines for contact with internet actors, stipulating contact should be limited, non-random, and including various participation formats; confronting participants with their own materials; including repeated and prolonged contact; and, making use of alternative techniques whenever possible (Androutsopoulos, 2008).

Interviews were conducted virtually using email or Skype, based on the participants' preferences. Participants' virtual interview responses were transcribed and saved. This interview data collection process was iterative. Researcher familiarity with the practices in the *Trelis Weyr* community precipitated additional questions, sent as follow-up email messages to further explore participants' perspectives about various identified information and comments. The iterative nature of virtual interviewing allowed continued inquiry from an insiders' vantage point by requesting additional information from focal participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing and recursive throughout the data collection process as recommended for the qualitative research paradigm (Merriam, 2009).

Table 1

Research Questions and Data Analysis Methods

Research Question	Data Analysis Methods
1. In what ways does an online text-based role-play game (RPG) forum provide adolescents and emerging adults opportunities for sharing their writing and for shared writing?	Inductive analysis of artifacts, observation field notes, and interview transcripts identified opportunities for sharing writing and shared writing.
2. What can forum postings tell us about participants' involvement in new forms of web-based collaborative writing?	Analysis of idea unit; assignment of one of the 5 categories for each idea unit. Inductive analysis of artifacts, observation field notes, and interview transcripts

To analyze story threads, we used a modified proposition analysis method (Turner & Green, 1977; Bovair & Kieras, 1985). Our sampling of story threads was purposefully selected in that we chose two threads from each of four story arcs in the forum that included sufficient interaction and production (approximately one thread each month of play). We divided each story thread into *episodes* based on writers' individual contributions, labeling each consecutively with letters (e.g., A, B, C, etc.). Using the modified proposition analysis, we next segmented each episode into *idea units*. These *idea units* were then subjected to an open coding until repetition isolated a set of eight categories (character description, background, outside action, insider view, plot movement [action], plot movement [description], scene development and dialogue) representing our inferences for each author's

intent when constructing the idea unit.

Three of these eight categories based on inference of author's intent (character description, background and scene development) failed to represent sufficient *idea units* to be included in the emergent model. Thus, the remaining five categories formed a rubric for subsequent analysis of the already parsed texts. Using these five categories, we analyzed the story threads and a sampling of out-of-character social texts (e.g., chats) created at the time these threads were being constructed during role-play. Using the five categories, we developed a composing model based on our coding scheme. We shared the emergent model with the focal participants in a member check to ensure we were representing their rhetorical intent on selected instances of story threads each created.

To analyze transcripts, we utilized an inductive approach (Hatch, 2002) that involved searching for patterns in data and making general statements regarding the phenomena through a multistep process. First, we read the data multiple times and separated it into analyzable parts for further examination. Next, we uploaded framed transcripts and collected artifacts into Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, and analyzed the dataset for domains (e.g., categories reflecting semantic relationships; Hatch, 2002). We then analyzed each domain for subcategories, as well as supporting and disconfirming evidence.

Dependability and Credibility

To strengthen the design of this study, we used both data and methodological triangulation to ensure dependability and credibility (Merriam, 2009). We achieved data triangulation by gathering data from multiple data sources and different participants, and methodological triangulation by adopting multiple data collection methods, such as the collection of artifacts, observation field notes, and interviews. We maximized the

trustworthiness of interview data through a process of member checking in which participants reviewed the transcripts to revise and confirm accuracy and representativeness (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Also, by allowing time to elapse between interviews and member-checking tasks, each participant was able to engage in reflexive thinking, a feature of dependability in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002).

The data analysis processes were strengthened by ongoing attempts to crosscheck for report, and explain negative cases, which did not fit emerging patterns (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, we engaged in discussions in order to check for transparency and confirmability of the data analysis and conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To further foreground researcher reflectivity and transparency of analysis, we expanded our collection of field notes to include analytic memo writing.

It is important to note this research focuses on a particular niche of youth Internet users and therefore may not reflect patterns of online literacy for youth in general. Interaction in online text-based RPG forums can be compared to research focused on fanfiction that examines online literacy for a similar niche of users, though there are important distinctions between the two populations. In addition to facilitating friendship, online fanfiction communities function as collaborative learning environments, scaffolding participants as writers in specific ways.

