

INVESTIGATING AN ONLINE STUDY GROUP AS A PATH TO CRITICAL DIGITAL  
WRITING FOR FOUR MIDDLE GRADES ENGLISH TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE  
STUDY

Kathryn Ann Jacob Caprino

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of  
Education (Culture, Curriculum and Change).

Chapel Hill  
2015

Approved by:

Cheryl Bolick

Jocelyn Glazier

Bill McDiarmid

Julie Justice

Jane Danielewicz

© 2015  
Kathryn Ann Jacob Caprino  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## **ABSTRACT**

**KATHRYN ANN JACOB CAPRINO: Investigating an Online Study Group as a Path to Critical Digital Writing for Four Middle Grades English Teachers: A Qualitative Study**  
(Under the direction of Dr. Cheryl Mason Bolick)

Although current rhetoric around education emphasizes the importance of technology in the classroom and technologies have altered the ways in which we write, the English classroom looks much like it did a hundred years ago. Building on the literature of teachers as writers, technological pedagogical content knowledge, digital writing, new literacies, and critical literacy, this dissertation study contributes to the research gaps around inservice English teachers as digital writers and the connections between digital writing and critical literacy. This collective case study examines the digital writing practices of four inservice middle grades English teachers, their writing pedagogies, and the moves they make toward critical literacy as a result of an online study group designed to help participants consider how digital writing can be a space for critical literacy. Findings reveal teachers who are active digital writers write in myriad personal and professional genres but with rather conventional stances. Though technological barriers and teacher-centered pedagogies characterize these teachers' classrooms, they begin to express understandings of the affordances of digital writing and new literacies practices. Furthermore, teachers' beliefs and understandings about digital writing and new literacies are reflected in their writing pedagogy. The study reveals that acquiring critical literacy is a developmental process and can develop as a result of engaging in an online study group dedicated to helping teachers understand the connections between digital writing and critical literacy. Teachers focus on a single element of critical literacy in their final digital text

composition projects, reflect on their practice in regard to critical literacy, and note several challenges to enacting critical literacy in the middle grades English classroom. In order to help preservice and inservice English teachers engage in digital writing with a critical stance and have their students do the same, I provide a model for English educators and suggest teacher educators encourage English teachers to reflect on what counts as ‘real’ writing, reflect on writing assignments, analyze new literacies practices within digital writing spaces, and engage in digital writing with a critical stance.

This work is dedicated to the family members and friends who have supported me throughout this process. I especially thank Mom, Dad, and Will - my very first students - for all of your support. And, of course, Mike, who encouraged me to take this journey with him. To Astrid, Huddy, and Mike's family, thank you for all of your encouraging words, pictures, and emails. This work is also dedicated to the four teachers in this study who graciously welcomed me into their English classrooms.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

There are many colleagues who have guided me through this process. To Cheryl, thank you for encouraging me to pursue my love of technology in the English classroom, listening and answering my many questions, and pushing me to compose something of which I am proud. To Jocelyn, for your support and guidance and for being behind the scenes of many of my opportunities here at Carolina. To Dean McDiarmid, for giving me the opportunity to work with you on our shared passion for the field of teacher education. To Julie, for letting me learn from you and see your enthusiasm for teaching English Language Arts methods. To Dr. Danielewicz, for allowing me to working with the English department and to have an opportunity to teach first-year composition. To Lynda, for opening up the CCC door for me three years ago. To those with whom I have taught and worked beside throughout the years, most especially Beth and Ann, thank you for teaching me how to teach. To Dr. Moore, who showed me what an excellent methods course looks like and to Heather, my student teaching supervisor, who inspired me. To the cooperating teachers and student teachers who have taught me more than I ever taught them. To the LEARN NC staff, most especially T.J., Lesley, and Helen, who supported my research project. To those in the School of Education who have consistently supported me throughout my time at Carolina: Leigh, Cathy, Brian, Anne, Jodi, Patricia, and

Tammy. To my critical readers, writing partners, and colleagues: Tara, Summer, Betsy, Jeanne, Mandy, Aubrey, Megan, Meghan, Sara, Ashley, Jonathan, *High School Journal* colleagues, and iPad project team members. To those Carolina graduates who have graduated before us and continue to support those who are in their footsteps. And to those whom I have left unnamed, inadvertently, please know that I am grateful for your support.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Study Prologue.....	1
Study Rationale .....	3
Definitions, Theories, and Frameworks Informing the Study .....	6
Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge .....	6
New Literacies .....	7
Critical Literacy .....	9
Social Justice.....	11
Study Introduction .....	12
Research Questions .....	12
Organization of the Dissertation .....	13
Chapter Summary .....	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	14
Perspectives on Writing's Importance .....	16
An Omnipresent Perspective.....	17
An Economic Perspective .....	18
An Educational Perspective .....	19
A Transformative Perspective.....	19
The Therapeutic Perspective .....	20
The Human Perspective .....	21
Teachers as Writers .....	22
The Research on Teachers as Writers .....	25
Teachers' identities as writers.....	25
Teachers' confidence in writing.....	27
Teachers' lack of experience with digital writing.....	28
Teachers and Technology .....	30
Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge .....	31



Technology knowledge and development.....	32
Pedagogical knowledge.....	33
Content knowledge. ....	35
Digital Writing .....	38
New Literacies’ Roots in Antiquity .....	38
Early Thoughts about Writing with Technology .....	39
Contemporary Understandings of Digital Writing.....	41
New Literacies .....	44
Research on Digital Writing and New Literacies .....	48
Multimodality complicates understandings of text. ....	48
Social nature.....	49
The ethos of new literacies.....	49
Benefits of digital writing. ....	50
Critical Literacy .....	51
The Research on Teachers and Critical Literacy .....	52
Reflections on teacher identity.....	52
Use of children’s and young adult literature to develop critical literacy .....	53
Use of critical text production to develop critical literacy .....	55
A developmental approach to acquiring critical literacy .....	56
Digital Writing and Critical Literacy .....	57
Research on K-12 Students’ Digital Writing and Critical Literacy .....	62
Identity formation .....	62
A challenge to dominant narratives .....	63
Critical dialogue.....	63
Research on Teachers’ Digital Writing and Critical Literacy.....	65
Text production.....	65
Unawareness about the connection between digital writing and critical literacy .....	66
Chapter Summary .....	67
Chapter 3: Study Methodology .....	69
The Research Approach.....	69
Participant Recruitment .....	71

Participant Protection.....	73
Selection of the Case Study Participants .....	74
Sally .....	75
Darcy.....	75
Nancy .....	76
Becca.....	77
Positionality .....	77
Teacher-Writer .....	77
Teacher-Researcher.....	78
The Online Study Group.....	82
Data Collection .....	88
Interviews.....	89
Classroom Observations .....	90
Digital Writing .....	91
Review of Data Sources.....	92
Data Analysis .....	93
First Cycle Coding .....	94
Second Cycle Coding.....	95
Grounded Theory Approach .....	97
Credibility .....	98
Chapter Summary .....	99
Chapter 4: Research Findings .....	101
Narrative One – Sally.....	101
Introduction.....	101
Teacher as Co-Writer Who “Help[s] Them Almost Write it”: .....	103
Consistent, Supportive, and Direct Writing Instruction .....	103
A Teacher-Writer Makes Sense of Digital Writing .....	106
Writing as “Liberating”: A Recommitment to Critical Literacy .....	109
Summary .....	113
Narrative Two – Darcy .....	114
Introduction.....	114

A <i>Writing</i> Teacher: “I Didn’t Really Consider Myself a Writer until Last Summer” .....	115
Multimodal Play: “The Intersection between Graphics and Words” .....	119
Nuanced TPACK Awareness: “We’re a Lot of Open and Close Today” .....	122
Digital Spaces as (In)Authentic Outlets: “Those With Little Perceived Power Can Make a Difference with their Words” .....	123
Summary .....	127
Narrative Three – Nancy .....	128
Introduction .....	128
Considerations of Safety: “I ... Try to be Cautious” .....	129
A Movement toward the Original .....	132
Digital Writing as Problem-Solving: “Think of Problems you want ... Resolved” .....	138
Considering Multiple Perspectives: “What Happened to these Voices?” .....	141
Summary .....	144
Narrative Four – Becca .....	144
Introduction .....	144
Digital Resistor: Writing Skills Now, Digital Writing “Later On” .....	146
Movement toward More Digital Writing: It’s a “Disservice” Not To .....	152
Questioning Perspectives .....	154
Challenges to Enacting Critical Literacy: “I Tend to Shy Away from Controversial Topics” ...	156
Summary .....	158
Chapter Summary .....	158
Chapter 5: Cross-Case Analysis .....	160
Myriad Genres .....	161
Teachers as Digital Writers with Conventional Stances .....	164
Writing Pedagogy Reflective of Teachers’ Digital Writing and New Literacies Practices and Beliefs .....	165
Teachers’ Broadening Understandings of Digital Writing and New Literacies .....	170
Teacher-Centered Pedagogy .....	174
Technology Barriers .....	177
Developing Understandings of Critical Literacy .....	180
Reflection on Practice .....	186

Challenges to Implementing Critical Literacy .....	188
Chapter Summary .....	191
Chapter 6: Discussion .....	194
Findings.....	194
Situating Findings within Literature .....	197
Teachers as Writers.....	197
Teachers as Digital Writers.....	198
Teachers as Digital Writers with a Critical Stance .....	199
Developmental Approach to Critical Literacy .....	202
Barriers to Digital Writing with a Critical Stance in the Secondary English Classroom.....	204
A Researcher’s Return to Positionality: A Reflection .....	206
English Education Implications .....	207
Engage Teachers in Reflecting on what counts as Writing.....	210
Engage Teachers in Writing Assignment Analysis.....	210
Engage Students in New Literacies Analysis of Digital Writing Spaces.....	211
Engage Teachers in Writing Digitally with a Critical Stance .....	212
Limitations .....	213
Time Frame .....	214
Types of Digital Writers .....	214
Participant Attrition .....	215
Researcher Role .....	215
Future Research Directions.....	216
Teachers’ Digital Writing Identities .....	216
Redesign of Online Study Group: Teachers as Personal Digital Writers with a Critical Stance .....	217
Pedagogical Practices of Teachers who Write Digitally with a Critical Literacy Stance .....	218
Students’ Digital Writing Practices.....	218
Independent Writing Time .....	219
Digital Writing in the Special Education Classroom .....	219
Conclusion .....	219
Appendix A.....	221
Appendix B .....	223

Appendix C .....	224
Appendix D .....	230
Appendix E .....	231
Appendix F .....	232
Appendix G .....	233
Appendix H .....	234
REFERENCES .....	245

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 - Participants.....	74
Table 2 - Research Connected with Goals of Online Study Group.....	84
Table 3 - Organizational Structure of Online Study Group.....	85
Table 4 - Data Sources.....	92
Table 5 - Data and Research Questions.....	92
Table 6 - Code List.....	95
Table 7 - Sally's Edmodo Account Prompts.....	110
Table 8 - Darcy's Blog Topics.....	120
Table 9 - Nancy's Haiku Posts.....	133
Table 10 - Nancy's Tweets.....	134
Table 11 - Nancy's Slides.....	139
Table 12 - Becca's Wiki Posts.....	146
Table 13 - Writing Assigned.....	174
Table 14 - Definitions of Critical Literacy.....	180
Table 15 - Participants' Critical Literacy Element and Related Research.....	202

## **LIST OF FIGURE**

Figure 1 - Digital Writing with a Critical Stance in the Secondary English Classroom .....	208
--	-----

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

I begin this introductory chapter with a study prologue and rationale. Next, I share the definitions, theories, and frameworks that informed the study; a study introduction; and research questions. Finally, I outline the organization of the dissertation and provide a chapter summary.

### **Study Prologue**

I am a writer. When I was a little girl – underneath the light of the flashlight in my room with the purple carpet - I wrote stories in my journal about wanting to be a writer. I wrote poems and adapted Disney movies into scripts for neighborhood performances. When I was a teenager, I noticed drivers were not stopping for ambulances and wrote a letter to my city's police department requesting that cameras be affixed to the front of ambulances so as to ticket drivers who did not pull over. I never received a letter back. But it was in this moment that I learned that my writing had the potential to inspire change.

One of the reasons I became an English teacher was because it was a profession that allowed me to stay connected to my passion for writing. My final project for my Master's in Education was titled *The Writing Teacher*. In this piece, I argued that teachers of writing should be writers themselves, a tenet to which the National Writing Project (NWP, 2014) ascribes and with which several scholars have agreed (Augsburger, 1998; Calkins, 1994; Elbow, 1998; Gere, 1980; Gillespie, 1985; Graves, 1983; Graves, 1994; Hicks & Turner, 2013; Hicks, Young, Kajder, & Hunt, 2012; Morgan, 2010; Murray, 1980; Murray, 1985; National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 1985; Smith, 1994). Teachers who share their work and speak about their process as writers bring credibility to the writing classroom, maintain their creativity,



and influence the writing identities of their fellow writers: their students (Norman & Spencer, 2005). As a composition and English methods instructor, I position myself not only as a teacher of writing but also as a fellow writer, often sharing my work with my students. I want students to understand that I, too, struggle with aspects of the writing process and embrace those moments when a sentence or paragraph finally comes together and works. In addition to writing for academic audiences, I write poetry and articles for local magazines. An avid digital writer, I write on Twitter, Facebook, iMovie, Pinterest, iMessage, my personal photography blog, and, of course, email.

As part of my graduate school assistantship, I supervise middle grades<sup>1</sup> English students in our undergraduate middle grades program. One day last spring I was in one of my middle grades student teacher's classroom. He assigned his seventh-grade students a journal prompt, asked them to start writing, and then proceeded to walk around and monitor students' progress. In my notebook, I wrote *Why don't you write with the students?* In fact, one of my most frequent comments to each of my student teacher supervisees is *write with your students as much as you can*. In our post-lesson conference, I asked him why he did not write with his students. He responded, *I did write with first period but for this period I didn't know what to write*. As a future English educator, his response made me think about how teacher education programs prepare English teachers to be teachers of writing. Should the following Gillespie (1985) quote have resonance in today's middle grades English classroom?

When we write, our classroom writing program and our interactions with our young writers can be based on knowledge we have earned ourselves rather than from others. We don't need to give up our curriculum to the experts. We can just watch ourselves write. (p. 2)

---

<sup>1</sup>Though I use *secondary* to refer to grades six through twelve, I use *middle grades* when I refer grades sixth through eighth in particular.

As the vignette I shared above illustrates, English teachers do not always assume the role of teacher-writer, which Bishop (1999) defined as the “one who advocates that teachers write with and for their writing students as well and with and for their colleagues” (p. 9). And it is because of my firm belief in the idea of the teacher-writer that I embarked upon a dissertation study about teachers as digital writers.

### **Study Rationale**

In this dissertation study, I researched how teachers who were digital writers moved toward understanding digital writing as a space for critical literacy. Work needed to be done in this area because preservice teachers tend to receive more training in teaching reading than teaching writing in their teacher preparation programs (Norman & Spencer, 2005). And, when writing is introduced into the curriculum of teacher education, that writing is generally conventional writing (Hundley & Holbrook, 2013, p. 500) rather than that which is “non-printcentric” (NCTE, 2003) and a “literacy of the screen” (Conference on College Composition and Communication [CCCC], 2004). Therefore, teacher candidates are not prepared to teach the types of digital writing genres that characterize today’s writing practices. As an English teacher educator, I find this problematic for a variety of reasons.

First, such a perspective limits the possibilities digital writing affords. The NWP (2010a) defines *digital writing* as “compositions created with, and oftentimes for reading or viewing on, a computer or other device that is connected to the Internet” (p. 7). Digital technologies have impacted how we define *writing* (Hocks, 2008; Kajder, 2007; NCTE, 2008a) and what it means to be literate (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008; Kajder, 2007; Kellner & Share, 2007; Spires, Hervey, & Watson, 2013; Morrell, 2012a).

Scholars have discussed digital writing's non-static, ever-evolving nature (Bowen & Whithaus, 2013; Selfe & Selfe, 2009; Sewell & Denton, 2011), embedded power dynamics (Lemke, 1998), and social aspects (Bowen & Whithaus, 2013; Gee, 2010; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Street, 1995). Technology's accessibility allows "everyday people' to produce and not just consume media" (Gee, 2010, p. 12). Grabill and Hicks (2005) asserted that "writing teachers must commit to this digital rhetorical perspective on writing, or they will miss the opportunity to help their students engage effectively in the ICT [Information and Communication Technologies] revolution taking place right now" (p. 308).

Second, even though many scholars (e.g. Hicks & Turner, 2013; Hull, Scott, & Higgs, 2014; Morgan, 2010; Myers & Breach, 2004; Schieble, 2010) have advocated that writing teachers should be digital writers, many preservice English teachers have limited skills as digital writers (Hicks, Turner, & Stratton, 2013). Preservice teachers in Hundley and Holbrook's (2013) qualitative study found digital writing difficult for myriad reasons. They were challenged by the thought of perceiving writing as anything but "conventional print texts" (p. 506), acknowledged obstacles to composing with images rather than words, confessed to wanting more control as writers, and conceded technology challenges. As Hull et al. (2014) suggested, this may be because "professional learning around digital media often focuses on tool use and neglects consideration of teachers as interested, creative producers of digital media artifacts" (p. 56).

And, third, teacher preparation programs have yet to institutionalize digital writing instruction that prepares teachers for how digital writing can transform not only

students' writing experiences but also their understandings of writing's possibilities. For example, English teachers have limited experiences in writing digitally for social change (Turner & Hicks, 2011-2012). Many English teachers teach writing not only with a tentative grasp of how digital tools have altered understandings of what writing is but with a limited understanding of how writing can be done with a critical literacy stance. Tracing the teacher-writer's evolution, Whitney, Hicks, Zuidema, Fredricksen, and Yagelski (2014) posited the teacher-writer has followed a particular trajectory: "the writing process phase (1970s and 1980s), the teacher research phase (1990s and 2000s), and, currently, teachers as advocates and intellectuals" (p. 177). The last phase establishes a space for teachers to be advocates whereby "teachers write as a form of activism and resistance. Thus whereas earlier teacher-writers wrote for other educators, now teachers also write for the press, parents, and the public, whose opportunities to understand teachers' perspectives may be few" (pp. 178). More work in the field of preservice and inservice teacher education needs to focus on helping English teachers understand how their writing, particularly their digital writing, can permit them to participate in discourse as advocates and intellectuals.

A proponent of teachers as digital writers, I wanted to extend the conversation to include inservice English teachers as digital writers with a critical stance. Teacher writers' roles as producers (Knobel & Lankshear, 2002) and change agents (Freire & Macedo, 1987) allow them to engage in social action (Clarke & Whitney, 2009) and embody what Janks (2009) referred to as "critical social consciousness" (p. 128). Like Vasquez, Albers, and Harste (2014), I advocate for teachers to design digital texts that permit their writing to be a means to "reclaim writing as a thoughtful, social, agentic

act” (p. 222). Though I shared research primarily about preservice teachers above, I think there are two reasons why work on inservice teachers as digital writers is necessary: First, methods professor-researchers often study their preservice methods students, limiting the knowledge about inservice teachers. And, second, I do not believe I make too much of a leap to suggest that the same unfamiliarity and uncertainty about digital writing plagues inservice teachers as much as their preservice counterparts (McGrail, 2005; NCTE, 2007), especially when one considers how writing has changed since the time during which many practicing English teachers were enrolled in teacher preparation programs. Thus, my dissertation study contributed one of the few empirical studies about inservice middle grades English teachers as digital writers with a critical stance.

### **Definitions, Theories, and Frameworks Informing the Study**

I provide a full literature review in chapter 2. In the following paragraphs, I introduce the central definitions, theories, and frameworks that informed my dissertation study: technological pedagogical content knowledge, new literacies, critical literacy, and social justice.

#### **Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge**

I structured my work around Mishra and Koehler’s (2006) TPACK framework, which is built upon Shulman’s (1996) idea of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). In their seminal piece, Mishra and Koehler (2006) “extend it (PCK) to the phenomenon of teachers integrating technology into their pedagogy” (p. 1017). Instead of *what* technologies are made available to teachers and students, these scholars advocate for “*how* the technology is used” (p. 1017). There have been critiques of TPACK’s vagueness and ambiguity (Brantley-Dias and Ertmer, 2013; Kimmons, 2014). However, I

agree with Hughes and Scharber (2008) who advocated for “the *explicitness* of the TPCK concept at this point in time” (p. 89). I believe this explicitness helps teachers and teacher educators emphasize the technological component and will be necessary until classroom teachers are adept at integrating technology effectively with their content and pedagogy. As Mishra and Koehler argued:

though, Shulman’s approach still holds true, what has changed since the 1980s is that technologies have come to the forefront of educational discourse primarily because of the availability of a range of new, primarily digital, technologies and requirements for learning how to apply them to teaching. (p. 1023)

Whereas the explicit “T” may not be necessary in the future, the NCTE (2007) revealed “two-thirds of all teachers report feeling under-prepared to use technology in teaching ...” Therefore, because teachers’ comfort levels with technologies impacts their likelihood to use technologies (Becker, 2001) and the ways in which digital tools have altered the ways in which we conceive of writing (NWP, 2010a), TPACK remains an important framework around which to consider teachers’ technology integration.

### **New Literacies**

The literature on new literacies also informed my study. The New Literacy Studies (NLS), from which new literacies emerged (Bartels, 2013), examines the way written language is “determined by the social, cultural, historical, and institutional practices of different groups of people” (Gee, 2010, p. 31) and privileges the social aspects of language, recognizing literacy’s role in making local changes and resisting traditional literacy formats (Black, 2008). New literacies, then, applies NLS to digital technologies. As opposed to traditional literacies, which rely upon written language (McEneaney, 2011), new literacies is “a belief that literate practices are deeply embedded in social practices, social contexts, and social identities” (Bailey, 2009, p. 208). As

Collier, Foley, Moguel, and Barnard (2013) asserted, “the definition of literacy now includes digital approaches to accessing, processing, and transmitting knowledge” (p. 263). Researchers typically focus on the Internet and the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as central to new literacy practices (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Commack, 2004). Moving in the direction of creating a theoretical framework for new literacies, Leu et al. (2004) identified the following new literacies principles:

1. The internet and other ICS are central technologies for literacy within a global community in an information age.
2. The Internet and other ICTs require new literacies to fully access their potential.
3. New literacies are deictic.
4. The relationship between literacy and technology is transactional.
5. New literacies are multiple in nature.
6. Critical literacies are central to the new literacies.
7. New forms of strategic knowledge are central to the new literacies.
8. Speed counts in important ways within the new literacies.
9. Learning often is socially constructed within new literacies.
10. Teachers become more important, though their role changes, within new literacies classrooms. (p. 1589)

New literacy practices emerge as quickly as new technologies develop, and this emergent nature prevents an exact definition of new literacies (Coiro et al., 2008; CCCC, 2004; Leu, 2002; Leu et al., 2004). Nevertheless, certain features seem to characterize new literacies: social aspects (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Street, 1995), multimodal elements (Coiro et al., 2008), disruptions of the reader-writer relationship (Buckingham, 1993), collaborative qualities (Curwood & Cowell, 2011), and hypertextual paths (Swenson, Young, McGrail, Rozema, & Whitin, 2006). New literacies alter our understanding of what literacy is (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003), challenging preconceived notions of text (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007), complicating traditional linear understandings of text (Lambert & Cuper, 2008), and facilitating new genres.

Writers who engage in new literacies practices have to understand more than just the digital tools. Rather, they have to embody particular “ways of acting, interacting, valuing,

believing, and knowing” (Gee, 2010, p. 32). Whereas the *technical stuff* focuses on the digital aspect of literacy, the *ethos stuff* focuses on one’s mindset and, in particular, one’s propensity to engage in Web 2.0 practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). And thus *technical stuff* and *ethos stuff* become intertwined, as it is not only what a writer uses to compose but how he or she thinks about the composing process. As Janks and Vasquez (2011) wrote, new literacies practices permit a democratization of text production:

The move from knowledge consumption to knowledge production evident on Web 2.0 has removed previous forms of authorization and ownership .... Authorship is further challenged by new forms of text-making: mixing, mashing, cutting, pasting and re-contextualizing are taken-for-granted practices of the net generation. (p. 2)

Leu (2002) suggested the technical skills and beliefs embedded in new literacy practices: “the new literacies include the skills, strategies, and insights necessary to successfully exploit the rapidly changing information and communication technologies that continuously emerge in our world” (pp. 313-314).

### **Critical Literacy**

The complexity of *critical literacy* makes it a term about which the field does not agree on a singular definition (Riley, 2015). Luke (2012) asserted, “critical literacy is an overtly political orientation to teaching and learning and to the cultural, ideological, and sociolinguistic content of the curriculum. It is focused on the uses of literacy for social justice in marginalized and disenfranchised communities” (p. 5). In his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) espoused, “people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and in *which* they find themselves” (p. 64). Central to Freire’s definition of critical literacy is the consideration of literacy as liberating rather than oppressive (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2010; Rogers, 2014). In *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, Freire and Macedo (1987) wrote, “critical literacy makes making oneself present as



part of a moral and political project that links the production of meaning to the possibility for human agency, democratic community, and transformative social action” (p. 15). Giroux (1998) believed “an emancipatory theory of literacy points to the need to develop an alternative discourse and critical reading of how ideology, culture, and power work...” (p. 63).

It is important for me to establish my stance on the connection between new literacies and critical literacy. Some scholars have argued that new literacies can be understood as inherently critical from a sociocultural view of literacy (Watulak & Kinzer, 2012) and from the perspective that literacy is inherently grounded in power, culture, and identity (Luke & Freebody, 1999; Street, 1995). In addition, Leu et al. (2004) argued critical literacies are central to new literacies. Other scholars, such as Myers and Eberfors (2010), have asserted new literacies are not inherently critical. And it is this sentiment with which I agree. Whereas new literacies are not inherently critical, digital writing provides a space for writers to engage in critical literacy.

Writing to engage in critical literacy in school has not been as common as critical literacy practices with reading (Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001; Morgan, 1997). Therefore, it is imperative to consider how digital writing can be used to work, or write, against “the hierarchies of power and privilege inherent in conventional schooling” (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993b, p. 47). Critical literacy in the secondary writing classroom can be a means to disrupt the status quo around issues of politics, economics, race, class, gender, and ethnicity (Beck, 2005; Glazier, 2007; McLaren & Lankshear, 1993; Morgan, 1997; Shor, 1997). As Janks (2009) wrote, “Writers need a critical social consciousness to produce texts that make a difference to the ways in which we ‘name’ and understand the world.” Digital writing with a critical stance becomes an act of social justice (Chapman, Hobell, & Alvarado, 2011). Critical literacy in the writing

classroom permits students and teachers to write about issues of personal importance such that they feel empowered and can affect change in their lives and communities.

## **Social Justice**

The field of English education is “focused on critical approaches to language, literature, and literacy” (Aslup & Miller, 2014, p. 196). I work from an understanding that these critical approaches have their roots in social justice pedagogy, which Moje (2007) defined:

Social justice pedagogy, or teaching to produce social justice, involves more the providing equitable learning opportunities implied in the phrase ‘socially just pedagogy,’ although such opportunities are necessary ingredients of social justice pedagogy. From a social justice perspective, opportunities to learn must not only provide access to mainstream knowledge and practices but also provide opportunities to question, challenge, and reconstruct knowledge. (pp. 3-4)

Like *critical literacy*, *social justice* is difficult to define (Conference on English Education [CEE], 2009); however, certain descriptions of social justice as applied to the writing classroom help make more concrete its abstractness. A teacher who promotes social justice empowers students to play an active role in critical evaluation of their worlds and facilitates students to take action that changes one’s life or community (Glasgow, 2001; Hackman, 2005). Christensen (2000a) used the phrase “rising up” to characterize such writing as emancipatory (p. vii). Chapman et al. (2011) believed writing with social justice in mind permits writers “to articulate their experiences, critique their world, and address those identified issues with subsequent action” (pp. 539-540). Chapman et al. (2011) continued:

A social justice approach to writing fosters an awareness of societal challenges that affect students’ families, communities, and the larger society. It affirms students’ multiple identities, creates solidarity among peers, builds students’ abilities to respond and embrace supportive criticism of their work, and targets authentic audiences for their finished products. (p. 539)

The writing classroom can be both a place to learn writing content and a place in which teachers and students compose pieces that bring about social change in their communities. Here, I agree

with Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, Lahann, Shakman, and Terrell's (2009) resistance to the critique that social justice and content cannot coexist. Teachers must not be forgotten in this discussion of writing as a social justice act. The CCCC (1982) claimed English education programs should permit teachers to write "as a means of developing, shaping, representing, and communicating our perceptions of our world, our experiences, our beliefs, and our identity."

### **Study Introduction**

The purpose of this dissertation study was to examine the writing and pedagogical practices of middle grades teachers who were active digital writers and to examine what moves they made toward critical literacy in their writing or teaching. This collective case study contributed one of the few empirical studies about middle grades English teachers who are digital writers with a critical stance.

I facilitated an online professional development online study group through LEARN NC, a program of my institution that offers professional development to K-12 teachers, in order to help teachers understand the connection between digital writing and critical literacy. Four middle grades English teachers who were active digital writers engaged in this online study group to learn how to apply understandings of new literacies and critical literacy to their writing and teaching. These teachers composed a digital writing assignment with a critical literacy stance that served as a mentor text for their students. Data collected included before- and after-online study group interviews, teachers' digital writing, study group postings, six classroom observations, and post-observation interviews.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided my study: (1) What are the writing practices of secondary English teachers who are active digital writers? (2) What does writing (digital and otherwise) pedagogy look like in the classrooms of teachers who are digital writers? (3) What factors move teachers toward critical literacy in their own writing and in their classroom practices?

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

After this introductory chapter, I detail the literature and research that informed my work in a review of the literature in chapter 2. In chapter 3, I provide the methodology for this collective case study. Case studies of each participant are provided in chapter 4, and a cross-case analysis of emergent themes is shared in chapter 5. And, finally, chapter 6 offers a review of the research questions and findings, a discussion of how my work extends the literature in the area of teachers as digital writers with a critical stance, implications for English educators, limitations, and future research directions.

### **Chapter Summary**

Whereas school districts and rhetoric around education continues to emphasize technology in the classroom, little attention has been paid to whether English teachers understand how to integrate it effectively into their classrooms. Even less research has been done about how secondary teachers who are digital writers themselves teach writing in a way that embodies critical literacy practices. This research study, one of the few empirical studies to examine middle grades English teachers as digital writers with a critical stance, looked at the writing and teaching practices of middle grades English teachers who were digital writers and enrolled in an online study group about the connections between digital writing and critical literacy.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is no question that *technology* nears the top of the contemporary education buzzwords list. The rhetoric of politicians, policy makers, teacher educators, administrators, teachers, and parents emphasizes the importance of helping students prepare for the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> centuries. In his 2012 National Council of Teachers of English Affiliate Breakfast Address, Morrell (2012a) suggested:

Being literate for this iPad generation of youth, these 22<sup>nd</sup> century youth, will mean processing and producing more information than you and I can even imagine today. It will also mean processing and producing information in modes and genres that we cannot imagine, that I won't even live to see.

To this end, school districts spend millions of dollars to equip their schools with one-to-one initiatives and technology tools (Hofer & Grandgenett, 2012). However, though the technological resources that could permit transformational classroom practices and alter the ways in which students engage in literacy practices may be present, many English classrooms look the same as they did a hundred years ago (Hicks, Young, Kajder, & Hunt, 2012). English teachers tend to privilege traditional literacy practices, often limiting or ignoring students' out-of-school literacy practices (Greenhow, Robelia, & Huges, 2009) and the ways in which technology has impacted the English discipline. As Leu et al. (2004) argued, "traditional definitions of literacy and literacy instruction will be insufficient if we seek to provide students with the futures they deserve" (p. 1570). Applebee and Langer's (2011) recent examination of writing classrooms in middle and high schools revealed that students are using computers mostly to type and the most frequent audience of students' final written products is the teacher. This contradiction between

the possibilities and the unfortunate realities of technology's place in the secondary English classroom engenders concern.

There are a few reasons for this discrepancy between the rhetoric about technology's importance to our educational system and the images of today's English classroom. One reason for this may be that new literacies are "slowly reaching our teacher education classes and high school classrooms" (Bailey, 2009, p. 209). In addition, the presence of technology does not automatically alter the English classroom and the types of literacy practices in which teachers and students engage: "Adding technology to instruction does not automatically create a meaningful change in learning or instruction" (Flanagan & Shoffner, 2013, p. 242). Ertmer's (1999) first- and second-order barriers, the former being software and hardware and the latter being teachers' beliefs about technology integration, remain. Based on the results of their qualitative case study of secondary English teachers, Flanagan and Shoffner (2013) claimed, "teachers must know how to integrate technology effectively into their practice in order to maximize its potential for student learning" (p. 255). These authors recommended "content-specific technology" instruction for both preservice and inservice teachers (p. 256).

In addition, though I do not take the stance that new literacies are inherently critical as several scholars do (e.g. Avila & Moore, 2012; Hinrichsen and Coombs, 2013; Freebody and Luke, 1990; Peters & Lankshear, 1996; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, 2006; Lemke, 1998; Leu et al., 2004, Luke, 2012; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Parker, 2013; Sholle & Denski, 1993), thereby agreeing with the work of Myers and Eberfors (2010), I believe digital writing and new literacies can be a space for critical literacy, a concept with which many English teachers are unfamiliar. Turner and Hicks's (2011-2012) qualitative study looked at novice Teach for America English teachers' understandings of digital writing with a critical stance. Findings revealed that these

teachers often selected to prepare their students for required standardized tests rather than ask them to compose for the community and take social action. Turner and Hicks's work is one of only a few empirical studies about English teachers as digital writers and critical literacy. In fact, Wohlwend and Lewis (2011) cited few researchers have examined critical literacies and their relation to technology. Consequently, my dissertation study aimed to fill a gap in the research regarding English teachers as digital writers with a critical stance. As such, my project provided teachers a way to consider their digital writing, pedagogical practices, and understandings of new literacies and critical literacy as they composed a piece of digital writing with a critical stance.

In this chapter, I share the theoretical literature and research studies upon which my research was built. First, I provide a justification for writing's importance and then provide an argument for teachers as writers, in particular, teachers as digital writers. Next, I explore teachers and their knowledge and use of technology, providing a technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Then, I discuss digital writing, new literacies, and critical literacy. And, finally, I share the possible connections between digital writing and critical literacy.

### **Perspectives on Writing's Importance**

Said to have originated in Mesopotamia around 3200 BC, China around 1250 BC, and Mesoamerica in 650 BC (Schmandt-Besserat & Erard, 2008), writing can be understood as a "medium of thought" (NCTE, 2004):

The notion that writing is a medium for thought is important in several ways. It suggests a number of important uses for writing: to solve problems, to identify issues, to construct questions, to reconsider something one had already figured out, to try out a half-baked idea.

As Bazerman (2008) suggested, “we carry out complex activities and projects that would be impossible without recorded knowledge, planning, and coordination enabled by writing” (p. 1). He described writing as a “core element in human history” (p. 3). In the context of marginalized writing instruction within today’s classrooms and teachers’ unpreparedness to teaching writing (Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2013), the question of why writing is so important seems particularly relevant. As Turner and Hicks (2011-2012) asserted:

Inasmuch as writing serves as a communicative tool, a representation of self, and a vehicle for articulating perspectives, writing is a part of the culture of power. It has the potential to empower or oppress individuals, and it has the potential to maintain the status quo or transform the collective community” (p. 55)

In this section, I offer six perspectives on writing’s importance: omnipresent, economic, educational, transformative, therapeutic, and human.

### **An Omnipresent Perspective**

One of the most validating statements on writing’s importance concerns its omnipresence. Be it on rocks or Facebook, walls have been invaluable to the way both ancient and contemporary people have communicated via writing. In the forward to Graham and Perin’s *Writing Next*, Gregorian (2007) suggested:

Whether inscribed on a rock, carved in cuneiform, painted in hieroglyphics, or written with the aid of the alphabet, the instinct to write down everything from mundane commercial transactions to routine daily occurrences to the most transcendent ideas – and then to have others read them, as well as read what others have written – is not simply a way of transferring information from one person to another, one generation to the next. It is a process of learning, and hence, of education. (p. 1)

Whether via Tweets, within journal pages, or on graffiti walls, writing is all around us. The current technological context has only increased writing’s stature (Brandt, 2009): In her latest book, Brandt (2015) wrote about the ways in which writing has superseded reading in the marketplace: “Writing is overtaking reading as the skill of critical consequence... It is surging into prominence, bringing with it a cultural history and developmental arc that stand in contrast



to reading” (p. 162). A 2008 Pew Internet & American Life Project and National Commission on Writing (Lenhart, 2008) national phone survey found that 93% of teenagers write electronically. In addition to its omnipresence, writing also has an economic value.

### **An Economic Perspective**

One cannot neglect the economic importance of writing. Schmandt-Besserat and Erard (2008) shared, “the function of writing when it came about in 3200 BCE was exclusively economic” (p. 8). Unquestionably, writing is still vital to workplace success. The NCTE (2008a) asserted, “We write differently – often digitally – and we write more than in the past. Technological advances, changing workplace demands, and cultural shifts make writing more important than ever, especially because the way we write often predicts academic and/or job success ....” Similarly, the National Commission on Writing for America’s Families, Schools, and Colleges (College Entrance Exam Board, 2004) emphasized the value business leaders place on writing in the workplace. Brandt’s (2009) biographical sociology work with multiple workplace writers revealed the importance of writing in today’s workplace: Over fifty percent of employers are spending a majority of their time at the keyboard. Despite the necessity of written skills, employers are not impressed with candidates’ writing skills. An employer survey conducted by The Chronicle of Higher Education and American Public Media’s Marketplace (2012) revealed future employees lack in written communication skills. Holland’s (2013) article “Why Johnny Can’t Write, and Why Employers are Mad” referenced several employer surveys that affirmed this idea that employers are concerned about potential employees’ writing abilities. Whereas I believe English teachers should consider students as more than future employees in the marketplace, we do a disservice to students not to acknowledge writing’s importance in the economy.

## **An Educational Perspective**

Many scholars have cited writing's importance to education. In their meta-analysis, Graham and Herbert (2011) "found that writing about material read enhances reading comprehension" (p. 726), "found that writing instruction enhances students' reading," (p. 731), and "found that increasing writing improves reading comprehension" (p. 731). Graham and Herbert found "four types of writing activities to be effective: extended writing, summary writing, note taking, and answering/generating questions" (p. 733). In their study of college writers, Fry and Villagomez (2012) summarized Zinsser's (1988) concept of writing to learn: "Writing to learn (WTL) is the act of making a subject or topic clear to oneself by reasoning through it in writing; it is a pedagogical approach that uses writing to facilitate learning" (p. 170). These authors examined the writing of 53 preservice social studies teachers in college; twenty-five students were enrolled in a fall 2010 course, and 28 were enrolled in a spring 2011 course. The students in the 2011 course received WTL pedagogy. Results varied by analysis method: "Quantitative analysis revealed that writing to learn did not have a differential effect on student achievement of course goals.... [however] qualitative analysis revealed evidence indicating students valued writing to learn as a way to make sense of course content ...." (p. 170). In addition to writing's importance to the educational process, another important aspect to consider is writing's propensity to evoke change.

## **A Transformative Perspective**

Schmandt-Besserat and Erard (2008) wrote, "Humans created two major systems of visual symbols to express themselves and to communicate with others: art and writing" (p. 7). And because writing is deeply connected with how humans transform and share thoughts with one another, it is imperative to consider writing's ability to effect change: "Writing is a powerful

instrument of thought. In the act of composing, writers learn about themselves and their world and communicate their insights to others. Writing confers the power to grow personally and to effect change in the world” (NCTE, 1985). In his essay *History of Writing in the Community*, Howard (2008) considered writing’s ability to evoke change: “Writing ... became increasingly part of social experience, human identity, community activity, and aspirations for change” (p. 239).

The idea of writing as a change agent cannot be separated from social justice thought.

Schneider (2013) proclaimed writing as a political act:

If you write privately, you change your own inner world, and that changes the outer world. If you write publicly, you give voice to what is, and that assists what is becoming. If you help someone else write the truth, you may not live long enough to know it, but you will have changed the world. (pp. 178-179)

A few research studies examined this idea of writing as a social justice act (Chapman et al., 2011). Fifth graders engaged in digital moviemaking to alter perspectives about urban youth in Love’s (2014) practitioner article about the power of hip hop literacy. Guzzetti and Gamboa’s (2004) qualitative work examined three adolescent girls constructed zines to address issues of oppression and marginalization. The change-effecting quality of writing cannot be ignored, especially in relation to digital writing and critical literacy.

### **The Therapeutic Perspective**

Those who identify as writers understand the healing quality of reading a great poem or whittling down a paragraph of ideas to one succinct line. The medical humanities field examines writing’s therapeutic nature. Frank (1993) wrote about the epiphanies that can come from composing one’s illness narrative: self-discovery in relation to “who I always have been” and “who I might become” (p. 42). Rinaldi (1996) wrote about a writing support group for people with multiple sclerosis:

Though writing and revising narratives of disability could not restore the crippled bodies of these writers, the insights gleaned from the heuristics of writing did seem to have therapeutic value for those grappling with the darker issues of chronic illness. (p. 831)

For people who are ill, writing becomes a way to cope, a means by which to understand the situations in which they find themselves. In her text *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, Lamott (1994) expressed writing's power: "Writing has so much to give, so much to teach, so many surprises....The act of writing turns out to be its own reward" (p. xxvi). It would seem, then, that the writing process itself is curative.

### **The Human Perspective**

Transcending human experience, writing's esthetic quality is difficult to quantify. In his *On Writing*, novelist King (2000) suggested writing is deeply connected to our ethos as humans:

It starts with this: put your desk in the corner, and every time you sit down there to write, remind yourself why it isn't in the middle of the room. Life isn't a support-system for art. It's the other way around. (p. 101)

He continued: "Writing is magic, as much the water of life as any other creative art. The water is free. So drink. Drink and be filled up" (p. 270). Gregorian (2007) conflated writing's importance with the need to leave a legacy. It is generally thought that the Phoenicians created the first alphabet; "clearly, the instinct for human beings to express their feelings, their thoughts, and their experiences in some lasting form has been with us for a very long time" (p. 1). There is this sense that writing extends people's life past their mortality. In *Writing Down the Bones*, Goldberg (2010) penned:

I don't think everyone wants to create the great American novel, but we all have a dream of telling our stories - of realizing what we think, feel, and see before we die. Writing is a path to meet ourselves and become intimate. Think about it: Ants don't do it. Trees don't. Not every thoroughbred horse, mountain elk, house cats, grass, or rocks do it. Writing is a uniquely human activity. (p. xii).

The social nature of writing makes it a practice inherently connected to our humanity. As Ueland (1987) wrote, “this creative power and imagination is in everyone and so is the need to express it, i.e., to share it with others” (p. 5). For it is through “writing that we inscribe our place in the literate world and all the social systems that depend on literacy” (Bazerman, 2008, p. 1). And thus, for all of the perspectives on its importance (e.g. omnipresent, economic, educational, transformative, and therapeutic), perhaps the most valid argument for writing’s importance is its inherent connection to what it means to be human.

### **Teachers as Writers**

How teachers understand themselves as writers may play an important role in their writing pedagogy. Cremin and Baker (2010) wrote, “teachers in many countries are expected to model writing and demonstrate their proficiency as writers, yet this is potentially problematic if they lack self-assurance and positive writing identities” (p. 4). There may be connections between writing identities and content knowledge about writing. Also, teachers’ comfort levels with digital writing may be related to how much teachers model Web 2.0 practices in their classrooms (Greenhow et al., 2009). Considerations of teachers’ writing identities, especially perhaps their digital writing identities, and how these identities might impact pedagogy are particularly important when we take into account most English teachers have literature, not writing, backgrounds (Callahan, 2002; Gardner, 2014).

Several scholars have argued for the importance of teachers to identify as writers (Augsburger, 1998; Elbow, 1998; Gere, 1980, Gillespie, 1985; Graves, 1983; Graves, 1994; Murray, 1980; Murray, 1985; Smith, 1994). The NCTE’s (1985) *Teaching Composition: A Position Statement* asserted, “Writing teachers should themselves be writers. Through experiencing the struggles and joys of writing, teachers learn that their students will need

guidance and support through the writing process, not merely comments on the written product.”

Smith (1994) wrote teachers

should write *with* their students, in order to provide demonstrations. I am not talking about teachers displaying to students the final drafts of their own hard-worked efforts, with all the effort being expended off-stage, but of actually writing at the same time as the students, at the same tasks as the students, as *publicly* as the students .... (p. 220)

Acknowledging that students may benefit even if teachers are not expert writers, Graves (1983) believed “the teaching of writing demands the control of two crafts, teaching and writing. They can neither be avoided, nor separated” (p. 6). Calkins (1994) wrote, “When we teach writing, we will probably not begin by talking *about* writing, but rather, by demonstrating the power and purposes writing has in our lives, and by inviting students to discover ways that writing can enrich their lives as well” (p. 31). Elbow (1998) believed teachers should participate in what he described as the “teacherless” writing classroom as a fellow writer during writing workshop. Murray (1985) shared similar sentiments about viewing himself as a fellow writer in his writing classroom. In his introduction to the text *Those who do, can* Root (1996) described the experiences of hundreds of teachers who partook in a teaching and writing workshop in Traverse City, Michigan, from 1986-1992: The workshop helped participants “make the word ‘writing’ in the term ‘writing teacher’ refer as much to something the teacher herself does as to the subject matter of her teaching” (p. xxi).

A few scholars have recognized the difficulties of asking teachers to be writers.

Applegate (1967) asserted, “a teacher of creative writing need to stimulate children to write, not to be a writer herself” (as cited in Perez, 1983, p. 848). Jost (1990a) refuted the idea that teachers should write with their students for various reasons, including not having the time to help students with their own writing process if they write at the same time and conflicting views about what to share with students because viewing assignments as a teacher often conflicts with

viewing assignments as a writer. In another piece, Jost (1990b) asserted that teachers do a lot of technical writing, but it is not the type of creative writing the scholars cited above expect teachers to do. Furthermore, she argued, “We are teachers by choice, after all, and not professional writers” (p. 66).

While acknowledging these valid points, many scholars have suggested the benefits outweigh the challenges. Although Bishop (1999) claimed one could be an effective writing teacher without considering oneself a writer, she, ultimately, found value in the teacher-writer concept. In a NWP network newsletter, Gere (1980) acknowledged that asking teachers to do writing may indeed add to their professional burdens but was quick to acknowledge the benefits:

My private hunch – one not verifiable with existing research designs- is that teacher-writers not only have against the hedge against the forces of teacher burn-out. Through writing they avoid being cut off from the sources of their own power and creativity. (p. 2)

Whitney et al. (2014) shared the trajectory of the teacher-writer: “the writing process phase (1970s and 1980s), the teacher research phase (1990s and 2000s), and, currently, teachers as advocates and intellectuals” (p. 177). Whitney et al. stated that “these phases are additive: rather than one idea-set replacing one another, each augments the concept of the ‘teacher-writer’” (pp. 177-78). In each of these phases, teachers have different purposes as writers. Within a pedagogy that underscored process and workshop, teachers wrote to better “‘walk the talk’ when asking students to write” (p. 178). The trend toward teacher as researcher positioned teachers as “writ[ing] for the field, generating knowledge, *and* increasing teachers’ representation within the research literature” (p. 178). The most contemporary phase establishes a space for teachers to be advocates: “teachers write as a form of activism and resistance. Thus, whereas earlier teacher-writers wrote for other educators, now teachers write for the press, parents, and the public, whose opportunities to understand teachers’ perspectives may be few”

(pp. 178). Having established the theoretical scholarship on teachers as writers, I now move to empirical research on teachers as writers.

### **The Research on Teachers as Writers**

In addition to a large theoretical rationale for the importance of teachers as writers, research studies have examined teachers as writers. What follows is a thematic look at research studies around teachers as writers. I separate research studies according to reoccurring research inquiries: teachers' identity as writers, teachers' confidence in writing, teachers' lack of experience with digital writing, and teachers' digital writing spaces.

**Teachers' identities as writers.** Research about teachers' identities as writers has provided some but not conclusive insight into teachers' writing pedagogy. Bizzaro's (1983) self-study helped him understand that he taught poetry in the way in which he wrote poetry. Robbins' (1996) case study work with high school teachers' identities provided insight into the various ways in which three teachers position themselves as writers and teachers:

The case studies included here describe a teacher who writes but does not connect her own writing to her teaching, a teacher who does not use her writing directly in instruction, and a teacher who writes and uses his writing in instruction but does not take a process approach. (p. 124)

Though eleven of the teachers engaged in personal writing, how their writing identities impacted pedagogy vastly differed, suggesting that "the mere fact that teachers write does not tell us much about the relationship between their writing and their teaching" (pp. 124-125). The case study teacher in the National Writing Project summer institute was torn initially between personal and professional writing in Whitney's (2009) qualitative study. Findings revealed "writing ... is never neatly divided into personal or professional" (p. 253) and teachers' personal and professional identities – and writing – are often intertwined. Norman and Spencer's (2005) qualitative study around 59 preservice elementary teachers' writing included the writing of



writing histories and autobiographies. Four themes emerged from their research: preservice teachers tended to favor creative writing, teachers' writing identities were impacted by positive and negative writing experiences in the past, there was a difference between motivating writers' development and teaching writing, and whether a teacher believed writing instruction to be critical was based upon his or her writing beliefs. Limited to two elementary school teachers, Cremin and Baker's (2010) case study revealed that teachers exist along a continuum of writer-teacher. Data analysis revealed a tension between participants' roles as teachers and writers. The researchers' graphic representation of teachers as writers illuminated the teacher-writer and writer-teacher on opposing ends, with a product for the system as an outcome for the former and a product for the self as an outcome for the latter. Representing "an ongoing oscillation ... teacher-writers writing for the system and more liberating identities: writer-teachers writing more for themselves" (p. 25), the diagram included institution and intrapersonal concerns and showcased emotional engagement, degree of authorial agency, and personal authenticity across a continuum of the practice of writing. The diagram calls our attention to the complexities and multifaceted nature of teachers' identities, a concept both Alsup (2006) and Danielewicz (2001) studied in their separate examinations of six preservice English teachers.

Morgan (2010) acknowledged little is known about how teachers' writing identities impact their pedagogy. Her qualitative study of her elementary methods students revealed preservice teachers often have negative views of themselves as writers and that a course designed with the specific purpose of writing methods instruction can positively affect teachers' perceptions of themselves as writers. Gardner's (2014) qualitative study with over a 100 elementary student teachers revealed that helping student teachers consider their writing practices and identities increased their self-efficacy with writing. Elementary preservice teachers

in Bishop's (2009) qualitative study created digital literacy projects that enabled them "stabilize and/or improvise formations of [teacher] identity" (p. 31). Using interviews and analysis of students' digital literacy projects, Bishop (2009) examined how the composition of multimodal digital texts enabled preservice teachers "to construct their sense of selves as *undergraduate college students, elementary school teachers*, other less prominent identities and/or composites of multiple identities" (p. 39).

Brooks's (2010) case study of four elementary school teachers countered perceptions that teachers need to identify as writers and reveal this to their students to be effective writing teachers. This case study revealed that instead of their literacy practices, teachers put most of their energies into students' literacy practices. Via interviews and observations, teachers in Brooks's study disagreed with theorists who claimed teachers should write. First, teachers had varying writing practices. And second, "teachers ... all claimed a strong allegiance to knowing and supporting their students as readers and writers, rather than concerning themselves about showcasing their own reading and writing" (p. 189). Though Brooks's work posited that teachers do not have to identify as writers to their students to be effective writing teachers, other research suggested a connection between teachers' identities as writers and how they thought about or enacted writing pedagogy.

**Teachers' confidence in writing.** Teachers' confidence in writing appears to have pedagogical implications. Frank (2003) looked at his elementary methods students to see if they became less apprehensive about writing if they wrote about personal memories. As teachers gained a sense of themselves as writers, they began to consider how reflection on their writing process would help their students work through the writing process in more authentic ways. Grainger (2005) employed a workshop model over the course of two years to enhance teachers'

writing confidence. Data collection methods included questionnaires, interviews, observations, composing logs, reflections, and late-phase interviews. Despite the sustained model, pedagogical effects varied; some teachers offered students more choices in writing topics, and others shared their composing practices and models with students. This study revealed that developing teachers' confidence with writing can have pedagogical effects. Morgan's (2010) qualitative study suggested preservice teachers were not confident in their writing abilities at the beginning of a writing methods course. This lack of confidence led them to focus on grammar, spelling, and punctuation, areas that, though important, are not what professional writers would consider substantive writing components. Professional writers, on the other hand, focus on "composing ideas, writing with simplicity and clarity, establishing a line of thought, providing detail that helps the reader live through the experience, and finding something meaningful to say" (p. 362). Considerations of teachers' writing confidence should be further explored, especially perhaps in light of teachers' lack of experience with digital writing.

