Talking with Our Fingertips:

An Analysis for Habits of Mind in Blogs about Young Adult Books

by

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ABSTRACT

The pace of technological development and the integral role technologies play in the lives of today's youth continue to transform perceptions and definitions of literacy. Just as the growth in completely online texts and the use of audio books and e-readers expands the definition of reading, digital platforms like blogs expand the notion of literary response and analysis. Responding to the complexities of literacy, this study examines the ways in which the literacy practice of blogging about young adult literature might elicit the active, intellectual orientation, or habits of mind, often sought in adolescent literacy development.

Employing Gardner's Five Minds theory as an analysis tool and what Erickson calls "key linkages" as a framework, blog transcripts were read and coded. Those coded literacy acts were then linked to reveal any evidence of the creating, respectful, ethical, disciplined, and synthesizing habits of mind. From these overlays, empirical data tables emerged, accompanied by integrated case study narratives. Empirical data illustrate the aspects of the cases, and exposition provides a feature analysis of the habits of mind observed during blogging as a form of literary response to young adult literature.

Results of this study suggest that bloggers writing about young adult books in a weblog environment reveal 1) some proficiency at synthesizing material, 2) a tendency to evaluate, 3) only moderate demonstration of the disciplined and respectful/ethical habits, 4) minimal evidence of the creating mind, and 5) moderate proficiency in basic transactional writing.

Aligning with previous research, *Talking with Our Fingertips* illuminates possibilities for adopting pedagogical principles that provide student agency and potentially increase motivation and productivity.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

       Because terminology can change from one context to another, the following glossary will familiarize readers with terms as they are defined and understood in this study.

Blog/Weblog: As a verb, to blog is to produce and post/publish reflections and conversations or to share thoughts on the Web. Writers often revisit and update this log of thoughts, hence the term *web log* and typically abbreviated as *blog*. These websites can develop a collaborative quality when comments posted in response to an original (or parent) post create a readily accessible, archived conversation. Related terms: *blogger* (one who posts or adds ideas to a blog)

Blogging: the act of writing on a blog; a form of dialogue published to the Web; a genre of web writing that goes beyond journaling about feelings or the day's events; it engages individuals in a process of thinking in words, posting ideas, and networking.

Blogosphere: the world of blogs, a web-based network that comprises all blogs and facilitates interconnections for those who join and write in the blog community. The term implies that blogs exist in a connected and complex environment with its own discourse practices, its own language and rules.

Blogspot/Blogger and Word Press: Two common weblog hosting services.

Critical literacy: Involving an interrogation of an author's message or purpose, it

    implies a skill for arriving at improved understanding; the emphasis is less

    about acquisition of skills and more about searching for alternative

    meanings and considering multiple perspectives.

Critical Theory: a form of deconstruction that encourages scrutiny and questions;

    looking from multiple perspectives and considering multiple angles.

Critical thinking: thinking that is accurate, relevant, reasonable, and rigorous; the

    practice of finding answers, imagining alternate outcomes, and making

    decisions in the same way that practitioners in a discipline decide

Cultural capital: a sociological concept that calls into question what constitutes

    knowledge, how knowledge is achieved, and how knowledge is validated

    or counted. As with money, social resources like wealth, power, and

    status have worth and can be *spent* to gain access to certain privileges.

Curriculum 2.0: curriculum models that employ digital tools (like wikis, podcasts,

    and blogs) for teaching

Dialogic/Dialogic exchange: an open discussion featuring authentic questions and

    a shared voicing of understandings not dominated by any one speaker.

    Discussion members build on previous comments and engage in

    dialogue—offering, defending, and revising positions.

Digital Immigrants/Digital Foreigners: those who were not born into the digital

    world but have, at some later point in life, adopted the new technology.

    Socialized differently than digital natives, for them, digital tool use is less

    familiar or natural.

Digital Natives: the generations who have spent their entire lives surrounded by

 and using the tools of the digital age. For *native speakers* of the digital

 language, technological practices like email, Internet use, texting,

 Tweeting, and instant messaging (IMing) are integral to life.

Discourse(s): a manner of using language, of thinking, and of acting that

 serves to identify a person as a member of a social network. Discourses

 are susceptible to shifting as members mediate and leverage group-

 accepted meaning. Related terms: *Primary* or *dominant discourse* (those

 cultural and language identities that arise from home and family);

 Secondary discourse (identities that typically grow out of work or school

 environments)

Discourse Community: social networks created around how language works or

 gets used; every discourse community has its own cultural attitudes,

 vernacular that requires translations by outsiders, and ways of being in that

 community.

Discussion Board: an asynchronous communication tool that allows one

 individual to post a comment or question online. Other members of the

 same discussion board read and respond with remarks, comments, or

 questions. If one individual posts a question, and three others post

 responses to that query, these four posts comprise what is known as a

 thread of conversation or as a *threaded discussion*.

Classroom without walls: an effort to embrace the network of learning

communities accessible through the Web and other media technologies.

Related term: *Expand the walls of the classroom* (going beyond a physical

classroom and school texts to enlarge learning communities and

opportunities)

Flaming: in online communication, the practice of expressing anger, often rudely

Frontloading: a type of pre-teaching that prepares students for what is to come

Funds of knowledge: refers to the background, home experiences, values, stores

of information, and abilities students bring to school—strengths to be

acknowledged and valued in the curricular setting

Generation M: a media label to describe those who grew up during the birth and

rise of the Internet. A related term, *M2* describes the next millennials.

Habits of mind: those cognitive practices that promote productivity—the active

Intellectual orientation sought for competence. According to Gardner's

Five Minds Theory, these are the creating, respectful, ethical, disciplined,

and synthesizing minds. Related terms: mental architecture and CREDS

Html code: the predominant hypertext markup language for web pages

Hyperlink: a web-based connection, often colored or underlined in a text, that

when clicked allows readers to instantly navigate from one source to

another

Key linkages: looking for matching evidence in order to determine pattern

analysis. These are lines of interpretation that emerge as more robust than

others; robust implies that the evidence is of central significance or aligns

significantly with the major assertions the researcher wants to make.

Literature circles: a book discussion format that accommodates student choice and promotes collaborative talk; often a feature of reading workshop

Multi-modal: learning or writing accomplished through the informed use of multiple methods, approaches, or options; often involves combining graphics, text, audio and video to deliver an enhanced end-user experience

Reading Workshop: an instructional model that blends explicit instruction, often delivered in mini-lesson format, with opportunity for independent reading practice; emphasizes reader interaction and engagement

Reflection/Metacognition: a habit of mind that encourages intentional, critical think time—engaging with material for the purpose of analysis, interpretation, an application. The term leans more towards the knowledge building benefit of reflection, rather than on the inner experiences or affective domain of reflection.

Responsive teaching: Pedagogical models that adapt instruction to accommodate diverse learning and communication styles and that present, promote, and honor cultural and linguistic identities. A related term, *culturally responsive teaching* implies responding to the multiple factors of culture, which include socioeconomic class, language, age, religion, gender, race, ethnicity, geography, and issues of exceptionality—whether giftedness or other special needs.

Self-efficacy: the personal belief in one's ability to be successful on a prospective

   task; a critical aspect of motivation that plays a particularly provocative

   and influential role in initiating and sustaining engagement in an activity

Sponsors of literacy/Literacy sponsors: identifies people, agencies, and resources

   that enable, support, and subsidize literacy development; sponsors can

   grant access as well as regulate or even suppress literacy.

Voice Thread: a discussion platform that allows an audio, video, and/or

   visual text reading of shared ideas. The posts themselves can be

   spoken using a computer's audio recording device, phoned in, or

   typed in the traditional way. Voice Thread also supports video,

   using a computer's webcam for recording.

Web 2.0: describes the digital tools or processes that go beyond simple access of

   or interaction with materials from the original Web (Web 1.0) to the act of

   creating and publishing one's own material

Young adult literature/YA lit: literature written by writers who are aware of

   contemporary issues and writing about topics and themes relatable to their

   audience—typically sixth through twelfth graders. The novels, which can

   include many genres, feature characters with whom youth readily identify

   because they are comparable in age, live lives that at least metaphorically

   parallel their own, and struggle with similar conflicts and issues.

CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Purpose of the Study. *Talking with Our Fingertips* responds to the complexities of young adult literacy by examining a hybrid of curricular and extracurricular cultures: blogging about young adult literature as a form of literary response. The primary purpose of this study is to explore literacy practices in the blogosphere and to examine whether real-world literacy practices like blogging about young adult books can benefit learning and whether such literacy acts have potential to nurture the habits of mind that enable the exercising of judgment on complicated matters and the solving of real world problems. This is an important area for study because potentially rich data to emerge from such research might inform our understanding of adolescent literacies and enable us to determine the value of integrating the way youth read and write outside of school with school literacies.

Study Rationale. Six circumstances foreground this study and justify the importance of the research question: 1) Literacy is shifting, 2) New discourses are evolving, 3) Traditional views of school often under-value certain literacies, discourses, and proficiencies, 4) Concerns about performance or competence with certain habits of mind prevail in news and research reports, 5) Teachers risk disengagement when youth desires for autonomy, mastery, and a meaningful sense of purpose are not acknowledged, and 6) Questions about the educational system's efficacy in light of these transitions and realities command attention.

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Shifting Literacies. The pace of technological development and the integral role technologies play in our lives continue to transform perceptions and definitions of literacy. In 2007, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) released a policy research brief titled "Adolescent Literacy" in an effort to dispel common myths regarding literacy and to provide research-based information to support those interested in shaping literacy instruction. According to this brief, "for adolescents, school-based literacy shifts as students engage with disciplinary content and a wide variety of difficult texts and writing tasks" (3).

Availability of information online continues to increase, and the creation of that content is collaborative. Kajder (2010) uses a dichotomy to illustrate characteristics of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 practices. The old web focused on receiving knowledge; while the new web is collaborative and participatory, multi-modal, self-directed, and focused on creating knowledge (35). Richardson (2010), a devoted proponent of internet technologies in schools, calls this "community-driven, participatory space. . . the Read/Write Web" (2). Given these trends, Richardson describes a shift from *know what* to *know where* learning; "it's not as essential to know what the answer is as it is to know where to find it" (151).

Evolving Discourses. As these technologies change, new discourses evolve. Today, primary discourses increasingly include digital tools which give youth access to social networks, music, and the repositories of information on the Web. Because of technology, today's youth have begun to redefine talking. Even in situations that support face-to-face communication, teens prefer to move

dialogue to an alternate space with social networking tools like texting, Facebooking, instant messaging, and even blogging; they talk with their fingertips.

Web-based technology frequently holds value for youth because it provides access to a broader audience, creating opportunities to publish ideas and to obtain immediate feedback. According to a study from the Kaiser Family Foundation (2010), the typical eight to eighteen-year-old devotes "an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes to using entertainment media across a typical day" (1). That's more than 53 hours a week using a smart phone, iPod, computer, television, or other electronic devices. While much of that time is dedicated to social networking, youth are also performing information searches, sharing ideas, and playing games that engage problem-solving and decision-making skills. Game designer Jane McGonigal (2010) with the Institute for the Future reports that globally, humankind "currently invests three billion hours a week playing online games" (n.p). Predictably, parents, educators, and researchers wonder how to harness this energy, how to put this cognitive surplus to work solving real-world problems. McGonigal asserts that time spent gaming should not be viewed pejoratively; instead, she theorizes that "games are a powerful platform for change" since they foster "[evolution] to a more collaborative and hardy species" (n.p.). She claims gamers are willing to focus and to work hard because they respond to the immediate feedback they receive and because they enjoy the collaboration and sociability that accompanies their online knowledge-sharing. The challenge rests in how to apply these principles to education. If games

inspire collaboration and cooperation, if they encourage players to get up after failure and to try again, if they facilitate "urgent optimism" and foster "blissful productivity" as McGonigal defines them, educators might look to gaming models as they design curriculums that foster those important habits. Research like McGonigal's suggests such hybrids of curricular and extracurricular cultures may facilitate learning.

Literacies Under-Valued in School. Despite such research, extracurricular proficiencies like texting, Facebooking, IMing, or blogging often "do not count" at school. School policies that confine cell phones to lockers and that forbid access to email, Facebook, and gaming sites on computer networks confirm that certain "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992) are often not welcome at school.

Perhaps the extracurricular literacy skills used in texting, Facebooking, and blogging, are some of the literacy skills referred to in NCTE's Policy Brief as "proficiencies . . . not valued in school" (3). Failure to engage the learners' experience and existing knowledge base, however, often leads to a disconnect between students and the material presented in the classroom, according to the NCTE brief. When schools foster real-world literacy practices, affirm multiple literacies, and encourage choice, students exhibit motivation and engagement.

Reading the research already written around these issues inspires one to wonder whether educators might promote literacy development by using blogs, by employing a youth friendly practice like social networking to bridge primary and secondary discourses. In this way, might a secondary discourse "filter" into the

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primary discourse? According to Gee (1989), "filtering represents transfer of features from secondary Discourses into primary Discourses" (11). Gee's idea provided vocabulary for this research.

Habits of Mind Focus. Themes often abound in research, and recently the term *habits of mind* appears prevalent. To describe the active intellectual orientation relevant to literacy development, Newkirk (2009) borrowed the term *habits of mind* from Deborah Meier (2003), who enumerates the habit of observation, the habit of generalization, the habit of evaluating and using evidence, and the habit of considering alternatives (142) as crucial to exercising judgment on complicated matters, whether in the workforce or as an engaged and thoughtful community member.

Howard Gardner (2008) also names five actions of the mind, calling them essential in gaining future credibility. Although he did not present them in this order, so arranged, they create the acronym CREDS: creating, respectful, ethical, disciplined, and synthesizing. Listing the habits of mind in this order makes no value judgment about a hierarchy of importance; it simply provides a mnemonic device to make the habits easy to recall. In building a case for nurturing these habits of mind, Gardner speaks to technological and social change. Because of computer search engines, individuals no longer need "to cultivate a faithful and capacious verbal memory" (11). Today, a pile of facts is simply "inert knowledge" (28) or mere ornamentation. Instead, the contemporary world and workplace needs people with the ability to survey, organize, and apply a cornucopia of information.

Other groups, like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) with their EdSteps project, are looking for "student work demonstrating performance at every level" (1). To support "the high quality teaching and assessment of college and career-readiness skills in schools" (1), EdSteps identified five skill areas — Writing, Global Competence, Creativity, Problem Solving, and Analyzing Information—selected "because they are important for student success and they are traditionally difficult and costly to assess" (1).

Also seeking to cultivate habits of mind, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the National Writing Project (NWP) developed the "Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing" (2011). The college and high school writing teachers who wrote and reviewed the *Framework* endorse eight habits: Curiosity, Openness, Engagement, Creativity, Persistence, Responsibility, Flexibility, and Metacognition as "central to education and to the development of a literate citizenry" (2). Besides fostering habits of mind, the *Framework* promotes "composing in multiple environments" (10), including electronic platforms like blogging.

While the *habits of mind* vary from person to person and don't exactly align, the business world, social scientists, and educational systems seem to share a common mission of nurturing the mental architecture that will benefit both the 21st century learner and the world. The prevalence of this theme in other research led to further wondering about whether educators might nurture certain habits of

mind if adolescents are performing academic and social work concurrently in tasks like blogging about young adult books.

Issues of Motivation. In these times of shifting literacy demands, especially demands to utilize Web 2.0 practices and other forms of media in increasingly innovative and integral ways, educators are poised to implement pedagogical principles that will develop student agency. Gee (2010), McGonigal (2010), NCTE-sponsored researchers (2007), and other digital literacy scholars endorse the value of acknowledging youth desires for autonomy, mastery, and a meaningful sense of purpose. They further encourage curricular designs that meet learners where they live, honoring and incorporating their multiple discourses and recognizing the importance of motivation and youth representation in school-based literacies.

In the absence of such focus and affirmation of youth expertise, many schools and teachers risk disengagement due to student feelings of irrelevance and disempowerment. Kohn (2010) describes multiple motivation-killers, including the restriction of youth choices. Blasingame (2009), Fletcher/Portalupi (2001), Strickland (2002), and Frey/Fisher (2009) also document the power of choice. Whether a factor in selecting a book or a writing topic, choice matters; it motivates, and it empowers voice, increasing the chance that youth will have something to say. In the absence of choice, Denise Clark Pope (2001), author and founder of Challenge Success, describes "classroom chameleons," who learn to "do school," who learn to please those in power positions, and who learn to finesse the system with their skills of adaptability. Conversely, but with similar

intent, Gardner (1991) claims school isn't where students play the role of performer or doer; "typically school is *done* to students" (243; italics in original). Kohn envisions an alternative school, one that privileges autonomy over knowledge consumption. He describes the accountability movement as one that "confuses excellence with uniformity" (18) and invites teachers to transcend "enforced passivity" by supporting students' desire to learn: "Deeper learning and enthusiasm require us to let students *generate* possibilities rather than just choose items from our menu" (19; italics in original).

Additional studies (Bandura, 1997; McCabe, 2009; McFadden, 2009) highlight this search for agency and relevance, and current researchers like Harter and Medved (2010) continue to explore how an information and technology curriculum can remain relevant and meaningful in the current century. Because they believe that literacy, communication, and thinking skills are more important than computer skills and because youth use computerized tools outside of the formal school environment to socialize, interact, connect, and gain knowledge, Harter and Medved, developers of Curriculum 2.0, challenge educational systems to find ways to "ensure that the way students learn with technology agrees with the way they live with technology" (1). Curriculum 2.0 proposes ways to employ digital tools for teaching. Tools like wikis, blogs, and podcasts have been described by Beach et al. (2009) as Web 2.0 tools "because they go beyond simply accessing material from the Web to having students create their own material" (vii).

