

# Words on the screen: broadening analyses of interactions among fanfiction writers and reviewers

Alecia Marie Magnifico, Jen Scott Curwood and Jayne C. Lammers

## Abstract

Young fanfiction writers use the Internet to build networks of reading, writing and editing – literacy practices that are highly valued in schools, universities and workplaces. While prior research shows that online spaces frame multiple kinds of participation as legitimate, much of this work focuses on the extensive contributions of exceptional young authors. In this paper, we foreground the contributions of fanfiction reviewers and focus on their interactions with writers, exploring their communicative literacy practices and hypothesising about how we can make their reading and writing more visible and more effectively consider their learning practices. To do so, we conducted a linguistic analysis of fanfiction review comments on two sites, FanFiction.net and Figment.com. While fanfiction readers provide writers with an authentic audience for their creative work, our findings indicate that the review comments that they leave generally do not offer specific feedback regarding the craft of writing. For this reason, we argue that teachers' expertise is still needed in the difficult task of developing young adults' composition, peer review and critique skills.

**Key words:** fanfiction, writing, audience, digital media, writing pedagogy, peer review

## Introduction

Today's digital tools and online spaces offer writers new opportunities to readily share their creative work with various audiences, locally and globally. Research in the United Kingdom indicates that 69% of young adults share their photos and 44% share their original videos online (OFCOM, 2014). Similar research shows that 38% of young Americans post their original creative work online, such as stories and artwork, and 21% produce transformative works or remixes inspired by others' words and images (Lenhart et al., 2010). In other words, large numbers of young people are engaged in a wide variety of online practices that include creating and sharing content.

Research across fields, as well as popular press highlighting young artists, shows that some exceptional young writers have used the Internet to build

networks of fanfiction writing and English language learning (Black, 2008), conduct public service projects (Jenkins, 2012) and establish fashion magazines with global reach (Gevinson, 2014). We know, too, that young people are motivated to engage and persist in such projects as they develop relationships with their readers, reviewers and collaborators (Curwood et al., 2013; Padgett and Curwood, 2015).

It is, however, difficult to assess the commonality of such experiences. Can we expect that all young people will find themselves interacting with global readers or viewers? Researchers studying *Scratch*, an MIT-based environment for youth programming, have shown that while many groups of users inhabit the site, only some use the site fully – for example, while over a million users have registered, fewer than a third of users have ever posted a project (Fields et al., 2013). Such findings do not preclude active participation; however, much of the activity of young people who participate online is invisible to the Internet (and Internet researchers) because their participation leaves few visible traces in the public domain (Magnifico et al., 2013).

In this article, we consider how literacy teachers and researchers can better understand the interactions among fanfiction authors, readers and commenters, as well as the benefits of doing so. Previous studies have largely focused on exceptional cases of writers, like Jenkins's (2006) examination of Heather, the 13-year-old writer and *Harry Potter* fan who founded an online Hogwarts school newspaper that developed into a global collaboration, or Curwood's (2013b) study of Cassie, a 16-year-old writer and *Hunger Games* fan who manages a popular fansite. While these cases are eye-opening stories of online possibilities, analysing a wider variety of fandom and fanfiction activities may be more valuable to teachers who wish to draw on students' interests in and experiences with fanfiction and other digital media.

While writing fanfiction has become an increasingly visible and mainstream activity (Jamison, 2013), many fanfiction writers additionally engage in related practices such as reviewing, reading, management of fan

spaces and sharing favourite stories. Even while Gee (2004) and others (Black, 2008; Curwood et al., 2013) have acknowledged these ancillary practices and noted the multifaceted array of options for participation in affinity spaces, few researchers beyond Fields et al. (2013) have experimented with methods that capture and describe such activities.