Findings

Findings indicated the text-based role-play-game (RPG) forum *Trelis Weyr* provided various opportunities for participants to share their writing, as well as for shared writing. Additionally, consideration of role-play as a combination of literacy and social processes provided insights regarding the ways participants interacted to collaboratively compose story-

threads, a new form of web-based collaborative writing. Story-thread data included a total of 31 *episodes* recovered from 8 story threads in 4 different story arcs. For these episodes, we coded in total 2080 *idea units* created by five different authors. Open coding of the individual propositional units identified five reliable categories for coding behavior, based on our inference of author's intent for the constructed text: (a) character action, (b) character insider perspective, (c) plot movement, (d) plot description, and (e) dialogue (see Table 2).

Table 2: *Categories and distribution of composing behaviors*

Category	Coding Definition	Rhetorical Intent
Character Action 43 % of total	Use of verb with particular character	Reveal character action within plot
Character Insider Perspective 20 % of total	Use of characters' interior thoughts, states of mind	Reveal character feelings, reactions, states
Plot Movement 18 % of total	Use of verbs in connection with story line	Use of omniscient, author mediated action in plot
Plot Description 17 % of total	Use of adjectives and adverbs not connected to specific characters	Use of descriptive language to enhance plot
Dialog 2 % of total	Text occurring within quotations	Language attributed to specific characters

Though the categories for the *idea units* were initially developed through open coding of the data, we continued analyzing the data in a second cycle of coding with these five categories. Each column in Table 2 represents a category for composing behavior based on our inference of author's intent. Row one in Table 2 is the percentage of comments created by participants during active role-play that were categorized as **Character Action** defined as the "use of a verb with a particular character" to describe action. The rhetorical intent we

associated with this code was to “reveal character action within plot.” Row two represents the percentage of comments created by participants during active role-play that were categorized as **Character Insider Perspective** defined as the “use of characters’ interior thoughts, states of mind.” The rhetorical intent associated with this code was to “reveal character feelings, reactions, states.” The third coding category (in row three) is **Plot Movement** defined as the “use of verbs in connection with story line.” The rhetorical intent of this code was “use of omniscient, author-mediated action in plot.” The category in the fourth row, **Plot Description** is defined as the “use of adjectives and adverbs not connected to specific characters.” **Dialogue** or direct address was the fifth category of comment coded and appears in row 5. The definition we associated with this code was “text occurring within quotations.” The rhetorical intent attributed to this code was “language attributed to specific characters.”

While the presentation of the arcs is the order in which they occurred, the arcs are not sequential. We purposefully selected arcs with sufficient propositions for coding. For the three selected arcs, we combined the parsed propositions from each of the various participants’ contributions and analyzed them within each arc. These results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: *Percentage comparison of use of five categories across three story arcs*

	Character Action	Character Insider Perspective	Plot Movement	Plot Description	Dialogue	Total
Arc 1	31.3 %	21.6 %	12.8%	7.7 %	26.5 %	99.9 %
Arc 2	40.3 %	20.0 %	15.7 %	13.2 %	10.7 %	99.9 %

Arc 3 42.6 % 16.9 % 16.0 % 19.9 % 4.5 % 99.9 %

Next, we selected three focal participants with adequate propositional representation across the story arcs to investigate their individual contributions: Akira, who often went by Zi; Larkwing, who mostly went by Lark; and Kitsu, who also went by Kit. These results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: *Percentage comparison of 3 focal writers' use of the five coding categories*

	Character Action	Character Insider Perspective	Plot Movement	Plot Description	Dialogue	Total
Akira	42.7 %	21.1 %	17.9 %	9.0 %	9.0 %	99.7 %
Lark	43.0 %	14.9 %	10.0%	16.9 %	15.1 %	99.9 %
Kitsu	35.6 %	16.7 %	17.6 %	18.0 %	12.1 %	100.0 %

A major difference between Arc 1 and Arcs 2 and 3 is clearly visible when consulting Tables 3 and 4. Arc 1 has a lower activity level for **Character Action** when compared to Arcs 2/3 (31.3% vs. 40.3% and 42.6%), and a much lower activity level for the category of **Plot Description** (7.7% vs. 13.2% and 19.9%). Instead, in Arc 1 there is a large reliance on **Dialogue** (26.5%). Arc 1 is the first appearing story Arc. Interview data revealed there might have been more to get done in terms of establishing the context for *Trelis Weyr* within this initial story arc, and according to Kit dialogue is normally the means to accomplish this task. “When we need to explain plot development or move the story along more quickly, we often

role-play between the leadership team and use a lot of dialog to let the characters explain the action,” stated Kit.

