Chapter 13
Rewriting the Book: New Literacy Practices and Their Implications for Teaching and Evaluating Writing

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13.1 Introduction

Poised on the vast landscape of communication in the twenty-first century, young learners have a fascinating, if daunting horizon to take in. The challenges they must confront are far more subtle and complex than those tackled by their peers of a generation ago. The pandemic has shaken certainties about life, school, and work. Social and political incidents have prompted widespread questioning of traditional notions about politics, gender, race, and identity. The Internet's penetration of our everyday lives, and the sheer volume of information that is made available to young people (and often dangled before them in a seductive and sly manner), has cast a shadow on the sunny promises of the "information age": the Spotify-and-podcast media culture in which so many of us exist, picking and choosing the news we care to hear, read, and believe, at moments has made the early twenty-first century feel more like the "misinformation age," polarizing people more and more despite the promises of all that freely available information.

All of us, but especially young people, are bombarded with messages—print, image, video, and other modes of expression—from morning to night. As they absorb information from friends and others in the world around them, they reply back in synchronous time, moving at warp speed through a process that, in the "olden days," took so much longer. For young people, this accelerated age of communication has been thrust upon them just as they are working to define and express who they are, who they might like to be, what they think. More than ever before, they need to learn how to read and listen thoughtfully and critically, and write and

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speak with confidence, clarity, and respect, for the range of real-life everyday situations that await them, in and out of school.

Advocates of the twenty-first-century skills have signaled the "4 Cs"—communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity—as key skills students need to develop in order to effectively understand and contribute to the world they will be living in (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2006). Arguably, these skills were important long before the twenty-first century and its attendant frameworks came of age, and wise educators taught them instinctively and intentionally, whether or not they were mandated by a given set of curricular standards. But they are especially valuable skills to focus on now, as available technologies have so radically changed the nature of reading and writing and the way we consume and produce information. The instant availability of such incalculable quantities of information is exciting but overwhelming, and more than ever, educators must think carefully about what skills they wish to pass on to students so that they may not just survive but thrive amid this "embarrassment of riches" we now have in terms of access to information in our literate world.

When the school day ends, young people around the world are communicating. Through a broad range of dialogic, interactive, multimodal, synchronous, and asynchronous activities, they consume and process information, share experiences, and let off steam with their peers, composing all kinds of messages, making meaning in different ways (New London Group, 1996). These novel practices, which engage the four language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking in new ways, are redefining how we communicate, and many of them offer valuable insights for adapting writing instruction and assessment. What are the implications of these new practices for in-school writing instruction? How might new technology tools and literacy practices change the way we think about, teach, and evaluate writing in school, particularly in light of the social and cultural upheavals of the past several years? How might young people's informal literacy practices today serve as a "roadmap" for the challenges and opportunities of preparing students to be effective writers and communicators in the twenty-first century? How may the role of the teacher change? On the other hand, what might this ever-shifting landscape tell us about what hasn't changed? What are the traditional skills that are still essential to becoming an effective communicator? This chapter will explore new paradigms in contemporary out-of-school writing and literacy activities to understand how the notion of literacy is unfolding and evolving.

I will then contrast some of these practices against contemporary standards for writing and learning in school. From there, I will offer an appraisal of how we might orient our standards and expectations, so that we can think about addressing and acknowledging contemporary literacy practices while also retaining what we know about best practices for literacy instruction. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to propose new ways for thinking about preparing students to be active, engaged writers and communicators in their personal, professional, and civic lives in the years to come.

13.2 From Socrates to Vygotsky and Beyond

The dawn of a new era tends to cause the jitters. In our own age, we have seen it, particularly in the realm of education, where the advent of digital technologies has prompted the emergence of a stark dichotomy: the utopian versus the apocalyptic visions. The utopians advocate digital reading, writing, and learning—they believe that paper books and "paper-and-pencil" learning are obsolete, replaced by flat screens with an endless array of at-your-fingertips functionalities, from dictionaries and audio narration to sophisticated search capabilities that make "old" reading seem dull. They defend their stance by pointing to the generation of so-called digital natives (Prensky, 2001), and all of us who live with and/or teach children of the TikTok generation have heard the same blasé, dismissive remarks about the tedium of reading, in the words of my daughter, "eighteenth-century" books. They have their point. At the other end of the spectrum are those journalists and researchers warning the public—especially those with children—of the inherent dangers of technology and its addictive potential (Melo et al., 2020). Yet neither the utopian nor the apocalyptic vision is entirely realistic (Gottschalk, 2019) or useful since there is no single way that millennials or members of Gen-Z read and write (Botterill et al., 2015; Kilian et al., 2012). The way people use traditional and digital technologies is more varied and layered than the exclusively digital futuristic visions and the nostalgic "print-only" visions would suggest.