This article focuses on fanfiction reviewing because authors see reviews as critical pieces of feedback (Black, 2008; Curwood, 2013a; Lammers, 2013) that closely parallel the common classroom writing practice of workshopping or sharing with peers. In classrooms, several studies have found that peer comments are largely positive (e.g. Simmons, 2003) and tend to focus on mistake fixing rather than true revision (e.g. Applebee and Langer, 2006; Beason, 1993). Even despite a dearth of deep commentary, such peer reviews – an important kind of formative assessment (e.g. Black and Wiliam, 2009; Shute, 2008) – are regarded as helpful by student writers. As researchers and teacher educators, we are curious about the typical content of these reviews and whether they are similar to classroom comments. Reviewing is a common practice in fanfiction communities, and constructive comments are often highly valued; therefore, teachers might find important openings to motivate students' reviewing and audience analysis skills.

We developed a linguistic analysis method to (a) closely analyse the comments and suggestions that readers make and (b) establish the content as well as the linguistic and social functions of these remarks. In doing so, we foregrounded the contributions of readers and reviewers on two fanfiction sites, FanFiction.net and Figment.com. We examined the everyday responses of readers and took broader online participation patterns and literacy practices into account. In our analysis, we considered how authors might use these reviews in formative ways and hypothesised about the contribution of peer reviews to writing development and literacy learning. Specifically, we asked: what are the primary characteristics of formative feedback in fanfiction online writing spaces?

## Situating our inquiry

New literacies research indicates that interested young people use online sites such as FanFiction.net, Figment.com and DeviantArt.com to create, edit, share and review multimodal compositions (Black, 2008; Thomas, 2007). As access to such spaces rises, young writers and artists increasingly use them to collaborate and communicate, sometimes forming coherent groups of interested readers and writers. Gee (2004) coined the term *affinity spaces* to describe ways in which this virtual learning can be space driven, while Lankshear and Knobel (2006) define the practices that happen in these spaces as “socially recognised ways of generating, communicating, and negotiating

meaningful content... within contexts of participating in Discourses” (p. 64). Even if writers and readers never meet face to face, online interactions provide opportunities for literacy learning through tool use, collaboration and critique (Steinkuehler, 2007).

While much has been written about the micro-dynamics of face-to-face peer review, editing and revision (e.g. Beason, 1993; Cho and MacArthur, 2010), as well as the dynamics of peer and teacher writing conferences (e.g. Atwell, 1998), relatively few empirical studies report on how online environments may reflect or change these dynamics. Ellis (2011) and Kline et al. (2013) describe cases of online peer review in formal learning environments, while several studies examine peer response and collaboration through a theoretical new literacies lens (e.g. Alvermann, 2008; Kalantzis and Cope, 2012) or from the experiences of writers and creators (e.g. Black, 2008; Lammers, 2013; Magnifico, 2012). Essentially, much current research focuses on online authors and their collaborations, assuming that the dynamics of online writing sites are similar to the dynamics of face-to-face writing groups. At the same time, we know that a much wider range of participation from lurking to beta-reading and editing, is seen as legitimate in affinity spaces (Gee, 2004; Grimes and Fields, 2012).

Our inquiry focuses on writing and sharing fanfiction, which are fan-created transformative works using the characters, storylines and/or settings of favourite media as source material. In these works, fans do not simply consume the media but rather become “active producers and manipulators of meanings” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 23). We know from existing literacy scholarship that youth participation in online fanfiction spaces offers them access to authentic identities as writers (Black, 2008) and connects those marginalised by school-based peer groups to other youth who share interests in fan-based writing (Chandler-Olcott and Mahar, 2003). Online fanfiction spaces facilitate collaboration among writers (Fields et al., 2014; Thomas, 2007) and encourage self-directed participation in ways that youth find motivating (Curwood et al., 2013). In these spaces, youth hear from their readers when they receive reviews and comments, and they communicate back to that audience by writing responses and including Author Notes with future writing. Such interaction encourages writers and readers to “co-construct the writing space” (Black and Steinkuehler, 2009, p. 275).

