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Preparing Young Writers for Invoking and Addressing Today's Interactive Digital Audiences


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Exploring Technology for Writing and Writing Instruction

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Chapter 4

Preparing Young Writers for Invoking and Addressing Today's Interactive Digital Audiences

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ABSTRACT

Twenty-first century technologies, in particular the Internet and Web 2.0 applications, have transformed the practice of writing and exposed it to interactivity. One interactive method that has received a lot of critical attention is blogging. The authors sought to understand more fully whom young bloggers both invoked in their blogging (their idealized, intentional audience) and whom they addressed (whom they actually blogged to, following interactive posts). They studied the complete, yearlong blog histories of fifteen fifth-graders, with an eye toward understanding how these students constructed audiences and modified them, according to feedback they received from teachers as well as peers and adults from around the world. The authors found that these students, who had rarely or never blogged before, were much more likely to respond to distant teachers, pre-service teachers, and graduate students than to their own classroom teachers or peers from their immediate classroom. The bloggers invoked/addressed their audiences differently too, depending on the roles that they had created for their audiences and themselves. The authors explore how and why this came to be the case with young writers.

INTRODUCTION

Twenty-first century technologies, in particular the Internet and Web 2.0 applications, have transformed the practice of writing (Andrews & Smith, 2011). Where once the concept of a

writer's "audience," in distinction from that of a speaker's, was described as "at best, an abstraction, a theory, or a metaphor" (Magnifico, 2010), the advent of social networking has now provided many Internet writers - or bloggers, as they are more often known in these media - immediate feedback from a variety of responders. These

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responders form a potentially international, and very “real” audience (Jenkins, 2006).

The construct of an audience, whether real or imagined, has suffused the large literature about teaching writing for a substantial period of time (Barbeiro, 2010; Graves, 1975; Kos & Maslowski, 2001; Lapp, Shea, & Wolsey, 2010/2011; Long, 1980; Ong, 1979). When Ede and Lunsford (1984) first grappled, more than a quarter century ago, with the dual questions of whether an actual audience existed for an individual writer, and, if it did, whether it should influence that writer’s output, they took the position that then-current models for and against such a construct were inadequate to describe the process of actual writing. At that time, Mitchell and Taylor (1979) had observed that some scholars were urging teachers to instill in students a desire to privilege their own messages’ sincerity and integrity, while others were advising them to be hyperaware of their audience and its particular needs (Hairston, 1978). Pfister and Petrik (1980) were exhorting students to “construct in their imagination an audience that is as nearly a replica as is possible of those many readers who actually exist in the world of reality” (p. 214). Despite this, prior to the late 1990s, however skillful one might be in such an exercise, “[f]or a writer, the audience [was] not *there* in the sense that the speaker’s audience, whether a single person or a large group, is present” (Ede & Lunsford, 1984, p. 161, italics theirs). Ong (1979) explained this challenge from the student writer perspective in this way:

The problem is not simply what to say but also whom to say to. Say? The student is not talking. He is writing. No one is listening. There is no feedback. Where does he [student writer] find his ‘audience’? He has to make his readers up, fictionalize them (p. 11).

That was then. Now we possess the technologies and predilection to textually communicate with and potentially witness and counter-respond

to a few, some, or many others from around the world who comment upon our work (Andrews & Smith, 2011). Within this context, “writers and readers can become active listeners and conversation partners for each other” (Magnifico, 2010, p.168).

What is different about composing for such an audience, compared to writing using traditional technologies such as pen and paper? And what are the implications for writing with a digital audience in mind for audience awareness development and the teaching of it to young writers? This chapter attempts to explore these questions, by drawing insight from a year-long research project with fifth-grade bloggers. During the project, these young writers engaged in written conversations with a truly worldwide digital audience about what they were learning in and beyond their classrooms. The blogging community they joined was interactive and diverse; it consisted of audiences from different age groups, cultures, nations, continents and geographical locations.

Defining Blogging

Blogging has been defined and conceptualized in several different ways. For example, some scholars see blogging as “a personal knowledge artifact” (O’Donnell, 2006, p.7), which reveals the writer’s emerging knowledge that is documented in writing and reflections posted on a blog. Others see blogging as a hybrid of conversations with the self and with others (Efimova & de Moor, 2005)—a practice and authorship that “combine two oppositional principles: monologue and dialogue” (Wrede, 2003, para. 1 Weblogs and Discourse).

Blogging has also been characterized as public and private spaces for individual reflection and social interaction (Davies & Merchant, 2007; Deng & Yuen, 2011). Self-expression and self-reflection support the individual in “expressing one’s thoughts and emotions, as well as recording one’s experiences” (self-expression) and deriving meaning from them (self-reflection) (Deng

& Yuen, 2011). Social interaction and reflective dialogue, on the other hand, are used “for the purpose of enhancing social presence” and joining “the cognitive presence within a learning community” (p. 443). Viewed from this perspective, blogging can provide young writers with the opportunity to develop “effective writing processes and strategies that enable them to use writing for an array of personal and social processes” (Chapman, 2006, p. 20).

Blogging can be both synchronous and asynchronous. Internet messaging (IM) which is less common today, and texting are examples of synchronous blogging. In synchronous blogging, responses mimic, in time elapsed, the amount of time that a spoken reply might take in a face to face interaction. When blogging is asynchronous, the writer and reader do not communicate at the same time. Rather, they write or access others’ writing at their own schedule. More recently, newer technology permits the embedding of audio, video, or graphical material in and with blogs, and in this way can amplify the tools the writer has available for meaning-making and communication with others (Andrews & Smith, 2011; Davis, 2005) Such a development has greatly enhanced – and been enhanced by – “microblogging” practices such as Twitter.

In the past half-decade, blogs and blogging have begun appearing with greater frequency on such “megasites” as Facebook and Instagram. Blogging and writing on social networking sites such as these have also been described as a social practice (Rowse, 2009). The writers in these spaces have been observed to develop and adopt certain conventions and behaviors, which go beyond writing conventions and include social norms or “practices, habits of mind, and texts” that have then become second nature to the users of these spaces (Rowse, 2009, p. 97). These social networking sites are now available to anyone with Internet access anywhere in the world, and because they are also extremely well-known, these spaces provide access to a wider and more diverse audi-

ence (Jenkins, 2006). These technical affordances and the social practices that they engender also enable new relationships with readers both known and unknown, in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts (Wrede, 2003). As such, these spaces boast the potential to both extend and transform the writing and communication practices of their users (Andrews & Smith, 2011; Rowse, 2009). Therefore, in order to address the complexity of these changes in teaching writing, we need to know more about practices such as blogging and the reader/writer nexus that evolves in this new writing context.

