Supporting Young Authors:
Exploring the Identity, Positioning, and Blogging of Adolescents

BY
Grace Hartzell Pigozzi

B.A., University of Illinois at Urbana, 1986
M.Ed., University of Illinois at Chicago, 1992

DISSERTATION
Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction: Literacy, Language, and Culture
in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Chicago, 2016

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:
Alfred W. Tatum, Chair and Advisor
James R. Gavelek
Nathan C. Phillips
Theresa A. Thorkildsen, Educational Psychology
Michael Manderino, Northern Illinois University
This thesis is dedicated in memory of three people, lodestars in my life: to my parents, Thomas Hartzell and Grace Forward Hartzell, for their love of stories and research; and to my other father, Raymond Pigozzi, who first made me aware of how a child’s sense of ownership of a learning space is essential for engagement and constructing new knowledge.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend a resounding thank you to my Committee Chair and Advisor, Alfred W. Tatum. I am most deeply grateful for what I came to know as the eleventh hour changes: those offhand, luminous insights into anything from the idea of “meaningfulness,” to creating the context for a pilot study, and finally, to the conceptualization of elements of this dissertation. Those suggestions usually came with a laugh, often a shrug, and an admonishment to “concretize that idea.” May your wallpaper never be yellow.

I am honored to call each member of my committee both teacher and colleague. Many thanks are due to Jim Gavelek, Nate Phillips, Terri Thorkildsen, and Mike Manderino for all of their insight, suggestions, and guidance. My committee represents the exemplary scholars who inform my work and learning.

Thank you, Bill Teale, Irma Olmedo, and Flora Rodriguez-Brown for providing me with kind advice, and rich opportunities for research and scholarship through the years.

A huge debt of gratitude is owed to Melanie Walski, for her wit, brilliance, courage, and thoughtfulness. She demonstrated that of all the research questions, “Is it really possible to fly?” wasn’t so unrealistic.

I am also grateful to my fellow doctoral students who extended their friendship and shared their knowledge. Thank you to the colleagues of the garden level, Colleen Whittingham, Emily Hoffman, and Jaime Madison Vasquez for their ongoing incisiveness and humor. I am grateful too, to Dr. Steve Kushner, Angela Fortune, Kellie Doubek, Marcus Croom, Rick Coppola, Kara Taylor, Shawndra Allen, and Melissa Gyimah.

Thank you too, to my other teachers, mentors who do not know they are mentors: Tamie Holmes, Paul Hartman, Sue Leoni, Lisa Montgomery, Karen Arnold, Kris Hartzell, Rosemarie McGee, Rachel Hayman, Audrey Ambrose, and Angela Johnson. I am especially grateful to Mike Gosney, whose discussion of the magnitude and potential of Internet technologies in adolescent learning sparked the idea for this dissertation.

It is important to extend a heartfelt thank you to the participants in my study, who gave up their winter Saturday mornings to come and blog. I appreciate their dedication, their humor, and their honesty as they shared their writing and experiences for this study.

Finally, I am indebted to my family: to my siblings Mary, Tom, Dan, Matt, Joe, Hank, and Chris, their spouses, and their children for their encouragement.

I am profoundly grateful to Charles and Cecilia, my young philosophers, whose jovial support and patience has continued to buoy me along, even as they’ve moved on to their own academic endeavors. My deepest appreciation goes to my husband Andy, whose intrinsic kindness, resilience, and sense of humor only increase as this journey we call life becomes ever more complex and interesting.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I
Introduction..................................................................................................................1
Statement of the Research Problem ...............................................................................2
Purpose and Significance of the Study...........................................................................8

CHAPTER II
Literature Review .........................................................................................................12
Overview of the Review of Literature ...........................................................................12
Multimodal Sites Featuring Writing ................................................................................12
  Crafting Digital Stories ..................................................................................................12
  Keeping a Journal Online ..............................................................................................13
  Blogging and Gender ....................................................................................................15
Blogging as a Socially Constructed Practice of Writing ..............................................17
  Composing Texts for Transformation ........................................................................21
  Blogging in School Settings .........................................................................................23
Affinity Spaces and Blogs ............................................................................................23
  Affinity Spaces as Sites of Motivation .......................................................................26
  The Connection between Blogging and Motivation ...................................................29
  Linking Blogging to Identity Performance ..................................................................33
Theoretical Framework ..................................................................................................35
  Positioning in Writing .................................................................................................35

CHAPTER III
Methods .......................................................................................................................40
  Framing the Methods ..................................................................................................40
  Connective Case Study ...............................................................................................40
Study Design and Procedures .........................................................................................44
  Blogging Session Routines .........................................................................................45
  Recruitment .................................................................................................................46
  The Physical Site .........................................................................................................47
  The Participants ..........................................................................................................47
    Donald .........................................................................................................................48
    Rosie ..........................................................................................................................49
    Derrick .......................................................................................................................50
    Mina ..........................................................................................................................50
    Jason ..........................................................................................................................51
    Coco ...........................................................................................................................52
  Researcher Role ..........................................................................................................53
  Pedagogical Timeline ..................................................................................................54
    Random Blog Posts: Weeks 1 and 2.........................................................................54
    Short Stories: Weeks 3, 4, and 5 ................................................................................56
    Poetry: Weeks 6, 7, and 8 .........................................................................................56
    Informational Texts: Weeks 9 and 10 .......................................................................57
  Data Collection ...........................................................................................................59
  Assessments ................................................................................................................60
  Field Notes ..................................................................................................................60
CHAPTER IV
Findings.........................................................................................................................71
The Word Factory.........................................................................................................72
Introduction ..................................................................................................................72
Part One: Considering Motivation ...............................................................................73
  Sharing for Composition or Modification: Ideas to Mentor Texts.................................77
    Derrick .......................................................................................................................80
    Mina ..........................................................................................................................82
    Donald ......................................................................................................................83
    Rosie ..........................................................................................................................86
  Take up with Audience: Seeking Fair Treatment and Sharing Passions .......................87
    Derrick .......................................................................................................................87
    Mina ..........................................................................................................................88
    Donald ......................................................................................................................89
    Rosie ..........................................................................................................................90
  Obligation to Oneself: Enriching Text via iPhones and Handwritten Notes .................91
    Derrick .......................................................................................................................92
    Mina ..........................................................................................................................94
    Donald ......................................................................................................................96
    Rosie ..........................................................................................................................98
  Stick-up Letters and Avatars: Personalizing the Space..................................................98
    Derrick .......................................................................................................................99
    Mina ..........................................................................................................................100
    Donald ......................................................................................................................100
    Rosie ..........................................................................................................................102
  Interrogation of Purpose: “I could find anything to write on.” ....................................102
    Derrick .......................................................................................................................102
    Mina ..........................................................................................................................103
    Donald ......................................................................................................................103
    Rosie ..........................................................................................................................106
Part Two: Positioning in the Cases of Derrick, Mina, Donald, and Rosie .....................109
  Derrick. Finding Himself Online ................................................................................113
  Mina. Love, Loss, and Lessons ....................................................................................117
  Donald. Platforms become Stages to Generate Characters .........................................122
  Rosie. Writer Fluidly Creating and Collaborating ......................................................134

CHAPTER V
Discussion and Summary ............................................................................................146
Manufacturing Discourse ..............................................................................................146
Review of Findings ........................................................................................................146
Connections to Educational Issues ...............................................................................150
  Common Core State Standards ..................................................................................150
  Expertise and Technology Disparities .......................................................................151
  Blog Space Supporting Engagement and Context for Identity Portrayal ......................153
  Theoretical Connections to Digital Research Fields ..................................................155
  Implications for Preservice and Current Teachers ....................................................161
  Creating Affinity Space in School .............................................................................163
**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1: Mentor Text by Week ..............................................................................................................................46  
Table 2: Participant Profiles .................................................................................................................................47  
Table 3: Data Sources and Organization ...........................................................................................................59  
Table 4: Data Source Timeline ............................................................................................................................63  
Table 5: Positioning Instances by Platform .......................................................................................................69  
Table 6: Representations of Motivation .............................................................................................................77  
Table 7: Blog Posts by Genre ..............................................................................................................................78  
Table 8: Positioning Theory Coding Instances .................................................................................................110  
Table 9: Positionings, Derrick ............................................................................................................................113  
Table 10: Positionings, Mina ...............................................................................................................................117  
Table 11: Positionings, Donald ............................................................................................................................122  
Table 12: Positionings, Rosie ...............................................................................................................................135
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Affinity Spaces Hosting the Benefits of Online Writing ......................................................24
Figure 2: Valentine Meme ..................................................................................................................57
Figure 3: Writing Attitude Survey/Whole Group n=4 ........................................................................75
Figure 4 Action Readiness Assessment/Whole Group n=4 .................................................................76
Figure 5: Positioning Theory Categories .........................................................................................112
SUMMARY

Technology creates a state of flux for educators. Opportunities for online interactions and experiences unfold exponentially while technology continually develops and evolves. As seasoned users, adolescents often seem to have a better grasp of the revolution of relationships fostered by new literacies and technologies. Implications for educators include acceptance of the fact that continual change demands a refining of practices that transcend context in order to navigate the social landscapes of literacy. Teachers have to make strategic use of existing tools that facilitate notions of teaching and learning to foster and support a learning environment in which students are able to interpret, synthesize, and understand how their meanings converge (Jenkins, 2006; McVee, 2011). With adolescent writers, blogs and their inherent affinity spaces (Gee, 2004) present a platform for recounting stories, making meaning about topics and events relative to their lives, cultivating community and social awareness, and activism, key ideas for observing both motivation and identity articulation (Kinney, 2012). Blogging offers access to primary information sources, in addition to varied analyses of complex circumstances and situations. By reading others’ blogs, students benefit from their peers’ reflections and have the opportunity to see emerging ideas rather than only final, edited compositions (Lapadat, Brown, Thielmann, & McGregor, 2010).

This connective case study asks two salient questions: 1) How does online writing in an affinity space affect motivation to write? and 2) How do adolescents enact their identities as they position themselves and others in a blog space? This study explores how adolescent writers used style, genre, and discourse both independently and collectively in an online blog space. Interviews and assessments, in addition to positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) analysis was used to examine writer interest, motivation and identity within the discourses of adolescent
writing. Conducted over the course of ten weeks, four young bloggers became more comfortable using technology and having a wider audience as they posted poetry, short stories, and informational pieces. Participants demonstrated motivation as they organized, wrote, embellished, and shared their writing, all while portraying their identities in unique ways, presenting their perspectives, and at times disrupting common discourses. Writers learned how to locate and use a wider range of online formats, and incorporated these new practices into their writing, thus expanding their knowledge of what writing can be.
I. INTRODUCTION

As global communication in business, politics, education, and personal life has become foregrounded in technology, the notion of what it means to be a literate person, in an era of shifting and expanding technological developments, is to constantly redefine that meaning (New London Group, 1996). In turn, increased use of technology engenders an academic climate of change, one that perpetually needs to refocus its priorities as educators determine how to best prepare learners for life.

In their everyday literate practices, young people are experienced multimodal learners with a variety of entry points to that learning that range from school to home and places in-between: such as after school clubs, religious groups, or community centers, and an assortment of mentors and colleagues with whom they interact (Alvermann, 2011b; Gee, 2003; Ito et al., 2013). Moreover, the experiences of young people outside of school may be more relevant to learning assisted by the use of online media. Key to knowledge construction in any context is how that knowledge is represented. Individual selection of modes, culturally shaped resources for meaning making, and media, the substance through which meaning is made, are integral to representation, and therefore integral to meaning (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Jewitt, 2008). One example of mode is the composing space on a blog. The medium is the screen that displays it. The need to broaden instruction that incorporates a wider range of mode and media through multimodal meaning making is heightened.

To connect informal multimodal learning and technology to a formalized school practice such as writing, especially for adolescents, demands consideration of such factors as authenticity and motivation, the benefits or constraints of collaboration in an online space, and an investigation of identity portrayal in that space. As technology and policy initiatives meld and
evolve together, the needs of learners are vital, particularly in the development of writing practices that acknowledge and support the complete literate identities of adolescents.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

Involvement in a variety of online literacy practices provides an opportunity for adolescents to affiliate and connect with a particular social group as well as explore an assortment of online personas in conjunction with literacy development. Writing on blogs can also support construction of identity (Huffaker, 2005; Kinney, 2012). My personal interest in blogs is derived from my roles of both parent and teacher, observer of the finesse and ease of young people’s use of technology at home or in the community, as compared to its limited use in school. My children and students have expressed frustration with the rigid constraints of blog spaces at school, where they are used for making inquiries about assignments, or responding to homework questions instead of in a manner that utilizes the potential transformative, collaborative, and expressive properties of the blog format.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) address the imperative to involve technology in college and career readiness with comprehensive standards for reading and writing; the added feature of multimodality in the writing standards promotes online writing as a core academic discourse (CCSSO/NGA, 2010). In response, researchers seek ways to support and stimulate better writing, particularly among students who find it difficult or uninteresting (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006; Pajares, 2003).

Although CCSS does not explicitly state the terms “online” or “Internet” in the reading standards, researchers have identified unique and troubling disparities in proficiency that are based on income inequalities and linked to deficits in literacy skills necessary for successful online reading and writing. Moreover, the study, “The New Literacies of Online Research and Comprehension: Rethinking the Reading Achievement Gap” found that all assessed students...
generally do a poor job of communicating in online formats, reading to locate relevant digital sources, and critically evaluating and synthesizing that information (Leu et al., 2015).

In addition to the ubiquitous and ever-increasing nature of Internet technology, increased policy attention to writing is borne of assessment reports indicating that middle and high school students lack solid writing abilities. In 2011, the Nation’s Report Card revealed a marked decline in the writing ability of eighth graders: roughly 25% of both eighth and twelfth graders performed at the proficient level in writing (NCES, 2012). By contrast, the 2007 Nation’s Report Card states that 33% of eighth graders were proficient in writing; and 24% of twelfth graders were proficient in writing (Salahu-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008).

These data parallel the proficiency levels of adolescents in 2002 (Miller & McCardle, 2011). A meta-analysis conducted to address to these low levels in writing aptitude investigates research in writing instruction (Graham & Perin, 2007a). National reports, including Writing Next (Graham & Perin, 2007b) and the National Commission on Writing (2003), respond to the lack of proficiency in adolescent writing and the neglect of the nation’s schools to make writing a priority. Additionally, these reports reference the value of writing for individuals, such as writing to build skills and knowledge, and for society at large, such as writing to benefit the workplace and economy.

Common Core State Standards, like the policy of No Child Left Behind before it, is in many ways a response to these numerous reports. Tracing the evolution of the link between education and the economy also reveals how this process led to the production of policy that emphasizes the cognitive aspects of writing instruction while downplaying the sociocultural dimensions that are as crucial to adolescent writing development (Tatum, 2008).

Identity construction through writing, particularly class, gender and racial identities within schools is an under-researched area. Associated identity issues influence students’
outlooks toward future goals, and significantly, their perspectives on current educational conditions. Policies such as CCSS and research measures aimed at reforming education and improving classroom practice are largely lacking in this area (Noguera, 2003).

One possibility for initiating comprehensive change towards writing is to attentively integrate individual attributes of home, popular culture, technology, and education through a connected learning approach. Instead of drawing exclusively on the norms and interests of dominant culture, connected learning seeks to construct new values and learning capacities elicited from diverse cultures and communities student by student. A connected learning design values and elevates the culture and identities of nondominant children and youth. By attending to the individual interests of writers, a connected learning approach can be a bridge to multimodal identity portrayal in four meaningful ways. Connected learning design uses digital media to 1) offer interactive formats for collaboration and self-expression, 2) reduce limitations to access for sourcing new information, 3) offer support for learning through social media and affinity groups, and 4) link a far wider and diverse range of culture, information, and resources to for learning opportunities (Ito et al., 2013).

Briefly defined, an affinity space is a physical or online space in which participants share a common interest and collaboratively explore a common topic. Defining factors of both group and individual identities emerge as affinity space participants connect and interact (Gee, 2004, 2005; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007).

Situated within interactivity and self-expression, identity is defined as how one thinks about oneself in terms of the devices and Discourses enacted in a situation, along with the specific activities associated with that identity. Simultaneously, Discourses are a mode of displaying association in a particular social network. Discourses “with a big ‘D’ ” (Gee, 2001, p. 717) is always more than just the spoken word and is delineated as the integration of ways of
talking, listening, reading, writing, and acting in the process of enacting socially situated activities and identities. This construct of identity examines the online Discourses, or projective identity, of adolescent writing. Projective identity is defined as the kind of person one strives to be, including beliefs and values, along with the history that one builds on and through an online persona (Gee, 2004). Additionally, the complex words and actions of writers’ assumed identities are further clarified by Goffman’s (1959) discussion of identity performance. Using a metaphor of theatrical performance for individuals in a group, in this case, writers on a blog, individuals adopt specific Discourses and enact particular behaviors in order to portray a specific image. Series of identity enactments comprise identity performances that writers present to their audience (Abrams, 2011; Gee, 2001; Goffman, 1959).

Indeed, it is with Gee’s D/discourses that I can clarify other relevant terms of this study. If primary Discourses are those that are acquired and practiced as children are socialized at home and in the community, then secondary Discourses are those encountered in the social sphere of non-home-based institutions. Dominant Discourses are utilized these institutions, and the acquisition of secondary dominant Discourses brings with it access to the power of the dominant institutions. Thus nondominant Discourses are those practiced not necessarily in one place, but also in a space of familiarity and solidarity with a particular social network but do not necessarily accord status in the world at large (Gee, 1989). It is to nondominant Discourses that I refer when discussing the practice of out-of-school literacies. And literacy, being the mastery of secondary Discourses, is also meaning making through reading and writing. Interlocutors move beyond specific language use in the affinity space interactional context and draw on personal cultural knowledge and histories to redefine who they are. Notably, although Gee (2001) considers D/discourses communities of practice, he determines that an affinity space is an alternative to a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). There is no explicit discussion of
the role of Discourses in affinity spaces, although the focus is on possibilities inherent in interactions within a space, rather than on stable group membership. While a community of practice connotes members and membership along with becoming part of a group while achieving a long- or short-term goal, an affinity space is the field in which interaction is situated with specific goals or outcomes intended. More importantly, participants can partake pseudonymously or even anonymously in an affinity space. In other words, the focal point of an affinity space is the area or environment, rather than the composite of its participating members (Gee, 2001, 2005).

For writers online, an expectation exists that individuals engage actively in the task of portraying not just their own identities, but also investigating the identities of others. Such pursuits are defined by symbolic possibilities that appear at the site of interaction. Given this circumstance, the definition of online identity is elucidated. It is comprised of the personal structure of rights and responsibilities that a blogger or other online participant enacts in the final composition that was produced in the course of multiple positionings in the context (Tirado & Gálvez, 2008).

Developmentally, adolescence is a crucial time for identity construction and for learning writing skills. As academic stakes increase in middle school, age-related motivational factors decrease. At the same time, students often struggle with the transition from elementary to middle school. Increased expectations, fluctuations in motivation, and personal transitions are conditions germane to writing (Graham & Harris, 2000).

Several researchers discuss the links between motivation and the literacy tasks that students elect to do on an out-of-school basis (Alvermann et al., 2007). Regardless of the reasons for decreased motivation in adolescence, out-of-school literacies: the intentional, personal, and everyday uses of literacies that adolescents increasingly practice online, such as social media use
and fan fiction writing, go largely understudied and underreported. This occurs despite continued calls for exploring the potential of digital literacies to engage youth in academic literacy tasks, and despite the fact that young people report engagement in intentional literacy tasks at high levels, as statistics indicate (Lenhart, 2015). The fact that young people elect to engage in complex online writing tasks contradicts claims that they have low literacy abilities. Generating and obtaining information through digital media is central to the lives of adolescents, and they are utilizing the Internet in increasing numbers and ways. According to the most recent PEW Internet & American Life Project Report, 92% of all middle and high school students in the United States go online daily. Of those users, 24% report going online almost constantly, and 56% of teens go online multiple times per day. Further, 85% of adolescents, ages 12-17 engage at least occasionally in prolonged online writing (Lenhart, 2015; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010).

Context matters for this age group. A writing environment that is supportive and authentic for adolescents can help ease motivational shifts and increase beliefs of personal competence, both of which are linked to increased academic success (Alvermann, 2002; Pajares & Valiante, 2006). Young people interact on a variety of social media; work on school or personal webpages; remix online sources; and share original images or videos to create new text.

Blogging is an intentional literacy practice that not only provides an online medium for writing, weblogs also offer an affinity space in which adolescents can make meaning about topics and events relative to their lives, foster community and social awareness, and activism. A blog consists of time-stamped journal entries that are generally comprised of thematic pages with commentaries. Blog authors may update several times daily, weekly, or monthly. Generally, blogs are easily editable and entries are organized in reverse chronological order (Mazur & Kozarian, 2010; Zawilinski, 2009).
In the current study, my objective was to explore identity portrayal and motivation of adolescents in conjunction with literacy development in an online space where its members are the operators and authors of that space. Motivation is defined as the force that induces action, specifically as young people organize their resources and explain their experiences as they interact (Thorkildsen, 2013). The young authors engaged in creative writing on a blog while I observed how the participants positioned themselves and others as they portrayed their identities in their writing.

**Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Examining identity in the writing of adolescents is significant for multiple reasons. Research and policy urges high quality writing as crucial to college and career readiness. The ease and popularity of online communication with both words and images has impacted what is understood as writing in both policy and research. Finally, the interactive nature of online writing provides a unique pathway for teachers to examine and support developing adolescent identity as it is performed through writing.

Adolescent writing in general and the quality of that writing in particular is a major focus of both researchers and policymakers. Writing and writing instruction are a central component of implementation of CCSS (CCSSO/NGA, 2010), adopted by 46 states. Learning to write and writing to learn are strongly emphasized for students, especially in grade 6 and beyond. As their schooling becomes more discipline-specific, writing becomes crucial for building content knowledge and reading across the disciplines (CCSSO/NGA, 2010; Graham, 2013; Graham & Harris, 2013).

Adolescents compose their identities through their writings in evolving ways, as what is understood as writing is changing. In both research and policy, semiotics has become an important factor for writing. The uses of images and physical layout have become part of the
evolution of the language structure for composition. The visual appearance of the written piece coheres into the compositional meaning as textual ideas and emphasis combines with images (Unsworth, 2008). Because blending words with images is often standard blogging practice, the use of images in the design of blog posts is meaningful to writing.

Reading and writing involve varying levels of composition. The New London Group (1996) defines a similar concept of design that includes inspired application and variety of conventions operationalized for semiotic activities that are transformative as they reproduce the conventions (New London Group, 1996; Smagorinsky, 2001). Transformation occurs within the collaborative, supportive nature of the affinity space that may also serve to enhance motivation to write, as blog author and audience continually interact and comment on the composition of written pieces. Referencing adolescents’ use of technology at school and in nontraditional learning contexts, Jacobs (2012) suggests a nuanced integration of research into motivation and multimodality. Writing should not just be an instructional goal, rather a tool for transformation and connecting to a larger community. Adolescents’ online interaction around individual blog posts, along with the final compositions that result from those interactions, provide collaborative markers that support investigation into the identity portrayal inherent in that writing.

While writing across a variety of writing genres may be less familiar to adolescent writers than other nondominant Discourses or literacy activities such as text messaging or conversing on social media, the blog format and collaboration among writers mediates this experience (Alvermann, 2009). Taking a connected learning approach, allowing learning to be interest driven, with students determining topics as they write across those genres, enriches this experience (Ito et al., 2013).

Focusing on the online writing of adolescents is a useful pathway for teachers to examine the identity development of this age group because of the interactive nature of online literacy
activities. Writing in this unique, yet closed format presents an opportunity for adolescents to adopt, express, and experiment with a variety of identities through their writing. Further, nondominant literacy activities are important to forming adolescent identities. New technologies enable journeys across space and time, blurring the boundaries between academic and informal learning contexts. Adolescents’ online identities and routines also traverse those spaces (Gee, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Leander & Sheehy, 2004; Schultz & Hull, 2002). The adoption of specific Discourses and enacting particular behaviors in order to portray a specific image and create a particular identity of who one strives to be in a unique, online space occurs as authors express their ideals in writing. How writers position themselves and one another is key to identity investigation. Whether bloggers write in accordance with or in opposition to accepted moral standards is relevant to the process (Davies & Harré, 1990; Goffman, 1959).

In this study, I examined a hybrid affinity space used by adolescents online: a weblog, or blog, to explore the roles and positions taken by its members in order to examine the identity articulation of the writers. Additionally, I indexed how bloggers position themselves and others, their motivation, and other issues that influence the writings of these young people. The blog site, as established for this study allowed for interconnectivity among the participants, but was closed to outsiders. In a literacy collaborative setting, the affinity space expanded from cyberspace into physical space, or vice versa, depending on the participants in the room, but never left the parameters of those two spaces and existed only as participants engaged in either.

It is my aim that this study adds to the extant literature on adolescent writing that calls for a consideration of students’ out-of-school interests to become more central to their in-school writing experiences. In an effort to view adolescent writing more holistically, for all writers, but especially for those writers who struggle with literacy, researchers underscore the importance of understanding the informal online practices of young people in order to appreciate and support
their complete literate identities (Alvermann, 2009, 2010; Alvermann et al., 2007; Lawrence, McNeal, & Yildiz, 2009; Moje, 2006).

Questions to Research

To thoughtfully investigate whether the interactive nature of online literacy activities is a useful pathway for teachers to examine the identity development of adolescents, smaller, isolated aspects of the issue merit consideration. Two research questions are warranted to advance the field of adolescent writing in general, and online writing in particular. Online writing and adolescent literacy have converged in the policy. In synthesizing a dynamic, interactive blog space with a more traditional format, this applied research sought to extend the extant research on adolescent writing instruction. This study sought to engage young writers in more challenging, yet familiar ways as they practiced sophisticated writing styles and structures with the intent to enhance further learning in the disciplines, preparing them for a well-rounded future of their choosing, whether that context is college, the workplace, or possibly somewhere in-between. The research questions were:

1. How does online writing in an affinity space affect motivation to write?

2. How do adolescents enact their identities as they position themselves and others in a blog space?
II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the Review of Literature

The purpose of the literature review is to situate my study among the relevant research and theory related to my research questions. This chapter presents the major frameworks that undergird my work and features a discussion of the extant literature about the wide-ranging yet frequently overlapping topics of multimodality and its relationship with motivation and identity portrayal. The literature around multimodality, as it is presented in a variety of literacy contexts, reveals some of the rich interrelationships between motivation, blogging, and adolescent writing. A discussion of affinity spaces focuses on the intersection of these interrelationships. The interactive and defining nature of blogging is elucidated within the construct of affinity space, and inspires further exploration of the associations between blogging and motivation, and blogging and identity. In the theoretical framework, I discuss tenets of positioning theory most relevant to motivation and identity. In each section, the format is defined and its significance to my study is then highlighted.

Multimodal Sites Featuring Writing

Crafting Digital Stories

Pertinent to my study is finding an appropriate format for students are interested in online participation, yet may express uncertainty with creative writing techniques or their own writing abilities. Crafting digital stories provides an alternate expressive mode for students who struggle with traditional forms of writing because it assists participants to recognize perspective, determination, and structure in writing (Freidus & Hlubink, 2002; Reid, Burn, & Parker, 2002).

Digital storytelling is considered a social practice that uses low-cost digital cameras, non-linear authoring structures, along with computer software in order to tell a story (Meadows, 2003). Akin to blogging, in addition to being understood as a media form, digital storytelling is
also considered a cultural practice. It is the meeting point of textual arrangements and symbolic principles, technologies production and conventions for their use, and collaboration as social action that occurs in local contexts (Burgess, 2006). As young people appropriate and re-craft ideas and images, they express agency as they disrupt common discourses to use in the portrayal of self in the constructive and performative moments of digital storytelling (Hull & Katz, 2006).

**Keeping a Journal Online**

While digital storytelling may create affinity among communities taking part in the practice, blogging creates an affinity space that drives the dynamics of interaction. (Freidus & Hlubinka, 2002). Time-stamped journal entries of a blog generally consist of thematic pages and commentaries. Blog authors may choose to update several times daily, weekly, or monthly. Blogs tend to be easily editable and entries are organized in reverse chronological order (Mazur & Kozarian, 2010; Zawilinski, 2009).

Akin to keeping a personal handwritten journal, maintaining a blog is considered an intentional writing practice, most often accomplished on a personal, as-needed or as-wanted basis. Blogs are both collaborative, and individualized. Their format promotes self-expression as well as joint or singular editing in the form of giving and receiving online feedback. With further coordination and an expansion of themes and topics within an educational setting, they can also be interdisciplinary (Huffaker, 2005).

Kinney, (2012) summarizes online writing in informal learning contexts in much the same way as the literature on digital storytelling. In a single-case study, Kinney discusses the variety of purposes that online writing has for adolescents. With adolescents, blogs and other forms of online writing present a platform for recounting stories, making meaning about topics and events relative to their lives, fostering community and social awareness, and activism, ideas that are key to observing both motivation and identity articulation. Online writing can also
support construction of identity. Involvement in non-mainstream literacy practices provides an opportunity for adolescents to affiliate and connect with a particular social group as well as explore a variety of online personas in conjunction with literacy development (Kinney, 2012).

According to Huffaker (2005), blogs represent a perfect medium for literacy development. As authors increase their comfort with both wider audiences and technology, students must read and write as they would on paper. By means of their widespread popularity and ease of use, blogs remain equitable for all age groups, interests, and genders, and still provide a medium for learning programmatic skills (Huffaker, 2005). For example, blogging affords readers access to primary information sources, often included as hyperlinks on original posts, along with multiple analyses of complex topics. By reading others’ blogs, students benefit from their peers’ reflections and have the opportunity to see emerging ideas rather than only final, edited compositions (Lapadat et al., 2010).

Normative developmental practices shape the blogging practices of adolescents online. With regards to blogging, some research suggests a dual relationship between general adolescent developmental processes and experiences. Offline events and developmental shifts impact adolescents’ online behavior as much as their online conduct impacts their offline events and developmental processes (Davis, 2010; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008).

When writers collaborate online, reactions to one another’s texts allow for elucidation and a reconceptualization of meaning as writer and readers negotiate meaning in their everyday writing practices. When blogging, writers are compelled to carefully and thoroughly consider ideas about purpose, structure, and audience. Writers take a more thoughtful approach because other group members are present and able to provide immediate suggestions and detailed analysis about how a piece of writing is relevant to the culture of the online collaborators (Magnifico, 2010, 2011).
Magnifico (2010) describes how online writing spaces produce a transformative shift in writing practices as the spaces become a forum in which readers and writers become conversation partners as well as active listeners. The relationship simulates that of orator and responsive audience instead of writer and passive reader. Further, electronic media has opened a window for clearly viewing the interplay and exchanges of writers and their readers. The communicative, interpersonal character of writing is more visible with multimodality in online spaces than ever before (Lammers, Magnifico, & Curwood, 2014; Lensmire, 1994; Magnifico, 2010, 2011).

**Blogging and Gender**

Research studies on role of gender in blogging often distinctly focus on the potential for identity portrayal and relationship formation within a blog space, and findings discuss the multiple ways that adolescents express identity, significantly, beyond the presence of intervening adults (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005). Findings in other studies of blogging and gender consider pragmatic or linguistic roles of blogging. For the most part, more females than males view blogs as diaries or online journals. Conversely, more males than females tend to utilize blogs for public sphere commentary (Karlsson, 2007).

A rare quantitative study looks at the intersection of traditional adolescent communities and the public Internet space across the entire span of Iceland. Findings discuss how blog spaces that adolescents create develop into spaces where they socialize and reinforce social networks, even as they form new ones. Adolescents also explore, form, and express personal identities on blogs. In Iceland, fewer boys use blogs than girls; in fact, girls dominate both blog production and blog readership. Suggested affordances of blogs include potential to boost interaction within communities and groups of adolescents; investigate the nature of news as it is produced by
adolescents in an adult-controlled medium; and explore social stratification as it occurs in adolescent blog spaces (Bjarnason, Gudmundsson, & Olafsson, 2010).

An ethnographic study of forty blogs found that girls simultaneously use blogs to construct identity and relationships as they navigate across the duality of Internet use for personal communication and mass communication. Girls take risks in doing so, yet they craft strategies to negotiate the dual audience of known and anonymous. Girls with intimate friendships tend to influence the content of one another’s posts. They report an awareness of the unknown, but that it does not directly affect their writing. Key features of self-presentation online include ingratiation, competence, and occasionally, supplication. In both large and small contexts, girls use both direct and indirect expressions of self to gain group acceptance. Analysis suggests that teens blog because they have created their own community where they can express themselves without adult interference. The identities that they construct in the blog space may also afford them access to a variety of other blogging groups (Bortree, 2005).

The potential for identity portrayal for girls in fashion blog sites is the topic of a case study, “Digital Dressing Up: Modelling Female Teen Identity In The Discursive Spaces Of The Fashion Blogosphere.” Viewing the blogging process as the social and cultural interchange of capital (Bourdieu, 2008), Chittenden (2010) suggests that the manner in which girls express their identities in multiple ways online: posting outfits and commentary about them while using a range of multimodal resources, shapes their offline identities.

One descriptive study that takes a different approach analyzed language use in Malaysia between male and female teenagers and found that both use blogs as a diary to discuss life issues, girls tend to use more intensifiers, empty adverbs, and lexical hedges than boys in an effort to be taken more seriously. Researchers note that linguistic differences are definitely related to gender;
this finding reflects differentiation in the socialization of girls and boys (Amir, Abidin, Darus, & Ismail, 2012).

While gender identity may be privileged in the latter studies, gender identity cannot be portrayed in the absence of other facets of identity. Examining gender and blogging studies provides information about similarities and differences of male and female bloggers related to such things as readership, topical choices, selection of audience, and language use. A variety of online sites provide an opportunity for creating digital stories, while blogging in particular serves as a means to keep an online journal, and blogging creates an affinity space that drives the dynamics of interaction. (Freidus & Hlubinka, 2002).

**Blogging as a Socially Constructed Practice of Writing**

Participation in an activity such as blogging enables a participant to appropriate cultural resources that contribute to becoming a literate individual. However, young people are never passive recipients of cultural resources; instead they continually construct those resources from an individual capacity for meaning and a related viewpoint on practice. The transformation of any learner’s mental resources changes how s/he perceives the world. As all young people are different, the constructions differ, and such differences transform the process itself. Other members of the culture are transformed in how they perceive it, too. Inspiration and modification are ongoing. Creative changes are inherent characteristics of all communication and interaction and transform the resources of individuals and the sociocultural practices in the contexts in which they occur (Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1994).

Literacy, the portrayal of identity, and online writing are considered social practices in this study. Online writing involves the creation of a diversity of texts. Text comprises a variety of semiotic modes, including written print, visual, oral, and aural material presented online (Alvermann, 2002; Gavelek & Bresnahan, 2008; Kress, 2003). To understand texts is to know
how such things as layout and grammar serve to relate blog entries, for example, and to other forms of writing used in similar contexts; to discover how writers are located in position to others in the affinity group; and whether blog entries encourage writers and readers to take action in the world. Further, what is deemed text relies upon the social and cultural means in which it is presented and interpreted, and that may change from one domain to another (Moje, Stockdill, Kim, & Kim, 2009; Stone, 2007).