Regardless of the specific writing environment, writers' ideas about and goals for their own work may change in response to the formative feedback that they receive from readers. Such reader response often reveals differences between how the writing is envisioned by writers and read by members of the audience. Such feedback has been shown to be a critical component of writers' processes (Beach and Friedrich, 2006; Beason, 1993; Magnifico, 2010).

Much of the research exploring interactions between writers and readers in online spaces draws on studies of an expert young writer in the space, informed by the writers' own perspectives and reactions to feedback (e.g. Black, 2008; Curwood et al., 2013; Lammers and Marsh, 2015). While we know more about these "exceptional cases" (Black, 2008, p. 101), less is known about the nature of the feedback that writers receive. As Fields et al.'s (2013) study of *Scratch* points out, in order to expand our knowledge of how young people learn from writing and creating in online spaces, we need to know not just about authoring but about diverse, less-visible forms of participation like reviewing. How do fans and fanfiction writers interact with their readers and audience members? How do they build common context when they only share an online space and little personal information? We hope that pairing linguistic analyses like this one with interviews and ethnographic observations might shed light on these broad, diverse roles and practices.

## Research contexts

### *The Hunger Games* fandom and the fanfictions that we analysed

In this analysis, we focused on one fanfiction story in Figment and another in FanFiction.net; both are within the *Hunger Games* fandom. To situate these examples, we begin with a brief background on Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* dystopian trilogy. The novels are set in Panem, which includes a glittering capitol and 12 impoverished districts. In the *Dark Days*, there was a failed uprising against the capitol. As punishment, the *Hunger Games* was instituted:

*The rules of the Hunger Games are simple... 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).

In the first novel, 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen becomes a tribute; the trilogy follows her as she tries

to survive the *Hunger Games* and overthrow the capitol.

There is a loyal and global *Hunger Games* fandom; on FanFiction.net alone, there are over 40,000 related fanfiction stories today. For our analysis, we chose a story written by a participant in Curwood's (2013b, 2014) larger study of the fandom; for the Figment analysis, we selected a story that represents a similar fanfiction sub-genre (Table 1). In the FanFiction.net story, the writer focused on Haymitch, a former *Hunger Games* victor and Katniss' mentor, and Effie, Katniss' escort. The writer imagines a romantic relationship between the two and to date has developed their love story into a 175,000-word piece of fanfiction. On Figment, there are a number of groups dedicated to the *Hunger Games* as well. In the Figment story, the author focuses on the world of Panem's past. She invents District 10-focused characters, relationships and events around the 41st annual games, imagining how these experiences line up what Peeta and Katniss survive 30 years later, in Collins' trilogy. The original story spanned 40,000 words on Figment, and the author later expanded this work to a 58-chapter, 74,000-word book and sequel on Wattpad.

### *Figment*

Figment (see Figure 1) was founded in 2010. Aimed at teens and young adult writers (Springen, 2011), it provides an informal community where young writers can share their stories and poems, talk with fellow readers and writers, and find new authors. While Figment focuses on original creative writing and young adult novels, popular forums for fanfiction and role play also exist. Figment was acquired by Random House in 2013, and the site boasts over 300,000 users and 370,000 pieces of writing.

### *FanFiction.net*

FanFiction.net (see Figure 2) was founded in 1998, and it was the first fanfiction archive open to material from multiple fandoms (Pellegrini, 2013). Today, the site continues to represent the Internet's largest and

Table 1: *FanFiction.net* and *Figment* story characteristics

	<i>Figment</i> story	<i>FanFiction.net</i> story
Length	40,000 words (expanded to 74,000 on Wattpad)	175,000 words
Number of reviews	49 (33 comments and 16 reviews)	69 reviews
Mean length of reviews	59.11 words	33.55 words
Longest review	323 words	338 words
Shortest review	3 words	1 word
Time frame	44 comments within 1 year	59 comments within 1 year

