From the **Editors**

Re-Seeing Response, Refining New Literacies

Our world is constantly changing as people act and interact using the tools and practices constructed by society. Shifts and changes in our literacy practices are visible in our own lives as well as in the lives of young people who surround us in our work and play. If we were to make a quick mental timeline of our own communication practices, we likely could name the time when cell phones came into our lives, when and why we began using email, when texting became part of our communicative practices, and how a computer/laptop and/or tablet transformed how we compose and read texts. If we observe and listen to those around us, we also learn about changes in the ways young people interact with and make sense of their world. We might see the ways in which they come to understand social issues as they compose a digital book drawn from perspectives gained from multiple online sources. Or we might see how they narrate their thinking using an app like Explain Everything (http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/explain-everything/id431493086?mt=8).

These changes invite us to think about the meanings we make about ourselves and the world as we transact with texts and others. Louise Rosenblatt taught us that when we transact with literature, we (as readers) construct a *poem*. The *poem* we each create is different based on our histories, contexts, and intentions. Turning to Rosenblatt's work to help us understand current changes and possible futures is what this issue of *Talking Points* is all about.

April Sanders opens this issue by providing an overview of Rosenblatt's work and of new literacies and by beginning to draw connections between these two realms of literacy thinking and research. Lenny Sanchez narrates the experiences of a young boy as he lives through a self-authored, multimodal text, linking the boy's moves with Rosenblatt's foundational work. Marva Solomon invites us into a first-grade community engaged in digital storytelling, suggesting how the genre and surrounding practices can help us rethink the role(s) of audience in transactions with digitally produced stories. And last, Mary Styslinger and Emily Eberlin share their collaborative inquiry into using an online space for teaching and learning. Each of these pieces addresses changes and challenges associated with an increasingly multimodal world.

Kathryn Pierce's book group recommends some wonderful books for us to learn more about the intersection of reader response and new literacies, while Rick Meyer suggests that whole language teachers are in a prime position to understand and use new literacies.

While it may seem that we are faced with a great deal of "new" in this issue, all these pieces suggest that we must not forget all that we know. Rather we must forge connections between new contexts and foundational thinking. We must think in terms of needed shifts that build on what we know while inviting new possibilities afforded by new tools about where we've been, where we are, and where we're going.

— **Katie Van Sluys** and **Carol Gilles,** Editors

Each of these pieces addresses changes and challenges associated with an increasingly multimodal world.

Rosenblatt's Presence in the New Literacies Research

April Sanders

Louise Rosenblatt (1978) established the transactional theory that moves literacy instruction away from prescribed meanings established by author, teacher, or expert into more of an experience with literature. Rosenblatt's reader response theory has a long history of being connected to print text, but as the language arts classroom evolves and technology broadens the realm of literacy, theory must adapt as well. While connections can be made between reader response theory and new literacies, literature that explores such connections is just emerging. In this paper I examine the changing nature of texts and literary practices in order to illustrate possible connections between Rosenblatt's reader response theory and new literacies in order to help escort educators and researchers into a new world of multimodal, transactional thinking.

Rosenblatt's Theories

Beginning in the 1920s, New Criticism emerged as the dominant theory used when teaching literature, and this theory places an emphasis on meaning that resides solely in the text. This theory remains a popular perspective for teaching literature, but the emergence of the contrasting reader response theory has challenged New Critical thinking. Reader response theory suggests that literature cannot be considered in isolation from the reader. Instead, the reader brings experience and knowledge to the text and creates meaning. Beach (1993) divides reader response theories into five categories: textual, experiential, psychological, social, and cultural. Of those five categories, Louise Rosenblatt is considered a major theorist in the experiential category.

Rosenblatt's transactional theory moves literacy instruction away from prescribed answers that the teacher or experts have established into more of an experience with literature. The reading experience is so critical in Rosenblatt's theory that she believes that meaning from the text is not created until the reader actually connects with the text, writing that "a novel or poem or play remains merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols" (Rosenblatt, 1983, p. 24). For Rosenblatt, reading transaction is not passive, but rather an active event, because meaning is created when the text and reader come together. The reader and the text have a particular affect on one another to create an experience. Works must be experienced and meanings produced as readers relate to texts (Rosenblatt, 2005). In other words, the transaction produces meaning, and its manifestation is the response from the reader to the text (Rosenblatt, 1978). The text does not contain a single meaning; the text and the reader combine to create meaning and a unique transaction.

Rosenblatt argues that text must be read and interpreted by the individual; the reading will be influenced by the individual's experience and stance. If the text is more than a literal piece, "the reader must have the experience, must 'live through' what is being created during the reading" (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, p. 33). The response emerges from what is in the text but also what is in the reader. A reader's growth comes from sorting through the "ideas and emotions relevant to the work" in relation to life experiences and literature (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 71). Instead of simply relying on or only regarding the knowledge of a critic or expert, the transactional theory gives credence to the reader and what s/he brings to the text. Whatever the reader brings to the text builds the foundation for the reading, which is particularly significant because the "reader needs to honor his own relationship with the text" (Rosenblatt, 1978,

p. 141). Quite simply, the text is read (and experienced) by the reader, not a literary expert or outside other.

The transactional experience is influenced by the stance of the reader, which can be established by the reader or by an outside person, such as a teacher. One's stance can be defined as a position one assumes toward an event or, in this case, text. For Rosenblatt, a reader assuming an efferent stance is one concerned with what one might take away, as the Latin root of efferent means "to carry away." The opposite of the efferent stance is the aesthetic stance. The more literary or aesthetic stance focuses on the combining of the private or personal contributions to the meaning (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995). The experience flows through this transaction that is created when the reader melds text and personal experience together.

The *poem* is Rosenblatt's term for the culminating event happening as a result of the transaction. The poem is "an event in time" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 12). Once a reader brings personal aspects from that moment in her/his life, the experience forms into the transaction. Through true motivation and engagement, an individual response is elicited from the reader. That individual response and transactional experience transforms into the poem. The reader and the text coming together in a particular moment in time results in the poem (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Rosenblatt's reader response theory has a long history of use in the literature classroom, often as a way of approaching literature (Close, 1990; Evans, 1987; Greco, 1990; Vine & Faust, 1993). A common theme across the research involves using reader response theory as a way to work with students' responses to novels read in the classroom (Cox & Many, 1992; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Leal, 1993). But as literacy tools, practices, and texts evolve, in the language arts classroom and beyond, it is worth considering how current theories can be applied and adapted to make sense of current and future actions. Before exploring the connections between new literacy practices and reader response theory it is first necessary to understand thinking associated with the changing nature of literacies.

New Literacies

By defining new literacies, we can see how literacy, which has historically only included traditional reading and writing, is morphing to include the Internet, email, instant messaging, avatars, virtual worlds, wikispaces, webpage design, multimedia applications, and gaming. These are just a few examples of the various specific technologies included under the broad umbrella of new literacies (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). Because the technologies shaping new literacies are rapidly changing (Leu & Kinzer, 2000; Leu, 2001), the precise definition of new literacies will continue to be dynamic and flexible.

Knobel and Lankshear (2006) discuss how the definition of new literacies is tied to changes in mindset instead of solely being connected to technological advances. For example, using PowerPoint presentations for narratives is not incorporating new literacies simply because a technological component is involved. Emailing is another example of how a traditional literacy practice (letter writing) was simply performed on a new machine, yet "when emailing became a truly collaborative practice, underpinning listservs and the like, *that* was new because that bespoke collaboration and participation on a scale and within a timeframe that was more or less impossible to achieve under older media" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006, p. 81).

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The New London Group, comprised of ten experts in the fields of multimedia, workplace literacies, and cultural diversity, met for a week in September 1994 in New London, New Hampshire, to begin a process of reviewing and discussing literacy pedagogy. The focus of discussion was on (1) how new media have drastically changed literacy pedagogy, and (2) the need for exploration of multiliteracies and pedagogy to incorporate new forms of media. The group explored the definition of *multiliteracies* and defined it as going past "mere literacy" focused only on traditional language. The New London Group (1996) identifies "the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies" (p. 61). The term *multiliteracies* can be, and is

Games are powerful systems imparting knowledge, and situated learning is significant to the learning process. The space of the virtual world in games defines the player's identity . . . and players explore the world of the game by being motivated to keep exploring and overcoming challenges presented.

often, used in conjunction with *new literacies*, but the two phrases are not interchangeable. In addition to language, multiliteracies includes modes such as print, gestures, visuals, or talk. The term *multimodal* has evolved from that original concept of multiliteracies. Modes of communication vary by culture and context, and meaning is derived and influenced by the use of such modes with language. Multiple literacies "involve many literacies and modalities beyond print literacy and a heightened awareness of culture" (Cervetti, Damico, & Pearson, 2006, p. 379). The New London group calls for literacy pedagogy to move past "formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language" (1996, p. 61). The work resulting from the New London Group impacted the study of the new literacies in academia, as well as K-12 classrooms.

In continuing the work to define new literate practices, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has established initiatives to define 21st century literacies. Initiatives are designed to connect reading and writing in and out of school. The definition of 21st century literacies established by NCTE states that 21st century readers and writers need to:

- Develop proficiency with the tools of technology;
- Build relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally;
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes;
- Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information;
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts;
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments (NCTE Position Statement, 2008).

As a result of changes in our world and shifts in thinking in our field, a static and traditional definition of literacy and pedagogy that can accompany literacy instruction is not feasible if the new literacies are appropriately included in instruction. Leu et al. (2004) emphasizes that new literacies studies say that literacy must include more than traditional print text and simple comprehension tests. However, just because new literacies are now included in literacy does not mean that traditional literacy practices are obsolete and we must forget all that we have known. Practices associated with traditional literacies continue to provide a foundation for what new literacies need, such as decoding skills, word recognition, vocabulary knowledge, inference skills, and comprehension (Leu et al., 2004). The more traditional and historical definition of literacy has certainly included the mechanics of reading and decoding as well as interaction between the reader and the text, but as communication evolves with technologies, that definition becomes quite limited. It is important that we do not discard historically valued practices and actions but draw from a rich history of literacy thinking to help us best understand current and future practices—in this case, how Rosenblatt's work can be used to understand new literacy practices.