It is interesting that the writers chose to use a larger proportion of Dialogue, as dialogue is a difficult genre to master; developmentally (McCarthy, 1994), instructionally (Kreeft, 1984), representationally (Fabian, 1990), and theoretically (Nystrand, 1989). However, use of dialogue in this study is in line with research findings recounting participants who created a shared fiction by describing events and sharing dialogue (Bal, 1997; Busier et al., 1997). Participants reported during our interviews that “in-character thoughts and dialogue for role-play” were things they learned as they helped each other develop as role-players. Dialogue was one element in particular that participants stated allowed them to “put more description in writing”. Gergen (2009) shared identities are relational and constructed through dialogue and conversation. We speak, think, and act as the “multiplicity of voices” residing in each of us (Anderson, 2012). This idea aligns with Bahktin’s theory involving heteroglossia as well; the understanding that we appropriate the voices of others as we develop language to communicate ideas and understanding. Interestingly, as the story arcs progressed chronologically in *Trelis Weyr* we saw the writers use less Dialogue and more Plot Description.

Our discussion of distributions and patterns in the data must be conditioned by the selection factors we used. Our results are premised on “productive” users of the RPG forum, since we needed to analyze sufficient amounts of data. Our discussion for this paper does not consider the circumstances and outcomes of less productive, less active users. Major differences occur in Akira’s relatively small use of Dialogue. We suspect that she had a difficult time with this type of text. She was a relative newcomer to the forum and text-based

RPG interaction, and the chat data supports that Akira was being scaffolded by more experienced writers in her development of writing character dialogue. In contrast, both Lark and Kitsu are experienced in this genre and more facile with using dialogue.

Lark differs from the other two co-authors in her sparse use of Plot Movement (10.0%) identified in her writing. Lark's interview data points to her desire to let others be involved in the direction of the plot. As the site administrator, she mentioned being conscious of others' needs to direct the plot. In talking about her goals when creating the site, Lark shared, "I wanted to create a forum where members felt empowered to become active and felt supported to improve their writing over time, as they become more involved as players." Lark was ever mindful of her role as a facilitator, which naturally curtailed tendencies she may have had to direct plot.

Smaller, relative differences were found as well. Akira used less Plot Description (9.0%) than did the other two authors (16.9% and 18.0%) and used somewhat more propositional units coded as Character Insider Perspectives (21.1% vs. 14.9% and 16.7% respectively). As mentioned, Akira is an inexperienced user of text-based RPG, thus writing about action may be easier for her at this stage in her own development as a writer. This difference in participants' use of code categories is the source of our speculation regarding their different approaches to writing together.

Discussion

We hoped to create a greater understanding of technologies' influence on a new context for literacy; the engagement in web-based collaborative writing, and its relationships to popular culture, social, and literacy practices. As evidenced throughout this investigation, participants of *Trelis Weyr* belonged to a community of practice and play where they used global literacy practices, made social connections, and collaborated with other fans of *Pern*

literature. In so doing, they shared resources and knowledge, interacting via role-play to create multiple forms of media to remix or create new items for a social purpose.

Collaboration as Social Interaction

In this study, the construct of collaboration was developed out of observable social interaction. While many previous studies of “collaborative writing” may have fixated on the documents produced, the current study re-considers written artifacts for what they can reveal about the collaborative processes that created them. Therefore, we suggest that collaboration (in this case, collaborative writing) is built upon the interaction patterns that construct it, and within the social situations in which it occurs. This RPG forum provided participants with a variety of collaborative opportunities to share their writing and for shared writing, resulting in literacies that were developed through performance and play within a community of writers.

Becoming a community of writers through role-play depended on participants’ shared interest, and that they chose to act on that embodied interest. After all, other readers of Anne McCaffrey’s literature might never participate in writing about it. Rather, these readers and writers decided to do something with their common interest in McCaffrey’s world of *Pern*. Participants also benefitted from both synchronous and asynchronous connections. In effect, they were set free from the restrictions of time and geography. The participants, who wrote from various locations and at any time they chose to do so, exploited these affordances. In participating as part of the community, the participants also were normalized into a particular way of communicating. They developed shared competence in both writing, and the framing of the discourse that precedes writing. There is a *Trelis Weyr* vernacular, and despite the disjuncture of time and location, the participants were joined in a common enterprise, the same activity, as a committed group, similar to Miller’s (2014) claims for “joint action and uptake” (p. 69).