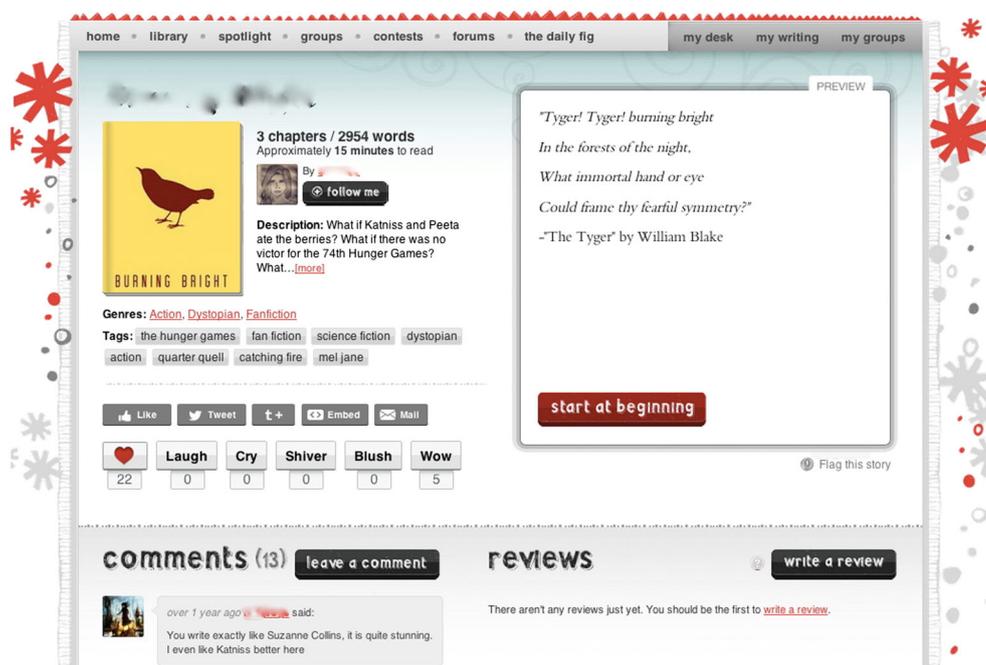


Figure 1: Image of a *Hunger Games* fanfiction “book profile” on Figment.com, altered to remove titles and authors

most diverse fanfiction collection. By 2010, it contained over six million user-written titles (Sendlor, 2011) in fandoms ranging from manga to television to novels.

## Methods

In the succeeding discussions, we offer emergent findings from our linguistic analysis of interactions between writers and reviewers on FanFiction.net and Figment related to the nature of review comments, the presence of critical feedback and how reviewers establish their authority. While we focus on interactions between readers and reviewers in the findings, as well as the implications of this work for teachers, we also illustrate our analytical process.

## Data collection

Data collection began with systematic observation (Androutsopoulos, 2008), or repeated monitoring focused on examining “relationships and processes rather than isolated artefacts” (p. 6) on FanFiction.net and Figment.com, to gain insight into the dynamics of communication, fanfiction writing and fanfiction reading. Using these observations to develop a richer contextual understanding of these sites informed our non-random selection of two stories, one from each site, to further analyse. Both stories were written within the *Hunger Games* fandom, and we selected them to reflect typical fanfiction sub-genres. While both stories are multiple-chapter narratives, one imagines a romantic relationship between two of the novel’s characters, and the other projects a historical *Hunger Games*, inventing new characters

