THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATORY MEDIA ON STUDENT WRITING

by

Susan M. Miller

An Abstract

of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development University of Central Missouri

May, 2012
ABSTRACT

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Web 2.0 is a relatively new configuration of the Internet but for most of today’s adolescents it is the only Internet they know. Most applications of this participatory media involve, among other things, forming words and sentences to communicate with others. This new medium is used by more than 85% of teens in some portion of their communications (Lenhart et.al, 2008, p. ii).

By examining current literature and research findings pertaining to technology, adolescent writing, best practices in literacy instruction as well as current studies that relate to Web 2.0 and other participatory media, the researcher will demonstrate how ready access to Web 2.0 is affecting the general writing quality and habits of adolescent writers.
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APPROVED:

Advisor: Jennifer Robins
Committee Member: Floyd Pentlin

ACCEPTED:

Chair, Department of Education Leadership and Human Development: Patricia Antrim

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI
WARRENSBURG, MISSOURI
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Statement of Research Focus

This review of literature investigates the technologies and applications of Web 2.0, or Participatory Media, specifically as it impacts student writing. The purpose is to determine how student writing is being impacted by the pervasive use of participatory media applications. Further, information will be presented with the purpose of demonstrating whether these changes in students’ writing behaviors and beliefs are positive or negative ones.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the impact of using participatory media on the writing habits of students. It has been ten years since Tim O’Reilly (2005, para. 2) popularized the term “Web 2.0” to describe the way the Internet was changing from static to participatory. The ways access to Web 2.0 technologies has changed our society are complex and the extent of that impact is still developing. Literature was reviewed regarding adolescent literacy, writing instruction, Web 2.0 technologies, statistical results of studies regarding use of the Internet, authentic literacy, the effect of audience on motivation to write, and other related areas.

Research Questions

The themes of this review of literature correspond with a progression of ideas, from general knowledge to specific examples related to the use of Web 2.0 technologies in the school
and school library. It particularly targeted information that shows the effect of these new technologies and practices on the development of literacy in reading and writing.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What do Web 2.0 and related technologies offer to writers?
2. What is The New Literacy?
3. What impact does this knowledge have on instruction for education professionals?

**Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of this study include the availability of peer-reviewed journals, texts, and applicable research studies. The effects of the Web 2.0 technologies are just now starting to be determined and academic studies are now beginning to be published. The scope of data collection focused on youths aged pre-teen to 20 (college age) primarily because they are more independent in their use of media. Journals, books, and articles reviewed deal with all aspects of literacy, literacy instruction, motivation for writing, and possibilities provided by Web 2.0 applications. The results of this study provide the reader with evidence of the current state of student writing and what may be seen in the near future with regard to students, writing, and Web 2.0 technologies.

**Definition of Terms**

Authentic audience – Participants who interact with media by choice.

Authentic writing – Writing that has a real audience and has intrinsic value to the writer.

Blogs – Short for Web log. A shared, interactive journal organized into discussion threads.
Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) – Communication that is possible only when using a computer of some kind.

Digital writing – Compositions created with a computer or other device that is connected to the Internet.

Fan fiction – Fan-authored texts inspired by popular culture and media such as books, music, movies, and video games (Black, 2005).

Microblogging (or microblogging) - A term used to describe a series of brief text updates posted on the Internet through a variety of digital channels.

Media – A means of communication, including print and visual works, live and television/film/video performances, audio, Internet (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2004).

Participatory media – Social media whose value and power derives from the active participation of many people. Examples: blogs, wikis, social media sites, music-photo-video sharing, podcasts, and video comments (Rheingold, 2008).

Read-write web – see Web 2.0

Real purpose - Has some intrinsic value to the writer.

School library 2.0 – the digitally re-shifted school library; it strives to transcend the physical space using the Internet to bring services and programming to every student and teacher throughout the school wherever and whenever learning is taking place.

Social Network – A website where users can create profiles, post information and exchange messages with other users.
Text message – also known as SMS (short message service). A short message of fewer than 160 characters sent from a cell phone. An MMS is a text message that contains an attached multimedia file, such as a picture or song. (Digital Life Glossary, 2010)

Twitter – Twitter is a social networking and microblogging service. (See Microblogging).

Web 2.0 – A set of Web-based software services that encourage users to become more involved in the creation and manipulation of data (Wolcott, 2007). Also known as the Read-write web.