In Internet visual design, image displaces verbal language as a communicative mode in many arenas of public interaction, including textbooks, print journalism, and electronic media in all institutions in general, and specifically in communication technologies. As young people increasingly use the Internet in their writing practices, they have also adopted the practice of foregrounding image in their writing. Further, multimodality is the idea that illustration and interaction is derived multiple semiotic modes, of which language could be one. A theory of representation and communication that focuses on language only is insufficient; the changing role and function of language as a support or companion to images and other representations is important (Kress, 2000).

Reading and writing is first a collective, socially organized practice that utilizes a symbol system and the tools for creating and circulating it (Scribner & Cole, 1981). Writing encorporates the sharing of knowledge—thought, insight, and questioning—for particular purposes in a specific context. In the context of this study, adolescents would discuss current events, popular culture, and other topics important to them online on a blog.

An ideological model of literacy varies with discourses, cultural norms, and social context. Its uses and meanings are always embedded in notions of power. This model is ideological in the sense that it inspires challenges over meaning, definitions, and boundaries. As
a social practice, students should be able to question the choices made in the kind of literacy they are learning (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008; Street, 2008).

In the context of blogging, writing and reading, as well as interpreting meaning, varies from one person to another. As authors collaborate, creating written pieces together on a blog, their intersubjective action generates novel and unique meanings. From new meanings, further meaning potentials emerge (Lähteenmäki, 2004) in a novel and unique social context formed by its users. This perspective views the processes of learning and thought as distributed across not only individuals within the space, rather as across all participants, tools, and contexts (Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010).

Blogging affinity space group members use blogs for a variety of purposes to serve multiple needs and interests. This occurs as part of daily enacted, lived, deliberate, value-rich, interactive social practices. In this sense, intentional writing on blogs is viewed from a sociocultural angle (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008). Online reading and writing can be considered a more social and collaborative act than more traditional forms of interaction because it focuses both on the purpose and process of the group, rather than the singular act of an individual (Leu, O’Byrne, Zawilinski, McVerry, & Everett-Cacopardo, 2009).

In any affinity space, a span of identities and discursive practices meet. In these sites for shared learning, adolescent writers can develop sets of discursive practices and learn to appropriate the voices and cultural practices of new communities in a semiotic apprenticeship (Gee, 1992; Wertsch, 1991).

In this process, the social and individual are continually recombining into new forms; identities and societies are continually generated. In the space between discourse and practice, identity construction, like positioning, can be considered a mediated action, a point of resonance
and alteration that produce subjectivities and the agency of the individual to adopt these practices (Hirst, 2004; Wertsch, 1998).

Spaces, like psychological tools (Vygotsky, 1987; Wells, 1994) mediate the social lives, consciousness, and identities of participants. Because they contain social languages, communal memories, narratives of shared experience, and discourses of shared cultural elements, an individual’s consciousness and identity is often spatially and temporally delimited (Bakhtin, 1981; Kostogriz, 2004). Social languages are acquired through social interaction rather than direct instruction. They can be either oral or written, or both, and are always linked to the characteristic social activities. They describe and connect action and interaction in the world (Gee, 2001; Wertsch, 1998).

The negotiation of discourses involves the process of creating with a hybridity of language that encourages discursive identity positioning, resulting in a reflexivity as individuals identify with and through others. Writers not only select words and write in specific contexts to interact; they may also adopt, subvert, or transform those words (Bakhtin, 1981). The transformed result of interactions, and the combining of ideas and discourses is a re-positioning of identity (Bhabha, 1990, 1996; Tate, 2007). Identities are dialogical and reflexive, that is, directed back onto oneself, as the view of others, or simply the Other, is necessary for authoring the self (Bakhtin, 1986).

To investigate representations of identity in writing, analysis in this study is situated with three platforms, thematically inspired by Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1981; Bostad, Brandist, Evensen, & Faber, 2004; Lähteenmäki, 2004). These platforms include 1) writing to position self on blog post, 2) writing to position others within blog post, 2) writing to position others reading the blog post (DiBlasi, Ferraro, & Conti, 2008). Drawing from the work of Tatum (2009) in the writing of African American adolescent boys, the term “platforms” was utilized to investigate textual
lineages and to interpret the historical writing of African American males. Writing platforms include intentions and purposes within writings, and are conceptualized in this study as a foundation from which adolescent bloggers interact with their own writing and with one another in the affinity space. As young authors inscribe their voices on record, they are afforded a distinctive opportunity to view and value their own perspectives as they become more engaged in their individual literacy development. By engaging writers to secure their writings onto platforms in a supportive environment, the writing of literacy collaborative members becomes a social act (Tatum & Gue, 2010). Moreover, platforms offer insight into how writers portray themselves and others in key ways.

Discursive practices can be analyzed in terms of dialogics, in how participants interact with each other and with meaningful texts, in addition to the reproduction or production of new social space and time (Bakhtin, 1986; Hirst, 2004). Because they occur as events with multiple people, all social interests are shared. Discourse reflects and achieves a communion of minds as language becomes blended (Mead & Mind, 1934).

Young people continually construct cultural resources from a personal capacity for making meaning and a related perception of experience. A diversity of texts comprised of many semiotic modes is produced when bloggers engage online. Affinity spaces exist at the intersection of identity portrayal and discursive practices. In an affinity space, participants share in tasks and dispersed knowledge. Writing is social as participants interact with their own writing from platforms, and with the writing of one another in the affinity space.

**Composing Texts for Transformation**

When students’ experiences increase and they become more adept at creating and contributing to online content, their ability to critique both their own productions and commercial ones also increases (Weber & Dixon, 2007). Media literacy is crucial so that users of
all ages learn to recognize who is producing a website and how that is situated in the broader scope of what they encounter online.

Text, as the manifestation of social action is the focus of critical sociolinguistics. Social factors are central; the influence of culture is crucial; linguistic practice is seen as one among a variety of socially and culturally significant practices. Kress (2001) in a discussion of Saussure relates that social interaction is located in the linguistic sign. In its use, the sign is transformed as it assumes the forms that most reasonably depict or realize the interest of the sign maker. Such interest factors in power relations of the sign maker in relation to the power of the recipients of the sign’s message. In the function of online writing, for example, the blog writer represents sign maker, while the recipients of the sign are the respondents and blog readers, the audience. Sign makers in turn transform the cultural and linguistic resources that are available to them in their social environment. Key here is Kress’ conception of motivation. Form motivates meaning (Kress, 2001).

Directing students to read, write, and think in ways that question the status quo invites them to rethink their identities as learners. Alvermann (2006) notes that teaching for critical awareness means creating communities of active writers, readers, viewers, and listeners able to identify the variety of ideological positions that texts offer. Conversely, teaching critical awareness simultaneously means that students learn to pay attention to the fact that online participants typically have options about the ideological positions that they may adopt or resist, or those they may choose to modify (Alvermann, 2006).

Through the process of guiding writers to regard text as the manifestation of social action, and to critically question life events, adolescents begin to understand how their online identities and materials are shaped and influenced by larger societal and institutional forces
Kinney, 2012). Furthermore, identities are considered socially created and recreated through the dialogues of everyday communications (Gee, 2001; Moje & Luke, 2009).

**Blogging in School Settings**

The general tone of inquiry is circumspect about blogs in school; blogs as classroom tools may be beneficial, although more investigation is necessary. Research on the role of blogs as meaning-making tools in formal educational contexts is limited and inconsistent (Bennett & Maton, 2010; O'Byrne & Murrell, 2014). In some disciplinary literacy inquiries, posting on blogs in one study was far more minimal than researchers expected, while another showed that participants did not value the blog posts of others (Halic, Lee, Paulus, & Spence, 2010; Homik & Melis, 2006). Bennett and Maton (2010) are cautionary about integrating online writing into curricula, reasoning that blogs and other classroom technologies may be limited in their usefulness for school practices that require critical evaluation or document synthesis. Another study in which blogs were incorporated into curricular projects on the assumption that they would engage students in reflective writing, demonstrated the opposite; instead, significant numbers of students produced posts that were unreflective and inconsequential (Krause, 2004).

Some studies find a benefit to the use of blogs in classroom spaces, while others find blogs limiting or less engaging than anticipated. Studies were focused on reflective writing and reading the academic posts of others, but not necessarily commenting on them.
Affinity Spaces and Blogs

Figure 1: Affinity Space Hosting the Benefits of Online Writing

Affinity spaces provide the context for blog posts and commentaries where writers demonstrate agency. Additionally, blogs as affinity spaces offer a choice in level of participation, mode of representation, and an authentic audience that reads and responds to the work of writers. Online affinity space participants nurture one another’s functional beliefs about writing. On the Internet, people enter sites, such as a novel writing or blog sites, and can contribute in many different ways, with different people for different reasons. Depending on the space, group members may engage in peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) by reading but not interacting, or more actively, to comment on others’ blog posts, or to add a character or write a completely new story (Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013; Lammers et al., 2014).

Whether as contemplator or featured writer, participation in an affinity space serves to help bloggers collectively understand the practices of a unique writing format, as it enriches their personal bonds with one another, while simultaneously supporting their literacy development (Gee, 2013; Graham & Perin, 2007b). In online writing spaces, participants engage as affinity
space members where they utilize the group-governed space for a variety of purposes that serve multiple needs and interests, with distinct norms of interaction. Because of their narrow focus and specialized functions, affinity spaces require thoughtful writing for participation, particularly in sites that require knowledge of topical jargon (Curwood et al., 2013; Domingo, 2012; Gee, 2013; Magnifico, 2010, 2011).

Examples of affinity spaces include *Weebly*, a do-it-yourself website builder that can be configured for collaborative story writing. Members log in as individual users and contribute to a singular narrative. Numerous writers have access as composers of their own character storylines, and as editors for the stories of other members. Changes made to text appear as highlighted items and original authors may accept or reject edits.

Affinity spaces are semiotic spaces, or sets of spaces, for individuals to interact with one another, to share a common interest and share and gain knowledge that is dispersed and distributed across its many members, throughout the entire space. A semiotic space is one in which meaning is mutable; texts are rich with potential rather than assigned meanings. The reader is allowed productive agency in meaning making (Gee, 2004, 2005; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). Affinity spaces create a context for the sharing of transformative writings with other participants, who function as a collaborative audience for these creations. Planning and organization of writing often changes as participants provide formative feedback by commenting on works they have read (Curwood et al., 2013; Magnifico, 2010, 2011).

Members share resources and values, and flexibly re-form in different groups. Multiple media-focused and social networking sites are considered affinity spaces. However, socializing is not allowed to undermine the goal of the space; it narrowly focuses on the endeavor that defines the space. Affinity spaces do not exist for social networking purposes (Curwood et al., 2013; Gee, 2013). As discourse and content are synthesized in blog postings, collaborative
Meaning making is evident as bloggers discuss or query the significance of videos, images, and text as they are added, repositioned, or removed within each post. “Huffpost Teen,” a blog space for popular culture essays and reviews on *The Huffington Post* provides daily examples of collaborative meaning making as high school students interact around one another’s blog posts.

An affinity space as a semiotic space is nested between competing cultural entities that negotiate cultural identities across differences of class, gender roles, and values (Bhatt, 2008). Affinity spaces are open and link to other spaces so that knowledge is shared and transformative. Yet, whether in person or online, each affinity space maintains a distinct vision, culture, and set of norms that are negotiated by affinity space members over time. Affinity spaces have the capacity to create new structures of sociolinguistic and semiotic authority as they redefine approaches to disciplinary learning, and group and individual identity. (Gee, 2013). In other words, each affinity space retains a distinct identity, and the affinity space members retain a related identity there, whether it is that of a virtual world inhabitant, a virtual pet, or a budding fiction writer.

Affinity spaces support many levels of participation and interaction. Texts created in affinity spaces have no fixed meanings, rather are open to interpretation by other participants. Meaning making is ongoing and collaborative and allows exploration of cultural identities, as they too are cultural entities (Gee, 2004, 2013).

**Affinity Spaces as Sites of Motivation**

The ubiquitous and authentic audience of affinity spaces and other online writing spaces may afford adolescent writers an edge for writing motivation and interest. Instead of the everyday indicators of identity such as social position or age, young writers are viewed through the lens of their willingness to contribute. In affinity spaces, participants may comment, make
suggestions, or provide access or affordances that might not otherwise be allowed a for a young in her/his offline existence (Magnifico, 2010, 2011).

While participants in affinity spaces are defined by their roles in a specific semiotic domain (Gee, 2003), levels of individual media engagement, along with properties of social affiliation and group identity can be more thoroughly investigated through ethnographic means that move beyond situating media engagement to structuring it. In “Hanging Out, Messing Around, And Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media” Ito et al. (2010) create descriptive frameworks around modes of participation with media that focus on genres of practice. Hanging Out, Messing Around, And Geeking Out (HoMaGo) describes stances of engagement rather than types of individuals.

Hanging out encompasses the process of getting together and being together. Adolescents generally make plans online to be together, whether they are meeting off- or online. Hanging out affords young people the opportunity for peer sociability that is autonomous from adults where they may integrate new media into their informal interactions. The genre of messing around is initially a more independent practice, although as adolescents explore more their own interests, they connect to others outside their immediate social groups. Messing around tracks how media interaction intensifies as young people navigate online for relevant pathways to new information and inspiration for their own creations. Geeking out represents a commitment to the quest for expertise often to just one type of genre, media, or technology. Attaining high levels of knowledge while geeking out merits individual status and credibility within both friendship- and interest-driven groups. The varying points of orientation of hanging out, messing around, and geeking out helps situate media practices within an array of contexts among social groups (Ito et al., 2010).
Salient features of the relationships within these stances that arguably make them appealing to adolescents are the characteristics of sharing and support. Social group members make recommendations for technological resources as well as share access to Internet or hardware connections that may begin with collective unstructured play and experimentation but evolves as participants expand their knowledge and capabilities within and across a variety of contexts (Ito et al., 2010).

Affinity spaces can link across and between the contexts of school and home, and peer and popular culture learning in innovative ways. Participation in affinity spaces is interest-driven (Gee, 2005). Similarly, in connected learning environments, learning is interest-driven. Connected learning examines the potential of meaning making that is created when social, cultural and technological supports are combined in ways that allow young people to think, integrate, and transform interests across and between civic, career-specific, and academic domains (Ito et al., 2013).

Connected learning involves the deliberate process of crafting and utilizing a space where young people can find online peers with common interests, either in a school or community setting. It aspires to learning outcomes that are both individual and collective in nature, and are viewed as gateway experiences to more traditional public or civic involvement. With a focus on implementing new media that equitably reaches and enables youth who would not otherwise have access to opportunities that build collective capacities for learning that online communities present, connected learning spaces share many similarities with affinity spaces. Like affinity spaces, connected learning environments need not be online, but connectivity is relevant to affinity space conceptions. Both contexts are interest-driven and peer-supported, but connected learning is more academically oriented, with social engagement to academic studies, career
interests or opportunities, and civic participation. Moreover, learning is both intentional and experiential in connected learning (Ito et al., 2013).

A blog space may be an affinity space, or a connected learning environment, or both. Users determine the participation, and therefore, the context. The present study encompasses both connected learning approaches and affinity spaces. Although the focus on interaction among participants makes it more affinity space-driven, the process of self-selecting topics of interest for writing also aligns my study with connected learning.

**The Connection between Blogging and Motivation**

Some researchers maintain that engagement in affinity spaces fosters motivation. Little empirical evidence supports this link between engagement in multimodality and motivation, although it is often suggested (Jacobs, 2012; Sylvester & Greenidge, 2009). However, the technology could be less germane than participation. Whether membership in a participatory culture, or the manner in which that participation sparks new interests, it is the participation itself that could be the motivating factor (Jacobs, 2012; Lammers et al., 2014).

Several survey and interview studies of adult bloggers find that ease of use, divulging personal feelings, sharing experiences and knowledge with readers, and gathering and disseminating information are motivating (Brooks, Nichols, & Priebe, 2004; Hsu & Lin, 2008; Liao, Liu, & Pi, 2011; Liu, Liao, & Zeng, 2007). Two quasi-experiments, also conducted with adults, demonstrate that other factors, such as writing about current events and learning from peers are motivating (de Zúñiga et al., 2011; Yang & Chang, 2012).

A strategic difference between classrooms and affinity spaces is participation. In online writing communities and other affinity spaces, participation is voluntary and varies in length and frequency person-by-person. Few online spaces prescribe exactly how contributors participate in
terms of what they write. In contrast, classroom protocol is often the opposite; completion in systemic modes of certain assignments is mandatory (Lammers et al., 2014).

Bloggers gather in an affinity space, motivated by a common sense of purpose, to share their stories. They believe themselves competent writers capable of doing so from a variety of perspectives. Children who possess a belief in their own capabilities as writers become the most successful writers (Klassen, 2002). Beliefs about one’s abilities, or lack of abilities, are prominently situated across theories of motivation (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

While engagement in affinity spaces may in fact spark motivation, Ata, Nguyen, Driver and Thorkildsen (2015) offer a contrasting perspective that views motivation as more internal. Drawing on Dennett’s (1989) intentional stance, in which one’s beliefs, desires, and actions together represent motivation, researchers determined that in academic activities such as writing, contexts that allow for students’ sense of control, belonging, and competence support motivation for academic success (Gray & Rios, 2012; Krapp, 2005; Van Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth, 2009).

Interpreting how adolescents regard teachers’ viewpoints, as well as their own intentions, offers an understanding into how they perceive their own motivation. Personal factors for motivation toward academic success include adolescents’ individual efforts and sense of responsibility (Ata, Nguyen, Driver, & Thorkildsen, 2015; Dennett, 1989).

Beliefs of personal competence that ultimately become motivation are formed from routines of thought that are developed like any other behavioral pattern. Teachers are instrumental in assisting students develop habits of learning competency. Adults mediate the transactions of adolescents to learn to exercise control of their surroundings in general, and of their writing in particular. Adults, particularly teachers, can either empower adolescents with self-assurance, or diminish their emerging self-concepts. With adolescent students, teachers
promote a sense of expertise and confidence when they demonstrate that they care about them as individuals and are invested in their learning (Alvermann, 2002; Pajares, 1996).

Motivational factors often interact with writing ability. During adolescence, three key factors affecting motivation are germane to writing: academic stakes increase; age-related motivational factors decrease; while simultaneously students often struggle with the transition from elementary to middle school (Graham & Harris, 2000). To ease adolescent motivational shifts, Bruning & Horn (2000) recommend that teachers 1) encourage practical beliefs about writing, 2) cultivate student engagement through authentic planning and writing activities, 3) provide an accommodating setting for writing, 4) nurture a positive affective environment for writing (Bruning & Horn, 2000).

In a study about the motivation of teens writing in fan-based affinity spaces, Curwood et al. (2013) found that formative feedback in the form of comments from participating readers supports writers as they organize and develop their own work. Additionally, students sustain interest in creating written projects when teacher comments focus on how writing impacts the reading audience. Audience feedback, choice in writing topics, and genre are key areas in which readers and teachers alike can positively affect adolescent writers’ beliefs in themselves and their writing abilities (Curwood et al., 2013; Hidi & Boscolo, 2006).

A study about intergenerational blogging found that it became a multimodal tool for developing mutual apprenticeships and agency. Participants were both students and teachers as they shared expertise on the blog, making writing choices and meaning in their shared digital environment (Lewis, 2014).

Indeed, the convergence of attributes of connected learning and affinity space may in part explain motivation to write on blogs (Lammers, 2011). The importance of socializing in connected environments (Ito et al., 2010) for adolescent writers plays a role in motivating
participation, as much as sharing a novel venture plays an initial role in generating interest in the format (Gee, 2004).

Technology creates a state of flux; as it continually develops and evolves, opportunities for online interactions unfold exponentially. As seasoned users, adolescents often seem to have a better grasp of the revolution of relationships fostered by new literacies and technologies. Implications for educators include acceptance of the fact that continual change demands a refining of practices that transcend context in order to navigate the social landscapes of literacy. Teachers have to make the most of existing tools that facilitate notions of teaching and learning (Jenkins, 2006; McVee, 2011).

Context may be ancillary to further factors that promote adolescent motivation to write. Burbules (2006) links a sense of immersion to motivation in either off- or online spaces. Virtual experiences can include board game playing, reading a book, or watching a movie, all provide that immersion occurs during the activity. Immersion is comprised of interest, involvement, imagination, and interactivity. The combined components of confirming personal interest, soliciting involvement, allowing imaginative exploration and interaction among writers are essential for engaging and motivating students in a classroom. However, the qualities of interest, involvement, imagination, and interactivity may be more technologically mediated than ever before because of those qualities are shaped by the experiences and interests of the students (Burbules, 2006).

Some research links identity exploration with motivation, acknowledging the elusive roles of context and agency in the process. Kaplan, Sinai, & Flum (2014) discuss how, for students, the elements of perceived topical relevance, materials designed to encourage identity exploration, scaffolding, and a feeling of safety within the context may mean different things to different learners. More prominent factors to consider are participants’ individual interests,
experience with exploration in the past, maturity level, and a variety of social climates. Integrating the concept of identity exploration directly into the curriculum may potentially promote identity formation with its exploratory character, as well as a motivation for and deep learning of curricular content and skills (Kaplan, Sinai, & Flum, 2014).

According to the literature, motivation in a blog context has numerous origins, including voluntary and self-selected levels of participation, a sense of belonging and control, belief in personal competence and effort, and a sense of responsibility (Ata et al., 2015; Thorkildsen, 2013). For young people, supportive adult mentors, the opportunity to socialize, attempting novel tasks, and full immersion in a setting are also considered motivating (Alvermann, 2002; Burbules, 2006; Gee, 2004; Ito et al., 2010). As the following section discusses, the chance to explore identity in writing may also motivate participation in blogging.

**Linking Blogging to Identity Performance**

To return to the national reports, such as *Writing Next* (Graham & Perin, 2007a) and *The National Commission on Writing* (2003), while both made suggestions about improvements to policy and instruction for the most part; mention is made, too, of writer self-confidence and writer self-esteem. Explicit reference is not made to writing as self-portrayal or identity expression, nor for teachers to use it as a tool to guide adolescents in this developmental stage. Nevertheless, the extant literature calls for more investigation into writing, particularly writer motivation and identity, and their relation to writing in various contexts as self-concept and self-expression (Colleges, 2003; Graham & Perin, 2007b; Miller & McCardle, 2011).

By concentrating on identity with writing, teachers can instantiate students’ positive beliefs about writing (Bruning & Horn, 2000). By designing authentic writing contexts and goals, teachers can foster student engagement by presenting students with a supportive context for writing and creating positive affective conditions. In turn, the positive and supportive
environment engenders more successful writers. Online, writers portray their identities in multiple ways. Discursive constructions of identity can include biographies and self-descriptions, photographs, self-related sketches, and unique graphics (Leander & McKim, 2003).

Like writing, adolescent development is a creative process, guiding the creation of selfhood as one that involves several versions of being that adolescents present to the public according to the demands and limitations of immediate circumstances. Through interaction and identity exploration, adolescent writers adopt the functions and traits of others through perhaps lighthearted, serious, or even competitive stances where they assume different perspectives, thereby allowing them to explore various aspects of who they might become. In online spaces, opportunities for identity exploration are infinite (Harter, 1998; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005).

In addition to being a unique and engaging space for writing development, the discourse of online writing is an ideal means through which those new perspectives are explored and adopted. Blogs offer a unique format for writers because they offer unlimited expression, whether informational or creative, formal or informal. The author has the power and opportunity to decide. Writing in the public sphere of the Internet affords teens the opportunity to explore and forge new identities online that simultaneously inform their developing writing ability. (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007).

If informal writing and written interaction is an expression of motivation, then self-representation and identity exploration should be an integral part of formal writing instruction in an effort to highlight and improve writing in the nation’s schools. Current research in literacy calls for more investigation into these dimensions of writing, particularly motivation and its relation to writing in various contexts, as self-expression, in response to education policy mandates (Alvermann et al., 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007a; Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo, & Vacca, 2003; Moje, 2002).
Noguera (2003) advocates strongly for further research on how identities are structured along children’s school trajectories and how portrayal of gender, class, or racial identity influences students’ outlooks toward future goals, and significantly, their perspectives on current learning and school contexts. Further, examination of the juxtaposition of race, class, and gender influence student identity is crucial. Policies such as CCSS and research measures that are taken in efforts to reform education and advance pedagogical practices largely lack this form of analysis (Noguera, 2003).

The identity of an individual impacts one’s disposition toward life in general, and school and learning in particular. In a supportive environment such as affinity space, identity exploration can be motivating through the sharing of self-representations that include a variety of texts, educators create writing contexts and goals that are authentic and promote identity exploration. The discourse of online writing is an ideal means through which those new identities can be explored and constructed (Kaplan et al., 2014; Leander & McKim, 2003; Noguera, 2003).

A blog space as affinity space creates a context for literacy learning that integrates cultural resources into an immersive writing experience, agency in meaning making, shared supportive and interest driven learning, an authentic audience, a variety of potential motivations for writing, and the capacity to explore identity in a format in which few adolescent writers have experience (Burbules, 2006; Ito, 2013; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007).

**Theoretical Framework**

**Positioning in Writing**

People distinguish and characterize who they are by locating themselves within culturally flowing discourses and events. Positioning theory is a comprehensive theoretical and methodological means for characterizing shifts in identity articulation during the course of interaction. Positioning theory is germane to conceptualizing enactments of adolescent identity
as the socially constructed practice occurs as young authors position themselves and others in their writing. Through examination of written discourse on blogs, potential exists for expansion of the use of positioning theory, as it has traditionally been used for oral discourse. Positioning theory is a valuable lens for examining identity because it views intrapersonal relations as positioning practices that are culturally embedded. Positioning theory can also strive to understand how and why people may position themselves in a certain manner, whether intentionally or not, in particular situations and writings (Davies & Harré, 2007).

While it acknowledges temporality and space, positioning theory presents a unique opportunity to view the connection between writing and identity with data captured from interactive blog posts. In this study, positioning theory is used to examine how people position themselves and are positioned by others as peers and fellow writers. Furthermore, positioning theory can guide analysis of discursive practices in terms of dialogics and meaningful texts (Davies & Harré, 2007; Wortham, 2003).

Initially utilized as a tool for research on shifts within interpersonal relationships, positioning theory focuses on elucidating the standard frames within which people interact as they observe, intuit, sense and behave, either in conjunction with or in conflict against norms of correctness (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009).

While positioning theory embraces joint action, identity construction is individualized within that action. Selves emerge from domains of experience that are organized like narratives, even as individuals differentiate themselves from other speakers through the discourse (van Langenhove & Harré, 1993). Written stories and other creative writing posted on the blog, also provide individual opportunities for self-differentiation through discourse.

As a mediational activity (Wertsch, 1991) the primary medium of interactions is discursive, just as writing is discursive. Speech and other acts, storyline, and position connect to
reveal identity, although identity is not exclusively the product of the three (Davies & Harré, 2007; McVee, 2011).

Positioning focuses on action as it is enacted or mediated as it triangulates an individual’s position with storyline, and speech and other acts with individual and social attributes. Speech and other acts include conversation and writing; storyline is defined by the patterns crafted by positions and speech act (Davies & Harré, 2007; van Langenhove & Harré, 1993). This study explores both speech acts and blog posts; positioning moves are traced and indexed in verbal and written interaction.

Wortham (2003) discusses how in a school setting, curricular topics can contribute to identity development in subtle and context-specific ways. Educators must attend to the interdependence of academic learning and social identity development because interactional positioning and identity development always occurs in classrooms (Wortham, 2003).

In discourse containing elements of autobiography, narratives can have interactional as well as representational functions. Through written positioning, writers can enact a characteristic type of self, and through identity performances, they become that self. Narrator and audience can position themselves interactionally, passively or actively, by relating narratives with autobiographical aspects (Wortham, 2000).

Relational experiences that comprise life narratives help readers construct new texts, which locate meaning in reading. The new texts are culturally mediated, as they localize meaning in both personal and textual antecedent histories, in social practices occurring in the context of reading, and in the power relationships intrinsic to collective interaction. A genre, defined as text features and social practices, develops as a given text is read. The reader, who is enculturated to regard texts in conventional, codified ways, and in interpreting, produces new text. Meaning is a function of tasks conducted between texts and audience, and is dialogic in nature (Bakhtin, 1981;
Genres encompass those interactive social roles, and the affective states and beliefs of the participants as new meanings are generated.

Positions comprise an individual’s belief system with regards to how rights and obligations are allocated in the course of individual relations, or, in the affinity space, writing. They are socially or culturally situated: positions embody the common customs in which these beliefs are most significantly understood (Harré et al., 2009). Conceptual indices are structured together through positioning theory. Individuals position and reposition continually within an assembly of rights for those who ascribe to each index (Tirado & Gálvez, 2008).

A positioning act is one in which a person makes claim to or opts for specific duties or thrusts them upon another actor. Positioning is necessarily a local act, dependent upon the individual’s societal moral values. As the moral terrain shifts, those morals can be fleeting or change altogether; therefore, positions can be challenged (Davies & Harré, 1990, 2007; McVee, Brock, & Glazier, 2011). Like culture, identity is negotiated and reassembled in positioning as a result of a variety of local contexts and conditions, social practices, and socio-historical eras.

As social actors, individuals shape subjective identities from a variety of available cultural structures and resources (Holland & Leander, 2004) that recast social positions for personal transformation. In this analysis, the bloggers’ writing interweaves experience and insight as they pass through multiple identities.

In a discussion of social interaction analysis, Tirado & Gálvez (2008) provide two reasons that positioning theory as a theoretical and methodological resource is particularly suitable for the study of communication in online spaces such as blogs. First, in positioning theory, all interaction is discursive. Positioning theory also acknowledges that virtual spaces contain unstable, disjointed, and completely circumstantial phenomenon. Moreover, positioning theory is useful for analyzing aligning and opposing perspectives in discourse because
positioning theory posits that conflict is a shared and situationally evolving process. The ensuing conflict analysis is organized according to the participatory roles that the engaged interlocutors or writers adopt during the process (Tirado & Gálvez, 2008).

In this study, positioning theory was utilized to examine identity portrayal within and across blog posts that include poetry, short stories, and informational texts. Participants interacted around common endeavors in the physical and virtual place (Gee, 2004) of an affinity space where they engaged in written joint discussions and activities, shared information, built relationships in order to learn, and developed a set of shared practices in the process. Regarding motivation, what the bloggers elected to learn about, and how their writing reflected interest-driven learning also became apparent in positioning theory analysis. Research into multimodality is generally qualitative and conducted from a sociocultural viewpoint. Studies of motivation tend to have psychology or educational psychology origins, and are quantitative, relying on psychometric tools. Establishing an association between online writing and motivation is in part epistemological and theoretical. Combining paradigms in this study are consistent with connective case study methods that rely on mixing research methods.
III. METHODS

This connective case study is grounded in positioning theory and aims to answer the following questions: 1) How does online writing in an affinity space affect motivation to write? and 2) How do adolescents enact their identities as they position themselves and others in a blog space? The practices and performance of identity are viewed through the lens of positioning theory. Discourse in positioning theory is defined as patterned occurrences of action or writing in which meaning is salient (Davies & Harré, 2007; Harré, 2011). In this chapter, I will elucidate what I mean by connective case study methods as I explain the design and pedagogical routine for this connective literacy collaborative.

Framing the Methods

The methods for this study are informed by a pilot study conducted with four young bloggers. The purpose of my pilot study was to observe and describe how four adolescent writers used style, genre, and Discourse both independently and collectively in an online blog space. Writing genres of short story, poetry, and informational text creation were originally selected in order to parallel the tutoring structure of the reading clinic. They were, in part, an effort to extend literacy practices that some participants had become more interested in developing. Because the structure was successful in its implementation, it was logical to repeat it in this study. Guided by digital ethnography methods, my pilot study informed the design and procedures for this inquiry.

Connective Case Study

Capturing the social nature and authenticity of online writing is indeed a difficult pursuit methodologically. Examining new mixtures of semiotic sources, intersecting intentions, and distinct facets of identity that are crafted and restructured while learning occurs has been problematic to conceptualize without newer methods that wed technology to ethnography. In what he terms connective ethnography, Leander (2008) refers to digital literacy practices as
social practices. Internet research should disrupt the perceived binaries of online and offline; virtual and real world; and cyber and real space because those binaries disregard how Internet-related practices construct meanings interactively and transformatively, from multiple social spaces (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Leander, 2008).

Collectively referred to as digital ethnography in my study, these methodologies attend to layers of context occurring online with the group in physical place and digital space and their interrelationships surrounding literacy practices. They rely on mixed method approaches. The additions of brief interest surveys and motivational scale assessment in this research acknowledge the necessity for mixed methods. Digital ethnography offers a framework for systematic inquiry into literacy phenomena that are continuously changing or about which little is known (Curwood et al., 2013; Gillen, 2009; Greenhow, 2011; Leander, 2008).

Paying attention to the unbounded nature of digital spaces while maintaining contact with participants online, synthesized ethnographies afford wider possibilities of exploring those out-of-school, more authentic kinds of writing, while at the same time paying attention to not only how the internet is practiced, but also how it is made an artifact (Leander & McKim, 2003). Moreover, digital ethnographies have the potential to spark a clearer connection between online writing success, and how to capture the novelty and innovative aspects of those sites for use in a classroom. For these very reasons, I draw heavily from digital ethnography methods because my individual case studies are similarly bounded, viewed from both physical place and digital space.

With digital ethnography, bounding occurs by cultural processes, in this case, engagement in online interactions associated with freely accessing Internet resources, in addition to organizing and applying those resources to blog writing on a closed system. To contrast digital ethnography with traditional ethnography, bounding occurs fluidly in cyberspace as connectivity, rather than by groups in one school, classroom, or a particular collective of students and their
artifacts. Like traditional ethnography, digital ethnography offers a precise reflection of participant perceptions and actions and uses interactive, inductive, and recursive data collection and systematic approaches to construct local and cultural theories. However, the data are comprised of artifacts generated online (Greenhow, 2011; Hine, 2000). For the purposes of this study, cases are bound by connectivity and interactive, recursive data collection occurred. Selecting deductive analytic strategies for use with positioning theory and a focus on four key participants suggest case study, a method I have come to call connective case study, highly influenced by digital ethnography.

To view the status of blog interactions as literacy practices in this study, I used elements of Hine’s Virtual Ethnography (2000) strategies with the six principles for conceptualizing and adapting virtual ethnography to one’s research. These include the following:

1. Considering the use of the Internet and its new technologies as problematic, the status of these literacy forms and functions, as ways of communicating, as sites, of literacy practices is determined by the ways in which they are used, interpreted and reinterpreted.

2. Interactive media should be understood as both culture and cultural artifact because privileging one over the other leads to an impoverished view.

3. The concept of the field site is questioned. The central focus is on flow and connectivity, in other words, the interaction, rather than location and boundary as an organizational principle for inquiry.

4. Boundaries are not assumed a priori but rather interrogated through the course of study. As interactions flowed from online blog space to discussion in physical place and vice versa, the notion of affinity space was also reconsidered.

5. Immersion in the setting is only partly achieved.
6. All forms of interaction are ethnographically valid. Researcher-participant relationships can be intermittent or sustained across temporal divides. (Hine, 2000).

Engaging in digital ethnography permits the researcher as participant-observer to look inward at the phenomenon (Greenhow, 2011) of blogging, to examine its culture and the course and discourse of social interaction. By providing detailed observations, and later focusing on four participants as a part of data assemblage, and interviews to more fully capture the participants’ perspectives, this study also looks outward, seeking to define the nature of positioning in blogging through detailed investigation of individual cases and their contexts (Stake, 2005).