Writing and Blogging

There is a growing body of scholarship on blogging as a subset in the scholarly field of writing. Studies have examined blogging as intervention (Lamonica, 2010; Wong & Hew, 2010) genre (Efimova & de Moor, 2005; O’Donnell, 2006) and as social practice (McGrail & Davis, 2011; Penrod, 2007). For example, Lamonica (2010) explored the blogging writing program for fourth-grade students and noted that what she termed an “intervention” had had a positive impact on children’s motivation and engagement, as well as on their writing skills. The study reported an increase in vocabulary and language use; for example, “the sentences invited expressive reading and were strong and varied” (p. 35). The researchers attributed this growth to both the opportunity for the students to “take ownership over what they write and what they want to write about” (p. 28) and the ability to engage with an audience beyond the classroom. However, the study did not elaborate on the nature of engagement with the audience.

McGrail and Davis (2011) examined fifth-graders’ writing in a blogging/writing program, one that focused on reflective, persuasive, and narrative pieces, for audiences both within and beyond the classroom. The initial analysis from this study examined student writing and the writing process, paying attention to the following aspects

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of writing: attitude, content, voice, connections and relationships, thinking, and craft. The researchers found that student bloggers do become aware of and connect to the audience. They also observed these bloggers develop as active and empowered members of a blog community. The researchers associated this positive outcome with the commenters' and teachers' focus on idea development in responding to student writing, rather than focusing merely on writing conventions and language issues.

Wong and Hew (2010) analyzed interviews, writing, and observations of fifth-grade Asian students in a Singapore classroom, noting the influence of blogging on narrative writing development. The intervention the researchers examined consisted of specific questions about the story development such as what the story was about, followed with the when, where, who, and other questions. While the bloggers in this study appreciated blogging, and especially the feedback they received on their writing, they were disappointed with the limited peer response and the teacher's focus on the language issues rather than ideas in their writing.

In Glogowski (2008), blogging was used with eight-grade students in support of developing an online class community. Within this context, Glogowski examined "the notion of dialogic critique - peer discussions and critiques of written texts - and its impact on the quality of student writing, sense of ownership, confidence, and engagement in learning" (p. 11). Similarly to the findings from Lamonica (2010) and McGrail and Davis (2011), this study reported student gains in engagement and an increased investment in learning and writing. The study also noted the positive impact of dialogic critique on student writing and made a call for the teacher to "extend the classroom discourse beyond traditional academic texts, abandon the evaluative and authoritarian voice, and enter the community as a reader and a co-contributor"(p. 12).

Other studies have looked at the influence of blogging and related practices on the development of motivation and agency or identity formation among blog writers (Farmer, 2004; Swanson & Legutko, 2008). For example, using a pretest-posttest design, Swanson and Legutko (2008) examined the effect of the Book Blog writing intervention on 3rd grade-student levels of motivation and engagement. The intervention allowed these students to interact with peers about their responses to book reading while the traditional paper reading response cohort did not have this option. The study reported an increase in motivation for all students who had blogged with their peers and teachers about their reading on a wiki site. Similarly, in a case study of ESL students' use of instant messaging for academic writing development (Jin & Zhu, 2010), the use of instant messaging was found to have influenced "the formation and shift of students' motives within and across the computer-mediated peer response tasks" (p. 284). Such an influence could be construed as of either a positive or negative nature, based on the degree of motive competitiveness for each participant during peer response interactions mediated by instant messaging. This means that the readers' and audience's prior experiences with either technology or a writing task may have shaped their motives for participating in online communication.

Collectively, all these studies underscore the importance of audience in an online interactive environment and call for extending it beyond the classroom teacher and peers. Such a finding has implications for classroom pedagogy. If this is true, what should pedagogy for blogging look like?

Blogging Pedagogy

There are many guides for using traditional blogs in the classroom (Boiling, Castek, Zawilinski, Barton, & Nierlich, 2008; Gelbwasser, 2011; Johnson, 2010; Parisi & Crosby, 2012; Penrod, 2007; Zawilinski, 2009) and for "microblogging."

as in Tweeting or instant messaging (Greenhow & Gleason, 2012). These guides offer practical advice on how to establish, manage, and maintain a classroom blog, how to sustain a community, and how to deal with Internet safety and privacy issues. Some describe ways to integrate blogging into literature discussion or a reading and writing workshop. For example, Johnson (2010) explained how to use blogs for engaging writers with young adult literature book authors. Others discussed blogging in creative writing such as digital poetry (Curwood, 2001) and digital story (Davis, 2005) or in general for self-expression and publishing (Fiedler, 2003; Downes, 2004).

Empirical research on teacher pedagogy for blogging is scarce. For example, Luehmann and MacBride's (2009) study investigated, through content analysis and teacher interviews, how high school science and mathematics teachers used blogs in support of content area instruction. The researchers categorized the teacher blog uses into six different classroom blogging practices: (a) sharing resources; (b) responding to teacher prompts; (c) recording lessons' highlights; (c) posting learning challenges; (e) reflecting on what was learned; and (f) engaging in on-line conversations (para. Conclusion). They also noted that even though all these uses reflected student-centered learning, student voice and participation levels in online conversations varied greatly in the classrooms of these teachers. While one teacher opened the class blog to a wider audience and allowed students to initiate posts and take ownership of their learning, the second teacher assumed more of a "take charge" attitude, initiating blog posts and directing the flow and the content of the conversations among the participants. The researchers concluded that the ways these teachers' blogs were structured and the affordances the teachers chose (e.g., opening or not opening the blog to the public and adding chat rooms for further dialogue) reflected distinct philosophical and practical realizations of student-centered peda-

gogy, as well as different ways to adapt blogging to fit in within these frames of reference.

McGrail and Davis (2013) examined blogging pedagogy in a somewhat different manner. Specifically, they applied the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Koehler & Mishra, 2008) to explore the teacher pedagogy and student experiences of blogging in a fifth-grade classroom. The TPACK framework explores the interplay of three sources of knowledge: Content (CK), Pedagogy (PK), and Technology (TK) in the development of pedagogy for technology integration in educational contexts. The researchers found that the teacher in this study understood and applied the framework in her class successfully. This was reflected in pedagogically integrating blogging technology into her writing instruction and capitalizing on this technology's affordances to extend the audience beyond the classroom. For this to happen, the teacher had to move away from a teacher-centered writing instruction style to a more participatory pedagogy. This shift, the researchers noted, "called for the blogging teacher to act both as an insider – fulfilling the traditional roles of a teacher in a classroom- as well as an outsider – a member of the larger blogging beyond the classroom community" (p. 279). It also required from the teacher to "rethink teacher, student, and commenter roles in the learning/teaching process" (p. 285).

Will exposure to such a participatory pedagogy in the blogging environment also make student writers rethink their understanding of audience? Will it also help them reevaluate the teacher as an audience as well? This work is an attempt to explore these questions.