It makes sense that new technologies raise anxieties. As one generation ages, its members may fear the loss of what they know, cherish, and believe in. And as another one emerges, its members naturally wish to explore and celebrate new ways of thinking about and doing things. As Marshall McLuhan astutely observed:

> Innumerable confusions and a profound feeling of despair invariably emerge in periods of great technological and cultural transitions. Our 'Age of Anxiety' is, in great part, the result of trying to do today's job with yesterday's tools—with yesterday's concepts. (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 9)

He wrote those words over 50 years ago, but he expresses precisely the problem we face today: the confusion of making the transition between what we know from past experience and what the future might (or might not) hold. In this chapter, we will explore some contemporary trends in reading and writing to see how they may add to what we already know about writing instruction and evaluation. But for the moment, let's pause to look at how these generational shifts have played out in the past and why.

In Plato's Phaedrus (Rowe, 1986), the Greek philosopher presents us with an imagined dialogue between his teacher, Socrates, and the interlocutor Phaedrus. In this dialogue, Socrates reflects on the practice of writing, concluding that:

> …your invention will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it, through a lack of practice at using their memory, as through reliance on writing they are reminded from outside by alient marks, not from within, themselves by themselves. So you have discovered an elixir not of memory but of reminding. To your students you give an appearance of wisdom, not the reality of it; thanks to you, they will hear many things with-

> out being taught them, and will appear to know much when for the most part they know nothing, and they will be difficult to get along with because they have acquired the appearance of wisdom instead of wisdom itself. (p. 62)

Here, Socrates asserts the importance of being able to remember for oneself and not have to sift through tome after tome in search of an elusive bit of knowledge. This remains relevant: a lawyer before a jury doesn't have time to look things up. A ship's captain caught off-course round Cape Horn doesn't have time to look things up. She must rely on her interiorized store of knowledge, of memories, of things lived and learned through the body, the senses, and the mind—written instructions take too long in the immediacy of real life. Plato (Rowe, 1986), in his Socrates character, continues:

> …I think writing has this strange feature, which makes it truly like painting. The offspring of painting stand there as if alive, but if you ask them something, they preserve a quite solemn silence. Similarly with written words: you might think that they spoke as if they had some thought in their heads, but if you ever ask them about any of the things they say out of a desire to learn, they point to just one thing, the same each time. And when once it is written, every composition trundles about everywhere in the same way, in the presence both of those who know about the subject and of those who have nothing at all to do with it, and it does not know how to address those it should address and not those it should not. When it is ill treated and unjustly abused, it always needs its father to help it; for it is incapable of either defending or helping itself. (p. 63)

What Plato tells us is that writing, once done, sits—the same way a painting sits on a wall, static and undynamic. In the fifth century BCE, the practice of writing on papyrus and animal skins was not unfamiliar to learned men like Socrates and Plato, but it was not what it is today. Writing was perceived as a copy, an inferior form to the face-to-face dialogue that truly evidenced a person's intellectual prowess and the dynamic, interactive nature of knowledge acquisition. At this moment in history, when writing was not a widespread practice and communication occurred in smaller clusters of human communities, the need for writing was wholly different to what it is today. Plato and Socrates seem to have perceived writing as a mimetic and mechanical rather than creative activity, one for documenting ideas rather than generating them. Writing, to them, was "dead words" sitting on a physical surface. What brought them alive was oratory, dialogue—the very form in which the messages contained in the *Phaedrus* are delivered.

Walter Ong, in *Orality and Literacy* (1982), explains it this way: "By storing knowledge outside the mind, writing and, even more, print downgrade the figures of the wise old man and the wise old woman, repeaters of the past, in favor of younger discoverers of something new" (p. 41). In a world in which knowledge is officially documented through writing, the oral tradition wanes and fades into something else. In our age, it tends to be seen more as the bearer of culture than scientific or technical knowledge.

Yet, Socrates' opposition to writing is more than just a reflection of the era and context in which he lived. The face-to-face dialogue, like the duel, that pits man against man, truth against truth, or truth against lies is what allows us to examine our knowledge, formulate arguments, test those arguments, improve or change them,

and communicate them. In the twenty-first century, these ideas about the importance of dialogue live on in the Socratic method that is still used as an instructional approach in law schools and other learning spaces. But it mattered then and now, as Lam (2011) reminds us, not because dialogue is inherently good, or virtuous, but for a much more vital and pressing reason:

> ….the ultimate goal for the Socratic Learning Method is not to help students to come up with a proposition that they can rest safely with –this would merely contribute to the creation of dogmas. The true goal of the Method is to help students examine their own beliefs and new information they encounter. In frequently exercising the Socratic Learning Method, the students should become independent learners with curiosity and sensitivity toward new information, and gradually develop a mental habit of active inquiry and vigorous thinking. (p. 15)

Elicit, clarify, test, and decide. This is the Socratic method, and, if we give it a good think, it isn't a bad recipe for cultivating some of those twenty-first-century skills mentioned above, particularly critical thinking—a skill more important than ever in our communications age, given the competing forms of information and "news" that we all must digest, assimilate, and evaluate in order to formulate our opinions and belief, take positions, and make decisions as informed, engaged citizens.