Wiki - A wiki is a collaborative online space in which many users can work together on a shared project. Everyone can contribute by adding to the wiki, making changes, and deleting items quickly and easily (Kroski, 2006).

**Research Design**

The researcher collected previously published information pertaining to literacy instruction, motivation for writing, and Web 2.0 technologies. No original research was conducted. Rather, existing literature relating to the topic was reviewed for the purpose of this study. At no time was there an effort to create new research or to examine existing data, privately or publicly held that would necessitate any type of permission.

Articles were retrieved from the following databases, *Education Journals; Education Research Complete; Library, Information Science and Technology Abstracts; and Library Literature and Information Science Full Text*. Search terms included “web 2.0,” “participatory media,” “read write web,” “writing motivation,” “authentic audience,” and “authentic literacy”.
In reading these articles the researcher gathered additional keywords and the names of the key researchers in this field. This search process was circuitous in nature; the researcher would glean a few things and then investigate those things and learn some more and investigate some more, spiraling deeper and deeper.

This researcher put to use frequently the research techniques of pearl gathering and berry picking while in pursuit of the desired knowledge. As a result, numerous article titles and experts’ names were discovered through reading these articles and looking at the reference lists. Another technique utilized was following the hyperlinks in online articles, blogs, and at the end of Wikipedia entries. This led to other articles and blogs not uncovered through database searching.

**Summary**

This study includes three chapters related to changes brought about by Web 2.0, the read-write web, and the impact these technologies have had on student writing. Chapter 1 introduces the topic, provides a glossary of terms and background of the research process. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature pertaining to the topic. Chapter 3 consists of answers to the research questions posed in chapter 1 and a discussion that includes conclusions and recommendations.
CHAPTER 2  
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the current literature relating to various literacies, what motivates students to write, what Web 2.0 is and what it provides for writers. This topic brings together concepts from the literacy education and technology education, specifically the participatory media made possible by Web 2.0. Literature was gathered in order to gain a full perspective of the past, present and potential future of these topics.

This chapter is organized into sections by theme. The first section is about language, literacy, and the Web 2.0, as well as some historical perspective on each. The second section covers topics relating to writing, technology, and teens. The third section covers findings on what ‘authentic’ means in writing, audience, and literacy. Finally, the last section looks at how Web 2.0 affects instruction and curriculum.

Introduction

The means of communicating are clearly different today than ten years ago, or even five years ago. Current Internet usage statistics state that as of December, 2011 a full 32.7% of the world’s population (2,267,233,742 out of 6,930,055,154) access the Internet. In the Americas (North America, South America and Central America) that percentage rises to 53.9% (Miniwatts Marketing Groups, 2011).

Kathleen Yancey, past president of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), has dubbed the current period as ‘The Age of Composition’ (Keller, 2009, p. 10). McPherson (2006) relays a conversation with a colleague in which his colleague remarked that “[n]ever
before in human history has there been more people reading and writing – this is largely due to the Internet.” (para. 1) Lead researcher for the Stanford Writing project, Andrea Lunsford, (as cited in Haven, 2009) concurs, saying that students are writing more than ever before in history. She cautions, though, that today’s writing may not look like the writing of yesterday (para. 1). Clearly students are writing and writing as never before. It remains to be seen, however, what Web 2.0 offer to writers.

According to Kylene Beers, former NCTE vice president, (as cited in Collier, 2007), “Literacy has always been intimately linked to technology. Writers in earlier centuries used chisels and stones, ink and papyrus, or the printing press” (para. 4). Jon Orech, Instructional Technology Coordinator from Downers Grove High School, confirms this essential link. He remarks that without tools such as a chisel, pen and paper, printing press, typewriter, or word processor writing cannot happen (Orech, 2009, para. 1). Technology is a fundamentally vital part of the writing process.

**Web 2.0**

Web 2.0 is one of the most commonly used terms to describe this latest version of the Internet, but there are other terms used nearly interchangeably. These terms give clues as to some of the ways the Internet has changed for users. The term ‘Read-Write Web’, for example, is descriptive of how computer users now have the means to not only read static Internet pages, but also interact as authors and creators. Another term, ‘interactive media,’ describes how the user is able to use media to communicate directly with the other users. ‘Participatory media’ is term with a similar meaning but with a connotation of social interaction. The term ‘computer
mediated communication’ (CMC), used since the 1990s, points toward the fact that we can use a computer (or similar device) as a way to communicate with others (Roschke, 2008).

