The Hunger Games: Literature, Literacy, and Online Affinity Spaces

A decade ago, the National Endowment for the Arts released *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America (2004),* which warned of a marked decline in adolescents' engagement with literature. The report contrasted books with digital media, arguing that the latter "often require no more than passive participation" and "foster shorter attention spans and accelerated gratification" (Bradshaw & Nichols, 2004, p. vii). In response, some scholars have resisted this binary positioning and argue that digital literacy practices are more participatory, collaborative, and distributed than conventional print-based literacy practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007).

Empirical studies suggest that youth use technology as part of critical inquiry (Beach & Bruce, 2002), engage in multimodal composition to express their identities (Curwood & Cowell, 2011), and participate in social networks to develop and maintain relationships (Boyd, 2007). Research on fan culture, in particular, has examined how young adults use the characters, settings, and themes within literature as inspiration for their own creative work (Black, 2009; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013; Thomas, 2007). In contrast to the view of adolescent literacy presented in *Reading at Risk,* this research shows how technology can facilitate young people's active participation in online spaces and promote their development of 21st century literacy skills.

The relationship between literature, literacy, and technology is evident in how adolescents engage with Suzanne Collins's Hunger Games trilogy, three books among a growing number of dystopian novels written for young adults (Miller, 2010). In 2008, *The Hunger Games*—the first of the trilogy, followed by *Catching Fire* in 2009 and *Mockingjay* in 2010—was released, and over the last five years, the trilogy has sold more than 50 million copies. In response, fans are writing Hunger Games-inspired stories, creating art, producing videos, composing music, and designing role-playing games. Not only are fans using the trilogy as the basis for their creative endeavors, they are critically engaging with the text-based story in affinity spaces. Affinity spaces are physical, virtual, or blended spaces where people interact around a common interest or activity (Gee, 2004). They offer multiple interest-driven trajectories, opportunities to learn with others, and paths toward becoming an authentic participant (Lammers, Curwood, & Magnifico, 2012; Squire, 2011). In many ways, the online affinity space related to The Hunger Games trilogy is pioneering a new paradigm for young adult literature in a digital age.

In this article, I take a sociocultural perspective on literacy in order to situate meaning making in wider social, cultural, political, historical, and temporal contexts (Street, 1984). Drawing on data from an ethnographic study of online affinity spaces, I focus on a 13-year-old boy and analyze his literacy practices across modes, texts, and contexts associated with The Hunger Games trilogy. I explore how technology, rather than encouraging passive participation or usurping books, has actually promoted his critical engagement with literature and fostered his development of advanced literacy practices and leadership skills. Finally, I offer recommendations related to the teaching of young adult literature and the integration of technology in the classroom.

The Hunger Games Trilogy and Online Affinity Spaces

Science Fiction and Young Adults

According to the Cooperative Children's Book Center (2011), recent years have seen a marked increase in the number of novels published for young adults, particularly in the science fiction and fantasy genres. These novels include the Harry Potter (Rowling, 1997–2009) and Twilight (Meyer, 2005–2008) series as well as *Divergent* (Roth, 2011), *Matched* (Condie, 2010), *Ashfall* (Mullin, 2010), *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (Ness, 2008), and *Shipbreaker* (Bacigalupi, 2009). Science fiction often involves a setting in the future, in a parallel world, or in a historical past. It may involve outer space or other planets, or feature characters that are aliens, mutants, robots, or genetically engineered humans. In science fiction, it's common to encounter new scientific principles, technological advancements, political systems, and social cultures.

Research suggests that when young adults read for enjoyment, it positively influences their performance on standardized tests.

Why does science fiction appeal to readers? First, it requires a suspension of disbelief. In order to understand science fiction, readers must imagine new worlds and ways of being. Second, science fiction is often thought provoking. Despite the dissimilarities to their own reality, readers must confront the moral dilemmas, personal struggles, and social conditions evident in the story (Simmons, 2012). Third, science fiction offers opportunities to actively engage in fan culture. While there is a long history of conventions, clubs, and fanzines, many fans now turn to online spaces to discuss literature, share fan fiction, and participate in role-playing games (Jenkins, 1992). Science fiction includes subgenres such as cyberpunk, post-apocalyptic, and dystopian fiction, and it's related to other genres like fantasy and speculative fiction.

