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"I got a confession, I still like Pokémon.": Enacting HOMAGO to foster creative writing

Grace Pigozzi, Ph.D.
Purdue University
gpigozzi@purdue.edu

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Abstract

A discussion of the merits of television cartoons inspired teen bloggers in a creative writing project to enfold those ideas into the overall discursive context, fostering engagement in their writing across the span of the workshop. The cartoon conversation unified writers, ultimately relocating them from physical place to multiple regions of online space. Connected learning teaches implementation of new media in projects designed to reach and enable youth who otherwise lack access to opportunity. Case study participants used varied tools and contexts to reminisce, interrogate meanings, and pursue unique topical ideas as part of the writing process through connected learning. Hanging out, messing around, and geeking out describe stances of engagement of individuals pursuing expertise in new formats. Through connected learning, HOMAGO supports an empowering, authentic approach to writing, teachers can adopt and implement them as part of the writing process that bridges from traditional writing practices to new ones.

Keywords: Affinity space, connected learning, adolescent writing

Introduction

As Internet technology becomes ever more ubiquitous and popular with young people, education policy has paid increased attention to that technology, and at the same time, to adolescent writing proficiency. 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, Persky, & Miller 2008;) other educational research points to how writing has been de-emphasized in the nation's schools (Graham & Perin, 2007a, 2007b) as focus has shifted to accountability and standardized testing.

Embedding digital practices into pedagogy has merits. However, teaching with technology does not automatically mean that student learning will be more robust, and the artifacts will be meaningful. Challenges include a lack of digital integration models of digital integration that effectively enhance classroom literacy instruction with Internet technologies. Teachers also need to know precisely how that integration can best improve learning for students (Dredger & Nobles, 2017; Mitchell, 2019). Literacy researchers and teachers can benefit from understanding how young people are learning new approaches to literacy and having powerful writing experiences as they encounter connected learning processes in their own pursuits of knowledge online.

Connected learning as a phenomenon reconceptualizes literacy learning with digital tools. Connected learning emerges in interaction or connectivity while learners participate in a variety of social practices that are mediated by artifacts (Kumpulainen & Sefton-Green, 2014). HOMAGO represents genres of participation with new media that serve as descriptive frameworks for how youth media practices are defined in accordance with or in contrast to one another (Ito, Baumer, Bittanti, & Cody, 2019). Ito (2010) and Horst et al. (2009) applied the

descriptive terms of hanging out, messing around, and geeking out to describe how HOMAGO informs connected learning design. It should be noted that each genre represents a stance—in terms of intensity and level of dedication—rather than a value judgement about the personalities of networked participants (Ito et al., 2019). While rarely viewed by parents or teachers as a productive learning stage, hanging out represents a young writer's initial engagement with media that is motivated by a desire to develop and maintain connections with friends and is characterized by socializing either on- or offline. Messing around, a transitional genre of participation, corresponds to the beginning of more focused interaction with new media centered on seeking new connections with others, or pursuing an interest that is attainable through media interactivity. Messing around encorporates creating opportunities to browse online sites and experimentation and play on those sites. Geeking out represents a deep engagement or commitment with a specific type of technology, site, or genre in which the user has developed some expertise (Horst et al., 2009; Ito et al., 2010). In popular media, the term HOMAGO appeared in *The New York Times* in 2014 to describe areas of use for teens in a renovation of the Boston Public Library (Ito et al., 2019; Seelye, 2014).

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how *conversation* around learning the process of blogging fostered writing engagement as participants developed expertise. Allowing for HOMAGO: hanging out, messing around, and geeking out, a tenet of connected learning, teachers can support student development of writing proficiency on blogs. I aimed to understand how participants occupied time and place in the hybrid affinity space and how their fluid positioning during the HOMAGO process shaped written products. My research questions were as follows:

1. What factors contributed to participants' take-up of HOMAGO during blogging?

2. In what ways did engaging in HOMAGO influence their writing within the space?

This connective case study is centered on a single, unifying conversation about 1990s cartoons that in many ways influenced the authors' writing trajectories as they enacted their literate identities in displays of agency and empowerment. HOMAGO was manifest in multiple forms as writers, motivated by the conversation, interacted and honed their creative writing objectives, and eventually shared artifacts in a blog affinity space. This study explores how the practices of hanging out, messing around, and geeking out led to the creation of final artifacts that ultimately disrupted and transgressed mainstream writing practices. In engaging with HOMAGO, participants joined a growing movement of innovators harnessing the power of emerging technology to expand access to participatory, playful, and creative learning. Technology as a teaching tool can transform school practices if strategically implemented.

