

Chapter 11

Exploring Tools, Places, and Ways of Being: Audience Matters for Developing Writers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how writers respond to interactions with readers and audience members in two technology-mediated writing contexts: a Hunger Games fan's use of FanFiction.net and a classroom using Scholar to write original narrative texts. The authors look across the two spaces to analyze similarities in how the technology is used to foster interaction with readers and develop writers' craft through these interactions. In particular, they analyze how writing functions in each space as a tool, a place, and a way of being. By considering the affordances of these two contexts, the authors argue that technology is changing how we write and learn to write, in and out-of-school, by connecting writers with an audience that can significantly shape their goals, skills, and processes.

INTRODUCTION

Young people spend increasing amounts of time writing in technology-mediated spaces (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, & Macgill, 2008), and educational researchers continue to call for studies to theorize these practices (Alvermann, 2008; Moje, 2009). As English teacher educators and literacy researchers, we are also interested in exploring connections

between young people's writing practices in in-school and out-of-school contexts. This chapter draws on our research within technology-mediated writing spaces to consider: How is technology changing how we write? How is technology changing how we learn to write, both in and out of schools? Comparing case studies of *Hunger Games*-related writing on FanFiction.net and *Scholar*, a classroom Web-based technology for writing and peer review, we argue that these spaces leverage technology in ways that afford different

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practices and encourage developing writers to attend to audience in new ways. As we continue to investigate ways technology is changing how we write, we find it helpful to return to existing metaphors used to make sense of the Internet (Markham, 2003) and of literacy (Steinkuehler, Black, & Clinton, 2005). Drawing on case studies of two adolescent writers, we conceptualize technology-mediated writing as a tool, a place, and a way of being.

As tools, both *FanFiction.net* (FFN) and *Scholar* connect writers with an audience and they become repositories for writing. Within each space, the technology provides other tools, such as drag-and-drop functionality and Author Notes that encourage writers to engage in particular practices. Thus, these technology-mediated writing context can exemplify the tool metaphors of conduit, extension, prosthesis, and container that Markham (2003) describes. However, we remain mindful not to perpetuate an oversimplification of what happens in these writing spaces by focusing only on the tools that these technologies provide: “By absenting context, individuals, and meaning from the conceptual framework, one derives a framework for Internet technologies which unproblematically transfer knowledge from one person or place to another. As long as there is access, there will be knowledge” (p. 6). Similarly, Steinkuehler et al. (2005) reinforce this notion that an understanding of the tool must be contextualized within each space. In other words, reviews and feedback are tools that shape writing each of these contexts, but writers employ such tools differently in each context.

As places, these technology-mediated writing spaces are “sociocultural places in which meaningful human interactions occur” (Markham, 2003, p. 6). Thus, our research attends to how the culture of each context is created as we examine the interactions between writers and audience that are afforded by FFN and *Scholar*. Our focus on exchanges between participants “does not only require a sense of architecture, but also requires

a sense of presence with others” (p. 8). Yet, in defining them as places, we recognize the “fuzzy boundaries” (Steinkuehler et al., 2005, p. 98) of FFN and *Scholar*, noting that not all of the interactions with audience and all of the writing may happen solely within the technology-mediated writing space.

Finally, as ways of being, FFN and *Scholar* establish patterns and practices that fundamentally shift what it means to be a writer in these spaces. As each of the case studies will illustrate, these technology-mediated writing spaces encourage participation that is self-directed, multi-faceted, and dynamic (Lammers, Curwood, & Magnifico, 2012). Markham (2003) notes that the way of being metaphor encourages us to see that “the self’s relation to Internet technologies is much closer and one can begin to see a collapse of the distinctions that separate technology, everyday life, self, and others” (p. 9). Similarly, Steinkuehler et al. (2005) posit that technology-mediated writing spaces, when conceived of as ways of being, might collapse these distinctions as they bring the dynamics of face-to-face communication into these spaces. As fans and teachers alike incorporate these technology-mediated writing spaces into their fandom and curriculum, practices begin to change and online/offline dichotomies are blurred, if not broken down altogether.

With these metaphors in mind, we turn to articulating the theories of affinity spaces and audience that frame our research. We continue by describing FFN and *Scholar*, introducing our focal participants, and explaining the data collection and analysis procedures used for this chapter. Then, we present findings related to how each technology-mediated writing space exemplifies the tool, place, and way of being metaphors, focusing on interactions between writers and their audience. In doing so, we begin with the FFN case to demonstrate how voluntary participation in an online affinity space connects adolescents with a worldwide audience that shapes writers’ processes and practices in particular ways. We

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