**Teachers' lack of experience with digital writing.** Published studies reported teachers' lack of experience with digital writing. Howard's (2014) qualitative study of preservice teachers examined teachers' digital journals, interviews, questionnaires, and observations. Results revealed that preservice teachers come to English education courses with an array of understandings about new literacies, from resistance to new literacies and an allegiance to traditional print texts to an awareness of new literacies practices and affordances. Sixty-five teacher candidate participants in Hundley and Holbrook's (2013) qualitative study of a writing methods course – even those who believed themselves to be effective writers – faced several challenges when asked to compose multimodal texts: difficulty with presenting ideas using images, a hard time working with the lack of authorial control of audience, and complications

because of the technological tools. Digital writing allowed preservice teachers “to struggle with new composition structures and to consider what they do when they write conventionally” (p. 504). Preservice English teachers in Turner and Hicks’s (2011-2012) qualitative study did not believe that digital writing deserves the same status as traditional forms of writing. These researchers suggested English teachers need to understand the affordances of digital writing, including its connection to social justice, and realize digital writing deserves the same status as traditional writing: “Teachers, regardless of the facility with technology or their personal writing practices or past academic experiences, must engage as digital writers” (p. 57). A severe gap in the literature exists in relation to teachers as writers with a critical stance. Although some teachers were inexperienced with digital writing, some teachers exhibited great adeptness as writers in digital spaces.

**Teachers’ digital writing spaces.** Whereas some studies revealed teachers were resistant or unfamiliar with composing in digital spaces, other studies highlighted teachers as digital writers. Schieble’s (2010) qualitative study of 15 preservice English students in a young adult literature course suggested that having preservice teachers design Moodle-based lessons that incorporated their personal social media accounts may encourage them to bring their students’ out-of-school literacy practices into their classrooms. Rodesiler (2014) suggested “little research has emerged regarding the features of the online contexts teachers weave as they engage in professionally orientated participation online” (p. 72). His qualitative case study examined teachers who were digital writers in professional spaces (e.g. professional organization’s websites, self-authored blogs, and self-authored Twitter sites). Findings revealed that these teachers engaged in multimodal affordances and a/synchronous flexibility, shared classroom experiences, and connected with other teachers online. In Roach and Beck’s (2012)

qualitative case study, the first author examined the second author's Facebook account for five weeks. Roach revealed trends in the second author's posts and replies, citing how her understandings of the second author's digital authorship and audience awareness could be applied to the writing classroom. Interestingly, teachers in Kist's (2008) study revealed they feared administrative and parental push-back to their personal or professional Web 2.0 use. In their theoretical piece, Greenhow and Gleason (2012) investigated tweeting as a form of microblogging and called for additional research on teachers' use of social media in the classroom.

Overwhelmingly qualitative, the research on teachers as writers was characterized by small participant pools, which often included the researcher's methods students. Many studies examined elementary school teachers. Some studies have shown teachers who identify as writers improve instruction while other studies refuted the necessity of a writing teacher who identifies as a writer. Also, research showed writing confidence can have positive impacts in the writing classroom. Further, though some studies exhibited there are teachers who are active digital writers, there remains limited research on teachers as digital writers, including digital writers with a critical stance. Because "scant attention has been afforded teachers' identities as writers with reference to their classroom roles and pedagogic practices as teachers of writing" (Cremin & Baker, 2010, p. 2), future large-scale work must examine how teachers' identities as digital writers with critical stances influence their writing pedagogy.

### **Teachers and Technology**

Literature in the area of teachers and technology has informed my work because teachers who write digitally with a critical stance and encourage students to do the same have to understand both how digital tools work and how to integrate them effectively into the secondary

English classroom. Zhao, Pugh, Sheldon, and Byers's (2002) evaluation of 10 K-12 teacher teams over the course of a year found factors that affect technology implementation. The most important aspect was the teacher, particularly his or her knowledge of the technology's capabilities, understanding of connections between pedagogy and technology, and knowledge of school's organizational and social culture. The technology project the teacher designed, particularly its alignment with school culture, its connection to available resources, and its connection to teacher's pedagogical practices, was also important. And, finally, the school context, including the school's technological and human infrastructures and organizational culture, was important. Results of Hutchinson and Reinking's (2011) national survey of 1,441 literacy educators revealed they had support for technology integration and believed in the importance of technology integration. Interestingly, though, over two-thirds of the respondents revealed technology played a supplementary role and considered integration in terms of enhancing previous goals rather than reimagining new curricular goals made possible by technologies. Survey results also indicated several technological barriers to integration, including not having enough laptops for each student or students not having e-mail accounts.

The TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) was designed to help educators consider how technology integration fits with their content area and pedagogy. Because the ways in which teachers understand and conceive of technology integration as related to the English content and their pedagogy impacts whether they include digital writing with a critical stance in their classroom, my work is informed by TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). In what follows, I define TPACK and examine teachers' practices and beliefs, focusing specifically on technology, pedagogy, and content.

### **Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge**

TPACK builds upon Shulman's (1996) idea of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and resonates with English Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (ETPCK) (Hughes & Scharber, 2008). Coined by Hughes, ETPCK is TPACK related specifically to the English classroom. These authors suggested that teachers engage in the following in order to move toward the most effective technology integration: meta-cognition about their teaching with technology practices and "...cognitive conflict with English content knowledge..." in order to engage with "...new perspectives within literacy such as new literacies and critical literacy..." (p. 104). Though I acknowledge Brantley-Dias and Ertmer's (2013) critiques about the vagueness and ambiguity of the TPACK framework, I agree with the work of Hughes and Scharber (2008) whose research study with three English teachers and technology integration led them to advocate that English education "needs the *explicitness* of the TPACK concept at this point in time" (p. 89). TPACK's connection to digital writing is, ultimately, what I am interested in, as "most teachers graduating with disciplinary credentials that will certify them to teach English have not formally studied digital forms of writing" (Hicks & Turner, 2011-2012, p. 63). Important to teachers and teachers educators alike, the TPACK framework is comprised of three main knowledge bases: technology knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and content knowledge, components I unpack in the following sections.

**Technology knowledge and development.** Because teachers' comfort levels with technologies impact their likelihood to use technologies (Becker, 2001), it is important to consider what teachers know about technology. Two-thirds of teachers – even those who used technology to access lesson ideas and to plan lessons - reported feeling underprepared to use technology in their classrooms (NCTE, 2007). Mueller, Wood, Willoughby, Ross, and Specht (2003) referred to teachers as "perpetual novices" when incorporating technology into the

classroom (p. 1524). In order to help such novices, Pope and Golub (2000) provided principles and practices for infusing technology into the methods course: use technology in context, understand the links between technology and literacy, model simultaneously content learning and technology use, understand when to and when not to use technology, offer a multitude of ways to use technology, think about the assessment of technology products, and consider equity and diversity as they relate to technology. Graham, Burgoyne, Cantrell, Smith St. Clair, and Harris (2009) suggested teachers progress from technology knowledge to TPACK. As such, technology instruction may have to focus on the tools at first – before the incorporation of pedagogy and content. Teacher education and professional development must focus on developing teachers' technological competence and help them learn not only what technological tools fit best in the English classroom but how to use these tools.

**Pedagogical knowledge.** The second component to consider is teachers' pedagogical knowledge, as teachers' pedagogical beliefs influence their technology integration. Teachers' beliefs are especially important considering that although classroom management concerns may indeed be barriers to technology use (Bowman, 2000; Pasternak, 2007), teachers' beliefs may be able to overcome management anxieties (Ertmer, 1999).

A teacher's pedagogical belief affects whether and in what ways he or she will integrate technology. For example, teachers with less traditional pedagogies and views about knowledge integrate technology more effectively. Greenhow et al. (2009) discussed that schools still have a rather traditional view of knowledge and “still dominant is a view and use of the Web as augmenting information retrieval rather than supplanting traditional resources and activities...” (p. 248). McGrail (2007) wrote, “research also revealed a strong connection between the instrumental use of technology and traditional concepts of pedagogy and theories of learning...”



(p. 61). These traditional pedagogical views reduce technology integration to information retrieval rather than transforming the ways students read and write with digital technologies.

Conversely, technology integration may be richer in classrooms in which teachers have constructivist pedagogies, as these teachers use technology to enhance their students' higher-order thinking skills (Becker, 2001). Teachers who understand "knowledge is multimodal, co-constructed, and performed or represented, not absorbed" (Miller, 2007, p. 65) may integrate technology in robust ways. Greenhow et al. (2009) proposed that teachers engage in the use of Web 2.0 tools whereby "knowledge is decentralized, assessable, and co-constructed by and among a broad base of users" (p. 247). Although technology can be used to transfer simply knowledge to students, it can also be used to help students create their own meaning, which is a more transformative use of technology (Hammond & Manfra, 2009). When used successfully, Web 2.0 tools can help create a constructivist classroom environment that takes the focus away from teacher-centered learning (Adcock & Bolick, 2011). Aligning with a constructivist approach, the CCCC (2004) recommended the following in order to engage students in digital writing: "introduce students to the epistemic (knowledge-constructing) characteristics of information technology," "provide students with opportunities to apply digital technologies to solve substantial problems common to the academic, professional, civic, and/or personal realm of their lives," "include much hands-on use of technology," "engage students in the critical evaluation of information," and "prepare students to be reflective practitioners."

Pedagogies that value students' out-of-school literacy practices may lead to greater technology integration. Allowing students to bring in their

out-of-school writing, such as text messages, IMs, and social network posts, as part of their portfolio in school would value these discourse practices and the language that is associated with them. Adolescents could begin to see their communications as *real* writing and appreciate their individual competencies. (Turner, 2012, pp. 40-41)

Often, students' out-of-school literacy texts are written for real authentic purposes (Turner, 2012). The space between students' school and out-of-school literacy practices can be narrowed if teachers realized technology's ability to increase student engagement (Spire et al., 2013). Hicks and Turner (2013) advocated for an integration of digital writing within the curriculum instead of incorporating it only if time permits. They wrote:

Student use blogs, podcasts, and digital movie-making programs, yet these digital writing tools are often brought in at the end of the unit, usually if there is 'extra' time after all the normal content (and test prep) has been covered, and never in a sustained, inquiry-based manner. (p. 58)

Additionally, Hicks and Turner provided five ways teachers are destroying digital literacy: privileging quantity over content, counting the number of slides or images, abandoning the interactive element of blogging by turning blog posts into question and answer sessions between teacher and students, condemning "digitalk," assigning writing tasks that can be determined through a quick Internet search, and using 'cool' technology tools without purpose.

If teachers are to incorporate digital writing in their pedagogy, they need to consider how technologies fit within their pedagogical beliefs and practices. Teachers with non-traditional, student-centered, constructivist pedagogies appear more likely to integrate technology into their classrooms. However, as we will discover in the subsection on content knowledge, teachers must emphasize literacy practices over technology tools (Hicks & Reed, 2007). In addition to their pedagogical beliefs and practices, teachers' knowledge about the evolving nature of the English discipline may impact their digital writing pedagogies.

**Content knowledge.** Teachers' knowledge about English and the ways they consider technology's influence on the content area is quite significant. Teachers need to understand how new technologies will continue to alter the English discipline (Wilber, 2008). In their seminal article, Pope and Golub (2000) suggested teacher educators should help teachers understand

technology in context and understand the links between technology and literacy. As such, technology use should meet content-specific learning goals (Alvine, 2000; Bull, Bell, Mason, & Garofalo, 2002; Ertmer, 1999; Hofer & Owings-Swan, 2005; Hughes, 2004; Hughes & Scharber, 2008; International Society for Technology, 2000; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Sahin, 2011; Swenson, Rozema, Young, McGrail, & Whitin, 2005). Understandings of the evolving nature of the English discipline (Bull et al., 2002) needs to include “what the new forms of reading and writing entail” (Kist, 2013, pp. 42-43). Teachers need to understand how digital tools have altered the ways in which we read, for example, the differences between reading text on screens versus in printed books. Also, teachers need to understand digital writing’s genre possibilities and ever-changing qualities, which are, in part, due to digital writing’s social and multimodal nature. Only after teachers understand the evolving nature of reading and writing embodied in these new understandings of the English discipline can they consider integrating technology in authentic ways.

As a group, English teachers have not adopted meaningful technology use into the classroom – in part because professional development has focused upon the use of tools rather than how technologies can be effectively integrated into the content (McGrail, 2007). In its *Resolution on Composing and Nonprint Media*, the NCTE (2003) “encourage[d] preservice, inservice, and staff development programs that will focus on new literacies, multimedia composition, and a broadened concept of literacy.” Kist (2013) wrote, “More powerful than a room full of gadgets is a teacher who has a deep understanding of what the new forms of reading and writing entail” (pp. 42-43). To this end, teachers will need to keep constantly up with emerging technologies and not haphazardly jump into new literacy tools (Bailey, 2009). Poignantly, Leu, O’Byrne, Zawilinski, McVerry, and Everett-Cacopardo (2009) encouraged the

understanding of technologies and the Internet as literacy tools rather than technology tools. Here, the English content is foregrounded.

***Pedagogical and content knowledge in teacher training.*** Though there seems to be mounting evidence that teacher pedagogical training matters (Darling-Hammond, 2000), more research is needed in order to contribute more knowledge to the field about what content knowledge teachers need to have to teach English and, more specifically, writing. We know that teaching English requires teachers to transform their content knowledge into accessible formats (Ball & Forzani, 2009). In this complex process, teachers are not just transferring what they know to students but rather considering students' needs as they break down complex material, so it is accessible to students with a wide array of interests and abilities. Smith, Bowen, and Dohm (2014) articulated the challenge in this area: "though much value has been placed on subject matter knowledge, we still have little valid research documenting the impact of English teachers' subject matter knowledge on student achievement" (p. 120). And though there are "a number of large-scale studies have found relationships between teacher effectiveness and the quantity of training teachers have received in subject matter and content-specific teaching methods" (Darling-Hammond & Hammerness, 2005, p. 395), scant empirical evidence is available for whether arts and sciences or teacher education courses, which both enroll future English teachers, impact English teacher's practices (Floden & Meniketti, 2005). Because little research has proven a connection between content courses taken and teaching effectiveness (Ball & McDiarmid, 1990), more work needs to be done in this area so as to be able to express more definitively the connection between content and pedagogy – in particular content knowledge about writing and its influence on writing pedagogy.

There is room in teacher education for teachers to practice engaging in these new understandings of the content. Even though they may be digital composers outside of their teacher preparation programs, preservice teachers often hold traditional views of what texts count as real writing (Hundley & Holbrook, 2013). Bailey (2009) asserted that new literacies are “slowly reaching our teacher education classes and high school classrooms” (p. 209). Miller (2010) suggested that “teachers ‘need to minimally understand’ the ongoing expansion of digital literacies and their authentic practices in schools” (p. 198). English teacher education – preservice and inservice – needs to move away from understandings of tools and move toward understandings of “socially-situated rhetorical and pedagogical practices” (Grabill & Hicks, 2005, p. 303) in which the English discipline is emphasized.

## **Digital Writing**

### **New Literacies’ Roots in Antiquity**

Before describing the nature of today’s digital writing and new literacies practices, it is important to provide a foundation on how digital writing and new literacies have roots in antiquity’s social media and build upon traditional writing practices. Janks (2010) suggested literacy has always been impacted by technology be it “papyrus, parchment, quills, pencils, pens, typewriters, computers” (p. 4). In his book *Writing on the Wall*, Standage (2013) drew parallels between Cicero’s web and today’s social media:

Cicero was, to use today’s Internet jargon, participating in a ‘social media’ system: that is, an environment in which information was passed from one person to another along social connections, to create a distributed discussion or community. The Romans did it with papyrus rolls and messengers; today hundreds of millions of people do the same things rather more quickly and easily using Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other Internet tools. The technologies involved are very different, but these two forms of social media, separated by two millennia, share many of the same underlying structures and dynamics: they are two-way, conversational environments in which information passes horizontally from one person to another along social networks, rather than being delivered vertically to an impersonal central source. (p. 3)

Instead of the ways of we conceive of social media as being new ways of writing, Standage commented that, more accurately, “the social nature of media has dramatically reasserted itself” after the rather centralized, one-way informational flow of mass media that existed from about the mid-nineteenth century until about the past decade (p. 4). Remnants of traditional literacy practices are evident in new literacies texts. Swenson et al. (2005) asserted:

Digital texts both imitate and expand existing print forms. Some digital texts share common forms and common purposes: the online newspaper, for example, is similar in many ways to its print-based counterpart. At the same time, digital texts possess characteristics that are unique to the digital medium, challenging our ideas about what texts are and how they work. (p. 220)

Having writers play around with the relationship between print text and images in picture books reveals that “‘new literacies’ are rooted in older ones” (NCTE, 2004). As Leu (2002) suggested:

New literacies complement and build upon traditional literacies. Reading and writing will always be central to the new literacies but each will be changed in important ways.... Writing will require similar types of spelling knowledge, but new strategies for structuring text and additional media forms will be required.

One cannot argue, however, that new literacies “are often more ‘participatory’, more ‘collaborative’, and more ‘distributed’; less ‘published’, less ‘individuated’, and less ‘author-centric’ than conventional literacies” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, p. 29). Nevertheless, though differences do exist in both the *technical stuff* and *ethos stuff* of new literacies practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006), what we conceive of as new literacy practices may not be as contemporary as some may think (Standage, 2013).

### **Early Thoughts about Writing with Technology**

Scholars and teachers have discussed technology in the writing classroom for decades. In her article about her ninth grade classroom, Muldrow (1986) discussed how the word processor altered her role as an instructor. Withey (1983) wrote about English teachers’ anguish when the computer arrived:

More painful for many teachers to accept than death of the five paragraph essay is the birth of the computer. English teachers did not see it coming (or looked the other way) and now that it is here, many wish it would go away. (p. 24).

Written over thirty years ago, Withey's piece still has resonance. Despite the changing technologies and understandings of writing, some contemporary English teachers do not expose their students to anything but traditional, paper-based essays. Though composition scholars have argued against the five-paragraph essay for decades, this form is still present in today's English classrooms (Brannon et al., 2008). Whereas I do find value in some traditional forms of writing, ignoring other forms of writing may be a disservice to our students (Merchant, 2008). As Turner and Hicks (2011-2012) suggested, "digital writing skills needed to participate in contemporary society do not always resemble skills of traditional, school-based literacy" (p. 55). Anticipating a digital revolution, Withey (1983) wrote:

English teachers need to become as familiar with the computer-cum-word processor as with the electronic typewriter or the TV set. Otherwise, their students will be far ahead in technological expertise. The knowledgeable teacher of writing can then turn to the teaching of writing with a new teaching assistant who may some day, some say, be an 'intelligent' machine.' (p. 30)

What Withey (1983) referred to as the "'intelligent' machine'" (p. 30) has indeed altered how we define *writing*. Withey's contemporaries also predicted some of our current digital writing practices. Hawisher (1989) anticipated what some may consider commonplace today: "as electronic networks become more commonplace, it is not difficult to imagine students collaborating with other students and instructors across different classrooms and communities" (p. 91). Though he acknowledged positives and negatives that come with computer technologies, Moran (1993) admitted "students ... will be writing online for most of their lives, both at home and at the workplace" (p. 38). Moran asserted, "because writing is now chiefly performed online, we can't *not* teach student writers in online environments" (p. 35). People

may chuckle at Scott's (1995) secrets to receiving a classroom computer lab: "be an opportunist," "take pictures," "publish students' work," "use the computers well," and "ask for computers." After providing strategy, he recommended business and friendly letters and sentence combining exercises are best done on the computer and discussed the benefits of completing creative writing assignments on the computer. In fact, he wrote, "most writing assignments can be done better on a computer than with pencil and paper" (p. 64). Twenty years later his forward thinking was confirmed in Brandt's (2015) biographical sociology study with workaday writers in which she claimed:

It is not unusual for many American adults to spend 50 percent or more of the workday with their hands on keyboards .... for the first time in history of mass literacy, writing seems to be eclipsing reading as the literate experience of consequence. (p. 3)

### **Contemporary Understandings of Digital Writing**

Having provided a historical connection between new literacies and antiquity and an introduction to early thoughts about the nature of technology and writing, I now move to the current scholarship on digital writing. The NWP (2010a) asserted:

Much *has* changed in the landscape of what it means to 'write' and 'to be a writer' since 2003. Social networking and collaborative writing technologies have taken hold, if not always in our schools, certainly among our students.... Spaces and devices for creating, sharing, and distributing writing have become more robust and more accessible. (pp. 1-2)

The NWP (2010a) defined *digital writing* as "compositions created with, and oftentimes for reading or viewing on, a computer or other device that is connected to the Internet" (p. 7). I acknowledge that someone may open a Word document and type, thereby engaging in digital writing, but my work is particularly focused on the ways in which digital writing can be understood as a practice involving new literacies. Moving beyond conceptions of writing that focus solely on alphabetic print text, I want to broaden the definition of *digital writing* to move beyond the Internet and to include new literacies. Therefore, I define *digital writing* as



compositions created using the Internet or mobile technological devices that embody new literacies perspectives. As I have already articulated, I do not believe digital writing to be inherently critical though digital writing certainly can be a space for critical literacy.

The CCCC's (2004) *Position Statement on Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Writing in Digital Environments* acknowledged digital writing can “refer to a myriad of practices” from typing on a word processor to creating hypertext links to composing a wiki. In 2003, the NCTE created *A Resolution on Composing with Nonprint Media*. This resolution stated:

Today our students are living in a world that is increasingly non-printcentric. New media such as the Internet, MP3 files, and video are transforming the communication experiences of young people outside of school. Young people are composing in nonprint media that can include any combination of visual art, motion (video and film), graphics, text, and sound – all of which are frequently written and read in nonlinear fashion.

Digital writing differs from traditional, print writing in various ways, and this “non-printcentric” quality can be characterized in a multitude of ways. For Bolter (2001), the Internet has “refashion[ed] the practice of writing” (p. xi); he found similarities between digital writing and hypertext: “flexibility, instability, and interactivity” (p. xiii). Digital technologies have impacted how we define *writing* (Hocks, 2008; Kajder, 2007; NCTE, 2008a), the ways in which we write (Bolter, 2001; Bromley, 1998), what we mean by *literate* (Coiro et al., 2008; Kajder, 2007; Kellner & Share, 2007; Spires et al., 2013; Morrell, 2012b), and reflect on our pedagogy (New London Group, 1996). Scholars have discussed the non-static, ever-evolving nature (Bowen & Whithaus, 2013; Selfe & Selfe, 2009; Sewell & Denton, 2011), the embedded ideas of power (Lemke, 1998), and the social aspect (Bowen & Whithaus, 2013; Gee, 2010; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Street, 1995) of digital writing.

Digital writing requires a reconsideration of what constitutes a text. How *text* is being defined and redefined continually (Swenson et al., 2006) relates to digital composing, as it often

challenges traditional understandings of *text* (Gomez, Schieble, Curwood, & Hassett, 2010; Miller, 2007) from print to “web pages, visual images, wikis, blogs, video files, and audio files” (Gerrard, 2012, p. 409). Modern technologies have permitted us to conceive of writing in new ways and consider digital writing’s “new possibilities of expression” (Bolter, 2001, p. 9). Also, multimodal composition engages students us to think beyond the traditional texts’ linearity (Swenson et al., 2005). Gee described the “intermix” of digital and nondigital worlds. The connection between in-school and out-of-school literacy practices is significant, for it is in non-school contexts that students often first engage in digital writing (Merchant, 2008). One of the most promising aspects of digital writing is that students are not waiting to be assigned digital composition; rather, they are choosing to become digital composers (Edmondson, 2012; Selfe, 2003).

Contemporary researchers have discussed digital writing’s collaborative nature. Acknowledging the challenges teachers face when assigning collaborative work, including concerns about plagiarism and assessment, Kittle and Hick’s (2009) practitioner piece offered several practical applications of engaging students in meaningful collaborative writing exercises in Google Docs and wikis, including using Google Docs to create collaborative lists and constructing group wikis around inquiry project topics. In their practitioner article about using collaborative wikis as a space for writing and peer review in college composition courses, Weingarten and Frost (2011) discussed how teachers and students must realize the complexities and opportunities for discussions of authorship and collaboration in open-source digital writing environments. Though this is hopeful news, Applebee and Langer’s (2011) study of the writing instruction in middle and high revealed that schools often ignore the possibilities of digital writing, often limiting technology use to typing and the audience to just the teacher. English

teachers and teacher educators are faced with learning and teaching genres that will continue to adapt – or disappear altogether – only to be replaced by genres unimaginable to even the most adept contemporary digital writers (CCCC, 2004; Morrell, 2012a). Other researchers have established an inherent link between digital writing and critical literacy. Gee (2010) asserted technology’s accessibility allows “‘everyday people’ to produce and not just consume media” (p. 12). Linking digital writing to social justice, Hicks and Turner (2011-2012) wrote, “digital writing is more than simply texting or being able to surf the web; it is a rhetorical and intentional act, and has the potential to empower individuals and communities” (p. 60). Whereas the democratization, collaborative nature, and increased audience base make digital writing spaces ripe for writers to engage in critical literacy rhetoric that can reach a multitude of people quickly, digital writing spaces are not inherently critical (Myers & Eberfors, 2010).

### **New Literacies**

Although the definition of *digital writing* that I use in the study involves new literacies understandings, I have separated these terms in the literature review so as to focus on the beliefs that characterize new literacies practices. As Collier et al. (2013) asserted, “the definition of literacy now includes digital approaches to accessing, processing, and transmitting knowledge” (p. 263). As opposed to traditional literacies, which rely upon written language (McEneaney, 2011), new literacies is “a belief that literate practices are deeply embedded in social practices, social contexts, and social identities” (Bailey, 2009, p. 208). New literacies are characterized by production rather than consumption (Janks & Vasquez, 2011). The New Literacy Studies (NLS), from which new literacies emerges (Bartels, 2013), examines the way written language is “determined by the social, cultural, historical, and institutional practices of different groups of people” (Gee, 2010, p. 31). The NLS privileges the social aspects of language, a recognition of

literacy's role in making local changes, and a resistance to traditional literacy formats (Black, 2008). New literacies, then, applies NLS to digital technologies, and researchers typically focus on the Internet and the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as central to new literacy practices (Leu et al., 2004). And as new technologies impact the ways in which we communicate, new literacies continue to evolve. This emergent quality of new literacies makes an exact definition difficult (Coiro et al., 2008; CCCC, 2004; Leu, 2002; Leu et al., 2004). Even so, Leu et al. (2004) identified the following new literacies principles:

1. The internet and other ICS are central technologies for literacy within a global community in an information age.
2. The Internet and other ICTs require new literacies to fully access their potential.
3. New literacies are deictic.
4. The relationship between literacy and technology is transactional.
5. New literacies are multiple in nature.
6. Critical literacies are central to the new literacies.
7. New forms of strategic knowledge are central to the new literacies.
8. Speed counts in important ways within the new literacies.
9. Learning often is socially constructed within new literacies.
10. Teachers become more important, though their role changes, within new literacies classrooms. (p. 1589)

Even without an agreed-upon definition, scholars have tried to identify practices and principles connected with new literacy practices, one of which is new literacies are inherently critical, a claim with which I, like Myers and Eberfors (2010), disagree but with which several scholars (e.g. Avila & Moore, 2012; Hinrichsen and Coombs, 2013; Freebody and Luke, 1990; Peters & Lankshear, 1996; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, 2006; Lemke, 1998; Leu et al., 2004, Luke, 2012; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Parker, 2013; Sholle & Denski, 1993) agree. A writer has to have a certain intentionality within new literacies practices to take a critical stance. I will now discuss elements I believe to be inherent in new literacies practices: their ever-evolving nature, social aspects, and multimodal components; and a writer's awareness of literacy's potential.

New literacies are ever-evolving, challenging traditional notions of literacy and text. New literacies continue to challenge our definition of *literacy* (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003) and what counts as text (Lambert & Cuper, 2008). For example, traditional, linear print texts that clearly situate the reader and writer in disparate roles have been joined by texts that rely upon hypertexts (Swenson et al., 2006) that disrupt the reader-writer relationship (Buckingham, 1993) and contradict traditional linear understandings of text (Lambert & Cuper, 2008). And thus perhaps the most defining feature of new literacies is a constant challenging of preconceived notions of text (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). Examples of new literacies genres are musical remixes (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007), memes (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007), video games (Gee, 2007), fan fiction (Thomas, 2007), and blogs (Davies & Merchant, 2007). Many of these genres privilege students' out-of-school literacy practices (Curwood & Cowell, 2011; Hull & Schultz, 2002) and popular culture (Gee, 2010). As new technologies come about, genres will continue to develop (Lew et al., 2004).

New literacies also have a social element. Street's (1995) work responded to the social aspect of literacy. Lankshear and Knobel (2006) layered their understanding of new literacies over their definition of literacy as "'socially recognized ways of generating, communicating, and negotiating meaning content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in Discourses (or as members of Discourses)'" (p. 64). For Gee (1990) discourse, or "d," referred to language. Discourses, or "D," move beyond language to include

distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading *coupled* with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, other people and with various objectives, tools, and technologies, so as to exact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities. (p. 155)

Gee's concept of Discourses relates to Lankshear and Knobel's (2006) ideas of both the social nature of new literacies practices and the *ethos stuff* of new literacies practices. Also, new literacies encourage people to participate in their communities (Coiro et al., 2008). Curwood and Cowell (2011) wrote about the collaborative nature of many new literacies genres.

Another element that characterizes new literacies is the idea of multimodality. Coiro et al. (2008) understood new literacies as "multiple, multimodal, and multifaceted" (p. 14). There is an emphasis on image (Bailey, 2009; Gerrard, 2012; Kress, 2003; Pilgrim, Bledsoe, & Reily, 2012) and screen (Kress, 2003). Lauer (2009) defined multimodal texts as texts "characterized by the mixed logics brought together through the combination of modes (such as images, text, color, etc.)" (p. 227). Multimodal composing provides authors with the opportunity to use a combination of modes (e.g. colors, graphics, photos, letters, sounds) to convey a message oftentimes richer than one that could have been composed in print-dominated texts.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a writer's awareness of literacy's potential seems to characterize new literacies. For Lankshear and Knobel (2006), new literacies are not just about the *technical stuff*, which focuses on the digital aspect of literacy, but about the *ethos stuff*, which focuses on one's mindset as he or she engages in new literacies practices and includes understandings the contextual nature of literacy practices characterized by NLS. Leu (2002) suggested, "the new literacies include the skills, strategies, and insights necessary to successfully exploit the rapidly changing information and communication technologies that continuously emerge in our world" (pp. 313-314). Thus, new literacies are less about the digital tools and more about the writer's "ways of acting, interacting, valuing, believing, and knowing" (Gee, 2010, p. 32). Not drawing an inherent link between new literacies and critical literacy as some

researchers do, I now share empirical studies about digital writing and new literacies in the K-12 classroom.

### **Research on Digital Writing and New Literacies**

Research has examined K-12 classroom practices focused upon digital writing and new literacies. In what follows, I provide an overview of research in this area focusing on the following topics: complicated understandings of text as a result of multimodal composing, the social aspects, emergent ethos of new literacies practices, and the benefits of digital writing.

**Multimodality complicates understandings of text.** Multimodal composing complicates students' understandings of text, broadening their ideas about what constitutes a text. In Borowicz's (2005) ethnographic dissertation, multimodality complicated urban secondary English students' understandings of literacy during digital video production. These at-risk students offered a "critical stance on societal conditions" (p. 139). Parker's (2013) study permitted students to showcase their experiences in a multimodal documentary about the immigrant experience in connection with their reading of T.C. Boyle's *The Tortilla Captain*. The idea of intertextuality also emerged from the research, as seen in Tan and Guo's (2009) case study with MediaStage composition projects in which students not only exhibited their knowledge of *Macbeth* but also of intertextuality, although the teacher in the study revealed the upcoming national assessment encouraged traditional literacy practices and thus class time for students to work on their multimodal projects was limited. Other studies developed students' understandings of intertextuality: Gorlewski and Malley's (2009) work in which students turned *Oedipus Rex* into an iMovie, Callahan's (2002) work with radio documentaries (Callahan, 2002), and Kist's (2013) research about multigenre autobiographies. Black's (2009) longitudinal ethnographic study of adolescents who wrote online fan fiction indicated students began to mix

genres. Similarly, Thomas's (2007) work with adolescents' fan fiction writing suggested a "hybridity and blurring of text types" (p. 150). Using multiple modes permitted students to challenge preconceived notions of text.

**Social nature.** Digital writers come to understand the social nature of literacy practices. Wikis' page histories emphasized writing's social aspect in Gerrard's (2012) work. In Kajder's (2007) practitioner article, wikis allowed students to contribute their text but also be influenced by their fellow co-authors, and post-literature circle group podcasts were uploaded and shared with researchers, authors, or readers via Skype calls. The collaborative nature of many digital writing compositions (Gerrard, 2012; Kajder, 2007; Kist, 2013; Pilgrim et al. 2012) is another category of this social emphasis. Students' participation in digital literature circles through wikis allowed "collaborative authorship" (Edmondson, 2012, p. 44). In Colwell, Hutchinson, and Reinking's (2012) qualitative study of 15 preservice teachers enrolled in a children's literature course revealed that participants enjoyed the safe and social nature of the Ning on which they shared responses to children's and young adolescent texts they read. Teachers enjoyed access to classmates' responses. Black's (2009) three-year longitudinal study with three youth fan fiction writers who were English language learners exposed that this platform encouraged online collaboration and engagement between writers (Gerrard, 2012). Yi's (2008) study with participants in an adolescent online community looked at relay writing's collaborative nature, which at times blurred the line between reader and writer. Yi's work, though it provided insight into multilingual high school and early college students' digital writing practices, looked at out-of-school literacy practices.

**The ethos of new literacies.** Research has confirmed the ethos of new literacies practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) is not inherent in all digital writers. Curwood and Cowell



(2011) discussed how their three-year practitioner inquiry research study around secondary students and iPoetry assignments failed on the first try because students focused too much on the tech tools, which made the projects rather superficial. On the second try, students were explicitly taught to think about audience, and students “more clearly revealed the ‘ethos stuff’ of new literacy practices” (p. 115). Conversely, Parker’s (2013) qualitative study revealed that documentary filmmaking showcased twelfth-grade students’ “meta-awareness” of the composition process in a way that is perhaps not possible with traditional print-based texts read only by the teacher. Clearly, researchers and practitioners need to make explicit the “ethos stuff” rather than the “technical stuff” of new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

**Benefits of digital writing.** Better student writing and teachers’ partiality to teaching writing digitally are among the benefits of digital writing. Goldberg, Russell, and Cook’s (2003) meta-analysis of 26 studies “suggest[ed] that on average students who use computers when learning to write produce written work that is about .4 standard deviations better than students who develop writing skills on paper” (p. 20). More recently, a Pew Research Center (2013a) study found that fifty-percent of the 2,462 Advanced Placement and NWP teachers surveyed expressed that it was easier to teach writing using digital tools. This data, however, needs to be looked at in context of a Pew Research Center (2013b) finding that concluded that whereas teachers frequently have students use technology to complete research, teachers seem less comfortable with permitting students to use interactive, collaborative technology tools as part of their instruction.

Research around new literacies in the K-12 classroom is characterized by small qualitative studies that examined one class of students completing a particular project. Also, some studies were studies of the researcher’s students. Nevertheless, what research has been

done suggested students can engage in the multimodal, social, and ethos practices of new literacies composing. More ethnographic work needs to be done on the benefits of having secondary students compose digitally in ways that exhibit their understandings of multimodality, new literacies' social aspects, and *ethos stuff* (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006)

### **Critical Literacy**

I acknowledge that *critical literacy* is a difficult concept to define (Riley, 2015). Morgan (1997) wrote, “critical theories of literacy derive from critical social theory and its interest in matters of class, gender, and ethnicity” (p. 1). With the understanding of literacy as a social practice (Freebody & Luke, 1990; Gee, 2006; Kress, 2003; Street, 1995) one can think about power dynamics (Behrman, 2006) and the empowerment that results from reflection on power dynamics, as Freire (1970) espoused in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: “people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and in *which* they find themselves” (p. 64). Shor (1997) claimed “critical literacy thus challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development.” Situating critical literacy theory within postmodernism, critical discourse analysis, and participatory pedagogy, Holme (2004) built upon Freire’s idea of praxis, “an instrument or set of practices that can transform our circumstances” (p. 53). Beck (2005) defined *critical literacy* “as an attitude toward texts and discourse that questions the social, political, and economic conditions under which those texts were constructed” (p. 392). Glazier (2007) suggested, “critical literacy essentially asks one first to understand how it is that texts perpetuate systems of oppression and suppression and then moves on to identify ways of disrupting the status quo” (p. 377). Critical literacy pedagogy’s goal is to make “economic, social, racial, and gender equality politically conceivable and pedagogically possible” (McLaren & Lankshear, 1993, pp. 414-415). A critical literacy

pedagogy “does not seek a universal truth, or a trust whose ideological effects permit some groups to survive at the expense of others” (p. 414). In what follows I share the research on teachers and critical literacy.

### **The Research on Teachers and Critical Literacy**

Teachers’ development of critical literacy has been an emergent and more robust research field in recent years. I organized the research into the themes that related to how teacher-researchers went about helping teachers develop critical literacy: reflection on teacher identity, the use of children’s and young adult literature to develop critical literacy, the use of critical text production to develop critical literacy, and a developmental approach to acquiring critical literacy.

**Reflections on teacher identity.** Reflecting on one’s identity as a teacher is key to developing critical literacy. In their practitioner article about introducing urban preservice teachers to elements of critical literacy, Meller and Hatch (2008) shared strategies they used over the course of three semesters to encourage preservice teachers to engage in critical literacy in their classrooms: critical literacy text selection, developing critical questions, role play, read-alouds, discussions, writing and sharing connections, reflection, addressing issues, and peer teaching. Wolfe (2010) completed a qualitative study of 14 undergraduate preservice teachers in which she examined one unit from each student for two semesters according to the implementation of the following critical literacy elements: negotiation, student ownership, contemporary focus, critical perspective, resistant reading, social action, and disorientation. Analysis revealed “critical literacy teaching is part of the process of ‘critical teacher’ identity formation” (p. 382). Riley’s (2015) qualitative case study looked at one teacher who was part of a study group dedicated to critical literacy. Findings revealed that the participant wanted to

create more talk in her classroom and reevaluate reflective writing in her classroom. Riley revealed the following implications: “teachers’ own critical literacy is part of critical literacy education,” “critical literacy practices should be considered in relation to school context, teacher identity, and professional position,” “critical literacy provokes struggles and questions,” and “critical literacy is a collaborative process” (pp. 423-424). Mosley (2010) explored how undergraduate preservice teachers attain critical literacy, which she believed to be an understudied area. After examining a variety of data sources for four participants, including observations, literacy course and practicum materials, interviews, and action research projects, the following themes emerged: “changes in literacy definitions, changing notions of the political contexts of teaching, and ways that participants drew across multiple frameworks for teaching including critical literacy and multiliteracies pedagogy” (p. 411). Though these teachers did not reach the social action component of critical literacy, they did begin to reflect on their identities as literacy teachers.

**Use of children’s and young adult literature to develop critical literacy.** Children’s and young adult literature texts provide entry points into critical literacy. In a practitioner piece, McDaniel (2004) advocated for the necessity of critical literacy and offered children’s literature texts that facilitate critical literacy. In yet another practitioner piece, Ciardiello (2004) also suggested children’s texts that help facilitate discussions about particular social justice issues. He also posited five elements to critical inquiry practices that he used to engage seventh-grade students who were studying issues of desegregation in New Orleans in the 1960s: regaining one’s identity, answering the call of service, examining multiple perspectives, finding an authentic voice, and recognizing and crossing social barriers. In their case study of one preservice teacher as part of an online discussion group about Walter Dean Myers’s young

adolescent text *Monster* with secondary students, Groenke and Maples (2008) explored preservice teacher's discourse moves relevant to critical literacy. The researchers noted that the preservice teachers did not reach the social action component of critical literacy. Woodcock's (2009) study of her online children's literature course involved preservice and inservice teachers envisioning their identities as teachers with critical stances while participating in online discussions. Myers and Eberfors's (2010) study of 42 undergraduate American and Swedish teacher education students suggested an online forum about Carrie A. Young's "Adjo Means Good-bye" can effect increased understanding about characters' culture. These researchers asserted English educators may need to walk explicitly methods students through digital composing projects with critical stances: "Since literacy practices are not inherently or necessarily critical, to achieve a critical literacy practice, it is absolutely necessary that the participants, or pedagogies, guiding the symbolic interaction have an explicitly critical purpose" (p. 153). Curdt-Christiansen's (2010) quantitative study of 58 Singaporean English language teachers revealed teachers did not see how critical literacy fit into the exam culture of the country. Analysis of two face-to-face surveys revealed "the participating teachers believed strongly that reading and writing are transactional and interactional practices. However, they were less certain in their beliefs about teaching critical literacy including the critical, analytical and evaluative aspects of text reading" (p. 184). In a graduate children's literature course, students in Enriquez's (2014) qualitative study examined social justice picture books from a critical literacy perspective. Analysis of data, including assignments, reader's notebooks, and discussions revealed three thematic critiques to the picture books: "simplistic portrayals of social inequity, compliance with dominant paradigms, and expedient resolutions to complex texts" (p.

28). Whereas children's and young adult books provided an entry point for developing critical literacy, studies have also examined teachers producing critical text to develop critical literacy.

**Use of critical text production to develop critical literacy.** Critical text production enhances critical literacy understanding. After introducing students to Lewison, Flint and Sluys's (2002) four elements of critical literacy (disrupt the commonplace, interrogate multiple viewpoints, focus on sociopolitical issues, and take action and promote justice), Lee and Runyan's (2011) qualitative study of six inservice teachers centered on the second author's experiences as part of a two-course literacy sequence taught by the first author. The second author, a middle school reading and math teacher, worked with one of her students on his interest in bikes. The second author and her student composed a letter to a local track owner offering suggestions about how to prevent bikes from being stolen. Authors shared the second author's story because it "show[ed] her struggle and with and change in attitude toward critical literacy" (p. 94). Tate's (2011) practitioner piece shared ways in which teachers and their students engaged in Morrell's (2003) critical text production to discuss inequities at their schools. Participants wrote a journal, a critical memoir (a piece about being a critical researcher, a personal letter, or an issue piece), and a final text that combined their journals and selected text. Choudhury and Share's (2012) practitioner piece shared the outcome of the first author's classroom project in which middle schoolers who were English as a Second Language students learned to analyze media accounts of minority populations. This critical media literacy element was combined with walks around the community, interviews with community members, discussion, and research. Students then wrote essays and created PowerPoint presentation based on their findings in which they discussed a problem in the community and their solutions for

solving it. Yet, though teachers engaged in reflection, discussion around texts, and text creation, research revealed that acquiring critical literacy was a developmental process.

**A developmental approach to acquiring critical literacy.** Rarely reaching the social action element of critical literacy, teachers' acquisition of critical literacy is understood as a developmental process. Lesley's (1997) reflective piece detailed the difficulties she had in teaching critical literacy to a continuing education course in reading and composition. In their study of elementary teachers' development of critical literacy, Lewison et al. (2002) suggested four elements to critical literacy: disrupt the commonplace, interrogate multiple viewpoints, focus on sociopolitical issues, and take action and promote justice. These authors found that teachers had difficulty implementing critical literacy and that none reached the point of taking action. Most of the teachers new to critical literacy began with the element of disrupting the commonplace. Rogers's (2007) qualitative case study of one student enrolled in a literacy specialist program and the student she tutored revealed that critical literacy practices were not integrated with curriculum, the teacher was nervous about asking difficult questions, and the teacher was concerned about pushing an agenda that was not the tutee's. The teacher was, however, more inclined to use critical literacy practices when she felt at ease with literacy instruction, finding "multiple entry points into critical literacy: (a) books that contained critical social issues; (b) student-identified problems that could be solving through reading and writing, and (c) genre study" (p. 245). Glazier's (2007) qualitative study of a former teacher education student revealed the novice teacher found integrating critical literacy into her practice difficult and revealed the researcher's understanding of critical literacy pedagogy as a developmental process. As Rogers (2015) suggested, "researchers know very little about how teachers gain pedagogical knowledge to practice critical literacy education" (p. 242). As part of her

qualitative study with literacy coach candidates and their tutees in a literacy lab, Rogers collected literacy lessons, observations and conferring, seminar, and interviews. The following themes emerged from this case study of 11 teachers: social justice approaches, multiple literacies, and genre approach. Rogers asserted that “literacy specialists and coaches who have not heard of critical literacy before need concrete examples of what critical literacy looks like, feels like, and sounds like” (p. 257).

In sum, research on teachers’ acquisition of critical literacy was characterized by small sample sizes and qualitative research. Uniquely, research in the area of teachers’ critical literacy acquisition included studies from countries other than the United States. Researchers, often methods instructors, had students engage in reflection of teaching practice, the reading of children’s or young adult literature, or the creation of critical texts to facilitate understanding of critical literacy. Studies revealed that preservice and inservice teachers were challenged by critical literacy, had trouble implementing it in practice for a variety of reasons, and rarely reached the element of social action. Overall, teachers’ acquisition of critical literacy was understood as a developmental process.

### **Digital Writing and Critical Literacy**

Writing to engage in critical literacy has not been as common as critical literacy practices with reading (Morgan, 1997). As stated previously, though I do not believe new literacies to be inherently critical, digital writing can indeed be a space for critical literacy. Asserting literacies are deeply embedded in the social, cultural, and political (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993a), Lankshear and McLaren (1993b) asserted it is important to consider how digital writing can be used to work, or write, against “the hierarchies of power and privilege inherent in conventional schooling” (p. 47). Morgan (1997) discussed how literacies can be reconstructed through



language to counter disempowering discourses. Arguing that “critical consumption of dominant texts” is not enough, Morrell (2003) argued for the *production* of counter narratives, naming writers as “cultural workers” (p. 6), suggesting a connection between critical textual production and social justice:

Consistent with the tenets of critical pedagogy, critical textual production is situated within the experiences of students and uses their experiences and real-world experiences and struggles as a starting point, but it quickly becomes the business of social justice. Critical text production is about naming oppression, certainly, but it is about eradicating oppression and injustice through the creative of counter-texts, critical texts, that present alternative realities as they simultaneously critique the existing narratives that promote the status quo” (pp. 22-23).

Avila and Pandya (2012) asserted that “critical digital literacies, then, are those skills and practices that lead to the creation of digital texts that interrogate the world; they also allow and foster the interrogation of digital, multimedia texts” (p. 3). Though not inherently critical, digital writing can broaden writers’ abilities to “effect change in the world” (NCTE, 1985) through a critical literacy stance. Scholars have discussed aspects of digital writing that make it a possible space for critical literacy: its ability to create producers versus consumers, its ability to permit writers to resist dominant narratives, and its ability to encourage social action.

### **Producers versus Consumers**

The democratization of digital writing permits writers to be producers rather than consumers. Lapp, Fisher, Frey, and Gonzales’s (2014) practitioner piece detailed how digital writing spaces enabled students to become producers rather than consumers: “students were using social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and Vine to share their thoughts and opinions openly. By doing so, they became creators of information rather than just consumers” (p. 183). That digital spaces allow large numbers of people to produce content makes digital writing spaces ripe for critical literacy. Freebody and Luke’s (1990) designed a

critical literacy-based four resource model for reader roles, which included code breaker, meaning maker, text user, and text analyst. Each of these roles related to a competence: coding, semantic, pragmatic, and critical (Luke and Freebody, 1999). In their model, Luke and Freebody (1990) emphasized authorial roles. Noting that no text is neutral, these authors posited that authors can redesign texts that marginalize particular groups. This idea of redesign is an important aspect of critical literacy because writers can produce counter narratives that reexamine dominant narratives. Similarly, Lemke (1998) wrote:

A critical multimedia literacy curriculum will not be successful with students if it I only about analysis and critique.... Critical multimedia literacy needs to be taught as creation, as authoring, as production – in the context of analysis of existing models and genres. We need to help students see how they could create multimedia different from the media that are sold to them, or offered ‘free.’ (p. 13)

Digital writers can push back against narratives “sold” to them in the media. In a piece about whether the Common Core and critical literacy can coexist, Avila and Moore (2012) posited that digital spaces provide locations for critical literacy: “perhaps digital texts are creating a new locale, constantly under construction, where critical literacies can exist, and continue to develop, beyond the confines of standardization” (p. 31). Focused on the ways in which “students’ voices could be amplified” by moving writing assignments into online spaces, such as blogs or wikis, these authors wrote:

critical literacy assignments can provide an opportunity for students to transcend test scores and to add their distinct voices to the discourses of authority. Digital literacy can provide an inviting gateway into critical literacy, as students are often more willing to engage in technology-based activities than those rooted in more traditional ones. (p. 32)

There appears, then, a connection between the voice digital writing can enable and critical literacy.

### **Resist Dominant Narratives**

Relatedly, digital writing provides spaces for writers to resist dominant narratives.

Merchant (2007) wrote about critical digital literacy, which permits students opportunities “to examine and critique discourses that relate to wider social issues, power relationships, prejudices or inequities” (p. 125). In order “to provide all student with opportunities to critique the digital media they encounter,” (p. 125), Merchant designed the following rights he believed to be central to “a common entitlement with respect to critical digital literacy” (p. 125):

- the right to access and use up-to-date new technologies building on everyday (or out-of-school practices);
- the right to an education that supports and develops the skills, knowledge and dispositions needed for the effective use of digital media, and also provides opportunities for critical digital literacy practice;
- the right to explore and experiment with one’s own digital space;
- the right to critique and resist dominant or dominating discourses in digital domains. (p. 126)

One way for writers to “resist dominant or dominating discourses” is to engage in digital writing with a critical stance. Peters and Lankshear (1996) suggested “six features of digital text in cyberspace [that] can lead to new understandings of the flexibility and interpenetration of textual practices which, in turn, open up new possibilities for theorizing and practice critical literacy”: “‘dematerialization’” or “‘desubstantiation,’” “interactiveness,” “integrative power and its radical convertibility,” “ease and speed of manipulating alpha-iconic texts,” “reconfiguration of discourse,” and “makes problematic the politics of publishing based upon the print-text system” (pp. 62-64). These authors argued that digital texts enable people to break free from “spaces of disclosure” (p. 63):

What has happened, we think, is that the institutions the book, the textbook, the classroom, the curriculum, and the school all embodiments of modernist spaces of enclosure have separated out a set bounded social practices as “educational” and demarcated them from other sets of similarly bounded social practices based upon the institutions of the family, the workplace, the corporation, the law, the church, and the various political institutions of the public sphere... Breaking free of such an “enclosed” consciousness is the first fruit of critical literacy....To this extent, practices

involving the production, distribution, and exchange of digital texts contain interesting possibilities for constructing critical literacy as transformative social practice. (p. 65)

Critical literacy has stressed that, as social practices, reading and writing are *cultural phenomena*: that is, they are essentially practices of communities and not of isolated individuals....Cyberspace denies the possibility of an individual operating in isolation. (p. 66)

## **Social Action**

Digital writing permits writers to engage in Lewison et al.'s (2002) fourth dimension of critical literacy: "taking action and promoting social justice" (p. 382). Selber's (2004) ideas about students as producers of social action provided a means by which digital writing can allow students to resist the status quo. Similarly, Vasquez et al. (2014) argued that new ways in which students are writing "encourage curricular engagements that have the potential to move students into social action in which their transformed beliefs are communicated to world-wide audiences using new literacies and various tools of technology" (p. 218). As producers (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006) and "active designers" of meaning (New London Group, 1996), digital writers can compose for social justice in their worlds (NCTE, 2005). Embodying what Janks (2009) refers to as "critical social consciousness" (p. 128) these writers can be change agents (Freire & Macedo, 1987) who write to incite social action (Clarke & Whitney, 2009).

I have established possible connections between digital writing and critical literacy, focusing specifically on digital writing's ability to encourage producers versus consumers, its ability to permit writers to resist dominant narratives, and its ability to encourage social action. Digital writing has the potential to democratize voices, providing opportunities for writers to push back and offer counters narratives that resist the dominant message. In these ways, digital writing can permit critical stances. In the following section, I review empirical research that has examined K-12 students' and teachers' digital writing with a critical stance.

## Research on K-12 Students' Digital Writing and Critical Literacy

Several researchers have looked at how K-12 students engage in digital writing with a critical stance. In what follows, I separate research studies according to several elements of critical literacy: identity formation, a challenge to dominant narratives, and critical dialogue.

**Identity formation.** Digital writing practices permit students to gain a sense of identity. Christensen's (2000b) reflective self-study discussed how she incorporated critical literacy into her high school English class:

Instead of only asking students to write essays that demonstrate a close reading of a novel or engaging in a literary evaluation of the text, critical literacy creates spaces for students to tackle larger social issues that have urgent meaning in their lives. (p. 62)

As they composed iMovies about their families, students gained identities as composers of their own realities in Borowicz's (2005) ethnographic study in an urban secondary English classroom. Producing confessionals helped eighth-grade students in Costello's (2006) study consider their identities and become empowered. Because of the potential to depend on students' out-of-school literacy practices, digital composing allows students to see that their "lifeworlds" were valued in the classroom; digital composing has the potential to "democratiz[e] media production, repositioning students as competent, bridging from multimodal to academic *and* critical literacies" (Miller, 2007, p. 79). In a single-case study design, Brass's (2008) work with an after-school program allowed students to bring in out-of-school literacy practices. Online fan writing spaces allowed students to bring in their diverse cultural and language skills to construct identities and gain influence (Black, 2009). In Bailey's (2009) work with one class of high school English students, digital media allowed students to engage in "self-discovery and self-expression" (p. 231). Gomez et al. (2010) asserted that students' identities are not often validated in the context of schools; digital writing practices with critical stances permit just this.