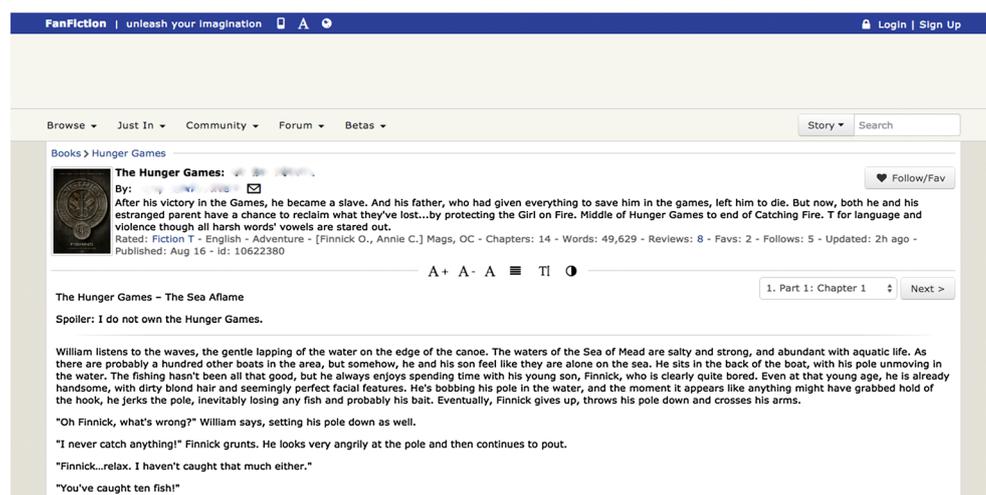


Figure 2: Image of a *Hunger Games* fanfiction story on FanFiction.net, altered to remove titles and authors

in a similar setting. We collected all available artefacts from each story including the stories themselves, authors' notes, readers' comments and reviews and reader art. Here, we analyse publicly available review comments.

### Data analysis

On FanFiction.net and Figment, responses and formative feedback from readers occurred in public interactions, via online reviews and comments. In order to divide the comments for coding, we broke the comments down into idea units, which are described by Chafe (1980) as bits of discourse in which the speaker or writer introduces one concept. In speech, these units are often marked by pauses, while in writing, they are often marked by punctuation or grammatical clauses. We coded these comments for linguistic function, seeking to understand how the idea unit informed the author (often about the reader's opinion), directed the author to make changes (generally through a direct statement) or elicited additional information (frequently by asking a question). These codes were inspired by Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model of classroom communications, in which these conversational moves drive feedback interactions among teachers and students.

We analysed the idea units quantitatively and qualitatively, beginning with a coding scheme developed by Kline et al. (2013). As discussed previously, we began by coding each idea unit's primary linguistic function (Table 2). In addition, we examined the comment's focus of attention to establish what aspect of the story the comment highlighted (e.g. content, conventions, formatting, sentence fluency and word choice) and whether the comment identified a problem (explicitly or implicitly) to examine whether and how comments encouraged revision. If the comment identified a problem, we coded for whether it additionally provided a revision strategy (e.g. add, correct, delete and reorganise). Finally, we examined affect, looking at whether the comment affirmed or demeaned the writer. We began our analysis using

Kline, et al's. (2013) existing coding scheme from classroom writing to reflect our interest in the ways that collaborative writing and peer review in fanfiction spaces are similar to and different from similar tasks in school spaces. Broader work in digital media often claims that online writing offers students a greater degree of collaboration than schoolwork does (e.g. Ito et al., 2010; Jenkins et al., 2007), so it makes sense to investigate the characteristics of actual formative feedback available to online writers.

Overall, we coded 646 idea units of reader comments and reviews from the two *Hunger Games* stories selected, which represent all of the comments on the Figment story and comments on chapters 1 and 21 of the FanFiction.net story. We each independently coded these language segments, and then reviewed each others' coding and resolved discrepancies through discussion. In the first round of coding, we achieved 77.7% agreement. In our subsequent discussions, we worked to achieve consensus on all coding categories. We refined the descriptions and examples of several categories to improve the clarity of the codes and solidify our inter-rater reliability. Additionally, we added categories to better reflect the context of fanfiction writing; for example, we added foci of attention that describe readers' reactions and the canonicity of the stories, two recurring topics of reader conversation. The most significant addition in this second round of coding was that we identified several comments as social communication – those intended to establish a reader's credibility (Royster, 2005) or social presence (Cogbill, 2014; Kehrwald, 2008). In these ways, the coding scheme that we developed allows for meaningful discussion about collaborative writing and peer review across fanfiction and school contexts.