I have found that these genres often appeal to reluctant readers and voracious readers alike. Science fiction such as The Hunger Games trilogy offers young adults a personally meaningful and enjoyable experience with literature while promoting the development of key decoding and comprehension skills. Far too often, students who struggle with reading are not given challenging, high-interest texts because the texts may be above their reading level or may include content deemed inappropriate for school. Research suggests that when young adults read for enjoyment, it positively influences their performance on standardized tests, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011a) reports, "A crucial difference between students who perform well in the PISA reading assessment and those who perform poorly lies in whether they read daily for enjoyment, rather than in how much time they spend reading" (p. 2). On average, students who read daily for pleasure score the equivalent of 1.5 years of schooling better than those who do not.

In addition, research suggests that we need to seriously consider the role of motivation in adolescent literacy development. Steinkuehler, Compton-

NOW ACT!

Interested in implementing the concept of affinity spaces into your classroom? Start by considering the key characteristics of affinity spaces, which include self-directed engagement, collaboration, and multiple paths toward participation. Next, choose your focus. For instance, you can either select one novel or several that are linked by genre or theme. Your students can engage with literature in a physical, virtual, or blended affinity space. By offering opportunities for students to use others' novels as a springboard for their own creative work, they will be able to critically engage with the ideas, concepts, and events. More than that, students will have an authentic audience for their multi-genre work and the chance to engage in thoughtful, critical discussion.

Lilly, and King (2010) found that young men who struggle with reading in school and read below grade level when assessed on academic tests actually read above grade level when assessed on high-interest, video-game-related texts. Notably, there was a difference of seven reading levels based on the kind of text and the reader's motivation. Research indicates that youth who feel confident in their abilities are much more motivated than their peers in terms of their effort, persistence, and behavior (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). For adolescents who struggle with decoding and encoding, perhaps we need to rethink the relationship between motivation, text selection, and comprehension, and consider the role science fiction novels such as The Hunger Games trilogy can play.

The Hunger Games Trilogy: An Overview

This dystopian trilogy includes *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), and *Mockingjay* (2010). Author Suzanne Collins states that her trilogy has both contemporary and classical influences. The idea came to her one evening when she was channel-surfing and flipped from a reality show to footage of the Iraq war. Collins describes the protagonist, 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen, as a futuristic Theseus. As an "overt critique of violence, the series makes warfare deeply personal, forcing readers to contemplate their own roles as desensitized voyeurs" (Dominus, 2011). While Katniss eventually leads a revolution, *The Hunger Games* begins with her description of life in District 12. Set in a post-apocalyptic world, Panem is a glittering capitol, surrounded by 13 impoverished districts.

In the Dark Days, the districts rose up against the capitol. As Katniss describes,

> Twelve were defeated, the thirteenth obliterated. The Treaty of Treason gave us new laws to guarantee peace and, as our yearly reminder that the Dark Days must never be repeated, it gave us the Hunger Games. The rules of the Hunger Games are simple. In punishment for the uprising, each of the twelve districts must provide one girl and one boy, called tributes, to participate. The twenty-four tributes will be imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena that could hold anything from a burning desert to a frozen wasteland. Over a period of several weeks, the competitors must fight to the death. The last tribute standing wins. (Collins, 2008, p. 18)

The Hunger Games is televised throughout Panem, and citizens from each district are required to watch, cheer, and mourn. In a recent *New Yorker* essay, Miller (2010) suggests that the games can be understood as a "fever-dream allegory of the adolescent social experience . . . [where] the rules are arbitrary, unfathomable, and subject to sudden change. and a brutal social hierarchy prevails." Around the world, millions of young adults have been swept up by Katniss's story.

Jack's Story

As part of an ethnographic study of online affinity spaces and young adult literature, I have conducted systematic online observations and interviews of 20 focal participants, ages 11 to 17, from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Curwood, 2013; Curwood et al., 2013). Participants shared their passion for The Hunger Games trilogy and their motivation for participating in online spaces, including Hunger Games fansites and social media such as Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, and Facebook. One of the participants in this study is a 13-year-old Australian boy named Jack (real first name used with permission). As a devoted participant in the Hunger Games affinity space, he offers insight into how adolescent literacy practices exist within a sociocultural context. Jack describes himself as a "mega-fan" of The Hunger Games trilogy. He read the first book soon after its release when he was 10 years old. He recalls, "I actually picked it up as a mistake! I wanted a different book but it was out of stock. *The Hunger Games* was the best looking one there so I got it and instantly fell in love with the series." Jack is now in eighth grade at an all-boys' school. While he is a dedicated student and has daily homework, Jack devotes a significant amount of his out-of-school time to Hunger Games fandom.