Mike Wolcott (2007), staff writer for the San Francisco Chronicle, writes that Web 2.0 is a set of web-based software services that encourage users to interact more in the creation and manipulation of data. According to Wolcott (2007), Web 2.0 represents a significant evolution in the way digital information is created, shared, stored, distributed, and manipulated. Tim O’Reilly, President of O’Reilly Media, is commonly credited with popularizing the term ‘Web 2.0.’

**Web 2.0 and Writing**

David Warlick, a 30-year educator and author, consultant, and public speaker on 21st century teaching and learning, writes that Web 2.0 has changed the way information flows. “Traditionally, information flowed in one or two directions. Through the new Web, content flows in a variety of directions that depend on the behavior of those who produce the information and those who use it” (Warlick, 2006, para. 6). Roschke (2008) wrote that digital communication was now “dialogic,” needing at least two participants who interact, whereas the previous versions of the Internet were more like a monologue with one-way communication (p. 3).

**Current Research Studies and Findings**

One of the most extensive and scholarly studies thus far to examine the impact of technology on writing is the Stanford Study of Writing. This five-year study gathered examples writing from all aspects of students’ writing lives. It tracked roughly 12% of the freshman class from the time they began at Stanford to one year after graduation asking participants to submit to
samples of any type of writing they did. This included not just academic writing but writing from outside the classroom as well. While just fewer than 200 students participated in the study, they submitted more than 14,600 pieces of writing (Keller, 2009, para. 15).

In an interview about the study, Andrea Lansford, director of the study stated, “I think we’re in the midst of a literacy revolution the likes of which we haven’t seen since Greek civilization” (as cited in Orech, 2009, para. 3). She likens the world of online writing to the ancient Greek tradition of argument, feisty, conversational, public, and concise. The student writers in the Stanford Study of Writing were found to be “remarkably adept at what rhetoricians call ‘kairos’—assessing their audience and adapting their tone and technique to best get their point across” (Thompson, 2009, para. 6).

Another study, conducted by Michigan State University’s Writing in Digital Environments Research Center, collected data from a first-year writing class, asking them to keep a diary of the writing they did in any environment. Grabill, lead researcher for the project, notes that the students in this study described their out-of-class writing as more significant and meaningful to them than their in-class work. "Digital technologies, computer networks, the Web—all of those things have led to an explosion in writing," Grabill writes. "People write more now than ever. In order to interact on the Web, you have to write” (as cited in Keller, 2000, para. 9).

Perhaps the largest amount of data about the impact of technology on the writing habits of young people comes from Pew Internet and American Life Project and the National Commission on Writing. Using a national telephone survey and focus groups the surveyors
gathered information from teens, ages 12 to 17, and their parents about the role and impact of technological writing on both in-school and out-of-school writing. They interviewed 700 pairs of parent and child during the period of September to November 2007. The data and findings of the study were published in 2008 in the Pew Report, *Writing, Technology and Teens*. One finding reported is that while 85% teens are engaging in some form of electronic personal communication, sixty percent of these teens do not think of these electronic texts as ‘writing.’ To them this communication is equivalent to between-class hallway greetings or telephone calls. The researchers surmised that teens believe that writing only takes place at school and on paper, not on cell phones, Web sites, or blogs.

Lenhart, the Pew study’s co-author and senior research specialist, writes, “There is clearly a big gap in the minds of teen agers between the ‘real’ writing they do for school and the texts they compose for their friends. Yet it is also clear that writing holds a central place in the lives of teens and their vision about the skills they need for the future” (as cited in Oleck, 2008, para. 8). Herein lays the dilemma. According to NCTE, good writing may be the quintessential 21st century skill (Tolisano, 2010, para. 2). Yet most teenagers think that much of the material they create electronically is not ‘real’ writing (Lenhart et.al, 2008, p. 24).

**Motivation for Writing**

In the Pew report teens stated that they are “motivated to write by relevant topics, high expectations, an interested audience and opportunities to write creatively” (Lenhart et.al, 2008, p. iii). The teens said “they wanted to be doing things that mattered socially, in their own lives, and had an impact” (Lenhart et.al, 2008, p. 54). They felt they would be more motivated to write if
they had the opportunity to select their topics for school writing assignments. Motivation to write well also comes from getting good feedback from their readers, especially from a great teacher. Their most impactful motivator, though, was having people such as parents, friends, as well as teachers reading what they wrote (Lenhart et al., 2008, p. 58).