Connecting Rosenblatt and New Literacies

As students work with different new literacy practices and texts in their lives outside of school, teachers are trying to incorporate some of these media into the classroom. Research is also starting to make the link between new literacies and reader response theory (Aguilar, 2001; Carico, Logan, & Labbo, 2004; Larson, 2008, 2009). Connecting image and language is the primary type of connection students are making with literacy outside of school, and this type of literacy connection will be necessary to function in a rich multimedia world. Lankshear and Knobel (2006) describe this connection by looking at two aspects of New Literacies: technical and ethos. The technical aspect includes the tools and operations, such as clicking and cropping, that are employed in the creation of multimodal texts. In contrast, the ethos aspect is focused on a mindset that sees the world quite differently than in the past by recognizing cyberspace as a new world not operating with the same values as the physical world. Students come to school with the ability

to make meaning using their available resources, which will include various new literacies that are shaped by this new mindset, Lankshear and Knobel describe. These prior experiences are what Rosenblatt (2005) refers to as "raw images" that the reader can use to help make meaning (p. 65).

Leu et al. (2004) recognize a broad definition in their work: the "ability to communicate, to present one's message, and to understand and evaluate another's message is part of reading, and . . . an interaction and transaction into one's experiences as well as personal response and meaning-making is part of the goal for literacy instruction" (p. 1584). With this recognition of Rosenblatt's thinking about reading transactions, the authors are saying that text is not the only valued element of the transaction.

Additional connections can be drawn by looking at gaming, a new literacy that is being explored more in-depth with regard to its connection to the world of literacy. Alberti (2008) points out, "Aren't novels, after all, seen as 'games' that readers 'play'? They require active participation and hours of work and result in experiences that range from the amusing to the disturbing to the tedious" (p. 263). Gee (2003) has explained that games are powerful systems imparting knowledge, and situated learning is significant to the learning process. The space of the virtual world in games defines the player's identity through the rules of the game, and players explore the world of the game by being motivated and overcoming challenges presented. In gaming, the player *must* be involved in an interaction with the game. Rosenblatt's transactional theory is key to understanding the reader's engagement with literary texts as well as providing the reasons such responses are significant (Soter, Wilkinson, Connors, Murphy, & Shen, 2010). The video game is vital to the experience just as a piece of text is vital to the transactional experience. Likewise, the gamer is also essential in the experience. As Rosenblatt (1938/1995) explains, the transactional experience is personal and varies for each individual based on what the individual brings to the reading experience.

Gee and Hayes (2011) created the term *passionate affinity-based learning* as when people organize themselves, whether in real life or virtually, to learn about a common interest or endeavor. Through such affinity groups, gamers gain and share knowledge that they take directly back to playing within their gaming experience. In a game like The Sims, players can play within the realm of the game and then take what they learned to another level of creation. Such innovation leads to further learning and development. Language arts classrooms should consider incorporating games as texts because they actually are texts—texts readers can transact with. A gamer can find insight into narrative structure as well as interpret the text. Educators can take aspects of the ways gamers are learning in the virtual environment and transfer them into how readers are learning from traditional texts (Gee, 2007). Rosenblatt (2005) argues that a standard literary diet does not meet the needs of our heterogeneous grouping of students. To combat standardization, educators should find literary works that "hold out some link with the young reader's own past and present preoccupations, emotions, anxieties, ambitions" (p. 65). Gee (2007) does just what Rosenblatt suggests by connecting traditional literacy with modern literacy options (such as gaming) in order to produce meaning through transactions.

Connections are emerging in the literature between Rosenblatt's reader response theory and new literacies, and these connections demonstrate new possibilities for pedagogy and literacy learning. As Rosenblatt (1978) writes "It is difficult to assess the residue of successive waves of philosophical thought" (p. xiv). Taking the transactional process off the printed page into the world of new literacies could produce interesting residue from Rosenblatt's reader response theory.

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Exploring the Lived-through Experiences of a Young Learner

Lenny Sánchez

Years ago Louise Rosenblatt raised a question in her now well-cited book, *Literature as Exploration* (1938), of what it means to live through a text. Primarily interested in the reader's processes for constructing a text, she discussed how

> the reader, drawing on past linguistic and life experience, links the signs on the page with certain words, certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain images of things, people, actions, scenes. The special meaning, and more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to him. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text. (p. 30)

Rosenblatt teaches us that the coming together of a text and a reader creates experiences encompassing private memory, presence of feelings, and altered meanings. Together these result in an undiscriminating, highly participatory, unique transaction and become "part of the ongoing stream of [the reader's] life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being" (1978, p. 14).

The reading transaction inevitably is complex, and as Rosenblatt tells us through her extensive writings, this meaning-making process always remains thoroughly personal as it draws on the reservoir of the past and the arousal of one's expectations. Curious about these enigmatic potentialities of personal response, in this article I explore what the experience entails for DJ (pseudonym), a third grader who engaged in the reading of a set of photographs centered on a multimodal project he produced at home and decided to share at school. Building on the ways Rosenblatt gives attention to the transactional relationship between readers and texts, my analysis of DJ's experiences suggests the importance of considering what happens when a reader interacts with a self-authored text and how this might influence personal response. By examining DJ's construction of a multimodal text and his use of a camera to document and discuss that text, this article further illustrates how interconnected media contribute to the complex processes of meaning making. DJ's reliance on drawing, writing, and photography to represent, engage, and impact his everyday happenings allowed him to generate distance from himself in a Freirean sense while seeking to reinvent his world.

Seeing DJ's Proclamation Statement for the First Time

> "The life of a work is surely not its own . . . but a function of the changing life-material." (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 121)

The following excerpt from field notes I wrote in the early days of an inquiry into the lives of third graders describes my initial reaction to DJ's proclamation statement.

> *March 27, 2009*
>
> *DJ arrived to school early this morning and greeted me at the front office door. I was coming out of the office when I first saw him. Walking towards me, he was carrying a three-foot long document, consisting of two pages of writing and one page of drawing with each sheet glued end-to-end. He called out, "Mr. Sánchez, look what I did last night!" As he turned it around so I could see it more clearly, I couldn't believe my eyes! Last night for homework I told the kids to begin thinking about what some of the smaller questions might be that we could begin researching. Instead, DJ came back with this work he had done!*

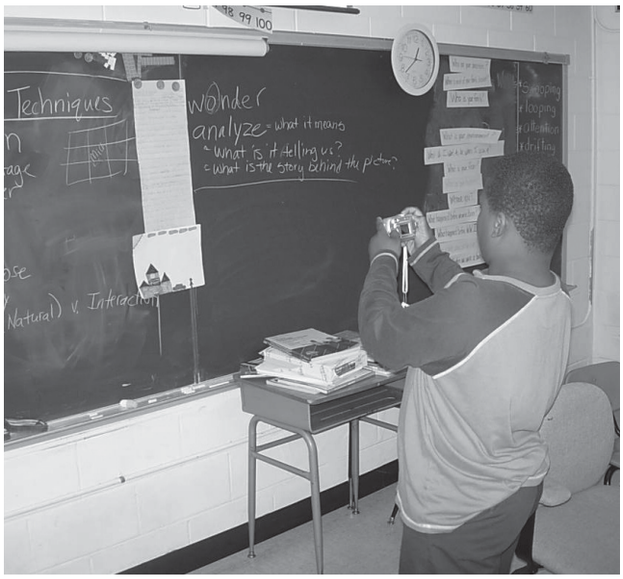

Figure 1. Classmates' photo of DJ taking pictures of his work

During two and a half years at DJ's school, I served as a school-university liaison between a midwestern state university and this public elementary all-boys' school. One of the goals for the partnership involved forming an inquiry community with the adults in the school focused on what it means for literacy to reflect the lives of those within the community. In the spirit of practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), we drew upon a *horizontalidad* approach to partnering (Campano, Honeyford, Sanchez, & Vander Zanden, 2010) in which the university and school partners worked diligently towards maintaining a relationship built on nonauthoritative group decision making, collective goal setting, and continuous participation from all involved in the partnership.

As part of this configuration, I made weekly visits to the school starting the third year of the partnership to work alongside teachers and students in their classrooms. Through poetry studies, letter writing, and read-alouds, I found myself increasingly participating in DJ's third-grade classroom. Over time, the students, classroom teacher, and I initiated a class-wide inquiry, spending several weeks discussing what our potential questions might be. From the outset, we determined we would conduct a social justice–oriented project. It was on the third day of brainstorming questions when students were given the assignment to draft "small" questions at home that concerned specific issues and interests in their individual lives. The next morning, DJ approached me at the front office door with his work, which far exceeded the expectations of the task. He had constructed what we later titled, "My Personal Proclamation Statement," in which he outlined desired changes he defined for himself and the school.

Perceptions of DJ and His School

From the first time I met DJ, I recognized the ease with which he commanded a room. Standing a head taller than his classmates, DJ's physical size alone identified him. He had a smile that would make it difficult for anyone to ignore him and a vibrant personality laced with wit and humor.

During my time in the third-grade classroom, I also witnessed how DJ enjoyed a particularly close relationship with his teacher, Ms. Harris (pseudonym), in part because she had also been his first-grade teacher. Since first grade, Ms. Harris regularly remained in contact with DJ's grandmother and mother out of mutual concern for making schooling a successful experience for him.

To most adults in the school building, DJ was considered a charming, perceptive student who frequently teetered between right and wrong. He adored being a helper to staff and faculty and would be the first to carry items for a teacher from her car to the classroom or to run errands to the office. DJ valued the attention he garnered from participating in such activities and happily welcomed the thank-you hugs or handshakes he received.

DJ also enjoyed engaging in intellectually stimulating one-on-one conversations with adults, including me. He often initiated conversations with me as I passed him in the hallway or by the gymnasium where he played basketball after lunch. Inevitably, if I was unaccompanied, he would approach me, ask about my day, and begin sharing questions or ideas he had been thinking about. He was a keen observer of the world.

Unfortunately, DJ's curiosities and concerns did not always translate into his school work. At times, he became overly involved in peer matters. Often he was punished by school staff regardless of whether or not he had instigated the conflict.

Aware of the disconnect between DJ's ability to succeed in school and the struggles he experienced in school, Ms. Harris regularly reflected on this dilemma in our conversations. She explained to me, "He came into the classroom

this morning with a smile on his face, bubbly, and as happy as can be. Then later I noticed he had a frown on his face at his desk. I knew something was wrong." The longer the school year progressed, the more common these incidents became. When confronted, DJ would tell Ms. Harris how he "couldn't take the teasing from other kids" who harassed him about matters such as his size.

Ms. Harris said,

> DJ gets himself into a lot of trouble, but there are times when others pick at him, pick at him, and pick at him until he can't take it anymore and retaliates. Then he's the one that gets in trouble and suspended, but not them... In gym and art class, other students bug him so that when he's fed up with it and does something, he gets in trouble. . . . He's a target; and . . . other teachers aren't doing anything about it even though he is telling . . . No one is doing anything . . . No wonder why kids resent school. They're not being listened to.