Audience Awareness, Young Writers, and Blogging

In general, young writers tend to have a weak understanding of the concept of audience (Barbeiro, 2010). As a result, in their writing they tend to "simply and briefly report an experience without

regard for the reader, the readers' perspectives, or the need for engagement" (Lapp, Shea, & Wolsey, 2010/2011, p. 33). New and growing research shows, however, that good writers are aware of and know their audience well (Kellog, 2008). Knowledge of the reader allows skilled writers to envision and assign to the reader particular characteristics and to identify and address their needs during writing (Barbeiro, 2010; Holliway, 2004). Audience awareness encourages, too, dialogic writing, with a hypothetical (imagined) or a real reader (Frank, 1992). It is not necessary for young writers to obtain encyclopedic knowledge of the demographic or psychographic makeup of their audience; what is required is for them to set the stage before they permit the actors of their stories to walk upon it. They must provide needed context.

Young writers tend to be self-centered in their writing (Blau, 1983), and struggle with this imagining, or invoking of the reader (Kos & Maslowski, 2001). They "must be taught to move beyond themselves as they learn to consider the dimensions of the audience for whom they write" (Lapp, Shea, Wolsey, 2010/2011, p.33). Blau (1983) used the term "decentering" (p.300) for the process of moving young writers beyond themselves, and described it as the writer's ability to evaluate critically and modify their writing with the readers in mind.

Blogging's most attractive feature may be that it offers opportunities for young writers to interact with an audience beyond the classroom (Boiling, Castek, Zawilinski, Barton, & Nierlich, 2008). Because such writing is on its face intended to be shared with others, blog writing also relies on response from the audience. As Penrod (2005) notes, "Without a response, there is no communication. If there is no communication happening, then there is no understanding as to whether one's words make meaning or fall silent" (p.2). The audience in blogging is therefore potentially an active agent, often functioning "as complex conversational partner; a listener with whom the speaker is attempting to

communicate" (Magnifico, 2010, p.168). Writers in these spaces thus have the opportunity to "speak with, ask questions, and be influenced by audience of readers" (Magnifico, 2010, p.168) and readers too have the opportunity to direct questions and comments to writers. Within this context, "writers and readers can become active listeners and conversation partners for each other" (Magnifico, 2010, p.168). What are the implications of such an audience on student audience awareness and writing development?

One of the few research studies in this area is Lapp, Shea, and Wolsey's (2010/2011) case study of second grade student bloggers. Through content analysis of student blogs as well as interviews and pre/during/post-blogging surveys with students, the study investigated students' growth of awareness of their audience through their participation in blogging. The researchers observed growth in student audience awareness and also "a concern for what the audience thinks" (p. 41). The findings from this study suggest several questions: How are young writers negotiating the vast and different audiences in the cyberspace? Do they know for whom they write? For whom do they intend to write? As Magnifico (2010) argues, revisiting these questions in "new media-infused learning environments" (p. 167) such as blogging is necessary. This work responds to this call as it explores further young writers' emerging understanding of the audience in the blogging milieu. It describes audience awareness development, paying attention to the following questions:

1. Whom are young bloggers *invoking* in their writing?
2. Whom are young bloggers *addressing* in their writing?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In a note in Ede and Lunsford's (1984) article, they explore various terms that mirror the di-

chotomy between “invoking” and “addressing” an audience. They provide “identified/envisaged,” “real/fictional,” and “analyzed/created” (p. 156) as suggestive of the same concept in invoked/addressed. The addressed audience for them “refers to those actual or real-life people who read a discourse” while an invoked audience refers to an audience “called up or imagined by the writer” (1984, p. 156).

When Lunsford and Ede (2009) revisited some of the precepts addressed in their influential 1984 article (Ede & Lunsford, 1984), technology had changed the framework under which questions of “audience” and “authorship” would apply. Now, in a very present way, audiences could and would respond to the posts of bloggers, whereas in the earlier period, both the concept and reality of an audience could only make itself felt to a student writer in a more gradual and ephemeral manner. They note that “new literacies are...expanding the possibilities of agency, while at the same time challenging older notions of both authorship and audience” (2009, p. 43). Nevertheless, for Lunsford and Ede, important questions remained for young writers about the size, composition and nature of an audience, however transformed it may have become. They revisit several questions:

- In a world of participatory media – of Facebook, MySpace, Wikipedia, Twitter and Del.icio.us – what relevance does the term *audience* hold?
- How can we best understand the relationships between text, author, medium, context, and audience today? How can we usefully describe the dynamic of this relationship?
- To what extent do the invoked and addressed audiences that we describe in our 1984 essay need to be revised and expanded? What other terms, metaphors or images might prove productive? What difference might answers to these questions make to twenty-first-century teachers and students? (2009, p. 43).

Because we remain primarily interested in how the above questions manifest themselves in school settings, among fledgling writers, our own study is poised to address these questions through the lens of young writers, who are at times only dimly aware of an outside audience (Barbeiro, 2010), even as they seek to make meaning for others in blogs by choosing words and phrases that seem to them to best express their emotions and states of mind.

In their earlier work, the principal difficulty expressed in invoking an audience was that a writer alone could not “know” his audience in the way that a public speaker could (Ede & Lunsford, 1984). Presumably, the speaker could, through the instant response of applause, silence, boos, cheers and other audiovisual cues, know, in a very direct way, whether he or she has “reached” his audience, and made her meaning felt. At the same time, blogging has reduced for writers the temporal distance between the act of publication and the act of response (Penrod, 2007). Now it is possible within seconds or minutes to know whether those reading a post approve or disapprove of it, or feel compelled to respond to it in one way or another. The speaker and the writer have moved closer together in their embrace of audience.

Applying the concepts of *audience addressed* and *audience invoked* (Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Lunsford & Ede, 2009) to writing in blogging environments, this chapter examines the ways in which fifth-grade bloggers interacted with a quickly responding audience, and the manner by which such an accelerated level of response shaped their understandings of *addressed* and *invoked* audiences.

METHODOLOGY

The Participants and the Context

The fifteen fifth-grade student writers who wrote on the blog consisted of ten girls and five boys - nine Caucasian, five Hispanic, and one African-

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American. Two students were in the gifted program and one was in the special education program, but we did not methodologically differentiate these students from the rest. All students were new to blogging, but many were familiar with word processing and searching the Internet. The student participants reflected the school student population's ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, with 81% considered economically disadvantaged in this Title 1 School in a southern state of the United States.

The research site was selected because a member of the research team had worked with teachers on blogging projects in the same school in previous years. The teacher whose classroom is discussed in the current study had also expressed an interest in blogging. The program described here is a response to this teacher's interest in blogging.

Since the focus of the blog writing program was providing students with opportunities to interact with the audience beyond the classroom, the researchers recruited commenters for the research project from among retired teachers and graduate students in their courses. Additional commenters who emerged from the larger blogging community came from several different countries and continents (Canada, Scotland, New Zealand, Australia and the US).

Student Blogging

Blogging was embedded into a language arts block period once a week for four hours over a period of one year in a computer lab. The writing curriculum was guided by classroom teachers, who suggested assignments for the students that could be completed by the act of blogging. There was a self-descriptive assignment, where students chose sentences that described them; there was a persuasion assignment, where students needed to write convincingly about a subject about which they had a conviction. Generally, however, the

young bloggers were free to expostulate and respond to the many commenters that responded to their posts, and who came from many walks of life, and parts of the world.