The degree to which the crafting of online contexts is dependent upon textual practices has shifted in online research; therefore, the researcher has to textually construct not only participants in the social context as well as his/her role in it (Leander & McKim, 2003). Borrowing Leander’s (2008) term that focuses on interaction, and adapting it to case study methods, I am terming my approach connective case study. While complete immersion in any online setting is impossible, and I am forsaking grounded theory analysis, I have opted to view analysis through an a priori positioning theory-based coding schema. Blogging artifacts, field notes and records of one-on-one interactions during group meeting times and interviews are essential in identifying and analyzing identity traits and relationships across and among writers. To refine field notes and observations, all sessions were audio recorded.

This connective case study of four participants in a connected literacy collaborative sought to recognize and categorize if and how creating an affinity space impacted the willingness of young people to write on a blog. Secondly, it explored individual enactments of identity performances during the process blogging as a means of determining how participants regarded themselves as writers.
Study Design and Procedures

This connective case study uses connected learning design, which utilizes digital media to 1) offer interactive formats for collaboration and self-expression, 2) reduce limitations to access for sourcing new information, 3) offer support for learning through social media and affinity groups, and 4) connect a far wider range of culture, information, and resources for learning opportunities (Ito et al., 2013). Four cases that represent the most robust data sets were drawn from the broader study of six participants.

The study was conducted in ten two-hour sessions that followed a routine of sharing a mentor text, participant discussion of their own texts and ideas, researching and writing of blog posts based upon topics selected by participants, and commenting on one another’s work. Initially, I requested that participants access the blog site to read the posted poems, stories, or informational pieces of each other, and select at least three to comment on, as blog post responses as a means of becoming acquainted, and to find perspective on individual identities. As that practice was integrated into the routine by the third session, motivation was considered as writers elected to either continue writing within the interactive domain or to write independently, creating new pieces, or editing and revising their own former blog posts. The writing of each new poem or story began with participants conducting an Internet search of topic, images, videos, and relevant authors, followed by selection of mentor texts (Calkins, 1994) used to guide their blog writing.

Participant meetings embodied the form of literacy collaborative, defined as a socially constructed space in which a group of learners with varying literacy abilities, identities, and experiences gather to advance and improve literacy development (Tatum, 2009). The final case study sample included two African American and males, one African American female and one Latina female from suburban and urban public and parochial schools, at ages ranging from 12 to
16 years old. The connective literacy collaborative format involved the participants and the investigator in the discussion of topic ideas, research strategies, and the composition and editing of blog posts.

**Blogging Session Routines**

The blog site was created through http://edublogs.org/why-edublogs, a platform that currently supports over two million blogs for educators and students. Participants published work on laptop computers, available in the reading clinic. Edublogs.com is a centralized location for students to publish their creations as well as being a secure, closed site to encourage reflection and collaboration (Edublogs, 2013). On a closed site, only participants on that site could view blog postings.

During the 10 sessions, the participants elected as a group to work in the same genre at the same time, first writing short stories, and then poetry, and last, informational pieces. Each morning, participants arrived, situated themselves at the same computer as they had previously, logged on, read others’ blogs, commented on them, and began work on their own pieces. Informal group discussion evolved weekly around guidelines for writing and ideas for mentor texts. Discussion usually began around 10:00 am and included a break for snacks. When requested by participants, I provided technical support and research suggestions. Focused Internet research followed group discussions. Participants explored their individual topics online by searching words, images, and videos until they found sufficient resources to begin writing new blog posts.

Participants created Word documents as a workspace for drafts that were then transferred to the blog space when complete. Links for images and videos were also stored in the same Word documents because participants had the option to share images and videos as part of blog posts.
Accommodations were made for participants to write off-site. They were encouraged to make blog posts from wherever they chose via phone or computer as necessary.

To edit, participants posted drafts of poems, stories, or reports as blog posts, and then posted comments on the drafts of others. Participants revised drafts two to three times, and posted again, following the same procedure. Upon completion of short stories, bloggers wrote poetry, and then, informational pieces. I kept detailed field notes of participant interactions, and conducted ongoing, open-ended interviews with each participant.

Table 1: Mentor Text by Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>1/10</th>
<th>1/17</th>
<th>1/24</th>
<th>1/31</th>
<th>2/7</th>
<th>2/14</th>
<th>2/21</th>
<th>2/28</th>
<th>3/7</th>
<th>3/14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentor Text</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Variety of Wordpress Blogs</td>
<td>&quot;The Story of an Hour&quot; by Kate Chopin</td>
<td>&quot;Gizmo's Spot&quot; by Alfred Tatum</td>
<td>&quot;Gizmo's Spot&quot; by Alfred Tatum</td>
<td>&quot;OCD&quot; by Neil Hilborn</td>
<td>&quot;The Average Black Girl&quot; by Ernestine Johnson</td>
<td>Excerpt, America's Greatest Idea by Ken Burns</td>
<td>Excerpt, Gloryland by Shelton Johnson &quot;The Buffalo Soldiers&quot; by Linda Allen Bryant</td>
<td>&quot;The Secret of Cathay Williams&quot; by Grace Pigozi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Choosing</td>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>Short Story</td>
<td>Short Story</td>
<td>Short Story</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>Informational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Introductions &amp; Passwords</td>
<td>Introductions &amp; Passwords</td>
<td>Elements of a story (Mentor text not used) Web navigation Social media</td>
<td>Avatars Pets</td>
<td>Elements of a story Story resolution Writing on paper Mechanics</td>
<td>Poetry slams Love Violence Support Kinship poems</td>
<td>Inspired by RC poetry Editing</td>
<td>Cartoons Primary versus secondary sources FB blue and black dress Audience</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Talking through writer’s block Adding art Avatars Anime</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recruitment

To strive for variety in writing topics and identity performances, it was important that participants represented a range of backgrounds, genders, and interests. Participants were chosen on a first-come, first-served basis, from a convenience sample drawn from face-to-face interactions with families in a university reading clinic and from responses to digital notices distributed through the reading clinic email listserv of parents, educators, and community
members. Parents and young authors were informed that the study examined young people’s motivation to write and youth portrayal of identity in writing across the genres of short story, poetry, and informational text on a closed blog.

The Physical Site

The research site contained technological resources, including laptops with Internet access, writing supplies such as paper, pencils, and pens, a printer and copy machine, and a projector with presentation board for instruction and the sharing of images or video. The site also had adaptable seating with five movable tables and study carrels large enough to seat two people for group, paired, or independent work.

Participants

Final recruitment included six adolescents in grades ranging from 7 to 10 from a large, urban area. The rationale for six participants was informed by prior work from positioning theory analysis of Summer Blogging Club 2014 blogs. Compositional themes reached redundancy (Beitin, 2012; Creswell, 1998; Stake, 2005) quickly within the posts of four blog writers. Selection criteria was minimal; participants enrolled because they were interested in blogging, whether or not they had experience with blogs or other online writing formats, and whether or not they were interested in writing.

Table 2: Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Writing Interest</th>
<th>Computer Skill (self-reported)</th>
<th>School Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donald</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Public elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosie</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Public elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derrick</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Public elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mina</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Parochial high school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Donald. Donald was a 14 year-old eighth grader attending a large, urban elementary school. The population of his school is comprised of 88.1% African American, 10.4% Hispanic, 1.3% of enrollees identifying as Multiracial/ethnic, and 0.1% White. He spent a great deal of his time during the project writing and researching, although he professed that he wasn’t crazy about writing. He participated actively in group discussions, often challenging the claims of others with unique insights. He was very self-assured and often stated his claims, likes, and dislikes with passion. In his first post, he clearly stated his stance for his audience, “I feel it would be important for the people who are reading my blogs/posts to get a chance to know more about me so please do not criticize about some of the things i like just because you do not like them or you think they are stupid.”

Donald was tall and thin, with a short buzz cut and dark skin, and always dressed in jeans and layered t-shirts in earth tones. He rarely had a jacket, except during the most frigid winter weather. He professed a love for music, anime, and Japanese culture. He showed a fervent dislike for materialistic people. His blog posts deftly encorporated hyperlinks and images that highlighted his interest in art and language. Donald uses the Internet a great deal, both in school and outside of school. He reported daily online multitasking: using chat or text messaging applications for five to six hours, playing games on a PSA system four hours daily, and spending at least an hour each day downloading new music. His user name was a combination of his own fused with the name of a hip-hop artist. Since they shared the same first name, he used the artist’s surname as his first name and his own family as last name. For blog avatar picture, he
chose an anime drawing of two girls kissing behind a book. It is a censored version of an image from “Sakura Trick,” an anime television series in Japan. When asked what he would like to be called for this study, he told me to choose a name, which I did because he was speaking like Donald Duck when I first met him, and the ensuing discussion of cartoons shaped many aspects of the ten-week study.

**Rosie.** Rosie was the group’s youngest author. She had originally applied to participate in the summer workshop the prior year, but she was not old enough. Consequently, she was the first to respond to recruitment materials for this study. Rosie was a 12 year-old seventh grader who attended an urban elementary school. The demographic make up of her school was 65.1% Hispanic, 23.1% African American, 5% White, 3.4% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 3% classified as Multiracial/ethnic.

Rosie was petite with long dark hair and large brown eyes. She was very soft-spoken, although she said that her home was loud with her pets and other siblings. She was the second child, with an older sister, a younger sister, and baby brother. She often joined the group late, and would slip into her carrel unnoticed. She liked to leave her coat on. She chose a bright pink ranunculus for her avatar “because I’m girly,” she explained. Rosie uses the Internet at school in two classes, but uses it much more at home. She texts and emails a few hours per week, but listens to music for several hours every day and spends a great deal of time on YouTube to watch video blogs (vlogs) and to upload and share those that she makes with her younger sister. Poetry was Rosie’s self-professed favorite genre. It resonates with a strength and conviction.

**Expectations**

My mom has high expectations for me  
It feels good to know that  
But when you make a mistake  
It feels as if you are failing that person  
My mother expects me to be able to do anything  
Yet, I can take so much
On the blog, Rosie used her middle name for user name. She chose pink flowers for her avatar picture after deciding not to use an image of Rosie the Riveter. The “We can do it!” slogan was too small for readers to decipher. Instead, she said that she wanted to be called Rosie in my study.

Derrick. As a blogger, Derrick had experience from my summer program at the reading clinic. Known for his brevity in writing and keen sense of humor, this 13 year-old eighth grader liked to write about sports, food, especially fruit, and animals. The population of his school is comprised of 73% White students, 15% Asian or Pacific Islander, 5% Hispanic, 4% African American, and 3% classified as two or more races.

Derrick was tall, dark-skinned, with brown eyes and black hair, and very athletic. He played on three winter basketball teams, and began training indoors for baseball in late February as he finished basketball season. Derrick reported that he was not an avid technology user. Although he uses a computer and goes online at school, he said that he owns an Xbox system that he rarely uses. Similarly, he uses his iPhone primarily for calling friends or family members. He does not use text or email often. His life outside of school is comprised of family activities, sports, and homework. Derrick used the word “baseball” as part of his user name. His avatar also depicted a bat and glove meme, “It’s okay if you think baseball is boring.” In smaller type along the bottom, it reads, “It’s kind of a smart person’s sport.” He chose his name for the study for a favorite athlete.

Mina. Already an accomplished writer when she joined the collaborative, Mina provided insight and a sense of patience for the creative process to the group as she edited and revised her blog posts. She was a 16 year-old high school sophomore. At her parochial school, she was editor of a yearly poetry magazine and writer for the school newspaper. She was also involved in musical
theater productions. The demographics of her school include of 67.3% White students, 13.2% Hispanic, 10.6% African American, 5.3% classified as Multiracial/ethnic, and 3.5% Asian or Pacific Islander.

Petite with medium-dark skin, bobbed curly black hair and black eyes, Mina’s avatar was a pen-and-ink drawing of cloud-shrouded mountains on a pink background. She said that it represented hope for spring during the cold winter. She reported that she read widely, especially poetry, and provided several suggestions for mentor texts. She always wore a heavy winter coat, and dressed in skirts with leggings. In her large, very heavy backpack, she had books, both in physical form, and several on a Kindle, and sometimes, she reported, on her iPhone, if she “had a long el ride.” She reported that she uses technology a great deal: her school uses iPads in most classes. She also uses the Internet during free time both in school and out of school. She seldom plays video games, but does play them. Her other online interests include listening to music on Spotify, posting memes and pictures on a Tumblr blog, emailing notes to her classmates, and writing on fanfiction sites. She stated that she almost never “just calls” anyone anymore. She uses Facetime exclusively, unless she cannot get reception. Mina’s blog topics encompassed love, loss, personal accomplishments, and fear. Mina used her first and last name together for user name on the blog. She chose her name for this study from a favorite author.

**Jason.** Jason was a 13 year-old eighth grader attending a large, urban elementary school. The population of his school is comprised of 88.1% African American students, 10.4% Hispanic, 1.3% of enrollees identifying as Multiracial/ethnic, and 0.1% White. He frequently discussed and wrote about school in relation to dance and drama because his creative aspirations included attending a performing arts high school.

Jason and Donald were best friends, and very physically dissimilar. Jason was short and muscular and wore his hair in braids. He wore bright colors to every blogging session, although
he missed two when his younger brother was born. He had a red parka that he liked to completely zip up, hood included, so that he looked like an Arctic explorer. He liked to joke and talk about social media and poetry. Although he does not play any video games, he spends a great deal of time online watching music videos, and reported that on some days, he texts almost continually with his best friend. He said that he might also spend up to five hours a day talking on the phone while he’s doing other things. Jason made copies from a book of his own poems that he had made at school as a booklet to give the other bloggers. It functioned not only as his Valentine’s gift to the group, but also as a self-fashioned set of mentor texts. Jason created a new word from his first and surname for a user name on the blog. He did not select an avatar. He chose his name for this study from a famous athlete.

Coco. She selected her pseudonym from Coco Chanel for her interest in makeup and fashion. A twelve year-old seventh grader, Coco joined the group because she was a follower of several blogs and wanted to start her own. Her school demographics are comprised of 98.2% African American students, 1.6 Hispanic, and 0.2 White.

Coco is tall for her age and medium build. She has green eyes and frequently wore sparkly tunic-length sweaters with metallic embellishments. Her “look,” she explained, is understated: neat, orderly, jeans and boots, with minimal makeup for Saturday mornings. She lives with her mother and younger sister, with whom she plays video games on Wii five or six hours per week. She listens to a great deal and variety of music, and her favorite site is YouTube, where she watches vlogs for several hours each day. Instruction that includes Internet use is not available at Coco’s school. She reported that they can only use computers in the library, and may only log in to sites provided by the school. She admitted that although she was an accurate and fast typist, blogging was a challenge, but Coco was definitely interested in continuing with it when the workshop ended. Her research pursuits netted a great deal of new information for her,
particularly in the creative writing genres. Like Rosie, Coco used her middle name for a user name on the blog. She did not select an avatar image. She chose her name for this study from a favorite fashion designer.

**Researcher Role**

In a study on positioning and identity, it is important for me as researcher to acknowledge my own positionality throughout the study. I adopted a mantle as fellow learner, attempting to enable or scaffold participation by acting as a resource person. As such, I often found myself treading a fine line between facilitator and fellow blogger, posting mentor texts that had first been shared with the group, as well as my own pieces, commenting on other blogs, and watching participants navigate on- and off-line, waiting to help only when asked. My usual seat was at the side of the middle table, although I frequently moved during the sessions to sit at carrels with the young authors, as there are two seats in each one. Although I had initially asked the participants to comment on one another’s work, after the first few weeks, they began doing so on their own. As participant-observer, I was guarded against influencing the writing and interaction online as well. Observational logs demonstrate that for most participants, the routine at login was to first check for comments on their own posts, read the blog posts of others, and to comment on those posts that piqued their individual interests. This was accomplished with no further guidance from me after the second meeting. For genre choices, participants were encouraged to select either group or individual topics each week.

As discussed in the literature review, affinity spaces accomplish the four recommendations that ease motivational shifts—with one key exception. There is no teacher present to nurture practical beliefs about writing, foster engagement through authentic contexts, or to create a supportive environment and positive emotional setting for writing. While affinity groups function without a teacher, or one single leader, the role of researcher in my study shifted
to that of facilitator, bridging the gap from self-efficacy to motivation in the part of participant-observer. At times, I found that role challenging, forcing myself to withdraw from repeated pleas for extra guidance, allowing the students space to develop their Internet navigational skills that included increased solo experiences researching, writing, and especially posting writings that included images, videos, or hyperlinks.

**Pedagogical Timeline**

**Random Blog Posts: Weeks 1 and 2.** Throughout the connective literacy collaborative, participants were tasked with writing 1) short stories 2) poems and 3) informational pieces. The intent was to provide at least one mentor text per session, and to write about meaningful ideas or experiences in their lives. For the majority of the group, navigating the Internet, particularly the blog space, became a task unto itself.

Coco and Rosie were the first to join the group. For the first meeting, both mothers stayed. I had to explain to the parents who wanted to stay that beyond the first meeting, per research protocol, the only people permitted in the room during the course of the study were the participants and I. Derrick returned from last summer. His father visited briefly before leaving him with the others. He knew the protocol. Mina, Donald, and Jason missed the first meeting and came the next time. In the first hour, logging in was extremely difficult on the new blog space, eventually named “Words in Winter” by the group. My special user account had been transferred over in name only, and I could not add new members to the Words in Winter site without tech help from Edublogs. The second week was more fluid, although entirely new passwords needed to be created to accommodate the updated account. I invited participants to locate other blogs online with which they were familiar, and to attempt to write their first informational post while I attended to ensuring that all users could log in to the space.
An early joke that evolved among the bloggers involved the positionality of the blog itself. The incident is also illustrative of the difficulty encountered by participants in accessing the blog space. On the first day, Derrick sat for a good 10 minutes laughing as he interacted with the personal profile questions on the dashboard. He chuckled each time the prompt registered that his attempts at creating a password were “weak.” Coco encountered the same obstacle:

**Pigozzi:** Let’s get you—you should be able to [navigating back, whispering] Dashboard, there we go.

**Coco:** 21 and there’s a capital—

**Pigozzi:** [I tell her the log-in name she created last week.] No it doesn’t work. [I point as she types.] That is your user name. I want to try to get you—all right.

**Coco:** I have to spell it out? [She does not pass the log in page.]

**Pigozzi:** Let me get you a new password though.

**Coco:** I don’t have one.

**Pigozzi:** Yes you do. [Checking the email sent to her with password.] Let’s figure out what’s gonna work for you. [I show her, she it in, and we go directly to profile page to create a short one we both will remember.]

**Coco:** [Laughing as she types a simple combination of words.] See how it’s telling us—

**Pigozzi:** [Laughing too.] Very weak! Let’s try this, [I add a number. She takes over.] The—

[Interruption] **Mina:** What are we supposed to do now?

**Pigozzi:** Do you have your headset?

**Coco:** [Again, laughing, she points to screen that says “strong” at password entry.]

After working for five minutes to create a strong password, Derrick experienced rejection by the site because it was already taken. The following week, both Coco and Derrick were able to knowingly laugh when Jason had the same experience:

**Jason:** [Back across the room Jason has his profile updated. he sighs.] I have one. Why does my password say weak? [Next to him, Derrick laughs.]

**Pigozzi:** Use it. Use it. If it is a private thing you can remember, use it. We were reminded this morning that even if the blog says we’re weak, we need good passwords. [Walking away.] I’m so proud of you guys, you’re all on. {Laughter.}

**Coco:** Is this how you do it? [She smiles, blatantly demonstrating how to generate a new, albeit weak, password for Jason to see.]
**Short Stories: Weeks 3, 4 and 5.** During the third week, writing routines had been established and the group had elected to begin working on short stories. To model how short story writing is adaptable to blogs, we read Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” from the blog of Ann Mathews Woodlief. Although later mentor texts were chosen based on interests of the group at large, I selected the first primarily for its economy of language and surprise ending. In a group discussion, we identified elements of short stories, including structure and revisions. Participants agreed that dialogue, plot, clearly-defined characters, and mention of setting were essential. I then shared part of my short story, brief, with a similar theme, and surprise ending, entitled “Dance into Dark.”

The ballet master looked as he had in a thousand dreams. Huge eyes, ferocious, silent. His wordless expression was masked in the darkness. I leapt into the car, safe. With a glance into the mirror as I started the engine, I laughed at my luck and hair blown wild in the cold wind. I was backing out as he barreled up, nearly launching himself onto the hood of the car. Cecilia and I gasped in unison to see him gracefully, suddenly stop, fold his hands, and bow.

Donald, Derrick, and Mina eventually completed similarly truncated short stories with surprise endings. The following week, Alfred Tatum’s “Gizmo’s Spot” resonated more strongly with the group, particularly because all have had pets at one time. In a similar vein of loss, Rosie wrote a story that will be discussed in great detail later in this study.

By week 4, all participants had begun writing short stories. Some finished quickly, others were adding final edits during week 10.

**Poetry: Weeks 6, 7 and 8.** Because Valentine’s Day fell on our meeting day for week 6, participants opted to read and write love poems. They shared their favorites on the blog. Jason, a self-professed poet, shared a booklet of his own poems that he had made. In addition to what I had selected—“The Average Black Girl,” by Earnestine Johnson, and “OCD,” by Neil Hilborn—
all shared became mentor texts for these weeks. Noteworthy for “found” poetry were Mina’s choice to use a podcast about a poetry slam for insight and Coco’s discovery of poems as memes and their application on social media. Participants were demonstrating that they had begun seeking inspiration and meaning beyond linear text and into other formats:

Figure 2: Valentine Meme

![Valentine Meme](image)

**Informational Texts: Weeks 9 and 10.** During the end of week 8, I introduced a video excerpt about forest rangers and wildlife managers of color from Ken Burns’ “America’s Greatest Idea.” The following week, I read from *Gloryland* by Shelton Johnson, a book by the same forest ranger in the Burns video, and a family history essay, “The Buffalo Soldiers,” by Linda Allen Bryant. Participants clarified the notion of primary and secondary sources:

01 **Pigozzi:** How might you use these documents, these online resources?
Donald explained how the mentor texts were informational texts (line 3). Mina questioned the difference between primary and secondary texts (lines 8-9). To model how I was using those same texts to write an informational piece, I wrote about a female Buffalo Soldier, “The Secret of Cathay Williams.” The purpose was to demonstrate exactly how I had conducted research by looking up a variety of media representations of facts, documents, statistics, and other data about the topic and time period about which I had chosen to write:

Until the 20th century, the US military was segregated, and women were not allowed to serve. In 1866, Congress established all-black units that later became known as the Buffalo Soldiers. Their role was to protect settlers from Native American attacks. After the Indian Wars ended, some units served in the Spanish-American and Philippine Wars. Buffalo Soldiers later became some of the first US National Park Rangers in Yosemite, Sequoia, and King’s Canyon national parks.

By the same token, I urged the other writers seek varied perspectives—including historical ones—on their chosen topics for informational pieces. If they chose current social issues, I urged them to go from broad topics to more specific, or vice versa, depending on how the factual information affected them personally, politically, or socially.
Data Collection

Data consisted of 44 blog posts with accompanying comments, six interviews conducted in segments, and 135 pages of transcripts with field notes. All blog entries, transcripts, field notes, and participant interviews were considered data sets in primary coding and in writing initial memos. Secondary coding and theoretical memos focus specifically on blog posts (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Observation logs were categorized according to how participants utilize Internet sites, and then compared to blog coding. Since both use a Likert scale, the three administrations of the Writing Attitude Survey and the Action Readiness Assessment were analyzed for relations and final relationships compared to final analyses of blog posts.

Table 3: Data Sources and Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Analytic Plans/Tools</th>
<th>Contribution to Addressing Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ 1: How does online writing in an affinity space affect motivation to write?</td>
<td>Comparing, Displaying 3 rounds of WAS, ARA results&lt;br&gt;135 pages of Field notes&lt;br&gt;6 Interviews</td>
<td>Likert-scale surveys (same subjects are tested before, during, after study to assess significant changes)&lt;br&gt;Coded analysis of interactions among participants&lt;br&gt;Coded discussion of participant beliefs</td>
<td>Addressing the nature of the space in addition to the writer’s reports on their motivation to write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ 2: How do adolescents depict their identities as they position themselves and others in a blog?</td>
<td>135 pages of Field notes&lt;br&gt;44 Blog posts&lt;br&gt;6 Interviews</td>
<td>Elaborating on identity characteristics by identifying and coding the intertextual, self/other, static, and tacit positionings of blog posts</td>
<td>Positioning theory only focuses on identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Assessments**

Prior to creating individual blog spaces, participants indicated initial writing interest level by completing an online version of the Knudson Writing Attitude Survey (WAS, see Appendix B) to measure interest. Generally used in schools, the WAS provides a quantitative estimate of the student’s attitude toward writing, provided by a percentile rank. This instrument has a high degree of reliability, with coefficients between .85 and .93. Content validity has been established through the construction and use of the instrument. However, it does not isolate specific reasons for students’ poor attitudes or identify positive instructional practices. Instead, it is used to support and confirm other data on students’ attitudes toward writing (Bottomley, Henk, & Melnick, 1997; Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000; Knudson, 1991). Participants completed the same scale during the fifth meeting, and during the last session to assess for possible changes in writing interest among and across participants.

To focus on the interplay between blog writing and motivation, participants also completed the Action Readiness Assessment (ARA, see appendix C) during the first, fifth, and final meetings to measure possible changes in motivation. The ARA is an instrument from the Civil Life Goals and Action Readiness Battery (Thorkildsen, 2013), validated by comparing samples taken from similar studies containing motivation constructs as postulated by current theories. The ARA is a self-report measure of individual readiness to work hard. While small sample sizes preclude complex statistical analyses, salient similarities or variations across respondents and between first, second, and third surveys become a symptomology for the individual participants.

**Field Notes**

Appropriate field entry for me, as participant-observer was crucial as the study commenced. Field entry includes learning the language, customs, rituals, and patterns of
behavior for the culture entered. It demanded building rapport with members. It was dependent upon trust and reciprocity (Purcell-Gates, 2011). To examine the group culture of blogging, I took detailed, descriptive field notes about the individuals, their respective locations, and time of each session, discussions of topic ideas, and conversation among participants (Purcell-Gates, 2011). Field notes focused on place—the actual room in which the study occurred and how students interacted within it. I also took part in the blogging process.

To address the second research question, “How do adolescents enact their identities as they position themselves and others on a blog?” a detailed observation log (Appendix D) was kept with checks of Web browsing histories of each participant. This was intended to enhance description of the participants’ use of Internet space in relation to affinity space, and to follow where they interacted online. The observation log enabled indexing of websites utilized for research, as well as sourcing for selected model texts, images or video, and final blog posts. Handwritten field notes were converted into memos that summarized participant actions and interactions for later thematic analysis, as part of the secondary coding process. During all phases of data analysis, analytic memos served to construct emerging theory as well as to identify associations and discrepancies across participants and also with the extant literature (Davis, 2010; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

**Interviews**

During field entry, to establish rapport with participants, and because the self-report data of WAS and ARA is not completely reliable, I engaged in semi-structured interviewing (Purcell-Gates, 2011), asking open-ended questions at different intervals throughout the study that relate to motivation about writing in general, and online writing in particular. All interviews were conducted face-to-face; follow-up and member check meetings were conducted as needed over the course of data collection. For interview questions, see Appendix E.
Alvermann (2011b) provides a comprehensive structure for interview questions in a discussion of multimodal 21st century digital texts. Viewed as interactive in the Web 2.0 sense, such digital texts are used by adolescents to negotiate their literate identities by combining words, images, sounds, icons, gestures, and performances to communicate who they are, and who they want others to recognize them as being. Music, videos, games, web pages, text messages, and podcasts are ubiquitous texts in the everyday lives of adolescents: they rightfully take their place alongside more traditional paper/print media. So, too, do internet-based virtual environments that foster social networking, such as Facebook, and Teen Second Life (Alvermann, 2011b). Interview questions are based upon these ideas. Additionally, questions about perceptions of the affinity space experience as a collaborative, supportive and safe space were included.

The added layer of affinity space setting required further insight into the dynamics of how individual participants view written communication and semiotic production in the online space. In addition to interview questions with each participant about writing, later questions sought information about the variety of factors that shape individual literacy practices, involvement in other online affinity spaces, and engagement with other online media. The collection of artifacts included samples of transformative blogs, discussion board rules, and online profiles (Curwood et al., 2013).

To garner an understanding of participant self-awareness while engaging online, and to triangulate the authenticity of participant identity (Leander & McKim, 2003), interview questions also included topics about author intent, the understanding of assumptions that they or others may be making during writing, and individuals’ awareness of the language choices and interests served as they posted and responded to blogs. Sample questions were open-ended, such as, “What is the main idea of your first poem?” and “Why did you choose to say it in this way?
Interview data was triangulated with evidence from field notes, systematically gathered from observations as participants discussed and selected topics, conducted online research for background information, and wrote their blog posts and comments (Baumann & Bason, 2011; Greenhow, 2011; Stake, 1995). Artifact and archival data was supplied from writing samples in emails, blog posts, and other online interaction. Data analysis included coding informed by my pilot study of patterns, events, actions, etc. of this triangulated data (Charmaz, 2003).

Table 4: Data Source Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>Exit</td>
<td>Begin</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Write Dissertation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessments</strong></td>
<td>First</td>
<td>Second</td>
<td>Third</td>
<td></td>
<td>Upload</td>
<td>Statistical</td>
<td>Write</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Raw Data</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Dissertation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observations</strong></td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td></td>
<td>Write Dissertation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blog Posts</strong></td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Write Dissertation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

Although three reports about writing interests and attitudes from the WAS and ARA over a truncated span of time with few participants may be constrained in demonstrating change, participants completed surveys on the first, fifth, and tenth meeting of the connective literacy collaborative. Means from salient questions across the individual cases are visually displayed in the Findings section. Bar charts show quantified aspects of motivation and are later discussed in comparison to discursive analysis of blog posts. Comparison of action readiness qualities and verbal insights of participants address the first research question, “How does online writing in an affinity space affect motivation to write?”
Because survey data suggest that motivation of participants was initially high, showed minimal increases, and was sustained throughout the course of the study, additional information was drawn from field notes and interviews to clarify findings from the survey instruments. Significant relations between interest and/or motivation and actual writing trajectories are focal in the final discussion and results. Further, methodological affordances are made in connective case study, as in connective ethnography to accommodate limitations of assessing participants with surveys.

To examine the motivation question from a different perspective, after participants completed the ARA for a third time, they were asked in final, open-ended interview questions to consider their understanding of their own motivation as it relates to writing. Again, the responses were compared to WAS and ARA data. Empirical ratings serve to triangulate interview responses about motivation, and serve to illuminate the space between tangible, observable findings and abstract interpretations of blog writings.

Blog posts were captured at the end of the study and preserved in a digital document for later analysis. The dialogic nature of the posts as writers shared poems, stories, informational pieces, and written comments to each other is the central focus of data analysis. Using discursive positioning categories and analysis methods (Hunt & Handsfield, 2013; Vetter, 2013), all blog entries were deductively coded to examine participants’ portrayals of identity in writing. The tools of positioning theory were operationalized while they intertwined through the socially constructed practice of identity as adolescents positioned themselves and others in multiple and complex ways in their writing.

Although initially, I considered each blog post an individual unit of analysis, in coding, I found that positionality can shift multiple times, even within a single sentence. In their writing, participants created interactive characters for blog posts, in addition to dialogic poems and
informational pieces. Positions changed as participants structured their texts. As verbal and written conversations ensued, positions logically shifted as interlocutors communicated. Bearing in mind that positions embody the common practices in which socially or culturally bound beliefs are situated, and that positions comprise an individual’s belief system with regards to how rights and duties are allocated in the course of a personal interaction (Harré et al., 2009) or, inside the blog space, writing, I modified my coding approach. Since a positioning act is one in which a person opts or makes claim to specific duties or thrusts them upon another actor, and because positions can be challenged, (Davies & Harré, 1990, 2007; McVee, Brock, et al., 2011) I broadened the a priori categories and revised the unit of analysis to individual positioning acts, also known as idea units (McVee, Baldassarre Hopkins, & Bailey, 2011). With another coder, I collaboratively identified idea units and then systematically examined them for positioning varieties. Categorical definitions were revised and refined accordingly.

In order to examine blogger representation in writing, and the subsequent narrative meanings of narrative practice in the affinity space, I drew the blog posts into categories for primary coding. The categories then served as platforms for participants’ subsequent positioning moves. Etic coding draws on blogging literature, particularly DiBlasi, Ferraro, and Conti (2008) and assists in answering the research question, “How do adolescents depict their identities as they position themselves and others in a blog?” My analysis of cultural phenomena from the perspective of facilitator established me as observer and record-keeper of all positioning acts made both on and off-line; and I coded those acts respectively. Primary coding encompasses first-order positioning, how writers tacitly position themselves and others within categories understood by the discourse participants. Later coding and analysis interprets second order positioning, which occurs when the first-order positioning is challenged or refused (van Langenhove & Harré, 1993). This coding chart appears as Appendix F.
Because the analysis concerns interactions occurring in the local context of affinity space and how stories make use of cultural discourses, my positioning theory analysis shared some commonalities with narrative analysis as it examined the form and function of how data is organized, including how the writer positions her/himself to the audience, in relation to others, and in the creation of characters as identity claims are made (Riessman, 1993).

Self: when a person positions him/herself in a particular role or acts in keeping with the rights, duties, and obligations of the moral order. This category analyzes the author’s choice to show or to leave hidden some aspects of him/herself. In positioning theory, whenever one positions him/herself, in so doing, positioning of the person being addressed is always implied (van Langenhove & Harré, 1993), but the focus is on the individual author and not how s/he is consciously or unconsciously positioning others.

Self with Other: This code represents enactments of identity of the writer engaging in first-order positioning of others. This field contains the thoughts and the images related to the presence of the Other in a Bakhtinian (1981, 1986) sense, resulting in a reflexivity as individuals identify with and through others. It is the writer making an identification, in acknowledgement of either a commonality or conflict with another person. It is important to understand how this presence can influence the author, his/her choices, and his/her communications.

Self Creating Other: This code represents the depictions of characters made by the author, as s/he identifies with the Other through creating an Other. This field analyzes the motivation for characters’ actions and the effects of this practice on the author, referring to self-reflection and identity building. The chronological order of posts and the continuance in writing support the symbolization of experience (DiBlasi et al., 2008; McVee, 2011; van Langenhove & Harré, 1993). Reflexive, first-order positioning is directed back onto oneself. Second-order positioning occurs when a position is refused or challenged. Interactive positioning involves two or more
people and includes Self with Other, and Self Creating Other. Whether in spoken word or in writing—in place or space—unless participants directly referred to themselves or their writings, it was assumed that their positions originated from the “Self” platform. When participants interacted with writing, they were coded as “Self Creating Other,” while verbal and written interactions among the participants was coded as “Self with Other.”

To elaborate on positioning theory analysis, particular attention is paid to the aspects of discursive positioning (Davies & Harré, 2007). During preliminary analysis, along with blog posts, I examined transcripts of group discussions and field notes to construct profiles of individual participants. I chose Donald, Rosie, Derrick, and Mina for in-depth focus because they represent the range of ages, schools, and abilities, and a brevity in writing that was characteristic of the group. In the four selected cases, the written blog posts were more deeply analyzed for evidence of aspects of discursive positioning and highlighted accordingly (See Appendix G). Secondary coding scratches deeper beneath the surface; it is comprised of previously adapted positioning theory categories, also derived from Bakhtin, relevant to identity performance including Intertextual, Self/Other, Static, and Tacit (Holquist, 2002; McVee, Baldassarre Hopkins, et al., 2011).