The instantaneous nature of communication and ever-present audience have changed the way students write. Because Web 2.0 is accessible from any device connected to the Internet writers are everywhere. So too are their interested audiences, world-wide and independent of school, parents, or other governing body. Because of Web 2.0 all can be authors. By counting “hits” to a personal website, blog, fan fiction, or social networking site, a site author knows that his or her words are being read by others. Better yet, they may get responses and feedback from those who have read their words. Thirty years ago Nancie Atwell (1987) reflected on the power of having an audience. She wrote that writers write better when they know that someone significant to them is going to read their texts (Atwell, p. 354). Thompson (2009) writes that students today almost always write for an audience. This gives them a different sense of what good writing looks like. For today’s teens, writing is about persuading and organizing and debating (para. 5).

The New Literacy

“New Literacy includes the use of multimedia texts, including the surrounding of the text with visuals such as color, and graphics, to construct meaning, to create, and to convey information in the World Wide Web” (Definitions, 2012, para 4). Educational writers and researchers began writing about The New Literacy and tying it to 21st century skills after the
emergence of Web 2.0. Since then, national groups dedicated to literacy and writing have participated in the discussion of what these new literacies and ways of communicating mean for educators.

In 2010, one of these national groups, the National Council of Teachers of English, presented a position paper that defined and described what is meant by the term ‘21st Century Literacies’ (NCTE, 2010). Lorna Collier (2008) and Clive Thompson (2009) each published articles about the changes being brought about in literacy, particularly in writing, and determined that the primary causative factor to be the read-write nature of Web 2.0.

**Digital Immigrants and Natives**

This current manifestation of the Internet, Web 2.0, may be new and baffling to ‘digital immigrants,’ but it is the norm for students. For most 12- to 23-year-olds, i.e., ‘digital natives’, Web 2.0 isn’t different; for them the Internet has always been this way. It is adults mid-twenties and older who feel the change (Prensky, 2007). Although there are professionals who will argue on both sides of the question of whether Web 2.0 affects to writing in a positive or negative way, the fact remains that participatory media is clearly affecting the communication habits of our students.

On the positive side, Lansford writes, “Technology isn’t killing our ability to write; it’s reviving it – and pushing out literacy in bold new directions” (as cited in Thompson, 2009, para. 3). Keller (2009) writes, “Some scholars say that this new writing is more engaged and more connected to an audience, and that colleges should encourage students to bring lessons from that writing into the classroom. Others argue that tweets and blog posts enforce bad writing habits
and have little relevance to the kind of sustained, focused argument the academic work demands” (para. 5).

Laurie Fendrich (2007), writer for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* seeks to reassure readers that, while the new writing might look differently than what we are used to, that alone doesn’t make the writing bad. She writes:

> While the older generation worries endlessly…[o]ver the quality of the writing on Facebook, blogs and Twitter, the younger generation enthusiastically probes new ways to express themselves clearly and concisely (texting and Twitter), to exchange open opinions about every matter under the sun (Twitter and Facebook), and to do all these things in clever, inventive ways. (para. 9)

**Evolving Nature of Language**

James Billington (as cited in Lenhart et al., 2008), the Librarian of the Congress suggests that “young Americans’ electronic communication might be damaging ‘the basic unit of human thought – the sentence’” (p. i). There are those who predicted “that this is the end of writing, that young people would never learn the ‘art of writing’ and that the new kind of writing is inferior to the ‘right,’ real and traditional kind” (Tolisano, 2010, para. 4).

The English language, however, has been evolving since its inception. Classical stories such as *Beowulf* or *The Canterbury Tales*, although written in English, are nearly unreadable by today’s students. What we know as English today is far removed from the version of English used to write these stories (Roschke, 2008). The past president of the NCTE, Kathleen Yancey
(2009), wrote from a historical perspective in *Writing in the 21st Century*, showing how views on writing and literacy instruction had changed over the previous 100 years.