The importance of dialogue has been taken up in many different spheres of life in the twentieth century and by many different thinkers. For the purposes of this chapter, we look at Freud, Breuer, and Vygotsky for the light they shed on the topic of communication and writing. Freud and Breuer (2004), in documenting the case of the "talk therapy" that helped cure the patient Anna O. of her psychological ailments, pioneered the notion of dialogue and narrative building as key components for navigating trauma as well as more garden-variety mental and emotional distress (Horgan, 1996; Menand, 2017). Despite the disputes that have arisen around many of Freud's theories, it is significant that we are still debating his ideas today and implementing them through dialogue-based therapeutic treatments in formal and informal mental health settings everywhere. With the culture of written expression firmly established by Freud's time, it is especially meaningful that it was human-to-human dialogue that unlocked the understanding of the mind.

Human-centered dialogue as a source of learning and growth is also a focal point—and occasionally a sacramental one—in a number of spiritual traditions, from Catholicism and Buddhism to Alcoholics Anonymous, in which confession with another human is essential to healing and/or forgiveness. In the best confessional and psychotherapeutic experiences, the outpouring of ideas and then their refinement through dialogue recall the Socratic learning method. Elicit, clarify, test, and decide.

Social psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) took this to another level in his development of co-constructive theory. "Consciousness is co-knowledge," he famously said (Leontiev, 1981), asserting that the acquisition of knowledge is dialogic and social, that we are primarily social beings, relational individuals. In *Mind and Society* (1978), he very plainly states that:

> Our concept of development implies a rejection of the frequently held view that cognitive development results from the gradual accumulation of separate changes. We believe that

> child development is a complex dialectical process characterized by periodicity, unevenness in the development of different functions, metamorphosis or qualitative transformation of one form into another, intertwining of external and internal factors, and adaptive processes which overcome impediments that the child encounters. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 73)

Here, Vygotsky places the emphasis on the uneven, recurring, and overlapping nature of learning through dialogue. His zone of proximal development (ZPD), that "gray space" between what a child can do on her own and what she can only achieve with assistance, is the space where dialogue becomes learning. The ZPD is:

> the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

This dialectic notion of learning contrasts starkly with the typical process of learning to write, a matter he takes up in *Thought and Language* (1962), saying that it is the abstraction of writing that makes it so challenging for children to learn, calling it "speech without an interlocutor, addressed to an absent or imaginary person or to no one at all" (Vygotsky, 1962). Here, he evokes precisely what Socrates complained of in his dialogue so many millennia ago. Writing begs an interlocutor.

Transforming "maximally compact" inner speech into "maximally detailed" written language is far more challenging than moving from thought to spoken word, which (again, recalling Socrates) occurs through the intrinsically motivating dialogic process of conversation (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2013; Vygotsky, 1962). Because the goal of writing instruction is to help students achieve autonomy as writers (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2013), writing has often been perceived and taught as a solitary endeavor (Yarrow & Topping, 2001). Yet, it is actually a social practice, since writers draw on a range of cultural, historical, and contextual resources to produce their texts (Daiute & Dalton, 1993; Heath, 1983; Rish, 2015).

Now, over the centuries, there *has* been a kind of dialogue taking place through writing. Julia Kristeva's concept of "intertextuality," which she coined in 1980, explained that the meaning of a text doesn't reside in a text itself but is produced by the reader and texts "dialogue" with one other (Kristeva, 1980). This has occurred in texts like the Bible, where we regularly see New Testament passages referring to, and even building on, passages from the Old Testament, and in modern texts like James Joyce's *Ulysses* which uses the structure and refers constantly to Homer's *Odyssey* or Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* which samples from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Even modern animated stories from *The Simpsons* to *The Lion King* draw on previous texts, reminding us that no writing exists in a vacuum. But the dialogues they generate are between authors and texts, not authors and readers. They may fulfill the Socratic proposition of elicit, clarify, test, and decide, but only over protracted periods of time and only between a privileged set of readers and writers who have the ability to secure publication and circulation of their works. And so, they fulfill Socrates' objection because, by and large, for the general consuming public, these books and words are static (maybe even dogmatic) objects that represent past ideas. This kind of writing is neither active nor dynamic. This was writing's limitation, through the twentieth century.

So where does it leave us in the twenty-first century?

Reading, listening, writing, and speaking are the four skills traditionally associated with literacy (Berninger & Abbott, 2010). Despite the evidence that supports their integration, these skills are rarely taught together in school (Graham, 2020). Emerging technologies have added a new layer of complexity, as well as new dimensions to literacy, which scholars and practitioners are continually debating and redefining to reflect new and hybrid forms of expression that incorporate images, videos, audio, and other modes. Because of this, the traditional notion of literacy as the comprehension and generation of written texts (Juel et al., 1986) has given way to multiple and often overlapping redefinitions, including "new literacies," "digital literacies," and "multiliteracies" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). Each of these new literacy concepts has its own particular emphasis, but most concur on three specific points: interactivity, multimodality, and context (Collier & Rowsell, 2014; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Rowsell & Walsh, 2011).