1. Intertextuality—Denotes cross-references in language to other texts or types of texts whether quoting directly, indirectly, or simply alluding to them. Intertextual positioning includes varying levels of connections made by the author, whether as hyperlinks, using brand names, images, or titles of artifacts.

2. Self/Other—While not a category unto itself, Self/Other is an umbrella category for four distinct subcategories that highlight types of positioning in respect to others:

   a. Self as Other in which the participant positions him/herself in the place of the other. (I am Other.)
b. Self in Other in which the participant positions him/herself in similar fashion to the other. (I am like Other.)

c. Self Opposed to Other in which the participant positions him/herself in opposition to the other. (I am not like Other.)

d. Self Aligned with Other in which the participant aligns him/herself with another. (I sympathize/empathize with the Other, ideas of Other.)

3. Static—Reinforces a particular belief, idea, theme, or position that is adhered to and articulated over time. This includes the expression of a stereotype, spiritual theme, or popular culture ideal.

4. Tacit—Includes both unconscious and unintentional positioning that occurs as an effect of a piece of writing (Davies & Harré, 1990; McVee, Baldassarre Hopkins, et al., 2011; van Langenhove & Harré, 1993).

Member checks and exit interviews with participants served to validate researcher interpretation of blog posts, which had been thematically assessed prior to exit interviews. To check for overlap in codes among interview data, field notes, and blog posts, NVivo 9 was used. New or contradictory themes across data topics were reconsidered when data crossed all three platforms. To establish validity in the secondary coding scheme, NVivo 9 was also used to run text queries for codes and themes within and across cases. A second coder, familiar with the study since its inception, also coded 20% of all data. Preliminary codes achieved a 91% reliability rating; secondary codes achieved an 88.3% reliability rating for an overall 89.5% reliability rating.
Table 5: Positioning Instances by Platform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Number of Instances</th>
<th>Number of Sources</th>
<th>Context of Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Interviews, field notes, blog posts—3 genres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self with Other</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Interviews, 3 genres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Creating Other*</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Interviews, 3 genres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Initially, “Navigating the Internet” was a fourth category with 383 codes, but was collapsed into “Writer Creating Other” because the fields overlapped and all delineated the same process.

While coding categories in interviews overwhelmingly represent “Self,” this was expected, particularly in the interviews and field note data, as participants discussed their individual approaches to and topics for research. Because “Self” was implicit in the written artifacts of participants, a deeper, fine-grained analysis was applied to all blog posts and blog comments with secondary coding. Discourse represents a form of interaction that always has an intended audience. This feature of addressivity, Bakhtin’s “Other,” is established within both writing and speech and appears as audience, interlocutor, or both. In other words, discourse is a two-sided action (Voloshinov, 1973).

As the authors posted and interacted, both in place and space, the “Self with Other” category, or platform, became prominent. Within that category, Tacit positioning occurred most frequently, suggesting that writers nuance their works, unconsciously or unintentionally, in an effort to enhance their work and enrich meaning. As writers creating characters from the “Self creating Other” platform, the bloggers’ positioning became Tacit. That is, from a “space”
perspective, writers attempted to resonate with one another even as they shared remarkable, uncomfortable, or even abrasive sentiments.
IV. FINDINGS

In this chapter, I discuss findings from the study. To respond to the first research question, “How does online writing in an affinity space affect motivation to write?” I first had to determine the parameters of affinity space itself. The affinity space, bound not just by the blog space and its entry points, i.e. logging in, but also by the physical place of the clinic in which discussions commenced. In essence, the affinity space, hybridized by the overlap of place and space, is the interaction, the fluid connections made between writers. Bloggers gathered in an affinity space, motivated by a common sense of purpose, with intent to share their stories. They believed themselves competent writers capable of doing so from a variety of perspectives. Next, I considered responses to surveys that include questions about action readiness with regards to writing and personal attitudes about writing. With four participants, simple comparison of means demonstrated similarities in beliefs, yet could not define nuanced variations. Combined with interview and observational data, the picture became more complete. Research question two investigates how writers positioned themselves in terms of motives to create.

To respond to the second research question, “How do adolescents depict their identities as they position themselves and others in a blog?” I considered the situatedness of the blog: works published and the development of their components. I framed the findings around the three platforms of “Self,” “Self Creating Other,” and “Self with Other.” However, the function of “Self” depicted in the social context of blogging shifted in the online space. Whether in spoken word or in writing—in place or space—unless participants directly referred to themselves or their writings, it was assumed that their positions originated from the “Self” platform. In other words, positioning oneself through actions or by adopting a particular role in keeping with the rights, duties, and obligations of the moral order (Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, &
Sabat, 2009) was inherent in the process of selecting a topic to write about, and developing discourse around that topic. Whereas Goffman (1959) defined role in relation to the language one uses to convey a status, Davies and Harré (1990) preferred the term “position” to “role” because role infers ritualistic, static discourses. During coding, blog posts were assigned general performative identity roles as place markers for identification. Change in positioning was then indexed. Samples from the artifacts of writers are taken directly from blog posts. No changes have been made to any participant text structures, spelling, grammar, or punctuation. All terms for codes and sub-codes (e.g. “Self” or “Intertextuality”) are capitalized when used for discussion of positioning within the blog space.

**The Word Factory**

**Introduction**

I arrive in the basement of a nearly empty university building known more for its functionality than its attractiveness on a freezing, windswept day. The trumpet player rehearsing in a classroom up the hall seems almost a cliché as Miles Davis’ “Kind of Blue” wafts about, punctuating my moves as I drag the back table over near the door and begin to set up breakfast with hot drinks for the cold morning. I turn on my computer, click a shortcut link, and our new site, “Words in Winter” appears, ready for users to generate content and interact around it. As the participants arrive, their first step will be to create their own portals, passwords and logons that will grant them access to the space from any device, in any place, at any given time. Like the music playing in the background, the blog space sets a mood, vast and empty thus far, yet inviting individuals to inhabit and personalize the domain. As she enters the room for the first time, Coco looks around at the books that line the front and back walls. She leaves her coat on because the room is not yet warm. “It’s cold in here. Like a factory.” Glancing at the laptop computers placed at the carrels and center table, she reconsiders, “Maybe a writing factory. A
word factory.” Given that comment, when it came time to re-name the blog, participants unanimously elected to keep the working title, “Words in Winter.”

The first meeting of our connective literacy collaborative began with participants seated around four tables arranged in a rectangle. Initially, they selected laptops at carrels, unplugged them, brought them with as each sat as a group in the center of the room. As participants attained passcodes and secure login, they drifted to individual carrels to focus on posting their first writing. In the ensuing weeks, the seating routine never varied. Coco and Rosie sat two carrels apart, on the west side of the room. Across the room, Mina sat nearest the podium, one carrel away from Derrick, who was one carrel away from Jason, who sat in the same carrel with Donald along the East wall of the reading clinic. In front of the bookshelves in the South end of the room, I set a weekly table with fruit, teas, juice, and breakfast snacks. Generally, participants entered the space, went directly to their chosen laptops, read stories from the past week, posted comments, and edited their current work. They tended to have a juice or snack when we re-grouped at the center of the room to share their own compositions or mentor texts and begin planning new writings.

Part One: Considering Motivation Viewing motivation as the force that induces action, specifically as young people organize their resources and explain their experiences as they interact, I was seeking to identify characteristics of motivation, in addition to what factors may influence motivation (Thorkildsen, 2013) within the parameters of the affinity space. To assess participants’ shifting perspectives towards writing over a brief period of time, as well as capturing what drove them to write, I used the Writing Attitude Survey and the Action Readiness Assessment.

Participant comments about the utility of repeated motivation surveys in transcripts, in addition to inquiries about green lights indicating audio recordings of sessions suggest an
awareness of the constraints of the research setting and their functions within it. Participants were tasked not just with writing, but also to share reflections on why they write. The study carrels in the reading clinic have lit microphone hubs, which, consequently, were turned on, but were not the instrument that recorded interactions in the space. It was amusing at times to watch participants hold up a hand to block the hub as they shared secrets. I analyzed the individual cases of Derrick, Mina, Donald, and Rosie. Each WAS and ARA was compared to group norms, variations were clarified, and attitudes that changed over time in ways unique to the individual case are specified and discussed.

In general, for the WAS, participants reported that as time passed, they enjoyed writing more than they had before. Their beliefs that they write well also increased. Similarly, while excitement was high from initial formation of affinity space, that feeling was sustained throughout the 10-week study. The February 15 drop from 3.4 to 3.1 for whether or not participants believed writing to be fun coincided with the end of poetry writing, and the beginning of research and writing of informational pieces. Writing non-narrative, expository pieces represented a shift in genre, away from “creative” writing, to perhaps more “school-like,” academic tasks. Three of the four case study participants completed an informational piece. Two chose biographical topics, and the third chose one more suited to his personality, anime.
With the ARA, participants progressively reported that they had learned something during the connective literacy collaborative, specifically, because discussions centered on acquiring new technological skills and structuring writing, their knowledge grew in those areas. Other responses that demonstrated salient changes over time were less clear. Three statements, including “I understand why this might be helpful in the future;” “I can figure out problems on my own;” and “I can decide when I know enough” required more comprehensive inquiry as to why participants felt that way, comparing responses to other data, and in some cases, adding clarification questions in exit interviews. The statement “rules for behavior are fair” sparked participant queries in its own right. Discussion turned to matters of sharing and audience interaction. Such results also merited closer examination, an investigation into precisely what forces prompted participant action, including sharing, audience connection, self-originated tasks, embellishment, and the process of interrogating what or why they were electing to write in the affinity space.
In both the WAS and ARA, respondents used a Likert scale ranging from 5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree. They were asked to answer the questions relative to their time spent with the group, either in the physical place or in the blog space, that is, relative to their experience with the connective literacy collaborative. I conducted comparative analyses of nonparametric survey data, seeking evidence of change over time. Analyses were then evaluated in relation to observable shifts in motivation as recorded in interview and field note data. As the surveys are student self-ratings, the isolated responses are those that also signified observable changes in motivation over time for the group. From disaggregated results for each of the four cases, relevant category codes were derived and applied to connected qualitative data. For example, in the WAS, “I like to share my writing with others” yielded little specific information about why participants became more comfortable sharing writing, whether that had more to do with feeling more secure with writing in general, or perhaps with the blogging format. Likewise, “I think I’m a good writer” and “I like to write” describe attitudes, yet explaining increases over time required closer analysis. With the ARA, I felt it important to explain why participants felt
that “rules were behavior are fair” increased over time. Fluctuations with responses to “I can figure out problems on my own” and “I can decide when I know enough” suggested to me issues with either writing, navigating the blog, or both. This new symptomology for individual survey responses were triangulated with data located in interviews and field notes. Discrepancies in the data were vetted during the exit interview process or during group discussions. Descriptive analysis yielded information about both characteristics of and influences on motivation.

Participants reported an increased willingness to share their writing, concerns with and interest in their audience, self-assignment of topics to research and develop, a desire to embellish their blog posts, and an interrogation of the purposes that writing online serves. The following table quantifies the enactments of motivation of individual participants by theme.

Table 6: Representations of Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Sharing</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Self Assignment</th>
<th>Embellishment</th>
<th>Interrogation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The desire to post individual stories or comment on the blog</td>
<td>The desire to post individual stories or comment on the blog</td>
<td>Making specific references to intended readers of posted writing</td>
<td>How participants persistently pursued writing or reading on the blog</td>
<td>Explicit semiotic gestures used to stylize one’s personal blog space</td>
<td>Making meaning from writing during engagement in the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derrick</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mina</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosie</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sharing for Composition or Modification: Ideas to Mentor Texts

Sharing writing is characterized by a desire to post individual stories or essays on the blog, or to comment on the writings of other bloggers. The core of shared writing is formative
feedback, whether in providing or receiving it. Participants requested time and opportunities to write about their own specific ideas or those of others.

Completed blog posts signify the culmination of written efforts around a specific genre and topic. Comments made by others on those posts additionally represent authorship and the conscious decision to join discussion of the piece by creating a textual response. In the digital collaborative, the act of reading comments on posts were an order of business, a review of the past week’s blog post and warm-up for organizing one’s thoughts in each new writing session. In electing to comment, these participants were making themselves known in a variety of ways as they chose to chronicle their interpretations, and in doing so, writing themselves.

Table 7: Blog Posts by Genre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Derrick</th>
<th>Mina</th>
<th>Donald</th>
<th>Rosie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Short Story</strong></td>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td><strong>Publication date</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total time/hours</strong></td>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The Star of Law”</td>
<td>1/24/15</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>No title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Proprioception”</td>
<td>1/31/15</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kinship Poem</strong></td>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td><strong>Publication date</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total time/hours</strong></td>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Eve’s great sin”</td>
<td>2/28/15</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poem 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td><strong>Publication date</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total time/hours</strong></td>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Colors”</td>
<td>2/14/15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Why Violence?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Elegy”</td>
<td>2/14/15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“A poem from down below”</td>
<td>2/21/15</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

78
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem 2</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publication date</th>
<th>Total time/hours</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Expectations”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2/28/15</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem 3</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publication date</th>
<th>Total time/hours</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2/28/15</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem 4</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publication date</th>
<th>Total time/hours</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3/14/15</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informational Piece 1</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publication date</th>
<th>Total time/hours</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Jay Cutler Real Deal or a Fake”</td>
<td>3/14/15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informational Piece 2</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publication date</th>
<th>Total time/hours</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Further advances in Technology”</td>
<td>1/24/15</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informational Piece 3</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“ANIME ALL DAY!!!”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication date</td>
<td>Total time/hours</td>
<td></td>
<td>3/2/15</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Derrick**

Derrick, who had also taken part in a summer blogging project, reported means about half a point lower than the overall group across all questions. Nonetheless, his writing self-perception remained consistent through the course of the study. Derrick generally selected humorous or entertaining topics, but wrote only four brief pieces, for a total of seven posts. He wrote a short story, a poem, a Kinship Poem, and an informational piece. His attendance was affected by basketball team tryouts and church activities, which in part explains the lesser quantity of his writing. As affinity group participant, he posted three comments on the stories of others, yet received seven on his four posts. However, he did acknowledge that commenters’ suggestions helped his writing. In fact, he is the only blogger who reported that he edited his writing based on the comments of others. In effect, written comments in the affinity space served to motivate Derrick to write a more elaborate story.

He expressed how in the affinity space, he liked to write in order to make others think about issues that he had considered himself. When asked what his best piece of writing had been, he replied that his poem about colors was his favorite. When asked why, he responded, “Because it is pretty interesting. It makes you think.”

Like a polished performer, Derrick’s sharing was characterized by a desire to engage the entire group in place:
01 Derrick goes next. He reads a poem that he wrote about why the color
02 orange is called orange if that is the name of a fruit. I nearly fall out of
03 my chair laughing. He is working last summer’s fruit theme still. For three
04 or four minutes, the group sits and laughs.
05 Mina: That was definitely not a Valentine’s poem.
06 Pigozzi: That was a fruit-from-last-summer poem. What is dragon fruit?
07 Derrick: [Shrugs] It worked. But I mean it. All the other fruits get a color,
08 why doesn’t orange? That sets the whole group off laughing again. Donald
09 and Mina begin snapping their fingers in approval.

Lines 1 and 2 explain the context, and the group reaction (line 4) is clear. His
explanation, (lines 7-8) generate more laughter, and the group responds accordingly (lines 8-9).
As the group read more poems, Derrick later commented, “That was good.” for Mina’s poem,
opening the gate for more feedback for Mina on her poem.

Exchange of ideas about how to provide feedback on poetry involved collective input,
even as they joked with me.

01 Pigozzi: Are you guys posting sarcastic comments about my poem?
02 Mina: No, I like it!
03 Derrick: Free verse!

In his comment during conversation, he both acknowledged my poem structure (line 3)
and his favorite type of poetry to write. In general, Derrick had difficulty pinpointing exactly
what makes him want to write. He articulated how he wants others to view him as “funny” and
“interesting,” and then he realized that reading the work of other bloggers was also key,
suggesting a sense of reciprocal entertainment.

01 Pigozzi: Do you think this would work in school?
02 Derrick: Yes. There’s more kids. It’d be funner—better—to
03 read a ton of blog posts with other kids’ writing.
04 Pigozzi: So you enjoy that part.
05 Derrick: Yes. It’s what motivates me. I probably should be
06 putting “funner” in a dictionary.

Derrick’s comment suggests that interaction in the form of reading the writing of others
line 3) in the affinity space may play a major part in keeping bloggers engaged (lines 4-5). He
viewed the process of sharing his writing both online and face-to-face as a way to inspire reflection, in addition to revealing a penchant for comedy.

**Mina**

As a fiction magazine editor at her high school, Mina had the most experience with writing across genres and formats. In the WAS, Mina reported that during the connective literacy collaborative, her enjoyment of writing and her confidence as a writer increased. Her motivation, high to begin with, was sustained throughout the course of the collaborative. Mina posted a total of eight times. She wrote a short story, a poem, and a Kinship Poem. She commented on the work of others five times. She received four comments on her writings.

Kinship Poetry is shared writing between two people. Mina, who preferred writing poems to other genres, said to her partner once she posted it on the blog, “I really liked ours. It was balanced.” As she spoke, another post appeared on the blog, and as she typed, she said, “I have to have a look at this poetry piece.” Another morning, she had a different approach to sharing. When asked which poem she was reading, she replied, “Not, um I commented on poetry. No, I looked at all the short stories.”

Mina said that she liked to post on the blog to share her own ideas.

01 When I have something to say. It’s not when I have something to say, 02 it’s when I have something to say, like, I don’t write slam poetry or 03 something like that. It’s mostly when I just have an idea of something or 04 when I think that’d be so cool, or when I get a pretty word or phrase. So 05 I always get like one word or line or maybe two, and then, I’ll like, go 06 back to it.

She articulated an introspective approach to writing (line 4) and how she develops her texts around ideas, word and phrases (lines 3-4). At the same time, Mina defined her interest in poetry by naming the type of poetry that she did not write (line 2).
Mina led the group on wanting to extend the connective literacy collaborative into spring. On our last meeting, she involved the entire group in finding out the verdict.

01 Mina: Are we doing another meeting next weekend or—[Donald and Rosie have looked up.]
02 Donald and Rosie have looked up.
03 Pigozzi: All right. Here’s what we’re gonna do.
04 Mina: Cuz I know I can make it on time next week.
05 Pigozzi: If you wanna come and work as one make-up, that’s fine.
06 Mina: Yeah, cuz I don’t have any plans.

She posed her interest in continuing to blog as a question (line 1) and assured those listening that she had an intention to come on time (line 4) and then reassured listeners that she had no other commitments (line 6). In attempting to persuade the group to meet again, Mina demonstrated an interest in sharing her time along with her writing.

When asked whether she enjoyed commenting, she said that she felt that the work of others prompted her to do so, “but it can get kind of tedious sometimes cuz you know you have to comment, and sometimes you don’t really have a lot to say. So yeah, I’m like half and halfway, neutral about it, unless there’s something where, like, I really, really want to say something.” She reported that there were two poems that absolutely compelled her to comment.

Mina expressed disappointment that few affinity space members appeared to have read her writing. To her, commenting was evidence of having read the post. “ I don’t have any comments. I only have a total of one comment.” In Mina’s esteem, sharing and making meaning appeared to be same practice. This notion will be discussed in greater detail later.

Donald

Like Derrick, Donald was consistent in his reports of positive writer self-perception. As he reported on the WAS, enjoyment of writing increased for Donald while participating in the connective literacy collaborative, yet his perception of himself as a good writer decreased. In discussion, he said that he entertained the notion of one day becoming a writer, yet, while
blogging, he often felt “stuck” during the process. Nevertheless, he shared some incomplete works online, including a short story without title or resolution. In all, Donald posted ten times. He wrote six pieces, including the short story, a poem, a Kinship Poem, and three informational pieces. He commented on the posts of others five times, and received a total of eleven comments on his posts, including one that he had written in response to a question.

For Donald, events that he had directly witnessed motivated him to write in the affinity space. His perceptions of the interactions and values of others, as entertaining—or in this case, as frustrating—to him merited observations for sharing. His interpretation of materialism as he reported his musings became his first blog post. The actual artifact will be discussed in further detail later. Donald explained how a shift in place, the act of moving from one side of town to another, inspired a consideration of the values of his new community members:

01 Donald: My surroundings [motivate me]. Like most writers, 02 your surroundings actually one day help you create one of the 03 best stories there is. So, surrounded with whatever I am, I can 04 come up with many things that I could use right now. 05 Pigozzi: There are things in your environment that influence you? 06 Donald: Like, my materialism piece, I got that influenced from when 07 I was living up north in Upton. Like many people, all they were 08 talking about was new shoes, new clothing. I was just thinking to 10 myself, “Don’t they ever have anything else on their mind?”

For Donald, his immediate surroundings—a personal context—motivates him (lines 1-2). He used the “up north” example located in his own writing to illustrate his point (lines 6-7). In stating, “your surroundings…help you create one of the best stories there is” (lines 2-3) he underscored his belief in the importance of physical context.

Each session, Donald would inform me that he was focused on writing new things, “Check this” one day was accompanied by a gesture of turning around his laptop to show that he was composing mode on the blog. Another morning, displaying the screen to the group, he said,
“Okay. My own poem.” In displaying the laptop as others looked on from their seats, his interest in sharing poured between the boundaries of place and space.

01 Donald: [Reading Jason’s writing] I ask or I asked her.
02 Jason: Whu---
03 Donald: I asked: A-S-K-E-D. [Jason fixes spelling.]

Donald frequently shared his expertise with others. From assistance with login, “Make sure you don’t have all-caps on. You don’t want to use it for your password,” to spelling and grammar guidance (line 3) he was proactive as he collaborated.

Sharing mentor texts was also important to Donald. He enjoyed discussing novels with Mina, including Gloryland by Shelton Johnson, Enrique’s Journey by Sonia Nazario, The Secret Life of Bees by Sue Monk Kidd and George Patterson books.

01 Donald: You haven’t gotten any books by George Patterson have you? Have you read any yet?
03 Pigozzi: You asked me that before. He just had a book made into a huge movie, right?
05 Jason: What movie?
06 Donald: Maximum Ride. It’s part of a whole series.
07 Mina: There’s one about angels, right?
08 Donald: Huh?
09 Mina: That’s the one about angels, or some kind of extra human…. They only call themselves avian. They’re part bird and part human.
11 Mina: Really?
12 Donald: Angel is actually the name of a character.

The circuitousness of this exchange about text is entertaining: Donald requests that the clinic purchase mentor texts for him to use (line 1). I inquire about the status of the books as film (line 4). Donald refocuses the conversation back to a singular title (line 6) while Mina further narrows it to one character, Angel (line 12). In this exchange, Donald has gone from requesting a favorite book so that others could share it to instructing about the characters and sharing his knowledge of the text when Mina shows interest because he has read it. Donald shared interests,
expertise and ideas for new blog posts with affinity space members as he demonstrated an ability to speak across his writing, causing place and space to overlap and flow together.

Rosie

As a writer who worked diligently on posting and commenting for the entire duration of the blogging sessions if she could, the quiet enthusiasm that Rosie demonstrated for the project was palpable. Her reports about motivation reflect this conviction. For her first few posts, Rosie had done topical searches and even preliminary writing at home. In the last three sessions, however, she worked more on an improvisational basis, generating new ideas as she created her blog posts.

According to interviews, Rosie joined the digital collective because of her belief in herself as a good writer, which was sustained during the project, as reflected in the WAS. She also was reasonably interested in sharing her writings with others. She regarded writing as more than a fun pastime, however, often mentioning what she had written at home, at school, and as “extra” poems or musings in her journal. Rosie posted a total of 11 times on the blog site. She wrote a short story, four poems, a Kinship Poem, and an informational piece. She commented four times, only on the poetry that others had written.

When she considered her shared writings in the affinity space, Rosie explained how she thought about the process as interactive, noting what it was in other posts that had inspired her to write as she continued over time.

01 Pigozzi: How do you decide what to blog about?
02 Rosie: I just think about writing. And at school, what I’m into.
03 Pigozzi: What you’re into or not into?
04 Rosie: What I like.
05 Pigozzi: What does your blog writing say about you?
06 Rosie: I could find anything to write on.
07 Pigozzi: What does your writing overall say about you?
08 Rosie: That I know how to express in writing about the things that I like.
09 Pigozzi: …what has guided you?
10 **Rosie:** Like the ones [posts] I can relate to. Not the big things.
11 **Pigozzi:** Small elements in other people’s writing?
12 **Rosie:** Yeah.

Rosie alluded to the give-and-take nature of sharing writing (lines 10-12) and developed that idea in a later conversation. She said that while she writes for herself, she also writes for others to experience what it is she is conveying. Overall, Rosie viewed the blog as a space to depict and exchange nuanced elements of interests and experiences that she believed to be common across members of the connective literacy collaborative.

**Take up with Audience: Seeking Fair Treatment and Sharing Passions**

Taking up ideas with the specific audience of the affinity space in mind describes another aspect of how the participants were motivated to select topics and share insights. Participants referred directly and indirectly to how their writing was intended for particular readers of the blog space. Take up with audience is distinguished from sharing by specific reference to one or more readers of the blog, connecting over written blog posts.

**Derrick**

In his final interview, Derrick explained how his reluctance to share his writing with others was borne of a concern about specific people reading his work. Clearly considering audience, he expressed anxiety about the existence of his writing in a public space.

01 **Derrick:** What if Jay Cutler reads my article and tries to hunt me down?
02 **Pigozzi:** Well, the sweet benefit of this blog is the fact that it’s a closed blog.
03 And, unless you explicitly give someone permission to use it, um, no one
04 can see it. [Smile.]
05 **Derrick:** [Dramatically wipes his brow, sighs.] Phew. That’s a relief.

Specifically, Derrick feared retaliation (line 1) for severely criticizing an NFL football player in his informational piece. His worries were mitigated (line 5) when I reassured him that his post was not likely to be read publicly (lines 3-4). Derrick did no further editing to the written piece and left the critical tone in the final version.
When directly questioned about how he approached audience in the affinity space, Derrick said that he wanted to be viewed in certain ways. “That I am interesting. That I am fun.” While observations such as “I like to write about whatever’s in my head. I write the first thing that comes into my mind” express little about how his words might impact his audience. However, his statement demonstrates his perceived benefit in making the attempt.

Mina

On Valentine’s Day during group conversation, Mina had difficulty deciding whether to read her own poem that she was revising, or a love poem that she had found online. She was reluctant to share her own writing because other bloggers had not yet made written comments on it. Her audience confirmed that she had made a good choice.

01 Mina: I can’t decide if it’s finished—
02 Pigozzi: We can help you.
03 Mina: [Reads. Donald starts the finger snapping this time. The rest joins in.]
04 Derrick: [to Mina] That was good.
05 Coco: [to Mina] Sad.

Mina disclosed that she was uncertain whether her poem was finished (line 1). Audience reaction is both physical (line 3) and verbal (lines 4-5). The gestures and words of others assisted her in deciding that her poem is in fact complete.

Mina spoke openly about audience when she described how she wrote her love poem with readers in mind, specifically with how they would interpret her shift from third to second person voice within the same piece.

01 Mina: I like that I often talk directly to the person. But in any poem, 02 I don’t make them the primary person. Or at least in the two that I’ve 03 written, the first poem, and even in the short story, I would talk to them 04 for maybe like a line. I don’t like second person very much unless it’s 05 that kind of thing, but I don’t like second person in stories. I think it’s 06 weird. It’s almost creepy.
While it is unclear whether she had one specific reader in mind, “the person” (line 1), Mina was certain that she did not want to be construed as different, or weird (line 6). She explained that the addressee was allowed a brief role in her poetry (line 2), but was less likely to become a part of her short stories (line 5). In interacting face-to-face and on the blog, Mina’s concern with her audience is apparent as she makes decisions about finalizing her poetry and attuning a voice in her short story for the reader.

Donald

How Donald’s views differed from the group is of great interest. He reported on the ARA that was slightly less excited (-.5) than the rest of the group to write on blogs, but the excitement he did possess was sustained for the duration of the study. As will be discussed later, Donald was unquestionably the most adept at navigating around the blog. He frequently helped other participants; yet, he still felt that he could have learned more and that he needed assistance editing and revising his writing. Donald wrote about feeling uncertain that he would be treated fairly in the blog space. He often addressed the reader in parenthetical blurbs, not unlike an aside of a drama. In his first post, he set parameters for how he expected to be treated.

…I would like to tell you some things about myself before I actually start to post things about other topics. I feel it would be important for the people who are reading my blogs/posts to get a chance to know more about me so please do not criticize about some of the things i like just because you do not like them or you think they are stupid.

In his short story, narration was interrupted by “hey, yeah you...... the one reading this, I can probably guess what you are think[ing].” He engaged directly with the reader in order to explain his futuristic setting. Donald maintained a dialogical or reciprocal perspective toward his audience. In his writing he sought to answer questions about him as author that may emerge as the reader engages with his writing.

01 Pigozzi: Why do you write?
Donald: Well, how I would say it is writing you could express your feelings and express your personality through writing and people could actually—through reading something you have written they might actually get to know you through your writing style. They might know more about you.

Further, Donald aimed to have his audience learn many details about him (lines 4-5). He articulates that the expression of feelings and personality through writing (lines 2-3) are key to his purpose for writing.

Donald said that his favorite piece to write was his short story because in the context of affinity space, he was afforded the opportunity to do what he had not done often before, “It’s a chance for me to show my style in my writings online.”

Predictably, Donald was eager to read and write about the posts of others.

In this exchange, Donald was seeking feedback on his initial blog post. At first, he vaguely explained his reason to access comments (line 1). Next, he clarified that he was interested in what others have posted (line 4). Finally, he stated he wanted to read what other writers had written about his post (line 5). Once he learned how to navigate to find comments on his posts, and how to comment on those of others, doing so became part of his routine as he warmed up to write at the beginning of each session. To Donald, take-up with audience meant the opportunity to express feelings and his personality for others, the show his “style,” online and read comments on his writing to interpret how his audience interpreted his writing.

Rosie

The wide-ranging and evolving views disclosed during her participation in the affinity space reflect the ardent and thoughtful approach of Rosie to writing as a collaborative member.
Her independent nature is clear in details from interviews across time. She terms her interest in writing a passion (line 2). Rosie is writing for herself, but also an audience (lines 5, 9) as she suggests intent to connect, to entertain, and possibly transport her readers. In another interview she talked about audience meaning making:

Like Mina, Rosie felt that the comments made to her blog posts certainly did not change the essence of any posts for her (lines 3, 6). Furthermore, despite the number and complexity of comments, Rosie felt that readers did not fully understand the immediacy of what she was attempting to convey (lines 5-6), although that did not prevent her from trying. She felt that readers were aware of the social injustices she addressed in her writing, but not necessarily the imperatives she expressed to change society (line 8). Rosie approached audience with intent to call attention to social issues important to her, and to invite action on those themes.

Obligation to Oneself: Enriching Text via iPhones and Handwritten Notes
Bearing in mind that participation in an affinity space is voluntary and varies in length and frequency person-by-person, the theme of self-assignment exemplifies how participants persistently pursued writing or reading on the blog. This includes advance preparations made by participants, such as organizing writing on paper, or on electronic devices prior to meetings, or bringing lists of possible mentor texts in anticipation of writing in a new genre. In interviews and communications in the affinity space, participants did not consistently distinguish a difference between asking for technical help and requesting assistance with writing. In other words, from the participants’ perspective, using a laptop to post stories and the composition process are steps in the same practice. Whether authors were reviewing their own former posts, the posts of others, or creating entirely new pieces of writing, self-assignment illustrates the personalized actions that participants elected to do themselves in order to advance the writing process.

Derrick

Accustomed to arriving early, Derrick had a weekly routine. He would take off his coat, set it over the back of his chair and sit down to read the blog. He occasionally posted comments, and then began research if he was beginning a new piece. One morning, technical difficulties slowed him down.

01 Derrick: Here it is. [He has found a post he wants to comment on and the screen glitches.]
03 Pigozzi: That’s so strange. You are not in one loop. You know that. [Derrick is moving his cursor from comment to comment across the blog from his author area to that of others.] You have a few choices. Do you want to type a poem? You want to find a poem?
07 Derrick: Yeah. Have one. [Holds up poem searched from iPhone.]
08 Pigozzi: You want to type it on, write a response, or do you wanna do same style? You have it on your phone, right? You wanna do it in the same style and then at the bottom, write the title and the author. Okay? And then we’re gonna share out as a group.
12 Derrick: It’s all right here. I need to copy it. [He copies and pastes it as a his blog entry.]
Derrick had brought a Langston Hughes poem that he found on a Safari search during the week on his phone (line 7). His mentor text selection was made in anticipation of the Saturday activity to write like a famous author. However, he had already completed that activity as well (line 12), so that he could spend more time on the colors poem that he eventually did share.

The week after he missed a session, Derrick expressed concern that he would not finish writing his informational piece and have the opportunity to post it before the collaborative ended. He was having difficulty selecting a topic:

01 Derrick: I don’t have a subject. I wasn’t here last week and I don’t know what to write about. [He is leaning to one side, resting his head on his left shoulder, with his left arm straight.]
02 Pigozzi: But it’s your choice. Write about something that interests you. I didn’t “assign” anything. If you want to do something biographical again, that’s fine. If you wanna do sports knowledge, if you wanna do a place you’ve vacationed to, whatever. But just be able to back it up with some sources.
03 Derrick: [Sits up. He has thought of something.] Okay. [He goes to Google.]

Derrick disclosed that he did not know what to do (lines 1-2). After hearing suggestions (lines 5-6) he quickly made his decision and took action (line 9).

With his short story, Derrick’s decision to reconsider his own post based upon comments by another blogger defines another aspect of self-assignment.

01 Derrick: [Reading his post aloud] Take out the “a” [He is editing story based on comments.]
02 Pigozzi: Are you gonna add punctuation?
03 Derrick: [Rereads] Hmm. Yes. Actually, no.

Derrick decided to make grammatical changes based on reader comments (line 1). He elected to ignore comments about punctuation (line 4). The story, entitled “Star of Law,” contains dialogue. After considering what others had written about its readability, acting as dramaturge, he changed the conversation to lines of dialogue, akin to a play script. He posted the final version without quotation marks.
Teacher: Class James had the had the best score in the grade this year
James: Thank you
Jim: I should have won i was better and smarter
Teacher: Better lucky next time
James: Ya you will get it next time Jim
Jim: I will bet you James at something

In essence, Derrick compromised. He followed some advice given, yet kept his post unique by formatting dialogue like a play—appropriate because he said that the story was inspired by a drama performance “in third grade at school”—and disregarding punctuation as if he were text messaging the conversation.

Mina

Arriving early and continually making certain that she was doing exactly what was expected of her characterize Mina’s involvement in the affinity group. One morning she had a difficult transition to writing.

01 Mina came in straightaway and attempted several times to log in at her laptop. Derrick arrived and logged in as she tried from a variety of devices.
02 Mina: NO. Still not.
03 Pigozzi: Are you logged in?
04 Mina: NO. Still not.
05 Pigozzi: [Looking on admin page from blog] Are you on now?
06 Mina: Yeah. [Holds up iPhone.]
07 Pigozzi: On your phone. Try logging off from your phone, cuz you’re logged in now from multiple sites.
08 Mina: Okay, I probably can’t log in at all. I’m probably still logged in from my iPad, which is at school.