As a medium, blogging connects students instantly and creates a platform for authentic, multi-voiced, widely shared writing as it simultaneously shifts how new knowledge is produced and disseminated. According to Huffaker (2005), blogs represent a perfect medium for literacy development. As authors learn to 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). Short for weblog, a blog consists of time-stamped journal entries that generally consist of thematic pages with commentaries. Blog authors may update daily, weekly, or monthly. Generally, blogs are easily editable, and entries are organized in reverse chronological order (Mazur & Kozarian, 2010; Zawilinski, 2009). 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 within an educational setting, they can also be interdisciplinary (Huffaker, 2005).

The affinity spaces created in connected learning sites are not restricted to online worlds. They are openly networked, and visible across all learner settings. Affinity sites are peer supported, and topical subjects are chosen by the learners themselves in order to achieve higher-order learning outcomes (Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013; Gee, 2013). Similarly, connected learning projects share a common purpose, and strive to be academically oriented. The blogging context, conceptualized the as hybrid affinity space of navigation through physical space and online space, served as the context for locating and sourcing non-dominant discourses consistent with connected learning design (Ito et al., 2010; Ito et al., 2013).

This study depicts a group of adolescent authors, drawn together by their interest in learning how to create a blog. In the online creative writing space, writers attentively integrated distinct 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, as creative writing in school may be, I supported the group as facilitator while participants pursued their own interests. In the process they constructed new, individual values and learning capacities elicited from their own diverse cultures and communities (Ito et al., 2013) in ways that can and should be reproduced in schools.

Theoretical Framework

Written print, visual, oral, and aural material presented online are semiotic modes that comprise text (Alvermann, 2002; Gavelek & Bresnahan, 2008; Kress, 2003). Understanding texts is to know how such things as layout and grammar serve to relate blog entries to other forms of writing used in similar contexts. To understand text is to discover how writers are located in

position to others in the affinity group, and whether blog entries are used to take action in the world. What is considered 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).

Connected learning draws on sociocultural learning theory as it values learning that is embedded within meaningful practices and supportive relationships. Connected learning recognizes diverse pathways and forms of knowledge and expertise while it addresses conditions of access and risk by providing interest-driven instruction in technology for youth who may not otherwise be experienced in its use (Ito et al., 2013). As a theory of intervention that calls attention to power and power relations, connected learning is inherently critical as it recognizes that learning is a lifelong process and is interwoven with an evolving ecosystem of outcomes, communities, institutions, and learning processes (Freire, 1970). Learning that integrates academic content, student interests and peer support represent threads in the fabric of strategic instruction that guides students in learning about text and language functions and how some texts may position them in such a way as to manipulate them. If the world is a socially constructed, readable text, then no text can ever be neutral. If texts position readers in a variety of ways, then readers and writers must learn to recognize and respond (Vasquez, 2004). Especially when working online, students must be able to weigh the variety of conflicting representations and decide which has the most veracity and value. Regarding online learning, it is essential for students to know not only language, but also how images work, as well as how different kinds of media work, and how they can also represent biases. Finally, oracy—oral language—learning how to talk and debate in rich, content ways around texts is crucial (Luke, 2000, 2018).

Connected learning experiences aspire to increase individual and collective user knowledge, and are viewed as introductory experiences to more traditional public or civic involvement. 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 share many similarities with affinity spaces, but connected learning is more academically oriented (Ito et al., 2013).