In addition, students were introduced to blogging as technology and as a social practice (McGrail & Davis, 2011) through the exploration of a Webquest that reviewed aspects of blog writing such as questioning, thinking, writing, collaborating, reflecting, commenting, linking, and proofreading. They also reviewed an ABCs-type "*Blook on Blogging*." The *Blook* book was an unpublished online book created by a group of previous elementary student bloggers who used creative idioms and appealing drawings in story format to describe what blogging meant to them. Both the Webquest and the *Blook* provided the necessary background knowledge the student bloggers needed before they began to apply their own understandings about blogging in their own writing. Teachers also discussed safety guidelines on a class wiki and established a class blog to model blog writing to students. The areas the class blog modeled for students included: how to develop and sustain dialogue in posts and comments, how to ask and answer questions, and how to develop a unique voice. Student blog writers also learned how to write on the blog in respectful and responsible ways with the larger audiences. Some of the blog posts that served this goal included topics such as understanding the nature and conventions of public writing; giving credit to others' words; and respecting others and their viewpoints. The class blog also served as a catalyst for conversations about learning and new topics for future conversations and learning.

The teacher and student individual blogs were created with Typepad software because this software was available through the university connection to the research site. Additional interactive Web-based components such as podcasts, Skype, Gizmo, and Google Maps applications

were used during blogging sessions to facilitate communication with commenters and readers, locally and globally.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data analyzed in this work included young writers' posts and their readers' comments, for a total of 659 single-spaced pages of blog scripts. Using a qualitative content analysis method (Creswell, 2007), we began with developing a coding sheet that included audience types (domains) and their descriptors (See Table 1). Ede and Lunsford's (1984) and Lunsford and Ede's (2009) concepts of *audience invoked* and *audience addressed* provided both the theoretical and analytical framework for defining and describing the audience typology reported in this work. The data were next analyzed in two steps.

In Step 1, which asks what audience is invoked, we qualitatively coded the data (i.e. the student blogs) using our initial coding sheet. Throughout the data analysis process, adjustments were made to the coding sheet, as informed by our ongoing individual and collective data analysis. Detailed analytical memos were written and were used to identify the themes that emerged from the data. The memos helped to member check (Creswell,

2007) our analysis. Excerpts from the memos were also used to provide elaboration on the key findings reported here.

In Step 2, utilizing descriptive statistics methodology (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006) several sorting and organizational tasks were completed on the raw data of the student blogs. This is because the blogging output of the students may be roughly classified as falling into one of two groups: pure self-expression not directed at anyone, and commentary that responded to what someone had written. In order to make this bifurcation meaningful, we determined where and when the students' posts initially addressed specific people or groups of people. In certain instances, this was self-evident, as when a student addressed other bloggers by name. In others, it was more difficult to determine, because students would refrain from, or neglect to name addressees. In these latter cases, both coders had to agree on the identity of the addressee of the blog. Notably, all of the blogs featured a mix of addressing specific people, specific groups, and pure self-expression directed to no one in particular.

It was also important for us to attempt to determine to whom a student blogger was responding when a comment, or body of comments, was made to one of their posts from one or more outside per-

Table 1. Audience typology

Audience	Descriptors
You Generic	No one in particular
You Specific	Anyone with specific qualities
We	Audience that includes the I and You
Classmate	Student who is in the same grade and classroom
Peer (Wide Audience)	Student who is close in age but is not in the same classroom
Teacher (Wide Audience)	Someone who is a teacher but is not a classroom teacher in the project
Teacher	A teacher who teaches the class in the project
Graduate Student (Wide Audience)	An adult who is not a peer or close in age and who is in graduate school
Harley (dog)	The dog who has a blog that is maintained by a retired teacher
Other	Anyone in the larger community who comments on student blogs

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sons. This is because such a determination gives us valuable clues as to how a blogger addresses his or her actual audience, following a burst of commentary from a wide swath of interested people. These different responders were grouped according to the following scheme: *Classmates*, *Peers from a Wider Audience*, *Classroom Teachers*, *Teachers from a Wider Audience*, *Graduate Students*, and *Others* (see Table 2). *Classmates* included students blogging with them in that class. *Peers from a Wider Audience* were grade-school and middle school students from around the country (and the world) who were also engaged in blogging. *Classroom Teachers* were just that; the teachers that directly and personally instructed the students, and monitored their blogs. *Teachers from a Wider Audience* were teachers from classrooms

around the US and the world. *Graduate Students* were pre-service teachers and doctoral students at a large urban southern US university. The group *Others* consisted of persons from anywhere who contacted the students for their own reasons and commented, either on sundry affairs or on the students' blogs in particular.

One of the challenges in organizing the data was compensating for the fact that the overall amount of blogging done by each student differed greatly. Some students were prolix, and others were more reticent about communicating. Still others hovered around the average level of output. We decided to measure the output of each blogger by the number of pages that person output, rather than the quantity of words, sentences or phrases. This was partly because a blog post can

Table 2. Audience addressed

Pseudonym	# of pgs	AI	C	P(WA)	T (WA)	T	GS	Other	Total
Johnny	73	YG	0	4.1	23.3	6.8	9.6	16.4	60.2
Emmy	42	YS; YG; We	4.8	14.3	14.3	9.5	21.4	9.5	73.8
Victoria	66	YG	6.1	7.6	31.8	6.7	12.1	21.2	85.5
Michael	57	YS	0	1.8	54.4	7	8.8	19.2	91.2
Rosalinda	34	YG	2.9	0	50	5.9	17.6	17.6	94
Mia	54	We	16.7	14.8	35.2	13	7.4	11.1	98.2
Leslie	13	YG; YS	23.1	0	23.1	7.7	23.1	30.8	107.8
TK	25	YS	4	0	40	12	28	24	108
Eddie	75	YG; We	0	26.6	46.6	6.6	26.6	2.7	109.1
Dulce Maria	21	YG; We	9.5	19	52.4	9.5	19	0	109.4
Anni	32	YG; We	12.5	6.3	43.8	25	18.8	3.1	109.5
MV	38	YS	21	7.9	42.1	13.2	23.7	5.3	113.2
Lindsey	40	YG	5	15	25	12.5	35	27.5	120
Tina	41	YG; We	22	14.6	58.5	4.9	29.3	12.2	141.5
Mary	41	We	9.8	12.2	75.6	17.1	19.6	17.1	151.4
Total			137.4	144.2	616.1	157.4	300	217.7	1572.8

Note: Addressed Audience: YG- You Generic; YS- You Specific; C- Classmate; P (WA) - Peer (Wide Audience);T(WA); Teacher (Wide Audience); GS- Graduate Student

The numbers in the cells are standardized values representing the number of times each of the bloggers in our study responded unambiguously to persons in the differing categories, proportionate to the total amount of blogging the student did. Thus, higher numbers represent more frequent addressing of persons in a given category corrected for the total amount of blogging.