Most new definitions of literacy address interactivity and dialogue because digital media have enhanced the interactive, dialogic nature of communication, in the sense of Kristeva's intertextuality, but also Bakhtin's view of language as "a dialogue, a relationship with others" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Dyson, 1995). Thanks to the affordances of entertainment platforms and social media, dialogue and interactivity in the literacy space now occur between texts, authors, and readers (Kress, 2003), or content, creators, and consumers (Honigman, 2022), not just between texts and authors.

For learning, in general, and literacy learning, in particular, it leaves us on a most exciting precipice. If we jump off without care, however, we might not get where we want to go. But, if we handle it intelligently, boldly but with caution and an appreciation of lessons gleaned from past experiences, we face an exciting prospect, the potential to transform literacy learning and writing in particular, into the dialogic ideal that Plato and Socrates envisioned, and taking it to new and unexpected levels.

13.3 (Not so) New Literacy Practices

School is just one of many places where children learn to read and write (Black, 2005; Kress, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978), and many scholars have advocated bringing out-of-school reading and writing practices into the classroom (Alvermann & Xu, 2003; Buckingham, 2003). James Gee (2007, 2013) has written exhaustively on gaming and the rich literacy learning it can provide, and other researchers have examined how children write and make meaning with content from popular media (Marsh, 2004, 2011; Wohlwend, 2009).

Gee (2013) tells us that:

> My own work and that of many others has pointed out that today, thanks to digital media, the conditions for optimal learning are often available outside of school in homes and in popular culture. Indeed, popular-culture activities have become more complex and also more linguistically and cognitively demanding than they have ever been before..... The

> changes that have been most important in digital media and society are ones that have led more and more people, young and old, to be (and want to be) participants not just spectators, producers and not just consumers, and experts even without formal credentials. (pp. 7–8)

In this section, we will look at a few literacy experiences that respond to Gee's criteria, to see how they may expand on our vision of what literacy is, what writing is, and how we might think about what matters when teaching it in the classroom.

13.3.1 The Fanfiction Phenomenon

One of the most potent and dynamic examples of out-of-school writing is the phenomenon of fanfiction.

Fanfiction offers, if not "the" answer, many clues about how and why writing—and literacy in general—is relevant and meaningful to young people growing up in an interactive age. Fanfictions are "original works of fiction based on forms of popular media such as television, movies, books, music and video games" (Black, 2005). Though today they are primarily created online, fanfiction texts circulated informally for decades through photocopies and zines distributed at conventions and other encounters (Jenkins, 1992). Fan writers "blur the distinction between reading and writing" by engaging with and interpreting the media they consume and practicing their craft with others (Jenkins, 1992). By reading, rereading, writing, and rewriting, fan writers both consume and produce (Storey, 1996), contributing to and expanding the body of knowledge around a "canonical text," the term for the original source fiction. They practice both co-construction (with the original author) and often multimodality, with images, songs, video, and other modes of expression incorporated into their new creations.

In recent years, the Internet has changed the face of fanfiction with interactive possibilities that further enhance the dialogic aspect of this largely self-motivated writing experience. Online fanfiction writers often take advantage of digitally enhanced text and art, hyperlinks, video, and games (Black, 2005). Equally relevant is the social dimension that always characterized fanfiction writing, which now unfolds on web sites where readers and writers engage in peer reviewing, mentoring, editing, proofreading, and workshop-style forums (Jenkins, 2004; Black, 2005, 2007). The Internet has helped fanfiction writers broaden their horizons and tighten their communities, since circulation is no longer restricted by the impositions of paper, print, and the institutional publishing world (Ramdarshan Bold, 2018). As of June, 2010, the largest fanfiction archive in the world, FanFiction.Net, contained over three million works (Fan Fiction Statistics - FFN Research, 2011), and at present, it has millions of regular users and works in over 30 languages. Author- and subject-specific sites, from Jane Austen to Harry Potter, also abound (Black, 2007). It is extremely telling that the majority of the writers on FanFiction.Net are adolescents (Black, 2009)—precisely the same age group whose underperformance on

standardized reading and writing evaluations is so worrying to many education experts.

Fanfiction is an overwhelmingly motivating phenomenon that is extremely auspicious for stimulating young people's literacy development (Curwood et al., 2013; Lammers et al., 2021). It is especially exciting to observe among novice writers, for whom the protective anonymity of digital platforms and the "play-acting" quality of fanfiction can make writing less threatening (Buckingham, 2003). Pre-existing settings and characters that they know and love can allow them focus on more process-related aspects of writing (Jenkins, 2004). Today, there is a wild array of movies and television series accessible on mainstream entertainment platforms, spanning every imaginable genre for every imaginable audience—from sci-fi series like *Stranger Things* to the Marvel universe with all the scenarios and characters it can provide beginning writers.