Educational systems increase the likelihood of relevance with curriculum when what happens in school holds significance outside of school or has Bourdieuian "cultural capital," counting for something in peer group interaction or beyond school. Cultural capital is a sociological concept first articulated by Pierre Bourdieu that calls into question what constitutes knowledge, how knowledge is achieved, and how knowledge is validated. Dominant cultural values often assign worth to certain knowledge. Bowles and Jensen (2001) consider the term *cultural capital* especially felicitous because "like money, our cultural inheritance can be translated into social resources (things like wealth, power and status), and the cultural capital we accumulate from birth can be 'spent' in the education system as we try to achieve things that are considered to be culturally important" (n.p.). As with money, these social resources can be used to gain as well as to deny access to certain privileges.

Efficacy Concerns. Regardless of individual biases about technology use, it is difficult to deny the importance of the digital world in the lives of today's youth. The media has coined labels like Generation M, a term used to describe those who grew up during the birth and rise of the Internet, and M2 to describe the next millennials or digital natives—those who have never known life without digital technology. It is incumbent upon educators to adopt pedagogy that accommodates these learners and the ways in which they interact with technology, producing and consuming information.

Many educators worry that content will get lost in the gadgetry of Smart Boards and iPads or that applications (called apps) like Really Simple Syndication

(RSS) will distract students more than enable them during the meaning-making process. But when teacher-researchers like Sullivan (2010) report that "giving students the time and space to spend more quality time with one another's writing really helped improve their writing skills" (xv) and that youth using digital tools are writing more than ever (Kajder, 2010; Burke, 2010; Beach et al., 2009), it's more difficult to dispute the power of a platform like blogs or wikis in creating a "classroom without walls."

Although digital tools themselves do not create powerful learning experiences, Web 2.0 applications can assist educators in creating lesson plans that make explicit the fact that literacy is first and foremost a social act. When students perceive some purpose and value in learning and when they see knowledge-sharing as a means to influence or engage an audience, their motivation and engagement increase. Adolescents are drawn to environments that are multi-dimensional, interactive, and social. The more educators know about students' media consumption habits, the more they can build upon them for use in the classroom. Encouraged by ethnographic research performed by Brian Street (2001), who shared his New Literacies theory, literacy sponsors can move from the simple autonomous model and the notion that literacy is primarily cognitive-based to accept a more ideological model. Viewing literacy as ideologically embedded does not require giving up on the cognitive aspects of reading and writing nor on the technical skills associated with the autonomous model. Street advocates not for polarization but for a view that links itself to those concepts while incorporating an array of social and cultural ways of knowing. His model

draws attention "to the creative and original ways in which people transform literacy to their own cultural concerns and interests" (430). Studies like *Talking with Our Fingertips*, which examine innovative uses of technology in adolescent literacy practices, can assist in making those transitions.

Theoretical Framework. As a partial response to these six circumstances, this study sought to determine whether youth blogging illustrates a bridging of curricular and extracurricular literacies, whether the proficiencies often not valued in school (texting, Facebooking, instant messaging or IMing, but here blogging) reveal evidence of the habits of mind that society, the business world, and educational systems seek to nurture: creativity, respect, ethics, discipline, and synthesis. While Gee's theory about *discourse filtering* gave shape to my thinking, Howard Gardner's *Five Minds Theory*—with its potential for coding—offered a tool for analysis and provided a theoretical framework for analyzing my data.

Research Question. A condensed question frames this work: *What habits of mind manifest when adolescents engage in the literacy practice of blogging about young adult books?*

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Pedagogical Models for Shifting Literacies. NCTE's (2007) policy brief

outlines six research-based teaching practices that promise to promote adolescent

literacy:

- Demystify content-specific literacy practices
- Motivate through meaningful choice
- Engage students with real-world literacy practices
- Affirm multiple literacies
- Support learner-centered classroom environments
- Foster social responsibility through multicultural literacy (4).

Teachers might implement those practices by designing reading

workshops or literature circles with high interest reading material that the youth

select and then by taking the discussion online. Trelease (2006) shares statistics

on the potential for recreational reading to build valuable knowledge capital that

will not only help students in future reading but will prepare them for tests.

Students remember better that which they enjoy, can connect to their own lives in

some way, or can align with prior texts or narrative patterns.

According to Sheridan Blau (2003), literature workshop and literature

circles in the English classroom provide an effective critical thinking model. Blau

renders the process of textual analysis—reading, interpretation, and criticism—

into general thinking stages applicable to most fields of inquiry. For example, he

generalizes the fundamental question —what does it say, to what are the facts.

This shift enables Blau to extend the inherent reflective process of literary

analysis to other areas of inquiry.   The parallel continues as students draw

inferences from presented facts, weigh evidence, identify contradictions, suggest

applications, and consider what theories emerge for concurrence or challenge.

In Blau's theory, stimulating the operations of mind fundamental to the

study of literature and providing students with regular practice in such evidentiary

reasoning builds the foundation necessary for effective intellectual work in any

academic field; we recognize these same processes in the work of a laboratory or

field scientist, a detective at a crime scene, or a business professional coming to

an important transaction. Blau's approach aligns with Scriven and Paul's (1987)

definition of critical thinking as that which is "accurate, relevant, reasonable, and

rigorous—whether it be analyzing, synthesizing, generalizing, applying concepts,

interpreting, evaluating, supporting arguments and hypotheses, solving problems,

or making decisions" (1). It also aligns with Gardner's perceptions of critical

thinking or habits of mind.   To develop efficacy with this kind of thinking, Blau's

workshop models put students at the center of learning where they grapple with

meaning through talk that supports confusion—a condition that Blau claims

"represents an advanced state of understanding" (21):

> In a classroom where intellectual problems and confusion are honored as
> rich occasions for learning, students and teachers will be more inclined to
> confront and even seek rather than avoid the textual and conceptual
> problems that offer the richest opportunities for learning (56).

This rich learning happens when students, not the teacher, perform the intellectual

labor involved in meaning making; when students read, write, and lead

discussions that foster disagreement and authentic questions—those without a

predetermined answer. The teacher, meanwhile, performs as an adjudicator who

directs but does not control the conversation, who lends focus to issues, and who guides readers to the text for answers. In the literature workshop model, the participants reflect on, talk about, or write through the problems and questions they encounter in the literary experience. With this paradigm in use, "the students become valued experts because only they can know and can report their own experiences as readers engaged with the problems they encounter" (13).

Discussion-based approaches to developing understanding or enhancing students' literary experiences have been studied by multiple other scholars, including Applebee et al. (2003), who argue that "high-quality discussion and exploration of ideas—not just the presentation of high-quality content by the teacher or the text—are central to the developing understandings of readers and writers" (688). Applebee et al. refer to the wide range of studies that have documented the inefficiency of the initiation, response, evaluation (IRE) discussion patterns since "such instruction places a premium on transmission of information, providing little room for the exploration of ideas" (689). Instead, readers experience cognitive growth when they explore authentic questions— questions that explore individual curiosities rather than "test" their comprehension or "check" their reading—and when they employ a wide range of discussion-based strategies. Discussion-based activities invite students to do real intellectual work—essentially to exercise the habits of mind outlined by Gardner's Five Minds Theory (2008). This emphasis on dialogic interaction and on what Langer in 1985 called "envisionment building" extends the conversation beyond the initial reader-response and leads to increased understanding—especially under the

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influence of "high academic demands (as reflected primarily in the amount of academic work that students are expected to do)" (714). Applebee et al. conclude that, under these influences, students internalize knowledge and skills necessary to engage in challenging literacy tasks on their own.

In their examination of the effects of classroom discussion on students' comprehension of text, Murphy et al. (2009) also concluded that talk appears to play a fundamental role in text-based comprehension. As Fletcher (2010) and others have asserted, "Too often talk is the forgotten stepchild when it comes to learning, but we neglect it at our own peril" (24). Talk is not only an element of the social activity within a school but also reveals itself in classroom interaction and in written work where students construct subject matter knowledge.

Just as often today, contemporary talk occurs electronically. Preferring to text one another or to interact on Facebook, youth have redefined talking, moving communication to an alternate space. Rather than denigrate the practice, though, teachers might harness it. Perhaps the phone or computer screen serves as an imposed pause. Maybe the emotional distance of a technology screen sets the stage for reflective thought. This space for reflection may offer an opportunity to literally see thinking before it is actually shared.

Even while literacies shift, certain research models continue to retain their power. A multitude of researchers (Blau, 2003; Fletcher, 2010; Probst, 1994 and 1996; Gallagher, 2010; Karolides, 2000; Blasingame, 2009; Purves, 1972; Knickerbocker and Rycik, 2002) stand on the shoulders of Louise Rosenblatt whose seminal work with transactional theory continues to prove itself effective

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in classroom settings. In 1938, Rosenblatt introduced the theory, transforming

perceptions of how literature could be taught and providing a basis for moving

beyond the text to consider the perspective of the reader in the response process.

Rosenblatt's three-part transaction involves the reader, text, and poem or message

in a process of meaning-making during which the reader constructs images,

savors language, forms opinions, makes connections, reflects, and engages in idea

revision. Karolides (2000) describes several necessary prerequisites for such a

transaction to take place: 1) the text must be understandable, "within the grasp of

the reader" (6), 2) the language of the text has to be comprehensible for the

reader, so as not to "short-circuit" the reading act or inhibit involvement with the

text, and 3) the reader must exhibit willingness to engage.

Knickerbocker and Rycik (2002) also explore adolescents' growth in the

interpretation and appreciation of literature, examining how models of literacy

and literacy development can help educators resolve conflicts regarding literature

program goals and reader difficulties. They refute the common claim that few

young adult books employ rich language or explore complex themes by offering

evidence to the contrary. More important than sophistication, though, is

sustaining motivation to read as high school level texts become less relevant and

teens become disconnected from reading. A disregard in this area actually leads

to lost literacies. Furthermore, if the goal of literature curriculums is to have

students understand the elements of fiction, it makes no sense to use novels that

are incomprehensible to students.

Gallagher (2010) speaks of these issues, too, as a way to prevent "readicide." While many factors have the potential to kill a reader's love for literary transaction, Gallagher describes the reader's need for prior knowledge in approaching difficult text. In the absence of experiences that might enhance comprehension, readers can not reach "the place where all serious readers want to be—the reading flow" (60). Gallagher borrows the term *flow* from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) who first described the flow as "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it" (4).

From this transaction—essentially the catalyst for the reading experience—readers create a literary work out of their experience and imagination. According to Karolides,

> The focus on the reader and the text grows out of an understanding of what happens during the process of reading; it recognizes that readers, rather than being passive recipients of text, like empty vessels being filled, are active during the process. They are not spectators of the text but performers *with* the text (5, italics in original).

Under this model, until the reader applies his/her former experience to the work in a text-to-self response, the text remains inert. Ultimately, the reader's active participation in the three-part transaction gives the text meaning. In describing a response-centered curriculum, Purves (1972) named four levels of response:

- Engagement-Involvement (Text to Self Connections)
- Perception (Analysis of Textual Elements within a Text)
- Interpretation (Text to World Connections)
- Evaluation (Assessment of Craft/Value of Text)

These response levels represent what Gardner (2008) defines as the habit of synthesis in his Five Minds Theory.

Because it reaffirms the important notion that textual interpretations and meanings are fluid, reader-response theory aligns with what many might consider natural responses to reading. In Probst's (1994) view, literature becomes significant to adolescent readers when personal connections are made: "Meaning lies in that shared ground where the reader and text meet—it isn't resident within the text, to be extracted like a nut from its shell" (38). From Probst's perspective, it is the transaction, not the text that deserves respect. Each individual comes to a literary experience from other experiences, circumstances which inevitably shape one's reading. These initial responses provide a starting place for exploring or facilitating additional responses—responses that can grow from collaboration. These value-added reader responses begin with—but then grow beyond—the transaction.

Blogging as New Discourse Literacy. Blogs are one web tool with potential to foster reflective, collaborative talk. These uncomplicated Internet publishing tools have contributed to a trend for creating and sharing thoughts online. Richardson (2010) reports that "in early 2009, Technorati.com, one of many blog-tracking services, listed 133 million blogs, short for Weblogs" (2). These Weblogs—"easily created, easily updateable Web sites that allow an author (or authors) to publish instantly to the Internet from any Internet connection" (17)—were the first widely adopted publishing tools of the "Read/Write Web." Richardson also provides a rich rationale, a plethora of uses, and copious

objectives for harnessing the power of this resource. He begins by explaining the

pedagogical benefits and further argues that weblogs, "truly a constructivist tool

for learning" (26), give students a real audience beyond the teacher for their

thinking and writing; support different learning styles; enhance the development

of expertise in a particular subject; teach students new literacies; and teach skills

with research, organization, and the synthesis of ideas. With web publishing and

interaction, students will "build relationships with others to pose and solve

problems collaboratively and cross-culturally" (32).   This opportunity for

students to find others to read their work builds on popular culture interests

connected to Facebooking or to other social networking activities.

Blogs, comprised of reflections and conversations, potentially expand the

walls of the classroom and extend the school hours to 24/7. Virtually

unsupervised, blogging can happen at the student's convenience, when inspiration

strikes or at moments when production peaks. As a genre, blogs foster

community building and interconnectedness; they provide a means for sharing

reading experiences and for offering suggestions that might influence the reading

of others. Richardson (2010) describes bloggers exploring their own curiosities

and, in the spirit of the collaborative community, discovering the power of blogs

to "connect us with others who can potentially teach us more" (28).

Because blogs archive a digital story of learning, they are available to both

the teacher and the student for metacognitive purposes. The blog transcription, a

virtual brain imprint, records the evolution of knowledge and captures thought—a

kind of prewriting or prethinking that provides an opportunity to test a hypothesis

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or a line of reasoning on an audience before committing the ideas to composition or to conviction. As learning management systems, blogs help teach writing as a reflective practice.

That process of making thinking visible facilitates detection of teachable moments, instances where an instructor can invite new ways of knowing or nudge critical thought. Teachers who survey this record of reader interactions increase their opportunities to intervene and remediate, challenge and inspire. Whether used by the instructor seeking to revise pedagogy or to improve curriculum delivery or by the other members of the community reflecting to revise thinking, a blog remains available for later reflection and for consultation. Without this tool for keeping track, a sort of brain GPS, growth potential may be lost.

Caccitolo (2010) observed a remarkable improvement in blog posts after inviting her students to examine their posts for weak and strong features. Such a rhetorical analysis facilitated the strength of their posts, with students noticing the power that comes from length, specific references to characters' thought and actions, and making real-life connections. Writers also benefit from advice for effective blog or discussion board posting. After all, teachers cannot assume their students will possess these skills naturally—even if they are digital natives.

Without good antecedents for their work, new writing tasks may render the writer ineffectual. Partnering with pedagogy, technology can improve learning. As Deborah Dean (2008) explains in her work with genre theory, "genres grow out of past genres and develop into new ones" (16). With effective genre antecedents—and blogging is a genre—educators can shape the rhetorical

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situation and increase the likelihood that writers in this new genre will adopt the frames of mind that define those who work in this discourse community, this context with its own culture or way of being. After all, as Noskin (2010) and others warn, "blogging just to incorporate twenty-first century technologies is not what impacts writing instruction. Instead, blogs or wikis or whatever Web 2.0 tools are used are simply the vehicle we use to help students build a writing community" (137).

Dialogic and democratic, blogs spread equality and authority to more people. These platforms give voice to students, regardless of their backgrounds, inviting them "to join a shared and meaningful conversation that transcends interruptions" (Ingraham, 88). With 24/7 Internet access, classroom conversations don't have to end at the bell; a web conversation "[allows] us to keep talking until we have asked questions and explored answers to a satisfying conclusion" (88)—a clear antidote to John Taylor Gatto's (1992) criticism of contemporary schooling, that bells send the subliminal message that no work is worth finishing.

While I resist much of Gatto's criticism, I do believe that vibrant, satisfying, healthy communities depend on the interaction of young and old, that learning is largely social. Web applications encourage this vital interaction. Essentially, these collaborative spaces can serve as "a third place," defined by Oldenburg (1989) as one of the "great good places." In preliterate societies, beyond home and school or work, the third place was often the grandest, most centrally located structure in the village. These places were also "levelers,"

inclusive, accessible places that expanded possibilities and required that worldly

status claims be checked at the door so that all within may be equals. Today, the

Web resembles that structure, that location where a social justice concept prevails,

where the transformation in passing through the portals of this home away from

home often visibly manifests in the individual as upbeat and at ease, welcomed

and honored for what Moll (1992) called the "funds of knowledge" brought to the

environment. Individual skills and knowledge allow these virtual world

community members to become "a genius of place" (Gatto, 88-89). Gone are the

issues of obesity and asthma, gone are the judgments about short people, band

geeks, or science fiction freaks. Online, blind to the traditional cultural markers

that are often used to alienate, we have access to a technology that switches off

the ability to see human beauty, so learners can concentrate on the more important

aspects of who people are—resourceful and creative thinkers.

This ability influenced author Scott Westerfeld to write his science fiction

trilogy, beginning with *Uglies*, a series in which he asks engaging questions about

the meaning of beauty and individuality. David, one of the main characters,

doesn't believe that beauty comes from symmetry, skin tone, and eye shape.

According to David it's "what you do, the way you think" that make you

beautiful" (278-279). Westerfeld encourages us all to exercise a similar wisdom:

"If only people were smarter, evolved enough to treat everyone the same even if

they looked different" (97). Online, without access to the superficial elements

that often prejudice us, we can also practice what Gatto enumerates as key lessons

of home and community life: "self-motivation, perseverance, self-reliance,

courage, and dignity" (19). Web technology supports this kind of learning

because it allows students to participate at their own pace in a collaborative

environment without anxiety about speech impediments, learning challenges, or

other exceptionalities. Empowered by confidence and equipped to find answers

that are available with a mouse click and a few keystrokes, students direct their

own learning while engaged in collaborative communities that encourage inquiry,

experimentation, and idea revision. The blogosphere provides "a place where we

can all meet and read and write" (Richardson, 1); it is an activity hub for

analytical and personal conversation. The *blogosphere,* a term reported to have

been coined by Brad Graham and popularized by Bill Quick (Jarvis, 1), is the

world of blogs, a web-based network that comprises all blogs and facilitates

interconnections for those who join and write in the blog community. The term

implies that blogs exist as a connected community, as a complex environment

with its own discourse practices, its own languages and rules.