This study, with its academic elements of creative writing, laminated features of affinity space with connected learning design. Participants initially possessed varying degrees of access to and expertise with using 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 or hyperlinks to enhance the experience of the reader. As a context for connected learning to occur, affinity spaces are open and link to other spaces so that knowledge is shared and transformative. Yet, each affinity space maintains a distinct culture and set of norms, whether in person or online (Gee, 2013) that are negotiated by affinity space participants over time. Members may engage in a variety of ways, depending on the affinity space location. They may choose to participate peripherally by reading but not interacting, or more actively, by adding a comment or character to others' blog posts, or composing an entirely new piece (Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Online, users enter affinity sites, such as writing sites, and can contribute in many different ways, with different people for different reasons.

As bloggers approached the writing process on their own terms, some of the rich interrelationships between social development and adolescent writing were revealed. At the intersection of these interrelationships, the communicative overlap of place and space is referred

to in this study is hybrid affinity space (Pigozzi, 2017). Participants interacted in the same room and online, and at times, simultaneously in both zones as they answered spoken questions as comments to blog posts.

Within the space, all participants are on equal creative footing. They may opt to continually reframe their engagement through independent or interactive writing and develop their identities through the inclusion of knowledge gleaned from out-of- school activities in their writing. Online tools are privileged to promote creation, collaboration, and publication (Britsch, 2005; Jenkins & Ito, 2015; Leander, 2002; Smith, 2017). The interactive and defining nature of creative writing is elucidated within the construct of hybrid affinity space and inspires further exploration of the associations between general discussion of writing, organizing and researching for writing, and posting writing in an online site.

Literature Review

The role of technology in education should be manifold: to amplify extant pedagogical capacity, to use technology to teach content, and offer teachers a means to reflect and problem-solve when they are in school contexts with limited means (Mitchell, 2019; Toyama, 2015). Intentional designs of connected learning experiences support writers in their initial ventures into online interaction. Studies challenge participants to expand networks and opportunities for feedback beyond their immediate contexts. The interactivity of online sites provides opportunities for identity exploration in some out-of-school contexts, while school-based HOMAGO studies facilitated student documentation and collaboration.

Meaningful conversation is the focus of a participatory action research program, Council of Youth Research, is a connected learning study project that disseminated presentations, writings, and video to demonstrate how audience members engaged in meaningful conversation

about issues affecting their schools and communities. Students melded academic literacies with out-of-school online interactions for civic and critical purposes. While digital media provided a context for the creation of complex, multimodal artifacts, it simultaneously renegotiated an understanding of relational and social power for participants who engaged in multiple forms of dialogue to develop critical consciousness (Garcia, Mirra, Morrell, Martinez, & Scorza, 2015).

Connected learning shifted participant focus to personal agency in a case study of social media use. Through connected learning, college students practices asserted agency as it took control of the technology and using it actively in their lives in support of their conscious purposes. The study suggests that students can expand their social and professional networks while increasing opportunities for feedback from a wider sphere of influence found in online sites (Brown, Czerniewicz, & Noakes, 2016).

The popularity of HOMAGO as a learning process has expanded. Studies specific to identifying and describing specific aspects of HOMAGO increasingly include museums, library maker spaces, and a variety of STEM projects. Museum learning spaces increasingly provide tools for tailored educational exploration using HOMAGO principles (Sabiescu & Charatzopoulou, 2018). Library practices of HOMAGO can change facilitator perceptions of young people, recasting them as creators rather than consumers. Interactions between mentors and peers were dialogic and reflective while they explore both traditional and digital media, and engage in expressive and creative projects (Abbas & Koh, 2015; Egbert, 2016).

Connected learning supported discourse and documentation in a design-based learning study with middle school students. Connected learning through social networking forums facilitated documentation and social interaction as students crafted a collaborative design process. Facilitators mediated the exchange of ideas and refinement of the design for learning. Students

engaged in experimentation, direct inquiry, and progress comparison online (Won, Evans, Carey, & Schnittka, 2015). Similar STEM studies that tracked characteristics of HOMAGO and found that it supported self-directed learning with a student preference for geeking out, yet showed no linear progression (Evans, Won, & Drape, 2014; Schnittka, Evans, Won, & Drape, 2016). In contrast, a Miami-area YouMedia survey study found that half of youth participants spent time hanging out and messing around. Only 21% reported geeking out. (Santiago, 2012).