Mina tried from her laptop to log in to the blog (lines 1-2) as another participant arrived and immediately accomplished (line 2) what she had attempted to do many times. After logging off from one device (line 9) she was still uncertain whether she could log in because she was still accessing the blog from other devices. During the week, she had accessed the blog from several locations, including her school-use only iPad.

After she was able to log in that morning, her next question shifted from technology to point of view for the short story that she had revised apparently in several locations, asking, “Is it
possible, if it’s in first person for the main character to be a person who’s not narrating the story?” Concerned with clarity of meaning, she asked me first if it would make sense to readers before posting it.

As for uploading the final revision the following week, a similar log in problem emerged, but Mina had the foresight to save a version in a more accessible location.

01 Pigozzi: Oh, let me see if I can do anything from my end.  
02 Mina: I mean, I could just do something from Google Drive and I could…  
03 I could—  
04 Pigozzi: You could email it to me and I can upload it as you.  
05 Mina: Awesome.

As I navigated to the blog dashboard to assist Mina (line 1), she had devised a plan to remotely access her document (line 2) and post it to the blog from there. In the end, we found a simpler solution (line 04) that allowed her to complete her task sooner.

On three occasions, Mina mentioned that she had brought books with her, either in print or digital form to serve as mentor texts for her personal writing, not necessarily to share with the other participants in the affinity space. During writing time, Mina additionally accessed outside poetry blogs for use as inspiration, and articulated her reasons for doing so.

01 …the poems I looked at first? I just was reading them and then they helped 02 me, a list of them. But I didn’t use one [a mentor text] to write. I didn’t 03 technically use it. I like used them for integration kind of? But I can’t have 04 voice that’s not my own.

She shared that reading the poetry of other authors guided her (line 1) yet she limited her use of mentor texts because she wanted only her voice present in her final writings (lines 3-4).

Mina had created shortcuts, what she referred to as “my hacks” to maintain access to her writing. She revisited both her poem and short story numerous times, although in real time, she seldom made changes to either one. In her own words, she explained:

01 Yeah, like I would go back up, and I’d be like, cuz this doesn’t fit 02 anymore. Cuz this would be better. So it’d be, like, in one sitting, I would,
Mina described steps she took with posts on the blog that she had already published. Thinking about her writing, she would reconsider word choices (lines 1-2), view the post and edit the language (line 3) because she was not satisfied with the final composition (lines 4-5). Contemplating and re-contemplating word choices, perusing a private collection of mentor texts, and accessing the blog from several locations are ways in which Mina took it upon herself to integrate her writing into her daily life.

**Donald**

Several examples illustrate Donald’s self-assignment as technical support person for the affinity space. He multitasked and toggled between pages on his own laptop, even as he helped other participants learn to navigate the blog. He also enjoyed pointing out spelling issues.

01 **Derrick:** Are you supposed to use this box?
02 **Donald:** No, it’s—“ [He has gotten up to come over to Derrick to show him.
03 He stops at Jason’s screen where he is reading Donald’s post and
04 commenting.] No, no, no, no that’s supposed to be “Spoiled White Boys.”
05 Spoiled. Not “Spoilt.”
06 [Jason types.] That’s better. You see what I’m saying? [He points to the box
07 beneath his own post on Jason’s screen.] Let me help you write that. This is
08 where you supposed to comment. [In a second he is at Derrick’s screen,
09 showing him the New Post pull down so that Derrick can post his short story.
10 He smiles,] So you see—
11 **Derrick:** [Looks at me and laughs about how quickly and effortlessly Donald
12 posted his story for him.] Yes.

Donald had moved to help one participant (line 2) and made a verbal spelling correction as he passed another participant (lines 4-5). He then demonstrated how he could help one to complete his post (line 7) by using the comment function (line 8). Almost simultaneously, he showed the other blogger how to post his story (lines 8-10).
Best friends, Donald often adopted a mentoring approach with Jason’s writing. One time, he toggled Jason’s laptop screen away from YouTube back to the blog repeating, “Finish that, finish that, finish that!” Jason invited Donald to read his notes for his short stories.

01 **Donald:** I get the story. Both of ’em. Okay, ya, you want the meanings to write down. I don’t like it. I’ll tell you my story anyway. [Tilts his screen.]
03 **Jason:** laughing quietly [at how Donald wants to share a short story about a 04 romance.]
05 **Donald:** [To Jason] Why don’t you read it and ask me why? [Jason shrugs and 06 reads Donald’s blog post.]
07 **Donald:** [In background] Pour it on, not too much [he is advising Jason on 08 what direction to take the relationship of characters in his story].

After trading laptops and reading his friend’s notes, Donald indicated that he understood the idea of the story (line 1). He was less comfortable sharing his own story (line 2). He pushed his friend to question him about his own writing (line 5) while advising the same friend about his story (lines 7-8). Donald often appeared to feel obligated not only to help others, but also to seek assurance that his own writing conveyed a specific point.

“Can you come and read what I got so far?” is illustrative of how Donald frequently inquired of others and me whether we would read his work. Over time, he began coming to the affinity space with handwritten notes to himself, and eventually, as the following sample shows, with rough drafts of entire blog posts (lines 4, 5).

01 **Donald:** I don’t need a story. I just need to come up with a title....I came up 02 with, I mean I wrote a story already and I need to just come up with a title. 03 **Pigozzi:** Is it on the blog? 04 **Donald:** I started typing it. It’s written on paper. I just need a title. I don’t 05 have a title. So I just wrote on the paper, I’ve said ‘for a story with a title 06 that has yet to be created.’

When questioned later why he had written it by hand, Donald replied that he had thought about his story during the week and knew that he could finish it so that he could move on to researching and blogging poetry. In little time, he had written several poems.

01 **Donald:** I did that red one, and then I did that poem alone.
Mina: You said two, right? Yes and no. I only did the second one.

Pigozzi: Yes, but you needed to type two.

Donald: [Struggling to be heard over Mina] I did, I did. I did one with Coco, and then did one of my own.

Donald signaled that he wanted to interact around his writing by announcing what he had completed in the poetry genre (line 1) and then by clarifying how much he had posted (lines 4-5). Similarly, he sought guidance with and acknowledgement of his writing from me and other participants. At the same time, he opted to become the technological support for those encountering difficulties as they attempted new tasks in the blog space.

Rosie

Blogging for Rosie represented the merging of literacy modes. She said that she enjoyed keeping a journal at home, where she wrote “true stories.” She also spent some time writing poetry on her own. Blogging was additionally logical segue way from video blogging, also known as vlogging, that she practiced at home with her younger sister. In her own words, she said, “I love vlogging! Whenever I can! My little sister and I vlog anything. Everything. Even a cooking show.” As will be discussed at length later, Rosie said that the written blog was somehow more freeing for her, as she discovered that she could quickly compose her thoughts and feelings into poems, even as the session was ending, and the project was coming to a close. The experience of learning to blog was a method for Rosie to expand her abilities writing in an online format.

Stick-up Letters and Avatars: Personalizing the Space

Images are explicit semiotic gestures used on the blog for a variety of purposes. When participants chose to add drawings, photographs, or stylized typefaces, they embellished their writings. Blogging IS writing, along with using a password to gain access into the space, downloading and saving images, and stylizing one’s personal blog space. In terms of
comprehending the process of blogging, participants reported on the ARA that initially, they believed that they could either rapidly master the format, or already possessed enough technological skill to contribute. However, as time passed, they realized that new tasks or added blog embellishments required further learning. For example, although she had never used an illustration before, Rosie decided to add a meme to her final blog post. On the last day, as participants posted and read one another’s closing writings, Rosie struggled to place the image at the end of her text instead of at the beginning. She said that was satisfied with the result, although nobody else had a chance to view it before they departed. Yet, needing to learn more in order to decorate posts did not prevent any participants from pursuing more images or other embellishments during blogging events.

**Derrick**

At times, Derrick struggled with the format of the blog space, and would request assistance from me or other writers. He eschewed the use of image or video because, as he explained in an interview, they not only do not help, rather, they limit his writing. However, selecting an avatar was a different matter. On February 28, with only two weeks left in the study, he found what he called a “really funny” baseball avatar after an exhaustive search, and although he had difficulty embedding the image into his profile, he succeeded on a second try.

01 **Derrick:** [Has an entirely different image now. It is a baseball meme.] I want to use this one. [Narrating as he goes] Now like that? [He saves to documents, clicks Add Media at his post.]
02 Pigozzi: Yes. Now lets see where it puts it.
03 **Derrick:** Here we go. [He clicks Publish and it appears.]

A first attempt at downloading the new baseball meme was successful for Derrick (line 2). He carefully saved (line 2) and then transferred it (line 5) into his online profile. In his exit interview, Derrick said that by the end, he had learned enough about how to use images in the...
space to feel comfortable incorporating them without assistance. However, beyond displaying the avatar, he still preferred not to use any other embellishments.

**Mina**

After she noticed that Derrick had used one, Mina quietly downloaded and posted an avatar picture. Like a weathered Chinese ink drawing on silk, her avatar depicts pink clouds lining the sky of a mountain range. When directly asked, however, she said that the further use of images on a blog constrains and complicates her writing (lines 3, 4). Noteworthy is her use of the word “quality” (line 1) as she refers to her personal writing style.

01 **Mina**: I don’t like getting a picture before I add my quality. Do you know what I mean? Because then it feels like you’re supposed to be writing about something that is forced on you. With an image you’re writing like everything’s done so it’s like—it adds unnecessary complexity if paired incorrectly.

06 **Pigozzi**: Hmm. If I should add an image to something on my blog that I should share after the writing?

08 **Mina**: Then it’s an illustration.... If you pick a better one, then it enhances your writing.

Mina elegantly circumvented complexity in her writing. In positioning almost exclusively as a writer creating characters with few, albeit formidable conflicts, she managed to invent blog pieces and comments on others writing that was direct, clear, and often bittersweet. For Mina, words became the embellishments she chose after much deliberation and reflection.

**Donald**

Donald embellished his writings with several images in different ways. Comments such as “I need more art.” and his reference, “to show my style” illustrate how Donald personalized his blog space. At first, he was coy in admitting that he had done so.

01 **Pigozzi**: [Looking at stick-up letter.] I love it. How’d you do that? How’d you do the big cap?

03 **Donald**: It does it on its own. On my first story, it did it. Did it without my setting it.

05 **Pigozzi**: Oh, I know, you stylized it when you—I know what you did. You
06 set it when you did the profile for your blog. [I’ve gone to dashboard to look
07 up only his writings.]
08 Donald: [Shrugs.] Want to see the new one I made?

When I pointed out he had used typography to stylize his blog (line 1), Donald initially
denied that he had deliberately selected to (lines 3-4). His gesture and offer to demonstrate his
most recent embellishment (line 8) suggest further exploration with the appearance of his blog.

During an interview, when asked to elaborate on how he used images, Donald said that
although they sometimes they limit his writing, he also said, “It gives people more—a better
visual of what I’m trying to say.” His preferred “extras” to use were typographic variations. “[I
like to use] just type. Using italic, and bolding, It’s like an extension of you and an extension of
your style and you change it, just the very first letter. With the one like a big letter—” [Refers to
template choice on dashboard.]

Donald used emoticons in his writing: once in a comment he used a grinning face to
express approval for another writer’s poem; in his own poem, “A POEM FROM DOWN
BELOW! (GET YOUR HEAD OUT THE GUTTER .-.)” the symbol at the end illustrates his
meaning with an upside-down face.

For a final informational piece, Donald wrote about anime. In physical place as well as
online space, he used drawings to engage about image quality and the genre.

01 Donald: [Angling his laptop so that others can see] Look at this image. Real or
02 fake? [He is showing a path that faces the sun. Looks like a photo.]
03 Jason: Real.
04 Donald: [Shakes his head no and smiles.] Fake. It’s a drawn image.

He verbally guided affinity space participants through his planning and organizational
process for this post. Showing the images as he formatted them (line 1), he invited insight about
the quality as it related to genre (line 4). The blog post itself continues the guessing game as it
provides information about the main differences between cartoons and anime. Images are shown
side by side, and the reader is invited to surmise, based on the text, which image is of which drawing style. Donald used emoticons—graphemes—to illustrate his opinion of the quality of each drawing in the captions that explain them: “Anime ^w^” and “Cartoon _.”

**Rosie**

During the third blogging session, Rosie examined pages of floral photos on the Internet to use for her profile avatar. When she added the “girly” pink ranunculus photo as her avatar, she also changed her password to “awesome,” whispering it to me as I wrote it down.

Rosie wrote her informational piece about Rosa Parks. To it, she added the singular image that accompanied her posts, moments before the project ended. The Rosa Parks illustration is a meme that features a black-and-white photograph of an elderly Ms. Parks. In the photo, she is looking upward, and superimposed in white type is the now-famous quote, “The only tired I was, was tired of giving in.” The meme provides a modern view of one of the faces that now symbolizes what is often taught as the Civil Rights “era” of history. The photo of Parks is a reminder that she has aged, and civil rights are still a current issue.

**Interrogation of Purpose: “I could find anything to write on.”**

Finally, ongoing interrogation of writing, the act of making meaning while questioning the what, why, and when writers would be researching, organizing, composing, editing, or revising work to share on the blog affinity space encompasses the interrogation process. Artifacts in the room, the opportunity to freely access videos, images, and other mentor texts was less important to the process. Participants’ approaches to meaning making were varied. In essence, participants interrogated purpose collectively and individually as they strove to make sense of their own writing, or contemplated the posts of other writers.
Derrick

Shared meaning making was part of the group dynamic. Derrick said that having feedback on his short story resulted in changing the meaning of it for him. “I added a lot more” as a result, he said. Comments encouraged him to develop the characters and add dialogue.

Pondering what “contextualizing” meant during a group discussion about setting in short stories, the following conversation ensued.

01 Pigozzi: What do I mean by contextualizing them?
02 Rosie: Stringing them together?
03 Derrick: Putting them all together…in place?

Striving to provide a definition for the group, Derrick developed his idea (line 3) from how Rosie had framed her thought (line 2), thus moving them both closer to the meaning of contextualizing a story.

One morning, while seated writing at the keyboard, Derrick was musing about the idea of location on the Internet. He turned to Donald, seated near him and said, “Once, I locked myself out of the Internet. Later the same day, I found myself.” He laughed, turned back to the screen, and returned to poetry writing. Donald did not respond, but Derrick's "finding of himself" was in reference to his own writing.

Mina

Despite the confirmed or unstated ways in which others may have interpreted Mina’s writing, her overall experience remained a positive and motivating one. She faced fewer difficulties with the format than with understanding exactly what was expected of her. She appreciated very clear directions and continually asked for clarification from the moment she established her blog space.

01 Mina: What am I supposed to do?
02 Pigozzi: Did you post your story idea?
03 Mina: [Shows me what she’s written.] This.
Pigozzi: Is that your setting? A line of dialogue?
Mina: It is the story.
Pigozzi: [Laughing.] Wow. Now you research. Look for inspiration. [Reading her idea again,] Is this something that occurs in the course of the story? Is it the main idea?
Mina: Ya. I was thinking that was the main idea. It is what happens.

Mina had posted one sentence (line 3) instead of a list of topics for a short story. Unclear on what she had intended to convey, I asked further questions (line 4). When she confirmed that her few words were in fact the crux of the story (line 5), I made suggestions to expand it (lines 6-7). Declining to add more (line 9), Mina elected to later write a very short story, based around a brief, but life-altering incident.

Generally, once she understood what she thought she was supposed to be doing during any session, whether that was writing or searching for new mentor texts, Mina stayed at her laptop and worked for the greater part of two hours. On any given day, her search history was full of inquiries on other blogs, dictionary and rhyming sites, and specific poetry websites, such as www.poemhunter.com and www.poetryfoundation.org.

Another thing I do is I’ll, like, start a poem and I’ll go back to it like a week later, cuz I, then, like, then you really decide that you like it or not. Cuz if you’re looking at it, like, that day or the next day, then it’s like, um, I guess it’s all right. But then if you see it like a week later you can be oh this is horrible, then, like, scrap it.

As she explained in an interview, writing is clearly a recursive and very individual process for Mina (lines 1-2). She said that she has moments of inspiration, and returns to them later with a different perspective (line 3), or even with the intent to delete what she has composed (line 5), and begin anew. The ideas behind writing that she shares must reach her standards of “cool” or “pretty” words, and she constructs meaning around them. But that standard must also meet a test of time.

If I start writing something and if I realize what it’s probably about. I’ll start writing a phrase. Meanings usually come later. They usually come to
Mina elaborated she writes first (lines 1-2) and meaning emerges later during the writing process (line 2). Words and their mutable meanings generated topical ideas, and often inspired further writing. In contrast, Mina’s “inner dialogue” when writing appeared to drown out the collaborative voices of others. She noted that the meanings in her writings could not change because nobody commented on them, which was not the case. The group had discussed her poem at length.

01 Mina: [Reads. Donald starts the finger snapping this time.]
02 Derrick: That was good.
03 Coco: Sad.
04 Pigozzi: ‘Bloody lips’ and the title suggest death. Is he dying as he speaks?
05 Mina: The lips are bloody only because they are telling lies.
06 Pigozzi: Then the death of love. [She shakes her head yes.]
07 Donald: Love bleeding to death in the t mat. What a bad end for it.
08 Mina: Something about the impersonal space of a laundromat struck me.
09 [She nods.] Okay, maybe it is finished.

Donald responded with the finger snap of approval (line 1). Derrick and Coco follow with comments (lines 2-3). Donald synthesized her final lines of poetry, as evidenced in his comment (line 7).

01 Mina: The short story was the one about falling. It was like, a mini. It turned out to be really, really short.
03 Pigozzi: Okay. I’m—
04 Mina: Cuz it was only inner dialogue. Like with yourself.
05 Pigozzi: Do you feel that others “got” what you were writing about?
06 Mina: That the other—
07 Pigozzi: Sorry, that readers—
08 Mina: The poem probably not…the falling one, I’m sure they did, cuz it was pretty short. It thought that that one was pretty straightforward.

Regardless of the conversation, Mina felt that others in the affinity group did not understand the poem (line 8). Instead, she said that her short story was comprehensible to readers because of its brevity (line 9). She felt that the meaning in her poem, “Elegy,” posted on Valentine’s Day, was not comprehensively interpreted by her peers despite the extensive group
discussion of it. Again, for Mina, it seemed that because there was little written
acknowledgement of the poem, then there was not clear understanding of it.

Donald

Two weeks after Mina had posted “Elegy,” on the blog, Donald had commented, “I’m at
a loss of words.” The affective remark on Mina’s poem sequentially followed his own poem, one
that represents his own beliefs about what it means to be a “true man.” While not explicitly
intended as counterpoint to Mina’s poem, its direct language served that purpose nonetheless.

but you are the fool who broke her heart
she may never love again
didn’t even get a chance
just to hold her hand
like a true man would do…..

Mina did comment on Donald’s poem: “This is nice. I like the last line a lot.” It remains
unknown whether she interpreted it as a rebuttal to hers, or if she were simply responding in kind
because he had commented on her poem.

During spoken interactions within the affinity space, Donald often deepened discussion
with his unique perspective. Once during group conversation, he pondered the whether it was
appropriate to display feelings in writing.

01 Mina: Can you use anger in a poem?
02 Donald: Yes.
03 Coco: Yes.
04 Pigozzi: Yes! Why? How?
05 Donald: It’s a way of showing how you feel. It makes your poem your own
06 emotions.

Donald spoke frequently about writing about his feelings. He extended this notion as he
introduced ownership of emotion (line 6). While he did not discuss at length how other bloggers
influenced his writing, during his exit interview, Donald did indirectly talk about why he had shared what he had.
Pigozzi: How do you decide what to blog about?
Donald: Whenever there’s something on my mind. Sometimes it comes from my surroundings, here.
Pigozzi: What does your blog writing say about you?
Donald: How I am, my personality, the things I like. What I enjoy.
Pigozzi: What does your writing overall say about you?
Donald: I’m a try and “tell” me.

In writing, Donald wanted for readers to know him, or at to begin at least to figure that out (line 5). This aspect of motivation suggests that the writer wanted his “tell”—in Poker the gesture that reveals a bluff—to be called (line 7), and his identity clarified.

Rosie

Rosie reported that writing in specific genres was more challenging than she expected. She said that “fun” was a misnomer for her relationship with writing. As an avid keeper of a handwritten journal, writing is more habitual than a pastime for her. The gravity of her blog topics about violence and civil rights further highlight this notion.

Pigozzi: What motivates you to write on the blog?
Rosie: [She has taken the seat that Jason has just left, to my right-hand side at the table.] Things I have happen to me.
Pigozzi: You can take a seat, I have a couple more. So your experiences.
Rosie: Um hmm.
Pigozzi: Memorable or just kind of everyday?
Rosie: Only the more memorable.

As for topic selection, it was the notable, or out-of-the-ordinary events in Rosie’s daily life (lines 3 and 8) often provided the catalyst for her to write about a particular topic in the affinity space. She shared that her journal often functions a resource for topical ideas in her blog writing. She said that it made her more secure in her writing as well.

Pigozzi: What does your blog writing say about you?
Rosie: I could find anything to write on.
Pigozzi: What was the most difficult part of this study?
Rosie: Nothing really. I enjoy writing.
Pigozzi: Do you think this project would work in school?
Rosie: Yes. Kids like to write. We could write more.
Like Donald, Rosie wanted her confident writing persona known by the reader, and was able to articulate that (lines 2, 4). In her exit interview, she noted that students in her age group have few opportunities for creative writing. The certainty with which she spoke for all “kids” in line 6 is remarkable. As a participant, Rosie was one of few spoken words, although the volume of her writing more than compensated for that fact. When given the chance to write, she rose to the occasion. Given few opportunities to engage creative writing in school, Rosie felt strongly that most students would enjoy it as she did.

In summary, paired with survey data, narrative data reveal very exacting information from individuals. When directly asked, participants’ general reasons for writing within the blog affinity space are varied and intricate. Generally, what motivated participants to write in the affinity space were single meaningful moments, contextual shifts, or inspiring words. Searching deeper in the data, further rationales for writing the individual posts that participants eventually shared each stem from the sum of interrogation of purpose, the desire to embellish, self-assignment, a curiosity or concern with audience, and a complex aspiration to share writing. By initially electing to write in a group focused on blogging, participants were clearly motivated to share their writing. The impetus to share personal perspectives, events, and experiences in writing in an interactive mode appears to be the central motivating factor in this study, along with composing coherent posts on topics meaningful to one another, with increased opportunities and technological expertise to enhance the appearance of blog posts in the space.

It is noteworthy that regarding motivation, the majority of positioning during interviews generally occurred from the Self platform, as participants explained their Internet habits, yet it shifted to the Self Creating Other when they discussed writing. The Self with Other platform emerges only when directly asked about blog posts authored by others, suggesting that writers
measured their abilities historically against themselves, and not one another. Interrogation of purpose describes how participants sought information to organize new writings, edit, revise, or to communicate intent.

Participants demonstrated a sense of self-assignment a total of 209 times. They took it upon themselves to prepare in advance for writing sessions by organizing ideas, selecting mentor tests, and other resources. They edited and revised their texts for posting, and assisted one another in do so as well. Participants displayed or discussed the importance of sharing 109 times. In the affinity space, time, humorous ideas, interests, commonalities, and knowledge, among other things were shared. Participants engaged in interrogation of purpose 96 times as they toiled to figure out technology use, text structure, and pondering how they and others make meaning from writing, and whether that meaning is consistent between them. Participants regarded topics surrounding audience 55 times as they planned for, wrote, posted, and awaited feedback from one another in the affinity space. Embellishment of blog spaces and posts occurred a total of 43 times, as participants found photographs, drawings, memes, and employed typography to stylize their individual writings.

Part Two: Positioning in the Cases of Derrick, Mina, Donald and Rosie

To answer the second research question, “How do adolescents enact their identities as they position themselves and others in a blog space?” all blog posts were coded and analyzed using positioning theory categories. With a second coder, I discussed at length the general role or function played in the social context by the author for each blog post, and then coded further by individual idea units containing individual positioning acts.

This section relates positioning similarities found across all four cases and some unique characteristics of each writer. All wrote from the multiple platforms of Self, Self with Other and Self Creating Other. These depictions continually shifted and evolved, often sequentially from
post to post, other times within the same post. Seldom did the bloggers portray a singular positioning of Self or Others. The nuanced sub-categories of Intertextuality, Static, and Tacit revealed further insight into the identities portrayed on the blog, specifically as writers referenced other events or added distinctive features to their compositions.

Table 8: Positioning Theory Coding Instances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Informational Pieces</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Short Stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N =</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self</strong></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertextuality</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Aligned with Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self as Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self in Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Opposed to Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Static</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tacit</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self Creating Other</strong></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertextuality</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Aligned with Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self as Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self in Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Opposed to Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tacit</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self with Other</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertextuality</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Aligned with Other</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self as Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self in Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Opposed to Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tacit</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>214</strong></td>
<td><strong>294</strong></td>
<td><strong>286</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While all participants positioned across the genres, they did so in compelling and differing ways. Writing informational pieces, they positioned most frequently as Self with Other. In poetry, participants positioned as both Self Creating Other and Self with Other numerous times. In contrast, all markedly positioned most frequently as Self Creating Other for short stories.

Because the research question refers distinctly to text created for the blog space, and not to all communications within the affinity space, samples from each author representative of
his/her discursive writing practices were also evaluated for identity enactments through positioning. By genre, participants positioned most frequently overall as Self Creating Other 116 times when writing short stories. That is, they were functioning as writers crafting characters. Similarly, the four participants positioned as Self Creating Other 52 times when writing poetry as they wrote to narrate verse that often spoke of or to the reader. Frequent positioning from the platform of Self with Other while writing informational pieces (31 times) and poems (42 times) represents collaboration, such as when writers discussed and organized their blog posts.

Figure 5 represents a road map to the galaxy of positioning in affinity space. General rules are that “Self” is the foundation for all other positions. Yet, without the “Other,” “Self” would not exist (Bakhtin, 1981; Holquist, 2002). While coding, I came to think of “Self Creating Other” as “Writer Creating Other” and “Self with Other” as “Writer with Other Writers.” Intertextuality is defined as references to other texts, most frequently popular culture representations. Self/Other categories, akin to grammatical “person” are explained as follows. When a participant speaks only as “Self” with no sub-codes, s/he uses second person singular or plural in blog posts. “Self as Other” is when the participant speaks as the character, in first person singular or plural. “Self in Other” depicts the participant speaking in third person singular or plural, akin to the character s/he has created. “Static” refers to a commonly held understanding, repeated theme, or stereotype, while “Tacit” embodies unintentional positioning of oneself or another.
**Intertextuality**—Denotes cross-references in language to other texts or types of texts whether quoting directly, indirectly, or simply alluding to them.

**Self/Other**—Self/Other is an umbrella category for four distinct subcategories that highlight types of positioning:

1. **Self as Other** in which the participant positions him/herself in the place of the Other.
2. **Self in Other** in which the participant positions him/herself in similar fashion to the Other.
3. **Self Opposed to Other** in which the participant positions him/herself in opposition to the Other.
4. **Self Aligned with Other** in which the participant aligns him/herself with another.

**Static**—Reinforces a particular belief, idea, theme, or position that is adhered to and articulated over time. This includes the expression of a stereotype, spiritual theme, or popular culture ideal.

**Tacit**—Includes both unconscious and unintentional positioning that occurs as an effect of a piece of writing (Davies & Harré, 1990; McVee, Baldassarre Hopkins, et al., 2011; van Langenhove & Harré, 1993).
**Derrick. Finding Himself Online.** As noted prior, Derrick enjoyed the interactive nature of blogging. Not surprisingly, his positioning within the blog space reflected that fact. His most frequent positioning was from the Self with Other platform, referring to other bloggers in their enacted roles. In speaking aloud, Derrick positioned from the Self platform, often enacting his identity as an athlete. As he switched topics from offline speech to his online short story, he also altered his positioning.

Table 9: Positionings, Derrick

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self Aligned with Other</th>
<th>Self as Other</th>
<th>Self in Other</th>
<th>Self Opposed to Other</th>
<th>Intertextuality</th>
<th>Static</th>
<th>Tacit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Creating Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self with Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a group conversation of short story mentor texts, Derrick discussed the Static concepts of setting and narrator within a short story, demonstrating positioning as Self with Other, candidly sharing his knowledge of story conventions. When comparing use of third person voice in writing to third person in speech about oneself, he mused that it was “creepy,” even as mentor text discourse. Discussing another mentor text, a poetry slam video, he positioned again as Self with Other, aligning with other writers, including the writer of the mentor text. As the group made meaning about the love poem, Derrick considered whether the author was “stuck” in love and in the poem’s language how “you could hear it...you know how he felt.” Although he positioned as a young man knowledgeable about romance, Derrick decidedly did not share a love poem. Instead, he read one that he had written earlier.
Colors
Bananas are Yellow
Apples are Red
Grapes are Purple
Watermelon are Green
Dragon fruit is Pink
Raspberry are blue
Then why are Orange Orange?

For three or four minutes, the group sat and laughed. Again, from the position of Self with Other, he engaged in interactional positioning with the affinity group. This moment was exceptional for Derrick because he received an immediate, positive response. While his short story had received comments requesting clarification or corrective feedback, the poem had received far fewer comments overall. As a blog post, this peculiar poem may nudge its audience into a second-order position to challenge it. The confusing language draws in the reader, perhaps in an attempt to make sense of its statements or to wonder whether dragon fruit exists. Ultimately, the joke is on the reader, because the poem is not about fruit, per se, rather fruit flavored, chewy candy, which explains why “raspberry are blue” and the singular orange is orange, with the referent being the unwritten “flavor.”

Derrick was one of several bloggers who wrote a Kinship Poem. As detailed by Dr. A. W. Tatum, Kinship Poems are a five-step shared poetry-writing activity for two people that involve the second writer taking a word from the first half to develop his/her half. For Valentine’s Day, we began with the word “red;” Derrick wrote his Kinship Poem with Coco. As she described the color and related it to love, he took a different turn.

01 The Color Red
02 The Color red is like blound there are many red color.
03 When you see red I think of Death.
04 Change
05 Out
06 leave
07 Open
08 Run
Derrick gave the color intensity and action with a short list of verbs (lines 4, 6, 7, 8), leaving the reader with a sense of urgency. From the platform of Self Creating Other, he reflexively positioned as Self as Other, a fleeing being. Derrick positioned Coco as initial author (line 3), and refutes her position with his interpretation of red as death (line 3).

Derrick spent two sessions writing his informational piece, which merged his athletic interests with his writing. Self Creating Other fuses with Self in Other. Derrick writes as a sports analyst, interactively aligning himself with the reader, opposed to the subject, in this case, a Chicago Bears quarterback. He posted two versions, and edited it, like his short story, according to comments on the original draft. This piece is peppered with Intertextuality, for example, NFL, INT, and Chicago Bears; it is the only blog post in which any popular culture celebrity was mentioned.

**Jay Cutler The Real Deal Or A Fake?**
Jay Cutler is the QB for the Chicago Bears and he contract states that he will get 126 million dollars for 7 years and 54 million guaranteed. That makes Jay cutler the highest paid player in the NFL and Jay Cutler through the most INT with 18 last year and with his 8 years of playing in the NFL his has thrown 130 INT. This year he has been sacked 38 times and has taken a total of 256 sacked in his career. I see that in 2006 he ran a 4.77 40 yard dash but that was 8 years ago. He has had 12 fumbles last year with 75 in his career. Now you tell me if he should make all this money?

After completing the piece, Derrick discussed it from the Self platform; he was a rookie blogger as he confided his worry about retaliation. His empowerment was balanced by a good-natured fear of Cutler finding him and getting even for his criticism. How the audience is positioned is noteworthy in this piece. Statistics are foregrounded; it is assumed that readers understand NFL abbreviations and jargon, i.e. “sacked” and “fumbles.”

Derrick had timorous interactions with the other young men, who knew each other from school. When he did enter conversations, it was briefly, face-to-face, and often to joke about
something. While Derrick encountered success and the “fun” he was seeking as a writer in broader affinity group interactions, one-on-one conversations were somehow more difficult for him. He positioned himself with Donald from the platform of Self with Other and retreated after Donald did not respond. In one interaction, Donald asked Derrick whether he ever played “Arabian Knights” video game. It was a Tacit invitation to join the second affinity space of a video game. Derrick glanced at Donald’s screen where it was visible, quickly replied “no,” and returned to what he was doing. Self Creating Other, a blogger writing poems, took precedence over Self with Other, potential gamer in a new affinity space. In an interview, Derrick detailed his disinterest in video games.

01 Derrick: Ya, video games don’t really interest me.
02 Pigozzi: “How about Web-based games?”
03 Derrick: “Never.”
04 Pigozzi: “Xbox?”
05 Derrick: “I have an Xbox. I don’t really use it. I do homework.
06 Sports. That’s it.

He immediately expressed his indifference upon being asked (line 1). When asked further probing questions about video games (lines 2, 4), he responded in similar fashion, privileging the completion of homework (line 5) over playing games.

Derrick’s comments on the blogs of others remained consistent with his Self with Other positioning of light-hearted prankster or joker. For example, in written comments of another participant’s attempt at a companion poem that featured a love story within a poem, he wrote, “I like how you end the story with the end.” On an informational piece rife with complex technical explanations of a Hadron Collider, Derrick simply stated, “Your story had some nice facts in it.” The only comment he made in which he requested further information was on the short story written by Donald. It was as succinct as his other comments: “How old was the school.” [Sic].
He timidly positioned as a friend, demonstrating interest and inquisitiveness in the writing of a peer on the blog space.

Derrick approached blog writing most often as congenial author, creating characters in a sympathetic, agreeable manner. Other identities included sports columnist, poet, and humorist. Character conflicts across and within his blog posts were quickly and tidily resolved. In positioning with other writers, Derrick was also agreeable, and relied on simple, Tacit stratagems to convey his meanings.

**Mina. Love, Loss, and Lessons.** The tragic natures of Mina’s characters were, according to her, all constructs of her imagination. Although she reported in her interview that she enjoyed writing short stories and poems because she liked having something that she felt she was good at, Mina actually wrote very little on her blog. Her pattern during the meetings of the digital collective was not unlike a newspaper section editor. She would greet the group, write a bit, discuss creative writing topics with others, navigate among online poetry sites for her blog posts, and then observe the others while they wrote, clicking to read blogs as new items posted. She often stayed after the session ended to continue using the computer while she waited for her mother to finish work half an hour later. Throughout the process, Mina positioned herself almost entirely as Self Creating Other, an editor, often writing blog posts in opposition to her readers.

**Table 10: Positionings, Mina**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self Aligned with Other</th>
<th>Self as Other</th>
<th>Self in Other</th>
<th>Self Opposed to Other</th>
<th>Intertextuality</th>
<th>Static</th>
<th>Tacit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Creating Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self with Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While she wrote very few pieces, what she did share was impactful. Mina alluded to having difficulty resolving plotlines and maintaining a consistent point of view. “What if I don’t know what to say?” she asked me on the third attempt to edit her story.

01 Proprioception
02 They say that it takes only seconds for your entire life to flash before your eyes.
03 But I do not see myself scraping my knees at five or sneaking out of the house at fifteen. I don't see places that I once knew or hear the melodies of songs I once played. I do not see my mother's face or yours.
04 All I know now is the air around my body making my head feel heavy and the pull of the upcoming impact.
05 I didn't jump; that would require a lack of both cowardice and narcissism, something that I do not have. I simply understood my fate when I felt calloused palms pressed into the small of my back. Their intentions were just I suppose.
06 My stomach churns. There is someone screaming. They are screaming for me. I want to tell them that there is no need for that, that I am okay. I promise.
07 My skin itches as if the pavement is already imbedded into it, as if gravel is already mixed into my blood and caked underneath my fingernails. I curl into myself, my cement bones becoming stiff.
08 The buzzing of a thousand flies fills my ears, and my eyes are wet. I wish that I was crying for you. I am crying for myself.
09 The buzzing is angrier now.
10 I should have gone to church more. I should have held you more. I should have known. I should have I should have I should have.
11 ... 
12 I am floating now.