    A Defense for Blogging. If given all of these advantages offered by the

blogosphere, dissenters still argue in favor of face-to-face discussion, they might

reconsider how that platform does not include the ability to add hyperlinks,

photos, video clips, and sound bites to immediately illustrate and enhance a

speaker's meaning. Blogs emphasize a purpose for using technological tools.

Beach, Anson, Breuch, and Swiss (2009) enumerate eight purposes: "to search for

material, record thoughts, formulate ideas, develop voice, collaborate with peers,

revise texts, engage audiences, and reflect on their writing" (viii). Besides

supporting these composing practices, digital tools "blur distinctions between

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work and play, . . .learning and entertainment" (12). Another benefit for online

discussion is that all students can speak at once. Such simultaneous collaborating

and composing and multi-modal material engagement meets the Harter and

Medved (2010) criteria for ensuring "that the way students learn with technology

agrees with the way they live with technology" (1). Anyone who has worked

with young adults has likely observed their penchant for what a digital foreigner

might call chaotic distraction: teens plugged in to their favorite tunes while social

networking on Facebook and at the same time word-processing homework for

history class; they have windows open to Word, along with several tabs to the

World Wide Web. Adolescents seem adept at managing multiple streams of

simultaneous information; educators are positioned to supply the additional

training to help students analyze and synthesize that information.

    Blogging as Reader-Response. Besides providing all these benefits,

blogging is a form of dialogue.   Peterson and Eeds (2007) call dialogue a process

of co-producing meaning. Dialogic exchanges of information require personal

investment and idea sharing. This opportunity for reflective talk gives students

permission to think more deeply and to have opinions. Sharing and thinking

aloud encourage students to generate meaning from text, whether that text is

written or visual. As important questions surface, students wrestle with what they

know or think and construct meaning through connections and applications to

previous experience, reading, and data encounters.

    Borrowing from Bakhtin's (1981) notion of dialogic interaction as

essential to discussion, Applebee et al. (2003) defined three key features

associated with performance improvement: authentic questions, open discussion, and uptake. In this final talk move, another group discussion member (often the teacher) "takes up" and builds on a previous comment. To achieve this development, to help with the hard work of teaching critical thinking, educators structure their "curriculum as a conversation" (Applebee, 1996, p. 83). Applebee found that the most effective curricula were organized around specific topics that unified the reading, writing, and discussion that took place over an extended period—like that offered in the blogosphere—which permits students to voice their understandings and then to revisit those posts for possible revision or refinement.

In classroom practices, teachers may discover, as did Michaels, O'Connor, and Resnick (2008), that normal features of everyday conversation can mask the logical structures that teachers attempt to construct. Interruptions, walking on another's lines, ill-chosen words, and incomplete thinking frequently make classroom conversations appear disjointed and unproductive. However, discussion may progress differently when educators disrupt typical school-based discourse patterns with digital platforms like discussion boards, voice threads, or blogging. With the common IRE talk protocol, the teacher initiates discussion, a student responds, and the teacher offers evaluative remarks. In such settings, students often feel less able; the teacher's expertise renders them silent.

About oral discussion and small group participation, Purves, Rogers, and Soter (1995) also raise questions: "How does a student gain the floor? Under what conditions can a student interrupt another student? How can it be assured

that everyone gets a turn? Will one person be the leader?" (103). Online, digital

discussions remove those worries, leading one to wonder about this

environment's potential for validating personal perspectives in a way the

traditional education setting is unable. Perhaps blogs, as a revised, enhanced

protocol, can evoke desired features of student talk—essentially guiding it to

"accountable" levels. In building these scaffolds, Michaels, O'Connor, and

Resnick (2008) encourage "accountability to the community, accountability to

knowledge, and accountability to accepted standards of reasoning" (286).

According to Richardson (2010), Kajder (2010), and Beach et al. (2009),

blogging facilitates dialogic exchange with enhanced democratic features. It

supports different learning styles, erasing some of the cultural constraints

regarding eye contact, turn taking, and notions of social aggression that occur in

face-to-face settings or that produce reticence in some students. The blog gives

space for everyone's voice in the conversation, and all ideas—even the

instructor's—receive equal presentation. In a blog, individuals cannot

monopolize the conversation because they have more comfort sharing in a group

setting or defending ideas. Interrupting, using volume and strong emotion as

intimidation, monopolizing the floor, and other features that impede dialogue are

minimized if not all together absent in blogging. For students disinclined to speak

out in class, for whatever reason, the blog offers opportunity.

Opportunities for responding to literature in group conversation also

produce discoveries that readers cannot construct alone. Burke (2010) reports that,

on blogs, individuals share their own understanding and insight, supporting their

ideas through negotiations with the group. Such interaction builds relationships with others and fosters the collaborative posing and solving of problems. Just as Probst (1996) recognized that compelling talk serves many purposes in constructing the classroom context, dialogic tools like blogs might effectively shape emotional and intellectual responses to a text.

Blasingame (2009) reminds readers, too, that enjoyment, interest, and immediate feedback are important components in fostering "flow experiences," what athletes call being "in the zone."   When we reach this state, we are overcome by concentration and performance. Because the blogosphere enables this state, by inviting writers to write to an authentic audience for a meaningful purpose: to be heard, to share insights, to make meaning of their lives, or to bear witness—writers achieve an altered level of engagement and a feeling of empowerment. Thus, blogging can be the tool that gives adolescents some sense of power over their world at a time when they feel virtually powerless. Blasingame refers to that power as the "power to make the world stop and listen to what they have to say, power to figure out what it is they have to say, and power to make sense out of life" (608).

These platforms are certainly not devoid of difficulty. Like any other discourse community, bloggers should agree to certain parameters so as to encourage respectful participation and to guard against "flaming," the practice of expressing anger, often rudely. Because with blogging participants don't hear tone of voice or benefit from reading body language, misinterpretation can occur. These cautions are not meant to deter but to remind the teacher about carefully

constructing the community so that all feel safe in participating. Ideally, blogs can make strides in fulfilling the NCTE's "Definition of Twenty-First Century Literacies," a document which includes such objectives as the ability to "build relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally" and to "attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments" (NCTE, 2008).

Despite all of its youth appeal and advantages, blogging is clearly not a simple endeavor. Blogging about books calls on one to decode and comprehend a written text and to make that reading process public and rhetorical through writing and posting a literary response. These performative acts transform reading into social interaction, maybe even social action, since as bloggers publish their ideas and receive feedback, those responses may motivate further writing or offer encouragement to carry out ideas. The reading, then, is no longer simply a private act of comprehension and appreciation. The discoveries in this alterative compositional realm are intriguing because in this learning space—essentially what Faust (2000) calls a "zone of possibility" (28)—idea creation occurs.

These flow zones appear critical to learning—as multiple researchers reference them, building on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978), who asserted that learning and problem-solving initially emerge on a social plane, one that favors cooperative learning and peer interaction. Vygotsky called this the "zone of proximal development" and described its role in engagement. In this vital place, potential simmers. From the Latin *potentia*, the term potential implies something

potent or powerful resides, and it is from this zone that knowledge bubbles up if appropriate support or coaching occurs.

For Faust (2000), who offers an in-depth examination of the term *experience* and an analysis of reader-response theory in his research on literary art as experience, reactions to text "should emerge from students' interests and flow with authority of students' voices" (16). In this flow zone, Faust envisions possibility, where "differences would be neither suppressed nor transcended but rather explored for their power to enhance the self-formation of individuals" (28). Under such influence, readers would reflect upon personal questions and reactions, measuring those against the merging concerns of others. In this context, "readers speak up to account for their own reading and listen up to what others have to say about their experience with literature" (29).

This practice aligns with preceding views on dialogic exchange, on creating talking zones that reflect accountability, and on value-added reader-response. Faust envisions classrooms that perpetuate pluralism, that develop cultural identity while providing an arena to voice, rehearse, and revise thinking, and that privilege the transactional approach of readers engaging in "a performance that brings life to literature and literature to life" (15). To underscore the constructive, dynamic quality of this work, Faust references both Dewey (1938) and Rosenblatt who equally exploit the versatility of the word *work.* Using *work* as both a verb and a noun blends the aesthetic and the intellectual. As readers interact with literary art, they engage thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. These affective and cognitive products contribute to the literary

experience. Faust endorses Dewey's idea of experience as active, engaged, and productive: "Dewey proposes that the act of remembering lived-through experience. . .sets in motion a thought process that blends 'practical, intellectual and emotions phases' and may result in a quality of perception he describes as *aesthetic*" (14). Building on this notion of aesthetic experience, Rosenblatt applied the concept to reading. In her view, the aesthetic stance focuses on the experience of reading as primarily motivated by pleasure. While engaging both mind and heart, the experience involves sensing, clarifying, and savoring the reading as it unfolds; draws heavily on past experiences with texts and the world; and includes emotional response, character identification, and perspective comparison.

Valuing Adolescent Literacies.   Because of deeply entrenched ideas about canonized literature and about what defines school-based literacy, some teachers reluctantly embrace YA literature; even fewer integrate graphic novels or comic books. Yet, according to Carter (2008), "integrating them is a step toward a realization of more democratic notions of text, literacy, and curriculum" (47). An expanded definition of literacy would allow teachers to evolve their own canons, to develop a more powerful and inclusive pedagogy, and to bridge the gap between literacies practiced out of school and those enacted in school.

Researchers like Newkirk (2009) and Frey/Fisher (2008) also encourage a more generous definition of literacy. Newkirk specifically argues that popular story types like Star Wars, SpongeBob SquarePants, and Spider-Man keep young readers, especially boys, engaged in reading and writing. And he challenges those

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who would dismiss such choices as inferior or as fluff to consider their stance: "To assert that some genres are, by their very nature 'authentic' and others are 'inauthentic,' is at its root, simply disguised censorship. It is an arbitrary assertion of literary preference" (105). The same is true of young adult literature and those who would eschew it as non-canonical candy.

French author Daniel Pennac (1994), who promotes readers' rights, likened schools to factories with more roboticism than vitality on the curriculum. When conditions like this preside, students rarely develop a love for reading. Pennac proclaims pleasure as paramount to being a reader. In part, this pleasure derives from honoring the reader's "right to read anything" (175).

Noted for his contributions to young adult literature, Don Gallo (2001) would similarly like to see "the love of reading" (35) listed as the English curriculum's number one goal. According to Gallo's survey of young adults and their reading habits, teacher-assigned books are boring unless those books speak to young people, unless they grab attention and provide entertainment. Gallo worries that a persistence to use inaccessible books like the classics will contribute to an aliterate society because, in the absence of pleasure, human beings don't persist in a task. Bold and opinionated in his approach, Gallo doesn't leave much room for opposition:

> It bothers me a great deal when high school English teachers or university professors condemn young adult books because they believe they are shallow and poorly written. Those people are ignorant elitists who haven't done their homework. . . . There are literally hundreds of great books written by sensitive, knowledgeable, and insightful writers who understand teenage readers (37).

Young adult literature can facilitate adolescent literacy because it meets the needs of adolescent readers. Focusing on teenage concerns rather than on adult issues, it is more likely than canonical literature to motivate youth to read (Stover, 2001). Sharing views similar to those of Stover and Gallo, Karolides (2000) puts a premium on relatability as critical to the transactional response, lest the process short-circuit. By offering high- interest reading material, teachers encourage reading; they maximize motivation and engagement; they help to manufacture the flow zone.

Choice further increases the chances for authentic engagement; it implies personal readiness or relevance and decreases the chances of committing *readicide*, a term defined by Gallagher (2009): "Read-i-cide: noun, the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools" (2). Although Gallagher outlines four major contributing factors to this killer, the linchpin has two prongs: Schools are limiting authentic reading experiences and teachers are over-teaching books. According to Gallagher, "the over-analysis of books creates instruction that values the trivial at the expense of the meaningful" (66) and "damages our students' chances of becoming lifelong readers" (72). Readicide sets in when teachers worksheet, quiz, analyze, and sticky note a book to death. English programs can inoculate against readicide with YA books. Gallo (2008) believes adolescents often connect with these novels because they identify with characters comparable in age who live lives parallel to their own and who struggle with similar conflicts and issues.

Young adult books provide the opportunity to read, to write, and to argue about issues in a modern context. Generally, English teachers don't just want students to read novels; they want to expose them to multiple perspectives, to situations that encourage a critical stance so as to inspire wisdom that might lead to an improved way of living in the world. But without the pleasure principle, youth won't remain interested and invested. Newkirk (2009) insists a role for pleasure does not preclude a place for challenge and difficulty. After all, "we lose interest in routinely easy tasks. Ask any gamer" (129). . . . [Yet], failing to acknowledge a role for pleasure and sociability is simply unrealistic, a misreading of human motivation, human nature" (130).

As English teachers try to balance reading as an act of pleasure and reading as a tool for increasing academic prowess in their students, they might look to what Gallo (2008) called *bold books*. According to Gallo, whose column ran from September 2003 to July 2008 in the *English Journal,* these are the best books for growing readers because they deal in the gray areas of life. Although these books are often targeted as controversial, Gallo says, "Good books have always caused people to think, and since few of us think alike, controversy is guaranteed" (116). He insists that young people need the tools to face life outside the protection of their homes and classrooms. Bold books provide the primer for living life in its good, bad, and ugly reality. "And there's no better place to explore the larger, diverse, often scary world than from the safe distance a book provides" (117). A kind of communication lab, literature provides insights for the reader; who through reading experiences many lifetimes in one.

Habits of Mind and Critical Thinking Correlation. Designing a

communication lab that fosters critical thinking or nurtures habits of mind

involves crafting opportunities for students to find answers, solve problems, and

make decisions in the same way that practitioners in the disciplines do. Scriven

and Paul (1987) offer a workable definition of this form of critical thinking:

> Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and
> skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or
> evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation,
> experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief
> and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual
> values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision,
> consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and
> fairness. (n.p.)

Gardner's five minds—creating, respectful, ethical, disciplined,

synthesizing—span the same cognitive spectrum and promise a similar

competence; the use of all the habits fosters critical thinking. This critical

thinking, these habits of mind, is not something a system can teach, but educators

can design and structure curriculums that facilitate such thinking. As O'Keefe

(1999) states, "Critical thinking is not a subject but a means to achieve a result"

(7). Young adult literature can facilitate the process as one way to encourage

deep learning. While the stories and books do not themselves provide the habits

of mind, well-crafted plots featuring nuanced thinking do provide opportunities

for readers to display the development of these particular thinking routines.

Educators who encourage intentional, critical think time often also value

reflection, or metacognition. A reflective learner is attentive and receptive while

skeptical and focusing on comprehension and meaning-making. Dewey (1938)

describes reflection as the process of "[looking] back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experiences. It is the heart of intellectual organization and of the disciplined mind" (87). Given these definitions and wonderings, teachers might argue for allocating time in the curriculum for reflection, for engaging with material so that students do more than memorize; they analyze, interpret, and apply their learning to uncover meaning. They employ the mental architecture delineated by creativity, respect, ethics, discipline, and synthesis.

Gardner (2008), with his Five Minds Theory outlined in *Five Minds for the Future*, wants to see more than the disciplined mind developed. As a citizen of the twenty-first century, living in a "world that so honors the STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics)" (xvii), he worries particularly about the arts and humanities: "I believe that one cannot be a full person, let alone have a deep understanding of our world, unless one is rooted as well in art, literature, and philosophy" (xviii).

Gardner has chosen to delineate these five operations of the mind, because he considers those the most essential: "They span both the cognitive spectrum and the human enterprise—in that sense they are comprehensive, global" (4). In his description turned prescription, Gardner speaks not as much from his psychologist's stance as he does from a humanist's or policymaker's stance. Attempting to balance his scholarly perspective with a "values enterprise," he believes that if humans are to survive in an inter-connected world, we *need* to cultivate the creating, respectful, ethical, disciplined, and synthesizing (CREDS)

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habits of mind. Gardner claims: "As human beings, we cannot afford to sacrifice the local for the global, any more than we can afford to sacrifice the arts and humanities in our efforts to remain current with science and technology" (18). In Gardner's view, "Those who succeed in cultivating the pentad of minds are most likely to thrive" (163):

- Individuals without one or more disciplines will not be able to succeed at any demanding workplace and will be restricted to menial tasks.
- Individuals without synthesizing capabilities will be overwhelmed by information and unable to make judicious decisions about personal or professional matters.
- Individuals without creating capacities will be replaced by computers and will drive away those who do have the creative spark.
- Individuals without respect will not be worthy of respect by others and will poison the workplace and the commons.
- Individuals without ethics will yield a world devoid of decent workers and responsible citizens: none of us will want to live on that desolate planet (18-19).

As we seek to nurture the CREDS habits, Gardner offers, on pages 18-19, role models in each arena:

- Creating: dancer and choreographer Martha Graham; American business pioneer, software architect, and philanthropist Bill Gates

- Respectful: "those who sheltered Jews during the Second World War or who participated in commissions of truth and reconciliation during more recent decades" (19)

- Ethical: ecologist Rachel Carson; statesman Jean Monnet, "who helped Europe move from belligerent to peaceful institutions" (19)

- Disciplined: English Romantic poet John Keats; Polish–French physicist–chemist famous for her pioneering research on radioactivity, Marie Curie

- Synthesizing: biologist E.O. Wilson; Greek philosopher Aristotle, who made contributions in multiple fields by systemizing deductive logic; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who was a German writer, pictorial artist, biologist, theoretical physicist, and polymath.