In their practitioner inquiry study, Curwood and Cowell (2011) discussed how iPoetry projects helped students “design and express their social identities” (p. 119). Additionally, Instagram and iPods provided the means by which students had the opportunity to share their world with others in Ehret and Hollett’s (2014) qualitative study with adolescents. Likewise, Schwartz’s (2014) study with a high school English teacher showed how students’ identities can be represented in hybrid digital essay assignments. Three Latina students enacted their identities within “personally and academically responsive argumentative texts” (p. 124). As students enact their identities in digital spaces, they often challenge dominant narratives.

**A challenge to dominant narratives.** Because digital composition permits writers to challenge dominant narratives (Kellner & Share, 2007), many digital composers produce a counter narrative, “a student-created text that presents a topic from a nonmainstream perspective” (Behrman, 2006, p. 494). In Myers and Beach’s (2004) work, students used multilayered intertextuality to remake the meaning of original texts as they took critical stances and “interrogate[d] the meaning of the original texts” (p. 261). Applying critical media literacy, students created movies and websites to counter media’s hegemonic trends in Kellner and Share’s (2007) piece. Black’s (2009) research of three fan fiction writers who were English language learners showcased adolescent girls who pushed against monolingual narratives as they included their multilingualism within texts. In some ways, these writers engaged in two themes: a resistance to dominant narratives and critical dialogue.

**Critical dialogue.** Writers engage in critical dialogue in digital writing spaces. In a practitioner piece, Myers and Beach (2001) shared how students used digital composition to engage in critique. Via hypermedia composing, “a combination of hypertext and multimedia that creates interactive experiences with media” (p. 545), students engaged in the following: “critical

inquiry into social worlds” (p. 539), “critical response to literature” (p. 541), and “knowledge construction” (p. 542). The variety of assignments and projects students composed revealed “students create hypermedia texts to reflect explicitly on how symbolic interactions construct community and ideology” (p. 539). Humphrey’s (2006) study of seven girls emphasized the power of new media genres: “MSN, zines and online discussion boards have, in fact, contributed to new forms of social activism among young people” (p. 143). Humphrey’s analysis of one adolescent girl’s weblog showcased that blogs are a “genre associated in the broader community with bringing people together and, in political discourse, with drawing attention to social issues” (p. 152). Examination of two adolescents’ online social media profiles as part of a small research project permitted Dowdall (2009) to examine adolescents’ online profiles. What she found was that what was absent told just as much as what was present: “this reflects that, as text producers, Tom and Sam [participants] have a clear sense that texts are made powerful by what is left out, as well as what is included” (p. 55). Students participated in an online Moodle to have critical dialogue about a YA text Gene Luen Yang’s *American Born Chinese* in Gomez et al.’s (2010) multi-semester case study of preservice teachers and adolescents. These researchers discovered the multiplicity of meaning making possible because of the archived posts. The online nature of talk permitted “multiple and diverse perspectives” (p. 26). In some instances, this critical dialogue took the form of taking social action in the community. For example, Comber et al.’s (2001) study examined elementary students who wrote about local civic action. Digital photographs also allowed secondary students and preservice teachers to work together to document a community’s problems, as exhibited in Myers and Beach’s (2004) practitioner article. Public service announcements allowed students to effect change in their communities

(Esposito, 2012; Selfe & Selfe, 2009). Though it did not always lead to social action, critical dialogue was an important aspect of K-12 students' critical literacy development.

Overall, there is a developing research base of students as digital writers with a critical stance. Interestingly, many of these studies were characterized by small participant pools and qualitative methods. Fascinatingly, many of the studies involved researchers examining students' out-of-school literacy practices. While this was promising, it revealed a gap in the research: research around K-12 students' critical digital writing habits in school. Finally, there is limited research about K-12 students using writing to promote social action.

### **Research on Teachers' Digital Writing and Critical Literacy**

This section offers an examination of the research conducted about teachers' digital writing and critical literacy. Two themes emerged from the limited research base in this area: text production and unawareness about the connection between digital writing and critical literacy.

**Text production.** Several studies engaged teachers in text production as they came to understanding critical literacy elements. Digital photographs allowed secondary students and preservice teachers to work together to document a community's problems in Myers and Beach's (2004) practitioner article. Students used multilayered intertextuality to remake the meaning of original texts as they took critical stances and "interrogate[d] the meaning of the original texts" (p. 261). Groenke and Maple's (2008) case study of preservice teachers in a pen pal discussion group of the young adolescent text Walter Dean Myers's *Monster* that took part in online forums designed for the teachers to engage with international partners in ways that invited critical literacy. The hope of generating teachers' critical stances and social action failed because researchers failed to emphasize the explicitness that is required of critical literacy (Myers &



Eberfors, 2010). Another study attempted to help teachers develop critical literacy via engaging in digital writing about a young adult literature text. Students participated in an online Moodle to have critical dialogue about a YA text Gene Luen Yang's *American Born* in Gomez et al.'s (2010) multi-semester case study of preservice teachers and adolescents. What these researchers discovered was the multiplicity of meaning made possible because of the archived posts. The online nature of talk permitted "multiple and diverse perspectives" (p. 26). In Blondell's (2009) case study dissertation of one teacher, students wrote counter narratives to Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* and Ray Bradbury's *The Sound of Thunder*; "DV [digital video] composing provided mediational tools that student[s] could use to construct, clarify, and represent meaning" (p. 275). Video production allowed students to "reposition themselves [as] knowledgeable, creative, social meaning-makers" (p. 281). Reid's (2011) qualitative study of preservice teachers in South Africa involved her and her students connecting via Facebook. Analysis revealed that Facebook became a place for teacher and students to enact Janks's (2010) elements of critical literacy: power, access, diversity, and design. Hence, there existed a continuum along which some teachers digitally wrote with a critical stance and others faced challenges.

#### **Unawareness about the connection between digital writing and critical literacy.**

Other studies have explicitly explored teachers' understandings of the connections between digital writing and critical literacy. Robertson and Hughes's (2012) four-year case study of preservice teachers collected a multitude of data, including five-minute digital literacy life histories and social justice digital book talks. Data analysis revealed that students reflected on their literacy histories and made connections to themselves as future teachers, learned from peers' digital projects, and expanded their views of literacy. Researchers suggested preservice teachers "require support ... to articulate the deeper and broader issues of social justice" (p. 84).

Turner and Hicks's (2011-2012) qualitative study worked with preservice English teachers around understandings of digital writing and writing as a social justice act. Preservice teachers appeared to not only devalue digital writing in favor of traditional print texts but also had difficulty incorporating the social action part of critical literacy into the traditional curricula for which they were responsible teaching. These two studies exemplified both the challenges teachers educators face when helping preservice teachers develop digital writing with a critical stance and the limited research base in the field of teachers as digital writers with a critical stance.

To conclude, research in the area of teachers as digital writers with a critical stance was extremely limited. Many research studies involved preservice teachers. Interestingly, children's books or young adolescent books were often entry points into digital writing with a critical stance. Furthermore, teachers' writing projects did not include the taking action element of critical literacy. As such, I designed my qualitative research study to build upon the limited research in the area of technology's relation to critical literacy (Wohlwend & Lewis, 2011) and in the area of teachers as digital writers with a critical stance.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this literature review, I shared important theoretical and empirical research on major research areas related to my dissertation study: the importance of writing, teachers as writers, teachers and technology, digital writing, new literacies, and critical literacy. I first established six perspectives on writing's importance: omnipotent, economic, educational, transformative, therapeutic, and human. Next, I shared themes of the research around teachers as writers. Research demonstrated that teachers' identities and confidence in writing can have pedagogical impacts. Overall, teachers have limited experience and understandings about digital writing and

tended to favor traditional writing. Nevertheless, there has been a move toward researching teachers' digital writing spaces. In the section on TPACK, I unpacked the technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge teachers need to have to implement technology effectively. After situating digital writing's roots in antiquity, I argued that engaging in digital writing provided writers the opportunity to engage in multimodality that complicated understandings of text and the social nature and *ethos* of new literacies practices. I also shared that research pointed to benefits of having students compose in digital spaces. Before moving to the possible connection between digital writing and critical literacy, I offered themes that appeared in relation to helping teachers develop critical literacy: reflection on teacher identity, engagement in children's and young literature, and text production. Although these methods moved teachers toward critical literacy, overall, research asserted that acquiring critical literacy was a development process. I then shared the research about digital writing and critical literacy in the K-12 classroom, which showed students engaged in identity formation and challenged dominant narratives. Also, students participated in critical dialogue though rarely moved toward the social action component of critical literacy. And, finally, I examined the rather limited research base about teachers as digital writers with a critical stance. Whereas there have been attempts to engage teachers in digital text production to develop critical literacy, teachers, overwhelmingly, lacked both experience with and awareness of the possible connection between digital writing and critical literacy. What emerged was a gap in the research on inservice secondary English teachers as digital writers with a critical stance. As such, I designed a qualitative research study for which the methodology is shared in the following chapter.

### **Chapter 3: Study Methodology**

I conducted a qualitative collective case study that examined the application of new literacies and critical literacy understandings in the writing pedagogies and practices of middle grades English teachers who were also digital writers. To explore how digital writing can be a space for critical literacy, these English teachers enrolled in an online study group titled *Composing Change: Teachers as Digital Writers with a Critical Stance* that I facilitated. The following research questions guided my study: (1) What are the writing practices of secondary English teachers who are active digital writers? (2) What does writing (digital and otherwise) pedagogy look like in the classrooms of teachers who are digital writers? (3) What factors move teachers toward critical literacy in their own writing and in their classroom practices?

#### **The Research Approach**

Qualitative methods were most appropriate for this investigation. Creswell (2009) wrote:

Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the research making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation. (p. 4)

This approach's reliance on individuals' contexts and settings and its emergent and inductive nature aligned with my study's objective: to examine teachers' digital writing spaces and classrooms in order that I might learn about their applications of new literacies and critical literacy. Rather than having a particular theory or hypothesis to prove, my research was exploratory and contextual in nature (Creswell, 2009). I approached the research from a

constructive paradigm, which as Creswell suggested is largely based on participants' experiences:

Social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied. (p. 8)

This constructivist approach allowed me to account for the variety of contexts in which teachers in my study wrote and taught and to rely on participants to work with me to construct knowledge about how teachers who are digital writers teach writing and move or do not move toward critical literacy. I examined participants' digital writing practices, interacted with participants as a researcher and colleague as part of an online study group, observed participants in their classrooms, and allowed for themes about participants' writing, teaching, and understandings of new literacies and critical literacy to emerge (Cresswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Participants' voices - in digital writing spaces, classroom practices, and the ways in which they talked about themselves as writers and teachers of writers – are foregrounded in my work (Creswell, 2009).

I selected a collective case study method to tell the contextual and individualized nature of my participants' writing, teaching, and understandings. Defined by Stake (1995),

Case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. (as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 13)

I analyzed each participant's writing, teaching, and understandings as a single case, "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (Miles & Humberman, 1996 as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). Yin (2003) suggested, "the distinctive need for case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" (p. 4). Case studies

“take the reader into the seeing with a vividness and detail not typically present in more analytic reporting formats” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 267).

As defined by Stake (1994) a collective case study is when a researcher “stud[ies] a number of cases jointly in order to inquire into the phenomenon, population, or general condition” (p. 237). Though I regarded each participant’s story as meaningful individually, I also valued what analysis across cases revealed. Collective case studies allow researchers to generalize across participants (Goddard, 2010). In summary, the phenomena surrounding teachers’ writing practices, teaching practices, and what factors lead one to enactments of critical literacy necessitated a qualitative collective case study.

### **Participant Recruitment**

From August 14, 2014, through October 5, 2014, I recruited English teachers who were active digital writers. I defined digital writers as those who compose using the Internet or mobile technological devices that embody new literacies perspectives. These teachers already had a presence as a digital writer via Facebook, Twitter, blogs, wikis, or Edmodo.

I relied on a variety of recruitment methods. Involvement in the research study was pitched as a professional development opportunity for which participants could learn about digital writing and critical literacy, compose a digital writing piece with a critical stance that would serve as a mentor text for their students, and earn two free continued education units (CEUs). LEARN NC, a program of my graduate school institution that offers resources and professional development to the state and served as the host of the online study group, advertised the research study group on my behalf via various sources. Written by a graduate student employed at LEARN NC, a *The Well* article was posted to the site’s web page. *The Well* is a source that provides research briefs and tips for practicing teachers based upon current education

research. A copy of *The Well* article is provided in Appendix A. Unfortunately, LEARN NC was unable to provide me data on how many people accessed *The Well* article on the LEARN NC website; however, a link to *The Well* article posted to Facebook reached 278 people. The research study was also advertised in a LEARN NC newsletter that reached 2,895 people, and an announcement in the LEARN NC news blog, a different source than *The Well*, was posted to Facebook and reached 157 people. LEARN NC also tweeted *The Well* article once and linked to the LEARN NC news blog once. LEARN NC also retweeted one of my Tweets. Each of these LEARN NC tweets potentially reached 6,237 followers. Additionally, I composed a recruitment email that I sent out to 46 graduates of the middle grades and Master of Arts in Teaching English education programs at a large southeastern research-intensive university. Additional recruitment emails were sent out via snowball sampling and administrators and English department faculty members in the local area. See Appendix B for the recruitment email. Finally, I advertised the study opportunity via my personal Facebook and Twitter accounts. Recruitment efforts reached approximately nine thousand people although it may be true that someone received both the LEARN NC newsletter and was following LEARN NC on Twitter.

Initial recruitment efforts were frustrating. Four teachers who were interested initially decided not to participate. Sample reasons included too many professional commitments and not teaching the English curriculum. Eventually, seven teachers committed to the online study group: four middle school teachers and three high school teachers. However, one of the high school teachers never returned emails after our first interview. Finally, six female participants enrolled in the study group.

The online study group about digital writing with a critical stance hosted through LEARN NC was offered free to participants on a pass/fail basis. Once the teacher completed

each assignment and aspect of the research study, she received a certificate denoted she had earned 2 CEUs. Participants then submitted these certificates to their school or district to earn recertification points. To pass the online study group, participants needed to complete each assignment and aspect of the research study. These participants signed an Institutional Review Board-approved consent form [See Appendix C) which informed them of the purposes of the research study, the requirements of the study, and the data that would be collected. Participants agreed to give me access to a variety of data sources, which are discussed in the data collection section below.

### **Participant Protection**

Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the research study at any time. In this dissertation, pseudonyms are used in place of participants' real names as they will be in all subsequent research articles, practitioner pieces, and conference proposals. Furthermore, I sent a letter, which is shared in Appendix D, to the principal at each participant's school detailing the purposes and nature of my research. Only after obtaining principal's approval did I move forward with my research. Also, to respect each participant's time and schedule, each observation and interview was scheduled in advance so as not to disrupt the research site (Crewsell, 2009). In addition, although I gained access to participants' digital writing accounts and permission to use these in my work, I removed distinguishable elements from participants' digital writing accounts accessible to the public in my data analysis and discussion so as to minimize the chance that participants' identities could be revealed. Subjects and topics were provided in place of blog posts' titles and the exact language of Tweets so as to limit the chances of someone accessing participants' online writing and identity. Though no participant prompted me to remove traceable elements from the way I presented data, a few of



the participants noted discomfort about safety in online spaces during our interviews. Thus, I felt this was my obligation as a researcher to conceal information that would make it easy for someone to identify a participant. To ensure that participants' thoughts and practices were depicted accurately, participants member checked both their brief introductions in this section and their case studies in chapter 4 during the drafting process of these two chapters. The member checking process is explained more fully in the credibility section below.

### **Selection of the Case Study Participants**

As stated above, I designed a collective case study. I selected the four middle school teachers for a variety of reasons. First, I was able to travel and personally visit these teachers' classrooms for many of my observations instead of relying only on video observations. Second, I was not able to collect the data I needed from the high school teachers in a timely fashion. And third, analyzing these four teachers provided me a means to research teachers who were tasked with teaching a middle school English Language Arts curriculum, making my cross-case analysis more focused. Table 1 provides a brief introduction to each of the study participants. More information on each participant will be included in chapter 4.

Table 1

#### *Participants*

Participant	Age	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Digital Writing	Digital Writing Component
Sally <sup>2</sup>	51	16	1	Edmodo (professional use)
Darcy	29	8	6	Blog (personal use)
Nancy	57	30+	7	Twitter (professional)

<sup>2</sup> All participant names in this dissertation study are pseudonyms.

Becca	32	6	9	Haiku (professional) Wiki (professional)
-------	----	---	---	---

---

## **Sally**

A special educator for students in grades six through eight, Sally, 51, taught English Language Arts in a separate setting classroom at a rural public school in the southeastern United States. Sally learned of the study through a LEARN NC email. A graduate of the local research-intensive university's Master's program, Sally was excited to participate in the research study to continue the love of research that began in her Master's program. Sally was committed to social justice pedagogies and was interested in helping her students find their voices in digital writing spaces. For example, the eighth grade English Language Arts curriculum had a unit on social justice in which students wrote an essay about what it means to be an American. In addition to Sally's laptop, document camera, and SMART Board, her students had access to Mac laptops that remained in the classroom. As a way to keep her students engaged in writing over the summer and meet her school improvement plan's initiative of helping students with written expression, Sally created an Edmodo account, which I analyzed in the study. Edmodo is an online, password-protected collaborative space for teachers, students, and parents.

## **Darcy**

After working in a public school setting, Darcy, 29, relocated to a private college-preparatory school in a suburban city in the southeastern United States to teach seventh grade. A graduate of the local research-intensive university's Master's program, Darcy was recommended to me by a cooperating teacher with whom I worked. Darcy commented that every couple years she set out to engage in a new professional goal. Having completed her Master's degree a few years ago, the research project came at a time when she needed to try something new. As

indicated by her quotation above, Darcy had a nuanced understanding of composing in digital spaces. She had access to a laptop and projection screen in her classroom, and each of her students had access to Enova tablets. An avid runner, Darcy frequently wrote on her personal running blog, which I analyzed in the study. Darcy described her blog as “an outlet” and as a “way to process” events that were happening in her life (personal communication, September, 2014). Because of work commitments and collegial dynamics, Darcy did not complete the online study group or compose the final digital writing piece. However, she agreed to a second interview and a fourth classroom observation.

### **Nancy**

Nancy, 57, taught sixth grade English Language Arts at an independent Episcopal day school in an urban city in the southeastern United States. Nancy found out about the dissertation study through the LEARN NC Twitter feed and was working to figure out how to communicate effectively with her professional Twitter presence. She first learned of digital literacy in her Master’s program at a local research-intensive university. Central to Nancy’s desire to learn more about digital writing was the idea of safety, and she often stated her students’ iPads could be both a help and a hindrance to the learning process. During the study, the school was transitioning into a one-to-one iPad initiative and students were experiencing problems with the external keyboards. Nancy had a laptop and SMART Board in her classroom. As part of the study, I examined Nancy’s Twitter account and class Haiku page. Whereas Nancy used Twitter to communicate with other professionals, her Haiku page was used to update parents and students about assignments and homework. Nancy focused upon problem-solving in her final digital composition project for the online study group.

## **Becca**

Becca, 32, taught sixth grade English at a suburban school district in the southeastern United States. Becca's sister, a fellow graduate student and graduate assistant at LEARN NC, recommended her to me. Becca graduated with a degree in English from the local all-women's liberal arts college and completed the licensure program at a local research-intensive university. Though she hesitated to broaden her digital voice, she realized the importance of having her students do more digital writing. Becca had access to a laptop and document camera in her classroom, and though there were three older desktops in the back of the room, Becca expressed difficulty in reserving the computer labs at her school. A devout paper journal writer, Becca wrote digitally professionally on her class wiki page, which I analyzed in the study. Parents and students were the audiences of her wiki page. Becca focused on unheard perspectives in her final digital composition project for the online study group.

## **Positionality**

### **Teacher-Writer**

As one's biography impacts her study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), I must also identify myself as a teacher who identifies as a writer. Recommended by Luttrell (2010), this reflexivity is important but because of my biases and the closeness to the participants. In my teacher preparation program, I became interested in the idea of teacher as writer and my final project was titled *The Writing Teacher*. As a secondary English teacher, I participated in the National Writing Project, a professional development opportunity dedicated to developing teachers as writers.

My understandings of new literacies and my propensity to share my writing with my students have developed as I have grown as a teacher. As a first year teacher, I taught at one of

the most technologically advanced schools in the nation. However, I did not have sufficient training in how to incorporate technology into the writing classroom and used a Smart Board to project PowerPoints and had students use laptops solely as typing spaces. Because my understandings of new literacies and digital writing have grown since I entered graduate school, my current students' assignments incorporate elements of new literacies. They have written online articles, Tweeted, composed pop-up videos, and designed digital film reviews with hyperlinks. In addition, I share my Twitter feed with my students, develop hashtags for the courses I teach, share poetry with my students, and discuss the success and struggles I have had as a writer in graduate school.

I am active within digital writing spaces. I have been the social media coordinator for two different outlets. I wrote Tweets, Facebook posts, and blogs for an alliance that was dedicated to sharing contemporary literacy research with interested parties. In addition, I write Tweets and Facebook posts for a graduate student-run journal at my institution. Personally, I use my Twitter account as a means by which to share my thoughts and ideas about English education, thereby using my digital writing space as a place of sharing my views and critiques.

Realizing the risks of one's positionality and in order to separate my "personal insight" from my "collection of data" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 97), I enlisted the aid of my faculty advisor several times to examine the early drafts of my codebook and analysis chapters so as to engage in a form of intra-rater reliability.

### **Teacher-Researcher**

As a qualitative researcher, I assumed a variety of roles: teacher, writer, facilitator, friend, and researcher. In the online study group, I positioned myself as a participant observer: "participant observation demands firsthand involvement in the social world chose for study ....

Immersion in the setting permits the researchers to hear, see, and begin to experience reality as the participants do” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 140). I examined participants’ digital writing practices and pedagogies and provided help when asked or when participants’ forum posts necessitated. I also recommended sources in the online study group forums to help participants think about the facets of critical literacy. My communication with participants was very much a part of my research study. For example, here is an example of the types of online interactions I had with participants via the online study group, which will be explained in greater detail in a later section:

I was looking at Stevens and Bean’s (2007) book *Critical literacy: Context, research, and practice in the K-12 classroom*. They listed the following questions that help students take a critical literacy stance:

- (1) Who/what is represented in the text?
- (2) Who/what is absent or not represented?
- (3) What is the author trying to accomplish with this text?
- (4) For whom is this text written?
- (5) Who stands to benefit/be hurt from this text?
- (6) How is language used in specific ways to convey ideas in this text?
- (7) How do other texts/authors represent this idea?
- (8) How could this text be rewritten to convey a different idea/representation?

I think this last question could really help your kids think about the hero that they are creating. Having your kids consider whose voices are not being portrayed as heroes and then portraying these people as heroes in their own iMovie might be one direction in which you could go. heroes might [sic] I’d love to hear your thoughts on these ideas.

In addition, I sat down with participants after observations to discuss their final composition projects and sent several emails back and forth between participants about their final composition projects. For example, I sat down with Sally to discuss how she might incorporate a video in her I Am Poem on Glogster and emailed with Becca about her final project.

I also composed a final project for the online study group to both enact my positionality as a teacher-writer and to guide participants and help them understand elements of critical

literacy. I composed a video that combined original drawings of dresses, the instrumental version of Beyonce's *If I Were a Boy*, and several questions, including a charge to the viewers: "What will it take for you to accept me for who I am?" This video project served as both a digital booktalk for Polonsky's (2014) *Gracefully Grayson*, a middle grades book about gender identity, but also a charge to audience members to consider how they were addressing issues of gender in their communities. I explained my project in my week five forum post for the online study group:

I've added in some of my original artwork to help readers understand the gender issues Grayson faces. The song I selected is the instrumental version of Beyonce's "If I Were a Boy." I selected this song to help viewers think about how *Gracefully Grayson* resists certain gender stereotypes which I think Beyonce's song does as well (though in different ways).

A discussion of the gender issues within the text will provide for some discussions that would engage students in critical literacy (e.g. Why is this particular type of narrator missing from middle grades texts?). The digital booktalk was a way for me to create a text that would not only engage viewers in thinking about issues of gender but to perhaps take some action against bullying in their own lives. Therefore, not only does the booktalk serve the purpose of introducing viewers to a book they might want to read but it also serves to ignite social action.

Here, I provided participants with not only an exemplar of a piece of digital writing with a critical stance but I also reflected on this idea of social action, which I felt was missing in some of the participants' project drafts and plans. Though I acknowledge that some may see my role as too invasive in the process, I felt remiss in my role as a teacher not to help my participants engage with the content of the online study group. Additionally, I felt committed to my role as a teacher-writer. The ways in which I was able to enact my role as a researcher, teacher, and participant suited the reciprocal type of research and scholarship I value.

Such immersion with my participants allowed me to connect on a human level to the participants in my work. Luttrell (2010) suggests qualitative methodologies allow the researcher

“to approach another as a knowledge subject – to care about a person’s integrity, joys, sufferings, and self-definition” (p. 1). Such an intimate relationship with participants freed them to discuss their challenges with me in a more personal, nuanced way than would be possible in a quantitative study. Citing the problems with objectivity due to establishing friendship rather than rapport with research participants, Glesne (1989) asserts

If intersubjectivity is desirable rather than objectivity, friendship assists both the researcher and her/his others in achievement new perspectives and in acting upon those insights in negotiated fashion..... Friendship may bias data collection; but it also may contribute an even more potent voice than that gained through rapport. (p. 53).

Allowing spaces for friendship to develop dismantles some – though not all – of the power dynamics between a researcher and her participants (Glesne, 1989). I fostered an environment in which participants and I shared control over the research process – and one in which participants felt comfortable being honest with me.

Though I welcomed the opportunity to be a researcher, participant, and teacher, I found figuring out my role as a researcher challenging. As I did not want to lead participants toward providing a definition of *critical literacy* I wanted to hear, my role as teacher was somewhat limited, especially during the beginning of the online study group when I was cautious to participate so as not to influence participants. After several discussions with my faculty advisor about the struggles I was having in defining my role, I learned to embrace the dynamic nature of a participant-observer and settled into a role in which I was more comfortable: a teacher. Whereas my role was more hands-off during the beginning of the online study group, it was more hands-on by the end of the online study group.

In summary, my role in the research study was dynamic and aligned, ultimately, with the type of questions I asked and participants with whom I engaged demanded: a teacher, writer, facilitator, friend, and qualitative researcher.



## **The Online Study Group**

I designed and facilitated a six-week online professional development study group titled *Composing Change: Teachers as Digital Writers with a Critical Stance*. The online study group took place for six weeks from October through November, 2014. Here is the description of the study group that was used to recruit participants:

In what ways does your digital writing impact your pedagogy? In what ways does your writing pedagogy engage students in critical stances? In this six-week online study group offered by LEARN NC, secondary English teachers will discuss how digital writing can permit critical literacy, engage in meaningful discussions about digital writing and critical literacy practices, learn how understandings of digital writing with a critical stance can be applied to the writing classroom, and compose a piece of digital writing that takes a critical stance. Participants will leave the online study group with an original digital writing mentor text to share with students. If you are interested in joining this online study group please email Kathryn Caprino at [kcaprino@email.unc.edu](mailto:kcaprino@email.unc.edu). Enrollees must agree to the use of their data in a dissertation research study.

The overarching online study group goal was as follows:

To help participants define *critical literacy* and apply it to their own digital writing and to their writing pedagogies.

Research in the area of professional development informed the online study group. The International Society for Technology (2000) recommends professional developments for teachers to learn about technology tools. Scholars suggest focusing on content during professional development (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Hill, 2009; Hill & Ball, 2009), particularly content-specific technology training (Graham et al., 2009). The course was not what Fleischer and Fox (2003) call a “one-shot, fix-‘em-up experience” (p. 259). Rather, the course provided “intensive” and “sustained” professional development (Blau, Cabe, & Whitney, 2011, p. 1) that was hands-on (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009) and grounded in teachers’ contexts (Fleischer and Fox, 2003; Little, 1993).

I selected LEARN NC to host the online study group's moodle for a variety of reasons. First, it is an online resource for practicing teachers in the state where I completed my research study. As per the 2010 LEARN NC annual report, over 1,800 teachers partook in professional development courses offered through LEARN NC, teachers earned more than 4,400 CEUs, and 27,000 teachers used LEARN as a resource for technology integration (LEARN NC, 2010). Second, the director of LEARN NC and instructional designer assisted me with technical and design questions I had along the way. Finally, LEARN NC assisted with recruiting participants.

Participants were engaged in a variety of activities as part of the online study group. In week one, for example, participants referenced the study group glossary to think about the meaning of the technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK), digital writing, new literacies, and critical literacy; composed an introductory forum post that included their current definition of what digital writing, a list of all the writing they did personally and professionally in that particular week, and a list of all the writing they assigned that week; and replied to two to three others' forum posts. During week three, for example, participants watched two videos that showcased a critical literacy perspective. Participants then read two to three practitioner articles about critical literacy and digital writing. In addition – like they did each week – participants composed a forum post that included their current definition of what digital writing, a list of all the writing they did personally and professionally in that particular week, and a list of all the writing they assigned that week; and replied to two to three others' forum posts. In addition to reading articles, participants watched videos, podcasts, and blogs that exemplified digital writing with a critical stance. Participants were also provided hyperlinks to new literacies texts and professional websites that correlated with the study group's content. As their final project for the course, participants wrote lesson plans for and went through peer and instructor review and

revision of their digital writing piece with a critical stance. The online study group became a digital sharing space for participants, and they were encouraged to interact with one another about their teaching. There were opportunities in the online study group module, via email or social media, or during face-to-face conversations in their classrooms for participants and me to share and discuss ideas about their instructional practices. Table 2 exhibits how research supported the online study group's goals.

Table 2

*Research Connected with Goals of Online Study Group*

Goal	Citations
Review <i>TPACK</i> , <i>digital writing</i> , and <i>new literacies</i> . Be introduced to the definition and practices of critical literacy.	Mishra & Koehler, 2006  National Writing Project, 2010  Bailey 2009; Bowen & Whithaus, 2013; Buckingham, 1993; Curwood & Cowell, 2011; Lambert & Cuper, 2008; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Swenson, Young, McGrail, Rozema, & Whitin, 2006  Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Knobel and Lankshear, 2002; Lewison, Flint, and Sluys, 2002
Learn how to apply understandings of critical literacy to original digital writing piece	Bailey 2009; Bowen & Whithaus, 2013; Buckingham, 1993; Curwood & Cowell, 2011; Lambert & Cuper, 2008; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Swenson, Young, McGrail, Rozema, & Whitin, 2006  Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Knobel and Lankshear, 2002; Lewison, Flint, and Sluys, 2002
Plan original digital writing piece with a critical stance and compose this mentor text	Lewison, Flint, and Sluys, 2002; Calkins, 1994; Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007; Ray, 2004

Consider one's position as a digital writer and how this position impacts writing pedagogy	Augsburger, 1998; Cremin & Baker, 2010; Elbow, 1998; Gere, 1980, Gillespie, 1985; Graves, 1983; Graves, 1994; Murray, 1980; Murray, 1985
Understand how to integrate technology in ways that meet English-specific content goals that integrate digital writing and critical literacy	Bull, Bell, Mason, & Garofalo, 2002; Ertmer, 1999; Hofer & Owings-Swan, 2005; Hughes, 2004; International Society for Technology, 2000; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Sahin, 2011; Swenson, Rozema, Young, McGrail, & Whitin, 2005

Table 3 exhibits how I established the following organizational structure for each week of the online study group:

Table 3

*Organizational Structure of Online Study Group*

Week	Major Elements
Week 1	<p>Focus: Introduction to Course Platform (Help students learn how to navigate course site)</p> <p>Participants were directed to investigate the following terms in the online course glossary: <i>TPACK</i>, <i>Digital Writing</i>, <i>New Literacies</i>, <i>Critical Literacy</i></p> <p>Participants completed the introductory forum: Introduce yourself as a writer in a writer's narrative. These narratives can take <i>any form or genre</i>. You can compose a six-word memoir, a poem, or a short video. Some of you may decide to put this narrative on your own digital writing space; if you do, provide us with the link. Also, tell us what you hope to get out of this online study group - both personally and professionally. How do the technology resources at your school impact the type of digital writing that you have your students do? What ways might you use the technology resources at your school to have your students engage in digital writing in new ways? What questions do you have for the fellow writers in the study group? Finally, at the end of your post, provide your current definition of <i>digital writing</i> and then list all of the writing you've done (personally and professionally) and assigned this week and why.</p>
Week 2	Focus: New Literacies

Participants examined a booktalk on *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (Scholastic, n.d.), a Gothic poetry creator (Elsensohn, 2012) and a Hicks (2014) list of website and apps that engage students in digital writing.

As participants read two of the following articles, they were asked to consider how a teacher who models her practice after the practices in the articles would need to consider TPACK.

- Curwood, J. S. & Cowell, L. L. (2011). iPoetry: Creating spaces for new literacies in the English classroom. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 55(2), 110-120.
- Rozema, R. (2007). The book report, version 2.0: Podcasting on young adult novels. *The English Journal*, 97(1), 31-36.
- Greenhow, C., & Gleason, B. (2012). Twitteracy: Tweeting as a new literacy practice. *The Educational Forum*, 76, 463- 477.
- Selfe, R. L. & Selfe, C. (2009). 'Convince me!' Valuing multimodal literacies and composing public service announcements. *Theory into Practice*, 47(2), 83-92.

Participants completed a New Literacies Forum: In what ways do your own literacy (reading and writing) practices reflect a new literacies understanding? What about your students' literacy (reading and writing) practices? In what ways do the practices in the articles embody new literacies understandings and exemplify TPACK? In what ways do practices from the articles have possible applications in your English classroom? Finally, at the end of your post, provide your current definition of *digital writing* and then list all of the writing you've done (personally and professionally) and assigned this week and why.

### Week 3

#### Focus: Digital Writing and Critical Literacy

Participants listened to a podcast on *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* ("Diary," n.d.) that examined the text from a critical literacy perspective. They also viewed a video that reviewed the children's picture book *10,000 Dresses* (Birner, 2012) from a critical literacy perspective.

Participants read two required articles and selected two readings from the option reading list.

#### *Required Readings:*

- Beck, A. S. (2005). A place for critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 48(5), 392-400.
- Behrman, E. H. (2006). Teaching about language, power, and text: A Review of classroom practices that support critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 49(6), 490-498.
- Clarke, L. W. & Whitney, E. (2009). Walking in their shoes: Using multi-perspective texts as a bridge to critical literacy. *The Reading Teacher*

62(6), 530-534.

- Guzzetti, B. J. & Gamboa, M. (2004). Zines for social justice: Adolescent girls writing on their own. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 39(4), 408-436.
- Ife, F. (2012). Powerful writing: Promoting a political writing community for students. *English Journal*, 101(4), 64-69.
- Love, B.L. (2014). Urban storytelling: How storyboarding, moviemaking, and hip-hop-based education can promote students' critical voice. *English Journal*, 103(5), 53-58.
- Mancina, H. (2005). Empowering students through a social-action writing project. *English Journal*, 94(6), 30-35.
- Miller, S. (2007). English teacher learning for new times: Digital video composing as multimodal literacy practice. *English Education* 40(1), 61-83.

Participants completed Digital Writing and Critical Literacies Forum: Provide us with your thoughts and/or questions about the podcast, video, and articles this week. In what ways do your own writing practices take a critical stance? What about your students' in-school and out-of-school writing practices? How might you design writing assignments that engage students in critical stances in ways that are similar to the examples shared in the articles, the video, or the podcast? What are your ideas for a digital composition piece with a critical stance that you can create and then share with your students before they do the same assignment? Think about what works with your school context, technology needs, and curriculum. You will be incorporating this piece into your lesson planning the first week of December. What questions do you have of us in regard to your preliminary idea? Finally, at the end of your post, provide your current definition of *digital writing* and then list all of the writing you've done (personally and professionally) and assigned this week and why.

#### Week 4

#### Focus: Drafting Mentor Text

Participants posted a draft of their mentor text and lesson plan. Participants were provided a final project checklist. Post draft of mentor text online for peer feedback. Participants provided feedback on their fellow participants' questions or concerns.

Participants completed Drafting Mentor Text Forum: Post the draft of your lesson plan and a draft of your final project of a digital writing piece with a critical stance. If your files are too big, provide us with a web address to your work. You can also attach files. What did you enjoy most? What aspects did you find challenging? In what way will your project embody new literacies and critical literacy? Why have you selected to compose this piece and share it with your students? What specific questions do you have for us

as we review your drafts? Finally, at the end of your post, provide your current definition of *digital writing* and then list all of the writing you've done (personally and professionally) and assigned this week and why.

#### Week 5

##### Focus: Publishing the Mentor Text

Participants took into consideration peer and facilitator comments on their drafts and published their final projects and lesson plans.

Participants completed Publishing the Mentor Text and Lesson Plan Forum: Please also give us a brief introduction to your project and let us know why you made the composing decisions you did and how you plan to use this with your students and have them do a similar project. In what ways does your project represent a piece of digital writing that embodies understandings of new literacies and critical literacy? What did you most enjoy about creating this piece? What did you find most challenging? In a few sentences, reflect on the process of composing a digital writing piece with a critical stance. Finally, at the end of your post, provide your current definition of *digital writing* and then list all of the writing you've done (personally and professionally) and assigned this week and why.

#### Week 6

##### Focus: Peer Feedback

Participants provided commentary on peers' pieces and lesson plans.

Participants completed the Feedback Forum: In this week's forum post, answer the following questions: In what ways does each writer embody an understanding of new literacies and critical literacy? How might you do something similar in your own writing or with your students in the future? Then, in a few closing remarks, reflect on your experiences in the online study group and what you might apply from our time together to your own writing and/or students' writing assignments.

Finally, at the end of your post, provide your current definition of *digital writing* and then list all of the writing you've done (personally and professionally) and assigned this week and why.

---

### Data Collection

From September to December, 2014, I collected multiple forms of data, including study participants' pre- and post-online study group interviews, six classroom observations, post-lesson

interviews, online study group posts (which included weekly posts, replies to fellow participants, types of writing log, and running definitions of digital writing), assignments and handouts, lesson plans, final digital composition projects and lesson plans, and digital writing (e.g. Twitter, wiki, Edmodo, and blog posts). Though I had intended to collect and analyze teachers' lesson plans for each lesson observations, they became hard to access. Lesson plans from three of the four participants were not as developed and were more list than completed plan. I believe this to be, in part, because these teachers were veteran teachers. I made the decision to not collect lesson plans to keep data collection consistent. Though there were multiple data sources, interviews, observations, and digital writing became the primary data collection sources.

## **Interviews**

Participants agreed to a pre- and post-online study group interview that allowed me to learn what participants knew about the online study group's main topics and how they viewed themselves as writers and teachers of writing. Open and flexible in approach, these semi-structured interviews allowed me to gather participants "perspectives, perceptions, experiences, understandings, interpretations, and interactions" (Mason, 2004). Not wanting to rely solely on my observations or my interpretations, I valued these interviews' capacity to provide a voice to the participants:

Semi-structured interviewing sometimes implies a particular approach to research ethics, whereby the power relationship between interviewer and interviewee is equalized as much as possible, and where the interviewee gets plenty of opportunities to tell his or her story in his or her own way. (Mason, 2004)

Though I had a list of questions, participants' remarks often drove the nature and order of my questions. These semi-structured interviews created a means by which each participant and I had "an active, reflexive, and constitutive role in the process of knowledge construction" (Mason, 2004). Conducting interviews before and after the online study group also allowed me to gauge



whether participants' understandings of new literacies or critical literacy had adapted. In addition, having more structured interviews that were consistent across all participants after each class observation allowed me to compare my field notes with participants' understandings about the lesson. These post-observation interviews were conducted via email to honor teachers' time,. The questions that guided the pre-online study group interview, post-online study group interview, and post-observation interviews are provided in Appendices E, F, and G, respectively.

### **Classroom Observations**

Marshall and Rossman (2011) recommended complementing interviews with observations as "immersion in the setting permits the researcher to hear, see, and begin to experience reality as the participants do" (p. 140). As Patton (2001) discussed, observations allowed me "to learn things that people would be unwilling to talk about in an interview" (p. 263). I conducted six classroom observations of writing lessons for each participant except for Darcy. Darcy dropped out of the online study group and for time constraints, I only observed her four times. It is important to note that in one of the observations, participants taught the mentor text they created as part of the online study group. If I could not make it to an observation, participants filmed their lesson and uploaded the video to a password-protected online space. After I had saved these video files to a password-protected computer, files were deleted from the online space. If I videotaped the lessons during my visit to the classrooms, I uploaded them to a password-protected computer, deleted the video from the recorder, and uploaded these video files to a password-protected computer.

These observations helped me make distinctions between participants' teaching practices and their writing and interview responses. Patton (2001) suggested teacher responses are always perceptions. In my observations, I looked for whether the teacher's position as a digital writer

presented itself, whether a critical literacy understanding was expressed, and the literacy practices in which teachers and students engaged. My main goal was to observe how they presented lessons and assignments to the students and how they positioned themselves as writers. I also documented nonoccurrences (Patton, 2001), spaces when teachers did not position themselves as writers or exhibit new literacies or critical literacy understandings. I based what I looked for in these observations on Kajder's (2005) observations of preservice English teachers. I looked for types of technology used, emphasis on technology, emphasis on writing, whether the teacher's position as a writer came forward, and whether new literacies or critical literacy understandings were expressed. I observed to see what type of technology integration was present. Were students using laptops to type, for example, or were they posting in digital spaces that permitted social interactions? In terms of critical literacy, I observed to see what types of audiences and purposes students were writing. Were they writing for the teacher, for example, or writing to incite social change in their communities?

### **Digital Writing**

I also collected data in the form of participants' personal and professional digital writing (e.g. tweets, blog posts, Edmodo prompts, wiki writing). I collected participants' online study group forum posts and replies to other participants. Furthermore, I examined participants' final projects for the course, digital compositions with a critical stance. Participants' digital writing were collected and analyzed for content and new literacies and critical literacy understandings. For instance, I looked for whether participants began to write with a critical stance on their personal or professional writing spaces. The forum posts, replies, and final course projects provided insight into participants' classroom practices and the challenges they faced in both

understanding new literacies and critical literacy and enacting digital writing with a critical stance in their classroom.

## Review of Data Sources

Table 4 details the data I collected on each of the four focal participants. Observation dates, topics of writing lessons, type of technology used during each observation, critical literacy understandings present in each observation, digital writing dates, digital writing topics, and types of texts exhibited in each digital writing exemplar are provided in chapter 4 as part of my analysis of participant data.

Table 4

### *Data Sources*

Participant	Data Sources
Sally	Edmodo prompts, pre- and post-online study group interview, six observations (4 in-person, 2 video), six post-observation interviews, 17 online study group posts (weekly posts and replies), digital I Am Poem project, I Am Poem lesson plans, handouts
Darcy	Personal blog posts, pre- and post-online study group interview, four observations (in-person), three post-observation interviews, 5 online study group posts (weekly posts and replies)
Nancy	Twitter tweets, Haiku page, pre- and post-online study group interview, six observations (3 in-person, 3 video), six post-observation interviews, 14 online study group posts (weekly posts and replies), digital hero project and lesson plans
Becca	Wiki account, pre- and post-online study group interview, six observations (6 in-person), six post-observation interviews, 14 online study group posts (weekly posts and replies), podcast, lesson plans

Table 5 exhibits how the data I collected helped me answer my three research questions.

Table 5

### *Research Questions and Data*

Research Questions	Data
What are the writing practices of secondary English teachers who are active digital writers?	Pre-Online Study Group Interview, Course writings (forum posts, discussion comments, online study group reflection), Running writing logs over time, Weekly blog post about what digital writing is, Teachers' Digital Writing, Digital Writing Piece
What does writing (digital and otherwise) pedagogy look like in the classrooms of teachers who are digital writers?	Pre-Online Study Group Interview, Course writings (forum posts, discussion comments, online study group reflection), Weekly blog post about what digital writing is, Digital Writing Lesson Plan, Digital Writing Piece, Post-Online study group Interview, 6 Observations of writing lessons, Post-observation interview
What factors move teachers toward critical literacy in their own writing and in their classroom practices?	Weekly blog post about what digital writing is, Teachers' Digital Writing, Digital Writing Piece, Post-Online study group Interview, 6 Observations of writing lessons, Post-observation interview

### **Data Analysis**

Admittedly, “there is no single way to analyze qualitative data” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 2). That said, I decided to code the data for emergent themes. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) claimed, “the process of coding is about asking oneself questions about the data” (p. 49). After each observation, I typed up field notes and engaged in a process of pre-coding, bolding “rich or significant participant quotes or passages” that I felt might be codes or themes later in the analysis process (Saldana, 2009, p. 16). I also made analytical memos in which I sought to answer my research questions, identify initial themes, and reflect on points of interest or researcher challenges (e.g. when participants wanted to have a conversation with me during the observation or when a student wanted me to help her on her writing assignment during my observation). As Saldana (2009) wrote, “codes and categories are found not only in the margins or heading of transcripts or field notes – they are also embedded within analytic memos” (p. 41).

Some of these preliminary codes made their way into the final codebook, which is shared in Appendix H.

Once data collection was complete, all printouts of interview transcripts, observation field notes, post-lesson reflections, online study group posts, assignments and handouts, lesson plans, online study group forum posts (which included replies, types of writing log, definitions of digital writing) and final course projects were placed in my data analysis binder and made ready for manual coding, which was selected to maintain “more control over and ownership of the work” (Saldana, 2009. p. 22).

After this process, first and second cycle coding methods were employed. Saldana (2009) writes, coding “is the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis” p. 4). Saldana defined a code as “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). I will now describe my first and second cycle coding methods in more detail.

### **First Cycle Coding**

Because of the nature of my data collection, which included a variety of interviews, observations, and digital writing, I completed first cycle coding using a combination of description, InVivo, and process codes. These codes were identified both from the literature in the field and the three research questions. Saldana (2009) defined a descriptive code as a “word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (p. 70). An example of this type of code was *teacher as co-writer*. An InVivo code “refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record” (p. 74). An example of this type of code was *distraction* or *doing them a disservice*. And a process code “uses

gerunds ('-ing' words) exclusively to connote action in the data" (p. 77). An example of this type of code was *blurring of teachers' digital writing spaces as in-class writing or permitting multiple perspectives*.

## Second Cycle Coding

As Saldana (2009) wrote, "The primary goal during Second Cycle coding, if needed, is to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from ... First Cycle codes" (p. 148). After the first-round of coding, during which description, InVivo, and process codes were applied to the data, I wrote analytical memos and notes to identify axial codes. Strauss and Corbin (1990) claimed, "axial coding puts those data back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories" (p. 97). It is important to understand "though open and axial coding are distinct analytic procedures, when the researcher is actually engaged in analysis he or she alternates between the two modes" (p. 98). Constant analysis of the data and conversations with my faculty advisor led to changes in the number and names of the codes. Whereas the first codebook had 7 major codes and 43 subcodes, the final codebook includes 6 major codes and descriptions and 58 subcodes, which are shown in Table ASDF. See Appendix H for a copy of my final codebook, which includes main codes, sub codes, definitions, and data exemplars.

Table 6

### Code List

Major Code and Description	Sub Codes
Barriers to digital writing with a critical stance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety concerns</li> <li>• Thoughts about students' behaviors</li> <li>• Thoughts about students' writing abilities and needs</li> <li>• Resources</li> </ul>

---

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum</li> <li>• Colleagues</li> <li>• Policies</li> <li>• Training</li> <li>• Beliefs about implementing critical literacy</li> <li>• Devaluing students' out-of-school literacy practices</li> <li>• Fear of human obsolescence</li> <li>• Beliefs about teaching practice</li> </ul>
Supports for digital writing with a critical stance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colleagues</li> <li>• Curriculum</li> <li>• Desire to learn and grow</li> <li>• Resources</li> <li>• Training policies</li> </ul>
Pedagogical practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety of writing practices</li> <li>• Balance between new and traditional literacies</li> <li>• Process approach</li> <li>• Mentor texts</li> <li>• Direct instruction</li> <li>• Time for writing</li> <li>• Social justice pedagogy</li> <li>• Assessment practices</li> <li>• Formulaic writing</li> </ul>
Role of the teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher as audience/grader</li> <li>• Teacher as director</li> <li>• Teacher as facilitator</li> <li>• Teacher as fellow-writer</li> <li>• Teacher as co-writer</li> <li>• Teacher as writer by necessity</li> <li>• Teacher as developing writer</li> <li>• Teacher as digital resistor</li> </ul>
Affordances of digital writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blurring of teachers' digital writing spaces an in-class writing</li> <li>• Social aspects of new literacies</li> <li>• Considerations of brevity</li> <li>• Empowerment and liberation to tell one's story</li> <li>• Permitting multiple perspectives</li> </ul>

---

---

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating change/impact</li> <li>• Broadening definitions and options for composition</li> <li>• A means to discuss etiquette</li> <li>• Ability to bring in students' out-of-school literacy practices</li> </ul>
Technology Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation/ projection space</li> <li>• Typing space</li> <li>• Research space</li> <li>• Composing space</li> <li>• Feedback space</li> <li>• Revision space</li> <li>• Sharing space</li> <li>• Entertainment/play space</li> <li>• Repository space</li> <li>• Distraction space</li> <li>• Assessment space</li> <li>• Ignored space</li> <li>• Teacher's space</li> <li>• Intentional space</li> <li>• Required space</li> </ul>

---

### **Grounded Theory Approach**

The amount of data collected on each participant allowed me to triangulate the data. Axial codes permitted me to build theory through a grounded theory approach, defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as “the discovery of theory from data” (p. 1). As Creswell (2009) suggested, “Theory also appears as an end point of a qualitative study, a generated theory, a pattern, or a generalization that emerges inductively from data collection and analysis” (p. 70). Through the data analysis process, I applied constant comparative method, which allows both explicit coding and generative theory-making (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This grounded theory approach allowed for themes to emerge. Emergent themes were determined for each case separately and then compared and contrasted across cases.



## **Credibility**

To ensure the credibility of data presentation, I employed several strategies, including triangulation, member checking, inter-rater reliability, and peer debriefing. The myriad data sources (e.g. interviews, digital writing, online study group forum posts, etc.) allowed me to triangulate the data. It was important for me to engage the participants in my presentations of their stories. To corroborate the field notes I took during each observation and the analytical memos I wrote after each observation, I emailed participants post-observation interview questions. Analyzing participants' responses in combination with my notes helped me more accurately depict a lesson.

In addition, I employed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) suggestion for member checking and asked participants to review the ways in which I analyzed the data. During the drafting process, participants were sent Word versions of their sections within chapters 3 and 4 in an email. This process allowed participants to "have the opportunity to discuss and clarify the interpretation, and contribute new or additional perspectives on the issue under study" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 556). The email that was sent had wording such as this:

I hope you are doing well. I have been working on your section of my dissertation and wonder if you might be able to read the attached draft and complete member checking for me. I want to make sure that I represent your story as accurately as possible. Your name will be changed to a pseudonym for the final dissertation.

Member checking is essentially where you go through and make sure that I have accurately depicted your quotes, classroom practices, themes, etc. If there are places where you feel I have misrepresented you, please let me know. If you believe more information should be added in particular places, please also let me know. Feel free to either write me an email or add comments to the document. I really value your input!

If I could have this back within a week, that would be wonderful. Please let me know if you have any questions.  
Have a wonderful week!

For some participants, I added questions so as to gain clarification about particular points. Participants emailed me back with editorial changes and answers to the questions I asked. For example, I asked Sally whether her students did a unit on social justice explicitly and asked Becca how many times per week she wrote in her paper journal. In addition, I also asked Darcy to clarify her intent for the critique assignment and Nancy why she had selected PowerPoint for her final digital writing assignment. Member checking contributed to the validity and credibility of my research study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) because it allowed me to take both what I had seen and heard from the participants and pair it with participants' thoughts and interpretations in order to reveal the most valid story.

To lessen the potential to become biased or too close to the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), I asked my advisor to complete intra-rater reliability in the form of reviewing the drafts and final codebook and list of codes. In several meetings, which served as peer debriefing sessions, we discussed how I had interpreted the data, the ways in which I might rearrange the codes, and the ways in which my codes had contributed to the development of themes. Finally, I engaged in discussions with fellow graduate students and faculty advisors about how I was representing the participants via emergent themes. These critical friends read chapter drafts and offered insights in terms of organization, terminology, methods employed, and readability.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I described the rationale for the qualitative research study I designed to analyze middle grades English teachers who were active digital writers. In addition, I addressed the rather difficult participant recruitment process that concluded with six participants enrolled in the study group. From these six teachers, I selected the four middle school teachers to be the

four case study participants. I discussed the course outline and the difficulties I faced as a participant-researcher during the facilitation of the online study group. Further, I shared how multiple forms of data, including interviews, observations, and writing, were collected and then coded based on literature in the field and how they helped answer my three research questions. I then explained how these codes helped me identify both emergent themes for the individual cases and for the cross-case analysis, which will be shared in chapters 4 and chapters 5, respectively.