For adolescents who struggle with decoding and encoding, perhaps we need to rethink the relationship between motivation, text selection, and comprehension, and consider the role science fiction novels . . . can play.

Jack's literacy development has been shaped by various *literacy sponsors* (Brandt, 2001). At home,

Jack's grandmother is an avid reader and shares his deep passion for literature. His parents support his love of books and digital tools, and he has his own laptop and smartphone. At school, Jack's teachers and librarians engage him in regular, sustained reading and writing. At his suggestion, his seventh-grade teacher added The Hunger Games trilogy to the curriculum. Jack says, "It was amazing to have comments from the whole class on my most adored series. English has always been one of my favorite classes, and I find myself lucky that I attend a school where teachers give quite a lot of time, energy, and care into the work in an effort to create interactive, engaging, and interesting lessons." Jack's home and school environments encourage his interest in literature and offer him opportunities to connect with other Hunger Games fans.

Portals may be websites, social networks, or digital texts such as podcasts, videos, or games that bring individuals into the wider affinity space.

The Hunger Games Online Affinity Space

Young adults are often motivated, as readers and writers, through their engagement in online affinity spaces. They have choice in their level and means of participation, they can employ multiple modes of representation, and they have an authentic audience who reads and responds to their work (Curwood et al., 2013). Jack's experience with the Hunger Games affinity space illustrates how this process occurs. Like Jack, fans of The Hunger Games trilogy are drawn to the online affinity space through multiple *portals.* Portals may be websites, social networks, or digital texts such as podcasts, videos, or games that bring individuals into the wider affinity space.

Hunger Games Top Sites currently tracks over 50 fansites that have a combined total of 30 million page views. These fansites are based in countries such as the United States, Australia, United Kingdom, Turkey, Germany, Spain, Brazil, Russia, Mexico, Italy, and Portugal. Some fansites focus on particular characters or the upcoming films while others offer a venue to share fan-created work, play role-playing games, or access teaching resources. For young adults around the world, any of these fansites can serve as a portal and introduce them to the powerful affinity space associated with The Hunger Games trilogy.

In this article, I focus on three portals integral to Jack's experience to date: Mockingjay, Panem October, and Panemonium. It's important to note that portals such as these are dynamic, malleable, and at times, unstable. They can evolve at a rapid rate, which gives rise to multiple pathways for participation and content creation.

The portal Mockingjay.net was founded in 2009, and it features discussion boards, podcasts, and a news blog. Jack joined Mockingjay.net when he was 12 years old. At that point, he was eagerly awaiting the publication of the third and final book in The Hunger Games series, and he wanted to find other fans of the trilogy. After stumbling on Mockingjay.net from a Google search, Jack quickly became an active participant on the discussion boards. Soon, he was asked to join the staff and serve as a global moderator. In this capacity, he created and judged the monthly fan fiction and fan art awards, and he moderated forum discussions. Jack was active on Mockingjay.net from June 2010 to January 2011; during this time, he posted over 1800 times to the discussion boards.

Launched in 2011, Panem October was an alternate reality game and social network. Tumblr, in particular, emerged as a digital platform that participants used to develop their in-game characters, share resources, and connect with other fans. They also used social media like Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. From the beginning, Jack was an avid participant in the game. However, he quickly realized that other players were struggling to understand the concept of an alternate reality game and how to participate in the first phase, which involved working as part of a team to scan Quick Response (QR) codes.

In response, Jack founded Panemonium. After a Skype conference with the Panem October founder, Panemonium soon became the official support site for Panem October. In exchange for building a website for his father's business, Jack's parents paid for his website hosting and server space. Drawing on his expertise with com-

puter programming and his previous experience with moderating Mockingjay.net, Jack produced podcasts, wrote blogs, and developed tutorials; he also recruited staff members to create content and support Panem October players. Panem October and Panemonium ended in late 2011, partially due to competition with TheCapitol.pn, another alternate reality game and social network. As a result of this experience, Jack's current goal is to design and moderate a new Hunger Games portal, using the valuable skills that he has gained over time.