In these exchanges, Ms. Harris admitted that DJ has certainly played a part in his peer problems. She knew that since first grade, DJ had struggled with forming peer relationships in school. She, however, began to problematize the schooling structures that forced DJ to exist as a school member in particular ways, producing a cycle where he was cast as the troublemaker and overlooked when he was the victim, since his suffering must be well deserved for the times he caused misfortune to occur. During the years I spent in the school, though, I witnessed numerous ways the adults did care deeply for the students at this boys' school. Teacher morale and actions often seemed impacted by surrounding conditions such as a focus on raising test scores, threats of school closure, and policies that devalued teachers as professionals.

Upon further reflection on DJ's school and his reputation, I began to ponder the construction of these images and the conflicting viewpoints presented by his proclamation statement. Even when DJ first shared his work with me, I remember feeling caught off-guard by his intention to find me and show me this work. He had arrived extremely early that morning, walking to school that day, just to meet with me. DJ pulled me aside in the front office hallway to share his work, telling me how "[he] started working on it when [he] got home and worked on it all night" despite the fact that, according to his teacher, "DJ did not have a reputation for completing homework assignments."

Additionally, I considered the significance of DJ's decision to utilize the office entrance as the location for sharing his proclamation statement. Although the office resembled a place of distress for DJ, given the many punishments he received there throughout the year, it did not deter him from finding me there that morning. Though he may have selected the entrance simply because I was there at that precise moment, it is worth considering how he could have waited until I walked down the hallway, entered the gymnasium area, or arrived at the classroom. Instead, he used that site to share his proclamation statement, a document that addressed his personal struggles in school. Thus, by doing so, he disrupted the discourses of the office doorway by transforming it from an area where he was historicized as a bully and disobedient student to one where he could engage in it on his terms in a way that critiqued his sense of belonging in that place.

Aware of the disconnect between DJ's ability to succeed in school and the struggles he experienced in school, Ms. Harris regularly reflected on this dilemma in our conversations.

Taking Pictures of His Work

After DJ showed me his proclamation statement, we left the front office area and walked to the classroom, where he immediately taped his work on the front chalkboard. He grabbed a camera the students had been using for their classwide inquiry project and started taking several pictures of his work. He also asked a classmate to take photos of him holding the composition and reading it (see Figure 1).

Within the previous few days, the students had been learning how to use digital photography in the classroom so they could capture the various ways they were beginning to engage in the classwide research project. I also had begun to conduct photo elicitation interviews with the students to understand the significance of the photos they had taken. Although these interviews were brief, informal discussions, they facilitated important reflection on the purposes behind students' photo-taking, as I soon learned with DJ. In fact, it was through a photo interview that I

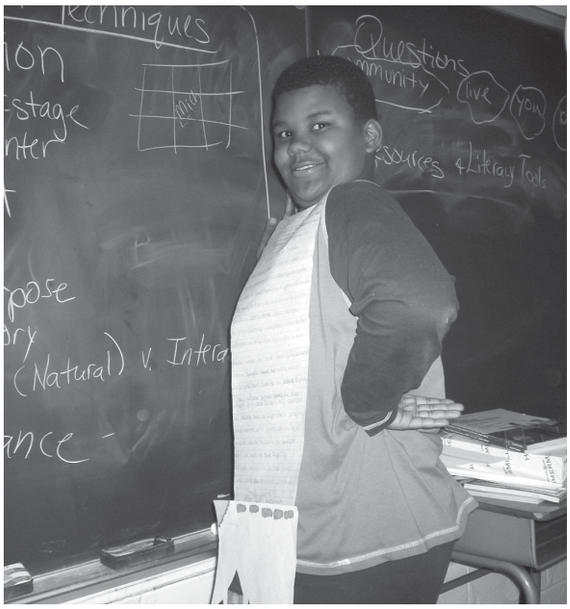

Figure 2. DJ holding the proclamation statement

gained better understanding about the intentions of DJ's proclamation statement.

Seeing It Again: Transacting with the Proclamation Statement

When Louise Rosenblatt raises the question of what it means to live through a text, she also speculates about the reader's "starting point," as she reminds readers that reading is not simply the duplication of the author's initial creativity. Given that DJ is the author of his own proclamation statement, how does this alter his meaning-making process as he rereads a self-authored text, and in particular, as this occurs through a photo elicitation interview? What makes this transaction with his multisemiotic resource and the set of photographs pivotal to me as an outside reader?

In the two pages of DJ's writing, he had formed a list of "rules" schools should abide by to ensure "people treat one another right" (from proclamation). He explained to me he generated these ideas as actions he personally would like to change, and he'd like to see schools make them a priority. This discussion of rules led, in part, to our reason for calling his work a "personal proclamation statement," since it echoed the merit of an announcement a formal governing body would make in regards to stating a position on an issue and making these desires publicly known. Through a list of more than ten "We can …" and "We need …" statements, DJ addressed issues of physical and verbal violence (i.e., hitting, fight threats, coercion gestures, damaging humor) to heed while focusing on aspects of what he defines as doing school well (i.e., giving attention to authority, obtaining high marks on schoolwork, and striving to meet personal expectations).

As I soon discovered, DJ's proclamation statement functioned as a critical, transformative literacy artifact grounded in personal struggles of power and identity. As sociocultural literacy movements such as the New London Group (1996) and New Literacy Studies (Street, 1995, 2003) point out, literacy is composed of cultural and ideological assumptions and raises questions about what counts as literacy and to whom it belongs. Whereas traditional forms of literacy treat texts monoculturally and wholly in relation to a set of rules, literacy texts such as DJ's proclamation statement can only be understood in its relationship to context, power, and authority and defined in relationship to different modes of meaning (New London Group, 1996). Scholars in multiliteracies (Albers, 2007; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005) further point out how visual images, media texts, and technologies produce meaning and construct representations of reality beyond traditional print-based methods of reading and writing. For me, the photo elicitation interview I conducted with DJ about his proclamation statement revealed substantial insights about the plurality of his texts (the writings, drawing, and photographs) and the reciprocal relationship (Rosenblatt, 1978) that developed between himself as the reader and the interrelated social texts he created.

Revisiting the Proclamation Statement through a Photo Interview

During our photo elicitation interview, DJ looked across the photos from the previous two days and immediately focused on the proclamation pictures. It quickly became evident that these were the ones he wanted to discuss.

While pointing to his proclamation statement, he explained his choice to write about fighting and discussed the teachers' perceptions of him as a fighter saying, "When I fight, the teachers hear bad things about me." Then he repeated a similar comment on why he wanted to stop fighting, explaining, "So teachers won't hear bad things about me. So they can hear good things about me." Rosenblatt (1978) maintains, "Literary texts provide us with a widely broadened 'other' through which to defend ourselves and our world. Reflection on our meshing with the text can foster the process of self-definition in a variety of ways"

(p. 145). In this transaction, DJ was using his text as a means to define himself to others, specifically to his teachers.

Interestingly, even though the proclamation statement does not center on teachers but instead, more generally addresses student issues, DJ elected to discuss teachers' perceptions of him as the starting point for our dialogue. His desire to give greater weight to the perspectives of the adult figures in the school rather than his peers echoed the visible relationships that mattered to him most. As he reread his work, DJ started to reveal the impetus for his decision to include himself in the "We can/We need" statements. He longed to alter his image in school in order to transform how teachers see him. Through his comments, he unveiled his fear of how teachers hear bad things about him and uncovered how these sensitivities to adult viewpoints play a large part in the internalized literary histories (Rosenblatt, 1978) he brings to the reading of his proclamation statement.

In a follow-up question, I asked if he thought it would be easy for him to make the changes he listed in his statements. He replied, "Got to work it out 'cause I got to … I can have friends. I can get a diploma. I can do everything if I want to, but I got to stop fighting." Again, DJ composed a private connection to the text as he clung to this identity as a fighter. He linked his experiences to larger systemic school problems that he knows impact his school social and academic success. Just as Rosenblatt (1978) has indicated before, the reading process fuses ideas and feelings as a reader connects the words on a page to the external world, and "has not fully read the first line until he had read the last, and interrelated them" (p. 10).

I noticed how DJ chose "We can/We need to stop" statements even though it meant aligning himself to ideas he felt he did not always commit to or initiate. In Figure 2, DJ is clearly puffing his chest out, holding the proclamation statement between his chest and chin, literally embodying the statements on the front of his shirt. His posture and hand positions (one on the side and one on the board) exude a personal investment in the work. Even so, it is not until the reading of the photographs that he comes to explore the power structures involved in his own work and the contradictions in the way he sees himself.

As the discussion continued, I shared with DJ how his proclamation statement made me wonder if this work resembled a dream he had for himself. In response, he shared how his wish for no more fighting was not only for himself, but "for other students at the school." Hence, I gained further insight about the integration of the first-person plural perspective ("we") in his work.

In conjunction with his description of the drawing (see Figure 3), I began to understand how his composition of the entire document not only interrogated his own path for participation in school, but suggested ways for restructuring these public spheres of meaning at an institutional level by insisting what it means to "to do our very best" (from proclamation). In his drawing, for example, he sketched a picture of the boys' school in blue, with a sun peering from the corner of the page and a line of clouds following after, indicating a scene of affection. Then DJ explained to me that the person standing beside the red car is himself, getting ready to step inside the new school. Through this work, DJ resisted the idea that he is the only one who needs to change, but that conditions of the school must change as well.

In the drawing, DJ was ready to start anew, stepping into an imagined school where he could become a new person, accepted under the new terms of his proclamation statement.

In many ways, his purpose for the drawing resembled the dialogue we were engaged in, signifying a break of the boundary between the reader's world and the world of the text as both entered into new potentialities (Rosenblatt, 1978). In the drawing, DJ was ready to start anew, stepping into an imagined school where he could become a new

Figure 3. DJ's Drawing of himself outside of the boys' school

person, accepted under the new terms of his proclamation statement. Additionally, as DJ found meaning in this drawing through the photographs, he evoked interdependence between his emotional response to the proclamation statement and the efferent goals of the photo interview. As a sophisticated reader of the texts (the photographs, the work represented in the photographs, and the photo interview), he equipped himself to tell the stories which underlined my curiosities and he exhibited the knowledge I needed to know as an outside reader of these texts. DJ's experience of reading these various photographs involved a continual interpretation of the meanings of the photographs, the imagined intentions he ascribed to our table conversation about the purposes for his photo-taking, and the implicit justification for the actual symbols of his writings and drawing as located within the photographs.