## **Chapter 4: Research Findings**

In this chapter, I share participant narratives for each of the four participants. In each narrative, I provide a brief introduction to each teacher's writing and teaching context, classroom layout, and classroom technology. Then, I share themes that emerged from an analysis of each participant. Though the introductory sections are parallel for each participant, the emergent themes are not, as a teacher's writing and teaching practices and moves toward critical literacy were unique to her. These individual participants' narratives lead into the cross-case analysis in Chapter 5.

Though I present each case as truthfully and accurately as possible, I acknowledge that these case studies cannot tell the participants' whole stories and difficult – albeit subjective – decisions were made concerning which aspects of the participants' stories would be told. Though participants' engaged in member checking, it was I who selected which aspects of participants' stories to tell (Stake, 1994). In what follows it is important to remember “less will be reported than was learned” (p. 240).

### **Narrative One – Sally**

#### **Introduction**

Sally wrote in a variety of digital and non-digital writing genres for personal and professional purposes, including her class Edmodo account, which I analyzed. A special educator for students in grades six through eight, Sally, 51, was in her sixteenth year of teaching. She taught three English Language Arts periods in a resource setting classroom at a rural public

middle school in the southeastern United States. Supporting writing done in mainstream classes, Sally often taught multiple grade levels and subject areas during a class period.

Sally's school had approximately 520 students and was A School of Distinction in the state, meaning that eighty to ninety percent of students were at grade level. Overall, 79.3% of the students passed the end-of-grade tests in reading and 87.2% of the students passed the end-of-grade tests in math. 34.3% of the students with disabilities passed both the reading and the math end-of-grade tests. Sally described her students as three or more grade levels below peers, visual or kinesthetic learners, having behavior challenges, having processing disorders, and cross-categorical, meaning students had cognitive impairments, specific learning disabilities, other health impairments, multiple disabilities, autism, or emotional disabilities (personal communication, February, 2015). Sally identified her students as marginalized students with "challenges to overcome economically, politically, socially, and sexually" (online study group week four forum post).

Sally's classroom had multiple seating options: four rectangle tables with seats for two students each, a larger table made of multiple tables around which six students could sit, a u-shaped table around which approximately five students and Sally could sit, and a chair behind a desk off to the front-right of the room where students who needed a more private space sat. There was also an area with chairs near the back bookshelf where students could sit. A refrigerator, stove, microwave, and sink were along the right wall. The desk for Sally's teaching assistant was near the in-class copy room, which was in the back of the classroom. There was also a hallway to the adjoining classroom next door, where Sally's special education assistant often took student groups.

Sally's desk, laptop, and document camera were in the front-left of the room. A SMART Board was in the center front of the classroom. Sally's classroom housed the Mac laptop cart for the Exceptional Children's department. Sally said her school had ordered Kindles and iPads.

Three themes emerged from an analysis of Sally's writing and teaching: teacher as co-writer, a teacher-writer makes sense of digital writing, and digital writing as liberating.

### **Teacher as Co-Writer Who "Help[s] Them Almost Write it": Consistent, Supportive, and Direct Writing Instruction**

The students in Sally's classroom required consistent, supportive, and direct instruction – so much so that she emerged as almost a co-writer of their pieces. Because of their reading and writing levels, Sally's students needed much direct instruction and guided practice - "a lot more guided practice than you would have in your regular settings" (personal communication, September, 2014). Working with Hill Center methodology in many writing lessons, Sally's lessons were structured and required students to have specific elements in particular genres. The Hill Center is a non-profit organization that provides resources and training around helping students with special needs. The Hill Center (2014) website cited its methodological approach to teaching writing:

Written language instruction includes spelling, sentence/paragraph dictation, copying, handwriting, grammar and mechanics, creative writing, and composition. Upper level written language classes continue instruction in spelling, grammar, and mechanics and focus as well on critical writing skills, including research papers and expository essays.

Sally's writing instruction included many Hill Center handouts, including a personal narrative paragraph checklist, sample topics for a personal narrative, a brainstorming handout, an organizational handout, a first draft handout – all of which were included in a packet for her students. A packet for a compare-contrast essay was set up in a similar fashion. Because she felt strong about peer editing, Sally included a handout on peer review in each packet.

Sally's daily warm-ups were often focused on helping students develop background knowledge they may need in future writing assignments. In observation three, Sally's students participated in a "name that" activity in which they named outer space movies and/or TV shows in order to give them common background knowledge on the topic of outer space. Sally spoke about the rationale of these weekly warm-up activities:

A lot of these kids have processing deficits so it helps move things on and a lot of children do not have prior knowledge on many things. So it's nice to give them some experiences or to hear other people's experiences. (personal communication, September, 2014)

Sally's thoughts about the necessity of structure and consistency led to direct instruction in which she provided explicit models for her students. When Sally helped an eighth-grade student with his essay about what it is to be an American, she demonstrated formulaic, structured teaching:

So you've got to define what it is, choose a topic based on what an American is. And that's your title What is an American and then um you're going to from there give two thoughts and you're going to research the topic, give your thesis statement, make it clear and concise. Uh underneath that you've got two body paragraphs cause you want um two thoughts which we would be say for example if you think an American is someone who has rights then you would want maybe freedom of speech, maybe freedom to bear arms. From those you would have to define what each of those terms mean and um give three details for each thing. For your conclusion, you're going to review the essay by stating again what it is that you just what you just aid earlier remind the reader why you chose the topic, restate the thesis.... (field notes, October 2014)

In this lesson, she provided a student with the hamburger model for writing:

The bun is for your topic sentence and then you have the hamburger and so your hamburger's here and then you have um lettuce, tomato, all your condiments so that goes together here. And then underneath is the bottom of the bun and that give you your conclusion for the paragraph. (field notes, October, 2014)

Related to structured and direct instruction, a discourse of etiquette permeated Sally's writing instruction. Sally sponsored the school etiquette club as one of her extracurricular

commitments, and she spoke about helping students in the club learn how to write paper-based thank you notes. For Sally, etiquette transferred to digital writing spaces:

But right now the Edmodo gives me the writing prompt where I put that in there, explain why we're doing the prompt and then they can just quickly post their reply. And then I can reply back. So it gives us the communication and conversations skills and etiquette so you know digital etiquette. (personal communication, September, 2014).

This sentiment was echoed when she discussed her students' Edmodo posts: "I'm hoping that posting one will teach them better social media etiquette ..." (personal communication, December, 2014). Sally underscored this theme again when she discussed her students' I Am Poems on Glogster. Whereas she commented upon the power of the broadened audience of digital compositions, she also emphasized that writers needed to consider their messages carefully: "I need to be really careful about what I say and what I do" (personal communication, December 2014). In her post observation two reflection, Sally wrote that her media specialist told her about Tween Tribune and that she had started a group. Careful not to forget issues of etiquette, Sally wrote, "I had to reteach social media etiquette and remind students to edit comments before sending/posting for grammar, writing conventions, and tone."

Sally's direct and structured pedagogy enabled her to assume the position of co-writer with her students. In our first interview, Sally remarked

Because a lot of my children are visual and kinesthetic learners and they need a lot of support from beginning to end. You can give them something and then just say go do it... But you have to sit there, you have to role model it, and then turn right around and sit with them and help them almost write it. (personal communication, September, 2014)

This sentiment of "almost writ[ing] it" was seen in observation two. Sally was working one-on-one with a student and preparing him to think through his peer's comments about punctuation:

So they're going to go through and they're going to say okay you need to work on your punctuation or you need to work on your capitalization or maybe your verb tenses or come over here you need to spice up your sentences because maybe you said too much. But that's not what happened cause we did that together. (field notes, October, 2014)



Here, she acknowledged that she and the student had worked on a particular aspect together, and, therefore, a peer most likely would not comment on that particular writing area. In my sixth observation, Sally wrote on a student's paper as she helped him. She told him, "So we've decided that we're going to start with similarities." Next, she asked him if he wanted to say "x and x" or "x and I" to which the student responded the first option was boring. Finally, Sally said, "So we've decided we're going to do it in first person" (field notes, December 10, 2014). Clearly, consistent, structured, and direct writing instruction and teacher as co-writer characterized Sally's writing pedagogy.

### **A Teacher-Writer Makes Sense of Digital Writing**

At the same time that Sally believed her teaching needed to be consistent and direct, she grappled with making sense of digital writing for herself and her students. Sally's digital composition project provided an opportunity for Sally to reveal herself as a developing digital writer to her students (Atwell, 1998; Christenbury, 2006; Kittle, 2001). She digitalized a project she had used in the past with her students: an I Am Poem, a piece in which writers share background information about themselves. She incorporated text and photos and attempted to incorporate a video, which came as a result of one of our discussions. Sally complemented the Irish flag, the Lumbee Tribe coat of arms, and personal photographs with the following written text:

I am from white,  
red, and black  
Fried chicken,  
collards, corn,  
fresh tomatoes  
Banana pudding  
and pecan pie  
Milk toast and  
potato soup

Though Sally's digital version included pictures and images, her I Am Poem, which could have easily been produced on poster board, exhibited she was still very much learning how to compose in digital spaces. The fact that she transferred the same assignment from a paper space to a digital space was further evidence that she was grappling with what digital writing afforded her and her students. As she shared both her Word and Glogster drafts of the project, her words characterized her understandings of digital writing as a whole: "I'm still playing with this. I'm still trying to figure out how this works" (field notes, November 17, 2014). Though sometimes frustrated, she wanted to try new things in digital writing spaces:

Where I was just going you know just sticking my toe into the water so now I really want to wade in good not go deep but you know over my head but I do want to see what other things there are to play with and I think I've done more in these last few months than I could have ever imagined trying different um you know I had already done Edmodo but looking into QuickTeen, looking into not QuickTeen TeenTribune uh Glogster I had seen it before but didn't what's the got to do with me? Or why do I need to do that? ... And so now I'm really interested to see what else is out there that we can play with that I think will be helpful to their learning. (personal communication, December, 2014)

She wanted her students to do more with digital tools and provided ways for her students to add multimodality to the digital versions of their compare-contrast essay by incorporating music via GarageBand, iMovie, or Storyboard. Still developing her new literacies understandings, Sally admitted new technology tools were "cool" and they provided more student options. That Sally and her students layered technologies atop traditional writing modes exhibited that she was still developing as a digital writer.

In addition, this layering revealed both Sally's lack of understanding of digital composing and, more importantly, conflict about the value of composing in digital spaces versus traditional spaces. For example, when asked about the effects the study group, Sally commented that it had helped broaden her definition of writing:

The study group made a huge difference in how I'm going to view composition. That there's just more than your traditional approach of writing. That you still have the graphic organizers which can be done on the computer because the thinking maps used to be on the computer but it's um also other ways of getting down the information other than Prezi, PowerPoint, and some of those earlier digital writing pieces. (personal communication, December, 2014).

Although she claimed that she understood composition differently and began to think about new ways of composing, her comments still suggested she believed digital tools permitted writer to engage in the same practices (e.g. graphic organizers) as pencil and paper. What I had hoped to hear was this idea that digital tools permit *new* genres rather than just enhance old ones. There were other instances in which Sally expressed tensions about the value of traditional writing versus digital writing:

As for the irony of traditional writing versus digital writing. Both are very important for my students. They need the freedom and creativity that comes with digital writing (i.e. Glogster, Edmodo) to show comprehension of material and thought. But it is through traditional methodologies that enable them to organize and process expressive written language for future success. Responses from Edmodo or Glogster will not get them into a University or land them jobs. (personal communication, February 2015)

Here, Sally articulated a certain hesitation about digital writing's usefulness to her students' future success. There also seemed this idea that students needed to be able to compose in traditional spaces in case catastrophe hit:

someday something's going to go crazy the satellite dish is going to go down and we're going to have to go back to remembering the way that it used to be, and I want them to be able to do that too" (online study group forum post)

Here, Sally privileged traditional writing practices.

Further complicating how Sally thought about digital writing versus traditional writing was her desire to be fearless and keep up with new literacies that she admitted would "be very obsolete very soon." She wanted to keep up with her students whom she described as "digital natives": "And I think because I know I have to keep up with them I have to be fearless too" (personal communication, December 2014). What arose was this idea that though she had

hesitations about digital writing, Sally also felt the need to be “fearless” in her approach to digital writing and “not necessarily [stay] ahead of the students but at least alongside of them and to teach them and to work with them on new ideas of either composing or thinking. (personal communication, December 2014). A comment she made in her second interview painted a perfect picture of the struggle Sally experienced between traditional and digital writing:

I don’t usually do much digital writing other than texting and emailing um not that I don’t consider myself capable I think I was just always hesitant I’d say touch bit anxious why would I use such things? But why not? Why not try? Why not find out what’s out there that I do? (personal communication, December, 2014)

In the same sentence, she admitted her anxieties and enthusiasm for digital writing, the latter sentiment having been attributed to taking part in the online study group. Thus, Sally’s case was a contradiction: Whereas on one hand she hesitated about digital writing’s worth as compared with traditional writing, on the other hand, she felt obligated to engage in digital writing in her writing and writing instruction.

### **Writing as “Liberating”: A Recommitment to Critical Literacy**

In many ways, Sally’s writing instruction embodied her commitment to writing as a “liberating” process. Students in Sally’s class were asked to consider their personal life situations and to react to instances of injustices. For example, she supported eighth-grade students in a combined English Language Arts-social studies social justice unit during which students wrote an essay on the topic of What does it mean to be American? and composed an iMovie about an injustice in their own live after watching *Walk Out*, a film about the 1968 East Los Angeles walkouts in protest of H.R. 4437, a bill written to make being in the country illegally felonious. In addition, Sally’s Edmodo account, which I examined from September 17, 2014, until December 10, 2014, was a space in which she engaged students in considerations of

social justice. Table 7 provides a detailed account of the dates and topics of Sally's 10 Edmodo accounts.

Table 7

*Sally's Edmodo Account Prompts*

Date	Prompt
Due September 17, 2014	What does it mean to be an American? This is brainstorming for your Definition essay due Oct 7th.
Due September 26, 2014	What are some chores you do at home? Do you get paid for them? Do you think you work hard to help your family?
Due October 1, 2014	What qualities do you think a person must have to help countries or everyday people to make peace? Do you have suggestions for solving conflicts without yelling or fighting?
Due October 15, 2014	It is rainy outside. What do you like to do on rainy days? I like to sleep in and read.
Due October 23, 2014	What are some examples that you have seen about social injustices in your life or in lives of people you know? As you watch <i>Walk Out</i> or other movies or read books on this genre, think how you would feel. What about the feelings of others?
Due October 29, 2014	What do you think of <i>Wringer</i> so far? Which is your favorite character and why? How would you feel about knowing you would have to do something you really didn't want to do, but felt as if you didn't have a choice?
Due November 5, 2014	Yesterday was voting day. Why is voting so important? As an American we have the privilege to vote- use your voice to explain.
Due November 12, 2014	As you read your books, think about how the main character feels. Would you want to be told you had to do something you did not want to do? What about those people who tell you can't accomplish something? What would you do or say to a person who doesn't feel they can achieve because they are different?
	How does the main character in your story overcome their obstacles?

---

	What are their obstacles?
Due November 19, 2014	<p>If you were creating a constitution (basic set of laws) for a new country, name the first 3 laws you would create? Which law do you think is the most important? Why do you think the whites ruled South Africa when the Africans lived there already?</p> <p>Today in 1993, South Africa adopted a new constitution. After more than 300 years of white rulership, basic civil rights (the right to vote, freedom of speech, etc.) were finally granted to black people in South Africa.</p>
Due December 10, 2014	If you were to award a peace prize to anyone in your school, whom would you choose? Give the reasons for your choice.

---

The September 17 prompt about what it means to be an American functioned as brainstorming for an upcoming essay in the English Language Arts-social studies unit on colonialism and the American Revolution. During that particular assignment, she helped a student prepare for upcoming peer review on his essay about how it is difficult for those without immigration papers to work in the United States (field notes, October 2014). Her post-observation interview provided insight into the lesson: “Quite a few asked questions relating to rights and what is an American – to them or their family. Some even thought more amendments should be made.” Here, her students were engaged in the problem-posing aspects of critical literacy (Janks, 2010; Shor, 1992) as they began to consider their positions in America. Explicit social justice pedagogy was evident in the October 23 prompt:

What are some examples that you have seen about social injustices in your life or in lives of people you know? As you watch *Walk Out* or other movies or read books on this genre, think how you would feel. What about the feelings of others?

In correlation with the movie *Walk Out*, Sally wanted students to consider both how others and they had been victims of social injustice. The November 19 prompt about why whites had power

in South Africa even though Africans lived there is accompanied by a definition of *social justice* from the Toowoomba Catholic Education Committee.

Via writing the digital I Am Poem, Sally wanted students to realize how their culture and heritage impacted them. This assignment, which might not have a social justice purpose in another teacher's classroom, emphasized the contextual nature of social justice (CEE, 2009). In observation three, the writing lesson during which Sally shared her I Am Poem, Sally told her students their purpose was to get their voice and help others find their voice. Sally discussed the connection between teaching writing and helping students find their voices:

Teaching writing does give voice .... Teaching digital writing has empowered my students far more than I thought possible. Teaching with a critical stance pushed them to think how their writing impacts themselves and others. Giving voice to those without voice is powerful. (post-observation three interview)

Here, Sally described how having students write in digital spaces became a form of empowerment (Freire & Macedo, 1987). For Sally's students, composing the digital I Am Poems became a critical literacy act and exemplified her understandings of some of the online study group's materials. Student voice and identity were components of the articles participants read as part of the study group. As she considered the students she taught, she shared they could focus less on skills deficits and "express themselves in ways that they normally can't.... I think for them that has been very liberating" (personal communication, December, 2014). Sally told me about one of her students, a selective mute:

– My students need to find their voice, their power through some form of the 'word,' unfortunately they have difficulty expressing it. My hope is through digital writing, critical, literacy, and new literacy. My selective mute, absolutely needs to find her voice she is one I think of first, then my CI students. The rest have enough attitude, they need to channel it appropriately. My point is – Digital Writing and New Literacies gives my students alternatives to the traditional approach of composing written language that best shows what they know in a form they can be comfortable with. (online study group week four forum post)

In other words, digital writing spaces freed her students from conventions privileged in traditional writing spaces, providing them an opportunity to share their voices. Digital writing empowered Sally's students: "It [digital composing] also enables the children to express themselves and present it in ways that wouldn't have thought about before. I think that's non-threatening" (personal communication, December, 2014).

Though Sally's digital writing space appeared to be already a space for social justice, Sally admitted the study group inspired her to recommit to the critical literacy pedagogies she had been exposed to in her graduate school program. Participation in the online study group reminded her of critical literacy's power:

I think it's [participation in the online study group] deepened in how I view it and how I want to teach it. And um remembering the pedagogy from when I was in grad school and bringing it back and knowing that even though it's really hard to teach to try and teach it with as much fidelity as I possibly can. And it's really hard cause how often do you get the opportunity to broach such sub- you know subjects um without it looking out of context. (personal communication, December, 2014).

Of course more time at the research site would have been needed to gauge whether Sally's direct instruction was altered due to her burgeoning ideas about the empowering nature of digital writing and her rejuvenation to enact critical literacy in her classroom.

### **Summary**

I highlighted themes that emerged via an analysis of Sally's writing and teaching: teacher as co-writer, a teacher-writer grappling with the importance of digital writing, and writing as "liberating." The context of Sally's classroom dictated that she be a co-writer with her students. As she grappled with what it meant to be a digital writer and a teacher of digital writing, she came to understand the "liberating" power of writing and digital writing in particular. This was illuminating because digital writing helped alleviate the difficulties her students had with traditional writing. Regarding the online study group, it became both a space in which Sally



reaffirmed her dedication to critical literacy and a means by which Sally was introduced to digital writing's possibilities.

## **Narrative Two – Darcy**

### **Introduction**

After teaching for a five years in a public school district, Darcy, 29, taught seventh grade and coached tennis at a private college-preparatory 6-12 school in a suburban area in the southeastern United States. Darcy was in her eighth year of teaching. I analyzed Darcy's running blog, which she had maintained for two years. Her blog showcased her firm understanding of multimodality.

The enrollment at Darcy's school was approximately seven hundred students. Though students at Darcy's school did not take the state-wide tests the public students did, they did take the Educational Records Bureau's CTP4 standardized tests and in May 2011 performed significantly higher in all tested areas than students across the nation. Built around four tenets, discovery, collaboration, innovation, and excellence, students at Darcy's school had opportunities rare at public schools: access to a faculty advisor and a daily 45-minute enrichment period to engage in advisory and club activities. Advisors and advisees eat lunch together each day, and I ate with Darcy and her advisees during my first visit to the school. Students were given much autonomy and gave the morning and lunch announcements. Darcy described her students as very bright and avid readers, admitting that meeting their intellectual needs could be challenging.

Darcy's classroom was designed in a series of tables around which four or five students sat. Darcy's desk and podium on which she set her laptop was at the front of the room. The

back of the room had two or three couches and oversized chairs that the students were allowed to use during writing or independent reading time.

Darcy's school had a one-to-one initiative, and each student had a Lenovo tablet, a blog, and a Google account. Darcy and her students had OneNote, a digital trapper keeper app, which permitted Darcy and her students to sync files. Darcy's school promoted TPACK, and Darcy was a member of the faculty technology committee that provided professional development around TPACK in the school. Darcy's laptop rested on a podium at the front of her classroom, and there was a TV in the front of the classroom on which the morning announcements came through, and she was able to project the contents of her laptop or student work samples.

Four themes emerged from an analysis of Darcy's writing and teaching practices, including the following: teacher as fellow writer, multimodal play, a nuanced TPACK understanding, and digital spaces as (in)authentic outlets.

### **A Writing Teacher: "I Didn't Really Consider Myself a Writer until Last Summer"**

Though she had written on her blog for over two years, Darcy's progression toward identifying as a writer had been a gradual one. She had gone from not writing with her students to writing with them as a classroom managerial move to valuing her role as writing teacher as one which necessitated her being a fellow writer with her students:

I think I was selling them short because I was not writing and then for a little while afraid to share what I'd written so asking them to do things that I wasn't comfortable doing or wasn't willing to do myself like writing or sharing began to realize that that was pretty unfair. (personal communication, September, 2014)

A workshop that emphasized Kelly Gallagher's work, she said, helped her realize she needed to write alongside her students. Darcy admitted that she did not identify as a writer until a Bard College training the previous summer: "I didn't really consider myself a writer until this last summer" (personal communication, September, 2014).

Darcy believed in the importance of the teacher-writer (Atwell, 1998; Christenbury, 2006; Kittle, 2001) and emphasized the importance of not just telling her students something “because it’s something that I was told to do in graduate school or undergrad for a teacher. It’s because it’s something I truly believe in” (personal communication, December, 2014). She shared her writing and writing process her students, giving her credibility when she asked them to share their writing:

I think it’s really important because if we hold these things to ourselves and we don’t ever share them then it’s really hard to get better. It’s really hard to um learn from each other. So that is something we’ll all be doing, myself included. (field notes, September 16, 2014)

During observation one, she used OneNote as a sharing space and asked her students to open up her poetry folder on their tablets. She spoke honestly to her students about her writing preferences: “There are times when I like the structure and then sometimes when I go ‘no’ don’t confine me, you’re breaking my will” (field notes, September 16, 2014). During observation two, she told her students, “I have a tendency to do long lines then I go back in and break them up.” (field notes, September 25, 2014). Darcy felt that providing her students with exemplars of her work “helped them take risks” (personal communication, September, 2014).

Darcy’s reflection on herself as a writer impacted the way she taught, and she was cognizant that the unprocessed way she wrote was different from the formulaic way she was taught to write. She admitted that she had a moment in the past when she realized “If I continued to do writing how I’d always done writing I would be teaching it like my seventh grade teacher, and I recognized back then that that was not working anymore” (personal communication, September, 2014). Her resistance of formulaic genres coupled with her multimodal play allowed students to break traditional writing rules:

Thinking back on my own instruction as a student um it was very formulaic. There was very little room for you know how do you think this should be organized? Or how to you think this should go best? Or what impact does this have on your reader? It was just nope there are three reasons and there are always three reasons. And so I try to be very careful about that with my students because no sometimes there aren't three reasons. Sometimes you have two really awesome reasons. (personal communication, September, 2014)

Her desire to teach writing in a way that was not formulaic and valued students' choices became clear throughout interviews and classroom observations. Explicit about her process and experiences as a writer, Darcy created a classroom space that encouraged students to make decisions about their writing. When asked to define *poetry* in seven words or less, she told them there were no right or wrong answers (field notes, September 16, 2014). Darcy spoke about types of poems: "Some genres are not your thing and maybe they will be later and maybe they just aren't and that's okay, too" (field notes, September 16, 2014). Here, she gave her students autonomy and choices; they got to decide which poetic forms they liked best. Toward the end of the lesson, Darcy provided students with a topic about which they could write, but it was no surprise that students could write about something totally different too (field notes, September 16, 2014). When one student asked whether there was a required length for the poem, there was none (field notes, September 16, 2014). This idea of student choice was also reflected in my second observation of Darcy. Discussing line breaks and stanzas, she told students:

This is your call. It's not like a paragraph where there are some certain rules and certain things that you have to have included. No this there is little bit more flexibility with a stanza. It is your call because however long or short that is you're creating meaning by how the length that you want it to be. (field notes, September 25, 2014)

In her post-observation three interview, she wrote, "You can only model so much before students have to test the waters." During observation three, Darcy made explicit advice to a student writer: "I would put..." (field notes, October 28, 2014). This was one of the only instances I

heard Darcy give explicit writing advice to one of her students. Though Darcy sometimes required line lengths or page limits, for the most part, students made their decisions.

In her introductory online study group post, she wrote, “As a writer, I don’t often think ‘process’; I just write.” She wanted her student writers to make their decisions: “I want my kids to own their writing and begin making decisions on their own” (post-observation one interview). This sentiment returned when she discussed conferencing with her students, the aspect of writing instruction she enjoyed the most. She talked about the editing chairs she and her students sat in during the conferencing process:

I have two like computer chairs they’re comfortable and we pull them up to the front table. And we call those the editing chairs and not just the teacher gets one but both editors. Cause we are both in this together. Um I was like you know this is your chance to ask me questions and you know what place, in particular, would you like me to focus on and you know trying to give them that ownership too it’s not just what I’m telling you cause I’m not the final authority on this. (personal communication, September, 2014).

In these conversations with students, Darcy positioned herself not as a writer teacher telling students what they must do but rather a fellow writer making suggestions.

As a fellow writer, Darcy was able to help her students understand the authentic reasons one would write. She talked about how one of the poems she wrote was about her childhood friend who was diagnosed with cancer. She shared this poem with her students for two reasons: She wanted to model a poem exemplar and to stress the authentic reasons people write. Darcy told me she wanted students to think beyond a grade: “It was neat to have them see like the poetry isn’t just about a grade sometimes it is to help you process or you know remember certain things or pay homage to something” (personal communication, September, 2014).

Students in Darcy’s writing classroom had sustained class time to write within forty-seven-minute periods. She even joked about pushing the freewriting time longer than the planned five minutes. Her assertion in our first interview that her students did “writing pretty

much every day” (personal communication, September, 2014) was confirmed by lesson observations. Students had fifteen minutes for writing and revising poems in observation two (field notes, September 25, 2014). In observations one, two, and three, students had at least 10 minutes to write during each class period. In the final observation, during which students were writing a critique of an experience they had, thirty-one minutes of class time was set aside for writing. For her students, Darcy was “a *mentor* of writing, a *mediator* of writing strategies, and a *model* of a writer at work” (Atwell, 1998, p. 21).

### **Multimodal Play: “The Intersection between Graphics and Words”**

Darcy’s understanding of composing in digital spaces centered on her understanding of and experimentation with multimodality. Darcy’s case was reminiscent of the multimodal awareness teachers in Rodesiler’s (2014) case study exhibited. In our first interview, she said, “I enjoy seeing the intersection between graphics and words” (personal communication, September, 2014). In the introductory forum post for the online study group, participants could compose in any media and post their response to the forum post. Darcy composed a multimodal video introduction in which she included personal photographs, a screenshot of her blog, and a voiceover:

I like seeing how they can take that and just expand it on traditional writing so when they have a journal in front of the what can they do and how can they complement that with digital writing with image with font with creation of mood with audio.... (online study group week one introductory forum video)

This multimodal introduction demonstrated the complementary nature of font, image, and audio about which she spoke in the video. She explained how she viewed multimodal effects as a type of language:

I think the ability to have a visual piece um and like I said whether that’s just the font or whether it’s moving graphics or um the layout it can really impact the reader and the tone um and the audience also that you’re trying to get so I’ve played with that a lot just

for fun because it's taught me more about um I won't say web design cause I'm by no stretch good I don't know HTML or anything of that nature but the ability to get in there and create those things is [unt] language all on its own. (personal communication, September, 2014).

The fact she wrote digitally for personal reasons set Darcy apart from the other participants. I analyzed Darcy's running blog from September 8, 2014, to December 7, 2014.

Table 8 provides the dates, topics, and text types of Darcy's blog posts.

Table 8

Darcy's Blog Topics

Date	Topic(s)	Text Types
September 8	Yoga and Breathing	Text
September 14	A four-mile race	Text and map
September 20	Personal best time	Text
September 26	Workout that correlated to <i>Scandal</i>	Visual of workout
October 5	Overcoming a hard race	Text and two photographs
October 12	Sister's wedding	Text
October 22	A four-mile run	Text
October 28	Upcoming political race, running	Text
October 30 November 2	Pride in running 10K race	Text Text, three photographs, running quote
November 22	Making time for running	Text
December 2	Thanksgiving race and what she's thankful for	Text, list, photograph

December 2	Running for charity	Text, link to charity site
------------	---------------------	----------------------------

December 7	Running	Text, photograph
------------	---------	------------------

---

The blog's central focus was to share her experiences as a runner; however, some posts were about other topics, including yoga, family events, holidays, and upcoming state senate elections. Central to Darcy's blogging was this idea that she could connect with people; Darcy enjoyed the accessibility aspect of writing in a digital space: "I think the digital component has made the ability to share and connect so much better" (personal communication, September, 2014). Six of Darcy's fourteen posts in the data analysis period included text other than written text. In addition to words, she included original photography, a link to a charity site, a visual of a workout that correlated with the show *Scandal*, amongst other texts. Darcy also switched platforms to WordPress from Blogger in November for a variety of reasons: its interface, plugins, writing community, and ability to control blog's appearance. Even this decision exhibited her impressive knowledge of digital composing.

Darcy's multimodal awareness was reflected in her teaching, as Darcy valued both digital and traditional writing equally; she did not feel, as some English teachers do, that digital writing was not real writing (Hundley & Holbrook, 2013; Turner & Hicks, 2011-2012). Though she co-planned many of her assignments with a colleague, it was no surprise when Darcy named all of the multimodal assignments her students composed: digital poetry compilation with voice recordings; films with musical scores; and independent reading projects in which they could use Spotify, Adobe Premier, or screencasting. She discussed how she and her colleague helped students understand how music and images "should intersect" (personal communication, September, 2014). It was evident that Darcy's beliefs about technology translated into her practice (Bai & Ertmer, 2008; Kopcha, 2012; Swenson et al., 2005). Thus, even before the



online study group began, Darcy possessed a heightened awareness of the multimodal affordances of new literacies (Coiro et al., 2009; Lauer, 2009; Selfe & Selfe, 2009; Swenson et al., 2005). She even admitted feeling that the Miller (2007) article we read in the online study group was past its time, explaining she believed teachers were fairly comfortable incorporating technology into English Language Arts instruction.

### **Nuanced TPACK Awareness: “We’re a Lot of Open and Close Today”**

In Darcy’s classroom, technology was not used because of its cool factor or to layer on top of a traditional assignment. Rather, Darcy’s pedagogy revealed her firm understanding of TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Observations and interviews revealed she was conscious of how technology was incorporated into her classroom and how her students use technology to compose. Reviewed early on in the online study group, TPACK was alive in Darcy’s classroom: “TPACK runs through the heart of technology integration at my school. It was one of the first professional development topics I was given, and it was surprising how quickly I drank the TPACK Kool-Aid. It just makes sense” (online study group week two forum post). It was evident that Darcy did not need the online study group’s TPACK lesson.

Darcy was intentional in her decisions to have students use or not use technology. Her decision was based upon if the technology would enhance her students’ writing. She integrated technology when she felt it would benefit students’ writing. Conversely, she had them use pen and paper when she felt that was best. Students used their tablets in each of my observations. In the introductory to poetry lesson, Darcy had her students open and close their tablets several times during the lesson. “We’re a lot of open and close today but I’m okay with that,” she told them (field notes, September 16, 2014). She expressed she liked that her students could email her a poem and then she could project it on the TV screen, the links she could send her students,

and the live syncing aspect of OneNote. However, she stated her and her colleague had incorporated more handwriting in paper-based journals this year because they noticed “a certain level of commitment [in journals] like you’ll see the thinking about a word more than they do on the tablet” (personal communication, September, 2014).

Though she admitted to being on board with TPACK, Darcy also admitted technology could be both a “help and a hindrance” (personal communication, September, 2014). Darcy constantly thought about whether the technology would help the lesson or would not contribute anything of substance, thus hindering the lesson. This constant reflection could be frustrating, which she exhibited after her first observation: “I always struggle with how to incorporate the tablet in a lesson like this. Too much, too little” (post-observation one interview). Darcy’s commitment to using technology in the English Language Arts classroom and her constant reflection on when to not use technology revealed Darcy’s nuanced understandings of TPACK. Though she acknowledged collegial constraints and other commitments as the reasons she dropped out of the online study group around week three, I wondered whether the online study group’s focus on new literacies and TPACK in the first weeks seemed too much of a review for Darcy to commit to remaining in the online study group.

**Digital Spaces as (In)Authentic Outlets:  
“Those With Little Perceived Power Can Make a Difference with their Words”**

Darcy understood the power digital spaces afforded her and her students. During one observation during which Darcy was teaching poetry, Darcy reflected, “their powerful language [can] get lost in the middle of lines” (field notes, September 25, 2014). It was interesting, then, how important making sure her students had their voice in the writing classroom became in Darcy’s classroom. Just as Darcy’s blog provide a voice to Darcy, so too did she want to provide her students with the same.

Darcy's blog was an outlet for her, and she designed it during a time when she had several challenging events in her life, including a sick relative and a move. Darcy commented about how writing became a release:

My father was sick, my fiancé's father was sick and we were you know I just felt like I needed an outlet so running became that and then writing about the running then the writing kind of expanded to include much more than that so um for me writing has become um a way to process a lot of things that are going on so whether it's um you know just a realization that I come to when I run or the intersection of what I do here at work and um you know my uh you like my coaching. Like is said a lot of it just flows together it's a way to think on paper. (personal conversation, September, 2014)

Darcy's blog became a place where she represented her thoughts in words and pictures. She considered the connection between new literacies texts and authenticity: "'Twitteracy' [part of the title of an article] hits at the heart of what new literacy is beginning to mean for me: writing with authentic audience, purpose, and connection" (online study group week two forum).

Understandings of new literacies' social nature (Street, 1995) and broadened, authentic audiences (Selfe & Selfe, 2009; Vasquez et al., 2014) were key components to the online study group, and in our final interview, Darcy spoke about how the online study group helped her think about authenticity on her blog (personal communication, December, 2014). She revealed wanting to share authentic information on her blog:

I want it to be something that is authentic from my experience and hopefully not just from my experience but if I'm reading things and say well I heard this or I read this that it's something that is accurate. You know not just passing along bad information. (personal communication, December, 2014)

One of the questions she had for the other participants in her multimodal video introduction to the course: "How do you create authentic critical literacy opportunities for your students? Really emphasizing authentic there." In sum, Darcy understood her blog as an authentic outlet, and, because of this, one in which she had to consider the importance of audience.

This idea of having students having authentic outlets for their writing was evident in my fourth observation in which students were drafting critiques. At the beginning of the lesson, Darcy shared a Bill Mahr quote about the importance of critique and pointing out flaws. Darcy added the following questions after the quote: “What role do you think being critical plays in our lives? Is critique necessary for growth?” (field notes, December 10, 2014). After a discussion of these questions, Darcy reminded her students “your words have power” (field notes, December 10, 2014). Their assignment was to write a one-page critique of something they experienced over Thanksgiving break. She provided some examples of experiences they could critique: games, books, movies, plays, concerts, hotels, resorts, and airports. Darcy was pleased with her students’ work in these reviews: “These were probably some of the best pieces students turned out so far this year. I don’t credit my instruction so much as their buy-in to the authenticity of the project” (post-observation four interview). I would remiss if I did not reiterate that Darcy dropped out of the online study group after the third week, the week we looked into digital writing and critical literacy, and that her students had been writing critiques each year in order to blend fact and opinion. Nevertheless, the critique genre did get at one of the central elements of the online study group’s lesson about critical literacy: student writers’ voices matter.

This is not to say, however, that Darcy was able to articulate fully what critical literacy meant before or after the study group, though analysis of Darcy’s understandings of critical literacy revealed that her understanding of critical literacy was developing. During our first interview, I asked Darcy what *critical literacy* mean to her. She responded, “I honestly don’t know” (personal communication, September, 2014). Her post-observation one interview indicated that she was still having difficulty with the term: “Still not quite sure on the critical stance.” Her second interview revealed a more developed response:

I would say that that [new literacies] transitions into the critical literacy for me a little bit... Yeah, so kind of the ability to um not just find it but to analyze it and to say is this what I need? Is this relevant? Is this important? Is this just filler? Um and you know so some of what I said I still stand by it but the new literacies like the ability to find it, the access to information I guess um is part of that new literacy. And the analyzing of it would be kind of the shift into the critical literacy. Man I like that answer. (personal communication, December, 2014)

Here, the analysis seemed important to her understanding of critical literacy. She also equated this idea of thinking about the underlying themes in what one's reading as critical literacy at a point in the online study group. As she continued to speak in our second interview, she keyed in on ideas of underlying, deeper levels; awareness; and analysis:

I don't think I knew what it was without knowing what it was. Like you know as a in [unt] when we talked about it and you asked and I was like I don't think I know what that is but I think I've got the concept that you have to be you have to know that there's um there's more going on in what you're reading and what you know what are the messages what are you know what may be the um the underlying themes or whatever what's going on a deeper level with what you're reading. And being about to discern that, working it out but I didn't know the same. So I think my definition is still the same but now that having an awareness of it is helpful because before I pretty much [unt] critical I didn't even really know what that you knew you wanted them to read deeper but what does that really mean so just saying I want you to be critical means I want you to look at why you know why is this important is this relevant to your purpose and so you can kind of have them hone in on for what critical means for this particular day and time and assignment. So it kind of focuses on um whatever that critical skill is um how do you need to analyze this particular time. (personal communication, December, 2014)

Here, Darcy expressed her students and she may have been engaging in practices in line without critical literacy without knowing the term *critical literacy*. She emphasized this idea that critical literacy stresses unpacking a text, looking beyond surface-level structures for, and interrogating a text for its embedded meaning. For Darcy, then, the study group helped her name a practice with which she was already familiar.

Though Darcy was able to articulate concepts dealing with critical literacy, including analysis on a deeper level and awareness, she did not define *critical literacy* explicitly. After her fourth observation, she commented the lesson could have more of a critical literacy component

had “students looked at the impact of critique and this genre in their own lives” (post-observation four interview). Darcy’s developing understanding suggested critical literacy is not only a concept that is difficult to define but one that must be learned as part of a developmental process (Glazier, 2007).

Regardless of the ways in which *critical literacy* proved complex for Darcy, she wanted her students to have a real audience for their critiques, just as she did for the restaurant and shoe reviews she mentioned she wrote on real sites. She acknowledged critiques could help “those with little perceived power can make a difference with their words” (post-observation four interview). However, Darcy’s school banned the social sites on which she wanted students to publish their critiques. This seemed to run counter to the school’s TPACK initiative and exemplified how administrators are capable of hindering teachers’ technology integration (Hew & Brush, 2007, p. 228). Even so, Darcy demonstrated her understanding of the importance of sharing one’s voice in an authentic space.

### **Summary**

In sum, Darcy’s nuanced understanding of digital composing, especially her awareness of multimodality and the needs and desires that she had as a blogger, translated into her teaching. Because Darcy valued time to compose and making choices, her students received the same. Her students had ample classroom time dedicated to writing – a facet that set Darcy apart from the other participants. Finally, Darcy’s TPACK awareness and understandings of new literacies – present before the online study group - permitted her students to be engaged in a variety of non-digital and digital writing assignments. And though Darcy mentioned ideas about the power of words, her understandings of critical literacy were still developing. Of course, I would have

liked to see what type of final text composition project Darcy would have composed had she remained in the online study group.

### **Narrative Three – Nancy**

#### **Introduction**

A teacher for over thirty years, Nancy, 57, thought she wanted to be a journalist after she graduated college. She still continued to write for a local print magazine. A digital writer for seven years, Nancy had maintained a Twitter account for four years and composed weekly posts on her class Haiku page, which she had done for two years. The administrators at Nancy's school encouraged faculty members to maintain professional Twitter accounts and Nancy wanted to learn how to use better her Twitter (personal communication, September, 2014).

Nancy taught sixth-grade composition and social studies at an independent Episcopal day school in a midsize, urban city in the southeastern United States. Serving approximately 167 students, the middle school at Nancy's private school catered to the Common Core standards because many students went on to public high schools. Founded on Episcopalian tenets, the school required students to attend chapel three times a week. Nancy taught two periods of composition. She stated that eleven of her thirty-eight students had special learning needs, some of which included ADHD, auditory processing disorder, non-specific learning differences, dysgraphia, dyslexia, and speech challenges. A few of her students received pull-out special assistance. As part of a foreign exchange program, Nancy hosted two Korean students, who received English as a Second Language services.

Nancy's classroom was set up in tables of four to five desks. Sometimes there were three single desks at which students sat separately. There was also a separate table toward the back of the room around which students sat during group activities. Nancy's desk was in the back left

corner of the classroom. The SMART Board screen projected away from Nancy's desk, and the whiteboard was positioned at a ninety-degree angle to the SMART Board. Nancy's desk and laptop were in the back left of the classroom. Students and teachers had access to Nancy's Haiku page on which to would post assignments, sample student work, and assignment guidelines.

During the research study, Nancy's students were transitioning from having a Mac laptop cart in the back of the classroom to receiving iPads as part of the school's one-to-one initiative. Though Nancy was pleased with her school's decision to purchase iPads for sixth graders – a much better situation, she said, than reserving the computer lab or cart – the one-to-one initiative was not sans challenges: Not only did connectively and bandwidth issues plague the school at the beginning of the research study, but the iPads protective cases made it hard for her students to compose. In addition, the iPad external keyboards had to be returned during the research study because they were not functioning properly.

Four themes emerged from an analysis of Nancy's teaching and writing: considerations of safety, a movement toward the original, digital writing as problem-solving, and considerations of multiple perspectives.

### **Considerations of Safety: "I ... Try to be Cautious"**

Nancy was committed to being a writer alongside her students: "I try to write with my students everyday cause that's part of the workshop approach. And I basically hold myself to the same expectations of honest writing. I write whatever they're writing" (personal communication, September, 2014). I enjoyed hearing about the articles for publication (as of yet unpublished) and the creative writing pieces Nancy loved to write. What was unique about Nancy's case was though she very much identified as a writer, especially a creative writer, she



struggled to find her voice as a digital writer. And one reason for this, I believe, was her apprehensions about safety in online spaces.

Apprehension about safety permeated Nancy's thoughts about composing in online spaces. Nancy expressed her concerns about safety during our first interview:

I've been uh in the last few years somewhat more cautious about privacy cause some teachers as we now know have gotten into trouble with expressing themselves online. The privacy concerns me still but you know we're out there. Genie's out of the bottle. (personal communication, September, 2014)

She worried about sharing too much of herself online: "I do worry about tweeting anything too personal or political.... At this late date in my career, I doubt I can do much harm, but I value my online reputation and try to be cautious" (online study group week two forum post).

Solomon's (2011) National Public Radio article validated Nancy's concerns about posting on social media sites: "In some cases, teachers have been fired for statements they've made on Facebook, which is raising free speech issues." Similarly, Whitney et al.'s (2012) work with teachers writing for professional journals found teachers feared administrators' reactions to their curriculum critiques or teaching strategies.

It was no surprise when I noticed Nancy's concerns about her safety in online spaces transferred to her teaching. She talked about one of the reasons she selected BiblioNasium as the site for her students to read and respond to books they were reading: "That's a nice safe space that's very well monitored" (personal communications, September, 2014). As she spoke about student safety, Nancy said, "We've been [sic] quite the constant battle with phones, Smartphones. Kids just texting each other, so I'd love to come out of this with some better ideas about how to keep them safe .... Safe is very important to me" (personal communication, September, 2014).

Though admittedly, classroom management (Hew & Brush, 2007; Pasternak, 2007; Pope & Golub, 2000; Yurdakul, Odabasi, Kilicer, Coklar, Birinici, & Kurt, 2012) and considerations of the iPads' bulky protective cases and faulty external keypads were contributors to lack of robust technology integration, I also believe Nancy's resistance to digital tools during her lessons may have been motivated by her concerns about safety. In some instances, Nancy viewed technology as a space of distraction. She said that she often had to walk around during lessons to prevent students from taking selfies with their iPads (personal communication, September, 2014). In observation two, Nancy often asked her students to put their iPads away "so it won't be a distraction" (field notes, October 6, 2014). At the beginning of observation three, Nancy asked her students to put their iPads away "so they will not become a distraction" (field notes, October 29, 2014). This perception of technology as a space of distraction, which might have connected to this idea of safety in online spaces, led to the technology being an ignored space in some instances.

This idea of keeping kids safe, then, translated into an avoidance of students' out-of-school literacy practices in her classroom. Significant, however, was that Nancy shifted a bit in her final interview. Instead of resisting students' devices, she wanted to know how to use them effectively:

For example, we had this big discussion about Snapchat this morning. Well Snapchat can be abused but I'm thinking how can we tap into what they really love to do? Snapchat's great for that. I use Snapchat I'm using it only personally for silly little things now. But couldn't we you know think about things differently and maybe tap into those things so I don't think Twitter's a good place for sixth graders, but it might be an okay thing for frankly kids who are already using things like that. Um and it changes all the time. ... I think we need some tech support that's a little bit more youthful, more aware of what the kids are really using and doing. And that's just my opinion. I think things change constantly, and we have to stay on top of it instead of just saying no, don't do it. (personal communication, December, 2014)

Though she admitted the importance of incorporating students' literacy practices more into the classroom here, she balked when students asked her if they could create fake Instagram accounts for their heroes (post-observation five interview). Despite her assertions about letting her students' out-of-school literacies into the classroom, Nancy's concerns for safety in online digital spaces conflicted with her desire to incorporate students' literacy practices into the classroom. In a follow-up interview, Nancy admitted to having her students use code to compose animated stories for the elementary students at their school. This would be she said "a safe audience, but the project requires my students to consider them [elementary students] as they compose their stories" (personal communication, February, 2015). Nancy appeared to be moving toward expanding her students' audiences – in safe spaces, of course. As Nancy's case illuminated, a teacher's beliefs (Ertmer, 2005) about technologies' contributions – or lack thereof - to the writing classroom impact pedagogies. In other words, Nancy's beliefs about the danger that awaited both her and her students in digital writing spaces impacted both her writing and the technology integration in her classroom.

### **A Movement toward the Original**

Despite her safety concerns, Nancy did appear to gain more of the *how* of technology knowledge about which Mishra and Koehler (2006) spoke. This, of course, is "the knowledge about standard technologies, such as books, chalk, and blackboard, and more advanced technologies, such as the Internet and digital video. This involves the skills required to operate particular technologies" (p. 1027). She also appeared to be gaining the *ethos stuff* of new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). I examined both her Haiku page and Twitter feed from September 10, 2014, to December 10, 2014. Nancy updated her class Haiku page weekly, which had her picture and a brief biography. Her pages provided information for students and links to

student work or assignments. Parents and students were the intended audience for her Haiku page. A typical weekly Haiku page is shown in Table 9. Though it was embedded into her Haiku page, other professional educators rather than parents and students were the audience of her Twitter account. She tweeted rather irregularly, sometimes more than once a day and sometimes over a week went by between tweets. Table 10 provides dates, topics, and text types for Nancy's tweets. And though I analyzed both her Haiku page and Twitter page, it is Nancy's Twitter feed on which I noticed a movement toward original content and will, therefore, be the focus of this section.

Table 9

*Nancy's Haiku Posts*

---

WEEK OF OCTOBER 20 - OCTOBER 23

**Monday, October 20:** IR due by 8:00. Please hand in using BiblioNasium. We'll do a notebook entry, then spend the rest of the period reading and reviewing *The Giver*, chapters 6-10. You'll have a quiz on chapters 6-10 tomorrow. After reviewing chapters 6-10, you'll be able to read and review these chapters in class. Homework: IR and reading *The Giver* if not finished in class or if you have been absent. Make sure you have completed chapters 6-10.

Study Guide for chapters 6-10: [The Giver Ch 6-10.docx](#)

**Tuesday, October 21:** Quiz on *The Giver*, chapters 6-10. (20 multiple choice/true-false items) followed by reading through ch. 11. We'll also start the "My Perfect World" project. Homework: IR

**Wednesday, October 22:** We'll have the first book presentation today. [student name] You'll use your writing notebook to guide you as you write a rough draft of the "Memories Matter" paper. Here's a link to a site with example book presentations:

<http://mcyawikispaces.com/Digital+Book+Reports>

Homework: IR

**Thursday, October 23:** Library will be on a "need to go" basis. [student name] and [student name] will do their book presentation in 6.2 and [student name] and [student name] will present in 6.1. We'll be working on the "My Perfect World" project. Homework: IR

No school on Friday, October 24 but you will be expected to do your regular reading assignment.

**Use this link to get to *The Giver* quiz on chapters 6-10. You may only take this quiz once for credit. Please provide your first name and last name initial when you sign in. Example: John B. or Caroline F.**

<http://www.quia.com/quiz/2753424.html>

Here's a link to all you need to know about the book presentations due at the end of each trimester:

[Book Talk Assignment and Rubric 1 -1.doc](#)

Book Presentations

**Enjoy these book presentations by your classmates.**

[Student's name]'s book presentation [Book presi.gslides](#)

[Student's name]'s book presentation [Presentation 2.key](#)

---

Table 10

*Nancy's Tweets*

Date	Subject of Tweet	Nature of Text(s)
September 13	Article about Steve Jobs	Tweet from <i>New York Times</i> site
September 17	Winning a free ticket to <i>The Giver</i>	Retweet from Walden Media
September 18	Greek festival	Retweet from another Twitter account
September 18	Greek festival	Original text, hash tag
September 24	Schools visiting campus	Retweet from colleague
September 24	<i>The Giver</i> viewing contest	Retweet from Walden Media with picture
September 18	Greek festival	Retweet from other Twitter member
September 18	Greek festival	Original text, festival hash tag
October 8	Ancient history	Tweet from NPR website
October 10	<i>I Am Malala</i>	Original tweet, link to <i>Washington Post</i> article
October 10	Malala wins Nobel Prize	Retweet from Edutopia with picture
October 25	Teachers treated as football starts	Tweet from non-profit organization
October 25	What a teacher learned from going to class	Tweet from <i>Washington Post</i>
October 25	Tips for divorced parents	Retweet from my Twitter account
October 28	You YouTube video of <i>The Big Bang Theory</i> and grammar	Retweet from another Twitter user with YouTube video

October 29	Time reading	Retweet from another Twitter user with graphic
November 1	Ancient European DNA	Article from <i>New York Times</i>
November 2	Fix for ADHD	Article from <i>New York Times</i>
November 4	Americans and African geography	Article from <i>Slate</i>
December 6	Boys meaner than girls	Article from <i>Time</i>
December 10	Coding exercise	Original text, original hash tags, original photograph
December 10	Student leaving	Original text, original photograph

Coming from news outlets such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, organizational websites, and other Twitter users, most of Nancy's early tweets were characterized by the intent to save or catalog information or articles relevant to her professional or personal life. For example, as both an English and social studies teacher, her retweet of the article about African geography on November 4 was relevant to her. Another retweet contained information on the value of reading volume. In many ways, her Twitter feed read much like a have-read list – especially early on in the online study group. Characterized by passive rather than active tweeting, she retweeted articles or others' tweets. However, as the online study group progressed, she began to post original content. Her posts made a turn from retweeting and posting news article in early tweets to tweeting about what was happening in her classroom and including original hashtags and pictures in her final tweet.

Nancy's move toward the original was evidenced in the way she spoke about her Twitter account before and after the online student group:

I struggle to find material for blogs and tweets that seem worthy of anyone's time. I use Twitter professionally -- mostly at the urging of my school's administrators. (online study group week two forum)

As for the photos in the tweets -- I'm definitely working on making my tweets more personal, while attempting to stay professional, of course. I've gained some confidence in my ability to do both, perhaps through your fine example and encouragement in the study group. I'm always on the lookout for photo ops with my students these days (personal communication, February, 2015).