Popular culture and fanfiction can help bridge the divide between kids' intensely interactive out-of-school practices and the more passive and less choice-driven nature of their in-school literacy activities (Buckingham, 2003). With good teacher mediation, it can help them develop critical attitudes about the media that inform their work (Alvermann & Xu, 2003; Black, 2009; McCarthy & Murphy, 2014), and it gives them a canvas for experimenting with other semiotic modes for meaning-making (Jewitt, 2006; McLean & Rowsell, 2015). In her study of adolescent girls' involvement in online fanfiction communities, Thomas (2006) found that fanfiction gave them an outlet for voicing relevant issues, which made writing more meaningful and motivating for them. Fan writers don't reproduce what they've read; they rework, reconfigure, and appropriate what they read (Jenkins, 1992; Storey, 1996) through a process that reflects the dialogic ideas posed by Plato and Vygotsky and that reflects their own process of sifting through characters, plots, and settings to identify what matters to them—and this aspect of fanfiction is what might be especially interesting for a writing teacher to explore, from upper elementary school to high school.

Adapting fanfiction for students is a topic that is receiving more and more attention from researchers at the secondary school level (Curwood et al., 2013; Fields et al., 2014; Magnifico et al., 2018), and a few studies have started to examine how elementary schoolers are engaging with fanfiction (Hutchison et al., 2016). For some time, there has been a tension surrounding the idea of incorporating popular culture practices in the classroom (Jenkins, 2004; Thomas, 2006). Students are sometimes reluctant about bringing their "outside" lives inside the school space for the sake of Learning (with a capital "L"), and there remains a sense among educators that too much popular culture could "dumb down" literacy instruction (Marsh & Millard, 2000). This is compounded by a lingering belief that fanfiction is not a legitimate practice for promoting literacy learning (Barnes, 2015), even though literature scholars know that writers have always drawn inspiration from other works of literature. Fanfiction is as much an example of intertextuality as the many literary works that have conversed with other texts, such as Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well*, based on characters from Boccaccio's *Decameron* (Cole, 1981), or Tom

Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, based on two characters from Hamlet.

Elicit, clarify, test, and decide. The four steps of the Socratic learning method, that dialogic method of acquiring knowledge and refining beliefs, are alive and well on FanFiction.Net, Archive of Our Own, and the hundreds of other online affinity spaces for fanfiction readers and writers. Writers write. Their peers comment and make suggestions. Writers revise. Then, together, they decide. This is Socratic dialogue in action, and the intrinsic motivation driving the fanfiction writers' devotion to their craft is evident, as is the dynamic sparring that takes place through writing, preventing the "forgetfulness" that Socrates feared, because the dialogue of fanfiction spaces, though not face-to-face, and sometimes even not synchronous, is nevertheless present enough to function at the rate of real life, real conversation—or at least pretty close to it. And, moreover, it does so without the interference of power structures such as the academy or the conventional publishing industry.

13.3.2 The Wattpad Revolution

The idea is so brilliant; it almost seems too obvious: created in 2006, Wattpad is a digital platform with a social media spirit where diamond-in-the-rough writers—unknown, unpublished, uncelebrated—might post their original fiction and not only find their niche and their readers but get feedback and make connections with them as well (Wattpad, 2021). For readers, it's a wide-open library of all kinds of writing—including fanfiction as well as many other genres—that they may read for free. For writers, it's a place to test their work, to comment with peers, to propose stories and then receive feedback, to improve their texts, and to cultivate an engaged, participatory fan base. But these fans aren't silent admiring groupies—they are people with ideas and opinions, too (Ramdarshan Bold, 2018).

Wattpad, like FanFiction.Net or Archive of Our Own, emerged as a central space for unpublished writers and became such a phenomenon that conventional publishers caught on and began finding talent there and conventionally published authors also began to appear here in order to reach new readers or, better put, a new *generation* of readers hungry to connect with the authors they read, to enjoy a more horizontal relationship than previously existed between authors and readers.

13.3.3 The Wiki World

What would you get if you had a web site where anyone could edit or add anything? "Boredom, I guessed, or chaos. Boy, was I wrong. You get hundreds, thousands of pages full of information, ideas, conversations, learning, and teaching. You get linkages among ideas, conversations among people. You get a tool for business, a tool for people. You get copies and replicas all over the world. You get … the wiki." (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001, pp. xvi).

With these words, Leuf and Cunningham (2001) capture the essence of the wiki, a web-based publication collaboratively written, edited, and managed by its own audience.