HOMAGO practices still appear to be relatively challenging for teachers. Connected learning practices were qualitatively analyzed in a study of preservice teachers in a low-resourced region who used digital media as a tool for learning. No teachers were observed geeking out. Few spent time messing around. Instead, most participants hung out online, becoming accustomed to online formats as they determined an appropriate time and place to engage in new media (Ansong-Gyimah & Gyamfi, 2014). Another Connected Learning case study with teachers described HOMAGO as a process of "mediated reinvention" (p. 320) in which participants underwent ideological transformation as they reconsidered creative use of technology (Baker-Doyle, Hunt, & Whitfield, 2018). This study provides an example of how teachers can remain involved with students through the process of HOMAGO.

Methods

Connective ethnography (Hine, 2000), attends to layers of context occurring online and the interrelationships surrounding literacy practices. Connective 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). Bounding occurs by cultural processes: collective meaning making in writing or face-to-face, in this event, on a blog. To contrast connective 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, connective ethnography presents an accurate reflection of participant perspectives and behaviors and uses inductive, interactive, and recursive data collection and analytic strategies to build local and cultural theories, but the data is comprised of artifacts generated online (Greenhow, 2011; Hine, 2000). Traditional case study methods necessitate holistic description, multiple sources of evidence, and finely detailed analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit. A chain of convincing and converging evidence, constructed as data from across contexts is analyzed (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2009). Similarly, with connective case study, bounding can also occur by connectivity (Pigozzi, 2017). Bounding for this study brings together interaction that occurs face-to-face, online, and on individual blogs that link to a singular group blog space.

Context and Participants

Selection criteria involved inviting students between the ages of 12 and 17 who were interested in learning how to blog to participate. The idea originated outside the literacy center of a Midwestern university. Frequently, older siblings accompanied their younger siblings for reading tutoring services and waited in the hallway during lessons. When the older sister of a grade 4 student requested online access while she waited, she also inquired about the blog that the clinic used for writing practice. Subsequent requests from siblings of others who waited in the hall became more complex, asking for assistance with Internet navigation, and later, asking me whether I could also teach them to blog. The idea for a study was born. The data from the larger study of 10 participants compared interviews, field notes and artifacts from the blogging affinity space. This study focuses on the interactions of three authors, whose comments and writings provide concrete examples of the HOMAGO phenomenon. Derrick, 12, was an African

American male in grade 7 attending a suburban middle school. Mina, 16, was an African American female in grade 10 from a parochial secondary school. James, 14, was an African American male in grade 8. The three cases were deliberately and inductively chosen as cases because their writing and positioning was different in quality from one another and from the rest of the group. In terms of HOMAGO, their actions are illustrative of the steps of hanging out, messing around, and geeking out.

All participants attended ten, two hour-long weekly group sessions with other authors in the literacy center of an urban midwestern university. Per connected learning format, patterns for discussion activities, genre requirements, and use of mentor texts was determined not in accordance with traditional, school-sanctioned norms for success, rather by what participants deemed was relevant and appropriate to the collective blog space.

They discussed writing genres, searched online for mentor texts and wrote short stories, poems, and informational pieces to share on the blog space. Prior to each genre change, participants discussed and recorded the elements of genres and criteria for self-assessment. The same quality assessment lists were applied to the posts of others and referenced in blog comments. Participants voted as a group on genres to include and chose all topics themselves. This work received Institutional Review Board approval prior to recruitment; because of their ages, participants gave assent while their parents/guardians provided informed consent.