Educational writers are now reporting a new evolutionary turn with regard to what we consider to be ‘texts.’ Sara Kajder, assistant professor of English education at Virginia Tech, writes that what counts as valued communication in the classroom has opened up. If the question is asked, “What counts as valued communication?” the answer will likely include new forms of communication. Rap lyrics, graphic novels, still images, audio text, or oral performance are just as meaningful to students as any written text (as cited in Collier, 2007, para. 6).

**What Web 2.0 Provides to Writers**

**Authentic Audience**

Joyce Valenza, high school library media specialist and nationally known writer and speaker, points out that Web 2.0 technologies provide more than authentic audience and motivation for writing. “Web 2.0 shifts writing and composition in critical and exciting ways. Students discover real reasons to research, to write, to tell their unique stories. Learners are discovering that research can be collaborative, community-based, media-rich, and exciting” (Valenza, 2007, p. 27).

Valenza points out that using wikis, blogs, and other Web 2.0 applications provide an authentic audience and an authentic motivation for our writing. Hallman (2009) writes about her experiences observing a high school English class for ‘at risk’ teens become energized about responding to an editorial in the newspaper. She writes that she realized that because the goal of
the letter was real and concrete to the students it became an authentic writing experience for them and, therefore, more meaningful.

In thinking about what makes something ‘authentic’ Hallman (2009) speaks of two rhetorical terms, dialogic and dialogism. These terms refer to the philosophy that all “utterances (distinct pieces of spoken or written texts)…. respond to and anticipate other utterances. Dialogism, then, as a theory, is primarily concerned with the idea that all language is produced as a response to other language…. At the core of dialogism is the belief that all texts respond to other texts” (p. 44). When viewed from this perspective it is clearer why particular kinds of texts resonate with and motive students. Authentic texts respond to real-world issues and, in turn, motivate students to respond in kind. According to Hallman, writing text that is purposeful and meaningful, as well as dialogic with other texts, is at the heart of the meaning of authentic writing. Orech (2009) writes that authentic audiences and purposes are vital in all student writing. Writing for a real audience with a purpose in mind that is valuable to the writer creates authentic writing experiences.

McPherson (2006) says that current research is finding that wikis provide students with a variety of authentic audiences, ranging from students themselves to anyone in the world with Internet access. He observes that students are motivated to write with enthusiasm when they know that real people will be reading what they write. By providing collaborative writing contexts in which users are allowed to edit their and other members’ contributions, adding, deleting, changing, and shaping the groups’ wiki writing becomes a social process.
Fan Fiction

Another venue for Web 2.0-style writing can be found in online fan fiction sites. Jenkins introduces the enthusiastic writing of fan fiction which involves writing stories with a combination of established characters and established "worlds" or settings with established histories of how characters normally interact in their fictional settings. Fan fiction authors take one or a combination of these elements and write a story line that is different from what the original author produced. Individuals who write fan fiction often change characters, introduce their favorite characters to characters from other works, or place their characters into new settings (Jenkins, 2008). Although this type of writing community existed before the advent of Web 2.0, readers communicated via photocopied sheets sent through the mail or by sending stories out through listserv-type emails. The last step is when the fan fiction writer posts his or her work on the Internet in specialized forums such as www.FanFiction.net.

One of the reasons fan fiction resonates so powerfully with young writers is because they know someone who cares is reading what they write. Others in the fan fiction forums will often give writers feedback, sometimes praise, and at other times constructive criticism. If the feedback is a critique, it is generally tempered with enthusiasm; hostile responses are discouraged (Black, 2005). For many fan fiction writers the feedback they receive from his or her readers is what drives them to continue to write, revise and create. Black (2009) writes that participating in fan fiction writing also encourages and motivates English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) learners.
Teaching with 21st Century Literacies

Changes in literacy and writing brought about by Web 2.0 necessarily impact instruction. Stephens (2007) likens this process of change to that of the American pioneers. She writes, “As with any new territory, the digital world is mapped by explorers, tamed by pioneers, and settled by homesteaders” (para. 9). She encourages educators to be those brave explorers, pioneers, and homesteaders not just because it is new and exciting but because it is good for students and their learning.

Instructional impact

Electronic communication and media are a large part of the lives of young people. William Kist, associate professor at Kent State University and director of the NCTE Commission on Media, remarks that what we consider literacy must change; the definition broadened to encompass multiple forms of electronic media (cited in Martineau, 2007). He goes on to say that educators who make use of a variety of media in their teaching can make instruction, and school in general, more relevant to students.