The project outlined in Gardner's book is—even by the author's own admission—"ambitious, even grandiose" (153); after all, the nurturing of these habits commences in one's formative years and survives until death. Given current social values, it is also a vision fraught with difficulty:

> It is difficult to be a disciplined thinker when television quiz shows lavishly reward disparate factual knowledge. It is difficult to be respectful toward others when an "argument mentality" characterizes politics and the mass media, and when bald-faced intimidators morph into cultural heroes. It is difficult to behave ethically when so many rewards—monetary and renown—are showered on those who spurn ethics but have not, or at least have not yet, been held accountable by the broader society. Were our media and our leaders to honor the five kinds of minds foregrounded here, and to ostracize those who violate these virtues, the job of educators and supervisors would be incalculably easier (160-161).

As young minds are being prepared for the future, Gardner aspires to see literature, music, philosophy, and history presented in ways that speak to a new generation and that address issues of current concern. Perhaps teachers can contribute to the difficult work of this teaching, to the fostering of these habits of mind and the creation of critical and balanced thinking with blogging. The digital environment of the blogosphere privileges think time, encourages the asking of questions, and operates in the adolescent comfort zone. Edward Albee's often

quoted line, "I write to find what I'm thinking about," could feasibly read, "I blog to find what I'm thinking about."

Adolescent Motivation. According to Karen Wood and William Blanton (2009), "How students value academic literacy activities influences whether they participate in these activities" (264). Such activity engagement often begins with motivation, and multiple theories exist in research that theorizes about this driving force. Dahbany and McFadden (2009) name six, but in promoting positive self-perception, they highlight the notion of self-efficacy—a critical aspect of motivation. Teachers frequently foster this sense of efficacy by scaffolding literacy instruction, by encouraging students to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, and by developing strategies that enhance autonomy, rather than stressing structure and routine. Educators most effectively apply theories of motivation when they meet students on their turf, when they know their students and find the language and discussion points that interest them. Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999, cited in Dahbany and McFadden, 2009) argue for infusing the curriculum with youth literacies because connecting features of popular culture with academic content not only helps students play to their strengths as they navigate new content but also increases the relevance factor. Because contemporary youth are more likely to be expert at emerging information and communication technologies than their parents or their teachers, educators will need to risk their own comfort zones, to enter the e-zone, where youth display sophisticated electronic and viewer literacies. The more educators make these connections, the more likely they are to enhance youth growth needs.

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As researched by Albert Bandura (1997), "self-efficacy, the personal belief in one's ability to be successful on a prospective task" (54), is a critical aspect of motivation, whether in writing or in some other activity. Although Bandura uncovered countless factors which contribute to this subjective and idiosyncratic notion, his research suggests that self-efficacy plays a particularly provocative and influential role in initiating and sustaining engagement in an activity. If this is true, McCabe (2009) and others theorize that a deeper understanding of self-efficacy, its development and its effect on motivation, can provide opportunities for learning how to increase or enhance this perception. When educators activate that *switch*, they positively impact student learning.

In their case study of a Latino boy, Marsh and Lammers (2011) also discovered the role interest and cultural relevance play in motivation and when curricular work allows "students to make connections between their multiple identities and the literacy content" (111).

Many adolescents growing up in today's world of primarily electronic print will find their own reasons for becoming literate and will individually define what counts as pertinent knowledge. Unless youth see realistic purposes to motivate them, they often will disengage from literacy activities, especially the *foreign* demands of academic literacy. As Brandt (2001) suggests, "Literacy counts in life as people find it, although how much it counts, what it counts for, and how it pays off vary considerably" (5). How youth negotiate their way to literacy development also depends largely on their access to resources and to literacy sponsors. As public sponsors of literacy, schools might do well to

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examine whom they enable, support, and teach and how both the overt and the

hidden curriculums contribute to an adolescent's sense of identity and potential.

The literacy sponsor contributes to feelings of self-efficacy and develops what

Moje (2008) calls *responsive literacy teaching*. Responsive pedagogical models

adapt instruction to accommodate diverse learning and communication styles.

They also present, promote, and honor cultural and linguistic identities. From

these foundations, sponsors can design and implement promising practices,

rendering research for its practical implications and taking care not to trivialize

the adolescent experience.

      Summary. As educators accommodate and enable new literacies, Kajder

(2010) reminds them that "just moving traditional curricular tasks into new media

spaces isn't helpful or purposive work" (86). Simply typing a literary response

into a blog doesn't make it a blog post, because we haven't done anything

differently besides change the venue. Work performed in these new media spaces

should provide students "with a different degree of knowing" (87) and provide

transfer to future, self-initiated tasks. Kajder declares: "My job as a teacher is to

help students engage as critical readers of literary texts but also to help them

unpack, examine, and engage in the literary practices that new media make

possible" (20).

      Besides connecting my research with what we already know about shifting

literacies, evolving discourses, under-valued proficiencies, habits of mind,

motivation, and efficacy concerns, I continue the conversation by adding to this

body of work what we can learn about literacy development by analyzing the

transcripts of blogs when adolescents are blogging about young adult books. My

analysis scrutinizes the posts for exhibited habits of mind as defined by Gardner's

pentad.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

Research Question. To answer the research question— *What habits of mind manifest when adolescents engage in the literacy practice of blogging about young adult books?*—required creating or locating blogs for possible study, finding participants, situating myself in the blogosphere, and immersing myself in the reading of young adult literature. These steps, and the descriptions of them that follow, provide a context for the study.

Description of Blogs. Blogs exist in multiple forms online. Some of these are personal; others are established by libraries, teachers, authors, or organizations for some specified purpose. Those wishing to explore the web for blogs on young adult books will note that not all blogs are created equal. Some provide rich models for the kind of "transactional writing" Richardson (2010) describes as "writing to be interacted with, to be returned to and reflected upon" (30). Other bloggers write in a monologic fashion—long parent posts without any transaction in commentary or subordinate posts. Some blogs use Voice Thread, a discussion platform that allows an audio, video, and/or visual text reading of shared ideas. The posts themselves can be spoken using a computer's audio recording device, phoned in, or typed in the traditional way. Voice Thread also supports video, using a computer's webcam for recording. Still others, especially author-hosted blogs, feature little more than compliments or short, evaluative comments. To familiarize myself with the blogosphere, I visited library blogs,

author-hosted blogs, classroom blogs, and blogs in the YA Blogosphere, but the cases for the study came from a researcher-created blog.

Researcher-Created Blogs. On September 29, 2010, I set up a blog using the Blogger site, which provided this address for users: http://youthvoicesresearch.blogspot.com. To encourage participation, I sent invitations to my teacher network, along with permission and consent/assent forms. For weeks, the *Youth Voices Research* blog sat idle. In late October, I attended the MEA/MFT Educators' Convention in Helena, Montana, and distributed invitations and announcements regarding my research project. On October 23, I also shared invitations with the Writing Instruction Now (WIN) team—middle school teachers focused on improving writing instruction. While I received multiple promises for participation, none came. In the meantime, I kept visiting blogs that featured youth participation and continued to read young adult books that I saw referenced.

While browsing these other blogs in January, I discovered various blogs with short or minimal responses. After that discovery, the scantiness of the *Youth Voices Research* blog seemed less anomalous—implying that these discussions require nurturing and time to mature.

By November 11, hoping to reach a broader audience, I established another blog at http://bookvoice.wordpress.com, tagging it with the labels "young adult books" and "youth readers" to increase the likelihood of others finding it in a topic search, using web services like Technorati.com. Throughout the course of the study, this blog never did receive any posts.

On December 10, when the *Youth Voices Research* blog received its first post—nine lines written on *Dairy Queen* by Catherine Gilbert Murdock—I cheered. By the end of April 2011, representing a seven-month period, the researcher-created blog had 41 posts.

In the initial months of the blog's activity—during December through early February—I interacted with the bloggers, responding to their posts or inviting thinking in a talk move that Applebee et al. (2003) call *uptake*. In this talk move, a group discussion member "takes up" and builds on a previous comment. I acted in this way as a form of subliminal modeling. In similar fashion, hoping for imitation, I modeled hyperlinks, used textual quotes for support, and demonstrated the process of dialogic engagement. From mid-February through April, I stepped back as an observer and allowed the bloggers to interact on their own.

Researcher Profile. Peshkin (1991) reminds researchers that "one's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed" (286). While reading and coding blogs, what I notice as a White, upper-middle class, fifty-year-old female and as a widely read educational practitioner with twenty eight years of teaching experience at the secondary and post-secondary levels will most certainly differ from another's "subjective I's" (288). A digital immigrant, I have adopted technology and web tools like blogging to stay competitive in the language arts teaching community. I am also a researcher, and I can't separate any of those facts from my identity, so as I read and coded data, my reading was certainly colored by my researcher identity. Any reader's personal convictions and

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sensitivity to rhetorical moves will dictate what gets noticed. If a reader favors, either positively or negatively, some technique or philosophy, those points will provoke a response. Because we humans all have passions, desires, and predilections, we will exhibit bias. Although it needs to be acknowledged, bias itself isn't a bad thing; it describes an inclination to present or hold opinions based on experiences and perspectives. In these readings, as much as is humanly possible, I monitored myself for consistency so as to ensure that those biases didn't unfairly tip the scales in an inappropriate direction. Still, sheer objectivity in such a project is impossible, and another reader might produce different results.

Given these facts about subjectivity, research will naturally engage the process of interpretation, which, according to Peshkin (2000), "is an act of imagination and logic. It entails perceiving importance, order, and form in what one is learning that relates to the argument, story, narrative that is continually undergoing creation" (108). As such, research results are malleable perceptions— not rigid proof. Interpretation has to do with where a researcher chooses to look, as well as the process of looking to warrant an assertion. With reported results, research invites an audience on the investigative journey and engages them in useful and interesting examination.

Methodological Perspective. For monitoring literacy acts and habits of mind in the blogosphere, I selected the case study design (Merriam, 1998). It works effectively in studies like this where there is interest in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than in hypothesis testing. This specificity of focus makes case study an especially good design for practical issues—for occurrences

arising from everyday practice. A case study can suggest what to do or what not to do; it can illuminate a general problem or explain why an innovation worked or failed to work. Other research designs might produce abstract or formal knowledge; whereas, case study knowledge is more contextual since the case, or experiences, will all be rooted in context. Qualitative researchers Guba and Lincoln (1981) conclude that case study is the best reporting form for evaluations "because it provides thick description, is grounded, is holistic and lifelike, simplifies data to be considered, illuminates meanings, and can communicate tacit knowledge" (375). The information gathered leads to opportunities for evaluation and analysis. Ultimately, this research sought to deepen an understanding of literacy practices visible in the blog environment.

About research, social scientist Frederick Erickson (1986) states: "The aim is to persuade the audience that an adequate evidentiary warrant exists for the assertions made, that patterns of generalization within the data set are as the researchers claims they are" (149). It was my goal, as I formally and explicitly presented data, to write narratives featuring rich detail—"thick descriptions" like those of an ethnographer, who probes deeply and invests considerable time to evaluate patterns. However, my work was not ethnography, since as ethnographic researcher Harry Wolcott (1997) differentiates: "It is not the techniques employed that make a study ethnographic. Nor is it necessarily what one looks at. The critical element is the perspective through which one interprets what one has seen" (346). I did not observe and record data with the intention of ultimately portraying the culture of a school or group. Rather, I hoped to deepen our

understanding about the role blogs play in literacy learning, especially as a component of critical thinking. An empirical data report accompanies both the pilot study textual analysis and the blog transcripts to illustrate research findings and to provide a feature analysis of the habits of mind most supported by these bloggers blogging about young adult books as a form of literary response.

To perform this analysis, I employed Erickson's "key linkages" framework. As researchers review data sources to generate and test assertions, they look for patterns of generalization within the case. Erickson (1986) offers a metaphor appropriate for visualizing this kind of pattern discovery and testing:

> Think of the entire data set as a large cardboard box filled with pieces of paper on which appear items of data. The key linkage is an analytic construct that ties strings to these various items of data. Up and down a hierarchy of general and subsidiary linkages, some of the strings attach to other strings. The task of pattern analysis is to discover and test those linkages that make the largest possible number of connections to items of data in the corpus. When one pulls on the top string, one wants as many subsidiary strings as possible to be attached to data (148).

This frame allowed me to determine the strongest assertions since those had the most strings attached to them, as outlined in Figure 1:

Fig. 1: Key Linkages between Data and Assertions
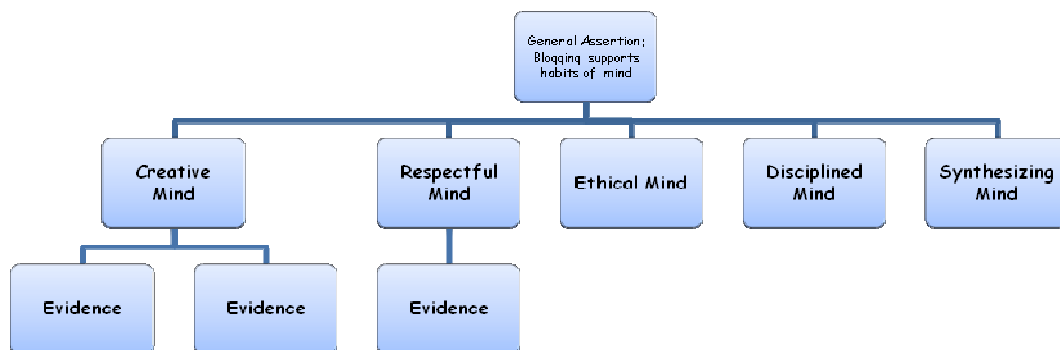
Processing and Coding the Data. Graue and Walsh (1998) describe

data interpretation as "both taking apart and putting together, [as] analytic and

synthetic, [as] descriptive and evocative" (161). They further define codes as

"[mere] signifiers for ideas—analytic categories that a researcher has identified in

the data" (163). Essentially, a code is a label, an indicator or example of the

researcher's assertion or idea. Researchers code recurrences, patterns, breaks in

patterns, and items that appear salient. In a basic interpretive qualitative study

like this, data points are collected through document analysis. These data are

inductively analyzed to make sense of recurring patterns or common themes and

categories that cut across the data. In this research, the names of Gardner's five

habits of mind function as these labels.

Tool for Analysis. Over a seven-month period, I collected and coded 41

blog transcripts representing the work of 36 bloggers—13 male and 23 female.

Employing Gardner's Five Minds theory as an analysis tool, I then overlaid or

linked those literacy acts to reveal any evidence of the kinds of mental abilities

("minds") that Gardner (2008) considers critical to success in a 21st century

landscape of accelerating change and information saturation. Gardner uses the

term *mind*, rather than capacity or perspective, to remind us that "actions,

thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are all products of our brain" (xv).

After reading *Five Minds for the Future* by Howard Gardner, I synthesized

five definitions from Gardner's theory and began to apply these to potential

reading response behaviors. According to Gardner, the *creating mind* poses

unfamiliar questions, conjures fresh ways of thinking, arrives at unexpected

answers, posits new ideas, and considers as many angles as possible. Creative

thinkers are lateral thinkers with the capacity to shift frameworks, assume

alternate identities, and devise ingenious solutions. Innovative, creators will

strike out in unfamiliar directions and offer fresh insight. They retain a childlike

sensibility and will apply different, equally viable interpretations to a single text.

Motivated by uncertainty, surprise, and disequilibrium, the creator will seek not to

order what is known but to extend knowledge, to ruffle the contours of a genre, to

pursue new visions (77-101).

Next, responding sympathetically and constructively, the *respectful mind*

notes differences between human groups but avoids stereotypes and caricatures.

Individuals motivated by respect offer the benefit of the doubt to all human beings

and avoids thinking in group terms. Respect reflects in how an individual thinks

of, responds to, and comments on characters encountered. Their search to

understand and to work with groups who differ extends beyond political

correctness and surfaces in a capacity for forgiveness. A respectful mind will

display active interest in and affection for those of lower status (103-125).

Tolerance embodies the third habit, the *ethical mind*, which considers the

needs and desires of society. Ethics involves an "abstract attitude—the capacity

to reflect explicitly on the ways in which one does, or does not, fulfill a certain

role" (130). Susceptible to noticing unprincipled values, the ethically minded will

assess character behavior through the lens of "goodness," drawing object lessons

from instances of compromised work or violation of acceptable/moral codes of

behavior. They will bear witness to destructive behaviors and to connotations of

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goodness and best efforts. Ethically minded persons focus on fulfilling a role that will improve the quality of life and living. Sensing an obligation to monitor what others are doing, they may call them to account or make references to an individual's role as a citizen oriented towards succeeding generations. Stewards of a domain, they think in terms of missions, models, and mirrors with little focus on the self (127-151).

Gardner's *disciplined mind* shows evidence of training to perfect a skill. It will identify truly important topics or concepts and approach those topics through diverse entry points. Disciplined minds may focus on and sustain one argument but will represent it thoroughly to exemplify understanding. Facts are minimized in favor of sense-making, but these thinkers will search for how a piece operates and will share methods and findings. They will apply themselves diligently, without pretension or fakery. A disciplinary focus will distinguish any analysis from a mere spewing of heterogeneous knowledge about a subject (21-44).

The final habit, the *synthesizing mind*, captures the ability to raise and address the largest questions. Taking information from disparate sources, it incorporates new findings and delineates new dilemmas. Inferring intended emotion when it has not been explicitly mentioned is an ability of the synthesizing mind. Synthesizers often bring concepts to life by invoking metaphors; by capturing wisdom in short, memorable phrases; or by marshaling concepts into theories. From their reading, even a first draft response frequently contains a crucial nucleus of the original version. The most common form of synthesis is the narrative with powerful images and analogies. With a proclivity to connect,

synthesizers apply the tools of understanding and engage in the boldest forms of interdisciplinary connection making. They discern links and will reference other books; these will be the creators of hyperlinks in their blog posts as they seek to generate several representations of the same idea or concept. Synthesizing writers will also provide a succinct summary of points of agreement and disagreement; they will evaluate sources and strive for what Gardner calls *multiperspectivism* (71), a recognition of and appreciation for different analytic perspectives. Ultimately, the synthesizer seeks order, equilibrium, and closure (45-76).