Thus, as the study group progressed Nancy's Tweets became more active than passive as she projected her thoughts rather than repurposing others' ideas. Of course, there could be multiple reasons for this movement toward the original. One, Nancy followed me and others on Twitter and may have modeled some of these tweeting practices. In our second interview she said, "when I see what other people are Tweeting you know that's been helpful. I'm of course following you and getting lots of ideas" (personal communication, December, 2014). Second, it could point to the fact that establishing one's voice in digital writing spaces is a developmental process. Nancy had a writing goal to be more effective on Twitter, watched and modeled other Twitter writers, and began to be more original in her posts. She revealed that she understood how to be professional and safe on her Twitter feed and that I had modeled the ways she could use Twitter as an educator (personal communication, February, 2015). It became evident that participation in the online study group and trying out the moves people she was following, including me, made on Twitter were, if not the sole factors, at least contributing factors to Nancy's progression toward original Twitter content. She moved toward "struggle[ing] to find material for ... tweets that seem worthy of anyone's time" to "gain[ing] some confidence ... and [being] always on the lookout for photo ops ..." (online study group week two forum; personal communication, February, 2015). This is, of course, significant because the new literacies



understandings and practices Nancy was beginning to exhibit on Twitter may translate into pedagogical practice.

### **Digital Writing as Problem-Solving: “Think of Problems you want ... Resolved”**

The aspect of critical literacy on which Nancy focused was problem-solving, which was a component shared with participants in the online study group via readings. It was intriguing that during the timeline of the online study group, Nancy was taking a critical stance with her administration who wanted to move forward with a top-down curriculum plan without listening to teachers’ opinions. Nancy adapted a ReadWriteThink lesson about heroes for her final digital writing assignment PowerPoint in which she modified Dave Barry’s Captain Tidy. Captain Tidy is a character who encourages people to take care of the environment, to showcase a modern-day hero addressing the problem of littering. She acknowledged that the humorous character Dave Barry created “would not likely be considered a hero in the classical sense” (week five online study group). As the following excerpts revealed, Nancy’s understanding of critical literacy adapted throughout the online study group. In our first interview, she said

Critical literacy was the piece that um . you know I think I know what it means and course I’ve looked online and looked at what people were thinking about critical literacy but it’s a squishy term I think. You know you start with the root of it being critical in the sense of looking with an educated and uh . I guess discerning eye at um what’s out there whatever that might be. And then the other piece of it is action from yourself critical in the sense of knowing what’s a must do a must have the skills you must be able to uh carry out to be to perform you know adequately as a communicator. (personal communication, September, 20140)

In our post-online study group interview, however, Sally’s understanding of critical literacy had evolved to include the idea of valuing multiple perspectives:


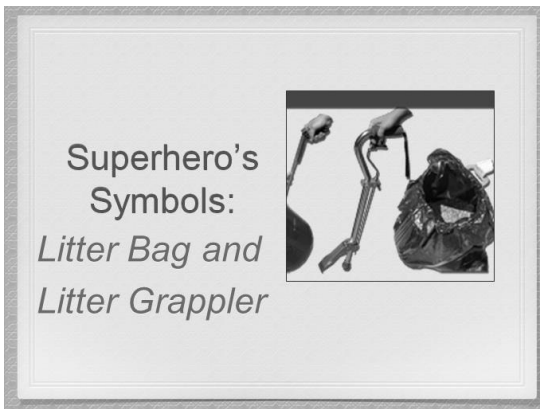
What I wanted to do was to come at critical literacy trying to get them to think of the small acts of heroes of all types how some of the things probably that they did get however rowdy they were about getting there thinking about how it is in the perspective of the beholder, the eye of the beholder, the perspective of the person who’s viewing the act and how heroism does not have a single definition. Heroes aren’t all one color, all

one gender, all one anything. And uh that was how it was basically informed. (personal communication, December, 2014)

This idea of multiple perspectives related to the idea of creating a hero to solve a problem because she wanted her students to produce a counter narrative to the stereotypical classical hero as a heterosexual male (Behrman, 2006). Multimodal in nature, her PowerPoint included text and images, Nancy showcased Captain Tidy's super power, symbols, personality, catchphrase, enemies, weaknesses, and advice. Interestingly, however, Captain Tide was a white male. Table 11 showcases three of Nancy's slides.

Table 11

*Nancy's Slides*

Slide Number	Graphic
1	
Slide 7	



---

Nancy shared her mentor text with her students in observation four. In this lesson, she challenged students to “think of problems you want to be resolved and how a hero might be able to help.” (field notes, December 4, 2014). Like some of the other participants, Nancy’s digital text was an adaption of something she had done in previous years, but instead of having students nominate real life heroes, which she said had resulted in students nominating NFL stars and celebrities, she wanted students to create a hero that enabled “them to think about real problems” (personal communication, December, 2014). Here, she moved toward this idea of problem-posing: “Freire’s model of problem-posing education is precisely a pedagogy for moving from naïve to increasingly critical consciousness” (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993, p. 42). Nancy emphasized helping students identify problems they would face in their world: “cyber-bullying, tropical diseases, climate change, etc.” (post-observation four interview). Janks (2010) wrote, “problem posing is the first step in action for freedom” (p. 14). But whereas Nancy’s assignment required students to create heroes that solved problems, her students did not create digital texts that would reach real audiences and encourage social action, for example, a podcast broadcast to the school to encourage recycling. Perhaps Nancy’s considerations of safety and her adapting understandings of digital writing with a critical stance prevented her and her

students from creating projects that aimed to solve real-world problems in authentic digital writing spaces for a real audience.

When asked to reflect on her final project for the online study group, Nancy revealed that composing a digital text with a critical stance had been more challenging than she thought. Equally as challenging, she thought, was helping students develop critical stances without leading them too much:

I think focusing on composing a digital writing lesson with a critical stance was far more difficult than I imaged it would be when I began. I want my students to observe the absence of women in any meaningful heroic roles in any of the words works we'll examine, to see that certain groups are marginalized in *The Hobbit* and *The Odyssey*, and to note that the modern hero in Dave Berry's humor piece would not likely be considered a hero in the classical sense. Of course, I don't want to lead them to this place; I'd like to see them get there on their own. (online study group week five forum post)

Paradoxically, a teacher with an evolving understanding of critical literacy worried about imposing her views on students. Nevertheless, as exemplified by the digital text Nancy and her students completed, digital writing with a critical stance in Nancy's classroom became – even without an authentic audience - a method by which to engage in problem-posing.

### **Considering Multiple Perspectives: “What Happened to these Voices?”**

Nancy's understandings of critical literacy reflected considerations of multiple perspectives – both in her writing and her teaching. Considering multiple perspectives was one of the ideas about critical literacy shared in the online study group. For example, we read Behrman's (2006) article about critical literacy practices, one of which was introducing students to perspectives that are not always included in textbooks. A teacher who includes multiple perspectives as part of his or her teaching brings in various people's thoughts on a particular issue so as to expose students to multiple perspectives on the same topic.

After the online study group, Nancy took the elements of critical literacy, particularly the element of multiple perspectives, personally:

And I came to it after the study or during the study more on a practical level thinking about it as a sixth grade teacher and as a middle-aged person a white person uh woman heterosexual how the term nowadays I don't think you have to be an English major to think about critical literacy. I think you have to think about it more on a day to day basis you know. Uh what are we doing? What are we teaching? Why are we making these choices? Why are these people represented? What happened to these voices? So definitely grown in that sense. (personal communication, December, 2014)

This idea of “interrogating multiple viewpoints” (Beck, 2005, p. 396) applied to Nancy's writing. When asked about how new literacies have altered her as a writer, Nancy spoke about the broadening audiences of digital writing: “The ability to have an audience right away. That's incredible. Because as an older person I mean I developed as a writer when there was no audience” (personal communication, December, 2014). As she considered the audience of her digital writing on her Haiku page, she reflected about the lack of perspectives in her Haiku page's introductory post:

As a writer, I think it pushes me to think about my audience a lot more than I ever did. I have to think about the audience beyond middle-class white person, middle-class educated person, middle-class American, middle-class woman and look at what somebody from a different background would think about what I would have to say and also to think beyond my message and try to think about the audience and how it would receive my message uh just depending on how I present it, what images I chose, my selecting for example. I looked back to my PowToon I used to introduce myself to the class I said oh my God I have all little white kid images. I didn't pay for the um the one that allows to have diversity, but it would have been I mean it's not a great production anyway, but you know you look and see little blonde kids I mean how's my class my fairly somewhat diverse for an independent school in Greensboro going to feel about seeing all blonde hair blue-eyed kids bouncing around in the PowToon? (personal communication, December, 2014)

Clearly, one of Nancy's key takeaways from a study of critical literacy was its emphasis on perspective. She realized her Haiku page showcased a certain population but ignored others.

Though not explicitly related to Nancy's writing or instruction, participation in the online

study group encouraged her to reconsider the texts her students read:

I think one of the biggest things I'm so totally embarrassed to say that the text that we have in our curriculum including *The Hobbit*, *The Giver*, I mean they're all about just pretty much white people or let's face it even though *The Hobbit* is not a person technically it's you know a little British character. The whole book's just a bunch of white Brits. Um *The Giver* basically is very middle classy, white even though they supposedly don't see color there's no sense of anybody going I mean that's part of the theme of the book. But basically it's you know it doesn't push the kids at all. *A Wrinkle in Time*, which has been in our curriculum forever, you know it's exactly the same thing. The values are even though I can ask questions and try to push them to think in broader terms than are in the study guide so to speak it's not a book that that's going to push any boundaries. (personal communication, December, 2014)

A surprising but welcomed finding of my study, the study group's reading and activities motivated Nancy to consider the lack of perspectives in the books to which her students were exposed. Noticeably embarrassed, she described the lack of perspectives in these texts and how these books did not "push any boundaries" or expose students to books with non-white or non-male characters. She told me she had asked her administrators for money and during member checking, Nancy revealed that the head of school approved not only money for new books but for a curriculum overhaul for English Language Arts and social studies that would be "more global in their approach to both curriculum and instructional methods" (personal communication, February 2015). She thought the next books would be digital and as she spoke about getting rid of the old paperbacks, she commented "I think that has come directly out of this study" (personal communication, December 2014).

As such, it appeared that an online study group about digital writing and critical literacy had the unanticipated outcome of altering a participant's classroom text selections: "I am absolutely committed to updating the book choices we have" (personal communication, December, 2014). Here, Nancy exhibited a movement toward critical literacy in that she was "locat[ing] content that can help learners investigate curriculum issues from a more critical

standpoint than those represented in prescribed texts” (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993, p. 47). Though an unintended outcome, Nancy’s desire to update reading selections was founded on understandings of critical literacy: Since what we read influences our writing, there are untold opportunities for digital writing with a critical stance that may come from Nancy’s revamped book selections.

### **Summary**

Nancy’s digital writing and teaching could be described as evolving. Whereas her thoughts about safety in digital writing spaces prevented her and her students from engaging in much digital writing, the study group prompted Nancy to consider her voice as a digital writer and to understand ways in which she could be safe in online spaces. By the end of the study group, she was no longer just retweeting others’ posts; rather, she was presenting more original text, photographs, and hashtags. This not only showed that she was more comfortable in digital spaces but also that she was gaining the *ethos stuff* of new literacies practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). And, finally, though Nancy admitted including critical literacy approaches in the writing classroom was more difficult than she had imagined, she emphasized the problem-solving and multiple perspectives aspects of critical literacy. Both problem-solving and multiple perspectives were topics of the online study group’s readings. She even planned to order new reading material that would introduce students to characters from a variety of diverse perspectives.

### **Narrative Four – Becca**

#### **Introduction**

Becca, 32, was a devout paper journal writer and wrote in it five times per week. As a digital writer, she wrote on her class wiki page, which I examined in the research study. In her

sixth year of teaching, Becca taught sixth grade English teacher at a suburban year-round middle school in a large public district in the southeastern United States.

A large public school on a year-round calendar over twelve hundred students, Becca's school had 71.2% of its students pass the reading test and 66.4% of its students pass the math class in the 2012-2013 academic year. Becca taught four English Language Arts courses per day, including two periods in which over half of the students were identified as Academically Intellectually Gifted, (AIG) one inclusion course in which there were several students identified as special education students, and one course that had no AIG students and went at a slower pace.

Because she worked at a year-round school, Becca shared her classroom with another teacher. Becca's classroom was rather crowded with several groups of four to five desks. She sometimes had 30 students in a period. There was a small table in the back with two chairs where I sat in during my observations. In the front of the classroom, Becca's laptop and document camera rested on her desk. The document camera's projector pointed toward the front of the classroom. Becca's classroom had three desktop computers and a printer in the back of the room. Becca's instructional team was experimenting with having students bring their own devices; however, she participated minimally because of her lack of comfort with technologies: "I'm not really comfortable like I don't know how to do all of their devices" (personal communication, September, 2014). Becca spoke frustratingly about the difficulties of reserving the school's computer lab, expressing time in the computer lab was

super hard to find. You have to plan several weeks in advance to get and then if you want any chunk of time not just a day that's an even more um so maybe some of the resources are actually like the programs are there but I you know computer time is not there. (personal communication, September, 2014)



In addition, a county-wide mandate prevented students under age thirteen from using Prezi, a digital writing space sixth graders had had used in previous years. This top-down county mandate demonstrated how administrative policies (Tondeur, van Keer, van Braak, & Valcke, 2008) influenced the digital writing Becca designed for students.

Four themes emerged from an analysis of Becca’s writing and teaching: digital resistor, movement toward digital writing, questioning perspectives, and the challenges of enacting critical literacy.

### **Digital Resistor: Writing Skills Now, Digital Writing “Later On”**

A regular journal writer, Becca believed it was important for writing teachers to be writers: “It’s important I believe for students to know that I believe in what I teach.” She wrote models of her assignments for her students and read them to her students. In terms of digital writing and teaching, however, I described Becca as a digital resistor. This sentiment presented itself in the way she wrote digitally and in the way she taught writing.

I analyzed Becca’s weekly class wiki page from September 15, 2014, to December 19, 2014. Table APED shows what a typical weekly post included.

Table 12

#### *Becca’s Wiki Posts*

<p><b>Language Arts</b></p> <p><b>**There may be a notebook check this week, so please be prepared!</b></p> <p>Monday, October 27  Reading: "The Dog of Pompeii", SSR  Grammar: pronouns/Caught'ya  <b>Homework:</b> Malala reading due Wednesday (cores 1, 3, 4); review for nouns quiz (online site for practice!); read 30 minutes</p> <p>Tuesday, October 28</p>
--

Reading: "The Dog of Pompeii"

Grammar: nouns quiz; pronouns

**Homework:** Malala reading due Wednesday (cores 1, 3, 4); work on pronouns poster; read 30 minutes

Wednesday, October 29

Reading: Malala reading

Grammar: pronouns/Caught'ya

**Homework:** work on pronouns poster, Malala questions 1-2; read 30 minutes

Thursday, October 30

Reading: Malala reading

Grammar: pronouns/Caught'ya

**Homework:** finish pronouns poster, Malala questions 3-4; read 30 minutes

Friday, October 31

Reading: Malala reading/summarizing nonfiction

Grammar: pronouns/Caught'ya

**Homework:** Malala questions 5-6, Happy Halloween!

**Malala VoiceThread link:** <http://bit.ly/malalavoicethread>

**Reading log resource for this week:** <http://www.dogonews.com/>

**\*\*There may be a notebook check this week, so please be prepared!**

Becca used the wiki to share daily agendas, homework, and upcoming projects.

Underneath each day of the week, Becca listed the day's reading, grammar foci, and homework.

The above wiki page example included a link Becca's first VoiceThread, which she created during the timeframe of the online study group. In addition, Becca included a hyperlink to DOGO, a news website for kids.

Becca acknowledged being a digital writer out of professional obligation more than anything else:

I don't really blog, and I don't I'm not on Facebook or anything like that but when I started teaching I realized I that students and parents obviously respond to that and are into that, and that needed to be something I jumped into as well. (personal communication, September, 2014)

In her introductory forum post for the online study group, she wrote

No Facebook, no Twitter, no Podcasts, no blog. I occasionally jump on Pinterest and love catching up with friends and family through Instagram, but aside from that, I do the normal emailing and texting to communicate. I keep a Google calendar and a wiki pages for parents and students to keep up with my class, but it's certainly nothing too impressive. As I said, I have a lot to learn and some changing to do.

In our first interview, Becca said, "I enjoy writing, but I'm not going to become a digital writer I'm not going to do anything for my own" and that she was "not that interested in digital writing for fun" (personal communication, September, 2014). I began to wonder if the repository nature of Becca's wiki page had something to do with the fact that it was required.

This resistance to digital writing Becca expressed was reflected in her teaching. An emphasis on skills development was underscored at the expense of digital writing. Although her students had composed twenty-five word Twitter stories on their cell phones and created Prezi presentations in correlation with the problem-solution pieces before the county's Prezi ban, Becca's students were not engaged in digital writing in any of my observations. In her post-lesson one interview, Becca wrote, "I feel like when I am teaching writing, I am teaching them a necessary, life-long skill." She revealed this sentiment again in her post-observation three interview:

I see it [writing] as a weakness for many students, often because they lack the concentration and desire it takes to be a good writer. My hope is that I can equip them with skills and perhaps a desire to keep writing, becoming better and better.

Becca and her colleagues' perceptions of student writers resulted in skill-based formulaic writing instruction:

We really feel like students struggle with summarizing text. They have trouble both with pulling out the main idea and finding the overall most important details. When uninstructed, their summaries do not cover the most important parts of the text, and they are often unorganized. I hate to be formulaic about writing, but, in this case, my team has decided that it is necessary. Once they have established this general format for a summary paragraph, they will be able to explore other methods later in their writing career. (post-observation three interview)

During my third observation, students received a handout titled *Writing a Great Summary Paragraph*, which indicated the organizational structure of a summary paragraph: the grabber sentence, the summary sentence, three details (3 sentences), and a closing sentence.

Identifying summarizing as a “key skill” (post-observation three interview), Becca taught students the A-B-C method, which required the author, title, and main idea of the topic being summarized (field notes, November 10, 2014). In her post-observation three interview, she wrote, “I hate to be formulaic about writing” but acknowledged its importance because of students’ writing abilities. This skills-based emphasis resulted in Becca positioned herself as the reader/grader of her students’ work, rather than, say, an authentic audience.

At the same time she emphasized formulaic patterns, Becca wanted students to understand writing as a process. Becca emphasized this because writing did not come easy for her even as an English major in college:

Some people I feel like can just sit down and write it. And I did fine. I did well in college. But it took it took a really long term but I enjoyed that process, and I think I loved what came of it. Um the idea of starting with something that wasn’t so great but working on it and working on it until I was proud or at least pleased with kind of what came of the writing. (personal communication, September, 2014)

Becca’s devotion to the process approach was evident in the way she discussed writing instruction and in classroom observations:

Because um I know I’ve said this before but I see writing as such a process, and I’ve I think I understand it so well cause I’ve done it so many times and I’ve never been one to sit down and be able to write a draft that was complete and good and all well. So I think that in teaching I try to instill that in my kids that this is not writing isn’t easy and I don’t I think that’s what they don’t enjoy a lot of them don’t enjoy that that they don’t want to

put the work in. You see some of them that are diligent and want to do that, but those kids are few and far between. Most of them I think at this age want to be able to sit down and kind of spit it out, but it's never been that way for me and I don't really think that writing was necessarily intended to be that way. (personal communication, September, 2014)

This understanding of writing as a process led to her workshop approach to writing instruction (Atwell, 1998). Though there was much direction, Becca gave her students time to offer peer feedback to one another and conferenced with students during several observations. During observation one, students engaged in musical editing for a revised copy of their *Seedfolks* piece, which was autobiographical in nature and based upon Paul Fleischman's *Seedfolks*. Music editing involved students editing for a brief amount of time, moving to another writer's paper while music played, and beginning to edit this new writer's piece when the music stops. Before she emphasized "dancing is highly encouraged," Becca told her students about the value of getting feedback on their pieces. Toward the end of the lesson, she reminded students that they could get more feedback from a friend or parent or during study period or lunch (field notes, September 15, 2014). The *Seedfolks* Chapter 14 rubric included an entire category titled Evidence of Writing Process. To earn a top score, students needed to meet the following criteria: "There is substantial evidence of brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing included with the published copy." In one lesson, students completed reflections on their graded writing assignments. Becca told the students, "I think that maybe this reflection um part of writing is maybe one of the most important things you're going to do" (field notes, September 24, 2014).

Despite understanding writing as a process, Becca's emphasis on building traditional writing skills effected both limited time for writing and limited opportunities for Becca's students to engage in digital writing – or any type of writing for that matter – during class periods. It also contributed to the teacher-centeredness nature of the class, though she encouraged discussion and peer review. She expressed to me that whereas she wanted students

to have more time to free write in their journals, they only did this a few time per quarter.

During many instances, Becca expressed concerns about the amount of time that she had during class periods. In observation five, although students were provided ten minutes to talk with one another about revisions to their speeches, there was no time for students to actually write during this class period (field notes, December 9, 2014). Becca appeared conflicted between providing instruction or time for students to write:

I don't whether this is good or bad I feel like I always have these ideas of giving them lots of time to write in my room and then my room becomes more of a discussion and a I do more instructing during the writing process than I don't know if that's a good or a bad, but I feel like when I look at my lesson plans I've got all this time where I'm gonna give them this idea and then let them write. And it doesn't always happen when I'm teaching a specific assignment. (personal communication, September, 2014)

Becca admitted that she was maybe “afraid to let them [students]” have extended time to write because she felt sixth graders need so much writing support (personal communication, September, 2014).

Because of the prominence of skills-based instruction and Becca's and her colleagues' perceptions of student writers, digital writing often took a backseat:

The importance of digital writing. I just before this class I kind of I would say as a whole our sixth grade is not do a lot of digital writing we're very and a part of it is that maybe in the sixth grade we don't we feel like they're some like ground level things these kids need to be learning and so we stick to that more so than the digital you like it's almost a later on thing .... (personal communication, December, 2014).

In observation five, students were developing speeches. Not until Becca wrote her post-lesson five interview response did she mention the project's optional digital component: “They may choose to include pictures or a slide show of some sort for personal connection and ‘pathos,’ but that was not the purpose of the assignment.” Traditional writing practices were emphasized more than digital writing.

This extended to Becca's ideas about students using their out-of-school literacy practices in the classroom. She admitted it was hard to think of ways for students to write on their cell phones: "Again like it's hard I mean they have their phone so like when you talk digital writing to what extent can I do digital writing when you're on your phone?" (personal communication, September, 2014). Furthermore, she resisted playing a big role in her team's bring-your-own-device program because she did not understand how all of her students' devices worked. Her lack of comfort with digital tools prevented her from engaging in the program; she did not want to put herself in a situation in which she would not know how to help a student with his or her device. It is important to acknowledge, however, that Becca's attempt to use Prezi as a digital writing component to students' problem-solution essays had been thwarted by a county ban due to minimum age restrictions.

Becca's case revealed tensions regarding digital writing. Because she saw her role as a skills builder, students had limited time to compose during class time. Furthermore, the acknowledgment that digital writing was for "later on" revealed this idea that students needed particular skills *before* engaging in digital writing.

### **Movement toward More Digital Writing: It's a "Disservice" Not To**

Although Becca's comments and observations showcased students doing minimal writing – including digital writing, participation in the online study group and the readings shared helped Becca move toward considerations of the importance of digital writing. When asked about the online study group's influence on her understanding of digital writing during our second interview, she said that though the course did not make her feel more comfortable with digital writing, she felt more inspired:

I don't know if I feel a whole lot more comfortable yet. I haven't I mean this is one I did something else because of this study um dig – oh I did do a VoiceThread since we started

this, so that was good. It was like my attempt at digital writing that I had not done .... (personal communication, December, 2014)

Becca made a VoiceThread and a podcast for the first time during the online study group.

In her week two online study group forum post, she wrote that she and her professional learning team spent time going through the TPACK framework, which was reviewed in week one of the online study group, in order to make a project more digital. She wrote, “If I understand new literacies as our ability to access information digitally, comprehend it and transmit that knowledge on, I have not quite embraced it to the degree that I probably should” (online study group week two forum post). Becca spoke about her desires to have students do more digital writing:

I think if anything this [participation in online study group] has made me want to encourage the kids to do more um like at this point ... I do think it’s made me look differently at what I ask the kids to write. (personal communication, December, 2014)

So whereas Becca’s students did not do more digital writing during the tenure of the online study group, she indicated the “applicable examples” from the online study group’s article readings made her think about future digital writing assignments:

You know it’s some of the stuff we read just really proved that this is the world that they live in and are going to live in and it’s I’m almost doing them a disservice if I continue to have them read from a book and write with paper all the time. (personal communication, December, 2014)

In her introductory forum post to the online study group, Becca wrote, “Reading the articles this week, just solidified what I already knew to be true – the world is changing and I, for the sake of my students, need to adapt.” Thus, even though Becca was not motivated to engage in digital writing nor did her students engage in more digital writing during the study group, the online study group prompted her to think about the types of digital writing assignments her students could do. She began to understand that though she was not comfortable with digital writing she



needed to consider digital writing less of “a later on thing” and more of a necessary thing (personal communication, December, 2014).

### **Questioning Perspectives**

The element of critical literacy upon which Becca focused was questioning perspectives, which was a component of critical literacy shared within the online study group’s readings. During our first interview, Becca acknowledged she was unfamiliar with what *critical literacy* meant: “I don’t think I know that term either” (personal interview, September, 2014). I was intrigued to see then that in my third observation, Becca spoke with her students about an article on the internment camps for Japanese-Americans. She wanted her students to find the article “eye-opening.” One student noted the ironies of the United States fighting the Germans while at the same time holding Japanese-Americans in internment camps (field notes, November 10, 2014). That Becca was helping her students consider unheard perspectives remained central to Becca’s work in the online study group. Unheard perspectives would become the component of critical literacy on which Becca focused.

Becca focused on identifying unheard perspectives in her final digital composition project, which was a podcast that examined the perspective of the Dursley family from the Harry Potter series. Becca shared her podcast with her students in observation four. Before she played the podcast, she told her students she had trouble wondering and thinking of the other side. To me, this demonstrated Becca’s lack of experience in critical literacy. Here is an excerpted transcript of her podcast:

An alternative perspective of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. While watching a clip of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* I was filled with delight at the sound of Haggard appearing like a monster in the doorway of the Dursley’s house. Then I rolled in laughter as Dudley stuffed his face with Harry’s cake only to find that a piggy tail’s growing on his behind. There they were. The people who most deserved it getting served with what they most deserved: humiliation and intimidation. The Dursleys and

Dudley were no longer on top of it all, and it felt good. I felt a combination of retaliation and contentment as I thought about how justice won out in this battle. Justice was served. Then as we do all too infrequently I took a step back and asked myself a couple of questions: Was I quick to jump to conclusions? Who's telling the story? Who's voice isn't there? Are they really getting what they deserved? Am I projecting a reality and did this movie based on my own assumptions, believing that I know the whole story and know what it is just in this situation? I realize there were voices that I didn't hear. I never heard the Dursley's side of the story..... So what did I learn from this experience? From looking at things on the other side? When dealing with a situation fictional or in my own life it's important to look and listen for that other side: the side that's not heard. It's important to question the author's intentions, think for myself, just as it's important in my own life to take a step back, think about the alternate perspective, and with that hopefully justice really will win the day.

The transcript revealed Becca's efforts to challenge perspectives, a central element of critical literacy (Beck, 2005). What was important here is that Becca showed her students the importance of questioning unheard perspectives and analyzing a non-dominant perspective. Interestingly, the transcript provides Becca's meta-awareness of the process of questioning perspectives, especially when she asks "Who's telling the story? Who's voice isn't there? .... So what did I learn from this experience?" In a way, her podcast not only exhibited her burgeoning understandings of critical literacy but also served as a learned tool for *how* to engage in a critical literacy reading of a text. After playing the podcast, she projected a PowerPoint presentation that included thought questions, including (1) Who is the hero? Who are we supposed to admire? (2) What does author want us to feel? (3) Who are we supposed to love (Harry, Hagrid)? During the discussion, Becca reminded students that hearing from the other side may alter feelings and reemphasized that we have to question each character's perspective (field notes, December 5, 2014). In our second interview, she expressed that the online study group pushed her to think about asking questions that she would not have asked previously:

But it really was fun for me I like I kind of said I really don't ask a whole lot of really good questions that's not typically how I read or how I study. So um I think that it forced me to ask questions that I certainly wouldn't have normally asked or look at things from different perspectives. And I don't know if that's just cause I kind of got hooked on that alternate perspective lesson but um I mean just like looking at that one section of that

book I would have never gone there in my head. And I think what was also really cool to me was that it is so applicable to life kind of the way that we tend to not look at perspectives or is this going to be background? (personal communication, December, 2014)

And though the podcast she created did not incite societal action, the ways in which she spoke about critical literacy indicated that she was beginning to understand one of critical literacy's central tenets: asking questions to identify unheard perspectives.

### **Challenges to Enacting Critical Literacy: “I Tend to Shy Away from Controversial Topics”**

Although Becca referenced the importance of focusing on asking questions to help reveal unheard perspectives, she admitted many challenges to enacting critical literacy. Originally, she designed a project in which her students would incite action on the part of their audience but it appeared that her understanding of critical literacy as a “life skill” and her thinking about the difficulties of enacting critical literacy in the context of her classroom may have impacted her decision to have her students find unheard perspectives in texts she selected (e.g. Lupe Fiasco's “He Say She Say,” Langston Hughes's “Mother to Son,” and a nonfiction text that criticized the Germans bystanders during the Holocaust). She was concerned about whether these texts would allow students to complete an analysis of unheard perspectives in a way that was similar to her Harry Potter example (post-observation four interview). After watching my video about gender identity during week three of the online study group, she expressed nervousness about parents' reaction to critical literacy elements:

Watching the ‘10,000 Dresses’ video, listening to the podcast and thinking about discussions of gender identity and negative stereotypes in the classroom honestly made me nervous at first. I have some very involved and outspoken parents, and so in the classroom, I tend to shy away from controversial topics that may cause my inbox to flood the following morning. This is no excuse for avoiding powerful conversation; I understand that. (online study group week three forum post)

Here, she enacted Beck's (2005) assertion that "teaching critical literacy ... is not without risks to students, teachers, and the institutions in which they are embedded" (p. 392). Another concern was student indoctrination to a particular belief system. As she reviewed others' digital texts in week six of the online study group, she agreed with Nancy's comments about pushing students too far to see the teacher's view:

As I read your thoughts, I began to wonder if my lesson pushes them too much into agreeing with me. I wondered if it too often, in my lesson plan for this project and in other areas of teaching, I coax them into my understanding and viewpoint of the text. That was great for me to think about – so, thanks!"

Time constraints limited Becca's ability to have students enact the critical literacy project. In her post-four observation interview, she wrote, "Many of my students were excited about the possibility of creating their own digital project. That's fun!" However, further analysis revealed that Becca worried about pursuing this project with all of her students. In our second interview, she expressed concerns about the time left before track out and which of her students might be able to tackle the assignment:

If I had the time right now. I have three weeks two weeks before track out. So if I had the time perhaps I'd try to dig it deeper, but it was more timing than anything else. But I also see this as being something that um like a bright student an academically gifted student or lack of better words I don't know could really like take off with. I think my two AG [Academically Gifted] classes today proved that for me. They jumped all over this, and you know were quick to have to look at it from other perspectives and really interesting perspectives so I think that they would find this you know fun in a way. (personal communication, December, 2014)

Becca's case provided an exemplar of the challenges teachers face in enacting critical literacy. And though Becca decided to make the podcast assignment optional for her AG students, what appeared more important was that Becca was beginning to make slight moves toward critical literacy.

## **Summary**

Becca was a devout paper journal writer who wrote on her professional wiki space for parents and students but did not want to engage in additional personal digital writing. Her writing pedagogy reflected her understanding of her roles as both skill-builder and as a grader/reader of her students' work. She did, however, emphasize writing process but, generally, digital writing was absent from her writing pedagogy. In our post-study group interview, Becca admitted that the materials read in the study group caused her to consider how much of a “disservice” it was to not have her students compose more in digital spaces. Asking questions to examine unheard perspectives, a component of the online study group, became a central component of how her own identity as a writer impacted the ways in which she taught writing. Becca's movement toward critical literacy and she created a podcast to examine unheard perspectives in the Harry Potter series as her final project for the online study group.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have shared individual narratives and themes that emerged from an independent analysis of each of the four cases. Particular narratives characterized the themes related to each teacher's writing and writing pedagogy and the moves they made toward critical literacy. Sally's case presented a teacher committed to helping her students with exceptionalities with direct, supportive instruction. Although she grappled with the importance of digital writing as compared to traditional writing, she expressed that digital writing provided her marginalized students with a voice and that the online study group's focus on critical literacy helped her recommit herself to the critical literacy pedagogy she learned in her graduate school training. Darcy's case revealed a teacher who understood how her identity as a writer impacted the ways in which she taught writing. Her nuanced understanding of TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006)

was displayed in the ways in which she had students use technology only when she thought it would enhance their writing. Present before the online study group began, the digital writing and new literacies understandings her blog exhibited were reflected in the many digital writing assignments she assigned students and the real audience she wanted them to have. Nancy's case presented a teacher who was trying to develop her voice in a digital writing space despite being nervous about the dangers of composing online. As the study group progressed, however, Nancy's Twitter feed began to reveal an awareness of the *ethos stuff* of new literacies practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Her tweets became more original as she included photographs, original text, and her hashtags rather than retweeting others' tweets. Furthermore, she was inspired by the study group's readings' focus on both problem-solving and multiple perspectives, creating a digital composition piece that aimed to solve the problem of littering and deciding to order new books for her classroom that will provide students with more protagonists from diverse backgrounds. And, finally, Becca's case provided the utmost irony: an active digital writer for professional purposes who resisted composing in additional digital spaces. Nevertheless, in part because of the readings within the online study group, she began to realize the importance of having her students write digitally, which had been deemphasized in the formulaic, skills-based nature of her writing instruction. In terms of movements toward critical literacy, Becca designed a podcast in which she questioned unheard perspectives, a topic addressed in the online study group's readings. As Becca admitted critical literacy was a new concept for her, she also admitted several challenges to enacting it in her English classroom. Whereas each case was treated separately in this chapter, I share themes that emerged from a cross-case analysis in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5: Cross-Case Analysis**

The narratives in the previous chapter illustrated the variety of contexts in which Sally, Darcy, Nancy, and Becca wrote and taught and the moves they made or did not make toward critical literacy. Each participant wrote digitally and non-digitally for a variety of purposes, approached the teaching of writing from multiple perspectives, and enacted understandings of digital writing, new literacies, and critical literacy in different ways. And though each participant's context was different, I was also interested in generalizations that could be drawn across the four participants. And thus, whereas each case was handled separately in the previous chapter, this chapter provides me with an opportunity to examine themes across all the cases.

In what follows, I reframe my three research questions regarding teachers' writing practices, writing pedagogy, and moves toward critical literacy into major themes. To review, my research questions were (1) What are the writing practices of secondary English teachers who are active digital writers? (2) What does writing (digital and otherwise) pedagogy look like in the classrooms of teachers who are digital writers? (3) What factors move teachers toward critical literacy in their own writing and in their classroom practices?

In regard to my first research question about the writing practices of second English teachers who are active digital writers, two themes emerged: (1) myriad genres and (2) teachers as digital writers with conventional stances. In response to both my first and second research question about the writing pedagogy of secondary English teachers who are active digital writers, two themes emerged: (1) writing pedagogy reflective of teachers' digital writing practices and beliefs and (2) teachers' broadening understandings of new literacies. Two themes emerged as I

answered my second research question: (1) teacher-centered pedagogy and (2) technological barriers. And finally, three themes emerged from my third research question about the moves teachers made toward critical literacy: (1) broadening understandings of critical literacy, (2) reflection on practice, and (3) challenges to implementation. Because the online study group was such an integral aspect of the research study, I make note of when I believe the online study group played an important role in a particular theme. In what follows, I provide a brief explanation of each emergent theme and provide supporting data.

### **Myriad Genres**

The theme of myriad genres emerged from an analysis of teachers' writing practices. What I mean by this is that in addition to the personal or professional digital writing (e.g. wikis, blogs, Twitter, Haiku, Edmodo) these teachers did, they also wrote in several other digital and traditional print spaces in a variety of personal and professional genres. Admittedly, I was not privy to *all* writing teachers did. Whereas I examined teachers' digital writing spaces, some participants did not permit or suggest that I follow them on Instagram or friend them on Facebook. So, whereas it may be true that teachers wrote in modes to which I was not privy, analysis of their writing logs revealed much of these teachers' writing – digital and non-digital – was required professional writing (Dawson, Robinson, Hanson, VanRiper, & Ponzio, 2013).

Sally listed the following personal genres: notes, grocery lists, checks, and day timer entries, texts, emails, LinkedIn updates, online study group posts, birthday cards, journals, online study group project plans. Overwhelmingly nonfiction pieces, these genres were mostly to stay in touch with friends or family or to remain organized. I had access to Sally's Edmodo account, which was started as part of the school improvement plan's emphasis on written expression. What was unique about Sally's digital writing space was that it was a shared space for her and



her students. Sally wrote many other professional pieces: mentor texts for students, Functional Behavior Assessment, accommodation/ modification list, daily work record of work-related activities, written observation replies, invitations, agendas, consents for evaluations and services, head counts, daily schedule, meeting schedule, Edmodo posts, database entries, emails, lesson plans, Response to Intervention reviews, reviews of substitutes, grades, progress reports, texts to parents online study group posts, emails, referrals, manifestation determination, Individualized Education Plans, referrals, eligibilities, Behavior Intervention Plans, behavior charts, and grades. Reflecting on the amount of writing she did, Sally wrote in week four of the online study group:

All the writing I have done professionally- enough to say I am tired of writing. I am on the other side of not having fun, and there is no end in sight. Personally- not as much as I would like due to job getting in the way.

What I found remarkable was Sally's professional pieces were mostly legal, required documents related to her work as a special educator.

Even though teachers' digital writing logs revealed they wrote in other digital spaces (e.g. Becca admitted she used Instagram), Darcy was the only teacher in my study who let me examine her personal digital writing space: her running blog. In addition to writing personally on her blog, where she shared primarily information about her road racing, Darcy admitted writing in the following personal pieces: tweets, Instagram posts, Facebook posts, beach vacation chronicles, Linked In, and reviews of shoes or pizza restaurants. Clearly, Darcy wrote in several digital genres. Professionally, she wrote beginnings to memoirs to share with her students and poems. Because Darcy exited the online study group after week three, it was difficult to assess characteristics of her professional and personal genres in great detail.

Nancy replied to over 100 emails in one week (online study group week two). I analyzed Nancy's Haiku page and Twitter account as part of the research study. Professionally, Nancy

kept a journal with her students; created assignments, tests, quizzes, and rubrics; updated her Haiku pages; wrote an entry for *The Giver* contest (which she won); wrote first drafts of narrative report card comments; an arts program announcement; a response to an online survey about a workshop; article responses, professional journal articles; a personal bio; proposals; curriculum; assignments; digital notes at a conference; education-related articles retweets, snapshot memory response; a response to social studies document-based questions; responses to curriculum questions; lesson plans; texts; and post-observation interviews as part of the research study. The commitments of her role as a teacher prevented her from Tweeting at all in week six of the online study group. Nancy's professional genres showcased that she wrote many genres that were required, that positioned her as a leader in her school, that showcased her trying to improve herself professionally, and that permitted her to gain resources for her students. Having considered being a journalist after college, Nancy wrote in a variety of personal genres: Snapchat, texts to family and friends, Pinterest, literary contests, and local magazine articles. She wanted to write more fiction, mostly personal narrative. Nancy's personal pieces exhibited not only communicative genres but also genres exhibiting her passion for creative writing and her understanding of writing for an audience beyond herself.

Resistant to digital writing, Becca wrote digitally out of a professional obligation. She said that when she began teaching, she felt as though students and parents expected to be communicated with via digital spaces. She, therefore, set up her class wiki page, which I examined for the research study. Professionally, Becca used Google Docs to take notes, "emailed, emailed, and emailed some more," updated team Google calendar, annotated articles, created a VoiceThread, created a summary paragraph model for students, composed substitute plans, wrote on her professional blog and OneNote, wrote lesson plans, and drafted and wrote

notes for the online study group's final project. Much of Becca's professional writing included exemplars for students and genres that had the purpose of updating parents and students. Outside the classroom, Becca wrote in her paper journal five times a week, wrote thank you letters to friends, posted to Instagram, and wrote a song for her brother's wedding. Becca's personal genres revealed her dedication to journaling and her understanding of writing as a means to connect with friends and family.

Thus, though each teacher was a digital writer— admittedly some more active and aware of digital writing and new literacies practices than others — she wrote a variety of digital and non-digital personal and professional genres for a variety of purposes. The myriad genres in which teachers composed led to a singular claim that is true regardless of how teachers identify as writers or discuss their writing practices: middle grades English teachers are writers.

### **Teachers as Digital Writers with Conventional Stances**

Though I had hoped to see teachers move toward critical literacy in their writing as a result of their participation in the study group, this did not happen during the research study. Participants' personal and professional writing spaces provided no evidence of participants addressing elements of critical literacy or evoking social action. Teachers did not understand their digital writing spaces to be venues by which they could empower themselves, thereby their communities (Turner & Hicks, 2011-2012). As such, the theme of teachers as digital writers with a conventional stance emerged.

Sally's Edmodo account already served as a place to help students find their voices and engage in topics such as injustice; however, Sally herself did not write digital texts with a critical stance to incite social change beyond these Edmodo prompts. The purposes of the others' digital writing spaces were not aligned with a critical stance. Becca's wiki was a repository space on

which she shared the class agenda and homework assignments for parents and students. Likewise, the Haiku page, for Nancy, also served as a repository space on which she posted homework, links to assignment exemplars and quizzes, and necessary announcements. And whereas Nancy's tweets became more original as the online study group progressed, they never included a critical stance. And even Darcy's blog, a personal writing space, did not exhibit posts that were particularly critical in nature. The only post that was remotely close to having a critical stance in which she called for social action was one about the upcoming state senate race. However, she only critiqued what she thought was the ridiculous campaign process. Whether these teachers started to embody critical literacy stances in their digital writing spaces – or other writing spaces for that matter – was both beyond the purview and timeline of this particular research study. I found this emergent theme particularly noteworthy, as many scholars (e.g. Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Leu et al. 2004) have asserted a connection between new literacies and critical literacy that I did not find in my work. Rather, my work proved that digital writers could engage in new literacies practices without a critical stance, discrediting the idea that new literacies practices must be inherently critical.

### **Writing Pedagogy Reflective of Teachers' Digital Writing and New Literacies Practices and Beliefs**

Data analysis revealed each teacher's digital writing and new literacies practices and beliefs about digital writing were reflected in their writing pedagogy. Summarizing Lankshear and Knobel (2006, Rish and Caton (2009) asserted one can use technical stuff without the ethos, use ethos without the technical, or use both in tandem. Teachers' writing pedagogies reflected such understandings, and it became clear that teachers need not only possess "functional" technology skills but rather "an ability to transform text, image, and sound for critical, rhetorical, and social purposes" (Turner & Hicks, 2011-2012, p. 58). In what follows, I focus on four ways

pedagogies reflected teachers' digital writing and new literacies practices and beliefs: technology layered atop traditional writing, digital writing as not 'real,' digital writing spaces as dangerous, and a nuanced understanding of digital writing and new literacies.

First, if teachers' digital writing spaces were merely repositories of written text, the assignments in which their students engaged reflected this idea of a technological component layered atop traditional writing. This is not to say, of course, that there were not also several examples of digital writing used in ways that exhibited deep understandings of the affordances of digital writing (e.g. Sally's iMovies about injustice; Darcy's digital book trailers, silent movies, and digital poetry compilations; Nancy's digital book trailers; and Becca's podcast). However, there were many more instances in which technologies were layered on top of a traditional writing assignment in a way that did not account for new literacies understandings. For example, Sally's Edmodo account was an online forum of only typed text, and her I Am Poem included some multimodal elements. Though she was developing as a digital writer, both the Edmodo account and the I Am Poem did not differ radically from questions or poems written on a sheet of paper or a poster. Further, Sally's students were encouraged to play with different digital spaces and add digital components to traditional assignments. Students put compare-contrast essays into GarageBand, iMovie, or Storyboard. Students were encouraged to "add fun stuff and to add it to your compare-contrast" (field notes, OBS 6). Here, technology was an element to increase the fun of an assignment not to alter dynamically nature of an assignment or genre. Moreover, Nancy's Twitter and Haiku pages were, for the most part, repositories of information – electronic lists – and during my observations Google Doc and Dropbox, both repository spaces, were featured heavily. Teachers who were still developing as digital writers used technology tools as add-ons to traditional writing.

Second, if teachers believed digital writing to be supplementary or not as important as traditional writing, their pedagogy reflected this. Though she understood the importance of digital writing and wanted to improve as a digital writer and expose her students to more digital writing, Sally emphasized the value of traditional writing over digital writing:

As for the irony of traditional writing versus digital writing. Both are very important for my students. They need the freedom and creativity that comes with digital writing (i.e. Glogster, Edmodo) to show comprehension of material and thought. But it is through traditional methodologies that enable them to organize and process expressive written language for future success. Responses from Edmodo or Glogster will not get them into a University or land them jobs. (personal communication, February, 2014).

The Hill Center packets for each essay type her students completed represented Sally's views about her role as an English teacher. Sally's students were introduced to the hamburger model of paragraph writing in my first observation (field notes, October, 2014). Similarly, Becca's personal resistance to digital writing was reflected in her teaching. Seeing her role as a skills builder limited her students' digital writing. And though she expressed that she thought she should move from digital writing being a "later on" thing, she revealed only after the lesson in which students composed speeches that they could include a technology component. Becca was explicit about the digital writing component not being the central portion of the assignment:

Their speeches may have a digital component to them, but this is not something that I emphasized. They may choose to include pictures or a slide show of some sort for personal connection and "pathos", but that was not the purpose of this assignment (personal communication, December, 2014).

It was no surprise that the journal writer who resisted more digital writing thought in such a way.

Third, if teachers believed digital writing spaces to be unsafe or dangerous, their pedagogy reflected this sentiment. Teachers expressed concerns about their and students' safety and behavior in online spaces. At the beginning of the online study group, apps such as YikYak had raised concerns at Nancy's school, and she explicitly stated her commitment to safety in online spaces:

Kids just texting each other, so I'd love to come out of this with some better ideas about how to keep them safe but how to use what we have they now all have iPads throughout the day in fifth and sixth grade in addition to whatever device they might you know keep in the locker supposed to be in the locker if it's a Smartphone or any kind of phone. Um and have them use it more effectively and safely. Safe is very important to me. (personal communication, September, 2014)

She voiced concern about her professional ethos on her Twitter feed and wrote

For instance, my niece has chronicled her sex life rather openly on Twitter, and unless you're Lena Dunham, this can't be a good move, career-wise. At this late date in my career, I doubt I can do much harm, but I value my online reputation and try to be cautious. (week two forum post)

Not surprisingly, her considerations of safety transferred to her teaching: She selected

Bibliomansions for her student to share book reviews because it was a safe space and banned students from creating Instagram accounts as part of the hero project:

I think this lesson incorporated understandings of digital writing in that the students were required to produce a digital product and used online resources to create it. They did research using their iPads and were able to incorporate this into identifying problems, naming the hero, and writing the backstory for the hero. The students were aware of new literacies throughout as they sought out digital resources and used them in creating the hero. I had students ask me if they could create fake Instagram accounts for the hero, for example. (Answer: Not for school work). (post-observation five interview)

Indicating her concern about students' behavior in online spaces, in many lessons, Nancy asked students to put their iPads away, often having students use poster paper as the iPads rested on students' desks. She cited:

They're pulling up all sorts of games and apps if I'm not on it constantly so it's challenging which is a positive and a negative it forces me to stay a little bit more aware of what they're doing" (personal communication, December 2014)

Sally was also concerned about privacy in online spaces, and it is no surprise that students had a password for both Edmodo and Glogster. A co-sponsor of the etiquette club, Sally also saw her role as helping students develop "social media etiquette." And, like Nancy, she was hesitant to bring in students out-of-school literacy practices, such as cell phones, because of management concerns.

And, fourth, if a teacher had a firm understanding of the affordances of digital writing and new literacies and enacted such an understanding in their digital writing, students were provided similar opportunities. It was no surprise that Darcy's classroom reflected her nuanced understandings of digital writing and new literacies. A blogger for over two years, Darcy was quite comfortable composing in new literacies spaces. She discussed how she loved the "intersection between graphics and words" (personal communication, September, 2014) and her students wrote in new literacies text that showed that Darcy had both the *technos* and the *ethos* of new literacies (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). Her students composed digital book trailers, digitalized poetry compilations, and silent movies. She told me about the silent film her student composed each spring:

Um we discuss fable, allegory, propaganda, and satire and how the overlap between some of these and then they have to choose one or two of the genres to make into a silent film so they um design pictures, um they have to use either Photoshop or uh drawing of their own and um so it's a picture and then followed by words um and they choose music to go with it and sound effects and things but they can't have any talking. And um it has to you know have a resolution of some kind or a moral to the story and um you know the pictures have to you know complement what it is that you're discussing. (personal communication, September, 2014)

Darcy stressed authenticity in her lessons, disappointed that her school's administration had banned social sites (e.g. Yelp, Google, and Facebook) on which she hoped to have her students post their reviews. Darcy often positioned herself as a fellow writer with her students, sharing not only her poetry with her students but this idea that writing was not always done for a grade but as an outlet to share ideas. A writer herself, she understood that "sometimes there aren't three reasons" in an essay (personal communication, September, 2014) and that writers need time to write. As such, her students were provided much autonomy and time to write in class. Clearly, Darcy was aware of the ways in which digital technologies have impacted what



we call writing (Hocks, 2008; Kajder, 2007; NCTE, 2008a) and this was evident in her classroom.

Whereas Sally, Darcy, Nancy, and Becca each composed in new literacies spaces, their understandings of the *technical stuff* and *ethos of* new literacies (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993) differed. As a result, teachers' writing pedagogies were reflective of their digital writing practices or beliefs. Teachers' practices and understandings of digital writing and new literacies presented themselves in the classroom in four ways: technology layered atop traditional writing, digital writing as not 'real,' digital writing spaces as dangerous, and a nuanced understanding of digital writing and new literacies.

### **Teachers' Broadening Understandings of Digital Writing and New Literacies**

Each teacher revealed a broadening understanding of digital writing and new literacies. Teachers' evolving understandings of the affordances of digital writing and new literacies began to present themselves when teachers wrote about digital writing and new literacies in online study group forum posts, spoke about digital writing and new literacies during interviews, and taught writing in their classrooms. It is important to note that there were several indications that these broadening understandings could be attributed to participation in the online study group. After the online study group, Sally said enthusiastically, "Why not try? Why not find out what's out there that I can do? ... I think I've done more in these last few months than I could ever have imagined trying..." (personal communication, December, 2014). In week two of the online study group, Becca reflected, "Many of my literacy practices and the practices I encourage in my classroom do not reflect the new literacy that I so vividly heard described in both articles" and Nancy shared one could be a "producer and consumer of digital content." Though I saw limited digital writing during my classroom observations, these sentiments alluded to the fact that

teachers were moving toward broadening understandings of digital writing and new literacies, toward an understanding that digital writing is indeed ‘real’ writing (Turner & Hicks, 2011-2012, p. 61). Becca spoke of the disservice to her students:

You know it’s some of the stuff we read just really proved that this is the world that they live in and are going to live in and it’s I’m almost doing them a disservice if I continue to have them read from a book and write with paper all the time. (personal communication, December, 2014)

Regardless of writing pedagogy in practice, teachers appeared to focus on four specific understandings of digital writing and new literacies: the evolving nature of writing, audience, the social aspects, and options.

Several participants mentioned the evolving nature of writing. Admitting the online study group had helped broaden her understanding of composition in general, Sally admitted “what we consider new literacies right now again going to be very obsolete very soon” (personal communication, December, 2014). Darcy also commented upon how new literacies continued to expand. Furthermore, Nancy commented about the immediacy and brevity of new literacies writing in contrast to lengthy essays (personal communication, September, 2014).

Participants also focused on the increased audience in new literacies texts. One comment that I found fascinating was that Nancy told me she learned to write when there was no audience. What she meant here was that she learned to write only for the teacher. She commented that new literacies texts permit a “considerably broadened” audience. For Nancy, digital publishing allowed one to “take advantage of the wider audience available through digital sharing” (post-observation four interview). As Nancy reflected on the audience of her Paltoon, she realized that she had not captured the diversity of her students in the characters she included (personal communication, December, 2014). Interestingly, her Twitter posts became more original as the online study group progressed, indicative of her heightened awareness of audience. As her

students worked on their Glogster I Am Poems, Sally expressed, “It’s going into the world.” She told students, “You have a wider range of viewers” (field notes, December, date, 2014). The online study group inspired Darcy, a personal blogger, to consider her authenticity. She remarked she wanted to make sure she always presented an authentic voice to her readers (personal communication, December 2014). Darcy acknowledged, “Digital writing is meant to be shared, and have an audience that gives feedback” (post-observation three interview). Darcy wrote, “I realized more and more the importance of audience” (personal communication, December, 2014).