Incorporating Web 2.0 in the instruction and teaching of writing, though, represents a significant paradigm shift. Orech divides writing experiences into school-bound authentic or world authentic. School-bound authentic writing experiences happen at school and have authentic audiences and purposes. World authentic writing experiences refer to writings with an audience outside of school that have a genuine purpose for a writer (2009).

The findings from Pew study and other research studies bring to light the discrepancy between what students consider as academic writing and what many educational professionals
consider as good writing. Yancey writes that educators need to avoid creating this ‘fire wall’ between in-class writing and out-of-class writing (as cited in Keller, 2009) while Kist observes that “out-of-school [and workplace] literacies are becoming more and more divergent from in-school literacies” (Collier, 2007, p.). The skills students utilize to communicate electronically; blogging, instant messaging, podcasts, video production, desktop video editing, and graphic design, are the ones students will need as adults in the workplace (Collier, 2007). These skills need to be validated and encouraged. If this type of writing is deemed as wrong or improper, the divide between out-of-school literacies and in-school literacies is compounded (Martineau, 2007).

**Curriculum Considerations**

Often when teachers aren’t eager to incorporate 21st century literacies, they see them as an attempt to replace tried-and-true methods of print literacy. Experts say when taught properly, both traditional and 21st century literacies can co-exist. Kist encourages us to see these new literacies as not being in competition with so-called old literacies and that teachers can use these new literacies to broaden and complement what has been always taught (as cited in Collier, 2007, p.). When 21st century literacies are used well, though, they don’t eliminate existing curricula. Rather, these literacies can broaden and complement what teachers have always taught.

At times, however, even when teachers are eager to incorporate new literacies, district administration or policies can create barriers to change. Kist writes that teachers may also be hampered by a prescriptive curriculum (Collier, 2007) as school curriculum is often tightly tied
to state standards testing. Yancey lays out three other challenges educators face but encourages readers to also see these challenges as opportunities. In this new age of literacy, she writes, educators need to develop new models of writing; design a new curriculum to support those models; and create models for teaching that curriculum (Yancy, 2009, para. 1). Incorporating Web 2.0 technology and communication strategies into curriculum will not only help better prepare students for the demand of the modern workplace, it will also provide educators with an opportunity to effectively teach the difference between formal writing and “text speak” (Roschke, 2008). Integration of these new technologies into the curriculum validates the writing students are doing and opens up opportunities for students to become motivated and powerful writers (McPherson, 2006c).

**Information Literacy**

Information literacy or information fluency is the ability to effectively and ethically seek, use, and create information. Valenza writes, “Information literacy competencies are process skills. They grow with students, even when current search tools and platforms are obsolete” (2007, p. 22). Students need to understand traditional information structures as well as the changes in the ways information and knowledge is built and organized.

Valenza describes two threads, information fluency and Web 2.0, woven into a 21st century cloth. Web 2.0, the new thread, is colorful and vibrant with great opportunities for collaboration and innovation. The more traditional strand, information fluency, is the sturdy fiber that provides structure to writing. Valenza encourages education professionals to blend what is
known from traditional information literacy skills with what is being learned from the interactive web (Valenza, 2007).

Students will come with all levels of expertise; even those who text or blog regularly may not know how to manage all the different ways to interface with the Internet. It is the role of educators, whether in the classroom or the library, to show students how use media effectively. According to Kist, it is a mistake to assume that students already know all they need to about ‘tech stuff’. He writes that students have varying levels of knowledge of technology and even those students who are knowledgeable need to know how to manage the influx of information (Collier, 2007). Kajder writes that students “still need teachers to be working with them to teach them how to learn and communicate with an emerging tool” (as cited by Collier, 2007, p. 6).

Before attempting to share this new thinking with other teachers or students, though, educators need to know how to use these technologies themselves and be comfortable using them. Instruction will come across as much more authentic and confident when the one teaching has texted, blogged, and created social networking sites. Additionally, teachers who use a wide variety of media in their instruction help make school more relevant to students.