Learning from The Hunger Games Trilogy

Jack's multifaceted participation in fiction-related online spaces points to how technology has had a profound impact on young people's literacy practices, identities, and affiliations (Curwood & Cowell, 2011). In terms of The Hunger Games trilogy, readers must be able to decode the language and recognize the use of literary techniques. They also need to understand the dystopian genre and Panem's specialized discourse, which includes reapings, mutts, tracker jackers, and jabberjays. In order to enrich their reading experiences and make intertextual connections, young people often look beyond the trilogy to the online portals of affinity spaces that feature fan-created stories, podcasts, videos, songs, and games. As a teacher educator and former classroom teacher, I am particularly interested in how young adults such as Jack use these online affinity spaces to actively engage with literature by comprehending, analyzing, and critiquing The Hunger Games texts.

When adolescents first join a Hunger Games fansite, they must learn the formal rules and the informal expectations. Over time, they come to understand what the community values in terms of interaction and participation as well as how the community actively engages with the trilogy. As part of this process, fans have the opportunity to transform the plot, characters, and themes. Whether they choose to be active participants, designers, or moderators, adolescents have the opportunity to

FOR INQUISITIVE MINDS

Ready to learn more about learning within affinity spaces? Check out these resources.

Curwood, J. S., Magnifico, A. M., & Lammers, J. C. (2013). Writing in the wild: Writers' motivation in fan-based affinity spaces. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 56,* 677–685.

Drawing from research on *The Sims,* The Hunger Games trilogy, and *Neopets,* this article considers how fan culture can support young adults' writing practices.

Gee, J. P. (2004). *Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Building on the concept of participatory culture, Gee argues that affinity spaces offer physical, virtual, or blended spaces for meaningful interaction.

Hayes, E. R., & Duncan, S. C. (Eds.). (2012). *Learning in video game affinity spaces.* New York, NY: Peter Lang.

This edited volume shares cutting-edge research on how games and affinity spaces influence knowledge construction and social engagement.

Wilson, L. (Ed.). (2012). *The girl who was on fire: Your favorite authors on Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games trilogy.* Dallas, TX: Smart Pop.

This collection of essays offers compelling commentary on The Hunger Games trilogy, from the Capitol's sartorial choices to the Gamemakers' science innovations.

Orman, T. (2012). *Hunger Games lessons.* Online at http://www.hungergameslessons.com.

Tracee Orman is a high school English teacher and active participant in The Hunger Games affinity space. Her blog and online store offer countless ideas, resources, and lesson plans.

construct and maintain online identities as readers and writers.

Applying a sociocultural framework to this study sheds light on the multiple dimensions of adolescent literacy practices, social identities, and relationships within The Hunger Games affinity space. Drawing on a thematic analysis of observations, interviews, and artifacts, I offer three guiding principles that can inform teachers' pedagogy related to literature and technology:

1. Online affinity spaces offer multiple ways in which young people can engage with literature.
2. Young people value text selection and multigenre responses to literature.
3. Media paratexts, or parallel texts, extend and enhance young adults' experience with literature.

Below, I explicate each principle by analyzing Jack's participation in multiple portals within The Hunger Games affinity space.

Online Affinity Spaces Offer Multiple Ways in Which Youth Can Engage with Literature

When Jack finished reading The Hunger Games trilogy, he couldn't wait to talk to someone about it. Since none of his friends or family members had read it, he turned to the Internet. On Mockingjay.net, Jack participated in the online discussion board in several key ways, listed in order of frequency: 1) he often engaged in fun games that featured word play; 2) he maintained the formal rules and informal expectations in his role as a moderator; 3) he critically considered the events, themes, and literary techniques in The Hunger Games trilogy; and 4) he reflected on his own life and shared his opinion on topics such as religion, politics, and 9/11. During his eight-month period of active participation on Mockingjay.net, it's important to note that Jack wasn't always directly engaging with the text—he was actively participating in a community. While online affinity spaces focus on a specific topic (whether it's a book, game, or sport), discussion boards offer an opportunity to build online friendships and social capital through off-topic exchanges.

In one of Jack's first posts to Mockingjay.net, he added to a discussion thread on characters that included each character's name, home, gender, fate, occupation, appearance, relatives, and characteristics. In response to Jack's post on President Snow, a more experienced member replied,

> Although you probably have all the information correct, we need quotes to back up everything. It adds to the credibility of the index. Also, when you give that quote, please remember to give the page number, the model, and the book you've gotten it from. . . . This is all mentioned in the index rules, please read them.