### Findings

In our previous research, we found that fanfiction encourages young adults' close reading of literary texts (Curwood, 2014) and that interaction with a networked, and at times critical, audience supports creative writing

Table 2: Primary linguistic function of reviews

Linguistic function	Code example	Figment.com (N = 320 idea units) (%)	FanFiction.net (N = 326 idea units) (%)
Direct	One piece of advice, you shouldn't make the story so predictable. (Figment)	8.4	7.7
Elicit	Isn't her father counted as her parents? Or was it meant to be like that? (Figment)	3.7	2.1
Inform	You get both Haymitch and Effie's personalities exactly right and both their reactions to what has happened are also perfect. (FanFiction.net)	79.7	82.2
Social communication	Hope your exams are going okay, [I just] finished mine (FanFiction.net)	8.1	8.0

processes (Lammers et al., 2014). In our observations and linguistic analyses of the Figment and FanFiction.net sites, we sought to move from descriptive case studies of specific writers to an analysis of the interactions among members of these writing communities.

### *Review comments are largely general*

In our analysis, we began by determining the linguistic function of reviewers' comments. For instance, is the reviewer's comment directing the writer to take a specific action? Eliciting details from the writer by asking a question? Informing the writer of their reaction to the story? Or engaging in social communication that builds a relationship but may be unrelated to the story? We found that readers' comments to the writers tended to inform the author of their experience, as evidenced by comments like, "I loved this!" or "I couldn't stop reading." Informing review comments represented 79.7% of idea units on Figment and 82.2% of idea units on FanFiction.net. These findings are represented in Table 2.

Additionally, readers' comments tended to be general or focused on the content of the story, as shown in Table 3. In practice, a general focus reflected the full story, and some of the most common comments stated a reader's love for the story on the whole:

*There's just so much I LOVED about this chapter, I don't even possibly know where to begin! :D (FanFiction.net)*

*I love the details in this story. (Figment)*

Despite the idea of readers writing reviews to provide formative feedback, a practice that is made explicit on both FanFiction.net (which includes a "reviews" page for reader reactions) and Figment (with site space for both "reviews" and "comments"), few readers write real points of criticism or ask questions that might help the author to revise his or her work.

Despite the fact that both sites exist in order for writers to share their work with an audience and for readers to

actively engage with fanfiction, little constructive feedback is evident in these two stories, which are representative of others within the fandom. Padgett and Curwood (2015) found that Figment writers tended to overstate the frequency of the constructive nature of feedback that they received. In interviews, writers asserted that constructive feedback was a predominant feature of Figment, yet Padgett and Curwood's linguistic analysis of the actual reviews and comments suggested otherwise. In our study, this implies that while many *Hunger Games* fans are avid consumers of fanfiction, they are generally not experienced reviewers who know how to offer timely, accurate and constructive feedback to writers. Studies of school classrooms have found that such general informing discourse is often particularly prevalent in peer reviews when students are new to the practices of reviewing and teachers have not modelled the reviewing process (Kline et al., 2013; Magnifico et al., 2014).

### *Problem identification is rare*

In many face-to-face writing groups, contributors are asked to provide formative feedback and offer detail (preferably explicit) for what the writer might do differently in a revision. Table 4 shows that both identification of problems and strategies for revision were very rare. On both sites, only 3% of comments implicitly identified any writing issues, and these comments were not detailed or specific. Moreover, only 10.6% of the idea units on Figment and 1.8% on FanFiction.net explicitly identified problems in the writing. These readers were able to locate specific issues with the story, such as places where the writer needed to add, correct, delete, reorganise, substitute or clarify content. Because Figment encourages readers to differentiate between comments and reviewers, this feature may encourage readers to provide these kinds of details in their responses to the work.