Our second point is that participating in role-play, any role-play, with others is an act of collaboration. The creation of meaning in role-play depends upon all players being able to articulate their part in a larger whole, shared by the whole group, whether face-to-face or in virtual contexts. The participants demonstrated their commitment and coherence within the role-play metaphor through engaged time; they created and used unique tools for their communication, shared these tools as a team, and mentored new members into the habitus of their group through virtual relationships and mentoring. Through these forms of engagement, the participants created a virtual participatory culture. They also worked together to solve problems. They made commitments to each other in the form of continued play, further evidence for Miller's (2014) claims for ludic payoffs in genre. The accrual of linguistic resources, the communication modes (AIM, Chat boxes) utilized, as well as unique vocabulary and visual item register as the creation and use of a culture's assets, as recurrent patterns. One outcome of this accumulation of affordances is the collective narratives produced by the participants. In fact, we suspect it is a form of new age story telling, borne out of and responsible for sustained collaboration. Yet, we again caution, that the processes of this community are as much an outcome as are the texts themselves.

More pragmatically, in our third point we recognize that participation in the *Trelis Weyr* community resulted in what we regard as literacy events and skill. New skills are those needed to sustain membership in a chosen literate community, or modes of engagement. The participants learned how to write in collaboration with other writers. Looking more closely at this process within *Trelis Weyr* revealed successive entries in a long chain of narrative. This iterative process was inherently collaborative because all authors were writing in response to what their peers wrote before them, or they wrote in anticipation of what one of their peers might provide as a response. Writing in response and writing as a projective response (Gee,

2007) were both necessarily in collaboration with the other, who also served as reader. The other participants constituted a shared, authentic audience. Based on the governance documents for the group, feedback and general reception of one's writing output in a "space that is designed to be friendly" might have been less threatening for writers. Further, the community had a stated and demonstrated interest in developing each other's writing competence.

A second aspect of these literacy events is that everything was construed as performance within *Trelis Weyr*. Participants were involved in the active construction of a social reality. Therefore, in order to make it so for others, the intended reality was performed via a text entry. These performances for each other were also inverted when the performance space was reflexively utilized to experiment with genre innovations, solve problems through play or imaginary writings, and also the recognition by the participants that some of their play did strategically solve problems in their writing, while other play may have been just for the fun of it; ludic play and performance.

A Web-Based Collaborative Writing Genre

Our interpretations of data suggest participants were guided by genre constraints created within this RPG forum (e.g., semi canon nature of story development, fantasy genre). Interestingly, the use of coding categories by the participants was strikingly similar across the profiles we developed for the participating writers. Likewise, the structural similarities in individual's coding across the different story arcs suggested the effect of genre awareness on the part of the writers, influencing their writing across time within the RPG forum. It is a genre shaped by collaboration of a particular type. While the contextual features of McCaffrey's original writing influenced the participants in *Trelis Weyr*, they did not copy her genre verbatim since participants agreed their work would be semi canon. Participants were

writing within heroic, dragon-based mythology as McCaffrey did, but their narratives did not follow the normal rhetorical constraints for heroic fiction.

Another aspect of this collaborative genre is the parallel writing that occurred. While writers participated in co-reference and thematic inclusion of shared content, the episodes each writer created were individually authored with scaffolding, modeling, and suggestions from the other writers. The episodes were also carefully linked to the previous episodes by shared characters, shared plot events, and shared goals. It was desirable and even necessary to reference content and characters from another writer's posts. However, the use of the co-reference strategy was more likely mentioning, or "inclusion-lite." Nonetheless, these cohesive ties bound the texts into a single work. This somewhat diffuse networking also afforded writers maximum freedom and flexibility, while anchoring them thematically and socially. These characteristics suggest to us an emerging, online genre and new insights for collaborative writing for semi-canonical fan fiction.