Having changed the way we think of libraries, archives, encyclopedias, and reference material in general, wikis are intended to be simple so that users might focus on the writing rather than the design or HTML; open to facilitate information sharing; and socially driven so that many authors might work on the same text at once (Cunningham, 2002).

Cunningham, the pioneering programmer-inventor of the wiki and owner of the software company, C2, where the first wiki resided, intended it to be "a freely expandable collection of interlinked web 'pages,' a *hypertext system* for storing and modifying information – a *database*, where each page is easily edited by any user with a forms-capable Web browser" (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001, p. 14). Called "the post-it note of the web," the wiki is, at its heart, a collaborative tool for gathering, revising, validating, and disseminating knowledge in a "free-form, yet structured way" (Cunningham, 2002). Its collaborative nature is inherently dialogic and consensus-based, introducing a democratic spirit to the notion of information sharing, consensus building, and truth seeking. As Leuf and Cunningham (2001) note, wikis "seek to involve the visitor in an ongoing process of creation and collaboration that constantly changes the web site landscape…" A wiki is unusual "because of its total freedom, ease of access and use, simple and uniform navigational conventions, and apparent lack of formal structure. Wiki is also a way to organize and cross-link *knowledge*…" (p. 18). Wikipedia itself uses sources verified by its users, and wikis in general function in the same way; they are verified by the collaboration and consensus of users who may add, dispute, correct, or even remove data that is believed to be incorrect; for this reason, it is so ideal as a venue for learning.

Over time, the wiki evolved into an ideal venue for fans—of TV shows, movies, video games, and any form of mass entertainment—to participate actively in their fan worlds, contributing, sharing, trading, and disseminating information in a single and expandable space. Almost the Web 2.0 outgrowth of fanfiction culture, Fandom (later known as Wikia), became one of the main wiki hosting services exclusively dedicated to entertainment. Another example of user-generated content, Fandom/Wikia allows "regular people" to collaborate in the interest of sharing and disseminating information on a specific subject (or media product) of their admiration. Fan wikis are a vehicle for fan engagement, for they structure fans' participation, giving them spaces for different forms and modes of content. Becoming exponentially more robust as its base of writers and editors grows, wikis proved to the world that "collective contributions can yield authoritative results" (Mittell, 2009). Like fanfiction sites, fan wikis give voices to people who might otherwise not have a space to be seen and heard, giving rise to an affinity space comprised of intrinsically motivated participants—people who write and read, copiously, for the contentment it brings them, for no particular reward beyond the satisfaction of sharing a common interest with a far-flung but tightly knit community.

Not surprisingly, wikis have indeed found their space in learning contexts, too, and are especially popular as tools for second-language learning (Storch, 2011), for

science and other subjects (Lau et al., 2016), and also in primary school writing instruction (Li et al., 2014; Woo et al., 2011). Its beauty lies in its creative, collaborative nature. With wise guidance, students stand to learn a great deal through group assignments, for wikis give them an open-ended structure for organizing and presenting information, and the collaborative nature of the work of building a wiki can turn a writing assignment into something far more meaningful—an opportunity to understand one's peers, relate to and negotiate with them, work toward a common goal, and produce a collective final project or product. In this sense, "learning to write" truly can become "writing to learn."

13.4 Best Practices, Old and New

Just a decade or two into the twenty-first century, it has already become abundantly clear that students must learn how to write and communicate for different purposes and different readers, and they need to be able to adapt to a range of modes and technologies (Merchant, 2007, 2012). The changes presently being wrought in the modern workplace—which will continue to unfold more over the next few years—are making workers ever-more reliant on written communication in order to fulfill professional tasks, especially in light of the turn to remote work situations following the pandemic. If effective written expression was considered an extremely important workplace skill before Covid (Graham et al., 2015), it is now more critical than ever as the corporate, industrial, and academic realms adjust to the "new normal" of distanced living, working, and learning.

In 2012, professionals spent an average of 28% of their work week writing. The percentage since then has skyrocketed; writing is now a critical, constant activity in workplace settings and not only among "professional" or "career" writers but a range of workers with different roles and educational backgrounds, whose job may not be dedicated to communication but involves writing as a professional tool. Beyond journalists, editors, technical writers, and communications specialists, there is a realm of professionals whose work depends on effective writing: teachers and professors, lawyers and politicians, doctors and nurses, engineers, merchants, and managers of every stripe (Schriver, 2012).

Work-related writing demands today are diverse. Even those professionals who are not regarded as writers per se must be able to write a range of complex texts (Ortoleva et al., 2016): from emails and memos to project briefs, financial reports, and complicated scientific formulas, frequently for a diversity of audiences (Breuer & Allsobrook, 2019): a cocktail of diabetes medications, for example, is expressed in one way between members of the medical profession and in quite another way when expressed between doctor and patient.