Where readers did identify problems, many of these idea units suggested some kind of strategy for revision

Table 3: *Foci of attention of reviews (top five foci)*

<i>Focus of attention</i>	<i>Code example</i>	<i>Figment.com</i> (N = 320 idea units) (%)	<i>FanFiction.net</i> (N = 326 idea units) (%)
General	Great job and keep up the good work! (Figment)	29.1	37.1
Content	Also, as district 10 is the Livestock district, you may want to incorporate more of that. (Figment)	22.2	31.2
Readers' reactions	I am anxiously awaiting the next chapter like my life depended on it! (FanFiction.net)	20.9	12.6
Writing	Your writing is very, very good. (FanFiction.net)	5.6	6.1
Conventions	On the contrary, you have some spelling issues in some of the chapters. (Figment)	5.6	0

Table 4: Problem identification in reviews

Problem identification	Code example	Figment.com (N = 320 idea units) (%)	FanFiction.net (N = 326 idea units) (%)
Implicit	I'm kind of surprised that Effie still [holds on to her allegiance to the Capitol]. (FanFiction.net)	3.8	3.1
Explicit	...like in chapter 2 (I think) you said; "My family aren't great." This doesn't make sense. (Figment)	10.6	1.8
None	(no problem identified)	85.6	95.1
Provide strategy for revision	...but all you need to do is reread and I'm sure you will find out about what I'm talking about. (Figment)	7.5	3.1

– 7.5% on Figment and 3.1% on FanFiction.net. Many of these explicit problems were ones of grammatical or spelling conventions, and reviewers often suggested “re-reading” as a strategy to find these mistakes, or merely “fixing” the errors. Some reviewers who were able to identify issues with the story did not seem to have the knowledge of writing craft or the language to talk about specific strategies for revision. Given the importance of audience interaction, fanfiction writers may find reviewer feedback less than helpful in developing their craft.

### *Presence: establishment of context and right to comment*

Because the linguistic analysis revealed that most reviewers did not identify explicit problems or offer revision strategies to writers, we then considered the role of cultural practices and social expectations in audience interaction. Table 3 notes the frequency of readers' talk about their own reactions to a story, while Table 2 shows that, in addition to accepted primary linguistic features, we established a social communication category as we coded the idea units. In short, reviewers often included social information in their reviews. Reviewers added friendly letter conventions, such as closing with “minionly love” (Figment), signalled real-world connections “hey its me (the kid who sits in front of you in math)” (FanFiction.net), and engaged in marketing, often requesting that the author read his or her own story.

Notably, several reviewers, particularly those who left critical reviews, worked to establish their ethos, or their right to comment, on the piece. For instance, one FanFiction.net reviewer established how much she loved the story by pointing out, “I had to read the whole thing in one sitting! ...I thought that it would last me a while, but oh my gosh I want more!” Similarly, a Figment reviewer first critically noted that the story mirrored the *Hunger Games* closely and then established her knowledge of the novel:

*Your story is close to the book. Her parents not talking to her and such, the bit about broken fences, and Drew's past with Lucia also seems to shadow Haymitch's experience with Maysilee in his own Hunger Games (Figment reviewer).*

While writers and reviewers in face-to-face settings share a physical context and (presumably) share some expertise that gives them the right to critique each others' work, such markers are absent on writing sites like FanFiction.net and Figment. Many reviewers may feel uncomfortable leaving critical feedback without first establishing such presence.

We argue that this tendency to establish ethos is reflective of new literacy practices in online spaces that emphasise “socially recognised ways of generating, communicating, and negotiating” (Lankshear and Knobel, 2006). For reviewers' feedback to be valued, it must be socially recognised; for the feedback to be socially recognised, they must establish themselves as avid readers and dedicated fanfiction writers in their own right.