Late in his book, Gardner discusses a resistance to any order for mastering the quintet of minds and says, "No doubt schools, regions, and societies will differ from one another in their emphases on the various kinds of minds, and in the order in which they highlight those minds. Such variations are appropriate and, indeed, welcome" (163).

Coding Summary. From these synthesized definitions, I developed the Coding Heuristic in Figure 2 to recapitulate the principle features of each kind of mind and employed this heuristic in the coding process. Each of the bulleted points is a label that I invented to capture an element of each habit as identified and defined by Gardner in the development of his theory.

Fig. 2: Coding Heuristic

Pink: Disciplined
- approaches diverse topics
- identifies important topics/concepts
- sustains a strong focus
- performs diligent application
- provides evidence of deep reading, a manifestation of thinking

- presents awareness of rhetorical events like literary technique and narrative structure
- validates interpretations with textual references

Blue: Respectful
- notes differences between human groups without stereotyping
- displays interest in and affection for those of lower status
- considers alternate positions
- examines rivals to personal positions
- responds sympathetically and constructively
- challenges the status quo
- expresses a variety of opinions and viewpoints

Green: Synthesizing
- incorporates new findings
- takes information from disparate sources and forms connections
- distills theme or tone
- makes inferences
- connects to other disciplines or sources
- invokes images and analogies
- develops links to other knowledge
- refers to other books, other genres
- creates hyperlinks
- makes real-world applications
- judges or evaluates while presenting criteria

Orange: Creative
- poses unfamiliar questions
- conjures fresh ways of thinking
- arrives at unexpected answers
- posits new ideas
- considers multiple angles
- assumes alternate identities
- devises ingenious solutions
- shifts frameworks
- presents uncertainty, surprise, disequilibrium
- takes interpretive risks

Yellow: Ethical
- considers society, a community as separate from the individual
- assesses character behavior through the lens of "goodness"
- notices unprincipled values

- draws object lessons from violations of acceptable/moral codes of behavior
- bears witness to destructive behavior and to connotations of goodness and best efforts

These bulleted points became my coding categories. Using a discrete highlighter color (orange/creative, blue/respectful, yellow/ethical, pink/disciplined, and green/synthesizing) to correspond with each habit, as I read each post, I looked for and coded these features, what it means to be of a certain mind. While reading, if I encountered a hyperlink for example, it would be highlighted green since a hyperlink connects to other disciplines or sources—a coding category that falls under the synthesizing umbrella. If a post discussed a topic at great length— sustaining a strong focus—that section of the post would be highlighted pink since that coding category falls under the disciplined habit of mind. In this examination, Gardner's Five Minds Theory supplied an analysis tool for coding the blog transcripts. As a heuristic for categorization, it enabled me to survey a huge body of information and to organize it. A compressed version of the Coding Heuristic simplifies the coding categories in a form of synthesis:

The Disciplined Mind. To what do the readers/bloggers pay attention? What disciplines and depth do they bring to their noticing?

The Synthesizing Mind. What inferences, judgments, evaluation, conclusions, theses do bloggers make/draw? What patterns or connections do they make as they synthesize? Do they provide any basis for their generalizations?

The Ethical and Respectful Minds. Do bloggers consider alternate

positions or examine any rivals to their own position? Where do we see

evidence of ethical and respectful thought?

The Creative Mind. What innovation do we see in bloggers' suggestions,

noticings, and connections?

Reliability and Validity. Without the benefit of considerable reading and

training, an independent researcher would have struggled to code my data. In the

absence of such triangulation and as a means of providing some sense of validity

to the data reading, I invited a group of pre-service teachers—who had read about

Gardner's Five Minds Theory—to lend additional perspective to the study, to

confirm or deny my findings in the coding of blog posts. As Stake (1997) pointed

out, "Most case study researchers can't do all the seeing and thinking themselves.

They need to collaborate, to use others' eyes and brains—in identifying issues"

(411). Fifteen college level juniors and seniors enrolled in ENT 441: Methods for

Teaching Reading and Literature, received the directions and Coding Heuristic

illustrated in Appendix A (see page 110) and coded a sample blog post to

corroborate findings. I tallied all of these results in Table 1 (page 55), using an

asterisk to indicate my codes, and then calculated alignment percentages, which

are recorded in parentheses.

Table 1: Alignment Record

Blog Features	Creative	Respectful	Ethical	Disciplined	Synthesizing
Creates hyperlinks				15 * (100%)	
Scarily possible	1	5			9 * (60%)
Sustains focus				*	
9/11 reference		2	3		10 * (67%)
Great loss of freedom		1	3		11 * (73%)
Refers to 1984					15 * (100%)
Big Brother reference	5		3 * (13%)	5	2
Other	1	2	2	2 (13%)	1

Although admittedly unscientific, the pre-service teachers' additional perspectives serve to impart some respectability to the analysis process. Despite the overall 61 per cent alignment, as revealed in Table 1, the assessments and conclusions of my research are still limited by researcher bias and call validity into question.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Purpose and Research Question. The purpose of this study was to

explore literacy practices in the blogosphere and to question whether real-world

literacy practices like blogging about young adult books have potential to nurture

certain habits of mind: *What habits of mind manifest when adolescents engage in*

the literacy practice of blogging about young adult books?

With my research focused on teens' habits of mind while blogging about

young adult books, I was not observing and recording data with the intention of

ultimately portraying the culture of a group. Rather, I hoped to deepen an

understanding about the role blogs play in literacy learning, especially as a

component of critical thinking.

Summary Analysis of the Blog Data. The Blog and Book List (see table

2, page 56) reveals the 35 books with which bloggers interacted. A .5 indicates

that the title listed was not the sole focus of that post.

Table 2: Blog and Book List

BOOKS STUDENTS BLOGGED ABOUT	NUMBER OF POSTS
The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie	5
Airborn series by Kenneth Oppel	1
The Alliance by Gerald Lund	1
The Art of Racing by Garth Stein	1
At Bertram Hotel by Agatha Christie	1
Blood Ninja by Nick Lake	1
Breakfast of Champions by Kurt Vonnegut	.5
Dairy Queen by Catherine Gilbert Murdock	2
Delirium by Lauren Oliver	1

The Eternal Ones by Kirsten Miller	1
Flight by Sherman Alexie	1
Gone with the Wind by Margaret Mitchell	1
Homer's Odyssey by Gwen Cooper	1
The Hunger Games series by Suzanne Collins	1
It's Kind of a Funny Story by Ned Vizzini	1
Life As We Knew It series by Susan Pfeffer	1
The Lightning Thief series by Rick Riordan	1
A Long Way Down by Nick Hornby	1
Lord of the Flies by William Golding	1
Maximum Ride series by James Patterson	1
Maze Runner by James Dashner	2
Nineteen Minutes by Jodi Picoult	2
Precious by Sandra Novak	1
Schooled by Gordon Korman	1
Slam by Walter Dean Myers	1
Soul Catcher by Michael White	1
Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson	1.5
Swimsuit by James Patterson	1
The Time Traveler's Wife by Audrey Niffenegger	2
Troubling a Star by Madeline L'Engle	1
Twisted by Laurie Halse Anderson	.5
The Work and the Glory by Gerald N. Lund	1
Uglies series by Scott Westerfeld	.5
Water for Elephants by Sara Gruen	1
Welcome to the Monkey House by Kurt Vonnegut	.5
TOTALS: 35 BOOKS	41

Reading and highlighting with the Coding Heuristic (see figure 2, page 51), I gleaned evidentiary detail from these 41 posts, giving rise to the data present in the Empirical Data Table (see table 3, page 58). The lists in each category match labels from the Coding Heuristic, and the numbers reveal a simple frequency count—the number of times across the data corpus of blog posts that the habit appeared.

Table 3: Empirical Data Table

Habits of Mind >>	Creating	Respectful	Ethical	Disciplined	Synthesizing
	◆Conjures fresh ways of thinking: 2 ◆ Considers multiple angles: 1 ◆Presents uncertainty, surprise, dis-equilibrium:1	◆Responds sympathetically and constructively: 3 ◆Considers alternate positions: 1	◆Notices values or principles: 6 ◆Draws object lessons: 1 ◆Assesses character behavior through the lens of "goodness": 1	◆Presents awareness of rhetorical events: 13 ◆Sustains a strong focus or thoroughly presents some issue: 5 ◆ Validates interpretations with textual references or research: 1	◆ Judges or evaluates while presenting criteria: 45 ◆ Refers to other books or genres: 6 ◆Distills theme, moral, or tone: 6 ◆Makes inferences or forms theories: 5 ◆Invokes images and analogies: 2 ◆Connects to other disciplines or sources: 1 ◆Forms connections: 1
TOTALS	4	4	8	19	66

Habits of Mind Evidence. Coding was driven by the research question—

What habits of mind manifest when adolescents engage in the literacy practice of

blogging about young adult books?

The resulting data suggest that the bloggers studied are most adept at

synthesizing material. Their blog posts, however, reveal only moderate evidence

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of the disciplined and respectful/ethical habits, and minimal evidence of the

creating mind. *Note:* As I report the bloggers' posts, I am preserving their

original texts, not correcting them for any mechanical or grammatical

shortcomings. To preserve anonymity, blogger's names are pseudonyms or net

names.

Synthesizing—In Gardner's definition, synthesis reveals itself in the habit of

selecting crucial information from one's textual encounters and displaying

that information in a manner that makes sense to self and to others. Using

the synthesizing excerpt from the developed Coding Heuristic, I found the

most evidence of this habit. Each of the bulleted points is a label I

invented to capture an element of the synthesizing habit as identified and

defined by Gardner in the development of his theory:

Synthesizing: Green
- incorporates new findings
- takes information from disparate sources and forms connections
- distills theme, moral, or tone
- makes inferences or forms theories
- connects to other disciplines or sources
- invokes images and analogies
- develops links to other knowledge
- refers to other books, other genres
- creates hyperlinks
- makes real-world applications
- judges or evaluates by presenting criteria

Evidence of synthesis occurred when bloggers referred to other books or

genres, linked their ideas to other knowledge, or connected text-to-self.

They also judged and evaluated, distilled moral or theme, invoked

analogy, made inferences, and developed theories. As I coded this

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evidence, I attempted to avoid subjective judgment; my aim was not to

determine the quality of a textual reference or to measure the

sophistication of an evaluation. I simply labeled each as an action of that

habit as delineated by the Coding Heuristic. The following post contained

the most coding categories from the synthesizing habit; the post not only

dialogically engages another blogger but also evaluates, distills theme,

refers to other books, and makes a text-to-self connection:

I have read the book Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson. I agree with you
Izzy that at times it got a little bit boring and hard to understand but there
is good life lessons in that book. I think part of the point of that book is to
see the outcome of a teenager with depression who is keeping her mouth
shut. It shows you that it isn't the good choice for your well being.
Though I wasn't impressed with the book it had a great message. The
other book I did read and really connected with because I am a guy similar
to the guy in the book Twisted which was also written by Laurie Halse
Anderson. It is about a teenage guy who is a nerd all his life but then after
an evil prank on his school he changes and starts to become popular. It is
a book that is fun and interesting to read (Colt Martin, *Youth Voices
Research*; April 21, 2011).

Across the data corpus of synthesizing habits, evaluations like the

following occurred most often:

One of the book series I have come to love are The Maximum Ride series
by James Patterson. They were all really great books. Max, the main
flock member, is funny even in the darkest of situations. The series is
about kids who get experimented on in a lab. They can fly because they
are three percent bird. It's really cool because they have wings and one of
their main struggles is keeping themselves secret. They are constantly
trying to get out of trouble. I have never read any books like these ones.
They have everything: comedy, horror, thriller, romance, suspense, fiction,
real facts, friendship, and so much more. They only thing that bothers me
is how fast they are. One moment one species exists and then they are
being chased by something else that you've never heard of! They are
really easy books, about 350 pages each with really short chapters. I read
three books in a night once. They are really great books (Angie, *Youth
Voices Research*; April 21, 2011).

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This post is typical in that it is framed by likes and dislikes, performs a

simple plot summary, and supplies the criteria the reader uses to define "a

good read."   Because evaluative judgments emerged so regularly in the

posts, I noted their frequency and counted over 100 evaluative terms.

References to liking/loving or not liking occurred 29 times, and the word

great—or one of its forms—appeared on thirteen occasions. Some readers

even rated the books as five stars of excellence, 4.5/5, an all-time favorite,

or on the top ten list.

Disciplined— In Gardner's *Five Minds Theory*, the habit of discipline shapes

one's focus and implies an ability to bring various disciplines and depth to

textual noticing. These habits are outlined in the disciplined habits excerpt

from the Coding Heuristic; each of the bulleted points is a label I invented

to capture an element of the disciplined habit as identified and defined by

Gardner in the development of his theory:

Disciplined: Pink
- approaches diverse topics
- identifies important topics/concepts
- sustains a strong focus or thoroughly presents some issue
- performs diligent application
- provides evidence of deep reading, a manifestation of thinking
- presents awareness of rhetorical events like literary technique and narrative structure
- validates interpretations with textual references or research

Evidence of the disciplined mind surfaced in the bloggers' sustained or

focused discussions on or awareness of some aspect of the text, rhetorical

feature, or author's style. Especially notable displays occurred in

awareness of rhetorical events like point of view:

One reason I like this book [*Swimsuit*] is because the chapters switch points of view. One chapter may be about the killer, or the investigators, or the victim, or the reporters, or the victim's family. Instead of just getting to know the killer or the victim, you know all of the characters surrounding the main characters. It was interesting to see what all of the characters in the plot were thinking and how they were dealing with their situations (Cathy Simpson, *Youth Voices Research*; April 22, 2011). 2011).

Bloggers also infused knowledge of history into their analyses:

I think that apocalyptic stories are becoming popular because there has always been some kind of theory out there to explore. 2012, for example. The ancient Aztecs, I believe, were a people who believed that on the date January 1, 2012, the world would come to some kind of end. . . . (jnsmith256, *Youth Voices Research*; January 3, 2011)

Studied readers, however, showed only minor diligence in approaches to

and identification of multiple topics, rarely revealed evidence beyond plot

summary, and never validated their interpretations with textual references.

Respectful—Defined by Gardner's theory, the respectful mind prompts a

sympathetic and constructive response. With this habit, one also seeks to

understand those who are different. An excerpt from the Coding Heuristic

enumerates additional habits. Each of the bulleted points is a label I

invented to capture an element of the respectful habit as identified and

defined by Gardner in the development of his theory:

Respectful: Blue
• notes differences between human groups without stereotyping
• displays interest in and affection for those of lower status
• considers alternate positions
• examines rivals to personal positions
• responds sympathetically and constructively
• challenges the status quo
• expresses a variety of opinions and viewpoints

Employing the respectful habit, bloggers most often responded

sympathetically to characters: "The book [*Precious*] is really sad and I did

not even want to read some parts . . . . Some parts in the book make me

just feel bad and you just want to jump in the situation and help this girl

get a real life" (asterclark93, *Youth Voices Research*; February 14, 2011).

This next example considers an alternate position: "I loved [in *Gone with*

the Wind] how the characters were interesting and flawed unlike the

heroes in other novels. I'm pretty sure I would hate Scarlett if she was

real, but I would respect her" (Ali H., *Youth Voices Research*; April 29,

2011). The blog posts offered little evidence to illustrate this habit of

mind.

Ethical— Similar to the respectful habit as outlined by Gardner, the ethically-

minded individual monitors principles, citizenship, and the connotations of

goodness—features included in the Coding Heuristic's ethical excerpt.

Each of the bulleted points is a label I invented to capture an element of

the ethical habit as identified and defined by Gardner in the development

of his theory:

Ethical: Yellow
- considers society, a community as separate from the individual
- assesses character behavior through the lens of "goodness"
- notices values or principles
- draws object lessons from violations of acceptable/moral codes of behavior
- bears witness to destructive behavior and to connotations of goodness and best efforts

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In revealing their ethical habits of mind, bloggers detected unprincipled

values and bore witness to destructive behavior, harmful events, and

suffering, or they drew object lessons. Sometimes this detection was

simply a blogger's noting persecution, abuse, social justice, or a

character's goodness: "Luckily a good ninja rescued Taro and his mother"

(DemonKingXD, *Youth Voices Research* Post Excerpt; January 26, 2011).

The only lengthy post that revealed evidence of the ethical habit, a

perception of unprincipled values, actually reflects a level of

misunderstanding and will be discussed further in Chapter Five:

I must say that I really did not like Sherman Alexie's book Absolute True
Diary of a Part-time Indian. I thought it was demeaning, rude and gross.
It was really mean how he treated the Indians. Even if he is Native
American that doesn't give him the right to trash talk them all (Corinne,
Youth Voices Research; April 21, 2011).

For the most part in the posts of studied bloggers, ethical and respectful

responses occurred with infrequency. Occasionally, a post would

approximate evidence but fall short, as this post by J-Man illustrates:

I read the book slam. I really enjoyed it due to the fact that it completely
connects with a person's life and you can follow it. The social justice
shown in the book was very appealing and I found out that it is a very
indirect form of social justice. It doesn't just hand it out on a silver platter
it makes you work for it and dig deeper to find the implications. Slam is a
very good book and I enjoy reading it every time I decide to. (*Youth
Voices Research*, February 22, 2011 Post [preserved as posted])

This blogger recognizes and names the social justice theme in Walter

Dean Myers' book about Greg, an African American teenage basketball

player from the ghettos of New York who plays so well he has earned the

nickname Slam. Because J-Man uses the pronoun *it* several times without

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an antecedent, a reader can surmise that a seed idea resides in J-Man's

mind, one he refers to but never names. This writer's subtlety emerges

again in his use of "indirect forms" and "deeper implications" in the above

post. The ideas are there, just unclear and unable to be coded as evidence

of a particular habit of mind since they're not explained and the blogger's

intention is unknown.