This text-based RPG form of writing, that is somewhat like parallel play, is a braided genre. As a semi-canonical writing experience, *Trelis Weyr* (based on the fiction of Anne McCaffrey) shares the constraints of other fan fiction sites. Pugh (2005) defines fan fiction (or fanfic) as "writing, whether official or unofficial, paid or unpaid, which makes use of an accepted canon of characters, settings, plots generated by another writer or writers." (p. 25) Or, "fanfiction can be defined as writing based on a canon invented by another writer or writers and shared by the intended audience" (p. 169) What Pugh's definitions do not exclude, but fail to explicitly note, is the profound and influential bias of these allegiance works exhibited by fans when they choose to write into popular canonical works, such as McCaffrey's *Dragons of Pern* series. In this investigation, writers used the themes and contexts provided by McCaffrey and braided their own plot structures into the existing (and

co-created) context. About such writing, Pugh adds: “It lives purely on the web...[and] tends to have more of an agenda than other fanfic universes, and the agenda in question is not about the personal fulfillment as a writer” (p. 27).

This final observation by Pugh creates an important distinction for writers of a canonical and semi-canonical, fan-based homage to the original author. It is writing “in service” to another’s world, agenda and plans. In fanfic writing emanating from a canonical contract, writers compose to “fill gaps” in the original story. Filling the gaps presupposes the shared knowledge base held by the canonical readers/writers is more articulated and enriched, in order to add to the work of the original author. Elaboration on the original work is the writers’ desire for more, and in response they provide it themselves.

Implications for Classroom Practice

New technologies are creating a profound blurring of the classical boundaries separating teaching, learning, research, administration, communication, media, and play. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is as much a way of life as it is a tool for youth today; deeply embedded in every aspect of their lives. Living and learning are interwoven, and youth expect a new type of learning ecology – one that interweaves learning with the social, in an active, participatory manner in which their physical and virtual worlds synergistically coexist. Students are pushing learning to new dimensions, using a language of interpretation and expression founded in an interactive approach to learning, creating, and responding to information through a mixture of multimodal text. Continuing to teach them in time-worn ways is a mistake; thus, it is imperative educators use research-based information to provide practices that will better fit the needs of today’s youth.

Recent interest in the use of online digital writing tools has increased, characterized by an emphasis on promoting new literacies in classrooms in response to new times and the

advent of new digital tools (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009; Kellner, 2000; Leu et al., 2009; Merchant, 2010). This escalation is apparent in policy statements and new standards for writing instruction, adolescent literacies, and 21st century literacies, all stimulating inclusion of technology, collaborative planning, and collective problem solving to prepare students for higher education and the workplace (Common Core, 2010; IRA & NCTE, 1996; ISTE, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Partnership, 2008). In the fields of literacy studies and writing research, the rationales for teaching new literacies like collaborative writing include: leveraging literacy practices characteristic of students' out-of-school literacy practices involving reading, writing and related semiotic systems (Gainer & Lapp, 2010; Herrington et al., 2009; Jacobs, 2011; Kajder, 2010; Wilber, 2010); creating new forms of social networks and relationships to support literacy practices related to writing development (Andrews & Smith, 2011; Hicks, 2009; Kist, 2010); and, preparing students for workplaces and other participatory cultures demanding an understanding of how specific digital tools are used in certain ways (Beach et al., 2009; DeVoss et al., 2010).

Teachers who leverage students' interests and literacy practices founded in out-of-school, informal learning experiences may find useful ways to support the new literacies we would like students to take up. As Gee (2003) shares, teachers should leverage the learning principals embedded within game designs for educational purposes. However, it is important that educators and researchers attempt to understand the activities youth find meaningful and motivating including: valuing of out-of-school literacy practices, integrating technology and popular culture, creating more opportunities for authentic collaborative, participatory environments, integrating performance into students' reading and writing lives, and positioning youth as designers of text.

Future Research and Conclusion

Findings from this study illustrate how youth engage in collaborative composing while navigating and manipulating popular culture and technology, providing a nuanced understanding of how a text-based RPG forum offers a range of multimodal, inter-textual, and hybrid reading and writing opportunities. By understanding participants' everyday literacy practices as manifest in this forum, researchers and educators may be able to better meet the needs of adolescents and emerging adults for the 21st century demands they will face as members of a global community. Reflexive analysis provides educators with a path toward increased relevance for academic writing that occurs as part of schooling. In concert with these applied understandings, we also suggest the results of this study confirm recent additions to Miller's genre as social action. Miller's elaborations to her 1984 theorizing are based on deep interaction with Internet texts.