Posts such as this serve to socialize new members into the culture of the online affinity space; this particular post speaks to the depth of character analysis evident on Hunger Games fansites.

Six weeks after the above exchange, Jack continued to add to the character index and told a new member that she needed to add quotes to her post: "I know it makes life much harder but it does add to the credibility of the index." We can see Jack move from legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to full participation as he acquires the discourses and ways of being in the affinity space. In this respect, online affinity spaces can be an important tool that aids in meaning making with literature. Literacy scholars emphasize how comprehension is shaped by discourses, modes, and texts that extend beyond the printed page (Luke & Freebody, 1999). For Jack, Mockingjay.net offered an online space where he could deepen his understanding of The Hunger Games trilogy. Moreover, as a reader, Jack was motivated by his interaction with other fans around the world.

Young People Value Text Selection and Multigenre Responses to Literature

On Mockingjay.net, a teacher started a discussion and asked: Do you think that this book is too violent to be taught in school? What ages is this book appropriate for? Can you think of any activities that might be really fun that would go along with this book? In response, hundreds of young adults chimed in and offered their thoughts. Most felt that The Hunger

Games trilogy was appropriate for a middle school or high school audience. Some pointed out that the violence in the trilogy could be compared to other books and films that teens encounter, from *Lord of the Flies* to *Star Wars.*

Interestingly, a number of young adults pointed out the themes in The Hunger Games trilogy and expressed concern that some readers may not have the emotional maturity or literacy skills to fully understand them. One young woman noted that some middle school students may not comprehend the characteristics of dystopias, such as the totalitarian regime in Panem. Another suggested, "I think The Hunger Games [trilogy] is like a complete treasure trove for using in school. I think most kids 12+ would be totally fine with reading it, and probably love you for it. Although, maybe save it for the end, so you don't lose them when you start other material that's less lovable?"

Young adults on the affinity space Mockingjay.net offered a number of possible activities that teachers could use in conjunction with this trilogy. These included having students:

- Write a song about the book and perform it.
- Keep a journal for a character throughout his/her experience in the Hunger Games trilogy.
- Make a movie trailer.
- Create a playlist for the book and write why they chose each song.
- Design a detailed map of the setting.
- Make a political cartoon that reflects life in Panem.

Jack shared how his seventh-grade teacher asked students to give a presentation in character, and he chose to be Caesar Flickerman, the host of the Hunger Games. In reflecting on this experience on Mockingjay.net, Jack said this was the highlight of his school year and joked that he suffered from a condition called "English Class Euphoria."

This discussion on Mockingjay.net shows how students crave experiences in school that allow them to closely analyze and transform literature. In addition, young people respond positively to creative, multigenre responses to literature that are shared with an authentic audience. Even though Jack had read each novel multiple times, he continued to actively seek out such experiences. The alternate reality game Panem October provided Jack with the opportunity to take on the role of game designer. In turn, this portal allowed him to respond to and extend the texts in powerful ways. When youth use fan fiction, for instance, to remix the characters and themes from The Hunger Games trilogy, the online affinity space provides them with a receptive audience.

Media Paratexts Extend and Enhance Young Adults' Experience with Literature

Contemporary young adult literature often involves media paratexts, or parallel texts. Gray (2010) explains that paratexts are both *distinct from* and *like* the primary text. With The Hunger Games trilogy, Scholastic and Lionsgate have produced paratexts such as a website, an alternate reality game, and films. Additionally, fan-created paratexts include stories, artwork, maps, videos, podcasts, and role-playing and alternate reality games. While separate from the books, paratexts often serve as a way for readers to access schema, critically understand themes, construct knowledge, and engage in multimodal content creation. Paratexts support readers' intertextual connections and multigenre responses to literature; as such, they extend the books in ways that are personally meaningful and engaging to readers such as Jack. With The Hunger Games trilogy, online affinity spaces are a way for young adults to access, create, and share media paratexts.

This discussion on Mockingjay.net shows how students crave experiences in school that allow them to closely analyze and transform literature.

Jack's experience with Panem October and Panemonium exemplifies the role of media paratexts in his life. On Panem October, Jack served as a Gamemaker, which means that he was instrumental in designing the alternate reality game (ARG). In one interview, Jack shared how the features of Panemonium are constantly evolving to meet players' needs in Panem October. Initially, he explained the concept of an ARG to new players, and he cre-

ated a video tutorial on QR codes, which were part of the first phase of the ARG. When he realized that certain players were cheating with the QR codes, he added a page called the Shame List. Panem October extended beyond the original website, and players used social networks to connect with each other and to play the game. In some ways, Jack's Panemonium is a paratext of a paratext. As a website designer, he needed to consider how Panemonium's visual design and content features could effectively support Panem October players and exist as an affinity space. Consequently, he needed to be able to read and write informational texts in order to support fans' literary engagement with The Hunger Games trilogy.