DJ's desired intentions for his work influenced both the construction and response to his work as he fostered understanding about the social forces underpinning his identity in school.

Final Reflections

As Rosenblatt (1938/1995) suggested years ago, understanding even one word of a text "demands a framework of ideas about humankind, nature, and society" (p. 106). Since Rosenblatt's writings, scholars (Cai, 2008; Damico, Campano, & Harste, 2007; Lewis, 2000) have pointed out that Rosenblatt's theory of reading values a larger capacity for democracy as it seeks critical awareness, a sociopolitical response, and an examination of the author-reader relationship.

As DJ demonstrated in the photo interview, the starting point for himself as both an author and a reader was his willingness to examine the "self" in relation to ideas of legitimacy and belonging. Rather than generate inauthentic questions, he took advantage of the specified homework assignment to embrace much larger questions about himself. He spent time in his bedroom constructing an artifact situated in honest, personal struggle based upon the conflicts he experienced at school. Reflecting on his work and the set of photographs, he projected deeply informed responses, which transcended the signs and symbols printed on the proclamation statement. This reexamination further bonded ideas, emotions, and sensitivities he authored into the interplay of the texts and provided him the opportunity to employ a lived-through experience he considered vital to his flourishing as a third grader in a school where he wished he could more affectionately belong.

While a text and reader never arrive at the "transaction" in isolation but rather with one another (Damico et al., 2007), DJ's reading of his self-authored text reveals the complexity of this process and the need to give greater attention to this transaction when authorship and readership are jointly rooted. DJ's desired intentions for his work influenced both the construction and response to his work as he fostered understanding about the social forces underpinning his identity in school. More specifically, this process forced DJ to view himself as an ideal witness to the social and political dimensions shaping his schooling experiences and allowed him to consider his ability to alter these structures and generate a response through creation of a multimodal resource. Subsequently, he produced conditions to reexamine (or reread) his response through photo-taking and to take responsibility for interpreting the messages of his texts to another. As a result, through these multi-layered transactions, DJ established the possibility to more deeply understand the textual cues and conventions (i.e. feelings, images, ideas) within the texts as he made the process more richly dependent on his interpretations as both the reader and writer of the proclamation statement. ●

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"Why can't you just say, 'It's cute'?" Sharing Digital Stories: African American First Graders' Insights into the Transactional Role of Audience

Marva J. Solomon

Marva: What makes a good story?

Kevin: A good story makes people be like nice, or funny or mean.

Kevin is the pseudonym of a six-year-old African American first grader who joined me (part-time computer teacher and graduate student) in a three-month digital storytelling project. He and seven other youngsters faced compelling issues related to digital composition, oral storytelling, varied types of texts, identity play, and audience awareness. Well, those were the compelling issues for me. For Kevin and the others, it was simply a chance to tell their stories.

The purpose of the project was to learn more about digital storytelling and young children. I entered our work together wondering, What roles do digital tools play in the creation process? What types of texts will the children produce? What purposes will the children have for their creations?

The children involved had few previous experiences with telling their own stories in any form in a school setting. By the end of the project, however, one of the most valuable outcomes was the students' growing, personal sense of what makes a good story. Kevin, quoted above, learned that good stories "make" the audience "be like nice or funny or mean." I think he meant that a good story touches the audience's heart enough to garner an emotional response.

Like Kevin, the other first graders developed a deep awareness of audience and surprisingly discovered new potentials for audience involvement in the meaning-making process. That is, there seemed to emerge an important transactional role for the audience as the digital stories were shared with peers and family; this role is similar to Rosenblatt's (1938/1995) theory of the transaction that occurs during the reading process. Does the *poem* exist outside the relationship between text and reader? Does that meaning-making place also dwell in the space between the digital storyteller and the audience?

Theoretical Framework and Related Literature

To understand the actions and thinking of these first-grade composers, I borrow thinking from the theories of reading response and the sociocultural lives of learners. Rosenblatt's (1938/1995) concept of transactional theory of reading is a mutual process where meaning is not exclusive either to the page or the reader, but lies in the poem that is constructed as the two transact. The reading of the text is an event in time, a happening between reader, text, and context (Ottinen, 2000)—conditions echoed in Bakhtin's (2002) dialogic theory as a meeting between the text, the reader, and contexts, as well as the past, present, and future.

Rosenblatt's and Bakhtin's theories also aid in understanding characteristics of the African American oral tradition. Call-and-response, for example, is an interaction where the listener acts as an "echo chamber, repeating, cosigning, validating, and affirming" the speaker (Grace, 2004, p. 482). Call-and-response participatory forms are often a part of African American storytelling (Smitherman, 2006; Callahan, 2001). Similarly, *Nommo* (Karenga, 2003), an African concept of rhetoric as community, embraces the interaction of "audience and the Word" across African American literature and culture (Wood, 2005, p. 104).

Dyson (1992), a researcher with vast experience studying African American youngsters and their interactions around written texts, warned that while classroom sharing experiences are valuable, the young author's sociocultural expectations are often not taken into consideration. Nor are variations of those expectations that might exist in the audience. Dyson felt that, in socioculturally diverse classrooms, practices similar to an "author's chair," which is often understood as a particular time and place where students

take turns sharing their final pieces (Graves, 1983), could well be problematic.

Das (2010) noted the need for a shift in focus based on the social and interactive nature of new media. Even basic ideas about audience become hard to define as "conventions, structure, and legibilities are now shared and blurred between authors, readers [and] writers" (p. 142).

Burwell (2010), in her study of digital natives' interactions with media on the Internet, also noted a blurring of the line between traditional producers of media (such as film studios and corporations like Google) and today's formerly traditional media consumer. Young people are used to an interactive role in the new participatory culture. Corporations have adopted new paradigms in sites like YouTube, where the audience has the power to publically construct new meanings from the texts they encounter in new media.

Setting and Methods

This project took place at a suburban/rural elementary school in the southwestern United States. I taught primary grades at the school for 12 years before going to graduate school and becoming the school's computer teacher. Most of this study took place during the time the first graders were with me in the school's computer lab.

Eight African American first graders agreed to participate in 18 planned and several other unplanned sessions of writing, recording, and sharing their stories during their regular afternoon time in the computer center. The students' creations were shared with the small group and then taken home on DVDs to share with family and friends. With little help, the students used multimedia software to create pictures and record stories. Only Starla chose to include written text in her stories. For the purposes of this inquiry, the students' digital stories were screen captured as storyboards and their spoken texts were transcribed beneath.

The first graders created the stories you will see on these pages with little adult guidance. They were shown an example of a simple digital story I created. Then they were given time to brainstorm topics of interest to them. They then sat down at the computers with directions to "make a story." The youngsters weren't asked in advance what they thought a story was, which—considering the varied character of the "stories" they created—would have been a good idea! Other than providing technical support, refocusing students who went off task, and discouraging the students from using the software's stamp tool (as it often froze the ancient computers), I left the children to their own creative devices. Table 1 outlines how the digital stories were made and the person responsible for each action, demonstrating that the children had quite a bit of independence as they were crafting their stories.

Action	Person Responsible for the Action
The first graders drew stories using children's multimedia software. If they made more than one image, they would click on the "new" button and continue on a new blank page.	I helped with tasks such as resizing the mouse pen or copying an image so that the first graders could paste it onto other pages.
The first graders' images were saved as jpegs.	The first graders left their images open on the computer and I saved their work after the session.
The children's images were placed in the multimedia software's storyboard.	I placed the images in the software with participant consultation. ("What image do you want to put first?")
The first graders used the software's capabilities to add titles, "the end," and occasionally music.	The first graders added titles and ending texts. I sat beside them for support and technical direction.
The first graders recorded their stories using the capabilities of the software. They generally spoke extemporaneously about what was happening in their illustrations. One wrote out text as part of the illustrations.	For the first two stories, I turned the recording on and off for the first graders. During the third story, the children did this part on their own. I was available if they asked for help.
The story was played back for the children so they could check if they liked the product. (They often chose to edit if other voices in the room interfered with the recording, to edit out long pauses, or if speaking too close to the microphone marred their recording.)	For the first two stories, I was in charge of playing back the story for this check. ("Do you like the way it sounds?") During the third story, the children performed this task on their own.
Once the recording was acceptable to the child, the video was compiled into a common video file suitable for displaying as well as burning onto a DVD for the first graders to take home.	I was in charge of the compiling functions in the multimedia software. I burned each of the children's stories onto a personal DVD. For the DVD version, I edited the errors rampant in the third stories (when the children recorded on their own).

Table 1. The process and responsibilities for story creation.

First graders at work on digital stories.

There were three author's chair events during the project, which were occasions for the participants to share their creations in front of an audience of their fellow participants and me. The stories were projected on the large white screen at the front of the computer lab.

After the first stories were shared, the children had a feel for the project's creating and sharing process and invariably they claimed they wanted to make a "funny" story.

Sharing their texts (beyond teacher-directed papers being hung for display outside the classroom) was a new experience for these first graders. I offered very little guidance on how they should respond to each others' texts, other than asking, "What did you think?" or, "What did you like about that story?"

After each viewing session was complete, I asked about their plans for their next story. After the first stories were shared, the children had a feel for the project's creating and sharing process and invariably they claimed they wanted to make a "funny" story. Ariel said she wanted to make her cousin, Baron, "laugh his head off." The one exception was Terrence, who wanted to make his final story a scary one.

In the four sections that follow, Starla, Jordan, Baron and a group of boys are featured. Two dimensional versions of their digital stories are included to illustrate their precarious encounters with audience response.

First graders watching a digital story projected on a large screen.

Starla: "All I did was draw pictures of stars."

When Starla's first effort (see Figure 1) premiered on the big screen, Kevin began laughing uproariously. He also was the most ebullient during all sharing events, while Terrence was the most reluctant.

The following transcript displays the conversation that occurred after Starla's digital story was shown:

Solomon: What'd we like about her story?

Kevin: It was kind of funny.

Solomon: Yeah, Kevin. What was so funny? Why were you laughing so much?

Terrence: This is serious. It isn't very nice.

Solomon: It's okay to be funny.

Kevin: The first part is really funny.

Solomon: What else do we like?

Jordan: It's cute.

Kevin: Her voice was nice. *(A few minutes earlier, I had complimented him on speaking loudly and clearly into the microphone.)*

Starla: Well, all I did was draw a picture of stars.