Mina positioned herself as Self Creating Other, Self as Other. She was writing from the stance of bitter protagonist, one far older than her current 16 years, as she graphically narrated her own death. The reader is tacitly positioned as bystander, witnessing the tragedy. When she ruminated that their intentions are just, I suppose (line 13) she positioned as Self Aligned with Other, despite that fact that the character did not jump. Instead, she felt calloused palms pressed
into the small of her back (lines 12-13). In other words, she displayed agreement with the decision of those who pushed her from a fatal height. Emotionlessly, she acknowledged a carefree culpability and the fundamental fact that life would soon end: “I am okay, I promise” (line 16). Regret soon emerges, along with a second order position, rejecting her situation, placing her in opposition to Other with the statement, “I should have held you more” (lines 24-25). Ultimately, she returned to Self as Other, reflecting as final words, “I should have known. I should have I should have….,” (lines 25-26). Even a mentor text is positioned in this story with the buzzing of flies (lines 21, 23) as Mina later disclosed later.

She consistently supplied mentor texts for her own writing. When questioned about “Proprioception,” she explained why she selected a particular mentor text, in this case, a poem.

I think Emily Dickinson. Maybe “I Heard a Fly Buzz”? I think that’s what it’s called. This lady, she was dying, waiting to see God. That’s what it’s about. I wanted to write about that feeling right before you fall, or land. Where you just fly. She was dying.

Regarding poetry, Mina made meaning from a poetry slam video about unrequited love in an enlightened manner. As she positioned as Self with Other, poetry slam specialist among other poets, she noted in discussion how slam poetry has dramatic aspects, “He does perform. He uses his tone of voice, gestures, the way his voice rises—” She maintained Self with Other position as she described how the author’s sentiments shifted in the poem.

01 **Mina**: Yeah, he refocused his feelings on her. He was obsessed
02 with her.
03 **Pigozzi**: Obsessed?
04 **Mina**: Yeah. But he transferred from objects to her.

She supported her claim of obsessed love (line 1) with evidence of the author’s refocused feelings (line 1) and transference of fixation with objects to preoccupation with the poem’s subject, a woman (line 4).
Her own poem explored similar emotions. In writing, Mina shifted to the Self Creating Other platform, positioning as Self Opposed to Other, a lovelorn laundress, as she developed her theme of losing love.

01 **Elegy**
02 As my heart
03 slowly dies
04 I have come to know

05 Of the silences
06 that fill my nights
07 and capture your breath
08 with the semblance
09 of a goodbye

10 And it is without grief
11 that I lie myself down
12 before you
13 to fill the vacancy
14 that you have stored up
15 in your roofless home
16 Therefore I ask
17 that you do not spare me
18 of the wretched verses
19 that flutter from bloodied lips;
20 a godless prayer
21 that you utter
22 as you return
23 smelling of dryer sheets
24 and another woman's perfume

Desolately, she draws tainted love back to her (lines 11-12), denying that she would not listen to rhymes said to her (lines 17-18), yet meant for another woman. In her opposition, she aligns with the recipient of her broken love who has returned (line 22), even as her heart slowly dies (lines 2-3).

In a poem written together with me, Mina elaborated on a holiday theme most profoundly, beautifully, and ultimately borrowed from a poetry blog. Although it is written by hand, the user log from Mina’s laptop indicates that she searched numerous poetry terms and
sites. Instead of writing a Kinship Poem inspired by the word imagery, she incorporated Internet use to enhance her response, thus adding another detailed step. Mina’s path to structuring Intertextuality, whether acknowledged or not, is traceable through her online navigation records. Mina perused poems by Walt Whitman, Pablo Neruda, and Mina Loy before finally using a term in the second half of the following poem:

**Kinship Writing**
The princess
who fell into sleep
Eve's great sin...Johnny
Crisp, tasty
fall doughnuts
Hot, cinnamon
drink
Holler.

...Eve's great sin;
er her wish to be
something more
than dust woven
with God's breath
in the wake
of the rising sun

Mina’s Internet history revealed a search on www.goodreads.com for “carnal apple woman filled burning moon” which is from a Pablo Neruda poem. The line “dust woven with God’s breath” appears on the quotes page generated by the search engine for the original search term, which she also pursued in other sites, such as www.poetryfoundation.org and www.poemhunter.com. From the Self Creating Other platform, positioning as Self as Other, a well-versed Internet poet, Mina’s online research was complex. She eventually capitulated by adapting the term in her own writing after studying it contextualized in varying ways.

Mina was generous and consistent in her comments on the writings of others. From a Self with Other platform in blog comments, Mina took a positive yet clearly authoritative stance. On a Kinship Poem by Derrick, Mina stated, “The way you ended this with the sequence of single
words was great.” Of Rosie’s post on Rosa Parks, she wrote, “Very nice information piece.” Of Donald’s anime piece, she wrote, “I like that you used pictures to make clear comparisons.” Of his materialism piece, she wrote “Awesome article! Just be sure to proofread for typos.”

Mina returned repeatedly to the author/editor role. She wrote almost exclusively as Other; she modeled how she could become her characters, even as she shared them with other bloggers.

**Donald. Platforms Become Stages to Generate Characters.** Donald’s discussion and reports regarding motivation reflected an initial concern with being treated fairly in the blog space. In his posts, Donald wrote adeptly from the platforms of Self, Self Creating Other, and Self with Other. Additionally, Intertextuality and unintended Tacit positioning appeared multiple times in his work. He most frequently positioned his characters when writing from a Self in Other and Self as Other stance: he either became his characters or empathized with them.

**Table 11: Positionings, Donald**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self Aligned with Other</th>
<th>Self as Other</th>
<th>Self in Other</th>
<th>Self Opposed to Other</th>
<th>Intertextuality</th>
<th>Static</th>
<th>Tacit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Creating Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self with Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A unique feature of Donald’s blog posts was his habit of addressing the reader directly. His titles, topics, and prose reflect his identification with his audience, and interest in establishing parameters for engagement.

Hello everyone my name is Donald, i am a 14 year old African American male i'll be turning 15 on…This is actually my first time blogging but I would like to tell you some things about myself before I actually start to post things about other topics. I feel it would be important for the people who are reading my blogs/posts
to get a chance to know more about me so please do not criticize about some of
the things i like just because you do not like them or you think they are stupid.

Donald was the only writer who self-identified by race. He wrote from a platform of Self
when he openly addressed the reader in expository pieces. He was himself as author. Then, as he
developed his characters, Donald shifted to Self as Other. In his short story, he invited
collaboration from the onset. Entitled “A story with a title that has yet to be created (help me give
it one)” the story’s second paragraph begins with “hey, yeah you...... the one reading this, I can
probably guess what you are think ‘what type of person jumps on top of someone who is
sleeping?!’ ” Donald juxtaposed his welcome with an entreaty to consider his curious situation.

The story’s details humorously explore education, romance, and the prospect of marriage
in a futuristic context. As writer, Donald became Sato Woods, a college student awakening to
bizarre circumstances, who continued the asides with the reader. He positioned as Self as Other,
moving through Self in Other as he interrupted with another aside.

1 But before i go any further I bet many of you want to know more about the
2 school well here i go

3 Purity university is a prestigious college that many students try to get into, The
4 facility was founded in the year.... hmm lets see here, if i recall correctly it
5 was founded the day i turned 9 or so my mother and numerous other people
6 continuously tell me, but anyway back to the school! Purity is only one of the
7 top 3 universities in the entire world (the other two being in Akihabara, Japan
8 and Russia) unlike most universities Purity has been built ON ITS OWN
9 ISLAND meaning we are technically "not associated with ANY country" since
10 the island was artificially made.

11 (BACK TO THE STORY NOW!)

Worth mentioning are the status markers employed by Donald in the story, including
“prestigious college” (line 3) and “only one of the top 3 universities in the entire world” (lines
6,7). The university built its own island is positioned as a world-class institution (lines 8-9). Thus
is the reader also interactively positioned as fellow student, entitled to a glimpse of the life of a popular Purity scholar.

In all of his posts, Donald adroitly juxtaposed binaries of real and imagined, reader and writer, Self and Other. In comments and in commenting on the work of other bloggers, his Self with Other stances present an interesting series of contrasts. He positions as Self Aligned with Other as frequently he positions as Self Opposed to Other. In his Valentine’s Day poem, Donald wrote balanced between the platforms of Self Creating Other to Self with Other. Again, his words speak directly to the reader and possibly about the reader. The allegory of “heart skip a beat” came from a mentor text he had used, found in his online history search log.

A poem from down below! (get your head out the gutter .-.)
Do you call it love if a person makes your “heart skip a beat”
How do you know if you truly love someone
you see from the way i see it….
most of these men don’t truly love the women they are with
they just play with her heart which i don’t understand
all the same you see that fool that played with her heart
just ruining another man’s chance
why they do her like that?
why you ruin another man’s chance
what did he do to you
he did nothing
he doesn’t even know you
but you are the fool who broke her heart
she may never love again
didn’t even get a chance
just to hold her hand
like a true man would do…..

Within the context of affinity group in face-to-face interactions, Donald wanted to be certain that he understood all that was expected of him. In turn, he extended his technological knowledge to others during every session. From the Self Creating Other platform, he repeatedly demonstrated proficiency with the computer, and further in the affinity space.

01 Donald: How do I download and post this?
02 Pigozzi: Ooh, I like. Okay, let’s see if it’ll let you do it.
Donald: [He has already selected the meme.] Here. It is in downloads.

Pigozzi: Now, select what file. I don’t know if it’ll take it from the downloads. [I point to the pull-down on that laptop.] Oh, awesome.


Donald: I knew how to use the Mac, it’s just that this desktop is different.

Donald was able to stylize his blog posts sooner than and with more functions than any other blogger in the group. In this exchange, he had located an image for an informational piece (line 1). As discussed previously, Donald was reluctant to discuss why he had chosen to embellish any of his posts, despite the fact that he had quickly grasped multiple complex functions necessary to efficiently navigate the affinity space (line 3). He needed assistance transferring some navigational skills (lines 7-8). Donald often intuitively stepped in to assist other participants, sometimes two at once. On another occasion, he juggled blogging with a video game and showing it to his friend, Jason.

Donald: Arabian Knights (video game)’s awesome. I grapple with this thing [toggles screen, points to his last post]. I can just look at my blog and just see it. I can get around the WiFi. What happened with [name]?...quoting song lyrics.

“Something stinks, but I’ll tell you.” [He returns to blog.]

He displayed the game to his friend who is typing and then moves back to his blog (line 2). A third space, YouTube, where he is playing a music video is brought in (line 4). As he encountered difficulty with the game, he again navigated to the blog (line 5). As he interacted among two affinity spaces and a music site, he positioned as Self with Other gaming, Self Creating other writing, and Self as he selected new music. Both participants were typing blog posts as this conversation occurred; both were also listening to music with earbuds.

Instead of trading handwritten web addresses or by sending hyperlinks, Donald and Jason often used one another’s laptop to initiate searches for textual resources. Together on the Self with Other platform, the two bloggers positioned themselves and each other as equals. They
functioned as teammates, perhaps as competing gamers on the Arabian Knights site, as music fans on YouTube, and finally, as collaborators in research and colleagues in writing.

Positioning again from Self with Other, Donald offered another type of guidance when he could no longer help his friend resolve his great difficulty with features of short story structure, especially punctuation. In so doing, he positioned himself as mentor or advisor, and, tacitly, his friend as struggling, failing at his task.

01 Donald: [to Jason] Tell Grace.
02 Jason: [to Donald] Why do you think I need so much help?
03 Donald: Why you gotta do something that doesn’t have an end?
04 [Donald and Jason are arguing about grammar again. Jason is laughing.]
05 Donald: I think you should ask Grace to help you with this. You should ask her—
06 [Pigozzi]
07 Pigozzi: About what.
08 Jason: Aw, he’s— [downplaying his own difficulty writing]
09 Donald: Writer’s block.

Jason, in second order positioning resisted the position as failing writer (line 2). Donald explained his reasons (lines 3-6). Jason continued to resist, but stopped as soon as Donald named the issue of writer’s block (line 9).

More so than any other participant, Donald positioned from a platform of Self with Other as he assisted other bloggers enacting their Self Creating Other positions. Incidentally, Donald was the participant most likely to traverse other boundaries, including online and offline, and his positioning was as fluid. Another time, I asked Donald where he (physically) was when he posted a particular entry, and he answered “Google.” He had composed his original blog post on paper, typed it onto Google Docs, and uploaded it to the blog—all while physically seated in the reading clinic room. Coco had stared across the room as he wrote, and identified with his approach of beginning on paper.

Donald: [Looking at Coco, shrugs] I usually just write it on paper.
Coco: Me too. First. [Coco also brings in her writing.]
Pigozzi: Why is that?
Coco: It’s easier.
Donald: It is easier.

For an informational piece about the Static notion of how people accrue objects to portray their values online, Donald approached writing in a completely opposite manner, accessing all of his sources, organizing his typed notes and composing directly onto the “Publish” area of the blog site.

1 That is all I would like to Say about myself now on to the ACTUAL topic I would like to talk about, Chicago!!
2 Some may say that life is Chicago is easy and let me tell you one thing about most the people I see. They are being controlled by an Alluring mistress, MATERIALISM! down below i will show you a little post I found on the Internet. The pictures are, of course, intended to incite envy. They reek instead of desperation. The young men and women seem lost in their designer clothes, dwarfed and dehumanised by their possessions, as if ownership has gone into reverse. A girl's head barely emerges from the haul of Chanel, Dior and Hermes shopping bags she has piled on her vast bed. It's captioned "shoppy shoppy" and "#goldrush", but a photograph whose purpose is to illustrate plenty seems instead to depict a void. She's alone with her bags and her image in the mirror, in a scene that seems saturated with despair.
3 Perhaps I'm projecting my prejudices. But an impressive body of psychological research seems to support these feelings. It suggests that materialism, a trait that can afflict both rich and poor, and which the researchers define as "a value system that is preoccupied with possessions and the social image they project", is both socially destructive and self-destructive. It smash the happiness and peace of mind of those who succumb to it. It's associated with anxiety, depression and broken relationships. There has long been a correlation observed between materialism, a lack of empathy and engagement with others, and unhappiness. But research conducted over the past few years seems to show causation. For example, a series of studies published in the journal Motivation and Emotion in July showed that as people become more materialistic, their wellbeing (good relationships, autonomy, sense of purpose and the rest) diminishes. As they become less materialistic, it rises."
4 Do you see now many people here consider themselves better just because they are wearing a pair of $800 "rocks".
5 I really don't see as to why anyone would spend that much money on a pair of pants that will be destroyed or stolen in the next 24 hours, in my opinion that money they spent would make the life of one of the many homeless people lives a lot better just go on YouTube and search giving a homeless man money prank but before you think it is fake they actually gave him that money and later on his life became bette because many of the people who aren't controlled by "materialism" actually care but that number of people is dwindling at an
37 alarming rate!

In this post, Donald positioned from the Self with Others platform. In Self as Other position, he became social analyst, aligning with the reader (line 3), but writing against his topic, the “Alluring mistress” of materialism (lines 4-5). Intertextuality appears in the form of high-end brand names, Chanel, Dior and Hermes (line 9), as well as the hashtag, #goldrush (line 11). Common Internet sites (line 6), a hyperlink to Instagram (line 9) and “YouTube (line 33) are mentioned, and other hyperlinks (lines 17-18 and 24, underscored) provide the reader with deeper evidence of, as well as a roadmap to his claims. Toggling between the blog site and linked sites heighten the interactivity of the post. Admitting that he could be projecting his prejudices (line 14), Donald further supported his arguments with evidence from correlational studies (line 21). The informational post finishes with an oblique call to action (lines 32-33), noting that money spent on assisting others (lines 35-36) rather than on consumer products would be more compassionate by improving the quality of life for homeless people (line 35). In all, the post positions the reader tacitly. In the final sentence, “many of the people who aren't controlled by ‘materialism’ actually care but that number of people is dwindling at an alarming rate!” (lines 35-37) hints at cynicism. The author understands that even a sympathetic audience will not always act with integrity.

For his short story, Donald had difficulty determining a topic, but was interested in doing a family history. Because researching his genealogy online would be the first step, he could not begin this blog post on paper as he had previously done. Two samples of conversation about family research reveal familial identity exploration interests of Donald. As Self with Other, he brainstormed the prospect of creating a digital family tree, telling a rambling story that was eventually about his brother while he scrolled the wall of Jason’s Facebook page, viewing Jason’s recent social history.
Donald: When I research it, there are a lot, lot of [his last name].

Pigozzi: You need to narrow it though.

Donald: I don’t know how we’re all actually related or not.

Pigozzi: But the more you narrow it, the more you can find out.

Donald: I don’t see where—

Jason: What about your dad?

Donald: My father, he’s not a [last name]. He’s a [another last name].

Jason: Who’s the [last name]?

Donald: My mother.

Jason: How do you know this much already?

Donald: Mostly free trials, to hold the space. You have to have a credit card for when those 14 days are up, then it will kick in right away before you cancel it.

Pigozzi: So you knew that by experience.

Donald: Yes. My brother. He got an offer from Netflix for a while, then he decided to keep it. And then it keeps charging his card until he cancels it.

Pigozzi: Did he like it?

Donald: Yes. He kept it. Most free trials will ask for credit, so when the trial is up—you can get burned.

While other participants casually discussed family and family events, Donald only did so in one isolated conversation. From the Self with Other platform, Donald stated that in initial attempts to trace his family lineage, he could not ascertain to whom he was related (line 3) because he did not recognize many of the names that appeared on the website (line 1). He clarified that he was searching his mother’s side (line 9) and that his father’s name is not his surname (line 7). The topic then shifts to online use of credit cards (lines 11-13). For the first time, Donald mentioned his brother who used a credit card on a specific site (line 15). The older brother is tacitly positioned by Donald as a pathfinder who shared his experience (lines 15-17). The tale is also cautionary: Donald learned that free trials require a credit card that will be charged once the trial period ends (lines 19-20).

Instead of writing about his actual family, Donald chose to create one for his short story, one that he had difficulty to a resolution. When asked if he were ready to post the final version,
he posed the question, “Maybe I want to continue to add to it?” Later, he added, “I need to keep working on the story, then a poem. Finishing the story is hard.”

01 Donald: I still need to come up with a title.
02 Pigozzi: You need to resolve it. There’s something going on between two forces there and you need to confront one or the other and resolve it. And then have your falling action—
03 Donald: No, I mean for your comment. You need more than that for the title. [He is speaking as if I had said my written comment aloud.]
04 Pigozzi: [Confused.] Huh?
05 Donald: You suggested for a title for it something to do with promises made and/or broken. I don’t know how to choose it.
06 Pigozzi: And you’re saying you need more than that?
07 Donald: To come up with a title.
08 Pigozzi: I need to see how it ends, cuz it could be ‘Disappointed Pain’ or ‘Green Mellowness’ or ‘Lively…Duplicity’ [laughing] depending on how you choose to end it.
09 Donald: [Laughing. Three minutes of silence pass while he types and re-reads his story.] But no one said anywhere that she did remember.
10 Pigozzi: But you did. You still are having qualms and regrets.
11 Donald: To me, let’s say the main character, Sato—I don’t think anyone could forget that. I never said she didn’t forget it. You don’t know that yet—

Positioning from the Self Creating Other platform, Donald was concerned with creating an appropriate title (line 1) while I was focused on the structure of his writing (lines 2-4). Donald then verbally referred to a written comment about the title for the story (lines 5-6) adjusting his positioning to Self with Other. As he drew me into conversation, he repositioned me from writer to interlocutor. After I made suggestions about and for the title (lines 12-13), Donald returned to writing (lines 15-16) and repositioned again to the Self Creating Other platform. As he returned to discussion of the story (lines 16-20) he also returns to the Self with Other platform to explain his characters to me.

Moments later, place and space again overlapped as he came across the room to read my laptop screen instead of looking on the blog site. He verbally repeated the comment he had

130
written on my poem, which was, “I have no words.” He returned to his laptop, and continued looking on YouTube and Google, looking for ideas for his next piece.

Conversing with the affinity group, his words often presumed that the other interlocutor had read the blog post to which he referred in speech.

01 **Jason:** [Reading Donald’s post.] That’s bad. That’s bad.  
02 **Donald:** One mistake.  
03 **Jason:** That’s bad.  
04 **Donald:** That from the man who would not participate in the school spelling bee.  
06 **Jason:** [Scrolls but does not edit anything.] I couldn’t.  
07 **Donald:** Why didn’t you do it then?” [Turning the laptop to Jason.]  
08 **Jason:** [Nods no.] I didn’t.

From the Self with Other platform, an exchange with Jason began interactively, with both on equal footing as writers. After Jason pointed out errors in Donald’s story (line 1), Donald made a second-order positioning move to the Self Creating Other platform. He resisted Jason’s positioning of him as he referred back to his own writing (line 2). Donald then repositioned to Self with Other, criticizing his friend’s reluctance to participate in an academic contest (lines 4-5). Jason then engaged in second order positioning as he defended himself (lines 6, 8), but declined to take action to edit his work (line 6). Jason remained in Self with Other position, refusing a return to Self Creating Other, even as Donald gestured to him to edit his own work from his computer (line 8).

Donald frequently spoke aloud about what each was writing, although apparently making changes to the posted text was optional for them. The roles reversed in another interaction.

01 **Donald:** If you’re going to post this for real, it needs a lot more punctuation.  
03 **Jason:** [Running his finger along each line] Comma, comma, punctuation, comma, punctuation, punctuation.  
05 **Donald:** Opening’s like a huge—it needs more organization.  
06 **Jason:** I started to read your comments. [Donald deleted these 07 immediately.] What’s up with that?  
08 **Donald:** Shoot—and then comes the name? I like that you made that—
09 **Jason**: What’s wrong with Jackson [inaudible] … Oh wait, and you 10 forgot that [pointing at a line of dialogue on screen].

11 **Jason**: [Highlighting something.] Delete.

While Jason composed a first draft of his story, Donald again positioned as Self with Other, offering critical guidance while standing behind him, reading Jason’s screen over his shoulder (lines 1-2). Both shifted to Self Creating Other as they typed and deleted comments. This conversation became a thunderstorm of first and second order positioning as they argued and repositioned each other. After that dialogue, Donald’s positioning returned to Self with Other, even as he was opposed to Other, and resolved with Self Aligned with Other. Ultimately, the interaction was summed up succinctly in a written comment on Jason’s blog: “You should proof-read your story but it was ‘ok’.” Donald frequently referred to viewing the comments on his posts and wanted to know whether I could also see those same comments from the dashboard. “Where do you go to look at comments other people have posted on your post? What they have to say about your post?” He wanted to read what was written about his work as soon as it posted, yet he expressed an anxiety in his writing and self-reports about what others would think of the variety of comments on his pieces.

However, with other affinity space participants online, as Self with Other writers, Donald was kind, and did not stray from Self Aligned with Other. “I like this poem it was good, keep up the great work!” he wrote in response to a poem by Coco. He finished the comment with the emoticon :-( Of Mina’s poem, he said, “I am at a loss of words….” He left instructions for the reader in comments for his own anime piece, “For the first set of images go on google and search Anime then search cartoon. For the second set search Anime sunset scenery and cartoon scenery.”

One mentor text for the informational piece was a segment about Buffalo Soldiers from Ken Burns’ “Our Greatest Idea” national parks documentary. The video is 11.5 minutes. Mina,
Rosie, Derrick and Jason appeared interested. They watched it, but did not comment, although they had spoken during other video segments. At 3:36, one participant decided that he would rather finish writing a post and returned to the computers. Donald silently mimicked the same actions as soon as video ended, although it was clear that a discussion would follow.

01 Pigozzi: How many of you knew anything about Buffalo Soldiers? [22 second pause.] Wow. Okay, they actually were hired after the Civil War. They were sort of finalizing the fighting with Native Americans. Most had been driven west already. It wasn’t a positive approach in any way in terms of…civil rights history of the United States--
02 Donald: [Just moved back to the table.] Um hmm. [He is acknowledging that he is aware of the early history of civil rights movement, but not elaborating.]
03 Rightfully so, Donald could show a pride in his knowledge, and his ability to share that knowledge in writing. While still traversing place and space in the affinity group and engaging others in the room around him, his final blog post compared anime art to cartoon art.

01 Donald: [Angling his laptop so that we can see—I am on the other side of Jason.] Look at this image. Real or fake? [He is showing a path that faces the sun.]
02 Jason: Real.
03 Donald: [Shakes his head no and smiles.] Fake.
04 Derrick: Really?
05 Donald: It’s a drawn image….In my, my post I put in, blog post that the scenery is detailed, still in the comic section, but I love it though.

Donald positioned from the Self with Other platform as he engaged as many participants who could see his screen (line 1). By interactively questioning others about images he had selected (line 2) he could preview for himself their experience as readers of the blog post he was constructing (lines 7-8) from the platform of Self Creating Other. In addition, his subject matter,
comparing cartoons with anime, explored perceptions and interpretations of Static popular culture ideals of animation (line 8).

More than any other blogger, Donald possessed a creative dexterity for writing across and between genres, just as he communicated across and between place and space. He narrated in a voice that mirrored his own, as well as in the voice of variety of other speakers. He created conflict in his writings that were not necessarily resolved, and would occasionally take a step back to speak directly to his audience. Donald employed Intertextuality from the platforms of both Self with Other and Self Creating Other, and navigated a variety of positions in doing so. He relied on more Tacit than Static devices to support meaning, and challenged other writers as they created posts, or as he interpreted the posts of others.

**Rosie. Writer Fluidly Creating and Collaborating.** As an author who selected a wide range of topics and stances, Rosie’s positioning reflects that. She most frequently positioned from the Self Creating Other platform and aligned herself with the positions of other writers. This is apparent in her comments and in her many references to Tacit beliefs. As she discussed in an interview, she was motivated to relate meaningful experiences, mostly in writing without visual or technical embellishments. When asked about her use of images or hyperlinks, she said, “I don’t like to use them.” She said that, instead, she preferred to use her time commenting on the blog posts of others because “You get to evaluate and appreciate what they write.” She also said that only the most memorable experiences inspire her to write. Despite what people said or how they said it on comments on her posts, those comments never changed the meaning of the piece for her.
Like Donald, Rosie often worked beyond the pace of other bloggers. The first morning that the group worked on poetry, Rosie had completed her first poem before many of the others had completed computer turn-on and log in.

01 Pigozzi: [To Rosie] Did you start a poem of your own?
02 Rosie: Yeah.
03 Pigozzi: Okay. Let me know when you’re done.
04 Rosie: I’d like to show you it. [I start to read.]

Rosie interactively positioned from the Self with Other platform as she verbally responded to me (line 2). Her positioning fluidly shifted to Self Creating Other as she displayed the poem she was completing as we began talking (line 4). As a participant very focused on her writing, Rosie often appeared to not want to converse with me or others beyond asking or answering cursory questions.

01 Rosie: [She has raised her hand to get my attention. Her voice is almost inaudible.] Grace?
02 Pigozzi: Yes? Question? Concerns?
03 Rosie: No, not really. Is it all right to do more poems? I’ll let you know if I need help in a minute.

Positioning from the Self with Other platform, she sought my attention with a gesture (line 1), asked a quick question and resumed her position back on the Self Creating Other as soon
as she had assurance that she could write more poetry. Rosie did not request help that day. Instead, she continued writing.

01 Pigozzi: [Rosie is scrolling through the various categories on the blog.]
02 And Rosie, if you wanted to write another poem, if you’re done—
03 Rosie: Can I do more comments?

While I spoke to her, Rosie was taking measure of the blog posts (line 1), transitioning from the Self with Other platform to Self Creating Other positioning in order to write comments (line 3). As a frequent commenter on the posts of others, Rosie made it part of her literacy collaborative routine that involved more actual writing than any other participant. She spoke very little overall, but she would arrive, engage in writing, and often typed and navigated online for two hours without stopping for a break. In the affinity space, Rosie could transition seamlessly from the Self Creating Other to Self with Other platforms.

During an early group discussion, we were attempting to pinpoint exactly what makes a short story appealing and memorable. Rosie immediately shared a tragic example from her own life that related directly to the text, which is about a child’s experience of the death of a pet.

01 Pigozzi: It’s very normal but it touches us in very individual ways. And in very differing ways, we respond to it. Do any of you have a similar experience?
04 Rosie: With my dog. It [got] ran over. And then, it was alive, but it did internally bleed. So then we had to take him to the hospital. They revived him three times, but he still got dead.

Speaking in front of the other participants from the Self with Other platform, Rosie very succinctly recounted an event that marked her (lines 4-6), yet she understood that writing about its impact on her could produce a powerful short story. Like Donald, Rosie had a preference for organizing ideas on paper, and then transferring them to either a Word document or directly to the blog, as she did with her short story, which she developed from notes of her reaction to the mentor text.
Pigozzi: [Glancing at paper open before Rosie.] Oh you’ve already written something. Okay. [Reading] Good for you!
Rosie: [Typing] This one? [She has written an end to her short story.]
Pigozzi: We can edit.
Rosie: [Shakes her head no.]
Pigozzi: All right. You finish that. If you can, within the next short time, half hour or so. Do you have any ideas? Do you know your poem?
Rosie: [Shows me one she also has written on paper] Okay.

Again, Rosie appeared to avoid shifting to the Self with Other platform from the Self Creating Other platform in order to continue writing. She was typing (line 3) as I checked on her. She refused an offer for assistance with editing (line 5), and then gestured to more handwritten notes that she intended to transfer to the blog (line 9). Her short story appears below.

Lucky
...it may have been a beautiful sunday, but not in my eyes. the most terrible thing had happen to me that day.
03 my little dog, Lucky, he was the best dog ever. i don’t know how i would ever live without him. i’ve had him since i was 2 years old. i’ve never thought that he’d be gone. until, that one day, that sunday. my father thought that my dog Lucky was trained, but he wasn’t.
08 it was time for my god mother to leave but my mother had to open the front gate for her. so then Lucky ran out but we didn’t think anything about it because since my dad told us that he was “trained”. i still can’t believe that we trusted that. as soon as my door opened Lucky ran and across the street he went. a car ran him over, but the car didn’t even stop to see if my dog was ok. 13 it was a hit and run. my dad told us that Lucky got revived 3 times but at the end he had internal bleeding. it was impossible to save him. he was blind and was INTERNALLY BLEEDING. i was still overwhelmed by all of the news. i can’t believe he is gone. Lucky would be the best dog that i’ve ever had. no other dog can replace my sweet little Lucky. oh, how i miss my little pup. he was simply the best. you will always be loved, Lucky.

From the Self Creating Other platform, Rosie positioned as Self Opposed to Other (lines 6-7, 10). Mentioning twice that her father assured the family that the dog was trained when it clearly was not also represented Tacit positioning, suggesting blame, especially with the use of quotation marks around “trained” (line 10). Overall, the narrator positions as Self Aligned with Other as her character related the heartrending story of the loss of a family pet. The Static,
repeated notions of “he was the best dog ever,” and “no dog can replace my sweet little Lucky” (lines 16-17) define her depth of feeling, illustrate her loss, and provide perspective to her grief.

Thematically, the violent nature of the hit-and-run accident (line 12) of her short story foregrounds her powerful poem. In it, Rosie wrote against the brutality that she sees on a recurring basis in a variety of contexts in her life.

01 Why Violence?
02 why violence?
03 can’t we speak
04 with violence the days are always bleak
05 we may write a speech
06 but it would never teach
07 many people die
08 but why try
09 it would never stop
10 even if there is a cop
11 it would never end
12 it has now become a trend
13 can’t we live normal lives
14 come on now put down that knife
15 we can’t walk out of our doors without fear
16 we all have a tear
17 why violence?
18 bang, there it goes again

From the Self Creating Other platform Rosie wrote as Self with Other. Tacitly interrogating the reader, positioned as a companion by use of the pronoun, “we” (lines 3, 5, 13, 15, 16) the narrator asked why life has become so violent (line 17). As the speaker in the poem, her voice became Self in Other, vilifying the now Static, ubiquitous bloodshed that has not just touched her own life, but has become constant (line 12). From the Self with Other platform among members of the affinity group, when Rosie shared the poem aloud, the initial reaction was stunning.

01 Rosie: [Reads her self-written poem, which ends with silence in the room. Nobody knows what to say. Mina begins snapping her fingers, and everyone follows suit.]
04 Mina: [To Rosie] Wow. That was really good.
05 **Pigozzi:** Are you referring to specific historic events in your poem?
06 You mentioned a speech. You also said that many people die. It could
07 be—
08 **Donald:** Cop killings
09 **Pigozzi:** Or, the speech—who could that mean? Bobby Kennedy?
10 **Derrick:** Who is Bobby Kennedy?
11 **Pigozzi:** [There is a pregnant pause in the air while I wait for someone
12 to volunteer the answer.] Bobby Kennedy, ran for president in
13 the 1960s, after—
14 **Mina:** John’s brother?
15 **Derrick:** He was shot in a hotel kitchen after a speech—
16 **Donald:** Like Martin Luther King was shot on the balcony of the
17 Lorraine Motel in Memphis.
18 **Rosie:** That is who I meant. Or Obama writing a speech.

Before her affinity space peers, Rosie positioned herself as social justice agent, and was
positioned by affinity space participants as historian (line 18), and as expert poet (lines 2-4).
Notably, the interaction—dialogue as well as finger snapping—around the poem afforded other
writers to an immediate opportunity to share their knowledge, personal experience with the topic,
and how the poem had impacted them, through gesture, if not in words.

Rosie wrote three other poems that express frustration and limited, or perhaps
dissatisfying, resolutions to family difficulties.

1 **Expectations**
2 My mom has high expectations for me
3 It feels good to know that
4 But when you make a mistake
5 It feels as if you are failing that person
6 My mother expects me to be able to do anything
7 Yet, I can take so much

8 **Life**
9 Time flies
10 I remember being 3 years old
11 Where has time gone
12 I wish I can relive
13 But you only get one chance in life
14 Make the best out of it
15 Don’t get mad, depressed, or sad
16 There is a lot to live
17 So don’t waste your time on dumb things
18 Treasure your life
19 Don’t waste it

20 Light
21 Life is like a light
22 So keep it on while you can

Again, from the Self Creating Other platform, Rosie stepped into the balance to the Self with Other platform, becoming Self in Other, narrating her own thoughts, as adolescent and as daughter. Her thoughts are in opposition to inner forces (lines 4-5, 6, 7, 15, 17, 19), and then aligned with inner forces (lines 3, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22). In lines such as “Treasure your life/Don’t waste it” and “Make the best out of it” (lines 14, 18-19), she additionally becomes Self as Other, tacitly positioning the reader as recipient of her motivational musings.

Mina and Rosie wrote a Kinship Poem together. As Rosie wrote the second half, she subverted Mina’s upbeat love lines into an existential question that alluded to violence and pain.

01 Kinship Writing
02 A red flavored lullaby
03 Beneath the brightness
04 Of the city-streets
05 That house
06 You and I

07 Red isn’t always kind
08 Yes, it may mean love
09 But not always
10 You bleed red and it hurts
11 So, what is the meaning?