On any given day, Jack might have been managing his international staff of four, computer programming, marketing, writing, researching, and interacting with others in The Hunger Games fandom. (And, of course, attending school and completing his homework.) As a Panem October Gamemaker, Jack assisted with the creation and implementation of an alternate reality game with thousands of players around the world. In this capacity, he had to be intimately familiar with the themes, settings, and characters from The Hunger Games trilogy. More than that, Jack had to consider how to engage fans in a compelling narrative-based game. Rather than just participating in portals, Jack was now designing them. Instead of encountering media paratexts, he was making them.

DIGGING DEEPER INTO DYSTOPIAN LITERATURE

Podcasts

- Listen to the ReadWriteThink.org podcast episode "A Second Look at *The Hunger Games*" to hear about the seeds for *The Hunger Games* story, themes that distinguish the series as an important work of literature, and what the books have to offer teen readers.
  http://www.readwritethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/podcast-episodes/second-look-hunger-games-30858.html
- Listen to this podcast episode for additional dystopian literature suggestions:
  http://www.readwritethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/podcast-episodes/dystopian-literature-30616.html

Book Report Alternatives

ReadWriteThink.org has several resources where students are invited to become a character:

- **Getting Acquainted with Facebook:** In this alternative to the traditional book report, students report on their novel choices using Facebook-like pages.
  http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/book-report-alternative-getting-30874.html
- **Rewind the Plot!** In this alternative to the traditional book report, students report on their novel choices by rewinding the plot.
  http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/book-report-alternative-rewind-30901.html
- **Creating a Childhood for a Character:** Students explore familiar literary characters, usually first encountered as adults, but whose childhood stories are only told later. Students then create childhoods for adult characters from books of their choice.
  http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/book-report-alternative-creating-a-958.html
- **Become a Character: Adjectives, Character Traits, and Perspective:** Students "become" one of the major characters in a book and describe themselves and other characters using lists of accurate, powerful adjectives.
  http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/become-character-adjectives-character-168.html

—Lisa Fink
www.readwritethink.org

Reinventing Young Adult Literature in Schools

Over the past three years, Jack's experiences with literature have been directly influenced by his involvement in online affinity spaces, his consumption and creation of media paratexts, and his interactions with other fans of The Hunger Games trilogy. This ethnographic study suggests that young adults' access to and engagement in online spaces can significantly shape their literacy development. In an era of high-stakes assessment, literacy is defined by increasingly narrow terms in schools. Online affinity spaces, in contrast, allow multiple pathways for participation. While Jack was motivated by opportunities to be a game designer, programmer, and leader, other young people have different (but equally valid) motivations for taking part in The Hunger Games affinity space. Some fans produce videos, create art, and write stories. Other fans engage in role-plays, share news updates, and post on discussion boards. Some just lurk. Whether they are engaged in active participation or legitimate peripheral participation, the affinity space encourages young people to read, critique, and reinvent young adult literature.

According to a recent survey by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 94% of adolescents in member countries have at least one computer at home (OECD, 2011b). Furthermore, using a computer at home had a greater impact on their digital literacy development than using a computer at school. Studies by the Pew Internet and American Life Project show that 73% of adolescents use online social network sites and 64% participate in content-creating activities (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & Macgill, 2007; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). This suggests that young people's meaningful engagement with technology in out-of-school spaces supports the acquisition of digital literacy skills. Alvermann (2008) adds that adolescents' online practices effectively expand the boundaries of classroom practice and research.

As educators and scholars, we can learn from young people like Jack who use online spaces as a way to become readers, writers, and designers. Rather than existing as separate (or opposite) from school-based literacies, digital literacies often shape when, how, and why young people learn. According to Vadeboncoeur (2006), we should not ask what counts as learning in formal and informal contexts, but instead ask, "How does a particular context contribute to learning?" (p. 272). In today's interconnected world, online contexts afford new opportunities for adolescents to learn about literature and interact with other readers. By participating in online affinity spaces related to young adult literature, youth can engage in activities that promote comprehension, reflection, and imagination (Gomez, Schieble, Curwood, & Hassett, 2010). Jack's experiences on Mockingjay.net, Panem October, and Panemonium show how he makes meaning across multiple contexts, modes, and genres.