From Starla's statement and the tone of her voice, I could tell that she was genuinely perplexed by Kevin's laughter. She seemed to understand he wasn't laughing to tease or be unkind. Whatever reaction she expected when others viewed her story, she sure wasn't expecting anyone to think it was funny. This was the study's initial incidence of an author encountering an incongruent audience reaction.

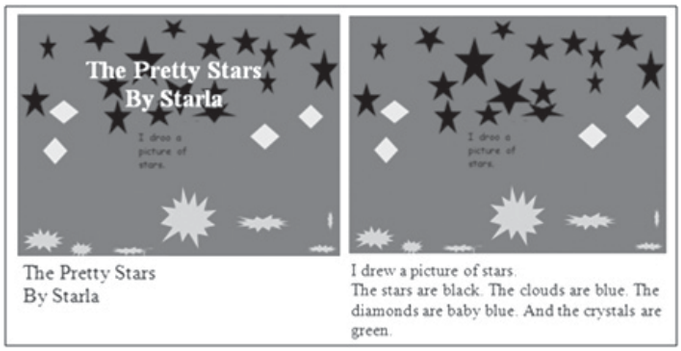

Figure 1. Starla's first digital story.

And whatever made Kevin laugh so hard came from his own background and experience. His laughter made Starla wonder about her own text, her own meanings.

"All I did was draw a picture of stars," she said, as if she were thinking through her story again, trying to ferret out what was so funny. What Dyson (1992) thought could be problematic in her study in which she noted this audience input from peers was indeed a puzzle for Starla.

Starla's final digital story (see Figure 2) was well received during the third author's chair event. Her six- and seven-year-old audience happily quacked along as the story played on the big screen. Later, Tony reported that it was his favorite story of the project, because it was "funny that a duck would be in the street."

In a conversation similar to the one transcribed above, the children and I discussed the story. The video camera caught the quizzical look on Starla's face as two of us commented that we thought her movie was sad. I will admit that one of those commenters was me: I was dismayed at the ending. Once again, Starla didn't expect or understand our reaction to her work. Like most of the other participants, Starla stated after the second author's chair event that she wanted this final story to "make everyone laugh." She didn't say anything, but her puzzled look indicated that as she bumped into the wall of others' perceptions, those ideas suddenly seemed as valid as her own intentions for her story.

During Starla's post interview, she was eager to report what had occurred when she played her DVD at home. She made me rewind her final story twice so she could provide play-by-play commentary on the specific parts where her family laughed.

> We can go back. You'll see . . . look . . . Like you're going to hear like . . . I made it kind of funny. You're going to hear it. Did you hear that part? I made that kind of funny. I added an extra quack. And I said streeeeeeeiiiit. My mom laughed on the quacks and she laughed when I said streeeeeeeeiiiit.

Though Starla's stated goal for this story was to be "funny," during this interview, she refused to take credit for the parts her family laughed at the most. She said, "I made it funny because I was nervous." Still, she delightedly recalled the parts her mother thought were funny and how surprised her niece was when the man in the car drove off laughing.

Starla's encounters with the transactional role of the audience were confusing for her as she participated in computer author's chair with us at school. How could her first star story be so funny? How could some of her audience find her third and supposedly funny story sad? At home, however, she found a more compatible audience. Her enthusiastic commentary about her family's reaction indicated that their responses had enriched her enjoyment of the story.

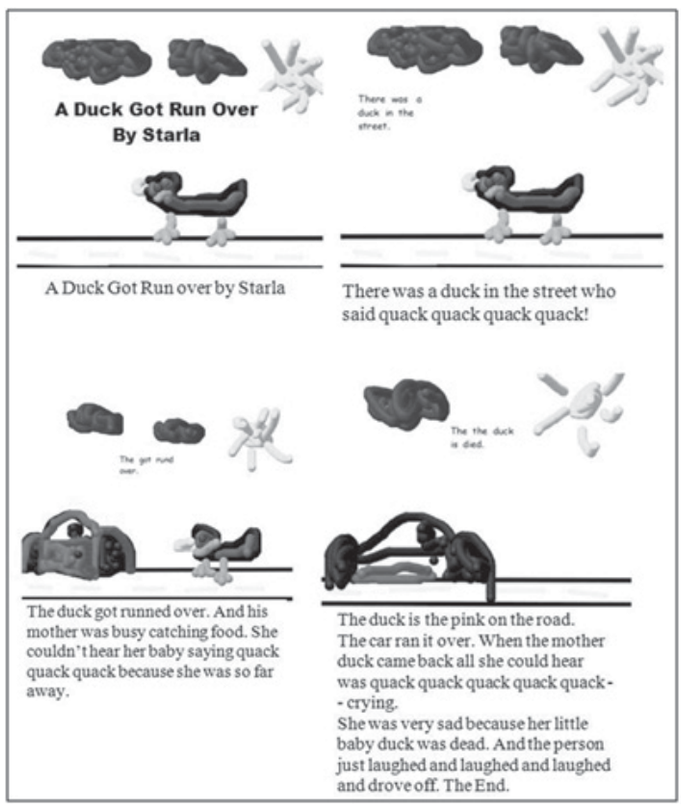

Figure 2. Starla's final digital story.

Jordan found this transactional role of audience unacceptable and attempted to dictate what should be the proper reaction to her story.

Starla not only made significant advancements as a storyteller, as you can see from Figures 1 and 2, she also developed an appreciation for her audience's response to her stories—at least an audience whose reaction matched her expectations. She savored her story and the memory of the audience response she got at home. That memory added value, depth, and meaning to her creation. Audience response was more than something to be feared or puzzled over; it could also enhance the storytelling experience.

Jordan: "Why can't you just say, 'It's cute?'"

Jordan was a sassy girl with lots of self-confidence. She did not simply make a polite, puzzled face when she did not get the audience reaction she wished as Starla had done; she became angry.

During the third author's chair event, Jordan argued with Ariel because Ariel commented that Jordan's story was "kind of blurry." Ariel meant that Jordan had spoken too loud and too close to the microphone when she recorded her text, so some of her words were hard to understand. I noticed this just after Jordan finished recording the story and asked if she wanted to record it again. Jordan replied, no, her mother would like it no matter what. But after Jordan shared with her fellow participants, Ariel called her out.

Jordan's favorite comment was, "It's cute." So she loudly interrupted Ariel to ask, "Why can't you just say, 'it's cute'?" From there, the two little girls argued about whether or not Ariel had indeed said it was "cute" but also "kind of blurry."

Eventually, Tony, a natural diplomat in a first grader's body, broke up the argument by complimenting Jordan's use of the multimedia software's "finger paint" tool in her final frame (see Figure 3). This tool smeared the colors on the screen similar to an actual finger painting. "That's something I couldn't do," he said, probably falsely, trying to placate his fellow first grader.

Once again, the young composer was faced with an audience response that was discordant from the expected reaction. Once Jordan's story was played for an audience, her audience had the right to share opinions and interpretations that were not sanctioned by Jordan. Suddenly, she was aware of the transactional role of her audience and realized that her text, once displayed, became open to the interpretations and criticisms of others.

She learned a lesson similar to what every playwright knows: You write your play the way you want to, then each actor feels compelled to put a personal spin on your characters, and the director has his own vision. Finally the audience experiences the story through their own filters: the venue, the lighting, and the availability of parking all have influence. It might be gratifying for experienced writers to know that a single tale can generate so many meanings. But Jordan found this transactional role of audience unacceptable and attempted to dictate what should be the proper reaction to her story.

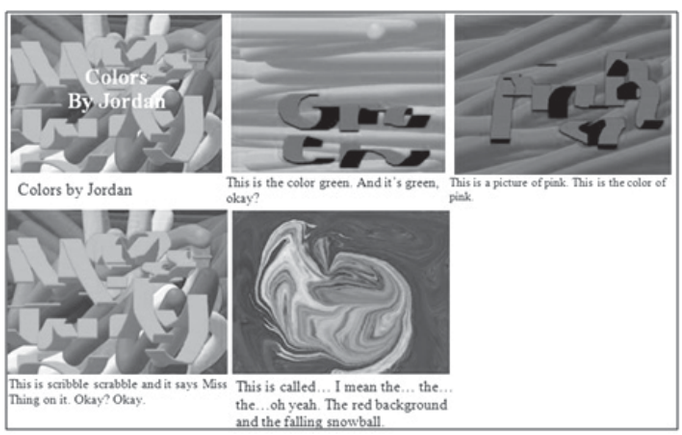

Figure 3. Jordan's second digital story.

Baron: "No! I did NOT change my voice!"

Baron was easily the master storyteller in the group. He had an active imagination and a big vocabulary that he displayed primarily at home. His teacher reported that he was quiet in class and rarely participated voluntarily. Yet in his class writings, he sometimes included aliens, pirates, and characters from mythology, even when the assignment was to "describe the Texas flag." His mother mentioned on her questionnaire that he "often surprises me with the things he says."

During his post interview, Baron denied that he changed his voice for entertainment purposes in his last two digital stories. He denied using a creepy, low, alien voice for

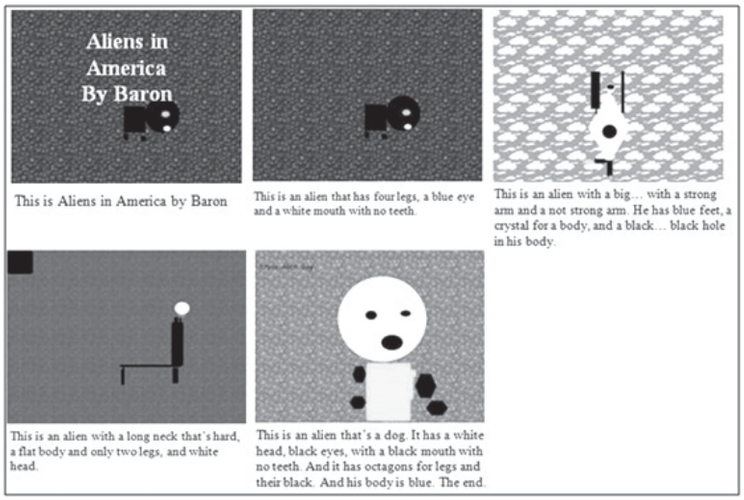

Figure 4. Baron used a "creepy voice" to share his aliens in this digital story.

the title of his second story, "Aliens in America" (see Figure 4), and he denied changing his voice for his Pokémon card friend, Wingull, which he brought with him to record his final story (see Figure 5). It was obvious to the listener that he had cleverly and deliberately changed his voice to enhance his stories. Yet he became almost belligerent in his assertion that he had not done so. Why on earth did he deny what was obvious on the recording?