consist of many words or a single word, and in some cases, of a series of letters only (e.g. LOL, ROFL). Because it was crucial for us to determine the proportion of blogging that each student created that was mostly or solely a response to outside commentary, we had to create a metric that reflected proportionality. To determine the response rate of each of our bloggers to posts by others, we treated the total number of pages of each blog as a necessarily rough estimate of the size of a given student blogger's output. Therefore, because students varied widely in the total amount of blogging that they did, and hence the total number of pages, the number of responses to outside comments was proportionately adjusted according to the number of printed pages of blogs that each student blogger was responsible for. Each category of person that the student blogger was responding to (*Classmates*, *Classroom Teachers*, etc.) was given a score that represented the proportion of their response to that category, compared to their total blogging output. Thus for example, if one student had 50 pages of blogging material and 10 responses to persons in the Graduate Student category, this was given a ratio of 10/50 or 1/5, and treated the same as that from a student with 25 pages of blogging material and 5 responses to graduate students (5/25 or 1/5). Using these proportional scores, we rank-ordered the data to determine which responder groups, after accounting for each student's total, were the more frequent respondents of these students.

FINDINGS

Step 1: Whom Are Young Bloggers Invoking in Their Writing?

The audience that these fifth-graders invoked - or constructed without specific readers in mind - most often in their blog writing was the *You Generic* audience. For some writers, this type of audience was a very broad audience, such as "people in our

society," as Eddie wrote in his first post, or even the world at large. [Note: Quotations herein have been preserved with the idiosyncratic spelling produced by the participants.] Rosalinda spoke of such an audience in this reflection of hers on blogging: "I love blogging! Blogging is fun and entertaining. It's fun knowing about what is going on in other places of the world."

For others, the *You Generic* audience referred, simply, to no one in particular, rather than to an invoked world. This was certainly true for Johnny, who seemed to consider blogging to be a method for the release of his stream of consciousness and therefore addressed such self-expressive writing to all who could understand or relate to his thoughts. Johnny wrote with the *You Generic* audience in mind in the following post, which had no title attached to it:

1. Maybe if I butter up my mom she will give me that new I Phone.
2. If you say something too much People will think you are crying wolf.
3. Everyone in this world has gone Bananas.
4. Get out there and break a leg.
5. If you go out there alone you're a sitting duck.

Still other bloggers perceived the *You Generic* audience in more concrete terms. This understanding of such an audience was evident when student bloggers assigned some qualities to otherwise rather generic audiences. A good example of such audience invoking is Anni's introductory post:

Hi!!!!!!!!!!!! My name is Anni and this is my first time that I blog. I think that this will be fun because I am already having a great time blogging. I think I am funny and nice. I hope you blog to me. Bye!!

In this post, the *Generic You* audience that Anni wished to address was narrowed down to the persons who, like her, like having fun and who would appreciate writing back to someone

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who is “funny and nice.” TK, on the other hand, wrote to football lovers and fans, with a similar understanding of them as the audience in this post:

My Passion is Football because I am Athletic. I started liking football when i was about 5 or 6 years old. Every time when a football game comes on, right away i go and turn that TV on and i watch the football game...

It is important to note that the student bloggers in this study invoked the *You Generic* audience not only at the early stages of blogging, when they were beginning to write for an audience that they did not yet know, but throughout the history of their posts. They did this by asking questions of their invoked addressed audiences frequently. To illustrate, when Victoria learned that her fictional story of a girl transported to another world contained errors, a fact about which she felt “embarrassed [*sic*],” she resolved to ask her invoked *Generic* audience, “Do you have another way I could catch my mistakes?” (p. 12). Lindsey also welcomed the give and take from the *You Generic* audience at different points of time: “If you have any questions on my blog you just write back to me and I will answer. I am always [*sic*] here to type to you and any body that writes me.”

The second type of audience these young writers invoked was the *We* audience. Typically, student bloggers invoked this audience type when they were asked to write persuasively for their blogs. Such writing was often on a topic about which they were passionate or cared deeply. Maria Dulce’s post on saving the trees is a good example of the *We* style of audience summoned with this purpose in mind:

I believe we should stop cutting trees down in U.S. The more you cut trees down, the more hotter is going to be. Each year thousands of trees are cut down. We won’t have any trouble if we stop doing that. Some animals live on trees or in trees like owls, birds, and other animals and they need

homes to live. A lot of animals are already dying because people are cutting trees down. Everybody might not see anymore animals like snakes and squirrels. So we don’t want animals to extinct...

In this piece, Maria used the “we-you-everybody” language to indicate the specific audience she had in mind for her writing, and to encourage the members of this audience to join her in her cause. Mia, too, implored the *We* style audience for a different cause, which was her call to add P.E. (physical education) to the curriculum “everyday.” Here is an excerpt from this call:

The first reason I believe we should have P.E. everyday is.... It will be a great exercise. Everyday a new exercise and activity could be done. Some news reporters say that people and mostly kids are getting fatter and they are overweight. So to stop that I think we should have P.E. every day. The second reason is by exercising everyday and making goals for ourselves. This will bring our grades up...

The least frequently invoked audience in the original posts of these bloggers was the *You Specific* audience. For example, Michael believed he possibly knew who might blog back to him. In his first post he wrote:

Hi, my name is Michael. I just entered the world of blogging and it is fun. I like posting comments on other blogs. I also like writing blogs online. My favorite subject in school is science. If you are new person like me I think you should read this. My friend is Mary.

Emmy too exhibited a *You Specific* audience that sometimes moved from a “You Generic” over to “We.” This was particularly true when she concentrated on her accomplishments, as evident in this post about a legislative event, at which she represented her class and her school:

I am at the Georgia Depot and I am interviewing legislatures [sic] and I have had wonderful answers especially Jimmy Pruett. We have given them the opportunity to answer and record questions. I have been able to get a caricature drawing done of me and the food is great (and free)....

Step 2: Whom Are Young Bloggers Addressing in Their Writing?

Addressing was herein constructed to mean specific individuals to whom the bloggers would either greet or respond. The first observation of note that can easily be seen when examining Table 2 is the category with the overall least number of “hits,” i.e. *Classmates*.¹ Evidently, almost all of the students regarded communicating with more distant groups as more important than with students sitting close by. For no blogger that we studied was the frequency of responses to the *Classmates* category greater than that for another group. However, it was not the only category ignored by some of the bloggers. Whereas Eddie, Johnny and Michael did not connect with anyone in the *Classmates* group, an equal number of students – Leslie, T.K., and Rosalinda – did not connect with anyone in the *Wider Peer Audience* group.