Whether they are engaged in active participation or legitimate peripheral participation, the affinity space encourages young people to read, critique, and reinvent young adult literature.

Technology integration demands that teachers acquire new orientations to time, space, performance, creativity, and design (Lewis, 2007). It's not just veteran teachers who are ill at ease with this; preservice teachers are often uncomfortable as well. Lewis (2007) explains, "Popular technologies are to be used and shared out-of-school. To do so in school challenges the materiality of what it means to be a teacher, in their minds" (p. 235). As a growing number of adolescents use digital tools and participate in online spaces, Gutierrez and Beavis (2010) propose that teachers and teacher educators have two key challenges. First, how can they learn more about these ever-changing forms, contexts, and literacies? Second, how can they respond to them in the classroom?

Since not all students have out-of-school access to the Internet, it is vital that teachers participate in technology-focused professional development and integrate online literacies into the curriculum (Curwood, 2011). Otherwise, the digital divide will continue to widen and not all students will be provided with 21st century skills and experiences (Collins & Halverson, 2009). Alvermann (2011) suggests that as teachers learn more about digital

literacies and online affinity spaces, they may need to let go of some of their instructional practices that no longer effectively motivate and engage adolescent learners. If our aim is to motivate students as readers and writers, we need to provide them with entry points into the curriculum, much like portals serve as entry points to an online affinity space. For one student, playing ThePotterGames.com, a choose-your-own-adventure game, may inspire him to remix settings and characters from popular young adult literature. For another, using Minecraft to design the town of Maycomb may promote her close reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird.*

Literacy is complex and dynamic. In today's world, adolescent literacy is increasingly mediated by new spaces, artifacts, and discourses. While some are quick to dismiss technology as an out-of-school practice that fosters passive participation and shorter attention spans (Bradshaw & Nichols, 2004), a growing body of research supports the multiple affordances of online spaces and multimodal texts both in and out of the classroom. For teachers, young adult literature such as The Hunger Games trilogy offers a powerful way to capitalize on their students' interests, integrate technology into the curriculum, and promote critical engagement with literature.

In order to incorporate texts, media paratexts, and online affinity spaces into the classroom, we may need to re-envision (if not reinvent) the school curriculum and instructional practices. As teachers are confronted with new national curriculum, outcomes, and assessments, we have a choice: will we adopt increasingly teacher-focused, skill-based practices due to the mistaken belief that they will result in higher test scores? Or will we champion student-driven, literacy-rich practices that incorporate diverse modes, semiotic resources, and learning environments? We need to trust ourselves—and we need to listen to our students.

References

Alvermann, D. E. (2008). Why bother theorizing adolescents' online literacies for classroom practice and research? *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 52,* 8–19.

Alvermann, D. E. (2011). Moving on/keeping pace: Youth's literate identities and multimodal digital texts. *National Society for the Study of Education, 110*(1), 109–128.

Beach, R., & Bruce, B. C. (2002). Using digital tools to foster critical inquiry. In D. E. Alvermann (Ed.), *Adolescents and literacies in a digital world* (pp. 147–163). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Black, R.W. (2009). Online fanfiction, global identities, and imagination. *Research in the Teaching of English, 43,* 397–425.

Boyd, D. (2007). Why youth (heart) social network sites: The role of networked publics in teenage social life. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *MacArthur Foundation Series on digital learning: Youth, identity, and digital media.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Bradshaw, T., & Nichols, B. (2004). Reading at risk: A survey of literary reading in America. Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts.

Brandt, D. (2001). *Literacy in American lives.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Chandler-Olcott, K., & Mahar, D. (2003). Adolescents' anime-inspired "fanfictions": An exploration of multiliteracies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 46,* 556–566.

Collins, A., & Halverson, R. (2009). *Rethinking education in the age of technology: The digital revolution and schooling in America.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Cooperative Children's Book Center. (2011). *Thoughts on publishing in 2010.* Retrieved online at http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc.

Curwood, J. S. (2011). Teachers as learners: What makes technology-focused professional development effective? *English in Australia, 46*(3), 68–75.