From the Self Creating Other platform, positioned as Self as Other, Rosie questioned the other author’s characterization of red as representing a lullaby (line 2) in a bright metropolis of lovers (lines 3-6). In the second half of the poem, she posits that red is also the color of blood and pain (line 10). Her Kinship Poem is a dark and terse response to a more lighthearted portrayal of romance.
Rosie’s informational piece about Rosa Parks could be considered Intertextuality in its entirety. Written without a resource search, Rosie wrote it based on background knowledge. She relates the story of the day Parks rode the Montgomery, AL bus, and did not give up her seat.

01 **Rosa Parks**
02 Rosa Parks went threw a lot of things within her life. She went threw it all
03 along. She stood up to what she believed. She was entitled to what she believe
04 in. She didn’t let nobody break her down. She wasn’t going to go down
05 without a fight.
06 Rosa was a really independent woman. She was fighting for her own rights, as
07 everybody else was. She always stood up for herself. At this time period it was
08 the segregation moment. It was the moment where everybody was separated,
09 blacks got separated from the whites. It was all a mess.
10 Rosa was tired from working hard at her job. She got on the public
11 transportation bus. Where all white people sat in front and blacks sat in the
12 back. Where blacks had to stand up if a white didn’t have a place to sit. She
13 just wanted to go home. So she decided to sit in the front of the bus.
14 Rosa got in trouble for what she did. But she wasn’t going to stop her from
15 standing up for her rights. She didn’t stand up for a white person and that is
16 what got her in trouble. She had said that she was really tired from work and
17 she needed to sit down. She wouldn’t stand up. She had gotten arrested for
18 that. Rosa is a very important person in history. She didn’t let anybody take her
19 down with out a fight. She was a memorable woman. Whom should never ever
20 be forgotten about. Without her we wouldn’t be the people that we are today.

The tone and details of the piece are Static (lines 3-4, 13). Positioning from the platform of Self Creating Other as Self Aligned with Other, Rosie presented the assertions that Rosa Parks was entitled to believe what she believed in, and that she made an overt decision to sit in the front of the bus, which currently commonly accepted facts about the incident. The post connects vague thoughts together, drawing the reader, presumed to be aligned with the author, into an explanation of segregation as “It was the moment where everybody was separated, blacks got separated from the whites. It was all a mess” (lines 8-9). Again, “Without her we wouldn’t be the people that we are today” (line 20) assumed that the reader knows the specific details of Rosa Parks’ story. The phrases “Rosa is a very important person in history” (line 18) and “Without her we wouldn’t be the people that we are today” (line 20) both suggest how Rosie identified and
empathized with Rosa Parks. Themes of agency and social justice were strong in her writing.

This piece prompted an intertextual conversation about a contemporary of Rosa Parks, and a Young Adult book.

01 Pigozzi: Have you read *Claudette Colvin*? I will even try to find it for you.
03 Rosie: I never heard of her.
04 Pigozzi: She’s another girl, she actually preceded—she went before Rosa Parks in refusing to give up a bus seat. She was a teenager—
06 [Walks to YA section of reading clinic shelves.]
07 Rosie: Really? I’d read that.
09 Young Author. Is it *Twice toward Justice*? [I copy the link from the Goodreads review and post it in comments to Rosie’s piece.]

I positioned interactively with Rosie from the Self with Other platform. I suggested a book (line 1) and looked for it to lend her (line 6) after her enthusiastic comment about how she would read a book (line 7) about a contemporary of Rosa Parks.

The Rosa Parks piece was the only one for which Rosie selected an image. While she did choose an avatar to illustrate her space, Rosie had remarked that she was still uncertain about the procedure to download an image onto a blog post, but that she wanted to use one.

01 Pigozzi: Rosie, how about you? You gonna illustrate? Or, are you gonna add it to the new one?
03 Rosie: Yes. [Rosie has already gone to Add Media, downloaded, and saved the same image to two different locations on the laptop.]
05 Pigozzi: [Laughing.] You’re working on something new every time I look over here. [Rosie is searching photos for another post.] And you know how to do it?
08 Rosie: I got it right here. [She clicks and downloads and smiles shyly.]
09 Is it better here? [Saving to desktop.]
10 Pigozzi: Or documents. Anywhere you want, really, as long as you remember where you put it so when you go to upload you can find it again. [Rosie adds one more.]

She positioned as blogging expert from the Self Creating Other platform as she selected and saved a new image (lines 3–4), accessed a second image (line 8) and demonstrated that she did in fact know how to upload it to the blog (line 12).
On the last day of the workshop, Rosie posted four pieces, three of them poems. By the tenth session, she was composing directly onto the blog with no handwritten prompts. She conducted several image searches for the informational piece, but toggled back several times between the individual posts she worked on simultaneously.

01 Pigozzi: [I walk back across the room and am drawn over to Rosie’s laptop, where she is several paragraphs into an informational piece that she began writing maybe half an hour ago.] Oh my gosh, you’ve got this whole thing. [I sit beside her and read it. I watch her switch to a new post and begin. I move back to the table to my laptop.] Are you writing another poem?
07 Rosie: Yes. Two. [They are already posting.]

Because she was engaged with the laptop during the entire exchange, Rosie positioned from the Self Creating Other platform. She typed her informational piece (line 2) at the same time as she added lines to her poems (lines 3-4). Her responses were brief because she multitasked, instantly publishing new posts as she edited an older one begun the same morning.

Rosie’s first attempt at writing a blog post was most illuminating for all practices within the affinity space. She requested guidance on how to set copy onto the blog, but her comments during belie her beliefs about what writing meant, at least for this project.

01 Pigozzi: [Pointing to screen.] You write your body copy in here. You can make up a title, or put in “working copy” or something, but then you’ll put it all together and you’re going to write a short story.
04 Rosie: It’s all the same thing. Update. Log in, writing the story.
05 Update. Add more stuff.
06 Pigozzi: What do you mean?
07 Rosie: Shrugs. I mean it’s all writing.
08 Pigozzi: Typing?
09 Rosie: No. [Pause.] All of it. [Gestures to laptop.] It’s all the writing.
10 All the parts. With the computer.

Rosie defined the Self Creating Other platform with her words. She stated that at least to her, writing was the sum total of many operations: creating a rough draft (line 1), refreshing the screen, log in, writing, and amending (lines 4-5). Writing is not simply organizing, composing,
editing, and revising, the practices in which I viewed the participants as engaged. According to Rosie, writing also entails mastery of several laptop functions, and how to access and navigate the blog platform.

During her exit interview, when asked whether creative writing on blogs would work in school, Rosie immediately responded from the Self with Other platform as a student that it would. “Yes. Kids like to write. We could write more.” When asked what made the connective literacy collaborative an enjoyable experience, Rosie responded in a roundabout way about audience, acknowledging her affinity group peers, and not the affinity space.

01 Rosie: I love writing. [She smiles as if that were a silly question.]
02 Pigozzi: What more?
03 Rosie: Taking my passion for writing, and you look at them [She gestures to the other kids across the room.]
05 Pigozzi: So you think about your audience too.
06 Rosie: Yeah. [12 second pause. I am waiting for her to say more. She doesn’t.]

Rosie positioned most frequently from the Self Creating Other platform, and she did so again in this exchange. She expressed harmony and conflict in her characters, and relied on primarily Static devices to secure meaning. Calling her desire to write a “passion” (line 3) and describing what she feels as a responsibility to share her writing with other young writers (line 4) reveals a sense of obligation not just for writing, but for its dissemination and possibly collaboration too.

Looking across the four cases, the affinity space as interpreted in interaction beyond writing in the Self with Other platform was surprisingly the site of a moderate number of positionings across all three genres, as were discussed in analysis from data located in field notes and observations, beyond blog artifacts, yet nonetheless within the bounds of the affinity space. However, in interpreting only the blog posts, Rosie, Donald, Mina, and Derrick each positioned most consistently as authors, that is, they spoke to their affinity space audience on the blog as
Self Creating Other, and communicated with one another as Self with Other. Of the informational pieces, poems, and short stories written for “Words in Winter,” poetry represented the genre with the most positioning shifts. Participants wrote as Other; individuals positioned themselves in the place of the Other, “becoming” that character or speaker. Static and Intertextual references served to reinforce and at times to clarify intent or meaning. Participants also positioned far more frequently as Self Opposed to Other instead of Self Aligned with Other in the popular poetry category. In contrast, within the genres of short story and informational pieces, participants wrote as Self in Other, expressing themselves in a fashion similar to the Other, sharing commonalities with the characters and narrators whom they created.

Informational pieces in particular included blog posts in which participants tacitly positioned as they wrote against the consequences of consumerism, racism, violence, and apathy.
V. DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Manufacturing Discourse. In the last chapter, I presented findings from my connective case study conducted over ten weeks of writing within a connective literacy collaborative. Data in the form of artifacts, field notes, interviews, and student self reports were collected and analyzed with three types of analysis with two specific questions in mind: (1) How does online writing in an affinity space affect motivation to write? and (2) How do adolescents depict their identities as they position themselves and others in a blog? Related questions considered how young authors position themselves, writers position readers, and how they position their characters. The multifaceted set of findings build a strong basis for educators who may be interested in implementing blogging activities in Language Arts classrooms or other settings.

Review of Findings

To answer the first question, I examined responses to two assessments, the Writing Attitude Survey and the Action Readiness Assessment. Based upon comparisons of means from salient questions across individual cases, a symptomology was developed that analyzed characteristics of and influences on motivation. Results were then compared to discursive analysis of blog posts. Finally, analyses were evaluated in relation to observable shifts in motivation as recorded in interview and field note data. Descriptive analysis yielded information about both characteristics of and influences on motivation. Over the course of the study, participants demonstrated an increased eagerness to share their writing, concerns with and interest in their audience, self-assignment of topics to research and develop, a desire to embellish their blog posts, and an interrogation of the purposes that writing online serves.

To investigate representations of identity in writing, I framed the findings from platforms, thematically inspired by Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1981; Bostad et al., 2004; Lähteenmäki, 2004). The three platforms include “Self,” “Self Creating Other,” and “Self with Other.” In the context of
connective literacy collaborative, “Self” was foundational to the other two platforms, “Self Creating Other,” and “Self with Other.” Positioning theory analysis indexed the practice of identity construction as participants related personal stories depicting individual events in writing, making those events comprehensible to readers by enacting a variety of positions. Rosie, Donald, Mina, and Derrick each positioned most consistently as authors, that is, they spoke to their affinity space audience on the blog as Self Creating Other, and communicated with one another as Self with Other. Of the informational pieces, poems, and short stories written for “Words in Winter,” poetry represented the genre with the most positioning shifts, followed closely by short stories. As poetry writers, the participants wrote often as Self as Other. They transformed into characters as they positioned themselves in the place of the Other. Static notions of family, romance, and life transitions, as well as Intertextual references to literature and popular culture writ broadly served to elucidate or reinforce those themes. Interestingly in the poetry category, participants positioned far more frequently in opposition to Other instead of in alignment with Other. In other words, poems generally involved a negative conflict.

To return to the first-day metaphor of the Word Factory, with its creation, “Words in Winter,” the blog is the culmination of personal literary pursuits of Rosie, Donald, Mina, and Derrick, as they became dedicated blogging specialists, skillfully crafting writings using a technology that required manipulation of materials, tools, and signs. Products of the Word Factory are as remarkable, as was participation in the practices that created them. While engaged in the generative process of writing, the four bloggers drew not only on traditional academic skills, but also incorporated a personalization into their writings that revealed a transformative aspect of the endeavor.

Positioning is a mediational activity, comprised of tool and sign. Bloggers enacted positions through discourse to represent, or encode, and to infer, or decode the meanings of
posted artifacts. Vygotsky’s (1978) metaphor of tool with its user oriented outward using interactional means to accomplish external activity is extended with this explanation of positioning. In contrast, as bloggers posted their ideas, which were visibly perceived and dialogically commented upon by others online, this exemplifies Vygotsky’s conception of sign with its user focused inward, contemplating means to carry out and shape mental functions. Texts, or blog posts in this study, are signs paired with symbols, expressed in images and figurative language. Tools are the vehicles by which meaning is made from signs and other forms of text, including memes, avatars, and hyperlinks.

Social languages, acquired through social interaction, describe and connect action and interaction in the world (Gee, 2001; Wertsch, 1998). Spaces, like psychological tools (Vygotsky, 1987; Wells, 1994) mediate the social lives, consciousness, and identities of participants. Because they contain social languages, communal memories, narratives of shared experience, and discourses of shared cultural elements, an individual’s consciousness and identity is often spatially and temporally delimited (Bakhtin, 1981; Kostogriz, 2004). Bakhtin viewed simultaneous voices and speech genres in dialogue as generative. Those voices continually have new significance as new narratives were posted and read. All language practices are negotiations over meaning. By engaging in interaction about shared events, individuals and groups dialogically mediate new meanings in new contexts and circumstances from practices, discourses, and texts that are already historically and contextually imbued with past meanings (Bakhtin, 1981; Wells, 2000). Engaging in interaction around discourse supports the construction of new knowledge. As authors shared ideas, they created meaning. The dialogical nature of language and continual negotiation of meaning underscore fluidity in the relationship of literacy and technology, signaling the importance of connectedness and generativity (Baerveldt, 2014).
Discursive practices, dialogue and writing blog posts, over time in the affinity space were analyzed in terms of dialogics and the meaningful texts of bloggers, in addition to the reproduction or production of new social space and time (Bakhtin, 1986; Hirst, 2004) as bloggers collaborated and embellished, edited or revised their writing. Identities too are dialogical and reflexive, that is, directed back onto oneself, as the view of others, or simply the Other, is necessary for authoring the self (Bakhtin, 1986). The negotiation of discourses involves the process of creating with a hybridity of language that encourages discursive identity positioning, resulting in a reflexivity as individuals identify with and through others (Bakhtin, 1981).

The process of customizing social languages, hybridizing language, is apparent in the participants’ use of Intertextual and Static positioning. Writers assumed a familiarity on part of the readers as they used vernacular expressions (e.g., Rosie’s use of “the worst thing ever” in her story, or Donald stating “why they do her like that” in a poem); referred to common stereotypes (e.g., overpaid athletes and materialistic teens); or referenced other websites and texts in individual blog posts. In this way, discourse became hybridized. If texts include all materials in the literacy environment, then background knowledge becomes a text. Intertextuality reveals efforts to integrate the social process of meaning making into writing. At the same time, Intertextuality functions as social glue, allowing group self-identification and coherence.

Donald’s use of the term “Weeaboo” in his introductory post demonstrates hybridization. He positioned and re-positioned, explaining his expectations to the reader in asides, and described his interest by what he is not. This was illustrated when he wrote: “…back to what i was saying but, I also like anime but I don't obsess over it like what people call a ‘Weeaboo’ would do.” Weeaboo, a derogatory term used to refer to overzealous anime fans, described others more obsessed with the genre than he; Donald distanced himself from the Other, yet acknowledged awareness of it in one word. The transformed result of interactions and the
combining of ideas and Discourses are also re-positionings of identity (Bhabha, 1990, 1996; Tate, 2007). By the same token, as readers shared social interests and its discourse reflects and achieves a communion of minds as language becomes blended (Mead & Mind, 1934). Most comments on posts acknowledge an understanding of and partaking in the hybridity of language.

**Connections to Educational Issues**

**Common Core State Standards**

In designing this study, I viewed blogging as a conceivable venue to initiate comprehensive change towards classroom writing practices by demonstrating how a group of adolescent writers could attentively integrate distinct attributes of home, popular culture, technology, and education through a connected learning approach in a creative writing milieu. Instead of drawing exclusively on the norms and interests of dominant culture, I sought to adopt the principles of instructor as designer, teaching design across the defined space, supporting the group as they constructed new, individual values and learning capacities elicited from their own diverse cultures and communities (Ito et al., 2013). Participants traded insights about professional athletes, television programs, and romance, as well as about more serious subjects such as grief and violence.

As Internet technology becomes ever more ubiquitous and popular with adolescent users, education policy has paid increased attention to that technology, along with writing at the same time. While policy is borne of assessment reports that indicate that middle and high school students lack solid writing abilities (Miller & McCardle, 2011; NCES, 2012; Salahu-Din et al., 2008), other educational research points to how writing has been de-emphasized in the nation’s schools (Graham & Perin, 2007a, 2007b).

Policy reports reference the value of writing for individuals, such as writing to build skills and knowledge, and for society at large, such as writing to benefit the workplace and...
economy. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) addresses the imperative to involve technology in college and career readiness with comprehensive standards for reading and writing; the added feature of multimodality in the writing standards promotes online writing as a core academic discourse (CCSSO/NGA, 2010). How teachers can support and stimulate better writing of any sort, particularly among students who may find it difficult or uninteresting (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006; Pajares, 2003) is a challenge in light of present circumstances. While engaging in this study, participants actively discussed conventions such as story structure and elements of poetry. They reported having learned and practiced them in elementary school, but that they had little experience with creative writing at school in the middle and upper grades. Donald noted that he got “stuck” because of a lack of experience with writing short stories, while Mina spent weeks reviewing the turn of one phrase for a poem.

In today’s climate of high-stakes testing, as curriculum shifts to focus on writing, one fear is that its practice will become diffused into testable skills, further narrowing opportunities for adolescents to engage in creative writing pursuits. The blog posts generated by participants in this study are mostly narrative. Authors primarily used words to portray identities and saved images and video as embellishments.

**Expertise and Technology Disparities**

Policy does not clarify how to engage students in online technologies. Yet, research demonstrates that major disparities in online abilities are related to income inequalities. Low proficiencies are also linked to deficits in literacy skills that students need for successful online reading and writing. Such trends make writing all the more difficult to teach, particularly when all students assessed generally do a poor job of communicating in online formats. Studies show that adolescent proficiencies in reading to locate effectual online sources, and critically evaluating and synthesizing that information are low to moderate (Castek, Zawilinski, McVerry,
O’Byrne, & Leu, 2011; Leu et al., 2014). However, matters such as bandwidth, WiFi connection, ease of use of sites used for research as well as for blogging, and even individual typing abilities were additional issues that shaped access to online technologies, especially during the first several sessions of this study. The possibility for equitably supporting access to technology becomes a paradox when issues of access are unique to each context and user.

Disparities in technological abilities among the bloggers in the connective literacy collaborative affected writing protocol in the affinity space. During the first four sessions, some participants required more than 15 minutes to access log in information and to often repeatedly attempt to enter the blog space. The accessibility paradox then continued to evolve. After gaining access to the dashboard, navigating the space proved difficult until all bloggers were comfortable using it. Design features obfuscated the difference between blog post space, in which writers pressed “Publish,” and comment-posting areas in which they simply hit “Comment” when sharing ideas. This often created confusion, as the following exchange illustrates:

Mina: What should I post this as?
Pigozzi: Not as a comment. New post. [She does.] We’ll check on it shortly.
Mina: It isn’t coming up.
Pigozzi: [Looking at my screen] Here it is. Right here.
Mina: What about the others?
Pigozzi: [Pointing to blog posts by others.] There’s one here, one here, and one down here.
Mina: Oh. [She scrolls down the page.]

As facilitator, I provided assistance with the log in and basic interactive features, tailoring that assistance to requests for how to complete specific tasks related to completing and posting blog items. Regularly utilizing an online blog site underscored the idea that often young people need more supports to translate and connect new media engagements toward more academic, civic, or production-oriented activities (Ito et al., 2013). Attending to the needs of writers on an individual basis helps to bridge multimodal identity portrayal in meaningful ways. Identity
portrayal as part of identity construction through writing, particularly gender, class, and race identity, is an under-researched area. Associated identity issues influence students’ outlooks toward future goals, and significantly, their perspectives on current learning and school contexts (Noguera, 2003). Exploring the personal value of writing on a blog, rather than its academic or workplace attributes demands a distinctive approach, yet has the potential to reveal unique and authentic creative writing artifacts, and can provide teachers with an avenue for inspiring better writing while empowering student learning with increased technological skills. Exploring enactments of adolescent identity and motivation for online writing supports a need for continued focused research that examines literacy supports for self-directed, interest-driven, and technologically enabled learning through the lens of equity and opportunity (Ito et al., 2013).

**Blog Space Supporting Engagement and Context for Identity Portrayal**

Blogging sustained motivation of participants for writing in fundamental ways. As they became comfortable with the format, participants showed motivation as they talked about and then shared their writings online; expressed a take-up with audience, whether that meant concern with how others may respond, or even if a post would get read; self-assigned myriad tasks from locating mentor texts to creating rough drafts by hand; embellished posts with images and typography; and interrogated meaning and purposes for writing.

Enactments of identity as tracked through positioning theory were decidedly more one-sided. Transitory roles melded and evolved in written pieces, revealing glimpses of identity portrayal as storylines developed. Rosie, Donald, Mina, and Derrick positioned fluidly as authors, connecting with affinity space peers on the blog as Self Creating Other, and communicated with one another as Self with Other. Most positioning acts occurred within the genre of poetry. Participants wrote as Self as Other, positioning themselves in the place of the Other, “becoming” their characters. Static and Intertextual references supported intent or
meaning. Participants also positioned far more frequently in opposition to Other instead of in alignment with Other in the popular poetry category, building negative conflicts into the poems. In the other genres of short story and informational pieces, writers positioned as Self in Other, representing themselves as having commonalities with their characters. With informational pieces in particular, writers often tacitly positioned in opposition to the consequences of behaviors such as consumerism, racism, violence, and apathy as they wrote against those themes, disrupting what they viewed as common Discourses.

Derrick tells a droll tale of justice. He is a humorist in one poem, action figure in another. He is sports commentator in last piece. Mina, in her account of the last thoughts of a murder victim reveals more Intertextuality. She is scorned lover in her poem. Donald is utopian student of the world; man with integrity in one poem; social commentator and scientist in informational pieces. Rosie tells an impactful personal narrative. She is mood navigator in poems about her role as daughter. She is also poetic social justice worker. Her informational piece has the voice of historian. Of all themes, complex, romantic relationship issues figure heavily in participants’ blog posts. Although most are only beginning to encounter this developmental stage in their lives, they were still able to perceive the world beyond their immediate identities and write about issues that they considered vital and appropriate to a group of young people to which they felt they belonged.

From the perspective of researcher, to replicate this study in a school, or possibly in an after-school setting, the teacher or blogging facilitator must first reflect with students about issues that interrupt or possibly divide classroom learning from their everyday learning, and how a blog could merge those important contexts. The facilitator would then explore with students what types or genres of writing represent meaningfulness within students’ lives: in their valued relationships, practices, and culture. Using online networks, students and facilitator could then
collaboratively design and implement tasks centered around forging linkages that mediate the defined disconnects of areas such as peer and home culture or outside interests and academic subjects (Ito et al., 2013). As participants become more comfortable with using the online format and with one another, they also benefit from sharing the responsibility of collaboration with one another’s writing. As the role of teacher shifts into the background and feedback is generated among students, new writing practices become independent from traditional academic structures, and therefore, empowering.

**Theoretical Connections to Digital Research Fields**

When writers collaborate online, reactions to one another’s texts allow for understanding and reinterpretation of meaning as writer and readers negotiate meaning in their everyday writing practices. When blogging, writers are compelled to carefully and thoroughly consider ideas about purpose, forms, and audience. Writers take a more thoughtful approach because of the presence of other group members who are likely to give immediate suggestions and critical feedback about how a posted piece of writing fits into the general purpose of the online culture (Magnifico, 2010, 2011). As authors in this study collaborated, creating written pieces, their intersubjective action generated novel and unique meanings. From new meanings, further meaning potentials emerged in a novel and unique social context stylized by its users (Lähteenmäki, 2004). Rosie demonstrated a search for meaning in her last three poems about tension, conflict, and resolution of discord at home. In an interview, Derrick described how understanding of his own characters changed based upon requests for clarification of his short story. In this instance the processes of learning and thought was distributed across not only individuals within the space, rather as across all participants, tools, and contexts (Leander et al., 2010). In this sense, blogging can be considered a more social and collaborative act than more
traditional forms of interaction because it focuses both on the purpose and process of the group, rather than the singular act of an individual (Leu et al., 2009).

However, in the context of blogging, writing and reading, as well as interpreting meaning, varies from one person to another. The ongoing “comment issue” is illustrative of this variety. Mina interpreted the lack of comments on her posts as a lack of meaning; that her affinity space peers did not understand her poetry. She believed that her sophisticated mentor texts and subsequent writing exceeded the knowledge of her audience. Yet, her interpretation was based on her understanding that written blog comments represented comprehension. Her peers had in fact demonstrated command of meaning in oral discussion of her poem. Perhaps comments, and the act of commenting on one another’s posts is more akin to social media interaction’s “likes,” representing an acknowledgment that an item was read, but not necessarily interpreted in any precise way.

By writing about one’s life events and experiences, participation in blogging enables a writer to appropriate cultural resources that contribute to becoming a literate individual. However, young people continually construct cultural resources from an individual capacity for meaning potential and a related viewpoint on practice. Constructing one’s own resources required time and focus for the participants in my study, particularly with writers who began with less experience navigating online. For example, Derrick was well acquainted with Google and Wikipedia. By clicking hyperlinks to newspaper accounts of the Chicago Bears, he expanded his toolkit of resources. Mina discovered numerous poetry blog sites by following hyperlinks from Goodreads.com as she searched the title for an anthology. The transformation of any learner’s mental resources changes how s/he perceives the world. As all young people are different, the constructions differ, and such differences transform the process itself. Other members of the culture are transformed in how they perceive it, too. Inspiration and modification
are ongoing. They are inherent characteristics of all communication and action. Creative changes transform the resources of individuals and the sociocultural practices and contexts in which they occur (Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1994).

As James Baldwin said, “You write in order to change the world ... if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way people look at reality, then you can change it (Baldwin, 1971).” As blogging affinity spaces define forums for participants to become conversation partners as well as active listeners, a transformative shift in writing practices occurs. Instead of writer and passive reader, those relationships have evolved into more active roles: similar to orator and responsive audience. In any case, writers received direct and often immediate feedback in the affinity space. Further, blog features, such as user-friendly dashboards provide a vantage point and digital imprint for clearly observing the dynamics of how writers consider and interact with their audiences. The communicative, interpersonal nature of writing is visible in online spaces (Lammers et al., 2014; Magnifico, 2010, 2011).

In any affinity space, a span of identities and discursive practices meet. In these sites for shared learning, each writer was developing his or her set of discursive practices, learning to appropriate the voices and cultural practices of new communities in a semiotic apprenticeship (Gee, 1992; Wertsch, 1991), one in which the four participants learned to interact with one another’s writing with their own written feedback, in a format that they had not previously explored. As one learned how to manipulate an aspect of the blog space, s/he shared that information via either explanation or demonstration. In this process, the social and individual continually recombined into new forms; identities and societies are continually generated. In the space between discourse and practice, identity construction, like positioning, is a mediated action, a point of resonance and alteration that produce subjectivities and the agency of the individual to adopt these practices (Hirst, 2004; Wertsch, 1998).
Connected learning is a major framework that undergirds my work. Other extant literature relevant to multimodality and its relationship with motivation and identity portrayal includes multimodality research as it enacted in both in school settings and out-of-school literacy practices. This body of literature reveals some of the rich interrelationships between motivation, blogging, and adolescent writing. Research on affinity spaces focuses on the intersection of these interrelationships. The interactive and defining nature of blogging is elucidated within the construct of affinity space, and inspires further exploration of the associations between blogging and motivation, and blogging and identity.

Connected learning experiences aspire to increase individual and collective user knowledge, and are viewed as introductory experiences to more traditional public or civic involvement. In this study, bloggers shared their interpretations of life events and perspectives as they created written artifacts. With a focus on creating new media that equitably reaches and enables youth who would not otherwise have access to opportunities that build collective capacities for learning that online communities present, connected learning spaces often overlap with affinity spaces. Designed connected learning experiences share many practical similarities with affinity spaces. Like affinity spaces, connected learning environments need not be online, but connectivity is relevant to affinity space conceptions. Both contexts are interest-driven and peer-supported, but connected learning is more academically oriented. (Ito et al., 2013). This study, with academic elements of creative writing fused affinity space and connected learning. Participants began with varying degrees of access to and expertise with using laptop computers and blogs. Over time, individual posts on the blog reflected growing expertise with the format, whether that meant independently publishing a post for the first time, or embedding media to enhance the experience of the reader.
Connected learning provides an opportunity for inquiry that is most relevant to the lives of participants, one in which they can explore their own interests. A superior learning experience is less about manipulating a tool than it is about knowing how to use that tool to leverage resources and meaning, affording students the chance to engage in learning in which they have personally invested. Creating writing to share in an affinity space, bloggers interpreted text through the evaluative interaction of comments and discussion. In the process, as meaning evolved and changed, re-evaluation, or in some instances, revision of a text occurred.

Steps in the meaning making process varied significantly from blogger to blogger, genre to genre, and mode to mode in my study. For example, on Valentine’s Day, participants interacted around romance and love poems, searching for them online and sharing them, if they chose. Afterward, they engaged in writing Kinship Poems, assisting one another, developing ideas from one another’s words. In this way, they constructed new text. Remarkably, participants did not privilege one mode over another, they declaimed found poems, they elected to write Kinship Poems by hand, and the next week, typed them on to the blog space, where meaning continued to emerge as they composed comments on the final versions of others.

With “Words in Winter,” the blog space was both affinity space and connected learning environment. Users determined their own levels of participation, and therefore, the context for their writings. Although the focus on interaction among participants makes it more affinity space-driven, the process of self-selecting topics of interest for writing also aligns my study with connected learning. For example, an informational piece for Derrick was a brief study of one football player’s stats, while for Donald, one of his informational pieces was an intricately detailed and researched study of the Hadron Collider. Mina wrote a short story about death, as did Rosie, yet the contexts for each, shocking murder and tragic accident, fiction and personal narrative, were vastly different.
Descriptive frameworks created by Ito et al. (2010) around modes of participation with media focus on genres of practice. Hanging Out, Messing Around, And Geeking Out (HoMaGo) describes stances of engagement rather than types of individuals. In generating topical ideas and organizing ideas for blog posts, participants frequently engaged in HoMaGo. One affinity group conversation, initiated by Donald, is illustrative of the construct of HoMaGo within my study. Hanging out, the process of getting together and being together occurred one Saturday morning in late February. The participants were reminiscing about cartoons, and Mina and Donald conducted parallel searches for “Ben Ten” episodes, where they found some while “hanging out” on YouTube, and briefly watched introductions to various episodes.

01 Donald: [Names them] Ben Ten, Ben Ten Omniverse, Ben Ten Alien Forces.
02 Mina: [Finds same site.] It was Ben Ten Alien Forces. Ben Ten the first one?
03 It was pretty good; it was okay. And then Generator X. I was really into it too.
04 Donald: Here it is again, Generator X. [He is looking up old cartoon titles on his laptop.] Now those were some fun episodes. [Switches to Airbender.]
05 Mina: It was really cool. I thought it was awesome.

From an offline context, they had made plans to meet online, which they did (line 2), and then their parallel paths diverged (line 5). They seamlessly integrated media into their informal interaction. Messing around, Mina navigated back to the blog to write while drawing Rosie into conversation about another cartoon. Mina remained within the affinity space. Meanwhile, Donald opted to independently “mess around” further on YouTube where he found links to several anime sites. He ventured to other affinity spaces as his media interaction intensified. Donald was seeking relevant pathways to new information and inspiration for his final creation, the informational piece about anime. As his writing progressed, Donald located himself in several affinity spaces. His outside connections with blog texts are demonstrative of authenticity and further intentional writing. “Geeking out,” committing to the quest for high levels of knowledge in one genre or media, Donald spent the following two sessions researching anime to
attain expertise to share in a blog post that would merit individual status and credibility within the blog affinity space.

The same example demonstrates how Donald developed the kernel of an idea from conversation and fused peer and popular culture learning in a way most meaningful to him. Participation in affinity spaces is interest-driven (Gee, 2005). While Gee did not address the relevance of social interactions in affinity spaces, connected learning environments are similarly interest-driven and do address social interactions. Connected learning examines the potential of meaning making created when social, cultural and technological supports are combined in ways that allow young people to think, integrate, and transform interests across and between civic, career-specific, and academic domains (Ito et al., 2013).

**Implications for Preservice and Current Teachers**

Technology produces a context of uncertainty for educators. Opportunities for online interactions unfold exponentially even as technology continues to develop and evolve. As seasoned users, adolescents often seem to have a better grasp of the transformation of relationships fostered by new literacies and new technologies. Implications for educators include acceptance of the fact that continual change demands a refining of practices that transcend context in order to navigate the social landscapes of literacy, both on- and off-line. Teachers have to make strategic use of existing tools that facilitate notions of teaching and learning to foster and support a learning environment in which students are able to interpret, synthesize, and understand how their meanings converge (Jenkins, 2006; McVee, 2011).

“Words in Winter” authors became more comfortable with technology and a wider audience. They began using a wider range of online formats and incorporated these new practices into their writing, thus expanding their knowledge of what writing can be. Simultaneously, as writers represented and positioned themselves by means of newly discovered
rhetorical and the tools of visual devices they began to draw from a larger ideological discourse (Gee, 1996; Street, 1984). Their representations and positionings show them now situated in wider literacy discourses of social and cultural identity.

With adolescent writers, blogs and their inherent affinity spaces indeed present a platform for recounting stories, making meaning about topics and events relative to their lives, fostering community and social awareness, and activism, ideas that are key to observing both motivation and identity articulation (Kinney, 2012). With further coordination and an expansion of themes and topics within an educational setting, they can also be interdisciplinary (Huffaker, 2005).

Blogging offers access to primary sources of information, often included as hyperlinks on original posts, along with multiple interpretations of complex events. By reading others’ blogs, students benefit from their peers’ reflections and have the opportunity to see emerging ideas rather than only final, edited compositions (Lapadat et al., 2010).

Technology’s altered landscape often provides an audience that can be ubiquitous and infinite. The bloggers in this study demonstrated awareness of this notion, as they made pacts, in asides with the reader, as Donald had; or simply wrote with a specific group in mind, as Rosie had. In his post about a fictitious trial, Derrick discovered that storytelling is no longer unidirectional. His story evolved as a result of comments posted to it. In expressing a worry about Jay Cutler reading his post, Derrick also acknowledged that interactive technologies create a digital afterlife. Comments on a digital story, along with the story itself, are time-stamped and endure indefinitely in cyberspace. Bloggers learn that writing can become a constant negotiation of function and audience, and that both will continually change with technological updates and new users.

An ideal medium for literacy development, blogs can help students transition to using a wider range of online formats. From YouTube, Donald discovered new anime blogs, and
subsequently found a new illustrator on one blog. Yet even as the young authors of the present study increased their comfort with both technology and wider audiences, they kept abreast of new post ideas and switching genres by keeping handwritten notes. Rosie and Donald transitioned away from this stage to composing directly on the blog. Mina and Derrick adapted by keeping notes on their iPhones. Because of its popularity, possibilities inherent in the format, and relative ease of use, blogs remain equitable for all age groups, interests, and genders, and still provide a medium for learning programmatic skills (Huffaker, 2005). Whether as a contemplator of others’ blogs, or as featured writer, participation in an affinity space serves to help bloggers collectively understand the array of practices in a unique writing space, as it enriches users’ personal bonds with one another, while simultaneously supporting their literacy development (Gee, 2013; Graham & Perin, 2007b). As Rosie mused, “It’s all the same thing. Update. Log in, writing the story. Update. Add more stuff… It’s all writing.”