By comparison, the group that received the overall most hits was the *Teacher (Wider Audience)* group. The highest single score was received in this group, and overall scores were very robust here. As a group, they received over twice the number of aggregate responses (a score of 616.1) than the next most numerous group, *Graduate Students* (which had a score of 300). We do not have the data to completely answer why this occurred. Perhaps because these teachers were accomplished writers and bloggers, their facility with language, and ability to “draw out” shy students led them to be very popular with the student bloggers. Perhaps the fact that the students were aware that these experienced people would not be grading them was a factor. Notably, one of these *Teacher (Wider Audience)* group members, Lani, was responded to by literally every blogger, and

was singly responsible for a plurality of the comments from this category.

Another interesting finding was that students overall significantly varied in the proportion of their overall commentary to their responses to commenters. On the lower end, Johnny, despite 73 pages of blogging material, responded, on average, only 40% as often to the comments of any other bloggers as the high scorer in the group, Mary. Part of the reason for this was Mary’s exceptionally high personal score for responding to *Teachers (Wide Audience)*, at over 75. This was more than three times Johnny’s score of 23.3. It is reasonable to assume that Johnny and Mary each regarded the blogging experience as having very different purposes. Mary seems to have viewed the feedback from experienced teachers as being essential to her success as a blogger, whereas Johnny obviously found that this was less important for the blogging he wanted to do.

A more typical median score was that of Eddie, another profuse blogger who produced 75 pages of material. Unlike Johnny, he responded to everyone except to *Classmates*, and in perhaps the most balanced way. However, he, too, seems to have privileged the remarks of *Teachers (Wide Audience)*, since they receive his highest score as well (46.1).

When we reanalyzed the blogs to search for clues as to what might have motivated this privileging of certain groups over others, we noticed that comments made by other students (*Classmates*) were often ignored, dismissed, or treated superficially by these bloggers. An example of such a response to a classmate is Emmy’s reply to Johnny’s critique of her post on a favorite school subject:

Johnny: I wish you had talked more about what science projects you did In science class. And more about what you do In basketball do you go to games. Or Is It a fun thing you do at home? Jhonny I didn’t talk about the science projects because I was just saying that I only liked them. I only said that I liked basketball. Emmy.

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On the other hand, our second search also showed that the commentary by outside groups was privileged not only by the frequency with which the bloggers responded, but by the praise and gratitude shown by the students toward these more experienced people – teachers and graduate students. To illustrate, in this post, Anni thanked Lani, a teacher from the wider audience, for inspiring her as a writer and for helping her improve her own writing (note Anni named this teacher “the best writer” and used nine exclamation marks to communicate this high opinion of this teacher to her audience):

My best writer !!!!!!!!!!!

I really enjoy all of Lani's post .They really help me because when I have trouble with prepositions she helped me .This is one comment that she was helping me on ” You said you were having difficulty with prepositions at school and you asked: “Do you have problems with some part of speech?” Can you tell me which words are prepositions in this paragraph or in the paragraph above this one?” Now I am better at prepositions. She also helps me with words that I don't know defonition of.

Thank You Lani

Maria Dulce, another blogger, included a graduate student in her “thank you” note to the teachers from the wider audience as well:

mY THANK YOU COMMENT (emphasis from the original quotation)

I'm thanking to everybody who comment me and I'm so glad people really did. The first person I'm thanking to is Lani you said alot of nice comments and I 'm glad you liked my story's. Did you know your were the first person to blog me? The next person was realy special to me and her name is Ms. Best. I think you tried your best in every thing

too and I 'm very glad your glad to be a Latino. I 'm Latino and I'm very happy about my culture too. Finlay is some one who tells the truth if she liked it or not. Chris I know you didn't understand my story is just I couldn't think what to write. I promise I will do a better story next time...

Another category that the students responded more often than *Classmates* was that of *Other*. Since people in the *Other* category seemed to be from other walks of life altogether, it was difficult for us to discern why the students enjoyed responding to them, other than that they appeared, in a few cases, to be people the students knew (i.e., family members or friends, such as “Uncle John,” who wrote to Michael).

The most prolix blogger, Eddie, was also the blogger that most often responded to *Peers (Wide Audience)*, but other students did not give this group a high score. They thus were ranked second to last.

In third to last place was the classroom teacher (*Teacher*) category. Because this particular year-long session of blogging had some of the features of an “assignment,” we believe that the comparative reluctance shown by these bloggers in addressing or responding to the classroom teacher may have been simply the maintenance of a respectful distance. We also observed that although classroom teachers offered comments on ideas in student writing, they tended to also give much attention to grammar, language or other issues in student writing. A response to Tina from this classroom teacher illustrates this kind of feedback:

Hi Tina,

I wish you had used spell check on this post because it is filled with so much good information. Always run spell check because it will pick up those errors. Also, remember to proof your work by reading it out loud.

You do such good thinking and contribute a lot to class. I think you are a good blogger! Reach for the stars! Mrs. C

As we can see, “Mrs.C” intertwines praise with a practical tip for a better result. Such advice is of course putatively helpful, but it also serves to reinforce that the blogging done by the students was performed in a school setting, and therefore possessed some of the features of “schoolwork.”

How Do Young Bloggers Invoke/ Address their Audiences?

The bloggers in this study used different strategies to invoke or address their audiences, and these reflected their personalities as well as the roles they envisioned for themselves and for their audiences. For example, Victoria always named the persons to whom she responded, immediately before the post, unless she was writing an assignment that she was sharing with the blogosphere. She was respectful of teachers, as with her response to Mrs. A’s criticism of a post: “You flatter me with your comments.” She also seemed to mollify and curry favor with the graduate students and teachers, as when, in response to a comment from Chris, she said, “Thank you for telling me that I need to work on my punctuation [*sic*] skills. Since you told me that, I can tell you are a person who is helpfull. And a person who tells the truth. What do you do for a living?” These quotes indicate that Victoria appeared to view blogging as a challenging game to improve at, rather than as an opportunity to reveal herself. She wrote, “Ever since my first day of blogging I have been learning to write, read, use descriptive words, and to do better in my writing!”

The role that she created for her audiences was that of a supporter. She seemed to be interested in cultivating good public relations with her classmates, teachers and the other people she encountered on the blog, rather than using the

blog to further compositional goals per se. To do this, she sometimes seemed to use her frequent questions as a kind of pleasant distraction, rather than to allow her blog posts to reveal things about her. Her classmate Eddie, who is also studied here, spoke about his interest in marine biology. In responding, Victoria replied, “You’re a very smart guy so use your knowledge that way you can have a good future when you grow up. POP QUIZ! If you had \$100,000,000,000 how would you spend it? See you in class.”

Eddie, on the other hand, did not conceal how he felt about the subjects that he wrote about. When describing the untimely death of his dog, he resorted to all caps – “DEAD.” In his otherwise lighthearted post on Jamaica, he delved into something he regarded as unfair – why he was denied an earlier visit to the island:

Last time I was going to go but my brother got bad grades and we couldn’t go. This time i’m going by myself although my brother got bad grades. My parents finally saw that it wasnt fair to get held back for my brother’s mistakes. can’t wait for that ocean water to hit my body.