Moving forward, there are several aspects of the online text-based RPG experience that should productively be investigated to flesh out the structure laid down within this study. First, investigate RPG forums like *Trelis Weyr* as communities of practice and play could help to develop a social learning model for online, virtual communities to include prior theories of community and new contexts that speak directly to the virtual nature of online resources. Research could also investigate participants' competence in writing; what signifies competence for a participant as both a role player and as a writer, and if these two notions of competence are compatible, mutually exclusive, and so forth. Additionally, research might investigate specific aspects of play in forums like *Trelis Weyr*, and their implications for classroom practice.

In closing, texts created in *Trelis Weyr* are the result of the new social actions Miller (2014) has come to embrace. Rationales for inclusion of new literacies within curriculum involve leveraging students' out-of-school literacy practices involving literacies and related

semiotic systems (e.g., Gainer & Lapp, 2010; Haynes-Moore, 2015; Herrington et al., 2009; Wilber, 2010), and creating new forms of social networking and partnerships to support literacy practices (Andrews & Smith, 2011; Hicks, 2009; Kist, 2010). Incorporating the use of these types of digital spaces within curriculum deserves further examination as educators struggle with how to weave technology within literacy curriculum in purposeful, authentic ways. Educators who undertake this challenge may be able to leverage students' out-of-school literacies to create motivating, interactive environments within school; spaces that may decrease the existing disconnect youth experience today by creating a "permeable curriculum" (Dyson, 1993) that allows for interplay across the boundaries of youths' official and unofficial worlds.

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Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions

Interview # 1 - Demographics

1. What is your name (can be a screen name) and your age?
2. What is your gender? Is your biological gender the same as your performed gender online (what you identify as when you role play in characters you create)?
3. What best describes your race/ethnic background (i.e., African-American, Asian/Asian American, Hispanic, Native American, Caucasian, Other)?
4. How would you describe where you live: urban (in the city), rural (in country), or suburban (in planned communities)?
5. What grade are you in (i.e., grades 6-8, grades 9-12, college, out of college)? If you are in school, what type of educational setting do you attend (i.e., public school, private school, virtual school, home school)?
6. What are/were your favorite subjects in school? What are/were your least favorite subjects?
7. Do you have any brothers and/or sisters? What age are they?
8. Do you live with both or one of your parents, a guardian, or on your own? Do any extended family members live with you in your home (grandparents, niece/nephew)?
9. What is the predominant language spoken in your home? Is a second language spoken in your home (if so, what?)
10. What is the highest grade level your parents completed (i.e., grades K-12, college)?

Interview #1 - RP experiences

1. How long have you been participating in text-based role-play forums?

2. Do you participate in other fan-based sites? If so, what else have you participated in and for how long?
3. What were the first types of role play games you played?
4. What got you started role playing? How did it make you feel as a participant?
5. When did you start role playing in Pern forums, and which forums have you participated in?
6. How do you feel about the people you interact with in forums like Trelis Weyr? How does that make you feel about being a participant yourself?
7. Do you feel you are a competent role player? What makes you feel that way?
8. Can you share how your participation in an RP forum like Trelis Weyr supports your autonomy (e.g., choice in tasks, expression of your own ideas, feeling you can be yourself)? How does that make you feel?
9. How much time do you typically spend per week role playing? Why/how do you spend that time? Can you describe how you fit your role playing activities into your schedule? How is that different from making time for homework or other activities you participate in?
10. Can you describe the types of things you do as a participant in a forum like Trelis Weyr?

Interview #2 – Role-Play Experiences

1. Have you created artifacts related to your role play activities that are hosted on other sites (for example, do you have a Flickr photo stream for images; do you blog or have a website to display creations; or, do you have a deviantART site)? If so, can you describe any of these creations, and how it makes you feel to be able to create and share this work?
2. What are the most valuable resources that helped you become a participant and learn to

- role play? Are there resources that supported your growth (i.e., helped you improve)?
3. What parts of the Trelis Weyr site did you visit most frequently? Why? Did your use of the site change over time (if so, how)?
 4. What forms of communication did you use with others on Trelis Weyr? What happens in that context (how does it work)?
 5. Have you used what you have learned from role playing and making role play content in any other areas of your life?
 6. Think about your overall experiences as a participant in Trelis Weyr specifically. How would you describe it to a friend who has not participated in Trelis Weyr or other Pern related role play games?
 7. Why do you participate in RP forums like Trelis Weyr? Can you describe why it is important to you?
 8. How competent do you feel about your ability to participate in role playing? Why?
 9. Did you feel prepared to succeed in your role-play on Trelis Weyr? Why?
 10. Can you describe a time when you helped others and/or gave advice on role-playing?