Once education professionals are onboard with Web 2.0 technologies, the rest of the school community can be brought onboard as well. This can be a challenge, but supporting teachers as they ‘try out’ integrating new technologies is a significant component in ensuring successful adoption of innovations. Stephens advises education professionals, when explaining these new technologies to the school community, to provide faculty with a safe place to learn and experiment with new technologies (2006a).
Summary

A question at the core of this exploration is this, “What is it about Web 2.0 that motivates adolescents to write?” Before finding the answers to this essential idea, first this researcher first needed to investigate several seemingly unrelated topics; technology, meaning computers, and the like that facilitate electronic interface; literacy and all the subtopics covered by this broad term; and lastly, students and how they are being affected by the new literacy and technology options available. In Web 2.0 these ideas converge and the diverse strands are brought together like a braid, interweaving them to make something new.
CHAPTER 3
CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter the research questions presented in chapter one will be addressed. These questions will be answered using the materials reviewed in chapter two.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What do Web 2.0 and related technologies offer to writers?
2. What is The New Literacy?
3. What impact does this knowledge have on instruction for education professionals?

Each question will be addressed separately below.

Web 2.0 and Related Technologies

Writers, especially young writers, are more motivated to write when they know that someone will be reading what they write. Good teachers have known this for years and recent research has confirmed this. Because of Web 2.0 our students are always able to find an interested audience, an audience that not only reads but also responds. It is little wonder that young people are writing more than they ever have before. Writers today write with this audience in mind, especially in their non-academic writing. As has been observed anecdotally and recently restated in the Pew Study, students write to bring about reaction and effect change. Impacting their world, whether that means their family, friends, school, community, or a larger audience, seems to be the goal of writers today. Web 2.0, because of the immediate, two-way flow of information meets many of the needs of young writers. Through the read-write interface of Web
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2.0 everyone can be an author; the audience is ever present, and there can be dialogic communication between writer and audience and that brings authenticity to the interaction.

This audience isn’t contrived either. The audience exists and participates because they choose to; they want to participate because they have a reaction to what they have read. The audience becomes authentic, immediate, and relevant to the writer. This creates highly motivated writers.

The upside of this is that more people are writing than we could ever have imagined even ten years ago. Logically, then, all this writing and communicating has to have an impact on the writing habits and literacy of our students. Common thought is that the more a person does something the better he or she gets at it. The question now is if this also applies to the impact of Web 2.0 technologies and student writing.

New Literacy and Web 2.0

One factor that we can see impacted by Web 2.0 and related technologies is what we mean by ‘literacy.’ We now have the New Literacy which can be defined as what literacy looks like when impacted by Web 2.0. This literacy is called ‘new’ to indicate to how perceptions of literacy and literacy instruction have changed in response to the changes in communication seen over the last decade. As described by Bennett (Definitions, 2012), with New Literacy meaning can be conveyed not just with text but with media and all the tools available because of Web 2.0.

Web 2.0 also brought to a new set of skills for dealing with the barrage of information that students encounter nearly every moment of the day. Twenty-first Century Skills refer to a set of principles designed to guide users and consumers of information in using the information
ethically and responsibly. These three concepts – Web 2.0, 21st century skills, and the new literacy – are intertwined.

**Impact on Instruction**

Currently instructional practices are in a reactive mode, playing ‘catch-up’ to evolve quickly to incorporate new technologies. A key step in moving from reactive to proactive is for education professionals to become familiar and comfortable with social media, texting, and other participatory media. Effective and authentic use of these mediums in the classroom starts with using and understanding them. Having this knowledge and level of comfort will also reduce anxiety and nervousness when incorporating them into instruction.

Educational professionals must note and address how participatory media could potentially impact the communication practices of students. Ignoring the extent to which young people are using participatory media or refusing to acknowledge and accommodate use of this media in instruction creates a disconnection between teachers and students. This disconnect can, in turn, create a gap that serves to make instruction seem less relevant to students. Bridging this gap will necessitate joining what is known about best practices in literacy and instruction with the technologies and media that are relevant and meaningful to students.

Library media specialists and building technology leaders, as educational professionals, can help by supporting and encouraging colleagues as they learn and experiment with new media technologies. As noted by Valenza and McPherson, participatory media is a wonderful arena in which to learn and practice 21st century skills and ethical use of information. Library media specialists need to seize this opportunity to influence the thinking of students and teachers while
educators are still figuring out all the factors involved in using these new avenues for communication.
REFERENCES


TRANSMITTAL FORM

Student Name: ___________ Susan Miller __________________________

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Jennifer Robins
Print Name of Committee Chair

Chair Signature

Floyd Pentlin
Print Name of Committee Member

Committee Signature