Eddie apparently assumed that respondents and readers would warm to the subjects that he recounted and he saw his audiences as friends and supporters. As a result, he did not hold back much. In the course of completing writing assignments on the blog, his vivid language both signaled his interests to a very general audience and attracted certain members of it. When responding to queries about those more general statements, he sincerely and comprehensively covered any subject that his respondents asked about. In doing this, he successfully made the distinction between statements made for a more general audience, and those made to specific individuals. Compare:

I always thought that time square was the only square. I can’t belive you guys go through the

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processes of making maple syrup. It looks so cool. When we have fairs in our town we have a pie eating contest. The rules are to eat the pie but you cant use your hands. What other kind of festivals do you have in Ohio? [Eddie was writing this post to the new peers he met online]

And:

Well in science class I've learned about the different parts of earth. The crust, mantle, and the core. The crust is the outermost layer of earth. The mantle is the middle layer of earth. The mantle is made of molten rock which shoots out of volcanoes. The last layer of earth is called the core. The core is actually made of many metals (mostly magnetic to be exact). It is made of iron, nickel, alloy, and some other unidentified metals.

Johnny did not “invoke” his actual audience much at all and therefore created no real role for them; they reacted by often assuming the teacher role, as when they asked him to proofread his work. However, in certain posts, Johnny would heartfully express his joy and concern over important personal issues. A good example is this post in response to his teacher having a child:

Guess what just came in our teacher just had a baby that is not something you hear every day in blogging it was just so exiting our teacher had a baby boy named Eli I am so happy for her I wonder if he will come to blog for us and be in her class I just cant wait it is just so exiting [sic] blogging will never be the same because she wont be back for six weeks but it doesnt matter I may be sad but I also happily mostly happy I mean my teacher is having a baby i just cant believe it can you please everybody pray he will be a strong and be able to do any thing he wants to when he puts his mind to it.

His blending of disparate sentences and thoughts and the lack of proper punctuation and

spelling made decoding this piece difficult, but one can see true affect and concern for another here. Therefore, while Johnny was primarily self-expressing through his blog, he was not unconcerned with the welfare of others.

Alternatively, Mia appeared to view blogging as a social opportunity, and as a result, preferred to focus much of her writing about likes and dislikes. Her incuriosity about the likes and desires of others, and the somewhat brusque quality of her posts meant that she tended to treat everyone similarly. When *Peer (Wider Audiences)* member Kara wrote:

Mia,

You remind me so much of myself. My favorite colors are pink and green and consider myself to be sassy and sweet also! I enjoyed reading your poem and I look forward to reading more of your writing. Is this your first blog? If so, how is your experience with it so far?

Mia wrote:

Kira [sic], I feel proud of myself because I made you feel the same you again. Most of the people that I know don't like the color pink, so happy right now. I can be sweet some times, But I always feel sassy. I consider this as my first blogging. My experince so far is preety good my teachers tell me that I use fantastic word in my blogging and I really admire what my teachers say about me.

Tina too assumed that her audience would be interested in her personal stories. She therefore channeled them into the Friend category. In one touching story, she described briefly the history of her dog ownership:

I enjoyed getting to see Harley your dog I used to have a dog just like him but he died last year. When he was little I was a baby and when I cried he came running to me to check on me. He was

always the first thing I always saw when I came home from school. He also slept with me in my bed at night when I went to bed. He was a good dog and last year on his leg it hurt him and his bone was showing so my grama took him to the vet and they said he would die that night. All I have of him now is a picture.

Tina used this story for developing new social relationships with her audiences—her new friends; and she found it rewarding to be able to talk to them about her dog.

Mary, yet another blogger, took pains to communicate with others on a cheerful and evenhanded level. She was polite, responsive and grateful for constructive criticism. Because Mary allowed the comments of others to influence her blogs, the audience she invoked, while of course dissimilar in some ways from the actual audience, approached it in others. She named the people whose comments she addressed, and amended her own work in response to this. For instance, she wrote:

Chris, when you commented on my first 'The Disappointment Turned Great!' you discouraged me. Now I understand you just wanted it to be longer and have fewer exclamation marks. It touched my heart that you took a long time to go through and comment kindly.

Later on, in that blog entry she wrote to her commenters, “Keep commenting truly from the heart.” This shows that Mary also attempted to engage the emotions of her audience when she wrote. She evidently intuited that the processes she used to clarify her own thoughts on the page would likely make her blog entries more intelligible to others. Therefore, she was sometimes “discouraged” when others did not enjoy her entries, and became “encouraged” again when what they said appeared to help those entries. Thus, she saw her audience as both supporters and critics.

Other student bloggers’ ways of invoking and addressing their audiences fell under one of the types of response illustrated above.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Based on the number of pages of the total blog-script (659 single-spaced pages), it is obvious that the blogging experiment yielded important fruit in stretching the writing muscles for the blogging students who participated. Since the text corpus also consisted heavily of exchanges among student bloggers and their readers and commenters, it was evident to us that the audience in this study indeed became an interactive and participatory audience, and did in fact affect the intentions and modify the blogs of the students. Put differently, “Blogs create audiences, but audiences also create blogs” (Liu & LaRose, 2008, p. 7). Baker, Rozenal, and Whitenack’s (2000) work, along with that of Jenkins (2006), has noted that interactive technologies such as blogging invite such roles from the audiences that use these communication tools. Our study has shown that our young writers embraced this kind of audience and the participatory interaction that it offered to them. It is through interaction with such an interactive audience that these young writers were able to sharpen their audience awareness, a concept, as we note above, that is often an abstract and difficult one for young writers (Barbeiro, 2010; Carvalho, 2002; Kos & Maslowski, 2001). For these student bloggers, however, the audience often became real and authentic people whom they chose to both invoke and address in their writing, and whose questions and needs they often recounted in their responses to them. The *You Generic/Specific* and *We* audiences that they invoked in their writing indicated that they indeed were in conversation with their participatory audiences.

The ways in which they invoked and addressed their audiences were different nevertheless. Sometimes, the bloggers saw their readers as friends and supporters; at other times, they saw in them teachers and critics. Others still did not see the need to hear from the audience at all and thus did not assign their readers any particular roles. Interestingly, some of these roles reflect the conception of

blogging as a space for self-expression (Fiedler, 2003; Downes, 2004) and some reveal the perception of blogging as a space for social interaction (Davies & Merchant, 2007; Deng & Yuen, 2011). What these bloggers struggled with, however, was finding an effective way to combine what Werde (2003) described as two oppositional principles of authorship - monologue and dialogue – that is, how to carry conversations in the blogging space with the self and with others (Efimova & de Moor, 2005). As a result, some blog posts read like a stream of consciousness and the authors of these posts appear to “invite the audience’s gaze,” rather than a dialogue with it (Scheidt, 2006 as cited in Liu & LaRose, 2008, p. 6). Other posts were somewhat limited, in terms of interactivity and sustainable levels of dialogue and multiplex relationships. That is, the bloggers who composed the latter posts conversed with their readers about numerous topics and the issues these topics raised for them, and did so even frequently, rather than explore deeper but fewer areas of interest with more readers and commenters. This was partly because of what these bloggers were asked to do in different writing prompts. It may have also been partly because these young writers chose to not return to certain topics and conversations even when they were invited to write freely on self-selected topics.