Tony's interview helped to shed light on Baron's reaction for me. Tony reported that playing his story at home was "sort of embarrassing." When asked why he thought it was so embarrassing, he said, "Because they laughed." Yet getting their audience to laugh was their stated goal before making their later stories. Still, as everyone knows: laughter could be with you or at you; the line between those purposes may have been too thin for these fledgling storytellers.

It became clearer why Baron reacted the way he did. Starla, who enjoyed the reaction of her home audience, stressed that she had done those funny things with her voice only because she was nervous. Baron's strategy was just to deny he had been so creative. Like Tony, Baron was embarrassed by his family's reaction to his digital stories. Once again, the encounter with an audience was an unsettling one.

The Boys: "Let's not be so funny next time!"

Another post interview was scheduled with the children so we could talk again about the experience of sharing their DVD with their families. Tony, Kevin, and Baron met at the same time, and the boys agreed that it was embarrassing when their families laughed at their stories. It seemed a lot of the embarrassment came from just hearing their voices magically through the television, which for most people can be an unnerving experience. The initial embarrassment did not stop them from playing the DVD again, as they all said they and their families watched the stories more than once.

Without my prompting, the boys began to excitedly discuss what they would do differently in their next digital story to get a more suitable response from their families. Baron said emphatically, "I'm not going to be as funny next time!" Tony agreed with him. Kevin mentioned that his sister really liked the gorilla part in his second story (see Figure 6), so he would include more gorillas in future digital stories.

Suddenly this problematic, puzzling, embarrassing transaction between author and audience became a tool

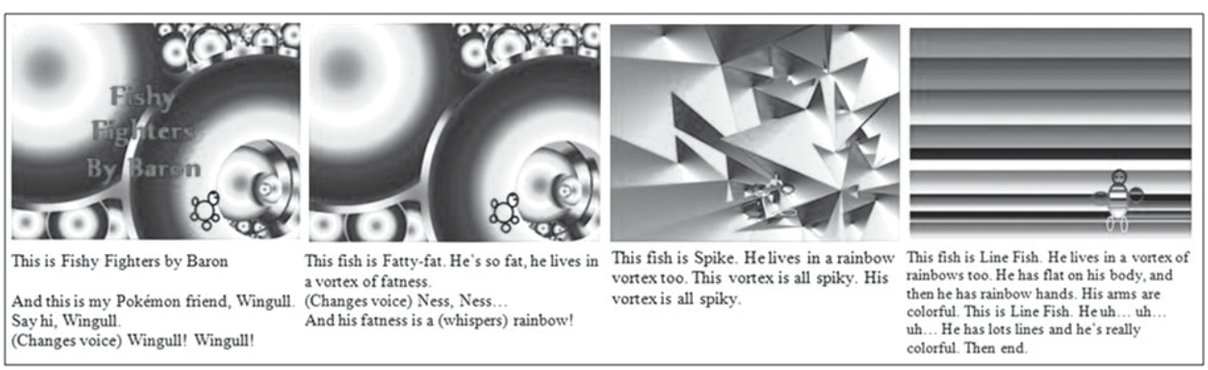

Figure 5. Baron used multiple voice changes in his final digital story.

for planning further texts, as the first-grade boys excitedly brainstormed how they might more aptly fit future digital stories more closely to what was most appealing to their audience.

Discussion and Conclusions

Earlier in this paper, I asked if the *poem* exists outside the transaction between text and reader. Does that meaning-making space also dwell in the space between digital storyteller and his audience? I believe these first graders did reveal such a space, one hinted at by Dyson (1992)—a space with the power to change authors' perceptions of their own storytelling, the power to generate reflection, and the power to add layers of meaning beyond the author's original intent. Before entering this transactional space, Starla had not considered her duck-in-the-street masterpiece to be a sad tale; once she took it home and shared it with family, she saw her story with new eyes and derived extra pleasure from the parts that pleased her audience the most. Kevin, after entering this transactional space, used the expanded meaning generated by his home audience to reflect and plan for an extra gorilla or two in his next composition.

The first graders in this study often relied on their cultural resources to make their stories more entertaining.

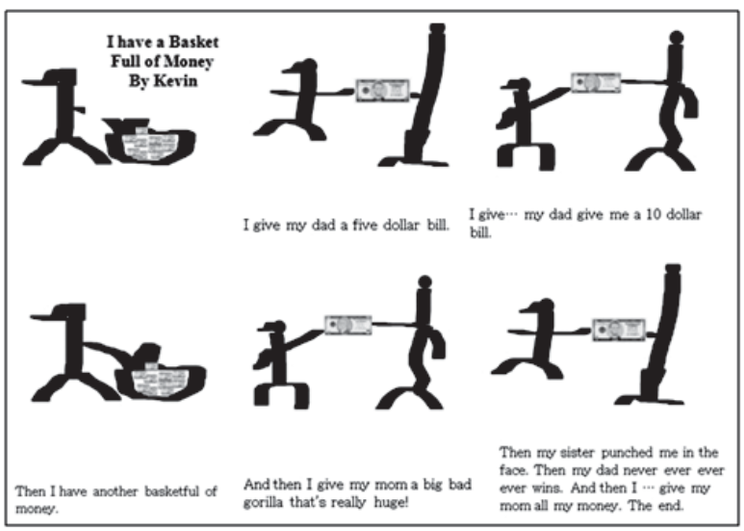

Figure 6. Kevin's gorilla (not pictured) was a hit with his sister.

As a long-time elementary teacher, I spent many joyful afternoons with students composing and sharing their writing. Author's chair was a common occurrence in my classroom, and even though I was familiar with Dyson's words, the "problematic" nature of the practice never appeared so glaringly obvious before. What was it about the circumstances of this particular project that brought this transaction between storyteller and audience to the surface?

During an earlier study (Solomon, 2009), I noted that children had stronger, more physical reactions to digital compositions than they did to traditional forms of classroom texts. I also noted that the children in that study sought ways to control who consumed their digital texts and how it was done. In a traditional author's chair event, a first-grade girl has the option to adjust her text on the fly as she gauges her audience's reaction. Or she might clutch her handmade book to her heart as she declares that "no boys" could read her text. The ways that digital texts are shared are less malleable in terms of adjusting instantly to audience reaction; the authors become part of the audience as they watch their productions.

The participants in this study reacted to their stories being shown during computer author's chair differently than I had experienced previously under traditional author's chair circumstances. During the presentation of his stories, Kevin paced the room like an expectant father from an old television show. While her story played, Jordan put her fingers in her ears and closed her eyes. Ariel covered the whole sides of face with her hands. Starla slumped down in her chair and covered her ears. During this study, the digital circumstances encouraged heightened emotional responses and denied the children the traditional control they have over their texts. This may have led a situation that "could be problematic" to become a full blown enigma.

Another factor that might have intensified the transactional role of the audience in this study is the African American oral tradition. As in Hall and Damico's (2007) research with secondary-aged digital storytellers, the first graders in this study often relied on their cultural resources to make their stories more entertaining. Jordan's story (see Figure 3) features a bit of signifying (Smitherman, 2006) as she adopted a participatory tone to address her audience: "It's green! Okay? Okay!" Ariel experimented with misdirection, word play, and church language common in African American English as she stated, "this is an interesting story because I hate

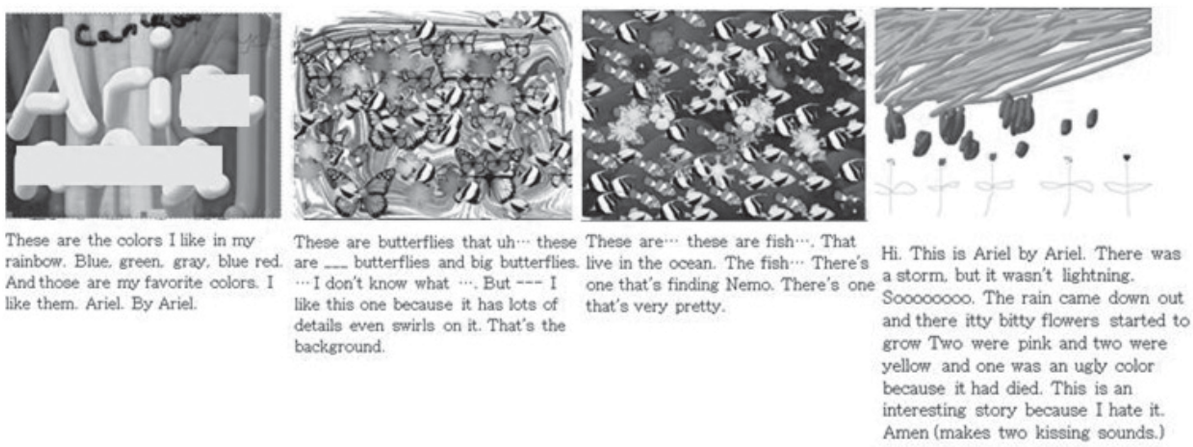

Figure 7. Ariel uses techniques found in African American English in her final panel.

it. Amen" in her final frame (see Figure 7). An interactive dialogue that brought the listener into a participatory stance (Ball, 1996) permeated most of these stories. The stories invited and garnered response, and within those responses, the meaning-making space—the poem—between digital storyteller and audience was revealed.

The transactional role of the audience was often disturbing for these first graders. But it compelled even these very young authors into authentic reflectivity about their work. So many times the author's chair is the culminating event, the publishing summit for a child's story before the story is put away. But the transactional role of the audience makes author's chair an important step in the formulation of further compositions. Children have the opportunity to benefit from the varied sociocultural expectations their peers and family members might share when responding to their stories. Even young children can consider questions like the following:

> How did my audience react? Why did they react like that?
>
> What can I do the next time to change or build upon that?
>
> In what ways can visual features (tone, volume, and voice) be used to engage my audience?
>
> How will I use what I know now to make my next story better?

The emergence of the transactional role of the audience in this study of digital storytelling should encourage teachers to talk more with their students after the sharing event is completed and to encourage students to reflect based on the meanings created between themselves and their audience.

Was this encounter with audience too traumatic for these first graders? Probably not. Except for butting heads with Baron during that ill-fated post interview, the participants were mostly matter-of-fact when expressing any negative emotions based on their encounter with audience. Overall, they were enthusiastic about the stories they created. When asked about their favorite parts of the project, they mentioned drawing, making stories, and sharing them. As indicated by Kevin's quote at the beginning of this paper, they seemed to be developing their own sense of what made a good tale, and they were able to express those ideas based on the experiences with story and audience obtained during the project.