In many professional settings, writing often is a collaborative effort between workers and different stakeholders (Schrijver & Leijten, 2019), and there exists a range of strategies for successful collaborative writing in the workplace (Lowry et al., 2004). Yet, though writing is high on employers' lists of desirable skills, not

enough candidates measure up (Burning Glass Technologies, 2015). This is unsurprising but worrying, given that the rise in remote work has made writing even more critical in professional contexts.

Technological and social developments over the past decade have stimulated the remote working phenomenon (Manzini Ceinar & Mariotti, 2021), and the Covid-19 pandemic intensified the trend: by March 2020, two-thirds of knowledge workers in North America were working remotely (Canzanese, 2020), and though the exact future of this trend is unclear, remote work appears to be firmly fixed in the professional sphere, particularly in knowledge industries. This makes writing even more critical.

13.4.1 What the Research Says About Writing Instruction

What do we know about learning to write? By the end of primary school, students are expected to master a wide range of skills, from handwriting and typing to planning and revising (Graham, et al., 2012). The passage from idea generation to finished product is a long and onerous one, and research shows that stage- and process-based strategies and scaffolds can be very effective for helping primary school students understand and interiorize the steps involved in producing good writing (Graham, 2006; Zumbrunn & Bruning, 2013). With its cognitive orientation, the process approach focuses on planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Englert & Raphael, 1988) and helps learners to become aware of the writing process itself. The contextual view of writing (Street, 1984), which understands writing development as firmly rooted in context, proposes writing for real purposes and audiences and learning strategies and conventions through practice (Bahr et al., 1996). It offers a vision of writing as inextricably linked to the environment in which it is produced, which may or may not reflect the school writing context/environment.

The Common Core State Standards in the United States largely reflect the cognitive research on writing. Across the grades, the Common Core State Standards propose four categories: (1) text types and purposes, (2) production and distribution of writing, (3) research to build and present knowledge, and (4) range of writing. For (1), students need to understand how to craft literary, informational, and persuasive texts and how to appropriately tailor their texts to specific audiences. For (2), they must learn how to produce texts from blank page to drafts to finished final revision—in other words, to understand the different steps involved in writing. For (3), they must learn to navigate the very tricky field of research, with the goal of identifying information, verifying it, and assimilating it into a coherent piece of writing. The last item, entitled "range of writing," refers to the importance of sustaining long-term writing projects, of encouraging a daily writing practice, and of writing over extended time frames, precisely to give students time they need to properly develop their writing.

We *also* know that students make an effort when they are interested and motivated (Dewey, 1913) and they become motivated when they are given the freedom

to write about topics that interest them (Boscolo & Gelati, 2013). And if students engage in active, constructive literacy pursuits that are both rewarding and challenging, they will take more risks, think reflectively, and grow as writers and learners (Gee, 2007).

What do "active, constructive literacy pursuits" look like? They involve writing, certainly, but they also connect writing to the other language skills, so that students may, for example, engage in a writing assignment and then speak about what they've written, read texts and then write about them, and listen to poetry and songs, see words on the page, and then write about them or recreate them in other ways. Again, many teachers have been engaging in these kinds of practices for decades—what matters here is that the digital format makes them more accessible. We can write a mostly text-based paper and then transform it into a mostly image-based PowerPoint and present it to a teacher or our peers. We can go to YouTube and watch a poet read his words aloud while reading them on the screen. If we're lucky, a singer-songwriter might have taken those poetic words and put them to music, and then we have an even more memorable learning journey that combines sight and sound, words and music (Leonard Cohen's musicalized translation-interpretations of Federico García Lorca's poems are one fascinating example of this).

A fair body of research shows that well-designed collaboration is valuable for writing instruction (Mak & Coniam, 2008; Sørensen & Levinsen, 2015). Yet, learners also need teacher guidance, structure, and strategies, all of which are key to the process of writing instruction, helping students to plan, organize, draft, and revise their writing (Bahr et al., 1996; Graham et al., 2013). It is easy to point out that, in theory, "learning is social" or that "we learn from each other"—this may be true but it doesn't happen magically. As teachers, when we take evidence-based practices such as peer review of student writing (Crinon & Marin, 2010; Hoogeveen & Van Gelderen, 2013), structure the experience in a way that makes sense, and facilitate them with, for example, tracked changes or sticky notes, the results can be transformative because they generate a dialogue between students and teacher.

Research also shows that students fare well when they practice writing for authentic reasons and for real audiences (Graham et al., 2015) and when it builds on their unique social and cultural strengths and experiences (Freeman & Freeman, 2006). Though the details of social and emotional learning (SEL) are beyond the scope of this chapter, research has asserted the value of using writing as a tool for exploring social and emotional issues (Storey, 2019), a topic that has gained traction of late, given the upheaval of recent years in the wake of Covid.