Curwood, J. S. (2013). Fan fiction, remix culture, and The Potter Games. In V. E. Frankel (Ed.), *Teaching with Harry Potter* (pp. 81–92). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Curwood, J. S., & Cowell, L. L. (2011). iPoetry: Creating space for new literacies in the English curriculum. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 55,* 107–117.

Curwood, J. S., Magnifico, A. M., & Lammers, J. C. (2013). Writing in the wild: Writers' motivation in fan-based affinity spaces. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 56,* 677–685.

Dominus, S. (2011, April 8). Suzanne Collins' war stories for kids. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com.

Gee, J. P. (2004). *Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Gomez, M. L., Schieble, M. B., Curwood, J. S., & Hassett, D. D. (2010). Technology, learning, and instruction:

Distributed cognition in the secondary English classroom. *Literacy, 44,* 20–27.

Gray, J. (2010). *Show sold separately: Promos, spoilers, and other media paratexts.* New York, NY: New York University Press.

Gutierrez, A., & Beavis, C. (2010). "Experts on the field": Redefining literacy boundaries. In D. E. Alvermann (Ed.), *Adolescents' online literacies: Connecting classrooms, digital media, and popular culture* (pp. 145–162). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Lammers, J. C., Curwood, J. S., & Magnifico, A. M. (2012). Toward an affinity space methodology: Considerations for literacy research. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique, 11*(2), 44–58.

Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2007). Sampling "the new" in new literacies. In C. Lankshear & M. Knobel (Eds.), *A new literacies sampler* (pp. 1–24). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Lenhart, A., Madden, M., Smith, A., & Macgill, A. R. (2007). Teens and social media. *Pew Internet and American Life Project.* Washington D.C.: Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved online from http://www.pewinternet.org/.

Lenhart, A., Purcell, K., Smith, A., & Zickuhr, K. (2010). Social media and young adults. *Pew Internet and American Life Project.* Washington D.C.: Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved online from http://www.pewinternet.org/.

Lewis, C. (2007). New literacies. In C. Lankshear & M. Knobel (Eds.), *A new literacies sampler* (pp. 229–238). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Luke, A., & Freebody, P. (1999). A map of possible practices: Further notes on the four resource model. *Practically Primary, 4*(2), 5–8.

Miller, L. (2010). Fresh hell: What's behind the boom in dystopian fiction for young readers? *The New Yorker.* Retrieved online at http://www.newyorker.com.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2011a). *PISA in focus.* Retrieved online at http://www.pisa.oecd.org.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2011b). *PISA 2009 results: Students on line: Digital technologies and performance.* Paris, France: Author.

Pintrich, P. R., & Schunk, D. H. (2002). *Motivation in education: Theory, research, and applications.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Simmons, A. M. (2012). Class on fire: Using the Hunger Games trilogy to encourage social action. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 56,* 22–34.

Squire, K. (2011). *Video games and learning: Teaching and participatory culture in the digital age.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Steinkuehler, C., Compton-Lilly, C., & King, B. (2010). Reading in the context of online games. In K. Gomez, L. Lyons, & J. Radinsky (Eds.), *Learning in the disciplines: Proceedings of the 9th International Conference of the Learning Sciences* (pp. 222–229). Chicago, IL: International Society of the Learning Sciences.

Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice.* Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press.

Thomas, A. (2007). *Youth online: Identity and literacy in the digital age.* New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Vadeboncoeur, J. A. (2006). Engaging young people: Learning in informal contexts. *Review of Research in Education, 30,* 239–278.

Young Adult Literature Cited

Bacigalupi, P. (2009). *Shipbreaker.* New York, NY: Hachette.

Collins, S. (2008). *The Hunger Games.* New York, NY: Scholastic.

Collins, S. (2009). *Catching fire.* New York, NY: Scholastic.

Collins, S. (2010). *Mockingjay.* New York, NY: Scholastic.

Condie, A. (2010). *Matched.* New York, NY: Penguin.

Meyer, S. (2005–2008). Twilight series. New York, NY: Little, Brown.

Mullin, M. (2010). *Ashfall.* Terre Haute, IN: Tanglewood.

Ness, P. (2008). *The knife of never letting go.* Somerville, MA: Candlewick.

Roth, V. (2011). *Divergent.* New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Rowling, J. K. (1997–2009). Harry Potter series. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Jen Scott Curwood is a lecturer in English education and media studies at The University of Sydney, Australia. She can be reached at js.curwood@sydney.edu.au