Another aspect on which participants focused was the social aspects of digital writing and new literacies. Nancy emphasized that students could collaborate more in digital spaces, noting her students revised and gave feedback to each other in Google Docs. She enjoyed being able to see how students’ papers evolved through the writing process. Sally commented on the sharing possible with new literacies, noting the reply feature of Glogster allowed her students to provide feedback on one another’s work. And even though her students did not engage in as much Edmodo discussion as she hoped at least it gave them the opportunity to share ideas with one another. Likewise, Becca mentioned her county was about to roll out Google Drive, which she hoped to use for feedback. Darcy admitted the sharing, connecting piece is what is so good: “The connection piece is what makes the digital writing so great” (personal communication, September, 2014). Interestingly, the design of the online study group inspired Darcy to consider how she could create a digital space for her students to discuss books (personal communication, December, 2014). Even the online study group itself became a digital writing space in which participants shared ideas about writing, teaching, and critical literacy.

Many of the teachers commented on the increased options new literacies texts provided. Realizing digital writing's many options, Nancy said she had progressed from thinking she had to offer students one digital option like she did in paper-and-pencil days. Even more fascinating was her epiphany in our second interview about how she and colleagues needed to stop saying no to students' out-of-school literacy practices:

I'm just much more aware of a need to figure out ways to tap into what the kids really do....I think we need some tech support that's a little bit more youthful, more aware of what the kids are really using and doing. And that's just my opinion. I think things change constantly, and we have to stay on top of it instead of just saying no, don't do it. (personal communication, December, 2014)

Encouraged to think more about digital book reports after reading one of the online study group articles, Nancy offered her students the option to compose a podcast, infographic, or video for the hero composition project. Sally admitted that her students had been given more chances to select technology options than they had before the online study group (personal communication, December, 2014). Glogster permitted students to add videos, texts, pictures, music, or images to their I Am Poems in Sally's class (field notes, November 17, 2014). For a book report, Darcy's students selected from a range of technological options to present their work. In our second interview, Darcy stated:

It's [new literacies] continuing to expand so when I think of some of the projects my kids did this year and the kind of the choices they had, the technologies they used new literacies is pretty wide open in that way in how they express themselves" (personal communication, December, 2014).

As teachers began to realize the evolving nature of writing and the affordances of digital writing and new literacies (e.g. the evolving nature of writing, audience, the social aspect, and options), a few realized their altering role as teachers. Darcy went so far as to say "Finding a resource that suits their [students'] particular need or interest is, in and of itself, a new literacy skill" (online study group week two forum post). And Nancy replied:

I now realize that not everyone is going to want to use the same resources as more options become available. This has been amazingly liberating for me because I no longer need to be the "expert" teaching them how to use various resources. Instead, I serve as more of a guide - directing my students to options and helping them to select the best one for accomplishing the task. I agree that this is "a new literacy in itself." (online study group week two forum post).

Irrespective of where each teacher was on the continuum of digital writing and new literacies understanding, there were several aspects on which they began to focus: the evolving nature of writing, an increased audience, the social aspect, and options. Through its readings, discussion forums, or final projects, the online study group was a factor that allowed these four teachers to broaden their understandings of digital writing and new literacies.

### **Teacher-Centered Pedagogy**

Brannon et al. (2008) wrote "writing ... should not be yet another way to train students to be obedient citizens, but rather provide them with opportunities to develop their thinking as individuals, making meaning through the act of composing" (p. 18). When I considered the writing assignments assigned to their students from a new literacies and critical literacy lens, the theme of teacher-centered pedagogy. As such, students were writing texts for the teacher with no real world audience or purpose. What became evident was that in particular instances, despite technologies present and teachers' technological knowledge, teachers' rather traditional writing content knowledge and writing pedagogical knowledge resulted in them assigning traditional assignments with no audience but the teacher.

Each participant was asked both to list all of the writing assignments students completed in the last year and to keep a running list of assignments assigned during the online study group. Table 13 provides these pieces.

Table 13

## Writing Assigned

Teacher	Assignments
Sally	paragraphs, brainstorming pieces, mini books for social studies, blogs for the American Revolution timeline., responses to reading comprehension and math questions, exit tickets, poems infused with music, journaling, debates, community writing, pros/cons bias for debate, community writing, quick writes, I Am Poems, compare/contrast essay with movies and print text; student choice projects (e.g. glogs for American Revolution, PSA for infectious diseases), poster and Bohr model for element unit, explorer project, brainstorming, copy and dictate assignments, stories with story elements, graphic organizers, copy agenda, Tween Tribune, Edmodo blogging, persuasive essay, narrative essay, definition essay, expository essay.
Darcy	movie versus book critiques in video, digital book reports (Spotify playlists, theme maps, eulogies of characters), short essay about <i>Wonder</i> , digital poetry compilation, memoir, news article, review, one-act play, silent film, great debates, free writes
Nancy	personal narrative, short answer questions, written responses on <i>The Giver</i> , snapshot memory, preliminary writing for a personal narrative, hero project
Becca	reading log, VoiceThread, summary paragraph, speeches, problem-solution essay, evaluation essay, journal entries

There existed an emphasis on formulaic writing and traditional genres in teachers' classrooms (Hundley and Holbrook, 2013) problematic because "most students never experience the power of their ideas or the structuring of them within a larger conversation, never get the chance to use writing to think, feel, and wonder" (Brannon et al., 2008, p. 18). Students in Becca and Sally's class were provided formulas for writing essays and paragraphs. Writing instruction using scripts or formulas "does not inspire creativity and expression in today's youth, and it does not connect to the larger community outside of school" (Turner & Hicks, 2011-2012, p. 57). These types of pedagogical moves exemplified rather traditional content and pedagogical knowledge.

Though there were particular instances of teachers assigning composition assignments that were seen by classmates rather than the teacher (e.g. Darcy's one-act plays or Sally's Glogster poems), in most cases, the purpose for writing was to earn a grade from the teacher. Though Nancy encouraged the writing process and offered feedback electronically and via student-teacher conferences, the difference between rough draft and final draft was that the former was "not yet graded" (field notes, September 26, 2014). Becca firmly secured herself as the reader and grader of her students' summary paragraphs when she suggests she gets "really tired" of clichéd opening questions (field notes, November 10, 2014). In addition, when she spoke about what she wanted to see in the students' speeches, she negated this idea of an authentic audience. Thus, even though students were presenting their speeches to classmates, the read audience was Becca as the reader/grader of their work. Nancy's students wrote memory snapshot pieces, but students did not have an audience beyond her. It was no surprise then when the digital texts these teachers composed had elements of critical literacy within them but were not the vehicles for social action themselves. For example, the PowerPoint Nancy created did not have the intent of being shown to a greater audience, and Becca's podcast was heard only by her students.

From a critical literacy lens, these inauthentic genres prevented students from taking critical stances that were shared with an audience broader than their teacher. As Kixmiller (2004) writes, "authentic writing assignments can have this power. They help students make sense of their world while advocating for change" (p. 29). The genres were primarily print-centric and did not incorporate multimodal elements or the sharing aspects digital writing affords. Overall, teachers missed opportunities to engage students in composing for change proposed by Turner and Hicks:

Teaching digital writing, then, is an act of community literacy.... teachers have an opportunity to help their students see writing for real-world purposes.... Digital writing is more than simply texting or being able to surf the web; it is a rhetorical and intentional act, and has the potential to empower individuals and communities. (p. 60)

Take Nancy's PowerPoint as an example. Even though the purpose was to consider the problem of littering, the PowerPoint did not have an explicit purpose of inciting an audience to stop littering.

Whereas it is true that perhaps I did not emphasize authentic genre, audience, and incitement of social action to as great extent as I should have in the online study group, I believe the theme of inauthenticity transcended these teachers' assignments. Indicative of traditional content and pedagogical knowledge, the teacher-centered pedagogy that resulted in inauthentic assignments written for the teacher served as a barrier to digital writing with a critical stance.

### **Technology Barriers**

As participants endured several challenges to technology integration, the theme of technology barriers emerged. The technological barriers about which I speak here relate specifically to software or hardware. In this educational context, the rhetoric around technology in the classroom seems to be that if a school adopts a computing initiative then student learning and engagement will be fixed. Of course, this is not the case, as "adding technology to instruction does not automatically create a meaningful change in learning or instruction" (Flanagan & Shoffner, 2013, p. 242). Even though three of the teachers had one technological device available to each student, all teachers experienced first-order barriers, which Ertmer (1999) defines as software and hardware challenges. Teachers experienced connectivity issues, lack of access to adequate resources, difficulty in access resources, and administrative bans.

Issues of connectivity proved to be one barrier. At first glance, Sally did not seem to want for anything in terms of technology: "We have really access to just about everything we



could want or need” (personal communication, September 2014). This did not mean, however, she experienced no technological challenges. As she tried to pull up a transitional words worksheet on the projector during observation three, the SMART Board did not work. Later in the lesson, when Sally tried to bring up Glogster the charge went out and Sally mentioned the computer was annoying and unpredictable. She stated “the joys of technology” in a frustrated tone (field notes, November 10, 2014). In another lesson, her student could not log into the Mac laptop. Exasperatingly, Sally noted, “Oh shoot you can’t because you can’t log in” (field notes, December 10, 2014). During my first observation, Nancy told her students they could not stream music because the school was having bandwidth problems. Later in the lesson one student expressed to Nancy he was having trouble with connecting to the wireless Internet (field notes, September 26, 2014). These connectivity issues kept Nancy from enacting the workshop pedagogy she wanted to do: “The poor internet connection was another factor that hindered student work and kept me from conferring with students as I tried to fix what I could” (post-observation one interview).

In addition to connectivity, types of resources available proved yet another barrier. Although Nancy’s school was transitioning to one-to-one iPads from Mac laptops, she and her students faced multiple problems. She criticized the school for considering budgetary issues rather than students’ composing needs. In her post-three observation interview, she commented upon the iPads’ faulty keyboards and the bulky protective cases:

I’d change the assignment by waiting to do it digitally when the students have their keyboards available. (The keyboards have been sent away to be replaced after we had numerous issues with the original shipment.) Most of my students revise more effectively when they edit in a digital format. The protective cases on their iPads make composing difficult, so I’ve been allowing students to choose between creating Google docs or writing on paper. Most are choosing paper. (personal communication, October, 2014)

Darcy was also upset by a top-down administrative decision to replace the projector at the front

of the room with a TV, which impacted her screen ratios and visibility.

Another technological barriers teachers experienced was access to resources. Having only three old desktops in her classroom for student use, Becca commented about the limited access to the school computer lab:

I do know some ways that they could use it but I've got to find time to get into the computer lab so they can all have a computer because even with bring your own device not everyone has them and half of them have a cell phone so that just limits your writing um, so time in the computer lab is super hard to find. You have to plan several weeks in advance to get and then if you want any chunk of time not just a day that's an even more um so maybe some of the resources are actually like the programs are there but I you know computer time is not there. (personal communication, September, 2014)

Comparatively, though Nancy wanted to compose her final digital project using iMovie, she was forced to use PowerPoint:

I was limited in some ways by not having the accesses I wanted to have for iMovie creation... Most of the iPads are functioning now ... and the school's network bandwidth has been increased to allow for faster uploading and better connectivity. (post-observation four interview)

Another technological barrier was administrative bans of technologies. Though she wanted her students to publish their reviews on authentic sites and help her students teach them online responsibility, Darcy's school banned social media sites. Likewise, Becca and her colleagues were struggling to find a technological replacement for Prezi, which the county had banned. Prezi itself does not allow users under age thirteen, a cutoff age for access to many social media sites.

Thus, Though Ertmer (2005) asserted that we might have moved beyond access to technology in our classrooms and more to emphasizing that it is teachers' beliefs that influence effective technology. However, my study revealed mechanical and connectivity issues; lack of access to proper, accessible technology tools, and administrative bans that still plague technology integration in the middle grades English classroom.

## Developing Understandings of Critical Literacy

In many instances, participation in the online study group, which included course readings, discussion forums, the final project, and discussions with me, was the factor that moved these teachers toward developing understandings of critical literacy. As the online study group progressed, teachers' responses revealed developing understandings of critical literacy emerged (Glazier, 2007; Lewison et al., 2002; Rogers, 2005; Rogers, 2007). Generally, teachers moved from not being able to define *critical literacy* to developing burgeoning understandings of *critical literacy*. In addition, teachers appeared to focus only on singular elements of critical literacy rather than multiple elements that affected social action. Aside from Sally, who admitted learning about critical literacy in her master's program, critical literacy was a fairly new idea to most of the participants. One of my favorite quotes came from Nancy who admitted the following about critical literacy: "It's so hard to put into words" (personal communication, December, 2014). For many of the participants, defining *critical literacy* seemed to be difficult. It was a new concept for many of the participants. For example, Becca explained

The idea of critical literacy was fairly new to me until this course. I loved learning about it and thinking about how it can impact my class. I see it as both questioning what you read and doing something with your findings. It's using those upper-level questions and thinking skills that I value in my classroom. Then, it's asking how our discoveries may impact the society around us. (post-observation three interview).

Here, Becca directly attributes her enhanced knowledge to the online study group. Through online study group's glossary, readings, and forums and via discussions with me, Becca became familiar with the idea of critical literacy. Table 14 presents each participant's response to the question about what critical literacy meant to them before and after the online study group.

Table 14

*Definitions of Critical Literacy*

Teacher	Definitions
Sally	<p><i>Pre:</i> Um critical literacy is I I think the ability to put down what's in your head ... either on paper or any other form of expression. So a form of written expression, whatever that looks like. And um literacy could be English language, it could be math. It just and by the way we do math activities we do math writing in math. So that's another form. So we do writing in math. So there is and there's math papers.</p> <p><i>Post:</i> It's getting that written expression or getting that expression down whatever way um by thinking critically not only about oneself but about others and about society and what a difference that maybe we can make."</p>
Nancy	<p><i>Pre:</i> Critical literacy was the piece that um . You know I think I know what it means and course I've looked at what people were thinking about critical literacy but it's a squishy term I think. You know you start with the root of it being critical in the sense of looking with an educated an oh . I guess discerning eye at um what's out there whatever that might be. And then the other piece of it is action from yourself critical in the sense of knowing what's a must do a must have the skills you must be to uh carry out to be to perform you know adequately as a communicator.</p> <p><i>Post:</i> I mean critical literacy is basically looking at a word beyond just it's so hard to put into words. Critics do it all the time. You're looking both at tone, the flavor, the subtext, everything involved, the audience, the audience interacting with it, every audience make every work read a little differently, the kids touched on that a tiny bit, it's all about perspective. And it's about starting off without a set notion in mind on what a particular text might mean to every consumer of that text." "As a writer, I think it [critical literacy] pushes me to think about my audience a lot more than I ever did. I have to think about the audience beyond middle-class white person, middle-class education person, middle-class American, middle class woman and look and what somebody from a different background would think about what I would have to say and also to think beyond my message and try to think about the audience and how it would receive my message uh just depending on how I present it, what images I chose, my selected for example. I looked back to my PowToon I used to introduce to the class I said oh my God I have all little white kid images...I don't know if they paid any attention, but it made me cringe when I saw it through the lens of thinking about what we were doing in this study.</p>
Becca	<p><i>Pre:</i> I don't think I know that term either really.</p> <p><i>Post:</i> Um asking those difficult questions, wondering as you read, applying it to your life, applying it to society, that was kind of an interesting step that it's not just asking the difficult questions but then it's also taking it one more step into how does this affect kind of like our ideas of society maybe." "Maybe being aware of my audience I don't really know. Maybe</p>

---

Darcy	<p>just being aware of who I'm speaking to and the different perspective the different I don't know I don't know if that." "Um, I feel like I just keep repeating myself what I know about critical literacy. I mean I think it encourages me to teach the kids these skills. Some of the things that I read just said very specifically that we have to teach them and model it over and over again how to be critical readers so I guess in that way it would certainly impact hopefully the way that I teach from here on out.</p> <p><i>Pre:</i> I honestly don't know.</p> <p><i>Post:</i> I would say that that [new literacies] transitions into the critical literacy for me a little bit." "Yeah so kind of the ability to um not just find it but to analyze it and to say is this what I need? Is this relevant? Is this important? Is this just filler? Um and you know so some of what I said I still stand by it but the new literacies like the ability to find it, the access to information I guess um is part of that new literacy. And the analyzing of it would be kind of the shift into the critical literacy. Man I like that answer.</p>
-------	--

---

These excerpts help focus on this idea that critical literacy understandings can only begin to develop of a short amount of time. And though no teacher in the study was able to enact a comprehensive understanding of critical literacy in their digital writing text, they each began to make moves toward understanding critical literacy – in both language and actions. Interestingly, participants seemed to focus in on four particular elements of critical literacy: having a voice in society, multiple perspectives, problem-solving, and critique.

Sally's developing understanding of critical literacy stressed having a voice in society, an element several of the articles presented in the online study group emphasized. The only teacher with explicit social justice pedagogies, Sally saw her role as a teacher as providing marginalized students with a voice. Turner and Hicks (2011-2012) articulate that teaching writing is "an act of social justice ... that seeks to empower the voices of individuals..." (p. 56) and this pedagogy was evident in Sally's classroom. Describing her students as having "challenges to overcome economically, politically, socially, and sexually" (online study group weekly four forum post), many of her lessons were dedicated to helping students find their voice. As such, it was no

surprise that Sally's Edmodo account was a digital space for social justice. Several of her prompts addressed issues of power and inequity:

Today in 1993, South Africa adopted a new constitution. After more than 300 years of white rulership, basic civil rights (the right to vote, freedom of speech, etc.) were finally granted to black people in South Africa.

If you were creating a constitution (basic set of laws) for a new country, name the first 3 laws you would create? Which law do you think is the most important? Why do you think the whites ruled South Africa when the Africans lived there already?

What are some examples that you have seen about social injustices in your life or in lives of people you know? As you watch Walk Out or other movies or read books on this genre, think how you would feel. What about the feelings of others?

Not surprisingly, Sally and her students completed an I Am Poem in Glogster. Though on first glance, the I Am Poem may not seem like a critical literacy piece, the ways in which Sally spoke about it reflected that she valued provided her students, whom she identified as marginalized, with a voice. In her third observation, Sally shared with her students that they would be working with Glogster doing a type of digital storytelling. As she is showing them a paper-based graphic organizer for the I Am Poem, she tells them her purpose is to get their voice and help other find their voice (field notes, November, 10, 2014). Sally wanted students to share their Glogsters with each other and others on the Internet. Here, she illuminated her understandings of digital writing as a social practice. We must remember, however, that the purpose of the I Am Poem was not to incite social change and did not have a community outside of Sally's classroom.

Both Nancy and Becca focused on critical literacy's element of multiple perspectives, an element focused upon in the online study group's readings. I acknowledge multiple perspectives are part of socially just pedagogies (Moje, 2007) but these teachers could not be described as having socially just pedagogies in the same way as Sally. Nancy reflected on audience's

reception of the primarily white characters on her PowToons account and considered the importance of audience in digital spaces. Her reflections on whose perspectives were emphasized led her to overhaul her classroom's reading selections:

I think one of the biggest things I'm so totally embarrassed to say that the text that we have in our curriculum including *The Hobbit*, *The Giver*, I mean they're all about just pretty much white people or let's face it even though *The Hobbit* is not a person technically it's it's you know a little British character. The whole book's just a bunch of white Brits... We'll just move em all out, and I think that has come directly out of this study. (personal communication, December, 2014).

She revealed the study group made her critique her practice: "Uh what are we doing? What are we teaching? Why are we making these choices? Why are these people represented? What happened to these voices? So definitely grown in that sense" (personal communication, December, 2014). She also talked about "moving away from a single story" (post-observation six interview). In her hero project, Nancy pushed her students to consider who was missing from heroes. For example, she wrote about the "absence of women in any meaningful heroic roles" (online study group week five) and wanted to push her student beyond this. As such, she wanted to push her students to think about the humorous Captain Tidy character as a hero who "would not likely be considered a hero in the classical sense" (online study group week five post). She wanted to emphasize "a changing definition of the hero": "our heroes have changed from the typically male, white classical model of the hero to embody the greater diversity my students encounter" (post-observation four interview). Nancy was committed to altering the reading selections for her students, which she cited lacked diversity.

Becca's podcast was also about unheard perspectives. Her Harry Potter podcast ended with the following lines:

So what did I learn from this experience? From looking at things on the other side? When dealing with a situation fictional or in my own life it's important to look and listen for that other side: the side that's not heard. It's important to question the author's

intentions, think for myself, just as it's important in my own life to take a step back, think about the alternate perspective, and with that hopefully justice really will win.

So whereas Becca's podcast did not have the purpose of eliciting social action, the ultimate goal of digital writing with a critical stance, it began to move readers and perhaps the composer closer to an understanding about multiple perspectives.

Nancy's final composition project revealed a focus on the problem-solving component to critical literacy. This idea of eliciting change and social action was focused upon in the online study group, especially by the mentor text I created and forum replies to teachers. Adapting the Dave Barry character Captain Tidy Pants, she created a PowerPoint in which she highlighted the key features of his stop littering initiative. As I watched Nancy deliver this PowerPoint to her students, I noticed that it was more of a project about stopping littering rather than a project to stop littering, thus missing the social action component of critical literacy.

And, finally, Darcy's work focused on the element of critique. I would be remiss to not acknowledge that Darcy left the online study group just as we began to explore the connections between digital writing and critical literacy. Nevertheless, during my fourth observation, I observed Darcy's students write critiques of experiences they had during a recent break. This assignment was planned before the online study group. Even so, it was unique to see Darcy start the critique lesson with a Bill Mahr quote about whether critique is necessary for growth.

Thus, even though participants were fairly unfamiliar with the term *critical literacy*, each participant moved toward developing an understanding of critical literacy. As a whole, participants came to focus on the following elements of critical literacy: having a voice, multiple perspectives, problem-solving, and critique. The online study group, which included readings, discussion forums, the final project, and discussions with me, moved these teachers toward singular understandings of critical literacies. Whereas I had hoped teachers would have been



able to focus on multiple elements of critical literacy as a whole, they each focused on one element. This fact exhibits that perhaps teachers need to move incrementally toward incorporating critical literacy into their classrooms before a total pedagogical overhaul.

### **Reflection on Practice**

Teachers' digital writing with a critical stance did not approach the level of igniting social action. However, each teacher reflected on her practice regarding critical literacy. Here, reflection means considerations of teaching practices in both the past and future that might support critical literacy. Though some of the reflective excerpts that I share below do not come from online study group forum posts, many highlight the fact that the online study group encouraged the reflective thoughts.

I was particularly interested when Nancy told me that thinking about perspectives had inspired her to reflect on the class texts her students read. Upon considering the typical white, male characters in the texts, she was committed and had administrative support to reorder texts. She shared:

I think one of the biggest things I'm so totally embarrassed to say that the text that we have in our curriculum including *The Hobbit*, *The Giver*, I mean they're all about just pretty much white people or let's face it even though *The Hobbit* is not a person technically it's you know a little British character. The whole book's just a bunch of white Brits. Um *The Giver* basically is very middle class, white even though they supposedly don't see color there's no sense of anybody going I mean that's part of the theme of the book. But basically it's you know it doesn't push the kids at all. *A Wrinkle in Time*, which has been in our curriculum forever, you know it's exactly the same thing. The values are even though I can ask questions and try to push them to think in broader terms than are in the study guide so to speak it's not a book that that's going to push any boundaries. It's not going to ask them to think any differently than they've already been thinking. So one of the things that I've done already is to ask for some more money to buy some different texts and whether their digital texts which they probably will be think they're definitely moving in that direction um we're about to use up all these old paperbacks, which is a good thing. We'll just move them all out, and I think that has come directly out of this study. (personal communication, December, 2014)

Though an unexpected outcome of my research study, considerations of the perspective aspects of critical literacy prompted her to consider the texts her students were reading. And when we consider the connections between reading and writing, that Nancy's students would be reading texts with multiple perspectives in the future may indeed alter their writing. Nancy attributed the online study group in which we focused on multiple perspectives as the contributing factor in her decision to want to alter her classroom's reading selections.

Likewise, Sally, who had been in a Master's degree program at a research-intensive institution with a focus on social justice pedagogy, seemed to recommit herself to critical literacy she had learned about when in graduate school. When asked about how the online study group altered her definition of critical literacy, she said,

I think it's deepened in how I view it [critical literacy] and how I want to teach it. And um remembering the pedagogy from when I was in grad school and bringing back and knowing that even though it's really hard to teach to try and teach it with as much fidelity as I possibly can. (personal communication, December, 2014)

In addition, she realized that the online study group articles from one week had "Freire's pedagogy in common" and admitted "Freire was/is my man." Furthermore, Becca focused on questioning perspectives and admitted both to her students when she shared her podcast and to me during our second interview that she had not asked "those difficult questions of texts" beforehand. Thus, reflection on her practice encouraged Becca to consider the types of questions she asked her students. In a forum post, she said that she would never have gone there [asking the types of questions she asked in her final project] on her own. The online study group, the book she looked at online, and the questions I posed to her in emails and discussion forums seemed to help her here, and it was the online study group's forum that provided her the space to reflect on practice. She also admitted that an activity she and her students had engaged in around Malala Yousafzai and a poem reminded her of the dialogue sessions Ife (2012) suggested in one

of the articles we read. In addition, she acknowledged that during *Seedfolks* unit, her students discussed connections and disconnections with characters. Similarly, Darcy revealed the online study group helped her name *critical literacy* she believed she and her students had engaged previously without knowing the name for the practice. Reflections on practice, then, involved teachers not only thinking about how some of the activities they had done in the past would be considered critical literacy activities but also critical literacy practices they could enact in future lessons. Thus, not only did the online study group provide readings and activities that facilitated teacher reflection but it provided a space for teachers to share such reflections with one another.

### **Challenges to Implementing Critical Literacy**

The challenges to implementing critical literacy was another theme that emerged. Participants indicated that including critical literacy in their teaching proved difficult for a variety of reasons. Riley (2015) notes several “challenges to ‘doing critical literacy’” that exist in today’s educational context: “the standards movement, the proliferation of high-stakes tests, top-down school reform efforts, and the framing of educational practices in terms of workforce and postsecondary preparation to the exclusion of other aims, such as democratic participation” (p. 417). In her study with future literacy coaches, she cited, “inevitably, uncertainty arises as teachers explore critical literacy practices” (p. 258). In my study, even though teachers moved toward understandings of critical literacy and reflected on their practice, many of the teachers admitted challenges with implementing critical literacy practices. Shared primarily within the online study group, these challenges included being overwhelmed with both technological and critical literacy aspects, concerns about parents, hesitations about implementing critical literacy, and collegial barriers.

The online study group forums provided Becca a space to express being overwhelmed with both the technological and critical literacy elements of the final project. Having to have knowledge of both critical literacy and technology tools proved difficult: “I am still struggling with the digital final product. And, honestly, think that in practice, it may feel overwhelming” (online study group week five forum post). Becca also suggested that though she found it applicable she found “it hard to streamline my plan, making it ‘doable’ in my classroom” (online study group week five post). The fact that the final project included not only critical literacy but a technology component proved a challenge. In addition, she admitted that critical literacy did not align seamlessly with the lessons and assignments she had planned.

Concerns about parents provide another challenge to critical literacy implementation. After she watched a video about gender identity as part of the online study group, Becca expressed concerns about parents:

Watching the ‘10,000 Dresses’ video, listening to the podcast and thinking about discussions of gender identity and negative stereotypes in the classroom honestly made me nervous at first. I have some very involved and outspoken parents, and so in the classroom, I tend to shy away from controversial topics that may cause my inbox to flood the following morning. This is no excuse for avoiding powerful conversation; I understand that. (online study group week three forum post)

Here, she enacted Beck’s (2005) assertion that “teaching critical literacy, however, is not without risks to students, teachers, and the institutions in which they are embedded” (p. 392). The online study group provided her a space in which she felt compelled and comfortable to express her thoughts about including particular texts in her classroom that parents might resist. After acknowledging she “tend[ed] to shy away from controversial topics” that may upset parents, she acknowledged “this is no excuse for avoiding powerful conversation” (online study group week three forum post). Whereas it is true that I did not see Becca and her students engaging in controversial conversations during the period of the study, Becca’s comments here showcase that

she is reflecting critically on the importance of engaging in “powerful conversation” despite parents’ potential reactions.

Other teachers suggested it was difficult to integrate critical literacy in ways they believed authentic. Sally expressed that it was challenging to find opportunities to engage students in critical literacy discussions: “And it’s really hard cause how often do you get the opportunity to broach such sub- you know subjects um without it looking out of context” (personal communication, December, 2014). Here, Sally admitted she felt as though she perhaps added critical literacy onto curriculum (Glazier, 2007). In addition, Sally revealed she felt it was difficult for her students to engage in discussions of critical literacy: “They have a narrow focus, but a few got it” (post-observation four interview). A few of the teachers also expressed concerns about not wanting to force students to think in particular ways. As Becca reviewed others’ digital texts in week six of the online study group, she agreed with another participant:

As I read your thoughts, I began to wonder if my lesson pushes them too much into agreeing with me. I wondered if it too often, in my lesson plan for this project and in other areas of teaching, I coax them into my understanding and viewpoint of the text. That was great for me to think about – so, thanks!”

Nancy also wondered if she was directing too much: “It’s challenging to think of ways to help students take critical stances without feeding them a certain point of view” (online study group week four). She was also worried that her students reading difficulties would limit their abilities to take a critical stance (online study group week four). Furthermore, Nancy wrestled with the idea of giving students the power to explore their ideas as Beck (2005) suggested is sometimes problematic, especially when students express views that are racist or homophobic, for example. In many ways, the online study group became a sharing space for these teachers, who felt comfortable enough to reveal their apprehensions about enacting critical literacy in their classrooms.

Another challenge to implementing critical literacy was collegial barriers. Both Darcy and Becca referenced planning writing assignments with colleagues. And though Becca admitted she “probably have more freedom” to plan on her own than she admitted, she was “such a team player” that she enjoyed relying on colleagues to plan assignments (personal communication, September, 2014). In addition to other time commitments at work, one of the reasons Darcy was unable to complete the digital writing project for the online study group was because of the administrative expectation that all seventh grade teachers assigned the same writing assignments. She stated:

It’s hard to justify and make that change and have the two teachers doing something that’s different. It’s kind of frowned upon so which is it’s it’s something I’ve struggled with here because innovation is so important but as long as we’re innovating together. (personal communication, December, 2014).

To conclude, each of the teachers revealed a variety of challenges to enacting critical literacy in their English classrooms. Of course, the grandest challenge to implementation may be the reality that digital writing with a critical stance may not be embedded in the typical English classroom.

### **Chapter Summary**

Although middle grades English teachers who were active digital writers composed in myriad digital and non-digital personal and professional genres, much of what they wrote had conventional stances rather than critical stances. Interestingly, though these teachers wrote approximately once a week in their digital writing spaces, they were on a continuum of understandings in terms of digital writing and new literacies. On one end stood Becca, who resisted any more digital writing than was expected of her in her professional wiki. On the other end stood Darcy, whose knowledge of digital writing and new literacies was immense and evidenced on her multimodal personal running blog. It was not surprisingly, then, that teachers’

understandings of digital writing and new literacies were reflected in their writing pedagogies. For example, if a teacher believed digital writing spaces to be dangerous, she limited students' access to digital spaces. If a teacher believed digital writing could provide writers a voice otherwise not available, she designed an online space for students to develop their digital voices. Regardless, as a result of the online study group – with the exception of Darcy – participants appeared to broaden their understandings of digital writing and new literacies understandings. Another theme that emerged was participants' teacher-centered pedagogy. Such pedagogies resulted in inauthentic, paper-based assignments written for the teacher. This theme, along with the technology barriers (e.g. resource scarcity, inadequate technology tools, connectivity and bandwidth concerns, and administrative bans) limited the possibility of digital writing with a critical stance. And, finally, regarding the moves toward critical literacy, data analysis revealed a developing understanding of critical literacy, reflection on practice, and challenges to implementation. Although no teacher made the transition from conventional digital writer to critical digital writer as I had hoped she would, each teacher moved toward understandings of critical literacy. Because teachers were developing understandings of critical literacy, they focused on a particular element of critical literacy in their text composition project. In addition, they began to reflect on their practice in terms lessons that enacted critical literacy in the past and those that could in the future and expressed several challenges to enacting critical literacy, including collegial and planning constraints and parents' views. Of, course these findings cannot be separated from the online study group in which these teachers were enrolled, as many of their moves toward critical literacy were either as a result of the online study group or exhibited within the online study group's forum posts. The online study group itself became a social space in which teachers presented their voices, pushed back against or altered previous pedagogies, and

shared ideas with one another, all components of critical literacy. Therefore, instead of the teachers' digital writing spaces - with the exception of their final text composition projects - the online study group itself became the path by which teachers began constructing critical literacy understandings.



## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

This dissertation study examined four middle grades English teachers who were digital writers enrolled in an online study group about the connections between digital writing and critical literacy. The study was guided by the following research questions: (1) What are the writing practices of secondary English teachers who are active digital writers? (2) What does writing (digital and otherwise) pedagogy look like in the classrooms of teachers who are digital writers? (3) What factors move teachers toward critical literacy in their own writing and in their classroom practices?

In the proceeding chapters, I provided narratives and themes that emerged from each participant and then provided a cross-case analysis in which I discussed themes that emerged across the four cases. In this chapter, I offer findings according to my three research questions, discuss how my findings relate to and extend the literature, and provide implications for English education. Finally, I offer study limitations and recommend future research directions.

### **Findings**

I organized my findings around my three research questions.

#### **What are the writing practices of secondary English teachers who are active digital writers?**

Findings revealed that middle grades English teachers who were active digital writers wrote in traditional and digital spaces in myriad professional and personal genres. Professional genres dominated teachers' writing practices, which had rather conventional stances. Perhaps what was most intriguing was that whereas all participants were active digital writers, writing

approximately once a week in a digital space, these teachers had various understandings of the *technical stuff* and *ethos stuff* of new literacies practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). These understandings may be indicative of *how* active and engaged in digital writing these teachers were. What became clearer as I collected data was that the phrase “active digital writer” applied to each participant differently. Whereas some teachers used their digital spaces to engage with students, friends, or family, others were still developing their digital voices. Likewise, whereas some digital spaces displayed an awareness of the affordances of digital writing and new literacies (e.g. pictures, text, color), others showcased a limited knowledge of such affordances, resulting in digital spaces being mere digital lists or information repositories.

**What does writing (digital and otherwise) pedagogy look like in the classrooms of teachers who are digital writers?**

Findings revealed writing pedagogy varied widely across participants, yet reflected teachers’ understandings and beliefs about digital writing and new literacies. These understandings and beliefs varied greatly from a resistance to digital writing to a desire to enhance one’s digital presence to a full awareness of multimodal elements. Teachers who used their digital writing spaces as repository spaces had students do the same. Standing out from the other participants, Darcy provided opportunities for her students to engage in writing that reflected her nuanced understandings of digital writing and new literacies. Although Darcy and other teachers assigned digital writing that involved more than typing, students were composing in traditional, inauthentic, and print-based genres without a critical stance for teachers. Teachers’ writing lessons were plagued by technological barriers and collegial and curriculum expectations. Nevertheless, regardless of individual writing and pedagogical practices, all

teachers exhibited nascent or developing understandings of the affordances of digital writing and new literacies. .

**What factors move teachers toward critical literacy in their own writing and in their classroom practices?**

The online study group itself proved a factor in moving participants toward understandings of critical literacy. The relationships amongst participants and the collaborative space within the online study group allowed teachers to share ideas with one another and develop critical literacy understandings. In addition, course readings provided examples of critical literacy from real classrooms. All participants struggled to define *critical literacy* at the beginning of the study group, and though they made developmental steps toward understandings about critical literacy, no participant was able to offer a concise definition of *critical literacy* after the study group. As such, participants focused on singular elements of critical literacy, such as providing a voice, considering multiple perspectives, problem-solving, and critique, which were elements shared in the online study group via course readings. It should be noted that none of the participants' final composition projects encouraged an authentic audience to take action. Nevertheless, considerations of critical literacy encouraged them to reflect on their practice. Whereas Nancy dedicated herself to providing more diverse books for her students to read, Sally recommitted herself to the critical literacy pedagogy she had been introduced to her in graduate school. Furthermore, Darcy and Becca both thought about how they engaged their students in critical literacy in the past without knowing the name of the practice. And, finally, participants revealed multiple challenges to enacting digital writing with a critical stance in their classroom. Barriers included teachers' technological knowledge, nervousness about parents' reactions, and collegial planning and curriculum expectations. Whereas I went into the research study

believing that digital writing would be the path for these teachers to develop critical literacy, what I found was that though the teachers' final digital text composition projects exhibited developing understandings of critical literacy, the online study group itself became just as important of a path for these teachers to develop critical literacy.

### **Situating Findings within Literature**

My dissertation was situated or extended the literature in the following areas: teachers as writers, teachers as digital writers, teachers as digital writers with a critical stance, a developmental approach to critical literacy, and barriers to digital writing with a critical stance in the secondary English classroom.

#### **Teachers as Writers**

My work contributed an empirical study to a field that has largely been theoretical: teachers as writers. My work revealed, like Dawson et al.'s (2013) work with first-year teachers, that teachers' writing is overwhelmingly professional and multivariate in nature. The teachers in my study wrote largely for professional reasons, with much of the writing expected if not required. I considered my work in the context of Cremin and Baker's (2010) qualitative study with elementary teachers. In relation to Cremin and Baker's teacher-writer continuum, teachers in my study – aside from Darcy – claimed to write more genres related to their profession, or the system, than they did for themselves. The degree of authorial agency and personal authenticity labels on Cremin and Baker's continuum are especially poignant in light of my work in that writing with a critical stance necessitates agency and authenticity:

Pedagogical consequences resulted from their participation as fellow-writers with their students. In recognizing their authorial agency and the importance of choice, they sought to afford the children more rights as writers – enabling them to choose their subject, form and audience, for example. (p. 21)

The autonomy and time to write Darcy provided for her students stood out in contrast to the other participants. Interestingly, she wrote digitally for personal reasons and identified as a fellow writer with her students in more explicit ways than other participants.

### **Teachers as Digital Writers**

More specifically, my work extended the research base on teachers as digital writers. Despite the fact that teachers were active digital writers who wrote in new literacies spaces (Gee, 2007; Leu et al, 2004; Street, 1995) in the form of tweets, blog entries, Edmodo posts, or wiki posts, they had varying understandings of new literacies practices' *technical stuff* and *ethos stuff* (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Therefore, regardless of the frequency with which they wrote digitally, teachers' understandings of new literacies differed. As they summarized Lankshear and Knobel (2006), Rish and Caton suggested one can use technical stuff without the ethos, use ethos without the technical, or use both in tandem. Though all of the participants in my study wrote digitally in spaces that embodied new literacies understandings, the writers themselves varied in their understandings of both the *technical stuff* and *ethos stuff*. It became clear that teachers need not only possess "functional" technology skills but rather "an ability to transform text, image, and sound for critical, rhetorical, and social purposes" (Turner & Hicks, 2011-2012, p. 58). For example, though Nancy knew *how* to Tweet, she was developing the *ethos* of what being a Twitter writer meant. In contrast, however, Darcy displayed both the *technical stuff* and the *ethos stuff*, showcasing knowledge of broadened audience and multimodality made possible by composing on her blog, a finding Rodesiler (2014) found when he researched teachers who were active digital writers in professional spaces. Not surprisingly, teachers' digital writing and new literacies understandings were reflected in their pedagogy. This built upon Bartel's (2013) idea of the echo, this idea that teachers' pedagogies echo their writing on social media. I was

intrigued by the fact that Darcy, the personal blogger, was able to bring in more robust ways of composing in digital spaces to her classroom than the other teachers who were writing for required professional purposes. Two future research directions emerged from this factor: Research on how pedagogies are different for teachers who are writing in digital spaces for personal versus professional purposes and research on how pedagogies are different for teachers who are writing in required versus self-selected digital writing spaces.

### **Teachers as Digital Writers with a Critical Stance**

My work contributed an empirical study to the limited field of teachers as digital writers with a critical stance. Other studies have used digital writing in the form of online forums to engage teachers in discussions about critical literacy (e.g. Gomez et al., 2010; Groenke & Maple, 2008; Myers & Eberfors, 2010), and though I used online forums to engage teachers in discussions of critical literacy, my study extended this line of research. Not only did my study group participants use digital writing to converse *about* critical literacy but they used digital writing to *enact* critical literacy. Whereas we discussed elements of critical literacy in the online forums, they also created digital texts with a critical stance. In addition, my study emphasized the importance of facilitating professional, supportive relationships amongst teachers and providing them a space to present their voices, share ideas, and work against traditional or previous pedagogies in regard to critical literacy.

My work aligned with the few researchers who have examined the connection between digital writing and critical literacy. Blondell (2009) shared a case study of a teacher who created a counter narrative video to a young adolescent book. The preservice teachers in Robertson and Hughes' (2012) four-year case study made digital literacy life histories and social justice book talks. Similarly, Turner and Hicks's (2011-2012) qualitative study worked with preservice

English teachers around understandings of digital writing and writing as a social justice act. And Reid's (2011) qualitative study with preservice teachers revealed how Facebook account became a space for a professor and her students to enact Janks's (2010) elements of critical literacy: power, access, diversity, and design. Similarly, the online study group, which included weekly readings, forum posts, text composition projects, and conversations with me, permitted participants to make movements toward understanding how digital writing could provide a space for critical literacy.

However, while many of these studies examined preservice or novice teachers, my work extended the literature base by including a study of *inservice* English teachers as they considered digital writing as a space for critical literacy within an online study group about the connections between digital writing and critical literacy. Disappointingly, teachers' digital writing spaces (blog, Edmodo account, Twitter, wiki) did not reveal that teachers' writing was becoming more critical in nature, a finding in line with Turner and Hicks's (2011-2012) work with preservice teachers who did not understand their digital writing spaces to be venues by which they could empower themselves and their communities in part because they did not see digital writing as writing that mattered, and they did not understand digital writing as a social justice act. Even so, the online study group provided my participants a space to discuss and enact developing understandings of digital writing and critical literacy in their final text composition projects – even if they did not begin to assume a critical stance in their personal or professional digital writing spaces. And though I do not know the exact reasons for this, contributing factors could be that study participants – all except Darcy – were still developing as digital writers with new literacies understandings. In addition, prior to the online study group these teachers were not critical writers.

It is important to consider my study in relation to the scholarship about the connection between new literacies and critical literacy. Although several researchers (Avila & Moore, 2012; Hinrichsen and Coombs, 2013; Freebody and Luke, 1990; Peters & Lankshear, 1996; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, 2006; Lemke, 1998; Leu et al., 2004, Luke, 2012; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Parker, 2013; Sholle & Denski, 1993) have asserted new literacies are inherently critical, my work established that new literacies practices (e.g. blogging, Tweeting, or writing for wikis or Edmodo) can be uncritical in nature. A challenge to much research in the area of new literacies, my work aligned with the work of Myers and Eberfors (2010) who asserted that new literacies are not inherently critical. Whereas it is possible for new literacies practices to be spaces for critical literacy - and three of the teachers' digital composition projects did indeed have critical stances - new literacies practices were also spaces for traditional and conventional literacies as exhibited by teachers' personal and professional digital writing, an idea that runs counter to much of the literature base about new literacies. That the teachers' digital writing outside of the online study group did not display a critical stance is a theoretically important finding, as it may help teacher educators and researchers in the field of new literacies reconsider preconceived notions about new literacies practices and their connection to critical stances. In addition, it may help facilitate conversations about new literacies practices that both do and do not have critical stances. Furthermore, that teachers' digital composition texts completed for the online study group did have critical stances implies that external factors, for example, online study groups, are capable of encouraging teachers to write digitally with a critical stance and that digital writing with a critical stance has to be an intentional act. Whether there always needs to be a motivating factor, or irritant, outside the writer herself to inspire digitally writing with a critical stance may need to be further explored.



## Developmental Approach to Critical Literacy

My work extended Glazier's (2007) assertion that teacher educators might understand English teachers' acquisition of "critical practice ... [to be] a developmental process" (p. 381), a finding in line with other scholars' work (e.g. Lewison et al., 2002; Rogers, 2005; Rogers, 2007). For most of the participants the idea of *critical literacy* was fairly new, which Rogers (2015) found in her qualitative study of literacy coaches and Lewison et al. (2002) saw in their study of elementary school teachers. In line with previous work on critical literacy, my study found, as several previous studies did (Glazier, 2007; Lewison et al., 2002; Mosley, 2010) that teachers who are inexperienced with critical literacy approaches are not able to immediately address the action component of critical literacy. Because of participants' unfamiliarity with critical literacy, they focused on a particular aspect of critical literacy (e.g. encouraging student voice, critique, problem-solving, and multiple perspectives). This idea of the singular focus was in line with previous researchers' work (e.g. Groenke & Maples, 2008; Lewison et al., 2002; Rogers, 2007; Wolfe, 2010).

Because it is important to consider the moves teachers made toward critical literacy in relation to the research shared in the online study group, I created a table to showcase how the participants' critical literacy elements aligned or did not align with the elements of critical literacy shared in the online study group readings. Table 15 presents this information.

Table 15

### *Participants' Critical Literacy Element and Related Research*

Participant	Critical Literacy Element	Related Research
Sally	Encouraging student voice	Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Love, 2014

Darcy	Critique	Though critique is an aspect of critical literacy, it was not explicitly discussed in the online study group. In addition, Darcy left the study group before we delved deeply into the connections between new literacies and critical literacy.
Nancy	Problem-solving, multiple perspectives	Problem-solving: Ife, 2012; Mancina, 2005 Multiple perspectives: Beck, 2005; Behrman, 2006; Clarke & Whitney, 2009
Becca	Multiple perspectives	Multiple perspectives: Beck, 2005; Behrman, 2006; Clarke & Whitney, 2009

This table is important for two reasons. First, it articulates that the elements of critical literacy on which participants focused were not random. Rather, these elements were influenced by the readings in the online study group. Second, this table reveals how important my role in the research study was. The fact that I selected these particular readings for the online study and that these readings emphasized particular areas (i.e. encouraging student voice, problem-solving, and multiple perspectives) cannot be ignored. To summarize, this table displays the ways in which the readings I selected for the course revealed themselves in participants' final text composition projects.

Relatedly, though my study did not investigate teachers' social justice dispositions directly, it became clear that aside from Sally, most participants were unfamiliar with the idea of writing as a social justice act (Chapman et al., 2011; Turner & Hicks, 2011-2012). This was not surprising, as "teachers have been afforded limited successful models on the enactment of social justice pedagogy in English language arts classrooms" (Chapman et al., 2011, p. 540). Even so, Sally suggested the online study group helped her recommit to critical literacy tenets espoused in

her master's program.

### **Barriers to Digital Writing with a Critical Stance in the Secondary English Classroom**

And, finally, my work was situated within the literature about the barriers that exist to enacting digital writing in the secondary English classroom. An analysis of participants' writing assignments confirmed both what Whitney (2011) discussed as the "schoolishness" of academic work and Applebaum and Langer's (2011) analysis that "the large majority of the writing students do is still to the teacher-as-examiner" (p. 17). It is not my purpose to condemn the traditional academic essay – in fact, I might argue that there is a place for teaching and learning the traditional academic essay: school. What is problematic about these traditional genres read by the teacher, of course, is they diminish the possibility of writing as a means for students to enact community change (Chapman et al., 2011; Turner & Hicks, 2011-2012).

That a few teachers in my study, namely Sally and Becca, seemed to value traditional writing rather than digital writing provided to be yet another barrier. The valuing of traditional modes of writing was evident with Turner and Hicks's (2011-2012) work with preservice English teachers. Overwhelmingly, rather than engaging in all of the possibilities that digital writing spaces afford, students were using their devices primarily to type. This is confirmed in the literature: "the general focus in English education still seems to see technology as a tool rather than using ICTs to open spaces for socially-situated rhetorical and pedagogical practices" (Grabill & Hicks, 2005, p. 303). My finding that some teachers still valued traditional writing modes in favor of digital writing modes went against Ertmer, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Sadik, Sendurur, and Sendurur's (2012) recent study that suggested second-order barriers, including teachers' beliefs about technology integration, have been minimized. Teachers in my study provided that teacher beliefs can still very much limited technology integration.

Teachers in my study also seemed to face institutional barriers to enacting digital writing with a critical stance. As evidenced in the literature and in Nancy's classroom, lack of proper or functioning software and hardware limits teachers' ability to integrate technology effectively (Ertmer, 1999, Hew & Brush, 2007). In addition, the fact that critical literacy components did not fit seamlessly with Becca and Darcy's curricula – because of factors such as collegial planning, major assignments for the year having been already planned, and track out schedule - revealed critical literacy is not institutionalized at their schools. Administrative bans on specific digital tools, Prezi in Becca's case and social media sites in Darcy's case, also limited digital composing. Glazier (2007) also discussed the juxtaposition that exists between those who want to enact critical literacy practices and the traditional pedagogies that are valued in today's schools. McLaren (1993) conferred the difficult but possible ways to engage in critical literacy in the classroom:

Where tight curricular guidelines are mandated, teachers will have to seek creative ways of turning the curriculum into pedagogical opportunities for critical activity. This challenging but by no means beyond the capacities of teachers committed to a more truly practical approach to education. Promoting class, gender, and race and ethnic consciousness can be done by using whatever freedom and control teachers have over curriculum, although the spaces are becoming increasingly constrained .... (p. 46)

Thus, my work confirmed that both technological and institutional barriers are capable of thwarting digital writing with a critical stance in the secondary English classroom.

To summarize, my work both aligned with and extended the literature in the field. In line with the literature, I found that the teachers in my study wrote primarily for professional reasons (Dawson et al., 2013) and their digital and non-digital writing was primarily uncritical. Embodying various levels of *technos* and *ethos* (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) these teachers were not only developing new literacies understandings but beginning to comprehend what critical literacy in the writing classroom looked like. Therefore, my work extended the work about the

acquisition of critical literacy as a development process (Glazier, 2007; Lewison et al., 2002; Rogers, 2005; Rogers, 2007).

### **A Researcher's Return to Positionality: A Reflection**

Though I have acknowledged the importance of the online study group in both the findings chapter and the discussion above, in this section, I write specifically about how my positionality impacted the research study.

The movements teachers made in terms of broadening understandings of digital writing and new literacies and toward understandings of critical literacy were due, in part, to the online study group I organized. Though all participants did not become critical digital writers in their personal or professional digital writing spaces, each participant made a movement toward critical literacy as a result of engaging in the online study group. Whether it was the articles I selected, the forum questions I asked, my replies to participants' posts, the mentor text I created, or the final text composition project I assigned, I was a crucial component of the participants' experiences in the online study group. If participants' text composition project drafts did not address particular areas, I prompted them to alter their work. For example, because I noticed that participants' drafts were not reaching the point of social action, I encouraged participants to think about the social action their project would elicit and shared how my mentor text elicited social action. In addition to my comments within the context of the online study group, I met and exchanged emails with teachers to help them consider their final text composition projects. In particular, I sat down with Sally and helped her consider how to broaden the audience for her students' digital composition projects. I exchanged several emails with Becca to help her solidify her final digital composition piece. I became integral to the development of these teachers as digital writers with a critical stance.

In some ways, I was an agitator for these teachers. Data collection revealed teachers' understandings of digital writing, new literacies, and critical literacy developed as the online study group progressed. I was left to consider whether these teachers would have made this growth – albeit incremental growth – without the online study group and me. Without my engagement and prompts, these teachers may not have been able to compose the digital texts with a critical stance they did for the online study group's final project.

Regardless of these four teachers' progress, what my research project proved to me as much as anything is that teachers who are teaching English in the current educational context may need outside forces to counteract the rather conventional and uncritical writing classrooms in which they teach. Though small and not generalizable beyond the four participants' contexts, the online study group and my interactions with the participants became critical literacy acts of their own. My role in designing and facilitating the online study group permitted me to resist conventional content and pedagogy characteristic of today's English classrooms. I believe this researcher positionality is important in today's educational context.