Data Sources and Analysis

Each blog post was considered an individual unit of analysis. Written artifacts were triangulated with observational and interview data. Individual internet use was logged daily by collecting online history information and was used to verify participant navigation. Face-to-face interviews were recorded, transposed and coded. Field notes were 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). Data analysis included open-ended coding of patterns, events, actions, etc. of the triangulated data (Charmaz, 2003). As themes emerged from the codes, I compared each of the three cases to identify similarities and differences, and cohesion overall. In the next phase, I coded supplementary data, including interviews and Internet logs for comparisons within and across data (Vaughn & Turner, 2016). A second coder, familiar with the study from inception, assisted in the identification and revision of categorical definitions when novel or contradictory themes across data topics emerged. 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. The second coder 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 (Woodward, 1948; Wainwright, 2010).

Findings & Discussion

In generating topical ideas and organizing work for blog posts, participants frequently engaged in HOMAGO. Instead of my suggesting topics, writers considered ideas aloud to the group. Inspired by the popularity of Pokémon Go, a new augmented reality mobile game, cartoons became a central starting point for three members in particular: James, Mina, and Derrick. While Mina generally preferred discussion of popular social media sites and 1940s American and British poetry, she initiated the cartoon affinity group conversation, which 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 February. Participants were gathered together at one end of the room near a snack table, making hot chocolate. They were

reminiscing about Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network shows that they used to watch, as 14 year-old James explained, "when they were young."

> **Mina:** [to James, who has an anime drawing as his iPhone screen saver] I used to watch Pokémon.
> **Facilitator:** Did you guys ever watch Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles?
> **Mina:** I did not---
> **Derrick:** Yeah! Loved them!
> **James:** [Hushing him.] For some reason I have to believe that they went forward with another movie for them.
> **Mina:** They did.

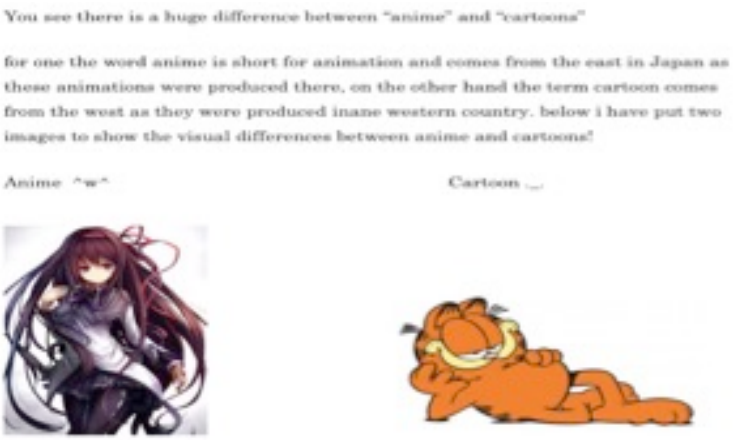
In the initial process of hanging out, participants began to know one another and shared their early preferences—or dislikes—for cartoon watching. It should be noted here, that at the time of data collection, Pokémon had been a popular cartoon for young children a decade prior. A new video game, Pokémon Go, was about to be released, but as young adults, the bloggers positioned the franchise as, in Derrick's words, "babyish." As the conversation navigated to favorite action animation, participants moved to their laptops, but not all stayed in the study carrels. After putting their devices on a centrally located table, Mina and James conducted parallel searches for "Ben Ten" episodes, which they found while hanging out as YouTube viewers, briefly watching introductions to various episodes.

> 01 **James:** [Names choices] 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 **James:** Here it is again, Generator X. [He is looking up old cartoon titles on his
> 05 laptop.] Now those were some fun episodes. [Switches to Airbender.]
> 06 **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. Meanwhile, in a study carrel, James 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. James was seeking relevant pathways to new information and inspiration for his final creation, an informational piece about anime. As his writing progressed, James located himself in several affinity spaces involving writing. 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, James 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.

Figure 1. Excerpt from James' final post



James' text guides affinity space participants through the planning and organizational process for this post. The images invite comparisons about the quality of the drawings as they relate to genre. The blog post continues with a 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. James used grapheme in the form of emoticons to illustrate his opinion of the quality of each drawing in the captions that explain them: "Anime ^w^" and "Cartoon ._." The emoticons are key to his beliefs: the happy cat face for anime, and the bored face for cartoons point to his critical assessment. In

all, James wrote across multiple genres, including an editorial on materialism, love poetry, and an expository piece on the superconductor. Posting about anime, however, afforded authentic interaction with his reader with questions supported by illustrations.