Creating Affinity Space in School

Pragmatically speaking, creating an affinity space that is both anonymous and digitally secure for work with adolescent writers involves creating a hybrid construct of affinity space. School and district Internet policies vary; parental consent and student assent are often required to share the writing of minors in a public space. Once consent and assent are attained, writers themselves could be given the option to share all or some blog posts fully publicly, within the school, or perhaps on a class-by-class basis on a closed circuit. Writers may opt to share works in progress and solicit feedback from other students in the form of comments, or post only final versions for comments. As a security measure, the real names of bloggers can be concealed by masking: connecting them to teacher email addresses. Students then access the blog and interact under the guise of invented user names.
Affinity spaces often revolve around sharing transformative works with other participants who serve as an active and interactive audience for these creations. Often writers adapt writing plans and plot lines in response to the formative feedback provided by the embedded audience (Curwood et al., 2013; Magnifico, 2010, 2011). Within the Discourse or discourse of the blog, power and position were revealed through the integration of acts, words, beliefs or attitudes and social identities, in addition to the positions taken by writers. The mastery of D/discourse found in the language of the affinity group determines which posts are privileged by participants in a variety of contexts (Gee & Green, 1998; Gee, 1989). It could be that Mina’s posts received few written comments because of her use of D/discourse.

Harré (2011) considers how acts of tacit positioning within speech actions engender power relations, despite how positionings can be both ephemeral and contradictory. By the same measure, written blog posts appear to do the same thing. Bloggers tacitly wrote against oppression in an empowering manner. How written blog posts are perceived as meaningful depends upon online interactions between storylines and positions taken by interlocutors or writers. The claim that Harré makes that positioning acts can create a sense of community and language choices can be used to define identities is extremely relevant to blogging. The community is the affinity space, and the language choices, although mutable in meaning, are recorded as blog posts. Participants may differ in ability to achieve specific positioning acts, yet they all succeeded in varying degrees, depending on their location in the social order (van Langenhove & Harré, 1993). Participants wrote to depict acts of power, victimization, and protest as dialogue within written pieces from the Self Creating Other platform or addressed those acts directly with the reader from the Self with Other platform.

All participants were agentive as they strove to educate the audience about their interests, and simultaneously positioned as experts on their topics. At given times, Rosie quietly positioned
herself as civil rights leader while Derrick was sports analyst. Mina was curator of poems, and
Donald was anime aficionado, NOT a Weeaboo. Positionings were tangible and observable in
the affinity space as interaction occurred around them, in particular as writers organized and
discussed their characters as they wrote. However, shifts in position were apparent only in posted
text. In some cases, locating the appropriate vocabulary or tone was elusive. Mina spent an entire
class session navigating dictionary and rhyming word sites, seeking the right title for her story,
which became “Proprioception.” Rosie shared that her poetry was more of an exercise in naming
her feelings and, at times, dismissing them. Donald intended to write a lengthy dystopian short
story, and found himself “stuck” at various points, including organizing the plotline, and titling
the piece. Derrick had no difficulty in selecting topics for his blog posts until he attempted
informational writing. Experience with the genres appeared to be pivotal for writers. Until they
were accustomed to the necessary elements of each category, participants often had difficulty
beginning—much less completing—their work. Conversely, having had experience composing
their writing on and interacting via computer supported the opportunities for literacy in the
group. As participants gained skill using the site and increased their research potential, posting
writing across genres was simplified; writers could spend more time editing or revising because
less time was required for basic Internet actions.

Positioning is relevant for teachers to explore student writing because it helps them track
and reflect on their own identities as writers so that they can model and support students to more
explicitly articulate their own identities. Perceptible positionings within a classroom and in
written text are key to indexing antecedent perspectives involved in becoming literate in a
particular social group. Tracking positioning in writing over time enables the reader to trace the
development of a piece of writing, shifting morality or values of the writer, and how the writer
may “read” his or her audience. The role of teacher shifts in a blogging project. Instead of being

165
the conduit for enculturation, the writing itself becomes the mode of cultural transmission of the affinity space culture. Rosie is exemplary of this; she transferred her knowledge of Rosa Parks, reproducing what she could remember, and assessing the importance of her place in history. Parks is transformed as a cultural icon to personal hero. Her posts more implicitly demonstrate how her perspective of civil rights history is dynamic. Instead of understanding a movement frozen in time, Rosie tied that knowledge to the present in her poem about violence and owned it for herself in the Rosa Parks post. More generally, Donald did the same in his materialism piece which unabashedly rejects the culture of consumption and provides alternatives to it. On the blog as affinity space, writing is clearly a social act; participants take up specific locations in relation to the posts that they post and read. Positioning theory examines how participants construct blog posts, the discourses represented within the posts, and throughout the interactions, the positions are revealed.

**Motivation to Blog**

Interpreting how adolescents regard teachers’ viewpoints, as well as their own intentions, offers an understanding into how students perceive their own motivation (Ata et al., 2014). As connected learning and affinity space converge, as adolescent students write on blogs, the act of socializing in connected environments (Ito et al., 2010; Lammers, 2011) may well play a role in motivating participation, as much as sharing a novel venture plays an initial role in generating interest in the format (Gee, 2004). Whether by spoken conversation or written comments, interaction becomes the connection that keeps students interested and engaged, as in the case of Derrick, who wanted to make his audience laugh, an accomplishment that traversed blog writing when he read it aloud to the group. For him it was the connection, which he made in both areas of the affinity space, online and offline.
Yet, every participant wanted to impact her/his audience in a variety of ways, suggesting an internal aspect to motivation in the context of affinity space. Other facets of motivation, such as articulating the desire to share, self-assignment, embellishment of writing, and interrogation of meaning underscore a profound, internal desire to succeed. Akin to students showing motivation toward academic success (Ata et al., 2014; Dennett, 1989) participants displayed individual effort and sense of responsibility during each meeting. Indeed, as bloggers posted whatever they wrote, regardless of whether the product elicited comments, or whether those comments were corrective or adulatory, they continued writing, trying new genres or add-ons such as images. Their motivation appeared to align with an internal sense of believing that something merited sharing, and simply moving to the next idea if the one prior did not garner attention. Creating a context that allows for writers’ sense of control, belonging, and competence supports motivation for academic success (Gray & Rios, 2012; Krapp, 2005; Van Ryzin et al., 2009); additionally, the same features appear to support motivation for success in an affinity space.

Key related findings contrary to the literature involved bloggers writing an insufficient quantity of posts (Homik & Melis, 2006), placing a low value on the comments of others (Halic et al., 2010), and how offline events and developmental shifts influence adolescents’ online behavior as much as their online conduct influences their offline events and developmental processes (Davis, 2010; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008).

First, although bloggers were encouraged to post from school or home, they did not. Instead, some, including Rosie and Donald, did preparatory handwritten work outside of the affinity space. Mina and Derrick brought notes and links to books and book sites on their iPhones. In this way, all writers were able to post adequate, and in some cases, copious short stories, poems, and informational pieces.
Likewise, much of this section centers on discussion of blog comments. Mina and Rosie expressed acknowledged frustration with a lack of comments on their work. Derrick used comments to guide edits of his work. At the same time, Rosie expressed a preference for using her time to comment on the blog posts of others “to evaluate and appreciate what they write.” Donald went further, operationalizing his comment spaces for himself, clarifying ideas that he felt were unclear in posted versions of his pieces. Comments were meaningful and useful to writers in differing ways. However, they did not appear to constrain or foster major revisions for any blogger, very likely because as comments posted, writers had already moved on to a subsequent narrative or genre.

Finally, little clear evidence of how experiences offline and shifts in developmental processes influenced bloggers’ online behavior as much as their online behavior influenced their offline events and developmental outcomes could support such a finding in my study. Instead, the aforementioned, “post and move on” approach was consistent with bloggers. For most participants, written interaction was a consideration, but did not limit blog posting. Further, participants enacted their identities from numerous platforms. While all were grounded by a sense of Self, online behavior for the most part was articulated from a platform of Self Creating Other, while offline experiences tended to be enacted from the Self with Other platform. One may have influenced another, but it is nearly impossible to index exactly how an online creative writing or search experience could impact developmental outcomes as strongly as how life events affect their blog writing. Technological mediation of life events, however, is a germane factor in sparking student interest. It could be said that the platforms of Self, Self Creating Other, and Self with Other, were anchored in technology, with the blog as online conduit for depicting life events.
Motivating and engaging students in a classroom involves supporting a sense of immersion, comprised of a writer’s interest in the selected topic, involvement in researching that topic, imagination and creativity used in the process, and interactivity while composing. Burbules (2006) notes that qualities of interest, involvement, imagination, and interactivity are shaped by the experiences and interests of the students, but those qualities are also more technologically mediated than ever before (Burbules, 2006). The notion of immersion is a fitting compliment to affinity space, particularly blogs, as they offer an immersion that challenges writers like Mina to brainstorm language appropriate to the desolation she wanted to convey in her poem, or for Derrick to draw on his broad athletic interests and engage his audience in a dialogue. Bloggers in this study joined because they were motivated to learn how to use an online writing space, and sustained their involvement by investigating personal interests, engaging with one another, inventing characters, and exploring new identities, perhaps as less of a reinvention of self than the discovery of new facets of self.

**Producing Online Identity**

By supporting immersion in an affinity space, teachers can foster student engagement through authentic writing contexts and goals by creating a supportive emotional context for blogging, and maintaining a positive emotional environment. In turn, the positive and supportive environment engenders more successful writers. Online, writers portray their identities in multiple ways. Discursive constructions of identity can include biographies and self-descriptions, photographs, self-related sketches, and unique graphics (Leander & McKim, 2003). In my study, participants wrote in the identities of civil rights champion, hapless college student, scorned lover, and football commentator, among other personas, in which shifts in positioning reveal expression of beliefs.
If informal writing and written interaction is an expression of motivation, then self-representation and identity exploring should be an integral part of formal writing instruction in an effort to highlight and improve writing in U.S. schools. Current research in literacy calls for more investigation into these dimensions of writing, particularly motivation and its relation to writing in various contexts, as self-expression, in response to education policy mandates (Alvermann et al., 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007a; Hinchman et al., 2003; Moje, 2002). Blog writing presents a medium for written self-expression and interaction.

In online spaces, opportunities for identity exploration are infinite (Harter, 1998; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005). Blogging can serve as a guide in the formation of selfhood as one that involves numerous versions of being that adolescents present to the public. Through interaction and identity exploration, adolescent writers often adopt the roles and characteristics of others through serious, as in the case of Mina in all of her posts, or often teasing stances, for example, Derrick and Donald, where they assume different perspectives, thereby allowing them to try on different facets of who they will become.

In this study, bloggers portrayed aspects of identity without composing a word. Avatar images introduce authors to readers. Rosie’s “girly” flowers speak to her desire to be interpreted from a feminine, albeit feminist stance. Donald seeks to surprise and confuse readers with a tiny anime image that serves to draw in readers out of curiosity. Mina, with her drawing of dreamlike yet steadfast mountains suggests transformation with her avatar. Derrick, chides the non-lover of baseball with his tiny joke on a meme. User names remind other bloggers of their “real” identities, whether the user names are actual names, middle names, or amalgams of their names. User names and avatars serve the dual purposes of defining authors by image, and serving as guidepost in who—or what, in the case of Derrick’s user name with baseball as part of it—is
being represented as author of the post. User names may reveal, or not reveal entire names; they are author guises, and as such create a safe distance for identity exploration.

In addition to being a unique and engaging space for writing development, the discourse of online writing is an ideal means through which those new roles are explored and constructed. Rosie poignantly calls for the end to violence in her community through blog poetry. Derrick personifies a lawyer in one post. Blogs offer a unique format for writers because they offer unlimited expression, whether informational or creative, formal or informal. The author has the power and opportunity to decide. Writing in the public sphere of the Internet affords teens the opportunity to explore and forge new identities online that simultaneously inform their developing writing ability (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007).

Limitations

Examination of how the conjunction of race, class, and gender influence student identity is crucial. Presently such an analysis is largely absent from policies such as CCSS and research measures that are pursued to reform education and improve classroom practice (Noguera, 2003). How identities are constructed along students’ school trajectories and how these identities affect students’ attitudes and dispositions toward school, learning, and life in general is complex. Across the writings of the participants, Donald is the only blogger who integrated his racial identity into a post. Both Donald and Rosie briefly discussed family events in the affinity space, but shared little background about race or ethnicity. Instead, their blog post topics focused more heavily on current events and popular culture interests, portraying identities of themselves as older students or young professionals. In curriculum, identity exploration can be linked with motivation, as teachers consider participants’ individual interests, experience with identity exploration in the past, maturity level, and a variety of social climates. Integrating the concept of identity exploration directly into the curriculum may potentially promote identity formation with
its exploratory character, as well as a motivation for and deep learning of curricular content and skills (Kaplan et al., 2014). This study represents an inquiry into how four adolescent writers sustained motivation as they wrote in an affinity space, in addition to how they positioned themselves as they did so.

While it is not an investigation into school attitudes or dispositions, my study did provide a window into participants’ perspectives on life in the social climate of affinity space. Forging new links in the connections between writing, motivation, and identity exploration is useful going forward, perhaps the next step would be an attempt to establish creative writing blogging in a school setting.

Another possible limitation is the relatively short length of the blogging study. How and if motivation for online writing could be engaged a longer period of time, particularly with more time spent writing in each genre, and perhaps developing longer and more detailed pieces.

**My Positionality**

The Bruning & Horn (2000) recommendation for teachers to ease adolescent shifts include 1) encourage practical beliefs about writing, 2) cultivate student engagement through authentic planning and writing activities, 3) provide an accommodating setting for writing, 4) nurture a positive affective environment for writing (Bruning & Horn, 2000). As facilitator, I sought to keep sessions focused on engagement. Positive environments begin with a feeling of safety, so I encouraged participants from the beginning to write from a stance comfortable to them, whether that meant choosing a user name that was his/her full name, middle name, or a blog pseudonym about personal interests. Moreover, authors were tasked to write only about what interested them, as I modeled the same, writing alongside when time away from troubleshooting technological glitches allowed.
Writers’ ideas about and goals for their own work are strengthened in response to the formative feedback they receive from readers. Moreover, when teachers give feedback on how writing might be more effective for readers, students more readily maintained their interest in writing (Curwood et al., 2013). As teachers nurture the beliefs of adolescents in themselves and their writing abilities, those abilities are malleable and self-concepts are positively influenced by their topic, genre, and feedback from both readers and teachers. While my role as facilitator limited my capacity to comment, bloggers did discuss at length the value and importance of writing and receiving comments from other participants.

Writing as well as multimodality shifts the role of the teacher from being information provider to demonstrating to the students how to find information themselves. With online writing instruction, teachers tread a fine line between modeling how to conduct effective Internet searches, and supporting those same students as they independently attempt the same. Yet, while the use of multimedia texts may help student comprehension of primary texts, it does not ensure that comprehension. Just like with traditional sources of text, multimodal sources require thoughtful scaffolding and instruction by teachers. (Manderino & Ripley, 2014) By the same measure, texts that students’ access online are not guaranteed to inform their writing effectively, so similar scaffolding is necessary. The regular display of mentor texts and subsequent affinity space discussion how to access individual mentor texts as models of different genres is an example of scaffolding for writing in this study. Participant questions about primary and secondary sources for writing informational pieces, while relevant, did not ensure that the sources that participants eventually accessed were dependable.

Affinity spaces function without a designated leader or facilitator. However, recent discussions of affinity space have focused attention on mentorship and apprenticeship in affinity spaces. Substantiated conclusions from a cross-case analysis (Abrams & Lammers, 2015)
demonstrate how the use of specialist language or inclusive/exclusive behaviors displayed in gaming communities with varying Discourses, reveals Discourse communities with hierarchical behavior, which is exactly what Gee had hoped to avoid in terming the space (Duncan, 2013). The formidable challenge for teachers in maintaining affinity within the space is to relinquish the role of leader to facilitator, or co-blogger, so long as students have writing modeled for them.

**Future Research**

The literate identities of adolescent students are constructed and negotiated in specific instructional settings. A future study would explore the variability of positioning online in multiple instructional settings for cross comparison, from a closed classroom, to class blog, to public blog. The seemingly small affordances of avatars and user names appear to be empowering, as they allow for limited identity codification, yet also create a doppelgänger that enables identity exploration, perhaps providing opportunities for wide-ranging identity performances. Investigating the extent to which such exploration occurs across affinity spaces, and tracking how the avatar and user name empower is warranted.

For a more in-depth study that provides more time and collaboration, an inquiry into how blog comments and other interactions sustain writing would provide more robust insight into the comment issue. In the present study, participants demonstrated different perspectives on it. As long as affinity space members were involved in discussion of their writing, Donald, Derrick, and often, Rosie did not discriminate between place and space in their perceptions of how their blog posts were understood by readers, as long as they provided feedback. Mina, on the other hand, felt that the lack of written take-up with her writings equaled a lack of comprehension or appreciation of her abilities.

The few studies that consider blogging with regard to gender and identity enactments use linguistic analysis to track language use between and among male and female bloggers (Amir,
Abidin, Darus, & Ismail, 2012). Another future study would inquire whether young men and women use blogs to discuss life issues in gendered ways using positioning theory analysis.

Conclusion

Bloggers published their thoughts and experiences online in order to be noticed immediately by the rest of the group in a way that enables them to view their own words and allows them to express a particular identity. Their Discourse indexes a code for their beliefs, for their values, for their aspirations, as well as their tall tales and attempts to simply entertain each other. In some nuanced way, individual codes contain visible and unique characteristics of the authors. Mediation of it all occurs online and offline.

What research lacks is the examination of how youths’ literacy practices reflect the intersection of multiple groups, and to examine how the knowledges, ways of knowing, and identities they build from these group experiences intersect with the advanced, deep content learning that schooling expects of young people (Moje, 2002).

The inherent portrayal of identity for adolescent bloggers is of great interest to me as a researcher because writing conveys not only narrative or informational content, but also the representation of self (Ivanič, 1998). Furthermore, because of the myriad opportunities for exploration and collaboration represented by blog writing, how identity is—or is not—revealed in these spaces is of particular appeal theoretically and analytically.

Perhaps it is the young writers themselves who are pushing the boundaries in classroom practice and research as they create and remix content for online production and distribution. They shape and are simultaneously shaped by changing literacies. Adolescents recognize that their authorship is neither singular nor fully original, yet that is often how they create new texts (Alvermann, 2008). That recognition is central to them becoming critical users and consumers of online content. The tools that they utilize empower them to demonstrate social awareness and
commentary in unique ways (Stone, 2007). Shared aloud, Derrick’s poem was the beginning of his online authorship. With the help and support of fellow bloggers, his posts served to initiate him into the affinity space that shaped his identity, while his participation shaped the identity of the blog space.

To return at last to the Word Factory metaphor, the layout of the space is key. Common areas, such as the main conference table for authors served as space for collective meaning making, as bloggers planned, organized, or interpreted writing. Carrels had a different function. Similar to fitting rooms, individual work stations served as areas in which participants could try on identities, posting narratives, or assessing those of other affinity space writers. Carrels afforded relative privacy for individuals to gauge the purchase of identities, eventually accepting, rejecting, or even refabricating personal identities enacted on the blog. Gee (1996) noted that interactions through language connect at the junction of who we are, the language we use, and the context in which we use it. Located within that connection are identity and motivation, as one continually colored and nuanced the other in the Word Factory.

The “Words in Winter” affinity space served as composing room for some of life’s greatest questions. On the final day of the study, my curiosity got the best of me. Because he had written the most, I specifically asked Donald why he had chosen to give up his Saturday mornings all winter, traveling a long way to come be part of this group of young authors. I asked him why he writes. He looked at me as if that were the silliest thing he'd ever heard, shrugged, and said, “I’m just trying to write who I am.
## Appendix A

**Operationalizing Research Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Analytic Plans/Tools</th>
<th>Citations for Method/Tools</th>
<th>Contribution to Addressing Question</th>
<th>Theoretical lens/Connections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ 1: How does online writing in an affinity space affect motivation to write?</td>
<td>Comparing, Displaying WAS, ARA Correlations Artifacts Open-ended Interviews</td>
<td>Likert-scale surveys need dependent t-tests (same subjects are tested before, during, after study to assess significant changes) Discussion of participant beliefs Analysis of interactions among participants</td>
<td>Vaughn, 1977 Purcell-Gates 2011 Strauss &amp; Corbin, 1990 Bruning &amp; Horn, 2000 Wigfield &amp; Eccles, 2000 Klassen, 2002 Pajares, 2003 Thorkildsen, 2013 Dennett, 1989</td>
<td>Addressing the nature of the space in addition to the writer’s reports on their motivation to write</td>
<td>Sociocultural Intentional Stance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| RQ 2: How do adolescents depict their identities as they position themselves and others in a blog? | Field Notes Artifacts Interviews | Elaborating on identity characteristics by tracking intertextual, role-based, self/other, static, and tacit positionings | Davies & Harré 1990, 2007 McVee, Hopkins, Bailey, 2011 Wortham, 2003 | Positioning theory only focuses on identity | Using positioning theory as applied to writing instead of oral discourse |
Appendix B

Knudsen Writing Attitude Survey

STUDENT WRITING ATTITUDE SURVEY

1. Writing is easier for me than it used to be.  
   - not at all  
   - a little  
   - some  
   - a lot

2. I need less help to write well than I used to.  
   - not at all  
   - a little  
   - some  
   - a lot

3. I like to write in my spare time.  
   - not at all  
   - a little  
   - some  
   - a lot

4. I enjoy writing notes and letters to people.  
   - not at all  
   - a little  
   - some  
   - a lot

5. I like writing at school.  
   - not at all  
   - a little  
   - some  
   - a lot

6. I have trouble thinking about what to write.  
   - not at all  
   - a little  
   - some  
   - a lot

7. It’s fun to write things at home.  
   - not at all  
   - a little  
   - some  
   - a lot

8. I like to share my writing with others.  
   - not at all  
   - a little  
   - some  
   - a lot

9. Writing is fun.  
   - not at all  
   - a little  
   - some  
   - a lot

10. I wish I had more time to write at school.  
    - not at all  
    - a little  
    - some  
    - a lot

11. I like to read.  
    - not at all  
    - a little  
    - some  
    - a lot

12. I think I’m a good writer.  
    - not at all  
    - a little  
    - some  
    - a lot

13. I like to write.  
    - not at all  
    - a little  
    - some  
    - a lot

14. How often do you write at home?  
    - not at all  
    - a little  
    - some  
    - a lot

15. My descriptions are more interesting than before.  
    - not at all  
    - a little  
    - some  
    - a lot
## Appendix C
### Action Readiness Assessment

### What leads you to work hard in school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I usually WORK HARDEST when…</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the teacher gives everyone the same chance to learn.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the ideas are exciting to think about.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can learn things that matter to me.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rules for behavior are fair.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find enough friends.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it seems like everyone can win academic contests.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am in a good mood.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I learned something.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could put ideas together in my mind.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn as much as everyone else.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel bored with everything else.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the teacher gives fair grades.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't look dumb.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I know how to study.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can study with smart people.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the work is in a language I can understand.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find the ideas interesting</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers help me when the work is hard.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
test questions match things we learned. | SA | A | U | D | SD
---|---|---|---|---|---
I can see how I might use the ideas. | SA | A | U | D | SD
My teachers care about me. | SA | A | U | D | SD
I am free to work on my own goals. | SA | A | U | D | SD
What leads you to work hard in school? | Strongly Agree | Agree | Unsure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
---|---|---|---|---|---
I usually WORK HARDEST when… | Strongly Agree | Agree | Unsure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
---|---|---|---|---|---
I can imagine how this would help my career. | SA | A | U | D | SD
I can feel smart. | SA | A | U | D | SD
I can decide when I know enough. | SA | A | U | D | SD
I know which strategies will help me do well. | SA | A | U | D | SD
the work seems difficult. | SA | A | U | D | SD
I can make members of my ethnic group proud. | SA | A | U | D | SD
I want my day to be fun. | SA | A | U | D | SD
no one is messing up my work. | SA | A | U | D | SD
I can figure out problems on my own. | SA | A | U | D | SD
the material fascinates me. | SA | A | U | D | SD
the work is about my culture or ethnic group. | SA | A | U | D | SD
I make my parents feel proud. | SA | A | U | D | SD
the work makes me curious. | SA | A | U | D | SD
I understand why this would be helpful in the future. | SA | A | U | D | SD

Compared to most other students, my ability in schoolwork is…
(Please circle one)
Top of the class 7
Top 10% of the class 6
I think my ability in schoolwork is…
(Please circle one)
Excellent 7
Very good 6
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above the class average</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle of the class</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>All right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below the class average</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom 10% of the class</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom of the class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogger/Date</td>
<td>Research or exploration?</td>
<td>Type of search</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Interview Questions for Young Authors as Bloggers

I. How often do you use technology for the following types of entertainment?

Playing video games
Playing Web-based games
Getting or listening to music
Blogging
Vlogging
Using Fanzine or other creative writing sites

What are your favorite websites?

Do you use the Internet at school?

What classes?

What are the websites you use the most for school?

How often do you use the following types of technology for communication?

E-mail
Non-e-mail Internet technologies (e.g., chat room, instant messaging, etc.)

Cell phone calls

Do you enjoy writing? Why or why not?

What is your favorite kind of writing to do at school? At home?
II. Do you enjoy blogging?

Have you done it outside of school?

Have you done long-term creative writing before?

What was your favorite story/poem/essay that you wrote?

Why?

What about the writing of others? What was your favorite?

Why?

Were there any special features that you used?

How does such use impact your writing?

Does using “extras” ever limit your writing?

What does use of extras say about you?

How do you decide what to blog about?

What does your blog writing say about you?

What does your writing overall say about you?

What are/were your favorite mentor texts?

III. What is XXXX about?

Did its meaning change as you read comments on the blog?

Did you feel that readers “got” what you were writing about?

Did you “get” what others were writing about?

What was the easiest part of this study?

What was the most difficult?
Did you enjoy commenting on others’ writing?

In general, did you like what was said about your writing?

Did you make changes to your writing based on comments? How often?

What motivates you to write?

Would this project work in school?
Appendix F

Primary Coding Scheme

These following three fields for coding represent blogger representation in writing, and the subsequent narrative meanings of narrative practice in the affinity space. This etic coding draws on the literature, particularly DiBlasi, Ferraro, and Conti (2008) and assists in answering the research questions, “How do adolescents articulate their identities in writing as they position themselves and others on blogs?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Self Creating Other (post)</th>
<th>Self with Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G

Secondary Coding

This phase is comprised of four more specific aspects of positioning that describe identity performance. This emic coding scheme draws on Harré and also seeks to identify recurrent themes apparent in the blog posts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intertextual</th>
<th>Role-based</th>
<th>Self/Other</th>
<th>Static</th>
<th>Tacit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


CCSSO/NGA. (2010). Common Core State Standards for English language arts & literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects.


*Educational Psychologist, 45*(3), 167-184.


Curriculum Vitae April, 2016

Grace Pigozzi
gpigoz2@gmail.com

RESEARCH INTERESTS
Adolescent literacy focused on writing, multiliteracies, multimodal discourse, equity in technology in schools, connected learning, affinity space, positioning theory, identity development.

EDUCATION
Doctorate, Curriculum and Instruction, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2016
Specialization in Literacy, Language and Culture

Master of Education, Instructional Leadership, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1994

Bachelor of Arts, Spanish Literature, University of Illinois at Urbana, 1986
Minors in Journalism, Philosophy, and Political Science

UNIVERSITY TEACHING APPOINTMENTS
Curriculum and Instruction 526: Assessment and Instruction for Struggling Readers, K-12: Part 2. This course is designed to focus on theoretical and practical issues concerning the etiology of reading and writing problems and clinical diagnostic techniques. Children who struggle to read and write well are assessed and taught in the practicum component. Spring, 2015, Spring, 2016

Curriculum and Instruction 542: Improving School/District Literacy Achievement. Review of research on school/factors implicated in improvement of literacy achievement. Examine the role of empirical evidence (best practices, scientifically-based research, research synthesis, beat the odds studies) in school decision-making and policy. Fall, 2015

Curriculum and Instruction 525: Assessment and Instruction for Struggling Readers, K-12: Part 1. This course is designed to focus on theoretical and practical issues concerning the etiology of reading problems and clinical diagnostic techniques. Students with reading difficulties are diagnosed and taught in the practicum component. Fall, 2015

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH EXPERIENCE
Publication Research
Developed and facilitated a summer blogging collaborative for teens, a writing workshop designed to support and expand the use of digital literacies in the repertoires of young authors, June-July, 2014.
Conducted second blogging workshop for students grades 6-12, designed to support and expand the use of digital literacies in the creative writing repertoires of young authors, winter 2015.


Worked with project supervisor Dr. William Teale on Early Reading First: Connections Between Morning Meeting and Literacy Play at Centers, assessing the efficacy of teacher introductions to preschool children’s creative center time activities. Collected qualitative data regarding child engagement and application of early literacy skills, January through March, 2012.

Teaching Assistant, UIC Reading Clinic
Supported graduate students in implementing the Multi Dimensional Reading Model for students, grades 3-10. Functioned as liaison between students, tutors, and parents/guardians, organizing weekly schedules. Taught Curriculum and Instruction 526, Assessment and Instruction for Struggling Readers, Part 2, spring semesters 2014 and 2015.

Research Assistant, Early Reading First
Assisted Drs. William Teale and Jeffri Brookfield in Early Reading First, a collaborative team of early childhood teachers, school administrators, university faculty, early literacy coaches, and advanced graduate students in building centers of early literacy excellence for three- and four-year-old children in urban preschool settings. Responsibilities included assessing young children, conducting teacher observations, planning and conducting professional development, data entry and analysis, researching and writing literature reviews for publications, 2011-2013.

**RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

**Literacy Instructor:** Summer Prep Early Outreach, UIC Urban Health Program, Summer, 2015.
**Graduate Teaching Assistant:** UIC Reading Clinic, University of Illinois, Chicago, IL 2013-2015.
**Graduate Research Assistant:** Early Reading First, University of Illinois, Chicago, IL 2011-2013.
**Middle School Teacher:** Old Orchard Junior High, Skokie, IL 2005-2011.
**Family Support Advocate:** District 65 Family Center, Evanston, IL 2002-2005.
**Preschool Teacher:** McGaw YMCA Child Care Center, Evanston, IL 2001-2002.
**Substitute Teacher:** Niles Township High Schools, Skokie, IL 1996-1997.
**Adult Basic Education Instructor:** New City YMCA Community Outreach Program, Chicago, IL 1995.

**DOCTORAL EDUCATION**

**Selected Coursework**
Undergraduate Coursework:
- Spanish Language
- Spanish Composition
- Oral Spanish
- Culture of Spanish America
Spanish Literature
Spanish American Literature

Master’s Level Coursework:
Colloquium on Literacy
Foreign Language Teaching Methods
Survey of Exceptional Children
Testing and ESL Instruction
Philosophy of Education and Urban School Policy
Foundations of Bilingual/ESL Education
Theories of TESOL
Spanish Phonetics
Instruction in Secondary Education
Advanced Educational Psychology

Doctoral Level Coursework:
Proseminar in Literacy, Language and Culture
Analysis of Research in Literacy
Essentials of Quantitative Inquiry in Education
Oral Language: Its Development and Role in the Classroom
Perspectives on Writing Instruction: Theory, Research and Practice
Reading Theory, Research and Practice
Qualitative Inquiry in Education
The Social and Cultural Contexts of Literacy and Literacy Instruction
Content and Discourse Analysis
Design and Conduct of Literacy Research

Apprenticeships:  Children’s and Young Adult Literature
Assessment and Instruction for Struggling Readers, K-12, Part 2

Qualifying Exams:
Passed July, 2014

PUBLICATIONS

“Imagining Online Research Design: Is it Virtual Case Study or Connective Ethnography?” Connective Case study submitted to Literacy Research: Theory, Method, Practice Vol. 65, February, 2016.

“How Does the Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy Embody the Changing Landscape of Literacy Research?” Content analysis of 2012 Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy featured articles, Steven Kushner and Grace Pigozzi, March, 2013.


PEER-REVIEWED PRESENTATIONS

Literacy Research Association, Round Table Presentation, Imagining Online Research Design: Is it Virtual Case Study or Connective Ethnography? December 3, 2015.
Midwest Research Association, Paper Session Presentation, Supporting Young Authors: Exploring the Identity, Positioning, and Blogging Practices of Adolescents, October 22, 2015.


INVITED PRESENTATIONS


SERVICE

Reviewer, American Educational Research Association 2016 Annual Conference
Read and scored program proposals for the upcoming AERA conference scheduled for April, 2016.

Reviewer, International Literacy Association 2015 and 2016 Annual Conferences
Read and scored program proposals for the upcoming ILA conference scheduled for July, 2015, and July, 2016.

Co-Editor, Reading Hall of Fame Newsletter
Photographed 2015 Reading Hall of Fame inductee ceremony for social media. Compiled information about new research and publications from current and new members for October, 2015 RHoF yearly newsletter.

Reviewer, Literacy Research Association 2014 and 2015 Annual Conferences
Read and scored program proposals for the LRA conferences in December, 2014 and December, 2015.
Graduate Student Discussion Facilitator, Future of Literacy Policy Breakfast
Led group discussion on policy issues relevant to literacy and pedagogy, April, 2014

Student Leadership Advisory Board

Co-organizer, UIC Reading Clinic Trigraphothon
Participated in planning and recruitment for writing contest. Served as facilitator for young writers, ages 9-18, as they composed poems, short stories, and, children’s stories, September 27, 2014.

Writing Judge, UIC Reading Clinic Trigraphothon
Reviewed and scored poetry, stories, and essays of competitors, ages 9-18, April 6, 2013.

Reviewer, 62nd Yearbook of the Literacy Research Association
Assisted in the evaluating research reports for yearly publication, January, 2013.

College of Education Doctoral Forum

AWARDS

President’s Research in Diversity Travel Award, 2015 $600
College of Education, Office of Research Dissertation Grant, 2015 $500
UIC Graduate College Student Travel Presenter's Award, 2015 $100
UIC College of Education, Office of Research Dissertation Grant, 2015 $500
Graduate Student Council Travel Award, 2014 $275
Graduate College Presenter Award, 2012 $500
Graduate Student Council Travel Award, 2012 $275
Curriculum and Instruction Conference Travel Grant, 2012 $225

HONORS

Grant Reader: Illinois State Board of Education, assistant to determine eligibility for several Even Start grant proposals, April, 2005.

Award for Distinguished Service, District 65 Family Center, Even Start and Prevention Initiative programs, July, 2005.

National Spanish Exam Sponsor, students were nationally placed gold, silver, and bronze award winners, 2006-2011.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND AFFILIATIONS

American Educational Research Association
Literacy Research Association
International Literacy Association
Mid-Western Educational Association
American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese

CERTIFICATION

Illinois Type 9, Standard Secondary Teaching-Spanish
Endorsements in English as a Second Language, Language Arts, Middle School Teaching

DESIGN EXPERIENCE


Production System Service Specialist: The Chicago Tribune, Chicago, IL 1989-1990. Participated in all phases of computerized ad production. Scanned, sized, and manipulated photographs and line drawings; composed finished art with copy; and proofread or copy edited work done by others, all with strict attention paid to hourly deadlines.

Assistant Production Manager: Graphic Connections, Chicago, IL 1988-1989. Oversaw composition of children's books from initial manuscript mark-up through final keyline alterations. Special projects included English-to-Spanish text translation and copyediting.