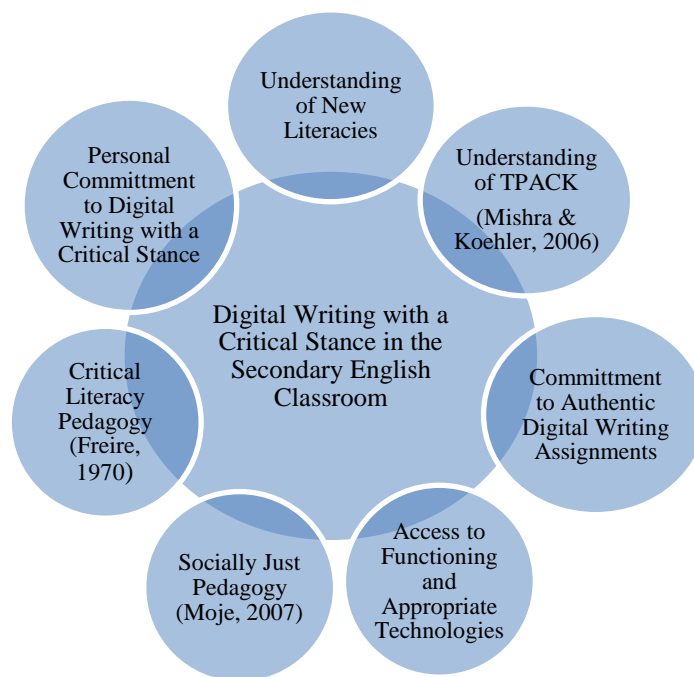
### **English Education Implications**

As a future English educator, one of my main goals is to make my work relevant to preservice and inservice English teacher preparation. After considering my findings and contemporary literature in the field, I created a graphic to illuminate what I believe to be the essential components of a secondary English teacher who writes digitally with a critical stance and encourages students to do the same: a personal commitment to digital writing with a critical stance, an understanding of new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Leu et al. 2004), an understanding of TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), a commitment to authentic digital writing assignments, access to functioning and appropriate technologies, socially just pedagogy (Aslup

& Miller, 2014; Moje, 2007), and critical literacy pedagogy (Freire, 1996; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2010). I believe it is important for teachers to commit to writing with a critical stance in digital spaces. To do this, they must have competence regarding the use of technology tools and an understanding of how to be critical writers. As they consider how their writing impacts their pedagogy, commitments to critical literacy and socially just pedagogies also become important. Furthermore, teachers must become aware of the technological resources available in their schools and design ways for students to engage in authentic writing for real audiences. Meant to serve as a guide for English educators, the graphic I created is shared in Figure 1.

Figure 1

*Digital Writing with a Critical Stance in the Secondary English Classroom*



English methods instructors who are planning methods courses or professional development opportunities for preservice or inservice English teachers can use this graphic as they plan course readings, activities, and course projects. English educators should help students

develop and enact understandings of socially just pedagogy (Moje, 2007), critical literacy pedagogy (Freire, 1996), new literacies, and TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) in the methods classroom and in their practica or classrooms. Because it is difficult to incorporate technologies in ways that alter the ways in which students write if preservice and inservice teachers have traditional content and pedagogical understandings about writing, teacher educators need to help English teachers reconsider what writing looks like and what writing pedagogy looks like in classrooms that acknowledge how technologies have changed writing. Furthermore, English educators should help English teachers learn what technologies are available to enhance the English curriculum and how to use available technologies in their practicum and classrooms. And, perhaps, most important, methods instructors should encourage their students to engage in authentic writing that engages them in digital writing with a critical stance. Admittedly, this is an ambitious plan for one methods course, and English educators may best meet students' needs by doing an early-semester assessment in order to understand which components of the graphic are particularly pressing for the preservice and inservice teachers in their course. This early-semester assessment may reveal areas of strength and areas that English teachers need to develop. Take, for example, a methods instructor who has a group of students who are particularly savvy with digital tools. This methods instructor can move into understandings of new literacies and how digital writing can be a space for critical literacy more quickly than a methods instructor who realizes her students are not digital writers and has to spend the early class periods in the semester teaching lessons on the current digital tools.

In order to help my colleagues and I create spaces for English education students to develop the aforementioned components, I offer several recommendations for fellow teacher educators: engage teachers in reflection of what counts as writing, analysis of writing



assignments, new literacies analysis of digital writing spaces, and the composition of a digital writing piece with a critical stance.

### **Engage Teachers in Reflecting on what counts as Writing**

If our students are going to embrace digital writing as ‘real’ writing, teacher educators have to help preservice and inservice English teachers value digital writing as much as traditional writing (Turner & Hicks, 2011-2012). We must help teachers counter their understandings of what counts as writing: “Active engagement with digital text making allows teachers to disrupt the distortionless window and challenge their conviction that ‘real writing’ is a static process unchanged across locations and media” (Hundley & Holbrook, 2013, p. 508). By doing this, we are helping teachers alter prior content knowledge that may have privileged traditional, print-based writing.

Ultimately, “we must help our students develop a composition pedagogy that will adapt as technology changes; preservice teachers must not be so deeply tied to a particular notion of writing that they cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn literacy practices” (Hundley & Holbrook, 2013, p. 508). Methods instructors might have students bring in various traditional and digital writing texts so as to engage students in discussions about what is real writing, how writing has evolved over time, how technologies have always been a part of writing’s development, and how they can use these understandings in their classroom. Inviting them to consider their print and digital writing practices may also help preservice teachers reflect on the importance of digital writing.

### **Engage Teachers in Writing Assignment Analysis**

Engaging teachers in an analysis of writing assignments may alleviate one of the barriers to writing digitally with a critical stance in the secondary English classroom: the inauthenticity of

the assignments assigned. I propose that preservice and inservice English teachers analyze the writing assignments assigned in their practicum classrooms or their classrooms. For example, an analysis of genre, purpose, technology element, and the audience may reveal that these assignments restrict a critical literacy stance. Methods instructors should engage students in an analysis of how technology is featured in the assignments to help develop TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Methods instructors should help students consider if the technology was just added to a traditional writing assignment or if technology altered the nature of the assignments (Leu et al., 2004). This move would also help teacher educators facilitate English teachers' pedagogical knowledge.

Similarly, discussions of whether the assignment permitted students to engage in critical literacy stances could be productive. Asking students to reimagine assignments from a critical literacy perspective would help them begin to develop socially just pedagogy (Moje, 2007). This exercise, which addresses English teachers' pedagogical knowledge, would also help preservice and inservice teachers reconsider the power dynamics within their English classrooms, as teachers who privilege student-centered pedagogies rather than teacher-centered pedagogies may be more likely to encourage students to take critical stances.

### **Engage Students in New Literacies Analysis of Digital Writing Spaces**

English educators need to help students explicitly understand both the *technical* and *ethos stuff* of new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Roach and Beck's (2012) case study of the second author's Facebook postings might provide an accessible starting point for preservice and inservice English teachers to analyze their own digital writing practices or the digital writing in their classrooms in relation to understandings of new literacies practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2011, Leu et al., 2004). After students learn about the characteristics of new

literacies in the methods course, teacher educators might have preservice or inservice English education students analyze their personal digital writing and the digital writing practices they see occurring in either their practicum classroom or in their classroom. Conversations around what they find in their analysis could be a starting point around which to plan a writing lesson or assignment for their students. Take, for example, a methods student who realizes that her practicum students are using iPads to type essays. This would align with contemporary research that says teachers use most of the technology and students' technology use consists mostly of typing (Applebaum & Langer, 2011; Turner & Hicks, 2011-2012). A teacher educator could then work with the methods student to plan a lesson or assignment that might engage students in an assignment that includes both the *technical stuff* and the *ethos stuff* of new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Methods instructors may need to help students “transform text, image, and sound for critical, rhetorical, and social purposes” (Turner & Hicks, 2011-2012, p. 59). Or, conversely, consider that a preservice teacher realizes that she uses her Instagram account in a way that exhibits both the *technical stuff* and *ethos stuff* of new literacies. A teacher educator could then work with this methods student to plan a lesson or assignment that encourages his or her students to be engaged in similar new literacies practices. The reflection that comes from such analysis may encourage methods student to engage their students in digital writing practices that embody new literacies practices.

### **Engage Teachers in Writing Digitally with a Critical Stance**

Finally, English educators must create opportunities for methods students to write digitally with a critical stance (Turner & Hicks, 2011-2012). If we approach the acquisition of critical literacy from a developmental perspective (Glazier, 2007; Lewison et al., 2002; Rogers, 2007; Rogers, 2014), we may need to scaffold our instruction (Wolfe, 2010). Exposing teacher

education students to digital writing pieces with a critical stance will help them have a selection of mentor texts on which to model their work (Rogers, 2014). Next, permitting students to practice with certain technology tools to do one aspect of critical literacy (e.g. exhibiting another's perspective, providing a counter narrative, inciting social action) may allow students to understand the complex components of critical literacy separately before being tasked with layer multiple elements of critical literacy in a single text. It should be noted that methods instructors may have to teach students how to use particular digital tools relevant to the English classroom.

Finally, helping methods students consider issues that are of relevance to their lives may be a starting point for their digital composition texts and may help students have an authentic audience for the social change they wish to inspire. Community partnerships and service-learning opportunities may also provide methods students with causes and authentic spaces in which to share their work.

To review, I have provided several English education implications: Engage teachers in reflection of what counts as writing, analysis of writing assignments, new literacies analysis of digital writing spaces, and composition of a digital writing text with a critical stance. It is my hope that these recommendations be implemented within preservice or inservice English education methods course in such a way as to foster the following in students: a personal commitment to digital writing with a critical stance, an understanding of new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Leu et al. 2004), an understanding of TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), a commitment to authentic digital writing assignments, access to functioning and appropriate technologies, socially just pedagogy (Aslup & Miller, 2014; Moje, 1997), and critical literacy pedagogy (Freire, 1996; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2010).

### **Limitations**

I would be remiss not to acknowledge the limitations of this research study: time frame, types of digital writers, and researcher positionality.

### **Time Frame**

Perhaps every dissertation researcher wants more time to work on her project. This project's data collection period was limited to approximately four months. The brevity of time limited my ability to see whether participants' digital writing spaces or pedagogies became more critical in nature, especially considering the developmental nature of critical literacy (Glazier, 2007; Lewison et al., 2002; Rogers, 2007). A longitudinal study may have revealed more about how teachers develop and enact critical literacy understandings over time.

### **Types of Digital Writers**

Another limitation was the nature of the digital writers in my research study. Three of the four participants in my study wrote digitally for professional purposes. I wonder how different my findings would have been had my study included participants who wrote digitally for personal rather than professional reasons. In future work, I may have to articulate more clearly what I mean by *active* digital writers so as to have teachers who are more committed to composing in digital spaces. As the study evolved, it became evident that teachers in the study varied in their understandings of new literacies *technical stuff* and *ethos stuff* (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). I imagine that writers with more nuanced understandings of writing in digital spaces would have approached the tenets of the online study group differently. Furthermore, I was only granted access to particular accounts. For example, though Becca wrote on her weekly class wiki page, she admitted to posting to her Instagram account in online weekly forum post one. However, I was never offered access to her Instagram account. I considered this a

limitation because participants may have a different persona in personal versus professional digital writing spaces.

### **Participant Attrition**

Initial recruitment frustrations came full circle when Darcy emailed me to let me know she was going to drop out of the study group. Not wanting to lose Darcy's story, which I believed unique, I asked her if she would let me observe her again and do the second interview. Because of time restrictions and not wanting to overwhelm her with more observations in a semester that had become a stressful one for her, I felt it was best to stop at four observations. Although other participants were observed six times, I think that Darcy's case would not have been any different because of the fact that she exited the study group unofficially in week three when she stopped posting in the forums. The pre- and post-study group observation schedule simply did not apply to Darcy's case in the way it applied to those participants who stayed in the study group and were observed before, during, and after the study group. Because of Darcy's heightened awareness of TPACK and new literacies understandings, I was disappointed to learn that she would not continue in the study group and produce a final composition project. I also wondered if Darcy's advanced knowledge of TPACK and new literacies, the focus of the early weeks of the online study group, led her to believe she could not learn anything new from the online study group. Because I believe her story important, I am, however, grateful that she agreed to stay involved in a limited capacity.

### **Researcher Role**

As I described in Chapter 3, I found my role in the research study a challenging one. I often felt conflicted as both facilitator of the online study group and researcher. In addition, though I believe my findings can help advance the field, I would be remiss not to admit that

much of what I found, especially perhaps in terms of teachers' moves toward critical literacy, could be quite indicative of the way in which I facilitated the study group. Researchers involved in similar work in the future may want to consider more clearly their role at the onset of projects.

If I had the opportunity to facilitate a similar study group, I would lengthen the time frame for the group, especially considering the developmental nature of critical literacy acquisition. Further, I would have emphasized the social action and authentic nature of the mentor texts we examined so as to encourage themes elements in participants' final projects. I also believe the asynchronous nature of the study group prevented some rich live discussions that could happen in a classroom or synchronous setting. Future work might also allow more time for conversations between facilitator and participant. Reflection on how this study group progressed will help inform my future work in this area.

### **Future Research Directions**

It is my hope that this dissertation study will encourage my English education colleagues and me to engage in future research in several areas: teachers' digital writing identities, pedagogical practices of teachers who write digitally with a critical literacy stance, students' digital writing practices, independent writing time, and digital writing in the special education classroom.

### **Teachers' Digital Writing Identities**

Teachers' writing identities in digital spaces is a research area in which I would like to engage as, in general, "scant attention has been paid afforded teachers' identities as writers with reference to their classroom roles and pedagogic practice as teachers of writing" (Cremin & Baker, 2010, pp. 8-9). As I progressed through my data collection, an interesting phenomenon developed. Whereas Becca wrote digitally on her class wiki – and in other digital forms on

Instagram and with VoiceThread and a podcast - she seemed to identify less as a digital writer than, say, Darcy, who was an active blogger and enjoyed the writing decisions and moves she could make in digital spaces. Even though Becca wrote digitally, she resisted the idea of developing herself as a digital writer, especially for personal reasons. Her case made me wonder whether one may not identify as a digital writer even though she engaged in the practice of digital writing. Future research on the writing identities of teachers who are digital writers is necessary. Perhaps there are pedagogical differences in teachers who identify as professional digital writers versus those who identify as personal digital writers. And perhaps there are teachers for whom their writing identities transcend professional and personal writing. A longitudinal study looking at how the ways in which teachers identify as writers to their students in visible and explicit ways and how this affects students' writing performance and writing identities could provide meaningful insight to the field.

### **Redesign of Online Study Group: Teachers as Personal Digital Writers with a Critical Stance**

I hope to have another opportunity to facilitate a similar online study group about the connections between digital writing and critical literacy. Reflection on the study group's implementation has allowed me to consider a future research direction: helping teachers compose digital texts with a critical stance not solely to show as mentor texts to students but so as to engage in digitally writing for a critical stance for personal purposes. Though creating a mentor text that aligned with a student assignment was meaningful, results may have differed had teachers had the opportunity to engage in critical literacy about a subject about which they were passionate. Had I given teachers the opportunity to select a personally relevant topic, teachers may have been able to see how writing with a critical stance often comes out of personally



relevant topics about which writers feel compelled to write. Having teachers produce digital writing texts with a critical stance that evolved from personally relevant topics may have altered the ways in which teachers grew in their knowledge of digital writing, new literacies practices, and critical literacy.

### **Pedagogical Practices of Teachers who Write Digitally with a Critical Literacy Stance**

As my research study progressed, I began to wonder how writing practices and pedagogies might look in classrooms of English teachers who write digitally with a critical stance. Whereas I aimed to help teachers develop critical literacy dispositions, my study would have been quite different had the teachers come into the study with a personal commitment to critical literacy writing. If we understand digitally writing with a critical stance to be a social justice act (Chapman et al., 2011; Turner & Hicks, 2011-2012), it is likely that these teachers' pedagogies would reflect such an approach to writing and issues in the world. Extensive research on these teachers' writing and pedagogical practices could inform English teacher preparation, especially if these teachers and teacher educators collaborate on practitioner pieces that provide insight into practice.

### **Students' Digital Writing Practices**

Though this project examined teachers' digital writing practices, future research might explore students' digital writing practices. Much current work in adolescent literacy speaks to the importance of students' out-of-school literacy practices, and much could be learned from considering students' digital writing practices – both in and out of the English classroom. Having methods students complete inquiry projects that answer the following questions could result in a practitioner piece: Are adolescent writers engaging in critical literacy practices outside of school? In what ways can secondary English teachers bring students' out-of-school literacy

practices into the classroom in a way that promotes critical literacy? Are students already composing with a critical stance in personal digital writing spaces?

### **Independent Writing Time**

Applebaum and Langer's (2011) recent study of the writing occurring in secondary schools uncovered that students do not spend much time writing during school. My study produced similar results. With the emphasis on providing students independent reading time (Miller, 2009), I believe research that examines pedagogical differences between secondary English teachers who provide student writers much time to write during class versus those whose students have limited writing time may provide meaningful work. Teachers themselves could also be involved in timing the amount of time they provide students to engage in the writing process (e.g. researching, writing, editing, revising, and reflecting). Much could be learned from teachers' self-reflection on the time they provide students to write.

### **Digital Writing in the Special Education Classroom**

My time with Sally leads me to my next suggestion for future research. Though the results from Sally's classroom cannot be transferred to all special education classrooms and students, her comments about the power of digital writing in giving voice to students who typically do not have a voice were especially poignant. Thus, digital writing in the special education classroom is an area around which English educators, special education educators, and special education teachers could collaborate.

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation study contributed an empirical study to an understudied research area: inservice middle grades English teachers who digitally write with a critical stance. In an online

study group I facilitated, four inservice middle grades English teachers learned about how digital writing can be a space for critical literacy. Findings revealed teachers who are active digital writers composed in myriad genres that were mostly professional in nature. In addition, these teachers' writings had rather conventional stances. Furthermore, technology barriers and inauthentic writing assignments were commonplace in these teachers' English classrooms. Intriguingly, teachers' digital writing and new literacies practices and beliefs were reflected in their pedagogy. And as the study group progressed, teachers expressed broadening understandings of digital writing and new literacies practices. In terms of the moves these four teachers made toward critical literacy, they reflected on their practice and noted several challenges to implementing critical literacy. In line with the idea that acquiring critical literacy is a developmental process, teachers focused on a single element of critical literacy as they created digital texts with a critical stance. None of these texts embodied the social action element of critical literacy. This work contributed to the literature in the field by revealing that new literacies practices are not inherently critical and that an online study group dedicated to the connections between digital writing and critical literacy can help facilitate teachers' development of critical literacy understandings. Along with a model for English educators, implications for practice, study limitations, and future research directions were shared. May this study provide a means by which English teacher educators help secondary English teachers digitally write to inspire change – and have their students do the same.

## Appendix A

### *The Well* article

Bringing experience, research, and practice together (with a chance for you to participate!)

Posted on **September 3, 2014**

Katie Caprino, a doctoral candidate at UNC, is bringing together her previous experience as a high school English teacher with her personal and professional interests in educational research to help improve practice within the English Language Arts classroom, particularly within the writing curriculum.

Caprino knew as she entered graduate school that she wanted to contribute to the research about teachers' writing practices. She was especially interested in whether the fact that a teacher writes impacts his or her classroom practices, and if it does, how. Through an independent study with her advisor, Dr. Cheryl Bolick, she also incorporated the idea of technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) in the English classroom. This path has led her to her most recent research study which will ask the following questions:

1. What are the writing practices of secondary English teachers who are active digital writers?
2. What does writing (digital and otherwise) pedagogy look like in the classrooms of teachers who are digital writers?
3. What factors move teachers toward critical literacy in their own writing and in their classroom practices?

#### **Here is how you can help:**

Caprino is in the recruitment period of her study and would love more participants. If you are a middle or high school English teacher, in need of CEUs, and would like to contribute to research in your field, this is your chance. Teachers will register for a online six-week online course about critical literacy and digital writing . The course will be offered during this fall semester through a LEARN NC and is worth 2 CEUs. In this six-week study group, teachers will read and discuss literature and examples of digitally written texts that take a critical stance. As their final study group project, teachers will design a mentor text – their own digitally written text that takes a critical stance – that they will share with their own students and present to their students as a course assignment. Based on observations and data collected during the course, Caprino will conduct teacher interviews and classroom observations as well as analyze digital writing (blogs, Twitter accounts, Facebook accounts, etc.). Caprino hopes this research will contribute to the field of English education and will

encourage teacher educators, school leaders, and teachers themselves to facilitate teachers engaging in their own writing and composing for change while encouraging their students to do the same.

Email Katie Caprino to learn more and to sign up! [kcaprino@live.unc.edu](mailto:kcaprino@live.unc.edu)

## **Appendix B**

### **Recruitment Email**

#### Email Recruitment Subject Line:

Invitation to Participate in Research Study about Teachers as Digital Writers and Critical Literacy

#### Body of Email:

Dear Teacher,

You are invited to participate in a research study titled Teachers as Digital Writers. This study aims to study secondary English teachers who are active digital writers in order to learn about how their digital writing impacts their pedagogy and how (after learning about critical literacy) they may address the components of critical literacy in their own digital writing and pedagogy.

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately 6 people in this research study.

Your participation in this study will involve participation in two one-hour interviews. The first interview will take place between in early fall 2014; the second interview will take place in late 2014 or early 2015. The interviews may be conducted face-to-face or virtually, depending on your preference. You will also agree to participate in a six-week online study group (for which you will earn Continuing Education Credits, or CEUs) during which you and fellow group members will engage in activities and readings about critical literacy. As a final project for the course, you will develop a digital writing assignment with a critical stance that you will create and model to your own students before they compose a similar piece. You will also agree to six classroom observations (face-to-face or virtual) after which there will be a short face-to-face or virtual interview. The researcher will have access to your digital writing space (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.), online study group materials (including mentor text created and lesson plan), and lessons plans and materials which will be part of the data analysis.

The attached consent form provides additional information about the study. Prior to the first interview, the principal investigator will go over this form in depth with you so as to answer any questions you may have about the study or your participation in the study. Participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate before the interview, or you may withdraw your consent after your participation, for any reason, without penalty.

Your participation has the potential to help inform the field of English education.

If you would like to be part of this research study, please email Katie Caprino ([kcaprino@email.unc.edu](mailto:kcaprino@email.unc.edu)). IRB # [14-1973](#)

## Appendix C

### Consent Form

**University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Consent to Participate in a Research Study  
Adult Participants**

**Consent Form Version Date:** August 11, 2014

**IRB Study #** 14-1973

**Title of Study:** Teachers as Digital Writers

**Principal Investigator:** Katie Caprino

**Principal Investigator Department:** School of Education

**Principal Investigator Phone number:** [REDACTED]

**Principal Investigator Email Address:** kcaprino@live.unc.edu

**Faculty Advisor:** Cheryl Bolick

**Faculty Advisor Contact Information:** [REDACTED]

---

**What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary.

You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this research is to study the writing and pedagogical practices of secondary teachers who are active digital writers. In addition, this study aims to look at how critical literacy and digital writing are connected. You are being asked to be in the study because you are an active digital writer (blogger, Facebooker, Tweeter, etc.). The main aims of the study are to look at the writing and pedagogical practices of secondary English teachers who enroll, participate, and complete an online study group through LEARN NC about critical literacy and digital writing.

Several forms of data will be used to determine the main aims of the study and to answer the research questions: pre-online study group interview, online study group writings (forum

postings, discussion comments, online study group reflections, online study group emails), running writing logs, weekly posts about what digital writing is, your digital writing (researcher will have access to participants' social media accounts), digital writing lessons plans, digital writing piece, post-online study group interviews, and six classroom observations with a post-lesson interview. This is a study about teachers; students will not be part of this research study.

**Are there any reasons you should not be in this study?**

You should not be in this study if you are not an active digital writer who currently teaches secondary English. You should not be in the study if you cannot commit to the six-week LEARN NC online study group and agree to the data collection methods.

**How many people will take part in this study?**

A total of approximately 6 teachers will be participating in this research study.

**How long will your part in this study last?**

You will be asked to actively participate in this research study from September 15, 2014 – February 1, 2015. The six-week LEARN NC online study group will take place between October 6 – November 16, 2014. Two observations will take place before the study group, one observation will take place during the study group, and three observations will take place after the study group.

The researcher also asks for access to your digital writing accounts (blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) from six months prior to the beginning of the course through April 1, 2015. This will allow the researcher to track any changes over time.

Pre- and post- online study group interviews will last approximately an hour and can be done in person or via phone. Shorter (approximately 20-30 minutes) post-observation interviews will occur after each observation and can be done in person or via phone. The researcher may come into your classroom for the six observations, or you may be asked to videotape yourself (not your students) teaching the lesson and post it to the online study group moodle for analysis.

Overall, participating will require approximately 20 hours of your time.

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**

If you take part in the study, you will

- Engage in pre- and post-online study group interviews. In these interviews, you will talk about your own writing and your teaching. These interviews are not evaluative.
- Allow six writing observations and post-observation interviews. These observations are not evaluative. Post-observation interviews are for the researcher to learn more about your perspective on the lesson and what your goals in the lesson were. Researcher will have access to lesson plans and materials for each of these six lessons.
- Participate in discussions and all assignments in an online study group through LEARN NC about critical literacy and digital writing for which you will earn free CEUs
- Continue to be an active digital writer and give researcher access to social media accounts or other digital writing medium from six months prior to the course until April



1, 2015 so researcher can analyze any changes over time. For example, you may need to give me the web address of your blog, “friend” me on Facebook, or “follow” me on Twitter.

- Permit researcher to analyze personal digital writing, classroom observations, and all online study group materials, postings, and assignments

### **What are the possible benefits from being in this study?**

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. Whereas there has been much literature about the importance of teachers as writers, there has been little work done about teachers as digital writers. This study permits you to engage in such work.

The benefits to you from being in this study may be learning how digital writing and critical literacy are connected. This research study is largely hands-on and will permit you to engage in your writing and think about your own writing and teaching practices. The online study group will be a collaborative space in which participants and researchers will learn together.

Aside from the personal benefits from participating in the course, this work has the potential to inform the field of English education on a broader scale.

### **What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?**

There may be uncommon or previously unknown risks. You should report any problems to the researcher. Please know that the researcher will protect your identity by providing each participant a pseudonym in any write-up or presentations of the data.

### **What if we learn about new findings or information during the study?**

You will be given any new information gained during the course of the study that might affect your willingness to continue your participation.

### **How will information about you be protected?**

Your privacy is of the utmost important. Data will be stored in secure locations and on password-protected computers on the University of North Carolina server. Real names will not be used. Pseudonyms will be used for any write-ups or presentations of this data. Only the principal investigator and her advisor will have access to the data. In addition, you will be given the opportunity to edit from the principal investigator’s final report any writing examples that disclose any information you deem too personal.

You will not be identified in any report or publication about this study. Although every effort will be made to keep research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is very unlikely, but if disclosure is ever required, UNC-Chapel Hill will take steps allowable by law to protect the privacy of personal information. In some cases, your information in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies (for example, the FDA) for purposes such as quality control or safety.

- The data on audio recorders and videos will be destroyed once it is transcribed and/or analyzed.
- At any time in the study, you may request that the audio recorder or video recorder be turned off.

Check the line that best matches your choice:

\_\_\_\_\_ OK to record me during the study

\_\_\_\_\_ Not OK to record me during the study

Please keep in mind that you must agree not to reveal anything they learn from interviews, group discussions, or other activities.

**What will happen if you are injured by this research?**

All research involves a chance that something bad might happen to you. This may include the risk of personal injury. In spite of all safety measures, you might develop a reaction or injury from being in this study. If such problems occur, the researchers will help you get medical care, but any costs for the medical care will be billed to you and/or your insurance company. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has not set aside funds to pay you for any such reactions or injuries, or for the related medical care. You do not give up any of your legal rights by signing this form.

**What if you want to stop before your part in the study is complete?**

You can withdraw from this study at any time, without penalty. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped. You will be asked to withdraw from the online study group and study if you do not complete all of the online study group assignments.

**Will you receive anything for being in this study?**

You will be receiving free CEUs for the completion of the online study group. You will be required to complete all online study group assignments to earn a “pass” grade in the online study group. If you earn a “pass,” you will be earn free CEUs. In my role as instructor, I will not be passing judgment on the quality of the assignments.

**Will it cost you anything to be in this study?**

It will not cost you anything to be in this study.

**What if you have questions about this study?**

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If

you have questions about the study (including payments), complaints, concerns, or if a research-related injury occurs, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to [IRB\\_subjects@unc.edu](mailto:IRB_subjects@unc.edu).

**Participant's Agreement:**

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Research Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

## Appendix D

### [Principal Letter]

September 10, 2014

Dear [REDACTED],

My name is Katie Caprino, and I am a doctoral student in Education, focusing specifically on English education, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. My advisor is Dr. Cheryl Bolick. I am currently working on my dissertation study and am writing to you to obtain your approval to observe [REDACTED], who has expressed an interest in participating in my dissertation study.

The purpose of my dissertation research is to study the writing and pedagogical practices of secondary teachers who are active digital writers. In addition, my study aims to look at how critical literacy and digital writing are connected. The research questions that guide my study are as follows: (1) What are the writing practices of secondary English teachers who are active digital writers? (2) What does writing (digital and otherwise) pedagogy look like in the classrooms of teachers who are digital writers? (3) What factors move teachers toward critical literacy in their own writing and in their classroom practices?

[REDACTED] has shared her wiki with me and I believe she will be able to contribute a lot to the study. [REDACTED] will engage in interviews with me and will be part of an online study group about digital writing and critical literacy. I will also observe her teaching. This study is only about teachers; no data will be collected on students. [REDACTED] will be asked to videotape her teaching if I am unable to come to her classroom. Students will not be videotaped.

My study has been approved by UNC's institutional review board, and the study will follow the mandated steps and procedures.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to email me at [kcaprino@email.unc.edu](mailto:kcaprino@email.unc.edu) or call me at [REDACTED]. You may also email my advisor Dr. Cheryl Bolick at [cbolick@unc.edu](mailto:cbolick@unc.edu) or call her at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

*Kathryn Ann Jacob Caprino*

Katie Caprino  
Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix E

### Pre-Study Group Interview Questions

**The following questions will *guide* this semi-structured interview.**

1. So tell me about you as a writer. What do you write? When did you start?
2. I'd love to hear what you think about whether writing teachers should be writers. Do your students know you write? Have you ever shared your writing with your students? Do you think the fact that you write impacts your teaching? How?
3. What inspired/prepared you to be a digital writer (teacher preparation, professional development, other)?
4. Where did you learn what you know about writing? About writing instruction?
5. Tell me what *new literacies* means to you.
6. Tell me what *critical literacy* means to you.
7. If I came to your classroom during a writing lesson, what type of writing would your students be doing? What is your role in this writing lesson? Is the type of writing they would be doing different than their out-of-school writing practices? Many teachers try to bring these out-of-school literacy practice into the classroom. Do you?
8. That said, do the resources at your school impact the type of writing you have students do? How?
9. I'd like you to consider for a moment all of the types of writing you have done in the last year and create a list. What pieces and genres are on this list? Why these?
10. I'd like you to consider for a moment all the types of writing that you have assigned in the last year and create a list. What pieces and genres are on this list? Why these? If any of these assignments involved digital writing, describe why you have your students digitally write these assignments.
11. In what areas of writing instruction do you most enjoy? Are you most comfortable? Least comfortable? Why?
12. I'd like to hear about your personal reasons for enrolling in the study group. I'd also liked to hear about your professional reasons. Would you say that the writing that you do has a critical literacy stance? What about the writing you have your students do?
13. Is there anything else that you'd like me to know?

## Appendix F

### Post-Study Group Interview Questionnaire

**The following questions will *guide* this semi-structured interview.**

1. Discuss how critical literacy informed this piece. (Follow up with something that helps me answer research question #2.)
2. The National Writing Project (2010) defines *digital writing* “compositions created with, and oftentimes for reading or viewing on, a computer or other device that is connected to the Internet” (p. 7). The definition that we used in our course is “compositions created using the Internet or mobile technological devices that embody new literacies perspectives.” Considering your work in the professional development course, your interactions with instructor and fellow participants, and your own digital writing project, explain how prepared you feel now in terms of your own personal digital writing or the teaching of digital writing. In what ways do you feel similarly or differently prepared than before you took the course?
3. Define new literacies.
4. Define critical literacy.
5. Explain whether you see your writing instruction as student-centered or constructivist. Provide examples.
6. Tell me what you know about your students’ digital writing practices and what technologies both in and out of school they use. What resources do students have in and out of school to digitally write? In what ways does your writing pedagogy permit students to engage with their out-of-school digital writing practices?
7. Explain whether or not you identify as a writer yourself. Do you write digitally? What types of pieces? In what ways did the course alter how you digitally write out of school? In school? In what ways did the course alter your comfort level with sharing your work with your students?
8. Do you share your digital writing (from out of school or in school) with your students?
9. In what ways has the course changed or not changed how you feel about your identity as a writer? What did you discover about yourself as a writer? And in what way will this identity impact your pedagogy?
10. In what areas of writing instruction are you most comfortable? Least comfortable? Why?
11. In what ways did composing the digital writing piece with a critical stance help you think about new literacies and critical literacy? About your own identity as a writer? About your writing pedagogy?
12. Explain whether the course impacted how you will have your students digitally write in the future. Explain whether the course and creating this digital writing mentor text will alter the assignments that you plan for your students in the future.
13. In what ways did the course help you identify as a writer? As a digital writer?
14. With whom would you like more learning about in terms of digital writing – personally and professionally?

## Appendix G

### Post-Observation Interview Questions

**The following questions will *guide* this semi-structured interview.**

1. In your own words, describe the lesson that I just observed. What prompted you to teach this lesson? What did you want students to gain from this lesson?
2. Tell me about what you think worked well in the lesson? What you would change the next time?
3. Would you say that this lesson incorporated understandings of digital writing? new literacies? critical literacy? If so, how?
4. In what ways did the fact that you are a digital writer impact this lesson?
5. Did the resources at your school or in your classroom impact this writing lesson?
6. What else do you want me to know about this writing lesson?
7. What does it mean to teach writing in your classroom? To teach digital writing in your classroom? To teach with a critical stance?



## Appendix H

### Final Codebook

Code	Definition	Example from Data
<b>BARRIERS</b>		
<b>Safety concerns</b>	Teacher expresses concern for her safety or her students' safety in online spaces	"I've been uh in the last few years somewhat more cautious about privacy because some teachers as we now know have gotten into trouble with expressing themselves online. The privacy concerns me still but you know we're out there. Genie's out of the bottle." (Nancy)
<b>Beliefs about implementing critical literacy</b>	Teacher expresses beliefs about implementing critical literacy	Becca expressed concerns about parents' thoughts after watching a video and podcast on gender: "An eye opening week of readings for me as I am an extremely passive person, one who doesn't like to rock the boat. Watching the "10,000 Dresses" video, listening to the podcast and thinking about discussions of gender identity and negative stereotypes in the classroom honestly made me nervous at first. I have some very involved and outspoken parents, and so in the classroom, I tend to shy away from controversial topics that may cause my inbox to flood the following morning. This is no excuse for avoiding powerful conversation; I understand that."
<b>Beliefs about using technology</b>	Teacher expresses her beliefs about using technology	"With the tablet I think they just pour things out and they don't quite ever look back and it or it's just out there and it's fine and it's whatever it'd done. On paper there's it's interesting [unt] when we watch them there's a certain commitment like you'll see them thinking about a word more than they do on the tablet. And so I like that process um I think balancing it's huge." (Darcy)
<b>Devaluing of Students' out-of-school literacy practices</b>	Teachers express a devaluing of students' out-of-school literacy practices	"I guess if we wanted to we could have the children bring out their cell phones and Twitter their likes or dislikes um but I just I just hesitate on that." (Sally)
<b>Fear of human obsolescence</b>	Teachers express fear of technologies replacing human interactions	"I don't want people humans to become obsolete." (Sally)
<b>Doubts about teaching practice</b>	A teacher doubts, questions, or lacks confidence in a particular area of her teaching	Sally commented on her discomfort with editing and worries students do not provide effective feedback to one another: "Sometimes they do fine or some students do fine but to get three or four students to look at your paper doesn't always help especially in particularly classes where a lot of them struggle with it. So I don't feel comfortable in the way that I instruct it [editing] or the way that the process rolls out in class and I didn't I haven't found anybody that has a great solution for that either."
<b>Thoughts about Students' Behavior</b>	Teachers express concerns about students' behavior in online spaces	"At my school, we're lucky to be fairly well-equipped to do digital writing. I work in a PreK-8 independent school in which all students from 4th grade up have one-to-one access to a device. My students have iPads in my classes every day, but they can also use desktops and laptops for projects that are better suited for these devices. On the one hand, I feel very fortunate that my students have these resources: on the other hand, there's a tremendous amount of pressure to keep up with the latest ways to use this technology and to monitor our students as they inevitably misuse their devices." (Nancy)

<b>Thoughts about students' writing abilities and needs</b>	A teacher expresses thoughts about students' writing abilities and needed	"We really feel like students struggle with summarizing text. They have trouble both with pulling out the main idea and with finding the overall most important details. When instructed, their summaries do not cover the most important parts of the text and they are often organized. I hate to be formulaic about writing, but in this case, my team has decided that it is necessary. Once they have established this general format for a summary paragraph, they will be able to explore other methods later in their writing career." (Becca)
<b>Resources</b>	Teacher expresses concerns about lack of resources, lack of access to available resources, or technical problems	"The lack of resources definitely impacted this assignment. My school's desire to use less expensive tablets instead of allowing students to use laptops make composing more challenging. The peripheral keyboards help, but tablets are better suited for using apps and creating short bursts of text than writing and revising lengthier assignments." (Nancy)
<b>Curriculum</b>	A teacher discusses how curriculum impacts the types of pieces her students write. In certain instances, these curriculum mandates do not support digital writing with a critical stance.	"I haven't figured out a way or spent time to figure out a way to incorporate that [students' out-of-school literacy practices] into what has to be written....Another thing about maybe we have four Language Arts teachers in the sixth grade and we all do the same writing assignments so in some ways I don't necessarily take the liberty or maybe feel like i have the freedom just to come up with some like these writing assignments that we do are fairly big deals." (Becca)
<b>Colleagues</b>	A teacher expresses colleagues' influences on her writing pedagogy.	"...I probably have more freedom than I again I'm such a team player in terms of I don't do a lot on my own. I pretty much I do what I feel comfortable doing which I what everyone else is doing." (Becca)
<b>Policies</b>	A teacher discusses various policies and their impacts on writing pedagogy <i>or</i> data sources reveal how policies negatively impacted writing pedagogy.	<p>"I do worry a bit about tweeting anything too personal or political.... At this late date in my career, I doubt I can do much harm, but I value my online reputation and try to be cautious." (Nancy)</p> <p>The school district in which Becca worked banned Prezi because of age requirements. When she looked at a list of other options she said, "we're like going back to PowerPoint and we you know actually there was a link in something that you sent that had tons of tools for digital presentation and going through those you have to be 13 or whatever. We want it to be able to have videos and pictures like they're kind of a lot that we wanted it to be able to do and we were not able to find another tool that we were allowed to use that did what hoped the digital tool would do. So that was been a little bit frustrated."</p>
<b>Training (PD, classes, etc.)</b>	A teacher admits that she needs better training (professional development, classes, etc.) to improve digital writing pedagogy. Teacher may also admit that she does not know how to use a particular feature. Teacher may also comment on the shortcomings of previous professional development or educational experiences.	"I just need more training. I need to definitely need more training. Even with a think like Haiku which is pretty intuitive ehh - we're using it all the time and mine's just a big sloppy mess. Kids can't read it. It's not interesting. I'm working on it but I'd love to have somebody tell me how to make it streamlined and simple um how to use Twitter, how to Tweet rather than just retweeting ...." (Nancy)

OPPORTUNITIES		
<b>Colleagues</b>	A teacher discusses influences of colleagues on writing pedagogy. A teacher shares ideas within the online study group moodle.	“And I liked reading everybody’s else’s lessons. I mean I think that was good for me to see and get suggestions from them on tools that they use. I had not heard of all those so that that was also helpful.” (Becca)
<b>Curriculum</b>	A teacher’s curriculum mandates may positively impact a teacher’s pedagogy. These curriculum mandates support new literacies practices and technology integration in the classroom.	“Edmodo came out of the School Improvement Plan where we were specifically last year where we were trying as a whole school to work on written expression and what are different forms of written expression that would be uh of interest to the students. And seeing how our students are digital natives um this would be uh of interest to the students. And seeing how our students are digital natives um then this would be one mode of . of getting to that.” (Sally)
<b>Desire to learn and grow</b>	A teacher expresses the desire to overcome previous anxieties or hesitations in order to help students learn. A teacher wants to try new things and/or improve and learn about a facet of her practice.	“I don’t usually do much digital writing other than texting and emailing um not that I don’t consider myself capable. I think I was just always hesitant um I’d say touch bit anxious why would I use such things? But why not? Why not try? Why not find out what’s out there that I can do?” (Sally)
<b>Resources</b>	A teacher expresses how the resources at her school are ample and enable her to incorporate them into her writing pedagogy.	“But I’ve got 10 [laptops] and I at this point not needing any more than ten. Um like I said we’ve got SmartBoards in every classroom. We have um really access to just about everything that we could want or need and ...” (Sally)
<b>Training (PD, classes, etc.)</b>	A teacher discusses how training (professional development, classes, etc.) have impacted positively her writing pedagogy.	“I think I’ve done more in these last few months than I could have ever imaged trying different...” She continues: “... I’ve learned a lot.... And not only for me personally but also professionally which is what I was hoping.” “And an it did far more than I ever thought it was going to be.” (Sally)
<b>Policies</b>	A teacher discusses a policy that has been put in place that facilitates understandings about digital writing or encourages teachers to use digital writing.	“Edmodo came out of the School Improvement Plan where we were specifically last year where we were trying as a whole school to work on written expression and what are different forms of written expression that would be uh of interest to to the students. And seeing how our students are digital natives um this would be uh of interest to the students. And seeing how our students are digital natives um then this would be one mode of . of getting to that.” (Sally)
UNDERSTANDINGS		
<b>Understandings of New Literacies</b>	Teachers express their understandings of new	<i>Before</i> “See I would put math as part of the new literacies because we’ve spent so much time thinking the only literacy there is in the language arts. Reading literacy, writing literacy, but it’s mostly reading literacy. Are you can you are you literate in

	literacies	<p>in reading? Are you literate in writing? But there's also are you literate in math? And not only math computation but math reasoning. So the the new literacies i think would have to include math because it's not really been paid attention to until recently. And I know it's not new new but it's still being discovered. And other literacies. I'm talking about problem-solving and um the critical thinking and rationalizing, analyzing, all these things we're supposed to be teaching the children you would think they're not new but in a sense they're being brought back because it's not being taught anymore. And I think that's a misfortunate cause when they get older and try to look for jobs then they're not literate in any of these areas." (Sally)</p> <p><i>After</i> "New literacies. New ways of thinking when it comes to anything we need to learn, anything we need to use, um reading, math, writing, um problem-solving. Anything that we need to use to be functional and to get ahead in the 21st century, 22nd century. So and and things are becoming too obsolete so what is new new literacy today is going to be obsolete in you know sixth months or a year just like that PowerPoint or that presentation earlier on that you asked me to put in the wiki the shared wiki. So new literacies are what we consider new literacies right now are again going to be very obsolete very soon. So yeah i think of math being literate in math and science and language." (Sally)</p>
<b>Understandings of Critical Literacy</b>	Teachers express their understandings of critical literacy	<p><i>Pre:</i> "critical literacy was the piece that um . you know I think I know what it means and course I've looked at what people were thinking about critical literacy but it's a squishy term I think. You know you start with the root of it being critical in the sense of looking with an educated an oh . I guess discerning eye at um what's out there whatever that might be. And then the other piece of it is action from yourself critical in the sense of knowing what's a must do a must have the skills you must be to uh carry out to be to perform you know adequately as a communicator." (Nancy)</p> <p><i>Post:</i> "I mean critical literacy is basically looking at a word beyond just it's so hard to put into words. Critics do it all the time. You're looking both at tone, the flavor, the subtext, everything involved, the audience, the audience interacting with it, every audience make every work read a little differently, the kids touched on that a tiny bit, it's all about perspective. And it's about starting off without a set notion in mind on what a particular text might mean to every consumer of that text." "As a writer, I think it [critical literacy] pushes me to think about my audience a lot more than I ever did. i have to think about the audience beyond middle class white person, middle class education person, middle class American, middle class woman and look and what somebody from a different background would think about what I would have to say and also to think beyond my message and try to think about the audience and how it would receive my message uh just depending on how I present it, what images I chose, my selected for example. I looked back to my paltoon I used to introduce to the class I said oh my God I have all little white kid images...I don't know if they paid any attention but it made me cringe when I saw it through the lens of thinking about what we were doing in this study." "Oh I think it's broadened tremendously because I was looking at it more as a critic in the I guess the broader sense and I came back to the point I didn't want it to just be about race, gender, orientation anything like that but I did want I did over the course of this story look at more about communication than criticism I guess. I was thinking about my olden days in grad school in thinking about the different kinds of criticism we did Marxist, feminist, you know all that sort of thing. And I came to it after the study or during the study more on a practical level thinking about it as a sixth grade teacher and as a middle-aged person a white person uh woman heterosexual how the term nowadays I don't think you have to be an English major to think about critical literacy. I think you have to think about it more on a day to day based you know. Uh what are we doing? What are we teaching? Why are we making these choices? Why are these people represented? What happened to these voices? So definitely grown in that sense." (Nancy)</p>
<b>Definition of Digital Writing</b>	A teacher defines <i>digital writing</i> .	<p>"Digital writing is a valuable intervention that I have incorporated weekly." (Sally)</p> <p>"Writing is a constant struggle due to receptive and expressive writing deficits in my classroom. Digital writing is a valuable tool that I have incorporated more this week due to these challenges." (Sally)</p>

<b>Conflation of Critical Literacy and Critical Thinking</b>	A teacher conflates the definition of critical literacy and critical thinking.	“Critical literacy uh just the whole critical thinking of who are you...” (Sally)
<b>Understanding of technology’s role in the classroom</b>	The teacher comments about technology’s role in the English classroom	In many lessons Darcy had the students open and close the tablets. She was conscious of how she wanted technology used in her classroom: “She tells them to close the tablets again. “We’re a lot of open and close today but I’m okay with that.”
<b>Understandings of writing’s importance</b>	A teacher acknowledges the importance of writing.	Darcy stressed the importance of writing: “Um as a teacher of writing is so I will be able to tell my students no I’m not just saying this because it’s something that I was told to do in graduate school or undergrad for a teacher. It’s because it’s something I truly believe in. Um you know you will write in real life. Like when we’re talking about reviews last week um I when I first introduced it I was like this is [unt] writing teach you but this is a type of writing that I actually do. And this is I told them about going to NAME’s Pizza and that it was one of the best experiences of my life and it was so good that the next day I went home and write a review on I was like nobody may care about that but I was like it was something that matters to me. And I was you know this is something that is out there on the Internet and it’s something that you know is writing that people will read however small that audience is. And so sharing with them that there is writing that you’ll actually do and this is something that I do in my real life and um I think that’s a really important part that they see. It’s not just something that happens in Language Arts class but it will happen in science and it will happen in you know on a Saturday morning in your apartment. You know it’s it’s real life.”
<b>Understandings of the importance of having students do digital writing</b>	A teacher acknowledge the importance of having students do digital writing	When asked about take-aways from the study group, Becca said, “The importance of digital writing. I just before this class I kind of I would say as a whole our sixth grade is not do a lot fo digital writing we’re very and a part of it is that maybe in the sixth grade we don’t feel like they’re some like ground level things these kids need to be learning and so we stick to that more so than the digital you know it’s almost like a later on thing but I really I think from this class have learned that it is important to help them become digital writers and despite the fact that I’m not all that comfortable with it.”
<b>ROLE OF THE TEACHER</b>		
<b>Teacher as audience/grader</b>	Teacher positions herself as audience and/or grader of students’ written work. Notice that rarely are teachers audience members without being the grader.	“...I show them one that I’ve done as an example for what I’m kind of looking for.” (Becca)
<b>Teacher as director of writing</b>	Teacher explicitly tells student writers what to do	“I think you [a student] need to take that out.” (Nancy)
<b>Teacher as facilitator</b>	Teacher positions herself as a facilitator of students’ independent writing and writing autonomy	When one student asked about length, Nancy told student writer that she could not tell him or her how long it should be because she did not know what details might be added.
<b>Teacher as fellow</b>	Teacher positions	“I try to write with my students everyday cause that’s part of the workshop

<b>writer</b>	herself as a writer who writes her own pieces and references and/or models her work for students. A teacher may 'write' aloud' in this role.	<p>approach. And I basically hold myself to the same expectations of honest writing. I write whatever they're writing." (Nancy)</p> <p>Darcy admitted that she had not always written with her students but then she started writing too: "So there was that managerial piece to it but then I also noticed that I don't write, my hand hurts. I'm asking them to do this. And I don't do it. So um I started noticing you know patterns in my own writing that I was, of course, telling them not to do but because I didn't have to be accountable to a grade anymore it's whatever so um I tried to start you know just with things like emails going back and revising and looking back and things like that.... I think I was selling them short because I was not writing and then for a little while afraid to share what I'd written so asking them to do things that I wasn't comfortable doing or wasn't willing to do myself like writing or sharing began to realize that that was pretty unfair."</p>
<b>Teacher as co-writer</b>	Teacher positions herself as a writer who collaborates with students on their written work. A teacher may also 'write aloud' to help students compose their own work.	During my first observation in Nancy's class, she engaged in co-writing with several students. Students were writing on laptops and Nancy said, "Let's think about a way we can introduce that topic instead of just jumping into the story." She even goes so far as putting her hands on the cursor and keys.
<b>Teacher as writer by necessity</b>	Teacher acknowledges the importance – even necessity - of teachers as writers.	"I can't even imagine teaching writing unless you were a writer. Gosh I mean how do you even approach it [the teaching of writing]?" (Nancy)
<b>Teacher as Developing Writer</b>	Teacher acknowledges that there are other writing areas in which to develop and/or that more training is needed to develop as a writer. Teacher may acknowledge that there is more out there than she can be doing in terms of writing in digital spaces.	"I would like to legitimately Tweet and connect with other educators not with students at all but other educators. One thing I have done is made a concerted effort to um so um one of the things I've done is make a concerted effort to connect with other teachers not just at NAMEOFSCHOOL but at other schools and I'll continue to do that." (Nancy)
<b>Teacher as digital resistor</b>	Teacher resists writing in digital spaces	In her second interview Becca said, "I don't do a whole lot of digital writing."
<b>AFFORDANCES OF DIGITAL WRITING</b>		
<b>Blurring of Teacher's Digital Writing Spaces and</b>	In some instances (but not many) the teacher's digital writing spaces are brought into in-class	"Their quick write yeah that was Edmodo and the prompt that I had put in" (Sally)

<b>In-Class Writing</b>	exercises in active ways.	
<b>Social Aspects of New Literacies (Including Broadening Audiences)</b>	Teachers recognize the social aspects of digital new literacy practices. This includes the broadening audiences afforded by new literacy practices	Nancy wrote, "My current definition of digital writing continues to be any writing done that can be shared online. It's an effective medium for more immediate communication and provides opportunities for collaboration beyond the writer's immediate area."
<b>Considerations of Brevity</b>	A teacher considers the brevity of some digital writing.	"You have to also think about um brevity because nobody wants to read 90 pages now of you know it's got to be to the point." (Nancy)
<b>Empowerment and liberation to tell one's story</b>	Teacher recognizes how new literacies practices can empower students and themselves. A teacher recognizes the power of having students find their voice and tell their own story through writing.	"I have done I Am Poems before. I've it for a couple of years about this is probably my third year to be perfectly honest third year but it's always had your traditional method of expression just because it usually not there has been a technological component in the sense of using it for word processing but um for the most part it's been fairly traditional. it was this year because of this research study class that I'm going oh there's another way of doing this. How cool is that? At first I was hesitant on how it would work with my kids but I think that I've found out that it works better than your traditional approach cause it allows them to express themselves in ways that they normally can't. So it doesn't have to be you know so many paragraphs or so many sentences in a paragraph. They can express themselves the way that they need to express themselves um without having to worry about skills deficits. That is still gets the message across and I think for them that has been very liberating." (Sally)
<b>Permitting multiple perspectives</b>	A teacher comments upon the importance of exposing multiple perspectives in digital writing spaces	As part of their hero creation project, Nancy wanted her students to consider classical heroes "and examine the heroes in these stories against the classical hero model." She is going to have students think about "underlying assumptions of their authors and of the cultures from which they were drawn." Her students will push against traditional models of classical heroes. In this way, her students are producing a counter narrative.
<b>Creating Change/Impact</b>	A teacher discusses how digital writing permits change or an impact on others.	"I think say for example these compare-contrast or the I Am Poem just expressing that in this this form um using digital writing um I think impacts others uh that it wouldn't normally impact. You have a wider range of viewers now than before you know if it goes into Young Authors just those people would see it. And now you can reach so many more people and make even more of an impact." (Sally)
<b>Broadening Definitions and Options for Composition (Including multimodality)</b>	Teacher may express how views on writing have changed or adapted as a result of the study group. A teacher may reference the multitude of options, including multimodality, that digital writing affords.	Becca wrote, "I have given them three choices: Podcast, infographic, or video. My hope is that they will choose the one they feel best suits their perspectives or the one they are most comfortable with. It's a way of giving them choice and freedom in the project, but also a way to help them self-differentiate."