13.4.2 Pedagogical Implications and Directions

Two decades into the twenty-first century, how might we reflect on past research, curricular standards, and accumulated wisdom to prepare students for a future of writing that is largely digital? I began this chapter talking about Plato and Socrates, for three purposes: (1) to compare their "age of anxiety" with the cultural and moral

panic surrounding the rise of various communications technologies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, (2) to underscore the continued relevance of their ideas about dialogue and knowledge, and (3) to show how digital technologies are allowing us to fulfill, so many years later, their beliefs about knowledge acquisition.

Writing is the focal point of this book. As the researchers have told us, it is an extremely complex skill to master. Today, in 2022, there is so much at stake for our students: to be active and engaged in their professional and personal lives, they need to develop all the skills pointed out in the research and standards—the writing process, the mechanics of writing, the difference between literary genres, and learning to write for different audiences—in order to be effective and lucid communicators. But there is something else. If they want to avoid getting lost in the all-enveloping universe of information in which they live, they must learn to become discerning thinkers, readers, and communicators.

This, they can only do through dialogue, through listening and reading what someone else has to say, through speaking and writing about what they believe. Each of these language skills has something to offer the learning process, not just in the sense of "literacy learning" but in the sense of learning with all of ourselves: with our ears, eyes, mouths, and hands (Berninger, 2000). By *seeing* the other with our eyes, by *listening* with our ears, by *speaking* through our mouths, and by *writing* with our hands, we participate in a dialogue. But we need to engage all four of these senses and organs, because it is through this dialogue—as Socrates, Plato, Freud, Vygotsky, and McLuhan remind us—that we may grow as intellectual beings.

McLuhan (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967) reminds us that:

> Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication… It is impossible to understand social and cultural changes without a knowledge of the workings of media. (p. 9)

It is for this reason that it is so challenging to be a student of writing in the third decade of the twenty-first century. The research and experience of the past have given us a "roadmap" for the skills, practices, and strategies that work for developing good writers, but educators—particularly teachers in the classroom—would be wise to observe and learn about those digitally based activities their students are engaging in outside the classroom, to take full advantage of them for the seamless way they permit the practice of more than one language skill at the same time. Yes, it is a delicate balance. Yes, it is trial-and-error. But by paying attention to, and acknowledging the value, of the literacy-related activities students engage in outside the classroom, teachers will be able to craft their own activities that bridge the gap in a creative and productive way for in-school purposes.

Precisely by opening a dialogue with students, teachers can find a way into new forms of writing and writing instruction. In this chapter, I have outlined just a few out-of-school practices that seem useful for in-school writing instruction. Fanfiction presents tremendous opportunities for students to further develop stories that interest them while also focusing on specific skills that they need to develop as writers: they can work on plots, characters, motivations, and sequences. It also allows them to "rewrite" stories or characters that, perhaps, are antiquated, or stereotyped, or unsatisfying to them in some way. Teacher-guided assignments in fanfiction or

online fiction allow students to exercise their creativity and test their abilities and interests in different genres. The dialogic aspect of both these practices, exercised through peer review, comments, and revision, is invaluable for developing students' ability to hone their beliefs and arguments and their expression of them. Wiki writing, the last "phenomenon" cited in this chapter, opens the door to writing in a fascinating way, because it allows students to practice collaborative writing through the construction and editing of a shared document about a topic of common interest. Here, educators can group students by affinity groups in order to give them real-life, authentic collaborative writing tasks which, as we have seen, are an integral part of twenty-first-century work and civic life.

13.5 Final Remarks

In this chapter, I have hoped to offer some insights into how educators can think about bringing current trends in out-of-school reading and writing together with time-honored, evidence-based practices so that they may implement some more contemporary, experimental practices with students, knowing that they are based on the collective knowledge and wisdom we already have about how students learn to write and learn in general. While some researchers and practitioners are comfortable pushing the envelope with potentially "revolutionary" and "transformational" practices, there are many of us who, every semester, must start anew and wonder "what's going to work this year?" There are still many questions to answer. To what extent can or should the role of the teacher change? How might evaluations adapt and change in order to alleviate the burden that often prevents educators from delving more deeply into long-term writing assignments? There is plenty of light at the end of the tunnel: advances in natural language processing (NLP) and automated writing evaluations (AWE) offer a glimpse into a future in which teachers and machines each may focus on what they do best in order to best serve the needs of their students as well as the educational system that, naturally, requires evaluations of some form (Crossley et al., 2021; Kim & McCarthy, 2021; Wilson & Czik, 2016). As James Gee (2015) wisely reminds us, what matters "is where the person is going, not just where they have been…we survive by using the past to move to the future, not by lingering in the past."

As readers, writers, teachers, and educators, this is the wisdom that will see us well into the next phases of literacy learning and learning in general. As Plato, Socrates, Freud, and Vygotsky would agree, our learning is social. Only by exploring our past, our relationships, and the tried-and-true practices of old, in dialogue and context, will we arrive at new destinations in our pursuit of knowledge, with the security and wisdom of past experiences and the courage and anticipation of the new: elicit, clarify, test, and decide.

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