Mina returned to the blog site—but stayed at the central table—to mess around with her own writing. That day, she began composing a post, which she revised anew. She was now geeking out during every subsequent session as she worked on it. Entitled "Proprioception," the piece takes the familiar cartoon trope of falling off a cliff and subverts it. She narrates her own descent from a window after having been pushed.

> 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.

After spending time writing, Mina departed from the blog affinity space to search names of television shows. She briefly looked at Teletubbies on YouTube. James interrupted her.

> 01 **James:** [Turning to Mina, points to screen. Derrick looks up.] There's another
> 02 video about Pokémon. If you're into it in middle school, they're like "Ha!"
> 03 In high school, "Hey!" But later, guys are like "I got a confession, I still like
> 04 Pokémon." And then you hear the audience, it's like [he does slow clap] and
> 05 this [speeds up into full applause clap]. Everybody starts clapping.
> 06 **Mina:** I used to love; I used to collect; I didn't even play those games with the
> 07 cards. I just used to collect them and I had like decks—
> 08 **James:** [Points at screen. Derrick glances at the screen, shakes his head, and
> 09 shrugs.] I think that video talks about the cards. [Derrick navigates to his blog
> 10 profile.]

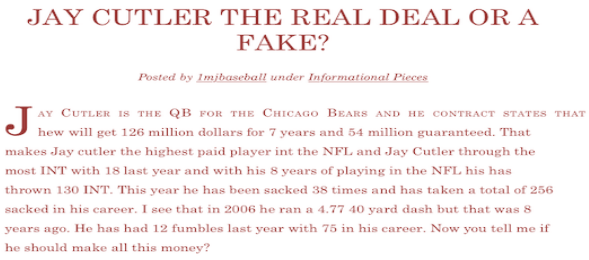
While seated between James and Mina, Derrick had followed the conversation from across the room (lines 1-8). His shrugging and head shaking (lines 8-9) suggest that he found the conversation silly, or perhaps it inspired him to pursue his own interests further (lines 9-10). Derrick generally avoided group conversation unless it was relevant to his writing. Instead, he preferred to hang out online, reading individual blog posts. He later messed around, writing

positive comments on others' blogs, and exploring Google and other affinity spaces as he became more comfortable navigating his blog and other media. Following his comments in the cartoon conversation, Derrick selected and posted his avatar, a meme that reads "It's okay if you think baseball is boring. It's kind of a smart person's sport."

> 01 **James:** …and this is mine [He shows the anime image on his phone to Derrick,
> 02 holding it next to the new avatar on his blog post. It is the same image.]
> 03 **Derrick:** [Looking at his own screen] This isn't a picture.
> 04 **Facilitator**: It'll work. Go to you on the dashboard. Go ahead. [Nearby,
> 05 James begins explaining to another blogger how to upload an avatar photo.]
> 06 You want to go to Profile. Why's that all weird on there?
> 07 **Derrick:** Rough draft. Something else. Take it from the desktop? [He
> 08 does so as he speaks and posts it.]

After selecting the image for his avatar, Derrick had difficulty uploading it from Google Images, while James had taken one from his own phone (lines 1-3). "This isn't a picture" (line 3) refers to Derrick's awareness that he has selected a meme, unlike James, who had chosen an avatar from drawings of anime characters on his phone. The young men are engaged in messing around across the room, experimenting with image selection on different devices, and figuring out how to embellish their blog areas. James then engaged in geeking out, expressing his expertise in posting an avatar (line 5) by assisting someone else in doing so. Simultaneously, even as Derrick asked for my assistance, he demonstrated his own expertise as he accomplished his task even as he questioned how to do it. He also revealed that he had posted a rough draft of a new post (lines 7-8). Like James, Derrick was seeking relevant pathways to new information and possibly found further inspiration during the search for his final creation, which became an informational piece about football statistics with a critique of inflated NFL salaries.