<b>A Means to Discuss Digital Etiquette</b>	Teachers emphasize the etiquette they believe to be important in digital spaces	“So it [Edmodo] gives us the communication and conversations skills and etiquette so you know digital etiquette.” (Sally)
<b>Ability to bring in students’ out-of-school literacy practices</b>	Teachers discuss how digital writing allows students to bring in their out-of-school literacy practices to the writing classroom.	“I’m just much more aware of a need to figure out ways to tap into what kids really do. For example, we had this big discussion about Snapchat this morning. Well Snapshot can be abused but I’m thinking how can we tap into what they really love to do? Snapchat’s great for that.... I think we need some tech support that’s a little bit more youthful, more away of what the kids are really using and doing. And that’s just my opinion. I think things change constantly and we have to stay on top of it instead of just saying no, don’t do it.” (Nancy)
<b>PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES</b>		
<b>Variety of writing assignments</b>	Teachers assigned a variety of writing assignments.	<p>Sally: I Am Poem, Edmodo, variety of others</p> <p>Nancy: memory memoir, coding, modern hero project</p> <p>Becca: autobiography like <i>Seedfolk</i> chapter, problem-solution piece, speech, critique, summary paragraphs</p> <p>Darcy: short essay, poetry and digital poetry compilation, memoir, news article, review, plays, debate, silent films</p>
<b>Pedagogies that Emphasize Assessment</b>	A teacher’s writing pedagogy emphasizes assessment.	Sally wanted a rubric for the final composition projects.
<b>Formulaic Writing</b>	A teacher emphasizes writing instruction as a formula	“So for the outline for some of those things that I just discussed you’ve got introduction and the first part with your hook, your background section where you have to research, and then your thesis statement.” (Sally)
<b>Balance Between Traditional and New Literacies</b>	A teacher references traditional literacy practices or researcher observes traditional literacy practices in the writing classroom.	Darcy balanced digital composition on the tablet and stylus with handwriting in composition books. She remarked, “On paper there’s it’s interesting [unt] when we watch them there’s a certain commitment like you’ll see them thinking about a word more than they do on the tablet.”
<b>Process Approach (Writer’s Workshop, Writing</b>	Teacher emphasizes the aspects of the writing	“There’ll be a minilesson basically out of writer’s workshop and that could you know those just really vary.” (Nancy)



<b>Conferences, and Peer Review)</b>	process.	
<b>Mentor Texts</b>	Teachers use a range of mentor texts - including their own writing and other texts.	Nancy used an excerpt from Angelou's <i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i> to help her students with sensory details.
<b>Direct instruction</b>	A teacher references direct instruction or researcher observes direct instruction in the writing classroom.	Becca discussed that though she wanted more time for writing, her feelings about her students' writing abilities led to more of teacher-student discussion rather than time for writing.
<b>Time for Writing</b>	Teacher provides either limited or ample time for writing during a class period.	Becca stopped her students from reflecting to begin the reading benchmark required by the county. Students only had 17 minutes to write.
<b>Social Justice Pedagogy</b>	Teacher admits to having a social justice initiative in interviews or online study group or research observes social justice pedagogies during a writing lesson observation.	In her opening post to the study group, Sally wrote, "This week, as part of the 8th grade Reading/Social Studies curriculum, I assigned a discussion in Edmodo regarding watching the movie 'Walk Out.' One of the main assessments for understanding and critical thing of the movie and its implications, is to use iMovie or another forum to tell their own story of social injustice."
<b>USE OF TECHNOLOGY</b>		
<b>Presentation/Project ion Space</b>	Teacher uses technology to present or project information – perhaps her own writing. There may be moments when the piece is interactive.	During observation 3, Nancy had a web page/frozen picture of Maya Angelou projected on the SMART Board
<b>Typing Space</b>	Technology is used as a typing space.	The primary use of technology during Nancy's first observation was typing. Students used Apple Macs or iPads to write their Who am I? pieces.
<b>Research Space</b>	Technological tools are used as research spaces.	"So let's go ahead and get started. Get your laptops and begin researching." (Sally)

<b>Composing Space</b>	Technology provides a composing space – beyond typing.	As part of the Hour of Coding, Nancy’s student created games using the app hopscotch. This was right before obs 6. In obs 6, the students were about to “get to digitally write ... [their] name[s] in hieroglyphics.” [This was not an observed lesson but she did discuss it in an observation.]
<b>Feedback Space</b>	Technology provides a space for feedback.	Nancy replied to Becca, “Surprisingly, my students are doing a pretty good job of using Google to give constructive feedback. I think part of it is because they are held accountable for everything they write. I can get into their school accounts and see when they posted anything they wrote. I can also pull up a history of changes and see if anyone has tried to cover up inappropriate comments. For example, I had one student make some changes after I called him on the carpet about plagiarizing from another students work. He hastily tried to change what he’d done, but I was able to show him his history and let him know quickly that he’d be in big trouble if this happened again.”
<b>Revision Space</b>	Technology provides a space for revision.	“Most of my student revise more effectively when they edit in a digital format. The protective cases on their iPads make composing difficult, so I’ve been allowing students to choose between creating Google Docs or writing on paper. Most are choosing paper.” (Nancy)
<b>Sharing Space</b>	Technology provides a space for sharing.	Responding to another participant’s definition of digital writing, Sally wrote, “I like that you include sharing ideas of digital writing.”
<b>Entertainment/Play Space</b>	Technology provides a space to play, a place for fun and entertainment.	Becca used a YouTube video during observation three. In her post lesson interview, she wrote, “I also use the YouTube video (projector, etc.) to get the attention of the students.”
<b>Repository Space</b>	Technology serves as an information-storing space	Nancy told her students how to upload their Who am I? pieces in Dropbox in observation 1
<b>Distraction Space</b>	Technology is viewed as a place of distraction.	“If your iPad is put away so it won’t be a distraction.” (Nancy)
<b>Assessment Space</b>	Technology is used as an assessment space.	Nancy’s students tracked their reading in a reading management program Biblio Nasium and/or on a Google Doc. They took grammar and reading quizzes with Quia.
<b>Ignored Space</b>	Technology is ignored; there is this idea that technology is in the shadows despite its presence.	During observation 2, Nancy’s students were writing on paper chart paper despite access to laptops/iPads. The chart paper was literally in the shadows of the SMART Board.

<b>Teacher's space</b>	Technology is used solely by the teacher.	Becca was the only one in her classroom who used technology. Though her team has adopted a Bring Your Own Device initiative, she was nervous about it because she did not know all of the tools. She said that she was going to have them bring in their phones for research but I did not see students using technologies during any of my observations.
<b>Intentional space</b>	Technology is used with explicit intention.	Darcy is intentional in her use of technology. Whereas she had time during which the students used technology, she also had times during which she told students to turn off or close the tablets. During observation 1, she said, "We're a lot of open and close today but I'm okay with that."
<b>Required space</b>	Technology is required.	Nancy discussed how her administration wanted teachers to have a professional Twitter presence.

## REFERENCES

- Adcock, L., & Bolick, C. (2011). Web 2.0 tools and the evolving pedagogy of teacher education. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 11(2), 223-236.
- Alsup, J. (2006). *Teacher identity discourses: Negotiating personal and professional spaces*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Alsup, J., & Miller, S. (2014). Reclaiming English education: Rooting social justice in dispositions. *English Education*, 46(3), 195- 215.
- Alvine, L. (2000). A 20<sup>th</sup> century English teacher educator enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century: A response to Pope and Golub. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 1(1): 102-106.
- Applebee, A.N., & Langer, J.A. (2011). A snapshot of writing instruction in middle schools and high schools. *English Journal*, 100(6), 14-27.
- Atwell, N. (1998). *In the middle: New understandings about writing, reading, and learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Augsburger, D. J. (1998). Teacher as writer: Remembering the agony, sharing the ecstasy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 41(7), 548-552.
- Avila, J., & Moore, M. (2012). Critical literacy, digital literacies, and Common Core State Standards: A Workable Union? *Theory into Practice*, 51(1), 27-33.
- Avila, J., & Pandya, J. Z. (2012). Traveling, textual authority, and transformation: An introduction to critical digital literacies. In J. Avila & J.Z. Pandya (Eds.) *Critical digital literacies as social praxis* (pp. 1-15). Peter Lang: New York.
- Bai, H., & Ertmer, P.A. (2008). Teacher educators' beliefs and technology uses as predictors of preservice teachers' beliefs and technology attitudes. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 16(1), 93-112.
- Bailey, N. M. (2009). 'It makes it more real': Teaching new literacies in a secondary English classroom. *English Education*, 41(3), 207-234.
- Ball, D. L. & Forzani, F. M. (2009). The work of teaching and the challenge for teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 60(5), 497-511.
- Ball, D. L., & McDiarmid, G. W. (1990). The subject-matter preparation of teachers. In W. R.Houston (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (pp. 437-449). New York: Macmillan.

- Bartels, J. T. (2013). New literacies practices of early career English teachers: From digital spaces to the classroom. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544-559.
- Bazerman, C. (2008). Introduction. In C. Bazerman (Ed.), *Handbook of research on writing* (pp. 1-4). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Becker, H. J. (2001). How are teachers using computers in instruction? Paper presented at the Meetings of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, Washington. Retrieved from <https://www.stcloudstate.edu/tpi/initiative/documents/technology/How%20Are%20Teachers%20Using%20Computers%20in%20Instruction.pdf>
- Behrman, E. H. (2006). Teaching about language, power, and text: A review of classroom practices that support critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 49(6), 490-498.
- Bishop, J. (2009). Pre-service teacher discourses: Authoring selves through multimodal compositions. *Digital Culture & Education*, 1(1), 31-50.
- Bishop, W. (1999). Places to stand: The reflective writer-teacher-writer in composition. *College Composition and Communication*, 51(1), 9-31.
- Birner, A. (2012). A review of *10,000 dresses* by Marcus Ewert. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTBSAKvdqqw>
- Bizzaro, P. (1983). Teacher as writer and researcher: The poetry dilemma. *Language Arts*, 60(7), 851-859.
- Black, R. W. (2008). Just don't call them cartoons: The new literacy spaces of anime, manga, and fanfiction. In J. Coiro, M. Knobel, C. Lankshear, & D. J. Leu (Eds.), *Handbook of research on new literacies* (pp. 583-610). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Black, R. W. (2009). Online fan fiction, global identities, and imagination. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 43(4), 397-425.
- Blau, S.D., Cabe, R.H., & Whitney, A. (2011). *Evaluating IIMPaC: Teacher and student outcomes through a professional development program in the teaching of writing* (Executive summary). Santa Barbara, California: South Coast Writing Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara.
- Blondell, M. (2009). *An English teacher's design of digital video composing in an urban high school: Impacts on student engagement and learning* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Buffalo, Buffalo, New York.

- Bolter, J. D. (2001). *Writing space: Computers, hypertext, and the remediation of print*. New York: Routledge.
- Borko, H. (2004). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the terrain. *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), 3-15.
- Borowicz, S. (2005). *Embracing lives through the video lens: An exploration of literacy teaching and learning with digital video technology in an urban secondary English classroom* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Buffalo, Buffalo, New York.
- Bowen, T. & Whithaus, C. (2013). Introduction. In T. Bowen & C. Whithaus (Eds.), *Multimodal literacies and emerging genres* (pp. 1-12). Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh.
- Bowman, C. A. (2000). Infusing technology-based instructional frameworks in the methods courses: A response to Pope and Golub. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 1(1): 98-101.
- Brass, J. J. (2008). Local knowledge and digital movie composing in an after-school literacy program. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 51(6), 464-473.
- Brandt, D. (2009). Writing over reading: New directions in mass literacy. In M. Baynham & M. Prinsloo (Eds.), *The future literacy studies* (pp. 54-74). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brandt, D. (2015). *The rise of writing: Redefining mass literacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Brannon, L, Courtney, J.P., Urbanski, C.P., Woodward, S.V., Reynolds, J.M., Iannone, A.E., ... Kendrick, M. (2008). The five-paragraph essay and the deficit model of education. *English Journal*, 92(2), 16-21.
- Brantley-Dias, L., & Ertmer, P. A. (2013). Goldilocks and TPACK: Is the construct 'just right?' *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 46(2), 103-128.
- Bromley, K. (1998). Technology and writing.. In M. McKenna, D. Reinking, L. Labbo, & R. Kieffer, R. (Eds.), *Handbook of literacy & technology* (pp. 349-353). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Brooks, G. W. (2010). Teachers as readers and writers and teachers of reading and writing. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 100(3), 177-191.
- Buckingham, D. (1993). Towards new literacies. *The English & Media Magazine*, 20 -25.

- Bull, G., Bell, R., Mason, C., & Garofalo, J. (2002). Elementary/secondary education. In H.H. Adelsberger, B. Collis, and J.M. Pawlowski (Eds.), *Handbook on information technologies for education and training* (pp. 543-555). New York, NY: Springer.
- Calkins, L. (1994). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Callahan, M. (2002). Intertextual composition: The power of the digital pen. *English Education*, 35(1), 46-65.
- Chapman, T.K., Hobbel, N., & Alvarado, N.V. (2011). A social justice approach as a base to teaching writing. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 54(7), 539-541.
- Choudhury, M., & Share, J. (2012). Critical media literacy: A pedagogy for new literacies and urban youth. *Voices from the Middle*, 19(4), 39-44.
- Christenbury, L. (2006). *Making the journey: Being and becoming a teacher of English language arts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Christensen, L. M. (2000b). Critical literacy: Teaching reading, writing, and outrage. *English Journal*, 53-67.
- Christensen, L. (2000a). *Reading, writing, and rising up: Teaching about social justice and the power of the written word*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.
- The Chronicle of Higher Education & American Public Media's *Marketplace*. (2012). The Role of Higher Education in Career Development: Employer Perceptions. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/items/biz/pdf/Employers%20Survey.pdf>
- Ciardiello, A. V. (2004). Democracy's young heroes: An instructional model of critical literacy practices. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(2), 138-147.
- Cochran-Smith, M., Barnatt, J., Lahann, R., Shakman, K., & Terrell, D. (2009). Teacher education for social justice: Critiquing the critiques. In W. Ayers, T. Quinn, & D. Stovall. (Eds.) *Handbook of Social Justice in Education* (pp. 625-639). New York: Routledge.
- Coffey, A. & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- College Entrance Exam Board. (2004). *Writing: A ticket to work or a ticket out: A survey of business leaders* (A Report of The National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges). Retrieved from [http://www.collegeboard.com/prod\\_downloads/writingcom/writing-ticket-to-work.pdf](http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/writingcom/writing-ticket-to-work.pdf)
- Collier, S., Foley, B., Moguel, D., & Barnard, I. (2013). Write for your life: Developing digital literacies and writing pedagogy in teacher education. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 13(3), 262-284.

- Colwell, J., Hutchinson, A., & Reinking, D. (2012). Using blogs to promote literacy response during professional development. *Language Arts*, 89(4), 232-243.
- Comber, B., Thomson, P., & Wells, M. (2001). Critical literacy finds a 'place': Writing and social action in a low-income Australian grade 2/3 classroom. *The Elementary School Journal*, 101(4), 451-464.
- Conference on College Composition and Communication. (1982). *CCCC position statement on the preparation and professional development of teachers of writing* (Position Statement). Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/statementonprep>
- Conference on Composition and Communication. (2004). *CCCC position statement on teaching, learning, and assessing writing in digital environments* (Position Statement). Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/digitalenvironments>
- Conference on English Education. (2009). *CEE position statement on beliefs about social justice in English education* (Position statement). Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/cee/positions/socialjustice>
- Coiro, J., Knobel, M., Lankshear, C., & Leu, D. J. (2008). Central issues in new literacies and new literacies research. In J. Coiro, M. Knobel, C. Lankshear, & D. J. Leu (Eds.), *Handbook of research on new literacies* (pp. 1-21). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Costello, A. (2006). New literacies in English: Integrating process drama and digital video in an urban, eight grade classroom. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Buffalo, Buffalo, New York.
- Creswell, John W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cremin, T., & Baker, S. (2010). Exploring teacher-writer identities in the classroom: Conceptualising the struggle. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 9(3), 8-25.
- Curd-Christiansen. (2010). Competing priorities: Singaporean teachers' perspectives on critical literacy. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 49(6), 184-194.
- Danielewicz, J. (2001). *Teaching selves: Identity, pedagogy, and teacher education*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). How teacher education matters. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), 166-173.



- Darling-Hammond, L., & Hammerness, K. (2005). The design of teacher education programs In L. Darling-Hammon & J. Bransford (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do* (pp. 390-441). San Francisco, CA : Jossey-Bass.
- Darling-Hammond & Richardson (2009). Teacher Learning: What Matters? *Educational Leadership*, 66(5), 46-53.
- Davies, J. & Merchant, G. (2007). Looking from the inside out: Academic blogging as new literacy. In M. Knobel & C. Lankshear (Eds.), *A new literacies sampler* (pp. 167-198). New York: Peter Lang. Retrieved from [http://www.academia.edu/293039/A\\_New\\_Literacies\\_Sampler](http://www.academia.edu/293039/A_New_Literacies_Sampler)
- Dawson, C. M., Robinson, E. L., Hanson, K., VanRiper, J., & Ponzio, C. (2013). Creating a breathing space: An online writing group. *English Journal*, 102(3), 93-99.
- The Diary of a Wimpy Kid. (n.d.) Podcast retrieved from <http://www.bazmakaz.com/clip/>
- Dorfman, L. R. & Cappelli, R. (2007). *Mentor texts: Teaching writing through children's literature, K-6*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Dowdall, C. (2009). Masters and critics: Children as producers of online digital texts. In V. Carrington & M. Robinson (Eds.), *Digital literacies: Social learning and classroom practices* (pp. 43- 61). Washington, DC.: Sage.
- Edmondson, E. (2012). Wiki literature circles: Creating digital learning communities. *English Journal* 101(4), 43-49.
- Ehret, C., Hollett, T. (2014). Embodied composition in real virtualities: Adolescents' literacy practices and felt experiences moving with digital, mobile devices in school. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 48(4), 428-452.
- Elsensohn, D. (2012). *The goth-o-matic poetry generator*. Retrieved from <http://www.deadlounge.com/poetry/poem4.html>
- Ertmer, P. A. (1999). Addressing first- and second-order barriers to change: Strategies for technology integration. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 47(4): 47-61.
- Ertmer, P. A. (2005). Teacher pedagogical beliefs: The final frontier in our quest for technology integration? *Educational Technology, Research and Development*, 53(4), 25-39.
- Ertmer, P.A., Ottenbreit-Leftwich, A.T., Sadik, O., Sendurur, E., & Sendurur, P. (2012). Teacher beliefs and technology practices: A critical relationship. *Computers & Education*, 59, 423-435.

- Esposito, L. (2012). Where to begin? Using place-based writing to connect students with their local communities. *English Journal*, 101(4), 70-76.
- Elbow, P. (1998). *Writing without teachers*. New York: Oxford University.
- Flanagan, S., & Shoffner, M. (2013). Teaching with(out) technology: Secondary English teachers and classroom technology use. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 13(3), 242-261.
- Fleischer, C., & Fox, D. L. (2003). Beginning words: Toward meaningful on-line professional development in English education. *English Education*, 35(4), 259-261.
- Floden, R. & Meniketti, M. (2005). Research on the effects of coursework in the arts and sciences and in the foundations of education. In M. Cochran-Smith & K. Zeichner (Eds.), *Studying teacher education: The report of the AERA panel on research and teacher education* (pp. 261-308). Washington, DC: AERA.
- Frank, A. W. (1993). The rhetoric of self-change: Illness narrative experience as narrative. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 34(1), 39- 52.
- Frank, C. R. (2003). Mapping our own stories: Teachers' reflections on themselves as writers. *Language Arts*, 80(3), 185- 195.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. & D. Macedo. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers.
- Freebody, P, & Luke, A. (1990). Literacies programs: Debates and demands in cultural context. *Perspect: An Australian Journal of TESOL*, 5(3), 7-16.
- Fry, S. W., & Villagomez, A. (2012). Writing to learn: Benefits and limitations. *College Teaching*, 60(4), 170-175.
- Gardner, P. (2014). Becoming a teacher of writing: Primary student teachers reviewing their relationships with writing. *English in Education*, 48(2), 128-148.
- Gee, J.P. (1990). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses, critical perspectives on literacy and education*. Publisher: New York.
- Gee, J. P. (2006) *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. Bristol, PA: Taylor & Francis Inc.
- Gee, J. (2007). Pleasure, learning video games, and life: The projective stance. In M. Knobel & C. Lankshear (Eds.), *A new literacies sampler* (pp. 95-114). New York: Peter Lang. Retrieved from [http://www.academia.edu/293039/A\\_New\\_Literacies\\_Sampler](http://www.academia.edu/293039/A_New_Literacies_Sampler)

- Gee, J. P. (2010). *New digital media and learning as an emerging area and 'worked examples' as one way forward*. Cambridge, MA: MIT.
- Gere, A. R. (1980). Teachers as writers. *The National Writing Project Network Newsletter*, 2(2), 1-2.
- Gerrard, L. (2012). Writing in multiple media. In I.L. Clark (Ed.), *Concepts in composition: Theories and practice in the teaching of writing* (pp. 409-430). New York: Routledge
- Gillespie, T. (1985). Becoming your own expert – teachers as writers. *The National Writing Project Network Newsletter*, 8(1), 1-2.
- Giroux, H. A. (1998). Literacy and pedagogy of voice and political empowerment. *Educational Theory*, 38(1), 61- 75.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Glasgow, J.N. (2001). Teaching social justice through young adult literature. *English Journal*, 90(6), 54-61.
- Glazier, J. A. (2007). Tinkering towards socially just teaching: Moving from critical theory to practice. *Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education*, 14(3), 375-382.
- Glesne, C. (1989). Rapport and friendship in ethnographic research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 2(1), 45-54.
- Goddard, J. (2010). Collective case study. In A. Mills, G. Durepos, & E. Wiebe (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of case study research* (pp. 164-166). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412957397.n59>
- Goldberg, N. (2010). *Writing down the bones*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Goldberg, A., Russell, M., & Cook, A. (2003). The effect of computers on student writing: A meta-analysis of studies from 1992 to 2002. *Journal of Technology, Learning, and Assessment*, 2(1), 1-52.
- Gomez, M. L., Schieble, M., Curwood, J. S., & Hassett, D. (2010). Technology, learning and instruction: Distributed cognition in the secondary English classroom. *Literacy*, 44(1), 20-27.
- Gorlewski, J. & Malley, J. (2009). Research for the classroom: Oedipus alive. *English Journal*, 98(6), 95-99.

- Grabill, J. T. & Hicks, T. (2005). Multiliteracies meet methods: The case for digital writing in English education. *English Education*, 37(4), 301-311.
- Graham, C.R., & Herbert, M. (2011). Writing to read: A meta-analysis of the impact of writing and writing instruction on reading. *Harvard Educational Review*, 81(4), 710- 785.
- Graham, C. R., Burgoyne, N., Cantrell, P., Smith, L., St Clair, L., & Harris, R. (2009). Measuring the TPACK confidence of inservice science teachers. *Tech Trends*, 53(5), 70-79.
- Graham, S., Gillespie, A., & McKeown, D. (2013). Writing: Importance, development and instruction. *Reading & Writing*, 26(1), 1-15.
- Grainger, T. (2005). Teachers as writers: Learning together. *English in Education*, 39(1), 75-87.
- Graves, D. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Exeter, NH: Heinemann.
- Graves, D. (1994). *A fresh look at writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Greenhow, C., & Gleason, B. (2012). Twitteracy: Tweeting as a new literacy practice. *The Educational Forum*, 76(4), 464-478.
- Greenhow, C., Robelia, B., & Hughes, J. E. (2009). Learning, teaching, and scholarship in a digital age: Web 2.0 and classroom research: What path should we take now?, *Educational Researcher*, 38(4), 246-259.
- Gregorian, V. (2007). Forward. Graham, S., & Perin, D. In *Writing next* (pp. 1-2). New York: Carnegie. Retrieved from <http://carnegie.org/fileadmin/Media/Publications/PDF/writingnext.pdf>
- Groenke, S. L., & Maples, J. (2008). Critical literacy in cyberspace? *ALAN Review*, 36(1), 6-14.
- Hackman, H. W. (2005). Five essential components for social justice education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 38, 103-109.
- Hammond, T. C., & Manfra, M. M. (2009). Giving, prompting, making: Aligning technology and pedagogy within TPACK for social studies instruction. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* [Online serial], 9(2). Retrieved from <http://www.citejournal.org/vol9/iss2/socialstudies/article1.cfm>
- Hawisher, G. E. (1989). Computers and research in the classroom: Computers and writing: Where's the research? *English Journal*, 78(1), 89-91.

- Hew, K. F., & Brush, T. (2007). Integration technology into K-12 teaching and learning: Current knowledge gaps and recommendations for future research. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 55, 223- 252.
- Hicks, T., & Reed, D. (2007). Keepin' it real: Multiliteracies in the English classroom. *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, 23(1), 11- 19.
- Hicks, T. (2014). Websites and apps for teaching digital writing. Retrieved from [http://digitalwritingworkshop.wikispaces.com/Websites\\_And\\_Apps](http://digitalwritingworkshop.wikispaces.com/Websites_And_Apps)
- Hicks, T. & Turner, K. H. (2013). No longer a luxury: Digital literacy can't wait. *English Journal*, 102(6), 58-65.
- Hicks, T., Turner, K., & Stratton, J. (2013). Reimagining a writer's process through digital storytelling. *Learning Landscapes*, 6(2), 167-183.
- Hicks, T., Young, C.A., Kajder, S., & Hunt, B. (2012). Same as it ever was: Enacting the promise of teaching, writing, and new media. *English Journal*, 101(3), 68-74.
- Hill Center. (2014). Methodology. Retrieved from <http://www.hillcenter.org/pages/about-hill/about-hill---methodology#.VNaV-PnF-So>
- Hill, H. C. (2009). Fixing teacher professional development. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(7): 470-476.
- Hill, H. C., & Ball, D. L. (2004). Learning mathematics for teaching: Results from California's mathematics professional development institutes. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 35(5): 330-351.
- Hinrichsen, J., & Coombs. A. (2013). The five resources of critical digital literacy: A framework for curriculum integration. *Research in Learning Technology*, 21, 1-16.
- Hocks, M. E. (2008). Understanding visual rhetoric in digital writing environments. In T.R. Johnson (Ed.), *Teaching composition* (pp. 337-362). New York: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Hofer, M. & Grandgenett, N. (2012). TPACK development in teacher education: A longitudinal study of preservice teachers in a secondary M.A.Ed. program. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 45(1), 83-106.
- Hofer, M., & Owings-Swan, K. (2005). Digital moviemaking—the harmonization of technology, pedagogy and content. *International Journal of Technology in Teaching and Learning*, 1(2), 102-110
- Holland, K. (2013, November 11). Why Johnny can't write, and why employers are mad. *CNBC*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/id/101176249>
- Holme, R. (2004). *Literacy: An introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh.

- Howard, P. (2014). Affinity spaces and ecologies of practice: Digital composing processes of pre-service teachers. *Language and Literacy*, 16(1), 34-52.
- Howard, U. (2008). History of writing in the community. In C. Bazerman (Ed.), *Handbook of research on writing* (pp 237-254). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum
- Hughes, J. (2004). Technology learning principles for preservice and in-service teacher education. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 4(3), 345-362.
- Hughes, J. E., & Scharber, C.M. (2008). Leveraging the development of English TPACK within the deictic nature of literacy. In Joel A. Colbert et al. (Eds.), *Handbook of technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK) for educators* (pp. 87-106 New York, NY: Routledge.
- Humphrey, S. (2006). "Getting the reader on side": Exploring adolescent online political discourse. *E-Learning*, 3(2), 143-157.
- Hundley, M., & Holbrook, T. (2013). Set in stone or set in motion? Multimodal and digital writing with preservice English teachers. *Journal of Adult & Adolescent Literacy*, 66(6), 500-509.
- Hull, G., & Schultz, K. (2002). *School's out! Brining out-of-school literacies with classroom practice*. New York: Teachers College.
- Hull, G., Scott, J., & Higgs, J. (2014). The nerdy teacher: Pedagogical identities for a digital age. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 95(7), 55-60.
- Hutchinson, A., & Reinking, D. (2011). Teachers' perceptions of integrating information and communication technologies into literacy instruction: A national survey in the United States. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 46(4), 312-333.
- Ife, F. (2012). Powerful writing: Promoting a political writing community for students. *English Journal*, 101(4), 64-69.
- International Reading Association. (2009). *New literacies and 21<sup>st</sup>-century technologies*. A position statement retrieved at [http://www.reading.org/Libraries/position-statements-and-resolutions/ps1067\\_NewLiteracies21stCentury.pdf](http://www.reading.org/Libraries/position-statements-and-resolutions/ps1067_NewLiteracies21stCentury.pdf)
- International Society for Technology. (2000). *ISTE national educational technology standards (NETS) and performance indicators for teachers*. Retrieved from [http://www.iste.org/docs/pdfs/nets\\_for\\_teachers\\_2000.pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://www.iste.org/docs/pdfs/nets_for_teachers_2000.pdf?sfvrsn=2)
- Janks, H. (2009). Writing: A critical literacy perspective. In R. Beard, D. Myhill, M. Nystrand, & J. Riley (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of writing development* (pp. 126-137). London: SAGE.

- Janks, H. (2010). *Literacy and power*. New York: Routledge.
- Janks, H., & Vasquez, V. (2011). Critical literacy revisited: Writing as critique. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 10(1), 1-6.
- Jean, B.C., & Gad, T. (2008). If I Were a Boy. [Recorded by Beyonce]. On *I am Sasha Fierce*. New York: Columbia.
- Jost, K. (1990a). Rebuttal: Why high-school teachers should not write. *English Journal*, 79(3), 32-33.
- Jost, K. (1990b). Rebuttal: Why high-school teachers should not write. *English Journal*, 79(3), 65-66.
- Kajder, S. (2007). Plugging in to twenty-first century writers. In T. Newkirk & R. Kent (Eds.), *Teaching the neglected 'r.'* (pp. 149-161). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Kellner, D. & Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy is not an option. *Learning Inquiry*, 1(1), 59-69.
- Kimmons, R. (2014). Examining TPACK's theoretical future. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 23(1), 53-78.
- King, S. (2000). *On writing*. New York: Scribner.
- Kist, W. (2008). "I gave up MySpace for Lent": New teachers and social networking sites. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52(3), 245-247.
- Kist, W. (2013). New literacies and the common core. *Educational Leadership*, 70(6), 38-43.
- Kittle, P. (2001). Writing giants, Columbine, and the queen of Route 16. *Voices from the Middle*, 9(1), 8-11.
- Kittle, P., & Hicks, T. (2009). Transforming the group paper with collaborative online writing. *Pedagogy*, 9(3), 525- 561.
- Kixmiller, L.A.S. (2004). Standards without sacrifice: The case for authentic writing. *English Journal*, 94(1), 29-33.
- Knobel, M., and Lankshear, C. (2002). *Critical cyberliteracies: What young people can teach us about reading and writing in the world*. Keynote address delivered to the National Council of Teachers of English Assembly for Research, New York, New York.
- Knobel, M. & Lankshear, C. (2007). Online memes, affinities, and cultural production. In M. Knobel & C. Lankshear (Eds.), *A new literacies sampler* (pp. 199-229). New York: Peter Lang. Retrieved from [http://www.academia.edu/293039/A\\_New\\_Literacies\\_Sampler](http://www.academia.edu/293039/A_New_Literacies_Sampler)

- Kopcha, T.J. (2012). Teachers' perceptions of the barriers to technology integration and practices with technology under situated professional development. *Computers & Education*, 59, 1109- 1121.
- Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age*. New York: Routledge.
- Lambert, J. & Cuper, P. (2008). Multimedia technologies and familiar spaces: 21st-century teaching for 21st-century learners. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 8(3), 264-276.
- Lamott, A. (1994). *Bird by Bird: Some instructions on writing and life*. New York: Anchor.
- Lankshear, C. & Knobel, M. (2003). *New literacies: Changing knowledge and classroom learning*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University.
- Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2006). *New literacies: Everyday practices & classroom learning*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Open University.
- Lankshear, C. & Knobel, M. (2011). *New literacies: Everyday practices & classroom learning*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New York: Open University.
- Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2007). Sampling the 'new' in new literacies. In M. Knobel & C. Lankshear (Eds.), *A new literacies sampler* (pp. 1-24). New York: Peter Lang.  
Retrieved from [http://www.academia.edu/293039/A\\_New\\_Literacies\\_Sampler](http://www.academia.edu/293039/A_New_Literacies_Sampler)
- Lankshear, C. & McLaren, P. (1993a). Preface. In C. Lankshear & P. McLaren (Eds.) *Critical literacy: Politics, praxis and the postmodern* (pp. ix-xx). Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Lankshear, C. & McLaren, P. (1993b). Introduction. In C. Lankshear & P. McLaren (Eds.) *Critical literacy: Politics, praxis and the postmodern* (pp. 1-56). Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Lapp, D., Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Gonzalez. (2014). Students can purposefully create information, not just consume it. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 58(3), 182-188.
- Lauer, C. (2009). Contending with terms: 'Multimodal' and "multimedia' in the academic and public spheres. *Computers and Composition*, 26, 225-239.
- LEARN NC. (2010). *Learn NC annual report 2010*. Retrieved from [http://www.learnnc.org/lp/media/misc/2010/AnnualReport\\_Final\\_9-17.pdf](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/media/misc/2010/AnnualReport_Final_9-17.pdf)
- Lewis, M., Flint, A. S. & Sluys, K. V. (2002). Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices. *Language Arts*, 79(5), 382-92.



- Little, J. W. (1993). Teachers' professional development in a climate of educational reform. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 15(2), 129-151.
- Lee, C., & Runyan, B. (2011). From apprehension to critical literacy. *The Journal of Educational Thought*, 45(1), 87-105.
- Leu, D.J. (2002). The new literacies: Research on reading instruction with the Internet and other digital technologies. In A. E. Farstrup & S. Jay Samuels (Eds.) *What research has to say about reading instruction* (pp. 310-336). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Leu, D. J., Kinzer, C. K., Coiro, J. L., & Cammack, D. W. (2004). Toward a theory of new literacies emerging from the Internet and other information and communication technologies. In R.B. Ruddell & N. J. Unrau (Eds.) *Theoretical models and processes of reading, fifth edition* (pp. 1570-1613). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Leu, D. J., O'Byrne, W. I., Zawilinski, L., McVerry, J. G., & Evertt-Cacopardo, H. (2009). Expanding the new literacies conversation. *Educational Researcher*, 38(4), 264-269.
- Lemke, J. (1998). Toward critical multimedia literacy: Technology, research, and politics. In M. McKenna, D. Reinking, L. Labbo, & R. Kieffer, R. (Eds.), *Handbook of literacy & technology* (pp. 3-14). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Lenhart, A. (2008). Writing, technology & teens: The findings of the Pew Internet Project and the National Commission on Writing. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2008/04/25/writing-technology-teens-the-findings-of-the-pew-internet-project-and-the-national-commission-on-writing/>
- Lesley, M. (1997). The difficult dance of critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 40(6), 420-424.
- Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Luke, L. (2012). Critical literacy: Foundational notes. *Theory into Practice*, 51(1), 4-11.
- Luke, A. & Freebody, P. (1999). *Further Notes on the Four Resources Model*. Retrieved from <http://www.readingonline.org/research/lukefreebody.html>
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (2001). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mason, J. (2004). Semistructred interview. In M.S. Lewis-Black, A. Bryman, & T. Ruting Liao (Eds.). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods* (pp. 1021-1022). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412950589.n909>

- McDaniel, C. (2004). Critical literacy: A questioning stance and the possibility for change. *The Reading Teacher*, 57(5), 472-481.
- McEneaney, J. E. (2011). Web 3.0, litbots, and TPWSGWTAU. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 54(5), 376-378.
- McGrail, E. (2005). Teachers, technology, and change: English teachers' perspectives: *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 13(1), 5-24.
- McGrail, E. (2007). Laptop technology and pedagogy in the English language arts classroom. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 15(1), 59-85. Chesapeake, VA: AACE. Retrieved from <http://www.editlib.org/p/18933>.
- McLaren & Lankshear. (1993). Critical literacy and the postmodern turn. In C. Lankshear & P. McLaren (Eds.) *Critical literacy: Politics, praxis and the postmodern* (pp. 379-419). Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Meller, W.B., & Hatch, A. (2008). Introductory critical literacy practices for urban preservice teachers. *The New Educator*, 4(4), 330-348.
- Merchant, G. (2007). Writing the future in the digital age. *Literacy*, 41(3), 118-128.
- Merchant, G. (2008). Digital writing in the early years. In J. Coiro, M. Knobel, C. Lankshear, & D. J. Leu (Eds.), *Handbook of research on new literacies* (751-774). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Miller, D. (2009). *The book whisperer: Awakening the inner reading in every child*. New York: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, S. (2007). English teacher learning for new times: Digital video composing as multimodal literacy practice. *English Education* 40(1), 61-83.
- Miller, S.M. (2010). Reframing multimodal composing for student learning: Lessons on purpose from the Buffalo DV project. *Contemporary Issues and Teacher Education*, 10(2), 197-219.
- Mishra, P. & Koehler, M. J. (2006). Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A framework for teacher knowledge. *Teachers College Record*, 108(6), 1017-1054.
- Moje, E. B. (2007). Developing socially just subject-matter instruction: A review of the literature on disciplinary literacy teaching. *Review of Research in Education*, 31, 1-44.
- Moran, C. (1993). The winds, and the costs, of change. *Computers and composition*, 10(2), 35-44.

- Morrell, E. (2012b). 21<sup>st</sup>-Century literacies, critical media pedagogies, and language arts. *The Reading Teacher* 66(4), 300-302.
- Morrell, E. (2012a). Inventors of the future: A vision for NCTE and our affiliates. 2012 NCTE Affiliate Breakfast Address. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/affiliates/emorrell2012>
- Morrell, E. (2003). Writing the word and the world: Critical literacy as critical textual production. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, New York, New York.
- Morgan, D. N. (2010). Preservice teachers as writers. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 49(4), 352-365.
- Morgan, W. (1997). *Critical literacy in the classroom: The art of the possible*. New York: Routledge.
- Mosley, M. (2010). Becoming a literacy teacher: Approximations in critical literacy teaching. *Teaching Education*, 21(4), 403-426.
- Mueller, J., Wood, E., Willoughby, T., Ross, C., & Specht, J. (2003). Identifying discriminating variables between teachers who fully integrate computers and teachers with limited integration. *Computers & Education*, 51, 1523-1537.
- Muldrow, E. (1986). Electronic media: On writing and word processors in a ninth grade classroom. *English Journal*, 75(5), 84-86.
- Murray, D. M. (1980). The feel of writing – and teaching writing. In A. Freedman & I. Pringle (Eds), *Reinventing the rhetorical tradition* (pp. 67-74). Ottawa, Ontario: The Canadian Council of Teachers of English.
- Murray, D. M. (1985). *A writer teaches writing*. Hopewell, New Jersey: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Myers, J., & Beach, R. (2001). Hypermedia authoring as critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 44(6), 538-546.
- Myers, J. & Eberfors, F. (2010). Globalizing English through intercultural critical literacy. *English Education*, 42(2), 148-170.
- National Council of Teachers of English. (1985). *Teaching composition: A position statement* (Position Statement). Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/teachingcomposition>
- National Council of Teachers of English (2003). *Resolution on composing with nonprint media*. (Position Statement). Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/composewithnonprint>

- National Council of Teachers of English. (2004). *NCTE beliefs about the teaching of writing*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/writingbeliefs>
- National Council of Teachers of English. (2007). *21<sup>st</sup> century literacies: A policy research brief produced by the national council of teachers of English* (Policy Research Brief). Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Positions/Chron1107ResearchBrief.pdf>
- National Council of Teachers of English (2008a). *Writing now: A policy research brief produced by the national council of teachers of English* (Policy Research Brief). Retrieved from [http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Magazine/Chron0908Policy\\_Writing\\_Now.pdf](http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Magazine/Chron0908Policy_Writing_Now.pdf)
- National Council of Teachers of English. (2008b). *Resolution on composing with nonprint media* (Position Statement). Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/composewithnonprint>
- National Writing Project (2010a). *Because digital writing matters*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- National Writing Project (2010b). *Research Brief*. Retrieved from [http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/download/nwp\\_file/14004/FINAL\\_2010\\_Research\\_Brief.pdf?x-r=pcfile\\_d](http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/download/nwp_file/14004/FINAL_2010_Research_Brief.pdf?x-r=pcfile_d)
- National Writing Project. Annual Report 2011-2012 (*n.d.*). Retrieved from [http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/download/nwp\\_file/17653/NWP\\_2011-2012report-p.pdf?x-r=pcfile\\_d](http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/download/nwp_file/17653/NWP_2011-2012report-p.pdf?x-r=pcfile_d)
- National Writing Project. (2014). About NWP. Retrieved from <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/about.csp>
- New London Group (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social features. *Harvard Educational Review* 66 (1), Retrieved from [http://wwwstatic.kern.org/filer/blogWrite44ManilaWebsite/paul/articles/A\\_Pedagogy\\_of\\_Multiliteracies\\_Designing\\_Social\\_Futures.htm#11](http://wwwstatic.kern.org/filer/blogWrite44ManilaWebsite/paul/articles/A_Pedagogy_of_Multiliteracies_Designing_Social_Futures.htm#11)
- Norman, K. A., & Spencer, B. H. (2005). Our lives as writers: Examining preservice teachers' experiences and beliefs about the nature of writing and writing instruction. *Education Quarterly*, 32(1), 25-40.
- Parker, J. K. (2013). Critical literacy and the ethical responsibilities of student media production. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 56(8), 668-676.
- Pasternak, D. (2007). Is technology used as practice? A survey analysis of preservice English teachers' perceptions and classroom practices. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and*

- Teacher Education*, 7(3), 140-157. AACE. Retrieved from <http://www.editlib.org/p/24232>.
- Peters, M. & Lankshear, C. (1996). Critical literacy and digital texts. *Educational Theory*, 46(1), 51-70.
- Pew Research Center. (2013a). The impact of digital tools on student writing and how writing is taught in schools. Retrieved from [http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2013/PIP\\_NWP%20Writing%20and%20Tech.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2013/PIP_NWP%20Writing%20and%20Tech.pdf)
- Pew Research Center. (2013b). 10 things to know about how teens use technology. Retrieved from [http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/07/10/10-things-to-know-about-how-teens-use-technology/Kristen Purcell](http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/07/10/10-things-to-know-about-how-teens-use-technology/Kristen%20Purcell)
- Polonsky, A. (2014). *Gracefully Grayson*. New York: Disney-Hyperion.
- Pope, C., & Golub, J. (2000). Preparing tomorrow's English language arts teachers today: Principles and practices for infusing technology. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* [Online serial], 1(1). Retrieved from <http://www.citejournal.org/vol1/iss1/currentissues/english/article1.htm>
- Reid, J. (2011). "We don't Twitter, we Facebook": An alternative pedagogical spaces that enables critical practices in relation to writing. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 10(1), 58-80.
- Rinaldi, J. (1996). Rhetoric and healing: Revising narratives about disability. *College English*, 58(7), 820-834.
- Roach, A.K., & Beck, J.J. (2012). Before coffee, Facebook: New literacy learning for 21<sup>st</sup> century teachers. *Language Arts*, 89(4), 244-255.
- Robertson, L., & Hughes, J. (2012). Surfacing the assumptions: Pursuing critical literacy and social justice in preservice teacher education. *Brock Education*, 22(1), 73-92.
- Robbins, B. W. (1996). Teachers as writers: Tensions between theory and practice. *Journal of Teaching Writing*, 15(1), 107-128.
- Rogers, R. (2007). A case study of teaching for literacy acceleration within a critical literacy framework: Reconstructing pedagogical approaches. *Pedagogies*, 2(4), 233-250.
- Rogers, R. (2014). Coaching literacy teachers as they design critical literacy practices. *Reading & Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning Difficulties*, 30(3), 241- 261.
- Sahin, I. (2011). Development of survey of technological pedagogical and content knowledge (TPACK). *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 10(1), 97-105.

- Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Washington, D.C.: Sage.
- Scott, R. (1995). How to get your own computer lab in your classroom. *English Journal*, 84(6), 62-64.
- Schieble, M. (2010). The no so digital divide: Bringing pre-service English teachers' media literacies into practice. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 2(2), 102-112.
- Schneider, P. (2013). *How the light gets in: Writing as a spiritual practice*. New York: Oxford.
- Schmandt-Besserat, D. & Erard, M. (2008). Origin and forms in writing. In C. Bazerman (Ed.), *Handbook of research on writing: History, society, school, individual* (pp. 7-22). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Schwartz, L. H. (2014). Challenging the tyranny of the five-paragraph essay: Teachers and students as semiotic boundary workers in classroom and digital space. *Literacy*, 48(3), 124-135.
- Selber, S. A. (2004). *Multiliteracies for a digital age*. Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois University.
- Selfe, C. L. (2003). Students who can teach us: A case study of a new media text designer. In A.F. Wysocki, J. Johnson-Eilola, C.L. Selfe, & G. Sirc (Eds.), *Writing new media: Theory and applications for expanding the teaching of composition* (pp. 43-66). Logan, UT: Utah State.
- Selfe, R. L. & Selfe, C. (2009). 'Convince me!' Valuing multimodal literacies and composing public service announcements. *Theory into Practice*, 47(2), 83-92.
- Sewell, W. C. & Denton, S. (2011). Multimodal literacies in the secondary English classroom. *English Journal* 100(5), 61-65.
- Sholle, D. & Denski, S. (1993). Reading and writing the media: Critical media literacy and postmodernism. In C. Lankshear & P. McLaren (Eds.) *Critical literacy: Politics, praxis and the postmodern* (pp. 297-321). Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Shulman, L. S. (1996). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. *Educational Researcher*, 15(2), 4
- Smith, F. (1994). *Writing and the writer*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Spires, H., Hervey, L., & Watson, T. (2013). Scaffolding the TPACK framework in reading and language arts: New literacies, new minds. In C.A. Young & S. Kajder (Eds.), *Research on technology in English education* (pp. 33-61). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

- Smith, E. R., Bowen, B. A., & Dohm, F. A. (2014). Contradictory and missing voices in English education: An invitation to English faculty. *English Education*, 46(2), 117-140
- Standage, T. (2013). *Writing on the wall: Social media – the first 2,000 years*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. London: Sage.
- Street, B. V. (1995). Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education. London: Longman.
- Swenson, J.; Young, C.A., McGrail, E., Rozema, R., and Whitin, P. (2006). Extending the conversation: New technologies, new literacies, and English education. *English Education*, 38(4): 351-369.
- Tan, L., & Guo, L. (2009). From print to critical multimedia literacy: One teacher's foray into new literacies practices. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(4), 315-324.
- Tate, S. (2011). Equity and access through literacy development and instruction: The use of critical text to transform student writing and identity within a research seminar. *English Teacher: Practice and Critique*, 10(1), 199-208.
- Thomas, A. (2007). Blurring and breaking the boundaries of narrative, literacy, and identity in adolescent fan fiction. In M. Knobel & C. Lankshear (Eds.), *A new literacies sampler* (pp. 137-166). New York: Peter Lang. Retrieved from [http://www.academia.edu/293039/A\\_New\\_Literacies\\_Sampler](http://www.academia.edu/293039/A_New_Literacies_Sampler).
- Tondeur, J., van Keer, H., van Braak, & Valcke, M. (2008). ICT integration in the classroom: Challenging the potential of a school policy. *Computers & Education*, 51, 212-223.
- Turner, K.H., & Hicks, T. (2011-2012). 'That's not writing': Exploring the intersection of digital writing, community literacy, and social justice. *Community Literacy Journal*, 6(1), 55-78.
- Ueland, B. (1987). *If you want to write: A book about art, independence and spirit*. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative research and evaluative methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Perez, S. A. (1983). Teaching writing from the inside: Teachers as writers. *Language Arts*, 60(7), 847-859.
- Pilgrim, J., Bledsoe, C., & Reily, S. (2012). New technologies in the classroom. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin* 47(8), 16-22.

- Rish, R., & Caton, J. (2009). The complexities of teaching new literacies in our classrooms. *Adolescent Literacy in Perspective*. Retrieved from <http://www.ohiorc.org/adlit/inperspective/issue/2009-11/Article/vignette2.aspx>
- Riley, K. (2015). Enacting critical literacy in English classrooms: How a teacher learning community supported critical inquiry. *Journal of Adult & Adolescent Literacy*, 58(5), 417-425.
- Rodesiler, L. (2014). Weaving contexts of participation online: The digital tapestry of secondary English teachers. *Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 14(2), 72-100.
- Rogers, R. (2007). A case study of teaching for literacy acceleration within a critical literacy framework: Reconstructing pedagogical approaches. *Pedagogies*, 2(4), 233-250.
- Rogers, R. (2015). Coaching literacy teachers as they design critical literacy practices. *Reading & Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning Difficulties*, 30(3), 241-261.
- Root, R.L. (1996). Introduction. In R. L. Root & M. Steinberg (Eds.), *Those who do, can. Teachers writing, writers teaching: A sourcebook* (pp. ix-xiii). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Scholastic. (n.d.). *The invention of Hugu Cabret video booktalk*. Retrieved from <http://www.scholastic.com/teacher/videos/teacher-videos.htm#3193874253001/1688353471>
- Shor, I. (1997). What is critical literacy? *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism & Practice*. Retrieved from <http://mediaeducation.org/mt/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/What-is-Critical-Literacy.pdf>
- Solomon, N. (2011). Friendly advice for teachers: Beware of Facebook. *NPR*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/2011/12/07/143264921/friendly-advice-for-teachers-beware-of-facebook>
- Stake, R. E. (1994). Case studies. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research* (236- 247). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Swenson, J., Rozema, R., Young, C. A., McGrail, E., & Whitin, P. (2005). Beliefs about technology and the preparation of English teachers: Beginning the conversation. *Technology and Teacher Education*, 5(3/4), 210-236.
- Swenson, J., Young, C.A., McGrail, E., Rozema, R., & Whitin, P. (2006). Extending the conversation: New technologies, new literacies, and English education, *English Education*, 38(4), 351-369.
- Turner, K. H. (2012). Digitalk as community. *English Journal*, 101(4), 37-42.



- Vasquez, V. M., Albers, P., & Harste, J. C. (2014). Digital media, critical literacy, and the everyday. In R. J. Meyer & K. F. Whitmore (Eds.), *Reclaiming writing: Composing spaces for identities* (pp. 214-223). New York: Routledge.
- Yancey, K. B. (2009). *Writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: A report from the national council of teachers of English*. Retrieved from [http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Press/Yancey\\_final.pdf](http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Press/Yancey_final.pdf)
- Watulak, S.L., & Kinzer, C.K. (2012). Beyond technology skills: Toward a framework for critical digital literacies in pre-service technology education. In J. Aliva & J.Z. Pandya (Eds.), *Critical digital literacies as social praxis*. New York: Peger Lang.
- Weingarten, K., & Frost, C. (2011). Authoring wikis: Rethinking authorship through digital collaboration. *The Radical Teacher*, 90, 47-57
- Whitney, A. E. (2011). In search of the authentic English classroom: Facing the schoolishness of school. *English Education*, 44(1), 51-62.
- Whitney, A. E. (2009). Writer, teacher, person: Tensions between personal and professional writing in a national writing project summer institute. *English Education*, 41(3), 235-258.
- Whitney, A.E., Anderson, K., Dawson, C., Kang, S., Rios, E.O., Olcese, N., & Ridgeman, M (2012). Audience and authority in the professional writing of teacher-authors. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 46(4), 390- 419.
- Whitney, A.E., Hicks, T., Zuidema, L., Fredricksen, J.E., & Yagelski, R.P. (2014). Teacher-writers: Then, now, and next. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 49(2), 177-184.
- Wilber, D. J. (2008) College students and new literacy practices. In J. Coiro, M. Knobel, C. Lankshear, & D. J. Leu (Eds.), *Handbook of research on new literacies* (pp. 553-581). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Withey, M. M. (1983). The computer and writing. *English Journal*, 72(7), 24-31.
- Wohlwend, K. E. & Lewis, C. (2011). Critical literacy, critical engagement, and digital technology. In D. Lapp & D. Fisher (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching of English language arts* (pp. 188-194). New York: Routledge.
- Wolfe, P. (2010). Preservice teachers planning for critical literacy teaching. *English Education*, 42(4), 368-390.
- Wood, D. R., & Lieberman, A. (2010). Teachers as authors: The national writing project's approach to professional development. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice* 3(3): 255-273.

- Yi, Y. (2008). Relay writing in an adolescent online community. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 51(8), 670-680.
- Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Yurdakul, I.K., Odabasi, H.F., Kilicer, K., Coklar, A.N., Birinci, G., & Kurt, A.A. (2012). The development, validity and reliability of TPACK-deep: A technological pedagogical content knowledge scale. *Computers & Education*, 58, 964-977.
- Zhao, Y., & Frank, K.A. (2003). Factors affecting technology uses in schools: An ecological perspective. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(4), 807-840.
- Zhao, Y., Pugh, K., Sheldon, S., & Byers, J.L. (2002). Conditions for classroom technology innovations. *Teachers College Record*, 104(3), 482-515.
- Zinsser, W.K. (1998). *Writing to learn*. New York: Harper.