There are several implications for practice from these findings. First, young writers need opportunities to interact with real audiences for an extended period of time, to help them develop a concept of the interactive and participatory audience. Everyone – the student bloggers, the classroom teacher, and the researchers – were surprised and delighted when interested persons, definitely not part of the ostensible blogging project, offered interesting opinions and viewpoints that came from many nations. The rich communication that this engendered was *sui generis*, and had its own kind of reward. We believe that the students were immeasurably served by it. It led the bloggers to ponder and respond to states of mind and states

of life that had thereunto been foreign to them. They became aware of, and sought to serve, an external, and very real audience. Skillful writers rely on such audience awareness as they imagine and address the needs of their readers in their writing (Barbeiro, 2010; Holliway, 2004). Writing in class with a teacher or peers as the only audience, as has been the experience for so many students in our classrooms (Gilbert & Graham, 2010), will not suffice in today’s digital milieu. It is true that teachers can provide essential help in the actual structuration of their students’ posts; grammar, spelling and narrative order are important ways that a classroom teacher can contribute. We do not anticipate that this will change in the future. However, responding only to a teacher or to students in the immediate vicinity is necessarily a limiting act.

Second, the fact that blogging as a genre often brings together two oppositional principles of authorship, monologue and dialogue (Werde, 2003), is a new writing experience for young writers. That is why young bloggers will need teachers to scaffold the ways in which they can learn to negotiate these seemingly competing writerly agendas and writing spaces. That is, young people must be taught to maintain a balance between that writing done for the self and that which is done for others. This balance is the essence of the blogosphere. Liu and LaRose (2008) observe that such negotiation requires from blog authors the ability to “maintain two delicate balances: the balance between satisfying different types of audiences, and the balance between satisfying themselves and their audiences” (p. 7). Helping students with satisfying their audiences will require particular attention from writing instructors, since we know that young writers have a hard time with not being self-centered in their own writing (Blau, 1983).

Third, moving young writers beyond themselves in their blog writing will also require teaching them about the needs of a variety of audience types that they may encounter in the blogosphere. Such an audience, as was the case in this study, is

sure to be heterogeneous (Liu & LaRose, 2008). It will consist of the known and unknown (Lenhart, 2005), the expected and unexpected (Li, 2005), the invoked and the addressed (Ede & Lunsford, 1984), and will be both approving and critical at times. Exposure to such diverse audiences will expand the facility blog writers will possess in both invoking and addressing these group types as they write.

Young writers in our study were very strategic with the choices that they made about the audiences that they invoked, and in particular about the audiences they addressed. With the exception of the few who responded to nearly all commenters, the majority of the young writers responded very selectively to their audiences, choosing the readers to whom they wished to write back. Being strategic about composing for an audience is an important skill for writers to possess (Dean, 2006). Young writers should be provided with opportunities to exercise such choices with the writing they produce for authentic audiences. Our young writers, however, seemed to be invoking outside group teachers and readers more often than their classroom teachers and classmates. Perhaps these bloggers felt constrained by, or uncomfortable in interacting with the classroom teacher as an audience. Perhaps they associated their teacher's reader role to be primarily that of an assessor or judge of their writing, even though the classroom teachers in this study assumed commenter and respondent roles as well. Ede and Lunsford (1984) note that the teacher-as-reader role in the classroom has already been "established and formalized in a series of related academic conventions" (p. 163). These roles have also been validated through the giving of grades, as well as the teacher power to render other important decisions about these young writers' futures, such as being promoted to the next grade level. Given these facts, it is perhaps understandable why these bloggers chose to address distant teachers who acted only as sympathetic and experienced writers. The emotional safety that these teachers from the wider audience could

provide to these young writers may have allowed them to take risks with their writing.

There is some research that teachers as authority figures may command respect, but not camaraderie *per se* (Pace, 2007). It is possible, therefore, that there is a trade-off of free expression in student blogging in a classroom setting, under the watchful eye of the teacher, for the bonus of a more organized and fruitful experience. Young writers may otherwise lack the discipline to continue blogging in a focused way on their own without such supervision.

As did the classroom teachers in this study, all digital writing teachers play an important role in not only getting blogs started, but more importantly in scaffolding young writers into the "practices, habits of mind, and texts" (Rowell, 2009, p. 97) of blogging. Accordingly, the students in our study were urged to explore their creativity in a way that demanded more of them as writers than merely conversing in a written way with their peers and other readers. The classroom teachers assigned poetry, fiction and non-fiction as blogging assignments that were then loosed to be commented upon by the world at large. This at times breathtakingly broad opportunity for review, from an abundance of peers and mentor figures, must be viewed in a positive light. We believe that the directed, organized and longitudinal nature of the blogging we analyzed, especially because it was not sporadic and scattershot, led to significant gains in expressive power and the inculcation of the needs of the external audience in the work of many of the bloggers whose posts we analyzed. Because of this, teachers may consider focusing on a small number of genre-specific assignments in a single blogging project and aim at more in-depth and sustained conversations on fewer topics that young writers can discuss with their readers over a longer period of time.

Another preference that our bloggers evinced was that of preferring an adult commenter or reader over a peer, irrespective of whether that peer was a fellow student from their immediate class, or a student from another classroom somewhere else

in the world. Perhaps these bloggers felt that they required a writing mentor who could act not only as a “more knowledgeable other” to use Vygotsky’s (1978, p. 128) term that describes a mentor in the apprenticeship learning model, but one who could also provide a different point of view than those from their peer age group.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

In this study, the largest audience that the students addressed was the teacher, if we broadly define this to include graduate students and pre-service teachers. However, the response of the student bloggers to their immediate classroom teacher was meager. Could the experience of the classroom teacher as an ever-present respondent and commenter have limited these young writers’ abilities to invent other types of readers/audiences and the roles they wished for them in their writing? Secondly, would they have invoked or addressed their audiences differently if the readers and commenters on their blogs were made up solely of peers from a wider audience? These questions are difficult to answer with the data at hand, and further research should be implemented to help answer them.

Since blogging affords the merging of self-expressive writing and writing for social interaction (Davies & Merchant, 2007; Deng & Yuen, 2011), and this was an area of challenge to our student bloggers, we need to know more about the ways in which writers invoke and address their audiences within such spaces. For instance, how do they negotiate the tensions and conflicts when these two distinct authorship experiences meet? Equally, it is important to examine the ways in which these contact zone (Pratt, 1991) authorial experiences inform or augment each other. How does this benefit both the writer and the reader? Blogging permitted these young writers to draw ever nearer to both intended and unintended audiences. How they might best serve these audiences in an authentic way, through cogent and effective

writing, is the question that further research should, as an intended audience, address.

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