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2013 Nominations for WLU Executive Board Now Being Accepted!

The WLU Nominating Committee is seeking nominations for **two board members** for the 2013 WLU elections. Board members serve for three years and must attend two Board meetings per year, one at the WLU Literacies for All Conference in July and one at the NCTE Annual Convention in November. The Executive Board is responsible for making all ongoing operational decisions for WLU. Additional information about the Board, member responsibilities/duties, and the nomination form can be found on the WLU website at www.ncte.org/wlu/elections. **Nomination deadline is January 15, 2013.**

Where We Are: Responsive Reading Using Edmodo

Mary E. Styslinger and Emily Langdon Eberlin

We all read ourselves and the world around us
In order to glimpse what and where we are.

—(Manguel, 1996, pp. 6–7)

We walked out of the classroom together, continuing our conversation about reader response theory and reader's transactions with texts. Emily was walking beside me as she mentioned, "I love Rosenblatt, really, I do. My students keep reader response journals, and I always encourage students to make personal connections before we read anything. But here's the deal. I'm switching schools, and the school I am moving to uses one-to-one computing. No more paper? How am I going to make these ideas work in a wired classroom? Will I just do the same thing but online? How is this going to be different for me and my students?" These were good questions—questions that I couldn't answer. So Emily and I decided to try to find some answers, or more likely, discover more questions and possible responses, together.

We are two teachers who teach in very different contexts. Although one of us teaches middle school and the other teaches college, our goals are the same. We want students to enjoy reading literature, to respond to it, and to leave our classrooms thinking about it. In accordance with reader response or transactional theory, we have great respect for the individuality of the reader and recognize the distinctiveness of each reading. We share the belief that text is unstable; meaning is variable and changes with each reader. Meaning lies somewhere "in between"; it happens through an exchange between the reader and a text, through the "dialogue" of the reader with the text (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994).

As teachers who advocate for response, we are interested in supporting the processes of individual readers. We are concerned with how readers make meaning from their experiences with text, and we strive to implement structures, strategies, and technologies that facilitate sharing of these responses. We encourage students to discover more about others and the world around them through the application of reader response or transactional theory. Social and collaborative experiences reaffirm the idea that no single reading of a text is definitive.

We encourage students to discover more about others and the world around them through the application of reader response or transactional theory. Social and collaborative experiences reaffirm the idea that no single reading of a text is definitive.

Social platform technologies offer teachers the means to foster the transaction between students, texts, and world while expanding classroom collaboration. Unfortunately not all schools and classrooms are keeping up with virtual possibilities. There is a vast difference between the ways in which teens read, write, create, and think online and the ways in which they are required to do so in schools. Gee and Levine (2009) argue that U.S. schools are stuck in a "time warp." And "unless we change course fast to integrate literacy and digital culture," they warn, "our current paradigm

and policies will make achievement gains more difficult in the decade ahead" (para. 1). A challenge for teachers is to build bridges between what students are doing digitally outside of schools and what we want them doing in English classrooms in order to prepare them for a rapidly changing world (Wilber, 2008).

As society and technologies have changed, so has our understanding of literacy. According to the National Council of Teachers of English (2008), 21st century readers and writers need to:

- Develop proficiency with the tools of technology
- Build relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes
- Manage, analyze and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multi-media texts
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments

Knowing the above, we wondered about the relationships between 21st century literacy practices, reader response theory, and social media platforms.

In an effort to find out more**,** we decided to interweave social networking into Emily's middle school classroom using Edmodo, a free online educational social networking tool. Edmodo allows teachers to create a class, monitor students and their work, assign grades, upload documents, and even participate in professional collaboration with other educators, in many different professional groups.

Creating groups within the program, administering, and using Edmodo to foster response and grow 21st century readers and writers was a learning experience for us. What did we really know about the potential for its use? Not much. Researchers are still trying to discover how teachers can use social networks, for what purposes and in what settings, and investigate how they may shape the ways we practice literacy. We need more studies of how technology integration occurs within classrooms and its effects on teachers and students.

Undaunted, we decided to use Edmodo as a means to facilitate reader response and engage in a collaborative inquiry. Particularly interested in a social theoretical perspective on response, we listened carefully for the influence of the social context (i.e., Edmodo) on the reader/text transaction and explored its effects on our understandings of 21st century literacy. Technologies are so pervasive now that many of us need to develop the critical ability to reflect and evaluate by thinking about their effects. So we asked two questions as we embarked on our inquiry: (1) How might Edmodo facilitate reader response in a middle grades English language arts classroom? and (2) What, if any, are the effects of using Edmodo to facilitate reader response on our understandings of 21st century literacy? In order to explore possible answers to these questions, we adopted an action research approach. Over the course of a unit on utopia/dystopia, we collected data in the form of student responses posted within Edmodo. We analyzed that data and looked for patterns in the ways students used Edmodo in class, responded on the Edmodo website, and grew in their thinking.

Exploring Teaching Using Edmodo

Emily teaches in a school with one-to-one computing, the first of its kind in her district. At the start of the school year, students are issued an iPad used to supplement, not replace, instruction. By incorporating Edmodo into tablet usage in her classroom, Emily was hoping to grow students as readers, writers, and ultimately, members of a global community.

Accepting a position in a paperless school meant changing Emily's approach to teaching. Used to students keeping response journals, bringing textbooks to class, and taking traditional quizzes and tests, Emily now would be facilitating learning in a digital format. She quickly began to realize the importance of teaching in context, in this case, teaching in the context of students' lives. Incorporating Edmodo allowed her to meet students in their worlds. She did not change *what* she teaches, but she has changed *how* she teaches. Edmodo provided the opportunity to update her own theoretical and pedagogical beliefs.

Facilitating Students' Responses

When we teach responsively, we want to recall experiences, elicit associations, arouse responses, and prompt reactions. In the past, Emily's students responded to class readings by answering a journal prompt. Teachers can still use a technology such as Edmodo to foster response in this way. Using the Assignment feature, a teacher poses a prompt or asks a question, and students respond, this response being viewable only to the teacher, student, and parent. When Emily was

teaching a unit focused around utopian/dystopian literature, she read aloud *Last Book in the Universe* (Philbrick, 2000). In this futuristic book, Spaz, who is not able to use the mind-numbing technology that others rely on, sets out on a quest to save his sister, and in doing so, begins to see the real world. To prompt students' writing, Emily asked students to imagine what songs Spaz should have on his iPod. Two students responded with the following songs and rationales:

> Jefferson:
>
> *The One that Got Away*—He got his sister taken away from him.
>
> *Space Bound Eminem* (without the bad words)—His sister is so far away, but Spaz will take a journey to reach her.
>
> *Without You*—Spaz is dying on the inside without his sister there with him.
>
> Delaney:
>
> *Without You*—I think Spaz would relate to this song, because without Bean, he feels lonely, depressed, and like nothing will ever get better.
>
> *Wake Me Up When September Ends*—Spaz would like this Green Day song because the world he lives in, the Urb, seems really horrible to him. He is different than everyone else, and the Bully Bangers direct life. To me, it seems like Spaz would want to go to sleep, and not wake up for a while.
>
> *Stronger* (What Doesn't Kill Us)—I think Spaz would jam to this song, because he feels like he's been through a lot, and this song is good for that.
>
> *I'm a Survivor*—This classic song would be one of Spaz's favorites, because he is on a journey to see Bean, and he isn't going to give up when he's so close.
>
> *Safe and Sound*—This song would definitely be on Spaz's iPod because it talks about being safe, even though the world outside is on fire and in destruction. Spaz probably thinks Bean can make his world brighter.

Students using Edmodo on their iPads in class

While this fairly traditional format encourages students to respond to text, it does not expand students' transactions with text, as the transaction occurs solely between the student and the text. Our students drew on familiar practices and thinking, prompting us to consider what changes might be needed in our practices.

Edmodo helped us to change and to elicit greater transactions among students, teacher, and text. Through Edmodo's Note feature, Emily offered students a prompt that generated immediate, simultaneous, unencumbered, unmediated, and collaborative responses from students. Unlike the Assignment feature, a Note allows all users to read and respond to the comments of others. As with the Assignment feature, teachers can select which of their classes will be able to view and respond to the Note, opening up the opportunity for cross-class collaboration. After reading more of *The Last Book in the Universe,* Emily asked students to take a stance on the following statement: "All technology is good technology." Responding to this prompt on the Edmodo page allowed students to transact with each other instantaneously:

> **Angel:** I think that all technology is not good technology. I think that because some technology can be used to do bad things. I also think that some technology is also good.
>
> **Grayson:** I most certainly agree with this statement. Many people think that technology is bad but I simply disagree. The reason other people think this is because of the bad choices people are making with this technology. I see it as a sort of stereotype. We need to think at the root of the situation and understand why technology was and is invented in the first place. For the bettering of our future.

Angel: @Grayson I totally agree with your thought.

Haley: @Angel I think that your first part was true because it can be used to do bad things but that is a personal decision to do those things.

Ryen: That isn't true. All technology isn't good technology. An example - Facebook helps you keep in touch with friends and family and socialize - but on Facebook cyber bullying happens. The same way with Twitter just within 140 characters.

Jada: @Grayson I agree with your comment that technology was created for the better of our future.

Elizabeth: @Grayson I agree with your statement about the inventing part.

Marie: @Ryen I agree with you because cyberbullying does happen a lot on Facebook and Twitter.

Angel: @Hayley That is true but still even so, it is a personal opinion the technology can lead to making the bad choices.

Grayson: @Angel Thank you. I agree with your comment as well. But remember the only reason people don't like technology is because of what other people do with it.

Grayson: @Jada Thank you Jada for agreeing with my comment and same thing I said with Angel. Technology was made for good. The only reason people don't like some of it is because of what they see other people doing with it.

Not only were students responding individually, they were responding collaboratively. In lieu of a dialogue between the self, text, and perhaps teacher, they were engaged in a digital response conversation with one another.

Not only were students responding individually, they were responding collaboratively. In lieu of a dialogue between the self, text, and perhaps teacher, they were engaged in a digital response conversation with one another. How does this differ from a large-group discussion? Edmodo allowed the students to see their thought processes and gave them a visual aid to accompany in-class discussions, a forum to display their thoughts and interactions with those of other students. Students' thinking may not be changed so much as it is pushed by Edmodo as a result of these online written conversations. Students are not limited by the rules of discourse, including conversational turns (even though some students seemed to comply regardless). No one forgets how they want to respond because no student is encumbered by the social mores of the classroom (e.g., "Raise your hand please").