Interview #3 – Role-Play Experiences

1. Can you describe a time when you collaborated with others during role-play?
2. Can you share what you think you have learned from role-playing in RP forums like Trelis Weyr? How does that make you feel?
3. Can you describe the kinds of conversations you have with other players through chat or other features in Trelis Weyr?
4. Do you talk to players about personal issues not related to role play? Why?
5. Can you share a time when a role play participant (online friend) offered you support

when you had a real life problem?

6. Can you tell me what it is like to work with others in Trelis Weyr?
7. How important is the way your character looks to you (i.e., visually and textually)?
8. Who or what encouraged you to participate in role play game forums like Trelis Weyr?
9. Has anything or anyone ever discouraged you from participating in role play game forums?
10. What do you like about role-playing in Trelis Weyr? What do you dislike about role playing in Trelis Weyr?
11. What parts of Trelis Weyr made you want to keep role-playing? Why?
12. Can you share what it is like to try out new roles and personalities with your characters?
13. Is there anything that you would like to add?

Appendix B: Definition of Terms Related to Role-Play-Games

Term	Explanation
Backstory	The history of a character prior to the player's actively portraying him or her in a role-playing environment.
Canon	Original material or referring to "official source material", which is created or accepted by an RPG group. Canon is often used to ensure continuity within a RPG or fantasy setting.
Character	The fictional persona (human or animal) being played by an RPG participant within the context of a game.
Character profile	A document containing a character's basic traits, skills, background, etc. Historically, a single sheet of paper, but this is now more commonly an electronic document or spreadsheet and/or may be made up of multiple sheets.
Chat	This is the chat feature on <i>Trelis Weyr</i> ; a place where members can interact with each other out of character. It is a socializing space.
DeviantART	An online social networking site that connects artists and allows them to display their work (http://www.deviantart.com/). One of the

participants displays her creations on DeviantART.

Fan fiction Fictional texts created by fans and derived from their fandom of a particular media such as a television show, movie, book, anime, manga series, or video game.

Fandom The state or attitude of being a fan.

Forum Internet forum, or message board, is an online discussion site where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages.

In Character (IC) An action or discussion which is meant to be performed by a character in the story of the game (behavior in line with the character's personality).

Moderator Members responsible for moderating assigned sub-forums on the site, with behind-the-scenes access to change the structure or appearance of the site as needed. Moderator is displayed on these members' profiles and forum posts.

Term

Explanation

Massively	An online role-playing video game in which a very large number of
Multiplayer	people participate simultaneously. Players play the game, competing
Online Role- Playing Games (MMORPG)	against and cooperating with other players connected to an online network.
Multi-User Dungeons (MUD)	A multiplayer real-time virtual world, usually text-based. MUDs combine elements of role-playing games, hack and slash, player versus player, interactive fiction and online chat.
Out of Character (OoC)	An action or discussion made between players, not meant to be performed by characters in the game (an action that is not in line with the character's personality).
Player or participant	The physical person playing the game (i.e., not the character they play).
Role-play	The act of taking on the role of a character. May be done in any of several modes, including 1 st person dialog, 3 rd person narration of action, or even 1 st person improvisational acting.
Role-Play-Game	Role-Playing Game. Includes a defined set of rules and allows

- (RPG)** players to take on the role of a character. Also allows players a strong measure of free will to choose what the character does, which shapes or influences the story unfolding during game.
- Scene** A single session of role-playing that takes place in the same room and/or setting. The portrayal of a single IC situation, which may span across multiple RP sessions, such as a story that takes several nights to play out.
- Setting** The fictional universe in which a story takes place. A setting may be immediate, such as a room, or broad-based, such as a planet.
- Screen Name** The abbreviation for screen name or user name.
- Story Thread** A narrative thread, or plot thread. Refers to particular elements and techniques of writing to center the story in the action or experience of characters rather than to relate a matter in a dry “all-knowing” sort of narration.
-