Creating— The creating mind as described by Gardner goes beyond existing

knowledge and tradition to pose new questions or to offer innovative

solutions; it devises unexpected approaches and performs as listed in this

excerpt from the Coding Heuristic. Each of the bulleted points is a label I

invented to capture an element of the creating habit as identified and

defined by Gardner in the development of his theory:

Creating: Orange
• poses unfamiliar questions
• conjures fresh ways of thinking
• arrives at unexpected answers
• posits new ideas
• considers multiple angles
• assumes alternate identities
• devises ingenious solutions
• shifts frameworks
• presents uncertainty, surprise, disequilibrium
• takes interpretive risks

Evidence of these creating habits was almost completely absent in the blog

posts. The research subjects only occasionally conjured the notion of

innovation, as this post illustrates:

I have never read "the hunger games" before, but some books that I think
make a great trilogy, is the "life as we knew it" trilogy. It is an
apocalyptic story about a girl named Miranda, who lives in a normal

present day surrounding. Her world gets turned around however, when an asteroid hits the moon and knocks it off of its axis. Earth gets affected with land-submerging tsunamis, building-rocking earthquakes, and dirt-ripping volcanic eruptions. Not to mention the loss of food transport, oil preserves, and of simple sunlight when ash smokescreens the planet in a danky film. The story is about how Miranda must survive, and how hard it can be. Imagine a world where everything is gray and quiet! (jnsmith256, *Youth Voices Research*; December 8, 2010).

Besides its invitation to imagine, the post employs creative word choice—

especially with its compound adjectives. This blogger's habit for creating

compound adjectives and for blurring word forms—by turning

smokescreen into a verb, for example—may reflect his/her tendency to

read-like-a-writer, since authors like Scott Westerfeld, frequently employ

such creative moves.

Another creative blogger considers multiple angles with an innovative,

interrogative approach:

We are reading lord of the flies in school and I am really enjoying it. In class we talk about the book and what all of the symbols mean. There are many symbols in this book that I wouldn't have picked up on if we didn't talk about it. I'm not sure how I feel about the moral of the story. I believe that we need society to stay functional as a community but I'm not sure that we all have evil in us. Yes we would all kill to stay alive but is that really evil? It is what all animals are meant to do. That is our natural instinct. I still like this book because it makes you think about it and it has a good story line. I recommend it to 8th graders (Anonymous, *Youth Voices Research*; April 22, 2011).

Combinations— Although the bloggers' habits of mind sometimes occurred as

isolated thoughts, more often they came as interwoven ideas. A blogger

might perform an evaluation while challenging the status quo (creating

mind) and showing sympathy (respectful mind):

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I really did not enjoy this book [*Speak*] at all. The book was boring and extremely annoying. I know that Melinda is depressed and the book is about being depressed, and I sympathize for her, but the entire thing is her complaining about how no one helps her and how no one cares about her. I couldn't help but be angry with Melinda for not helping herself and for not telling anyone so they could help her too. My favorite part in it was when she tells Rachel in the library, because she is finally doing something productive (Izzy13, *Youth Voices Research*; April 21, 2011).

Habits of Mind Summary. A level of elaboration and cognitive depth were basically lacking in the youth blogs. These bloggers do not regularly banter with one another, weighing and considering interpretations or deeply engaging the book's themes. If back-and-forth banter about content did occur, it was often brief or served as a transition between posts: "I didn't read that series. I heard it was a good and well written series, but I am just not into reading series all that much" (Pitbull, December 17, 2010 Response). Most often, interaction referenced agreement or disagreement, recommended reading, or revealed both:

I also read Nineteen Minutes by Jodi Picoult and I completely agree with kathyeyebrow. This book was extremely moving and definitely made me think about bullying. It showed you how school shootings actually are caused starting from the beginning of the shooter's childhood. I agree with Siena about how you really get to know the character and love each one, even the shooter because it explains the reasons that they did the awful thing that they did. I also agree about the ending and how it was too out-of-the-blue and random, but this book is amazing and is one of my favorite books that I have ever read. I would recommend it to anyone. (Anonymous, *Youth Voices Research*; April 22, 2011)

Other posts invited response via a direct question: "All I'll say is it's [*Dairy Queen*] a really fun book and I definitely recommend it: Have any of you read it?" (December 10, 2010 Comment). On other occasions, more authentic social engagement occurred:

RapidReader has been trying to get me to read that book [*Dairy Queen*].
I'm considering it. I just might because I love football and I'm a girl.
From what I've been told, it's a great book for people who are interested
in sports. I'm one of those people! (DemonKingXD; *Youth Voices
Research*, January 27, 2011 Post)

Or

I also read *Maze Runner* by James Dashner. Jack said that he didn't really
understand the perspective of how big it [the place/setting] was. I
imagined it as being about 400 meters long and wide, that being the little
shelter area. As for the maze I imagine a mile in each direction.
(Anonymous; *Youth Voices Research*, April 22, 2011 Post)

Over-all, 39 percent (16 out of 41) of the blog posts revealed some

dialogic engagement. These findings may be due to the nature of the researcher-

created blog. In the initial months of the blog's activity—during December

through early February—I interacted with the bloggers, responding to their posts

or inviting thinking in a talk move that Applebee et al. (2003) call *uptake*: "Why

do you think apocalyptic stories are so popular now?" (Donna; *Youth Voices

Research*, December 29, 2010 Post). Eight out of the fourteen, or 57 percent of

those early posts were dialogic. Even though I primarily played an observer's

role after that time, that early blog activity may well have influenced later posts

that came in April when eight out of 27, or 30 percent, illustrate dialogic features.

While reading and coding the blogs of adolescents blogging about young

adult books, I attended to Gardner's five habits of mind, noting mainly those

aspects of the blogs that provided confirmation, looking for "key linkages"

(Erickson, 1986). I matched the analysis tool descriptors (see figure 2, page 51)

to the habits of mind reflected in the writing. These were charted in an Empirical

Data Table (see table 3, page 58) to reveal the frequency of evidence as it

occurred across the data corpus of 41 blog posts. The synthesizing habit emerged most often, the creating habit the least.

A good next step might be to test those linkages, to determine pattern analysis, by collecting more instances of these events from additional bloggers. The ultimate goal in most research "is to persuade an audience that an evidentiary warrant exists for the assertions made, that patterns of generalization within the data set are indeed as the researcher claims they are" (149).

According to this study, adolescents engaged in the literacy practice of blogging about young adult books reveal:

- some proficiency at synthesizing material

- a tendency to evaluate

- only moderate demonstration of the disciplined and respectful/ethical habits

- minimal evidence of the creating mind

- moderate proficiency in basic transactional writing.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Review of Findings. This study proposed to answer the question: *What habits of mind manifest when adolescents engage in the literacy practice of blogging about young adult books?*

Results suggest that writing about young adult books in a weblog environment invites purposeful writing while fostering the synthesizing and disciplined habits of mind. These bloggers meet the aspect of NCTE's "Definition of Twenty-First Century Literacies" that readers and writers should show ability to "share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes" (NCTE, 2008). In the blogosphere, bloggers are reading and writing in a linked environment where they present knowledge about books and reading to share with an extended audience. They are adding to a conversation, available to potentially teach others. In this process bloggers are both content-creators and connectors, contributing and synthesizing ideas. The interactivity of these blogs potentially builds social engagement. Based on blog-reviewers' evaluations and shared recommendations, readers get ideas for additional reading.

The scope of this research did not propose to prove that blogging contributes to the development of mental architecture or that adolescents who blog about young adult literature possess or don't possess the mental architecture often described as essential for future competence. Furthermore, this research indicates no parallel between the level of sophistication described by Gardner's theory and the manner in which the observed bloggers revealed their habits. This

research sought only to observe the literacy acts in the blogosphere and to discover what habits of mind manifest when adolescents engage in the literacy practice of blogging about young adult books.

That the data reveal evidence of synthesizing and disciplined thought does not imply that those habits will transfer to the academic or business worlds. Nor do these findings prove that blogging, young adult literature, or even adolescent choice are responsible for these outcomes. These were simply the conditions under which I observed. While one might conclude that these conditions contribute or that reading literature that exemplifies the habits of mind potentially increases chances of developing the habits of mind, only additional research with controlled variables would lend validity to such a claim. The results of this study simply stir the "educational imagination," a quality described by Erickson (2009) as addressing issues of curriculum and pedagogy that shed light on—"not *prove* but rather *illuminate*, make us smarter about—" (504) the possibilities for what materials and methods practicing educators might employ to develop adolescent CREDS.

Maybe all *Talking with Our Fingertips* did prove is that Gardner's Five Minds Theory can be synthesized to create a Coding Heuristic which works as an analysis tool for observing and labeling primitive evidence of the habits of minds.

Limitations of the Study. Since I was working in a strictly online environment, one limitation of the study exists in my not knowing if all the study participants are adolescents, even though they declare they are. In response to that limitation, for young writers to truly exhibit their experience in the

blogosphere, they probably need the anonymity that real blogging provides. Since considerable current research already reveals how student writers respond to teacher commands, requests, and invitations, this study sought to capture the "wild" voices of youth, when their ideas are not managed or controlled by teacher directives or assignments, when they work in habitats natural to them—habitats that are online and digital. Online, no one knows anything about one another except what individuals are willing to reveal, and any information revealed is suspect since it is self-authored or self-selected.

An additional limitation of the study was sample size and having no set routine and no explicit way to invite participation on researcher-established blogs in the blog community. Without direct access to youth, finding or encouraging bloggers to participate was problematic. Furthermore, a desire to protect researched youth with consent/assent forms (see appendix B, page 113) in an otherwise generally unsupervised blog environment may create hesitation on the part of potential participants. These conditions resulted in a very small research sample, a sample that may also be skewed with intrinsic motivation. Those intrinsically motivated to blog about books are likely strong readers already, with many of Gardner's named habits of mind perhaps previously practiced. A larger sample may supply a more accurate picture, as discrepant cases leave a smaller imprint on the statistical outcome.

Another limitation lies in issues of authenticity. Even though these posts are not graded and the blogging occurred outside the classroom environment, they might still be teacher sponsored—a blogger may blog because a teacher

encourages or suggests that venue or because extra credit is offered. At least one teacher encouraged students with this prospect: "I'm offering extra credit to those who take part in this with an emphasis on participating over an extended period of time" (Olsen). Teacher-sponsored posts are suspect because posted ideas might just reflect a distillation of class discussion, not impart authentic evidence of the adolescent mind at work. The same might also be true of book responses posted to library blogs, where book club discussions can influence and shape thinking. Yet, this trying on of another's thoughts to see if they fit personal convictions is often the seed from which philosophies grow.

Freedman and Medway (2008) discovered that "school writing may imitate and adapt features of working genres but cannot be those genres; it is doomed, whatever its transparent features, to remain school writing" (qtd in Dean, 27). When we teach texts or literacy practices, we invite students to act and respond to the task requirements, to essentially take on a new identity: a writer of this genre, a member of this discourse community. To belong to a community means adopting the cultural attitudes or ways of being in that community. These are not simple transitions since culture is intimately connected to identity. Connecting discourse to displays of identity and calling them a "sort of 'identity kit'" (6), Gee (1989) defines primary and secondary discourses, with primary discourses emerging from home and family and secondary discourses growing largely out of work or school environments. As students take on additional discourses, like those expected in an online environment, teachers sponsor those literacy acts with supportive instruction, with descriptions for what the task

requires; however, nascent learners frequently copy forms, like a book review, or they parrot back topics and points from class book discussions. Samples and models quickly translate to a formula for writing or being. Under such circumstances one wonders if we are observing actual performance or good imitation, a form of what Clay Burell (2009) might call "schooliness." Because students may be copying forms and acting out ways of being, we never get a true insider's view of youth practices. As researchers, we are left "to make do with something less when the real thing is not available," Gee's definition of "mushfake Discourse" (13).

Demographics also deserve consideration. Those who write on blogs about books might already be readers or youth who have easy access to a computer—two aspects that potentially skew any results. There isn't a level playing field—social and financial privileges are not equitably distributed among students and school districts. Although some students will come to literacy experiences, like blogging or reading, equipped to engage in critical thinking and to interact dialogically, based on home experiences or cultural influences, others may decline such invitations, considering such practices unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or even in conflict with home or community norms. Although culturally responsive classrooms will honor such beliefs while still providing agency for diverse learners, these realities will pose challenges for discourse communities. With time and careful attention paid to community building and to protocols that support risk-taking and respect, the system can make gains in providing access. Students can draw on their familiar modes of explication while

practicing new discursive practices like those supported by blogging and argument literacy.

Finally, researchers well know that what works in one classroom, in one place, under the tutelage of one teacher might not transfer across the hall in the same school, let alone across state lines. Curricular and extracurricular practices, literacies, and habits of mind are bound to vary with the context, so no real bridge building can occur. These conditions will impose limitations on any study.

Shifting Literacies Lessons Gleaned. Internationally known as an evangelist for the use of blogs and related internet technologies in schools, Will Richardson (2010) offers a rubric for the assessment of classroom blogging, evaluating the posts for 1) level of participation, 2) intellectual depth, 3) effectiveness of writing, 4) level of reflection, and 5) willingness to contribute to and collaborate with the work of others. Using this rubric to assess the bloggers in the study exposes advanced skill in participation, effective writing, and willingness to contribute. But the bloggers might only earn a nearing proficiency rating in intellectual depth since their posts exemplify competency in only two of the five habits of mind and do not illustrate the meaning negotiation described by Burke (2010). There is minimal evidence that these youth collaborate with others to reflect on or to revise their thinking. While the bloggers do show evidence of dialogic engagement, their continuing or interactive discourse doesn't deeply engage the books' themes. Perhaps the conditions discerned by Applebee et al. (2003), activities like scaffolding and teacher-guided discussion that contribute to

"envisionment-building" and to high academic demands, were absent in the blogging environment.

The type of dialogic evidence in the researched blog posts shows concurrence with Applebee et al's. (2003) results, which suggest that "dialogic instruction, envisionment building, and emphasis on extended curricular conversations are in fact related aspects of a common emphasis on discussion-based instruction activities that support the development of understanding" (714). If instructors wish to foster complex literacy development, to develop the critical thinking habits outlined by Gardner and others, they do well to consider the relationship between instruction and performance. Applebee et al. found that "when students' classroom experiences emphasize high academic demands and discusssion-based approaches to the development of understanding, students internalize the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in challenging literacy tasks on their own" (723).

Further considering the type of dialogic evidence in the researched blog posts, researchers like Richardson (2010) might say the studied youth are not blogging in the truest sense of the term, and if they are, it is simple blogging rather than complex blogging. Richardson defines blogging as "transactional writing, as writing to be interacted with, to be returned to and reflected upon" (30). While I'd argue that these youth are blogging, theirs is not the academic blogging that makes use of frequent links, mimics argument literacy, or fosters reflective, metacognitive writing. New literacies often do not fit old forms of writing. Many of these bloggers were writing about self-selected young adult

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books, not reading a common, core text. This condition may have limited their ability to dialogically interact with one another's texts. Although individual choice is a catalyst for motivation, efficacy, and energy for a task and although independent reading offers readers the most choice, Randy Bomer (2011) describes limitations of independent reading:

> If this is the only structure for reading, a teacher may not see students growing much in their habits of interpreting and reflecting about meanings, or even their responses to texts beyond just liking or not liking. Even if the text is supporting nuanced and complex thinking, those ideas are not necessarily going to come out in talk, because to understand, the other person would need to have read the book, too (81).

Recalling the studied bloggers' tendency to synthesize by judging or evaluating (see Table 3, page 58) makes Bomer's observation especially relevant. To acknowledge this large "liking or not liking" component provides another lens for regarding the habits of mind observed. Deeper considerations of meaning that potentially emerge from reading, then, might require shared experience so as to stimulate creative, respectful, ethical, and disciplined thought. A blogger may reveal these CREDS and emerge as more competent in dialogic exchange when the reading activity supports more participatory dimensions of reading like those described by Applebee et al. (2003) and like those exercised with common texts, whether negotiating perspectives in paired partnerships, literature circles, or even whole-class groups. That both independent reading and common reading develop literacy habits—just different habits—suggests that literate lives and new literacies are best achieved through multiple structures and multiple modes.

As one of those modes, blogging engages adolescents and adults in a process of thinking in words. As a genre, blogging invites a posting of ideas as so as to dialogue with an author's or another's thoughts. Because the studied bloggers to a certain degree were reporting into cyberspace their individual thinking, not necessarily listening to or taking up the talk of another and not seeking to transform or be transformed by another's thoughts, true collaboration and the opportunity for new thinking were lost. To function as a medium for emergent, collaborative thinking, talk—whether face-to-face or in digital discussion—requires that conversants attend to one another's contributions and build upon them, perhaps by employing Applebee et al.'s (2003) *uptake* strategy. Talk that occurs in a nonlistening way will typically produce monologic results or superficial dialogic engagement. Full-spectrum, meaningful thinking not only benefits from the work of multiple minds dialogically engaged but also from thought-provoking pondering points and serious inquiry. To foster the kind of critical thinking defined by Scriven and Paul (2009) and the metacognition advocated by Dewey (1938), one might consider the value of catalysts like deliberate questions to stimulate further contemplation. Such guidance might curb the tendency to focus only on independent interests since a heuristic supports students' noticing or assists in students' efforts in describing learning experiences or in imagining possibilities. Such protocols and scaffolds can aid youth—whose culture may have accustomed them to judgments—to discern that being responsive is about more than being evaluative. A tool used long enough

potentially builds habits, habits youth can carry to their self-sponsored literacy

interests to produce writing in response to real feelings, of having been moved.