Figure 2: Derrick's post



JAY CUTLER THE REAL DEAL OR A FAKE?

Posted by Imjbaseball under Informational Pieces

Jay Cutler is the QB for the Chicago Bears and he contract states that hew will get 126 million dollars for 7 years and 54 million guaranteed. That makes Jay cutler the highest paid player int 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?

As his writing progressed, Derrick located himself in five other affinity spaces where he checked out other blog and fanfiction sites and interacted by commenting on the posts. as he discovered them, and sourced information from those sites. Other writings by Derrick included a a short script for a courtroom drama, and poetry about Valentine candy. 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 blog posts in a public space. Reflecting on his own intentions, he realized the import of the digital afterlife of online writing. Not only had he come to identify himself as a blogger, he also understood the impact he could have on an authentic, if invisible audience. For Derrick, geeking out was sudden acknowledgement of a power he could capture for future writings that may or may not further his individual status and credibility within the blog affinity space. The fact that Derrick elected not to take down the post, even after realizing that it questioned the integrity of an NFL player drawing a large salary during a mediocre season is relevant. He affirmed his right to publicly share his opinion.

Discussion & Implications

The examples of Derrick, Mina, and James demonstrate how participants developed a kernel of an idea from conversation about childhood cartoons that lead them in vastly differing ways to being agentive by as they pursued images and new topics for writing that transcended

former abilities. Their meaningful conversation provided multiple forms of engagement that led to storyline development about issues in their lives and communities (Garcia, Mirra, Morrell, Martinez, & Scorza, 2015). Their focus was generally more social commentary rather than about community engagement.

As authors collaboratively wrote poetry, short stories, and informational pieces, their intersubjective action generated novel and unique meanings in the social context formed by its users. Dialogue fused peer and popular culture learning in meaningful ways that differed across the writers and their artifacts. As students collaborated to find design elements such as images, documentation through social interaction was facilitated (Won, Evans, Carey, & Schnittka, 2015).

Connected learning and participation in the hybrid affinity space was an interest-driven process. Participants generated ideas through and asserted agency through what appeared to be idle conversation. When they linked personal experience to new writing topics and uses of the blog, the affinity space provided a context for merging cultural capital with new writing tools (Brown, Czerniewicz, & Noakes, 2016; Skerrett, 2010). While the relevance of social interaction is not addressed in affinity spaces (Gee, 2005), connected learning environments are similarly interest-driven and address the potential of meaning making created when a variety of supports and allowances are combined in ways that allow young people to think, integrate, and transform interests across and between domains (Ito et al., 2013) as they move through affinity space.

Increased actions within the hybrid affinity space reflect planning and organization processes of messing around. James sought cartoon art to contrast it with the anime illustrations he knew well. Editing posts and commenting on the work of others are also emblematic of messing around. Writers demonstrated working knowledge of the space, and could use many

features with proficiency, as Derrick had when he collected sports statistics to support the claims of a blog post he was writing. Posting a piece that was crafted with mentor text and perhaps images that were sourced online defines the geeking out process, as shown in James' final illustrated post. Affinity space participants displayed expert qualities when they have thoroughly learned a new platform or online process.

To return to the research questions, the factors that contributed to participants' take-up of HOMAGO during blogging included invitations to conversation, verbal and silent reflection about possible writing topics, and movement within the affinity space as it shifted from from face-to-face discourse to pursuit of interests online. As participants engaged in HOMAGO, what they wrote was influenced by elements of the process. Mina initiated hanging out: she solicited insight about the cartoons. As other speakers joined in, this action provided context and time to share ideas and opinions, in this case about past narrative media use. As writers messed around online in pairs or alone, they shared and developed knowledge as they searched for images and writing ideas, notably on other online writing sites, as Derrick had. Finally, bloggers demonstrated agentic acts through their words as they articulated those ideas into blog posts as well as their identities online. James tacitly voiced an awareness of how his early interest in Pokémon informed his current interest in anime as he pursued sources to write about it. He knew, that in a few years, he could acknowledge that he once thought Pokémon was cool.