However, rules do exist for online discussions. Emily has made it clear to students that Edmodo is an extension of the classroom; students are expected to behave on the digital screen as they would in a real-world classroom. The result of these expectations is that students respect each other during written conversations in the same ways they respect each other in a whole-class discussion.

Discovering More about Others and the World

A wired classroom provides students with opportunities to connect to each other. Because response is so immediate, the personal clearly intermingles with the textual, making evident those "present needs and preoccupations" that Rosenblatt (1938/1995, p. 31) mentions:

Matthew: WE WON THE BASKETBALL GAME!
Ryan: Hi.

Social platforms make very evident that we are teaching in the context of students' lives.

While teaching this same unit around dystopian and utopian literature, Emily asked students to make three different connections: connections between their independent novel and the novel she was reading aloud in class (*The Last Book in the Universe*), connections between their independent novel and personal experiences, and connections between their independent novel and current events. She included links to some news websites (*USA Today*, *CNN*, and a local newspaper) and encouraged students to read around on those sites, selecting a current events article in order to make these connections with the novels they were reading, wanting to direct students to consider connections they may not normally have made.

Haley:
1. I compare the Jet Bikes to the hoverboards. I compare them because they are futuristic vehicles. The only difference is that the hoverboards are only made for flying. They make it out to sound like the hoverboards go really

fast and the Jet bikes also go very fast.
2. I think that a connection between my life and *The Last Book* is the Latches. I think of them like they are neighborhoods. Like there are different rules for every different one, and in some of them, only some people can come in. A connection between *The Uglies* and my life is The Ruins in their life are like our world now.
3. I read the article about how depressed kids attract bullies. Basically it just summarizes how bullies are more attracted to kids that are depressed. I kind of think of this as the Uglies and the Pretties because the Uglies are sad because they are ugly, and the Pretties have more power over the Uglies because they are ugly.

Aubree:
1. I think I can connect these two stories by Luke and Spaz both having to hide. Also they are both on a mission. Luke for his freedom and Spaz for his sister. Also they are also set at different times than today's time. This is how they are connected.
2. I can relate these 2 books by my life being like *The Last Book in the Universe*. I think this because my life is always an adventure. There is always something new happening. Also *Among the Hidden* I'm like this because I like playing Manhunt and Luke has to hide. This is how I can relate.
3. I can relate the article about the Orangeburg massacre to the *Last Book in the Universe*. When the furies and the vandals got into a big war. I can relate it to *Among the Hidden* when the shadow children all got shot down in front of the White House. This is how I can relate these 3 things.

One of the biggest challenges all teachers face is increasing the level of student engagement. Increased exposure to multimedia texts opens doors for students to find connections to ideas not previously considered. The student who may not be as interested in the utopian/dystopian literature may be struck by a current event related to the reading, thereby heightening his or her interest in the novel, all while navigating websites.

Understanding 21st Century Literacy and Teaching

As our understanding of literacy is changing, so might our understanding and application of reader response theory. One-to-one computing classrooms offer expanded venues for students to respond to text and to other people. Via new technologies such as Edmodo, transactions with text are shaped not just by a dialogue with the text, but by immediate digital conversation. Technologies offer increased opportunities to support the collaborative processes of literacy. Connections to the world beyond the classroom are a link away, helping to establish those "harmonious relationships" suggested by Rosenblatt (1938/1995, p.3).

All this being said, there is a need for new pedagogy to support the online application of transactional theory. It was all too easy and tempting for us to simply substitute one medium for another—to replace a folder for a journal or a virtual response for a handwritten entry. Instead, we need to explore the potential of social platforms for expanding student responses to multiple texts. The potential is there for increased access—to others and texts—but we are waiting for new ways and means.

As our understanding of literacy is changing, so might our understanding and application of reader response theory. . . . Via new technologies such as Edmodo, transactions with text are shaped not just by a dialogue with the text, but by immediate digital conversation.

A limiting feature of current social platforms commonly utilized in schools is their inability to share outward with the global community, a skill NCTE has deemed necessary for 21st century readers and writers. Members of an Edmodo group are only able to view, respond to, and interact with information posted by other members of that same group. This safety feature prevents those outside the classroom from posting or communicating with students. But this same feature also prevents students from collaborating with members of the outside community. Students are not able to publish work viewable to anyone outside of their group, limiting the ability for authentic writing for a variety of audiences.

Emily and I knew we would leave this inquiry with more questions than answers. While we have realized that social platforms support students in their 21st century literacy by developing proficiency with technology, fostering relationships with others, connecting with multimedia texts, and attending to ethical responsibilities, we are left wondering about the effects social platforms have on individual readers and their unique responses. Emily questions if she is

What kind of pedagogical shifts are needed when using social platforms to create lifelong readers of literature? What does plagiarism mean to a student who has always been able to find the answer to a question on the Internet?

doing enough to continue to reinforce the growing needs of 21st century learners. What kind of pedagogical shifts are needed when using social platforms to create lifelong readers of literature? What does plagiarism mean to a student who has always been able to find the answer to a question on the Internet? How do we teach and encourage ethical use of ever-growing 21st century tools that are not themselves bound by ethics? While we have attempted to read the world around us, we have only begun to glimpse where we are and the tensions that are involved in utilizing online tools. While we have attempted to read the world around us, we have only begun to glimpse where we are.

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Professional **Book Talks**

Responding

Teachers turn to professional books in response to questions they are asking about their practice, and for support in responding to others' questions about their work. The books we feature in this column help us respond to questions about learning, reading, and writing with students. Each highlights the crucial role of talk in supporting these processes and invites us to see our work through new lenses.

Responding to Learners

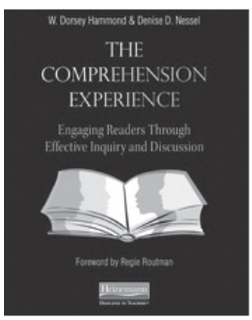
Opening Minds: Using Language to Change Lives
Peter H. Johnston. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2012.

Opening Minds continues the journey Peter Johnston began in *Choice Words* by once again showing that the words and phrases teachers use daily in the classroom can either positively or negatively affect not only the academic achievement of their students, but also their students' lives and futures outside the classroom. Johnston discusses the differences between *fixed theorizing* as a belief system in which students see intelligence and ability in themselves and others as predetermined and unchanging and *dynamic theorizing,* where students see that intelligence and ability have the capacity to increase with learning. He believes that teachers promote either one or the other by the language they use with children every day across the curriculum. Teachers who focus on students' efforts and strategies make comments such as "How did you figure that out?" or "Tell me more," or "You really worked hard on that." This process-oriented feedback leads to greater dynamic theorizing by students and greater learning and empowerment. Teachers who focus on the ultimate rightness or wrongness of students' work using language such as "You're right," or "That's the wrong answer," or "You missed six out of ten" are giving product-oriented feedback that leads to greater fixed theorizing. These students will compare their achievements to others' and believe that learning is either easy or hard. Johnston argues for more dialogic classrooms where teachers spend more time asking open-ended questions and facilitating more dialogue among their students. To illustrate these points, Johnston provides many classroom examples of teacher/student discourse at various grade levels. This slim volume is essential reading not only for pre-K and elementary teachers, but also for content area teachers in middle and high school. This was one of our favorite books selected for review, and many of us are finding ways of using it with groups of teachers in various settings.

See also ***Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*** by Carol Dweck (New York: Ballantine, 2007) for a more extensive discussion of the power of perspective in promoting growth.

Responding to Readers

The Comprehension Experience: Engaging Readers through Effective Inquiry and Discussion
W. Dorsey Hammond and Denise D. Nessel. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2011.



In the foreword to Hammond and Nessel's new book on reading comprehension, Regie Routman writes, "Once in a great while, a book comes along that radically changes how we perceive and process crucial understandings." This is not an overstatement. Our study group found a great deal in this book to discuss and debate. The authors take their readers on a well-researched journey through one hundred years of reading research and call upon all of us to reconsider how we teach children to read. They believe that teachers need to engage students in reading rather than teach about reading. The authors question such common practices as picture walks, pre-teaching vocabulary, and providing back-

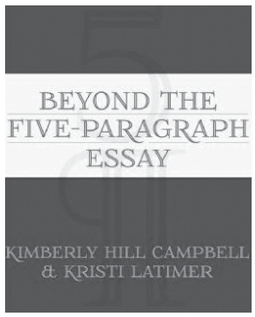
ground experiences before reading. Further, they challenge the common practice of beginning a reading lesson with a specific skill or strategy in mind. Instead, they advocate an inquiry-based approach to reading instruction where thinking and effective questioning are at the heart of instruction and where students are positioned over time to be strategic and purposeful readers who read for meaning rather than simply to practice applying a certain skill or strategy. Entire chapters are devoted to thoughtful discussion of prediction in reading narrative text, hypothesizing when reading informational texts, the power of talking about what has been read, and the importance of writing about reading. This book is a must-read for all teachers and administrators interested in an inquiry-based, constructivist view of teaching reading and would make an excellent text for a book discussion group or professional learning community.

Responding to Writers

Beyond the Five-Paragraph Essay

Kimberly Hill Campbell and Kristi Latimer. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2012.

Secondary teachers continue to debate the merits of teaching the standard five-paragraph essay, only to "unteach" it later as they help students develop multiple ways of organizing information and supporting their assertions. Recent curriculum materials for elementary schools include attention to the essay structure, in part in response to the anticipated demands of the Common Core State Standards in writing. Hill Campbell and Latimer argue that we should stop teaching formulaic writing and focus instead on developing the critical thinking skills necessary to write effectively. Subsequent chapters provide thorough descriptions and are rich with classroom examples and strategies for teaching students to read closely and critically, learn from mentor texts, and talk about their reading and writing in ways that help clarify thinking. Even those who disagree with the basic premise of the book—who feel that the five-paragraph essay has a useful role in the development of writers—will find practical strategies and teaching ideas to refresh the writing classroom.



Talking Points **Professional Book Club, St. Louis, Missouri:** Phyllis Cook, *Ft. Zumwalt School District;* Charlene Ehll, *Ritenour School District;* Laurie Finkenkeller, *The Wilson School*; Dana Humphrey, *Ft. Zumwalt School District*; Victoria Jones, *School District of Clayton*; Dick Koblitz, *Webster University*; Kathryn Mitchell Pierce, *School District of Clayton*.