This study observed writers networking in an out-of-school literacy space,

although one somewhat contrived by researcher limitations. While novice in

some of the areas defined and valued within the blogging genre or in dialogic

interaction, these youth do reveal literacy with motivation and synthesis—the

average review was ten lines long, not the two short lines one typically sees on

Amazon reviews or on author blogs.

Making Room for New Literacies. In the computing world, WYSIWYG

is an acronym for *What You See Is What You Get*. I invoke it here because the

synthesizing and disciplined habits of mind—what we get—may derive from

what youth see; their blog posts are likely a reflection of those school and life

experiences they have so far developed. Perhaps their talk isn't collaborative

because they have not learned to talk in this listening way with protocols that

favor thinking together and asking follow-up questions. If students have been

"trained" in settings that feature initiate, respond, evaluate (IRE) protocols or

monologic delivery, they might not have practice in revisiting important issues

and concepts from new perspectives. As Applebee et al. (2003) report:

> Comprehension of difficult text can be significantly enhanced by replacing
> I-R-E patterns of instruction with discussion-based activities in which
> students are invited to make predictions, summarize, link texts with one
> another and with background knowledge, generate and answer text-related
> questions, clarify understanding, muster relevant evidence to support an
> interpretation, and interrelate reading, writing and discussion (693).

In general, the cognitive habits that are emphasized by Gardner develop under the influence of multiple-strategy approaches—a fact Bomer (2011), Blau (2003), Karolides (2000), Purves (1974), Probst (1994), and others validate.

Explanations for the missing cognitive depth in the blog posts might derive from other sources. Perhaps the respectful, ethical, and creative habits of mind do not come naturally in the discourse of traditional classroom literary response, which is essentially the discourse community in which these bloggers were working. Classroom experiences in this discourse frequently focus on analysis that elicits the disciplined and synthesizing habits. For instance, a class may read a poem of social consciousness, a poem like Tony Hoagland's "America" (2003) that comments on contemporary American society. An ensuing discussion may focus on the poem's sensory language, its use of specific brand names to represent contemporary consumerism, its conversational and informal tone intermixed with rich figurative language, and its form: the poem, told in eighteen unrhymed couplets, is one long interrogative question. Those dialogically engaged will likely conclude that the poem examines how Americans often use stuff and noise to dull their social consciousness. All of this rich noticing from the discipline of literary analysis may happen without anyone's ever asking, what's wrong here and how might it be different? If we look at text book approaches to this genre or at Advanced Placement Literature and Composition test questions for evidence or as models, traditional literary analysis thoroughly examines a text for its message or theme and critically investigates the rhetorical strategies an author employs to make that meaning. But whether

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curriculum stops at intellectual understanding of texts or includes an action phase is a question for local contexts to resolve. A curriculum that includes such topics aims at helping students recognize the discrepancy between ideals and the status quo. Curriculums so designed invite students to decide for themselves what action, if any, is appropriate to take in closing the gap. We are left to wonder how often students experience this chance to openly discuss what's not right about the society in which they live, to read a text as social protest literature, or to develop a body of knowledge about contemporary social conditions and to critically examine the culture that created those conditions. Burke (2010) favors a little discomfort, calling it real life: "Education should disturb when possible; it should challenge students' perspectives, inspire curiosity, and pose questions about hwy things are the way they are" (78). If students have little experience in such discourses, researchers will likely not observe those habits of mind in youth blogging practices.

As Karolides (2000) asserts:

The language of a text, the situation, characters, or the expressed issues can dissuade a reader from comprehension of the text and thus inhibit involvement with it. In effect, if the reader has insufficient linguistic or experiential background to allow participation, the reader cannot relate to the text, and the reading act will be short-circuited (6).

In this case, it isn't the linguistics or the phonetics of the young adult literature that short-circuited the bloggers; it is the discourse of cognitive demand. The studied bloggers have not yet reached the level of dialogic exchange that extends curricular conversations; they appear not to have entered Faust's (2000) "zone of possibility." Evidence of this occurs in the following post, where the blogger

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remarks on what she perceives as unprincipled values. Her post exhibits the

ethical habit of mind but forms an opinion that is unsophisticated, illustrates a

level of misunderstanding, and reflects an immature reading of the text:

> I must say that I really did not like Sherman Alexie's book Absolute True Diary of a Part-time Indian. I thought it was demeaning, rude and gross. It was really mean how he treated the Indians. Even if he is Native American that doesn't give him the right to trash talk them all (Corinne, *Youth Voices Research*; April 21, 2011).

Difficult as it was, I resisted the urge to not count the post as illustrative of the

ethical mind. After all, the habit of mind is there; the reader notices what she

perceives as unprincipled values, and I couldn't violated my pre-stated analysis

method. My resistance was especially acute because, in 2008 I had reviewed

Alexie's National Book Award Winning novel, *The Absolutely True Diary of a*

Part-Time Indian for the *Montana English Journal,* and Montana's Office of

Public Instruction still makes available the talking points from that article,

"Empowering Students with Sherman Alexie."

Since Alexie's *Diary* is a book about life, it is not without its disconcerting

moments: masturbation, domestic violence, racism, alcohol related deaths,

bullying, and the ill effects of poverty all figure into the text. It also makes

readers face the harsh truth: "That reservations were meant to be death camps"

(217).

In spite of those moments, this is mostly a book about empowerment and

hope. It dispels some myths: "Hunger is not the worst thing about being poor"

(8). In addition, it helps readers see with new eyes: "The greatest gift is

tolerance" (155).

Through the main character, Arnold Spirit, a Spokane Indian a.k.a. Junior,

readers further learn about resilience and about triumphing over handicaps.

Arnold reminds us all that life is laden with pain: "We all have pain. And we all

look for ways to make the pain go away" (107). Some people turn to addictive

behaviors, like alcoholism or eating disorders, but Arnold reminds us not to give

up on the world; instead, we should find healthy escapes, like drawing:

> I draw all the time. . . .
> I draw because words are too unpredictable.
> I draw because words are too limited.
> If you speak and write in English or Spanish or Chinese or any
> other language, then only a certain percentage of human beings
> will get your meaning.
> But when you draw a picture, everybody can understand it (5).

And for Arnold, a stuttering, lisping, hydroencephaliac, communication is fraught

with challenges, but important:

> So I draw because I want to talk to the world. And I want the
> world to pay attention to me.
> I feel important with a pen in my hand. I feel like I might grow up
> to be somebody important. An artist. Maybe a famous artist. Maybe a
> rich artist (6).

Thus, Alexie reminds readers of the value of nurturing dreams, of paying attention

to dreams. Arnold's dreams are not only about communication; they are

connected to his desire to escape poverty. Arnold knows his mother, given the

chance, would have gone to college, his sister would be a writer of romance

novels, and his father would have been a musician, but "nobody paid attention to

their dreams" (11):

> We reservation Indians don't get to realize our dreams. We don't
> get those chances. Or choices. We're just poor. That is all we are.

> It sucks to be poor, and it sucks to feel that you somehow *deserve* to be poor. You start believing that you're poor because you're stupid and ugly. And then you start believing that you're stupid and ugly because you're Indian. And because you're Indian you start believing you're destined to be poor. *It's an ugly circle and there's nothing you can do about it.*
>
> Poverty doesn't give you strength or teach you lessons about perseverance. No, poverty only teaches you how to be poor (13).

Alexie also talks about anger, about how "volcano mad" or "tsunami mad" is a symptom of poverty. Many of his characters exhibit such anger: Rowdy, Rowdy's father, the Andruss brothers, even Arnold, who throws a book at Mr. P when he discovers his reservation school, Wellpinit High, is using texts that are 30 years old or more. His anger leads to his choice to attend the off-reservation school, Reardon. Thus, Alexie invites readers to think about anger as a life-changing power. Sometimes, anger provides the first step in making a dream come true; after all, activism has its roots in anger.

This book also reminds readers of the power of laughter as catharsis and the power of affirmation:

> Do you know how amazing it is to hear that from an adult? Do you know how amazing it is to hear that from anybody? It's one of the simplest sentences in the world, just four words, but they're the four hugest words in the world when they're put together.
>
> You can do it (189).

Comparing a teacher-researcher's cognitive response to that of a 14-year-old blogger is hardly a fair assessment. Still, discussion might bloom under the facilitation of more informed or experienced readers—suggesting that classrooms benefit from teachers and from the perspective sharing that occurs during collaboration.

A similar instance of shallow understanding occurred with Laurie Halse Anderson's award-winning, highly acclaimed, and controversial novel about a teenager who chooses not to speak rather than to give voice to what really happened to her:

> I really did not enjoy this book [*Speak*] at all. The book was boring and extremely annoying. I know that Melinda is depressed and the book is about being depressed, and I sympathize for her, but the entire thing is her complaining about how no one helps her and how no one cares about her. I couldn't help but be angry with Melinda for not helping herself and for not telling anyone so they could help her too. My favorite part in it was when she tells Rachel in the library, because she is finally doing something productive (Izzy13, *Youth Voices Research*; April 21, 2011).

Because most readers will probably not describe the book as "boring and extremely annoying" and because most readers will probably not trivialize Melinda's rape by calling her response "complaining," this reader challenges the status quo—representing a creative response, although a response many would count as a misreading.

Such results reveal how blogging as a method for fostering powerful talk moves has far to go. It is important to note, however, that the average age of the bloggers in the study was 14.17 years, so youth and inexperience may also contribute to these observed unsophisticated levels of interaction and cognition.

Looking for Youth CREDS. Because the blogs in this study showed little evidence that the bloggers were grappling with meaning through talk that supported confusion—a condition that Blau (2003) claims "represents an advanced state of understanding" (21), the blogs fell short of Blau's literature workshop model and Probst's (1996) definition of compelling talk.

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Although this research data did not see frequent or balanced evidence of all five habits of mind, that does not imply an inability on the part of adolescents to employ these habits. My twenty-eight years of anecdotal experience with writing instruction tells me that good thinking lodged inside a writer's head may not always show up on the page. Youth thinking is often more subtle than their writing, and when, during a writing conference, I have been able to tease out that thinking, those writers often express impatience with having to put all the thoughts on paper. The same may well be true in the case of these blogs; the post in Chapter Four by J-Man offers possible evidence:

> I read the book slam. I really enjoyed it due to the fact that it completely connects with a person's life and you can follow it. The social justice shown in the book was very appealing and I found out that it is a very indirect form of social justice. It doesn't just hand it out on a silver platter it makes you work for it and dig deeper to find the implications. Slam is a very good book and I enjoy reading it every time I decide to. (*Youth Voices Research*, February 22, 2011 Post)

J-Man's unclear pronouns and lack of clarity may be a product of the blogging genre, where young writers under the influence of spontaneity publish their first drafts in a practice that James Britton (1994) called "shaping at the point of utterance" (147). Although an important stage in the writing process, such writing has yet to benefit from deep thought and revision. Further contemplation and assimilation will likely hone CREDS habits.

The apparent shortage of creative mind evidence may reside in how creativity is defined or how it was coded and counted. In Gardner's definition, "the creating mind puts forth new ideas, poses unfamiliar questions, conjures up fresh ways of thinking, and arrives at unexpected answers" (3). Adjectives like

new, unfamiliar, fresh, and *unexpected* invite subjectivity, increasing the likelihood for interpretations to vary or for disagreements to result. What one reader defines as unfamiliar and unexpected, another may define as common and conventional.

Diminished creativity may also stem from other forms of familiarity. Sometimes, readers need encouragement to read outside their usual boundaries so they can grow as readers. Some of the bloggers, who are probably reading genres in which they find the most pleasure, might be trapped in a narrow world-view determined by their reading territories. If so, they might benefit from new art forms, gaining creativity and life from sources outside those boundaries. Youth might also benefit from novelty training, learning to look at a book or topic with novel eyes—seeing what others haven't noticed and paying attention to their interpretive hunches which can sprout into theories.

Developing CREDS and Fostering Motivation with Texts. That this study did not observe recurrent evidence of respectful and ethical habits of mind as they connect to literary response might encourage a critical literacy approach with textual analysis. According to Frey and Fisher (2008),

> The emphasis of critical literacy is less about acquisition of skills and more about questioning the author's purpose, searching for alternative meanings, and considering the role identity plays. A critical literacy lens assumes that all text is constructed from a particular viewpoint, and that the reader or viewer must analyze the message for who or what is left out. (2)

Such analysis inevitably leads to conversations about power, marginalization, and point of view—topics that elicit respectful and ethical engagement.

Several recent research reports (Appleman, 2009, Soter et al., 2008, and Latrobe/Drury, 2009) suggest a social readiness for such critical theory work. Every day, young adults face issues of identity, gender and role expectations, and repercussions from the power paradigms that operate in society. Today's reader does not passively or neutrally accept the status quo. To provide the tools to question, to resist, to work towards change may be a beneficial step in the development of both literary appreciation and critical literacy. But the undertaking does require balance. As Nilsen and Donelson (2009) point out, educators don't want the "joy of relaxing and losing yourself in a good story to be replaced with feelings of angst and suspicion" (92).

With teacher supported reading that employs a book for more academic purposes, including critical lens theory, teachers generally perform best by using multiple approaches and perspectives, an opening up rather than a closing down of exploration. Gallagher (2009) claims that teachers teach deeply, not when they focus on memorizing minutiae or proposing single interpretations but when they encourage analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. For him, books aren't just slices of cultural literacy or opportunities to recognize literary elements such as irony or symbolism; books are springboards for examining current social issues or for stimulating critical thinking and engagement. Thus, books provide opportunity for "imaginative rehearsals" (Gallagher, 66) for living a productive life as an adult; they foster problem solving and deep thinking. As Gallagher says, "When students read books solely through the lens of test preparation, they miss out on the opportunity to read books through the lens of life preparation" (72).

Similarly, "Rosenblatt says that 'of all the arts, literature is most immediately implicated with life itself,' and Kenneth Burke refers to literature as 'equipment for living'" (qtd in Probst, 1994, p. 39).

Such critical literacy practices encourage students to engage texts and discourses inside and outside the classroom. Engaging with such questions encourages critical and independent thinking; it invites cultural activism in favor of passive acceptance of "the way things are." Another goal of these intellectual conversations is to develop ideas that none of us could have constructed alone.

Efficacy Concerns. With *No Child Left Behind* or *Race to the Top* politics, with documentaries like Davis Guggenheim's *Waiting for Superman* (2009), and with increased attention paid to the school-reform movement in the national press, we need not go far to find a narrative about education in crisis. Maybe my holistic tendencies drive me to look instead at what's happening that is working, to take a failure narrative—if that's what we've truly written with our public school system—and to find where hope is growing. It won't be found in recent data from ACT or that collected by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). From these measures, one might quickly conclude that college readiness and reading and writing aptitudes of U.S. students are lagging. But test scores are just one measure of aptitude. If we instead look at authentic performance, the story doesn't end so dismally. When I studied teen blogs to observe literacy acts and habits of mind as teens write and think about young adult books, I found evidence of synthesis and disciplined thinking. I also found respectful and ethical thought, although less frequently. While test scores and the

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media are effective in promoting a rhetoric of crisis in our schools, test scores and other summative assessment numbers fail to capture the true complexity of literacy learning and literacy action.

During the research process, I fully recognized that an author spends a year or more to research and write a novel, and I wasn't expecting a blog communication—even a well-crafted, well-developed post—to compare to an author's skill or to an experienced reader's response. Nor did I expect the habits of mind exhibited in young adult books to parallel the habits which manifested in the blogs. I did, however, hypothesize that youth blogs would resemble literary analysis. I projected that bloggers would warrant their assertions by quoting passages from the texts they read or, as is more felicitous to the digital environment, with frequent hyperlinks to lend credibility to their writing or to make text-to-text or text-to-world connections—I modeled both events in early interactions with bloggers, just as I encouraged dialogic interaction with *uptake*. Based on my previous teaching experience with blogs and because the review of literature spoke so strongly about dialogic exchange and critical thinking, I anticipated seeing transactional writing and "zones of possibility." These educated guesses were not supported by the research. The literary response of these bloggers came in book review, fan-based, or reader-response format; and the posts coded were predominantly monologic with NO hyperlinks. However, the absence of hyperlinks, a typical form of synthesis found in blogs, may be attributable to the challenges posed by the host site, Blogger. For someone unfamiliar with html code (the predominant hypertext markup language for web

pages), the operations of creating a hyperlink, italicizing, or even underlining pose

challenges. Book titles were not punctuated, either—perhaps for this same

reason. Disparate findings such as these remind us that as we further study what

youth bloggers do on their own, we must not expect or look for them to do the

things we want to lead them to at school and we must carefully consider variables.

Other observations collected during this research inform the way we

might teach with blogs so as to enable student voices, broaden the range of critical

thought, and take advantage of serendipitous teachable moments. Engaging the

learners' experiences and existing knowledge base may mean posing problems for

reflection and exploration that closely tie to the real issues students deal with in

their daily lives. Applebee, Burroughs, and Stevens (2000) found that,

> when an entire course was integrated around one or more central topics of
> conversation, students' knowledge and understanding developed
> cumulatively throughout the course as they revisited important issues and
> concepts from new perspectives, with gradually broadening frames of
> reference (qtd in Applebee et al., 2003, p. 692).

Burke (2010) experienced similar results when student learning was shaped "from

a particular 'angle of vision'—a critical perspective that interests [the student]"

(62). Once the student has formed such an angle—a question to drive inquiry—

Burke encourages "teaching big ideas" and designing extended units of study that

cultivate student innovation, collaboration, and disciplined intelligence.

Using these models, students could take turns hosting blog forums and

posing questions to encourage critical investigation. Student-driven catalysts

suggest a value for independent thought and are less likely to alienate students

from their own education. Giving them this manner of ownership in their learning

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may empower their understanding of varied subjects and better prepare them for social participation and a better way of living in the world.