Conclusion

Although working with a larger sample size would provide greater opportunity to pinpoint and define elements of HOMAGO, this small study opened a brief portal into tracing its effects on the blogging process. Future connected learning studies could focus on other factors, including how social media affects topical choices. More broadly, a larger study of how the

immediate cognitive dissonance fostered by a switch to all-online learning contributed to participants' take-up of HOMAGO during blogging and other online activities is definitely warranted.

When writing is an interest-driven process and online writers are allowed to share those interests within a network of peers, the result is highly active and engaged learning. Writers gain validation for their work when the audience is broadened online (Ito et al., 2019). HOMAGO affords space for writers to gauge their perceptions with those of their peers. Collaboration becomes essential when writers work in tandem or develop new text from each another's ideas. Through the sharing of perspectives, students gain insight as they interrogate a text, image, or cartoon to determine its meaning. Teachers can mediate reinvention to support students' ideological transformation by reconsidering creative use of technology (Baker-Doyle, Hunt, & Whitfield, 2018). Encouraging what may appear to the onlooker as meandering conversation and online multitasking with no apparent purpose can actually generate creative space for online writers to learn new formats, test their boundaries, and gain expertise while they interact across physical and online spaces. Blog posting represented the culmination of geeking out, attaining expertise, which in terms of adolescent identity, enabled each author to portray him/herself as an expert writer. In the context of HOMAGO, hanging out affords young people the opportunity to explore and perhaps locate new, or additional affinity spaces in which they might participate. As users mess around, they seek like-minded peers who share an online or offline interest, and create time and space to begin to learn how to engage and make meaning within the new context. Geeking out reflects a commitment to a particular endeavor, and a clear effort in mastering skills necessary for success and credibility in the space or project. Exploring the framework of

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HOMAGO and its connection to affinity spaces is a useful pathway to creating authentic and meaningful writing experiences for students.

Blogging within classrooms can be used to foster student agency and empowerment, as it supports students in connecting ideas and strategies gleaned independently beyond school—in this case to 1990s cartoons—to a classroom context. By drawing on students' own understandings of out-of-school literacy practices, teachers can facilitate opportunities to enhance literacy learning within classrooms (McCarthey, Kennett, Smith, & West, 2017). The bridge from those external online experiences is hybrid affinity space. With a blog, students inhabit space in ways that flow from online space to classroom space, and back again, bringing what is possible beyond the classroom directly into it.

The discourses that students adopt as they resist or affirm their own and others' online writing continually relocate them in new discourses. In a classroom setting, teachers can support students as they learn the tools of blogging while actively engaged in the often messy process of blogging and allowing the requisite conversation that prepares and inspires new topics. In this way, students transform their abilities and capacity for making meaning.

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Appendix A

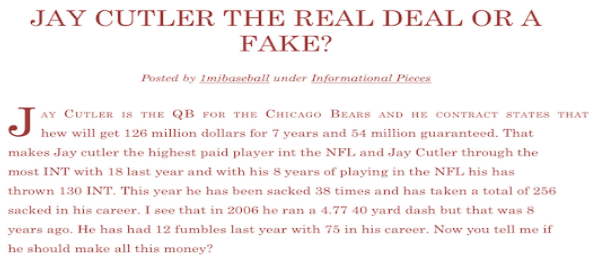
You see there is a huge difference between “anime” and “cartoons”

for one the word anime is short for animation and comes from the east in Japan as these animations were produced there, on the other hand the term cartoon comes from the west as they were produced inane western country. below i have put two images to show the visual differences between anime and cartoons!

Anime ^w^ Cartoon ._.

Figure 1. Excerpt from James’ final post

Appendix B



JAY CUTLER THE REAL DEAL OR A FAKE?

Posted by Jmibaseball under Informational Pieces

Jay Cutler is the QB for the Chicago Bears and he contract states that hew will get 126 million dollars for 7 years and 54 million guaranteed. That makes Jay cutler the highest paid player int 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?

Figure 2: Derrick's post