## Discussion and implications

This work remains preliminary, although these analyses of review comments reveal that, while some prolific fanfiction authors do establish critical online writing circles (e.g. Black, 2008; Jenkins, 2006), these collaborations seem relatively uncommon. It seems far more likely that reading, loving and sharing stories within a certain fandom represent valuable literacy practices and participation within an affinity space (Gee, 2004), but they are perhaps less visible and under-reported in the literature. Research from English language arts classrooms, however, suggests that similar activities are key components of developing students' taste for literature and general reading habits (Atwell, 2007; Kittle, 2012). Classroom readers' workshops, writers' workshops, book talks and multigenre responses to literature all might be enhanced by students' knowledge of online spaces to post and share such reflections. After all, existing research clearly suggests that students

are motivated by sharing with and responding to fellow readers and writers (e.g. Curwood et al., 2013; Lipstein and Renninger, 2007; Nolen, 2007).

Our findings – the commonality of relatively thin praise under the guise of “reviewing” in spaces like Figment and FanFiction.net – suggest that teachers’ expertise is deeply needed in the difficult task of developing students’ skills in writing, peer review and critique. Few young readers and reviewers learn how to give constructive feedback without instruction, whether in classrooms or online environments. Work on peer review and formative assessment shows that many students welcome writing reviews, but without assistance, they tend to evaluate and edit each others’ work as teachers do, simply saying “good job!” or “needs work!” – or, in fanfiction circles, “I LOVED this chapter.” Such results rarely encourage meaningful rethinking and revision in any environment (Beach and Friedrich, 2006; Kline et al., 2013; Magnifico et al., 2014).

And yet, many innovations in Internet communications link interest-led affinity spaces to classrooms. Figment itself provides a site for educator partnerships, as do classroom-focused teen literary magazines like *Teen Ink*, and much research suggests the value of providing students with authentic critical feedback on their work (e.g. Purcell-Gates et al., 2007). One challenge in moving forward with this work, however, is that teachers may not have access to technology-focused professional development that encourages them to engage in critical reflection and sustained dialogue around curricular goals and student outcomes (Curwood, 2011). Another challenge is that it is difficult to trace many kinds of online participation – and our work points toward great participatory diversity in these online, informal spaces.

Our results here suggest that few reviewers write in-depth reviews, but social validation and presence are important to fanfiction authors. These findings are similar to other studies of writing. Results from online and classroom environments point out that even though positive, “cheerleading” (Simmons, 2003) fanmail is not constructive criticism, the awareness that others are reading helps writers find motivation and an occasion for reflection on their work (Curwood et al., 2013; Lammers et al., 2014; Magnifico, 2012). Thus, even while interactions with Internet sites do not themselves ensure deep revision and learning, echoing Warschauer’s (2011) claim that computers alone do not change classroom pedagogy, the social presence of readers and the ethos of those readers remain important factors (Cogbill, 2014; Kehrwald, 2008). Writers need instruction, but they need contact with other writers, too.

As writing continues to grow in importance, both in classrooms and for online communicative purposes, the field must continue to theorise what participation in “writing” means and to document the many practices of writing processes. While cases of exceptional young authors have laid vital groundwork, we need

to keep talking with young readers, reviewers and sharers of writing. In addition, we need to learn about young writers’ participation in all of these activities. We hope that pairing linguistic analyses like this one with interviews and ethnographic observations might shed light on these diverse roles and practices and how they might be leveraged in classrooms as examples of real-world writing activities.

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#### CONTACT THE AUTHORS

Alecia Marie Magnifico, English Department,  
Hamilton Smith Hall, University of New  
Hampshire, 95 Main Street, Durham, NH, 03824  
USA  
e-mail: [alecia.magnifico@unh.edu](mailto:alecia.magnifico@unh.edu)

Jen Scott Curwood, Faculty of Education & Social  
Work, Education Building A35, The University of  
Sydney NSW 2006, Australia  
e-mail: [js.curwood@sydney.edu.au](mailto:js.curwood@sydney.edu.au)

Jayne C. Lammers,  
Warner Graduate School of Education, LeChase  
Hall 464, University of Rochester, 500 Joseph C.  
Wilson Blvd. Rochester, NY 14627-0425, USA  
e-mail: [jlammers@warner.rochester.edu](mailto:jlammers@warner.rochester.edu)