If educators want young readers to do more than synthesize their reading with evaluation and personal preference, if they hope to nurture depth with the CREDS habits, if they desire transactional writing that reflect true collaboration, and if they seek dialogic engagement that translates into significant learning, this study suggests that "wild" blogging—that unsupported by scaffolds or protocols—will not produce the desired results.

Recommendations for Further Study. These issues of context and community will require monitoring and consideration in additional studies. If teachers implement blogging in their classrooms and students show a resistance to this writing practice, their resistance may have nothing to do with habits of mind but more to do with how the literacy presented will "travel" in their world, whether it will have any cultural capital. Another study might focus on why students choose or don't choose to blog, and if they blog about books, why they select some books but not others.

Additional research might look at such issues, with an eye toward whether gender plays a role in blogging predilections or whether the habits of mind align along gender lines. For instance, just as Michaels, O'Connor, and Resnick (2008) found that girls from a variety of backgrounds—socialized to view the asking of questions or the raising of objections as something that girls should not do— hesitated to participate in class discussion, other studies might examine these issues as they specifically relate to the blog environment. On the Youth Voices

Research blog, 64% of participants were female, 36 % male. The gender disparity

is even greater with open sites. In the YA Blogosphere, for example, a site started

by Steph Bowe, a 17-year-old young adult author, approximately seventy per cent

of the teen bloggers are female. This site (http://yablogosphere.blogspot.com/),

which represents voices from fourteen countries, describes itself as "a directory to

blogs written by writers and readers of Young Adult books all over the world.

This is a site for book bloggers looking to network and teenage readers looking

for great books; authors looking to publicize their books and publishers looking

for reviewers" (n.p.). Here, a site rich for future research, reader voices are

featured, empowered, and celebrated as they talk about YA books. For a fellow

bibliophile, being in this virtual place felt like being in a friendly neighborhood.

It exuded with an energy or passion for books. Just as a locker room or a club

meeting provides comforts to those who inhabit those spaces, the YA

Blogosphere offers impressions of place and membership and illustrates that

reading and writing in the blogosphere are not solitary acts. This welcoming

space—available to adolescents interested in reading response experiences

enhanced through collaboration and sharing—exemplifies what urban sociologist

Oldenburg (1989) called the "third place," one of the "great good places." That

this space is populated by females causes one to wonder: Does blogging have

little cultural capital for males? Do the ethical, respectful, and creative habits of

mind present themselves as foreign to females? Ethical and respectful habits

invite thinkers to consider alternate positions, examine rival positions, challenge

the status quo, and hold others accountable for behavior. Similarly, a creative

thinker poses unfamiliar questions, takes interpretive risks, and shifts frameworks. If bloggers are not socialized to these habits, research may not find them evident. Another factor may be in discussion protocols. With canonized literature, often the fare on school curriculum menus, discussion may follow prescribed rules in which renegade voices not singing the same melody either get on tune or stay silent so as not to upset the composition. Additional research could study whether certain curriculum designs or activities serve to bring out Gardner's described habits of mind.

The current task, then, calls for literacy studies that provide rich and complex accounts of literacy practices in multiple contexts, including online while blogging about young adult books. Additional research might look for ways to promote the creative habits of mind that nurture ingenious solutions and the positing of new ideas. To nurture the respectful and ethical habits of mind, educators might consider how to employ the powerful medium of blogging to encourage youth to question the status quo, to contemplate alternate positions, and to assume alternate identities. Such projects could concentrate on whether certain books and whether certain pedagogical practices like critical lens theory show more potential to develop Gardner's habits of minds than others.

Further research could also compare and contrast youth blog posts with those posted by older readers, to determine if age and life experience play a role in the blogging discourse community or to determine if certain habits of mind— like the creative, respectful, and ethical—emerge more frequently in certain age groups.

Finally, research might consider issues of socioeconomic status and whether that element—or some other element of culture—enables or disables bloggers in finding their voices.

As *Talking with Our Fingertips* reveals, research might answer one small question while it brings to light a plethora of additional questions. The complications of finding deep thinking in adolescent blogging practices suggests that cultivating the habits of mind is not easy. Gardner himself admits that such cultivation takes a lifetime and does not happen with the work of schools alone— "the workplace, the professions, the leaders and foot soldiers of a civic society must all do their part" (165).

Significance of the Study. If teaching practices like meaningful choice and engaging students with real-world literacy practices like blogging foster adolescent literacy, then educators might consider adopting this hybrid of curricular and extracurricular literacies and take the literary response task online for blogging—but not without some scaffolding in place to facilitate the flow zone. This making room for new literacies might mean making room for young adult books, though, since the studied bloggers show some proficiency while engaged with this genre in the blogosphere that affirms multiple literacies.

To consider the value of integrating the way youth read and write outside of school with school literacies might begin to address those six circumstances foregrounding this study. Such integration policies might accommodate what we already know about the impact of motivation, dialogue pedagogy, and digital literacy on adolescent literacy. Blogging about young adult literature might

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ratchet up the relevance of students' work; it might infuse the curriculum with

vitality and passion. Observing events in the blogosphere reveals an invested

community where reading, responding to, and engaging with books might be fun.

Unfortunately, for many policy makers and administrators, *play* and *fun* imply an

absence of productivity. In fact, *play* and *fun* are just layman's terms for Lev

Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, Csikszentmihalyi's (1990)

theory of flow, and McGonigal's (2010) "urgent optimism" and "blissful

productivity."

With fun at the center of learning, teachers keep youth engaged and can

teach into their intrepid and inquisitive natures. The research of British

psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1971) defined play as a multi-purpose vehicle

for learning and adapting to the real world. His findings suggest not only that

play, fantasizing, and creativity represent high levels of abstraction but that the

brain grows in a social environment.

Fletcher (2010) also argues that "Fun is a Trojan horse for weightier

educational terms like *ownership, engagement*, and *flow*. Fun matters. We have

created this elaborate pedagogical contraption called the reading-writing

workshop, but fun is the engine that makes it run" (18). To further make his

point, he uses the analogy of an athlete juking and jiving on a drive for the

basket—poetry in motion—and invites us to wonder, is the athlete working or

playing? Such talent, such art requires deep, deliberate practice, but pleasure also

resides in the rigor. We "become more skillful not merely through work and

study, but through play" (25). Just as a basketball player competes in pickup

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games, teachers hope students read during the off-season, sharpening skill while motivated by love of the game. For bloggers, technology isn't about doing a school assignment; it is about sharing, socializing, and having something to say.

Because *Talking with Our Fingertips* looked at "wild" blogging—that untamed by teacher directives—to apply expectations like Richardson's proposed blog rubric or to assess for Gardner's CREDS habits and say the bloggers fell short presents an unfair conclusion. This study proposed to account for practices in one place, the blogosphere, where blogging provides an approach to learning with young adult literature that is practical, digital, and socially engaging. From such studies, we hope to draw inferences that can inform promising practices in other places. This study observed adolescents navigating in a digital environment; they're reading, thinking and writing in response to a text, and sharing or publishing these thoughts. If educators wish to draw upon these extracurricular literacies and extend them, they can start with what local youth already do well and deem meaningful and bridge those intelligences and habits with curricular literacies: "Because it's to the degree we make the curriculum connect to life outside that students will actually use the curriculum in life outside" (Bomer, 2011, 47). From the point where school-based literacies intersect with community literacies, those interested in responsive teaching can extract important information about issues of agency and about the value of relevance and of writing for authentic audiences. As this research data is added to existing knowledge, it might broaden perspectives about the complex issues associated with literacy acquisition, with developing the habits of mind which are

needed in this information-rich era. How literacy gets mediated, resisted, or redesigned to meet social and cultural purposes may potentially define its value. What students know comes into sharper focus as they interact with literacy and make it meaningful, understanding and negotiating what it means to practice literacy in a particular place. As we examine these evolved literacy acts, we need to be prepared to see with new eyes, to not allow preconceived notions or traditions to inhibit the evolution of new literacies since these new literacies may not fit old forms.

If Gardner's five habits of mind—creating, respectful, ethical, disciplined, and synthesizing (CREDS)—in fact give credentials to youth, educators might consider explicitly identifying these CREDS and then fostering them through reading, writing, and critical analysis experiences. Well-designed classroom activities that foster transactional writing, enhanced reader-response theory, and intellectual negotiation might facilitate the critical thinking described by the CREDS habits. Also, during text selection, teachers might survey texts for their potential for both affective and cognitive appeal—to both motivate reading and to stimulate the intellect, so as to assist CREDS habit development.

These habits persuade students to question a text, the author's intentions in writing a text, and their own engagement with a text. Gardner's pentad also helps develop the metacognitive strategies that are so valued in literacy education. Blau (2003) calls metacognitive awareness the key in "directing one's own reading process" (214). Using Gardner's five habits as a metacognitive strategy encourages readers not only to consider values as a part of the construction of a

text but also to assess their own responses, identifying where their thinking illustrates the CREDS habits. Perhaps such practice with metacognition as strategy will eventually fall away to become the way to read a text for its implicit values. As Bomer (2011) asserts: "It's always the learner's assessment that is most important, because it's that self-regulation that the learner carries into the next experience, that sets the learner's intention for the next effort" (219). By doing some deep thinking with heavy materials while monitoring their cognitive practices through self-reflection, students might build mental muscle. To support literacy development, learners might benefit from heuristics—whether those be questions to guide metacognition or lists to indicate CREDS features. A heuristic may help adolescents not only see but name valued features; producing them may follow.

Additional research might complement this study to determine whether any transformative power for fostering literary literacy resides in 1) offering opportunities for both independent and common reading, 2) integrating the innovative ways youth utilize the Web and other forms of media, and 3) establishing settings—whether paired partnerships, literature circles, whole-class groups, or blogging sessions—that promote dialogic exchange and perspective negotiation. As readers engage with these texts and practices, educators must remember that behavior won't change fast; intellectual and literacy development are life-long processes connected to education in both school and life. Although reading a book, engaging in an experience, or practicing metacogniton may inspire intellectual abilities, the "filtering" (Gee, 1989) of these secondary

discourses into one's primary discourse will require time before they become part of the individual's way of "talking, acting, thinking, valuing" (Gee, 1989, 10) and being in the world.

Because *Talking with Our Fingertips* suggests that writing about young adult books in a weblog environment fosters only two of the habits of mind that support students' success in a variety of fields and disciplines, perhaps it will be some time before talking in school sounds more like keys ticking out Morse code than like bantering chatter. This, and other research, suggests that self-selected reading material facilitates purposive writing, demonstrates important connections with adolescent lives, and legitimizes youth voices.   However, to see adolescents grow in their habits of interpreting and reflecting about textual meanings and to shift their responses to texts beyond just evaluating and sharing personal preferences may require more participatory dimensions of reading like those exercised with common texts. When the reading activity includes prompts to stimulate nuanced and complex thinking and when readers negotiate perspectives with others, they emerge as more competent in dialogic exchange and in CREDS habits. That both independent reading and common reading develop literacy habits—just different habits—suggests that literate lives and new literacies are best achieved through multiple structures and multiple modes. Such multiplicity and orchestrated commitment increase the probability of inspiring youth to become producers, not merely consumers, of knowledge.

As technology and social change continue to move dialogue into an alternate digital realm, talking begins to depend more on manual than on vocal

dexterity. That this movement may begin with youth does not surprise me.

Young people look at life with fresh perspective and an uninhibited style. They

often navigate with unanticipated purpose, with unexpected, magical potential.

According to Toni Morrison (qtd in Zinsser, 1998), layered literacy practices

approach a type of enchantment: "If writing is thinking and discovery and

selection and order and meaning, it is also awe and reverence and mystery and

magic." As literacies shift and new discourses evolve, research will continue to

provide data about literacy practices, about how students use talk—in multiple

forms—to construct knowledge and to find their voices, their places in the

community.

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APPENDIX A

CODING HEURISTIC

CODING HEURISTIC

Read the blog transcript and highlight features to match the habits of mind, a
distillation from Gardner's Five Minds Theory:

Pink: Disciplined
- approaches diverse topics
- identifies important topics/concepts
- sustains a strong focus or thoroughly presents some issue
- performs diligent application
- provides evidence of deep reading, a manifestation of thinking
- presents awareness of rhetorical events like literary technique and narrative structure
- validates interpretations with textual references or research

Blue: Respectful
- notes differences between human groups without stereotyping
- displays interest in and affection for those of lower status
- considers alternate positions
- examines rivals to personal positions
- responds sympathetically and constructively
- challenges the status quo
- expresses a variety of opinions and viewpoints

Green: Synthesizing
- incorporates new findings
- takes information from disparate sources and forms connections
- distills theme, moral, or tone
- makes inferences or forms theories
- connects to other disciplines or sources
- invokes images and analogies
- develops links to other knowledge
- refers to other books, other genres
- creates hyperlinks
- makes real-world applications
- judges or evaluates while presenting criteria

Orange: Creative
- poses unfamiliar questions
- conjures fresh ways of thinking
- arrives at unexpected answers
- posits new ideas
- considers multiple angles
- assumes alternate identities

- devises ingenious solutions
- shifts frameworks
- presents uncertainty, surprise, disequilibrium
- takes interpretive risks

Yellow: Ethical
- considers society, a community as separate from the individual
- assesses character behavior through the lens of "goodness"
- notices values or principles
- draws object lessons from violations of acceptable/moral codes of behavior
- bears witness to destructive behavior and to connotations of goodness and best efforts

SAMPLE BLOG POST: This book is the most scarily possible dystopian fantasy that I have ever read, and yet it is also incredibly hopeful. Taking place in the not-too-distant future, *Little Brother* describes a great loss of freedom and privacy in the name of safety. Addressing questions important to Americans, particularly since September 11, this book takes reality one step further and shows how technology can be used to both dominate and liberate people. This book takes inspiration from Orwell's classic, *1984*. Instead of allowing Big Brother to watch and control everyone, though, Marcus creates rebellion by inspiring thousands of Little Brothers to watch the watchers and outsmart them. As a long-time reader of this genre, I can say that this book is dystopian fiction at its best.

Once you have performed the highlighting, tally the total occurrences of each feature in the chart below:

Tally Chart

Habits of Mind:	Creative	Respectful	Ethical	Disciplined	Synthesizing

APPENDIX B

INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD DOCUMENTS

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To:	Alleen Nilsen
	LL
From:	Mark Roosa, Chair
	Soc Beh IRB
Date:	08/06/2010
Committee Action:	**Expedited Approval**
Approval Date:	08/06/2010
Review Type:	Expedited F7
IRB Protocol #:	1007005344
Study Title:	Dissertation Research on Blogging
Expiration Date:	08/05/2011

The above-referenced protocol was approved following expedited review by the Institutional Review Board.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without approval by the Institutional Review Board.

Adverse Reactions: If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.

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Talking with Our Fingertips
Dissertation Research on Blogging

Parental Permission Form

Dear Parent/Legal Guardian:

I am a Ph.D. Candidate under the direction of Dr. Alleen Nilsen in the English Education Department at Arizona State University. I am conducting research to study discussion that occurs in a blog environment about young adult books. *Blog* is short for Web log, a Web site that contains online entries on a specific topic in reverse chronological order. My 28 years of teaching experience at the high school and university levels has made me sensitive to youth concerns. I am committed to producing knowledge that will ultimately aid in the improvement of our understanding of youth literacy and discourse communities.

I am inviting your child's participation, which will involve reading and blogging about books that may extend to age 16 reading and interest level. The teens themselves will propose titles and select four from that proposed list, reading a book per month from September through December, posting at least a weekly response to the blog. This will be a safe place for individual expression and group discussion, a place for youth to try on and discard ideas as they put into words their questions, feelings, observations, and connections regarding each book.

To protect the rights and privacy of the participants, all bloggers will use net names, false names to protect their identities. In all research documents and reports, I will use pseudonyms for people and places. Since the teens will only be participating in or talking about topics associated with their reading, I anticipate no foreseeable risks or discomforts to their participation.

Although there may be no direct benefit to your child for participating in the study, the results of this study may have potential benefits for others since we are examining how literacy principles get implemented for the purpose of increasing reader competence.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child's participation in this study, please call me or Dr. Nilsen at (480) 965-3224.

Sincerely,

Donna L. Miller

Donna L. Miller

By signing below, you are giving consent for your child _____ (child's name) to participate in the above described study.

_____	_____	_____
Signature	Printed Name	Date

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

**Please return this signed permission form to Mrs. Donna L. Miller; 2010 Laurin Court; Missoula, MT 59801 or leave it with Linette Green, the young adult librarian at Missoula County Library.

ASU IRB
Sign SM   Approved
Date 8.06/0-80S11

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Participant Assent/Consent Form

My name is Donna Miller, and I a studying for my doctoral degree through Arizona State University. I am asking you to take part in a research study because I am trying to learn more about youth communication in the Blogosphere. I want to learn what young people between the ages of 13-18 have to say about young adult books, using the blog environment.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to read four books from September through December. You and your fellow bloggers will be proposing and selecting the books, and we will choose four from that proposed list. Book members should be willing to read all genres and understand their participation in the study means making a commitment to contribute thoughtfully to each book, posting at least one response per week to the blog and responding to other posts.

However, your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or wish to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

If you decide to be in the study, your responses will be anonymous. While your responses and the results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications, your name will not be disclosed. All people and places will be represented by fake names.

The study can potentially benefit you by providing a safe place for individual expression and group discussion, a place for you to try on and discard ideas as you put your questions, feelings, observations, and connections regarding each book into words. The results of this study may also benefit others since I am examining how literature discussion might increase reader competence.

If you are under 18, parental permission will be required. In addition to this signed form, I will need your parents to fill out and sign a parental permission form, also downloadable from this website.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at ASU English Department: 480-965.3224. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

Signing below means you have read this form and are willing to be in this study.

Signature of subject_____ DATE_____

Subject's printed name _____ AGE_____ GENDER_____

**Please mail completed Assent Form with Parental Permission to Donna L. Miller; 2010 Laurin Court; Missoula, MT 59801 or leave it with the young adult librarian at Missoula County Library.