
Fanfiction, Poetry, Blogs, and Journals: A Case Study of the Connection between Extracurricular and Academic Writings

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There has been a recent spate of interest in the literate lives of students. Numerous researchers (Grabill, et. al., 2010; Haven, 2009; Roozen, 2008; Roozen, 2009; Roozen, 2010; Shrum, 2011; Wardle, 2007) have researched the multiple discourse communities that students participate in and transfer, repurposing, and connection across discourse communities and genres. In his numerous studies, Kevin Roozen (2008; 2009; 2010) has studied several students and found that the methods used in discourse communities, be it for organization, writing process, etc., have often transferred from one discourse community to another. After his study of two students, named Kate and Charles in his articles, he concluded that in many ways Kate's fanfiction (writing using the characters, setting, storyline, etc. of a movie, TV show, book, etc.) activities had helped her understand numerous assignments both as an undergraduate and a graduate in college (2009), and that Charles' activities and experience with journalism, poetry, and stand-up comedy helped him with some of his college courses (2008). Through further research (a study of two college students), Shrum has supported Roozen's findings, concluding that the experience of Nikki and Jack (pseudonyms) in their various discourse communities had aided them in other discourse communities on occasions. However, at times their outside literacy experiences didn't help with school tasks (Shrum, 2011). Other researchers (Sommers, 1980) have compared the revision strategies of student writers and experienced writers, concluding that students have poor revision strategies. However, Nancy Sommers considers student writers as not being "experienced" and her research was only done concerning academic writings. A person's experience writing varies with their discourse communities and genres, and with this varying experience come a difference in the quality of revision. In her article on the transfer from First-Year Composition in other academic writings, Elizabeth Wardle (2007) identifies what students in her study had identified as an engaging writing assignment:

- The assignment doesn't have one "right" answer but is authentic to each student.

- The prompt for the writing assignment is thought-provoking so students think about the assignment outside of class and when not writing.
- Students have some freedom while being given the necessary structure to help them succeed.
- The assignment is not simple regurgitation or summary of fact.
- The assignment relates in some way to students' interests/future.
- The assignment is challenging, not easily within reach.
- The assignment clearly relates to the rest of the course content.
- The assignment is intended to achieve a clear purpose.
- The student understands what is being asked of them in the assignment and why. (p. 77-8)

Many of these characteristics could be applied to fanfiction, and, in fact, explain why most of the participants in my study were so engaged with fanfiction.

While this research is extensive, it is lacking in some areas, bringing up many questions:

- How does a person's engagement in a discourse community or genre differ depending on their motivation?
- Is there connection, repurposing and/or transfer across fanfiction and other discourse communities and genres?
- Are student writers really as "inexperienced" as Sommers makes them out to be?
- Could student writers have more complex revision strategies than Sommers found them to have?

To answer these questions, I conducted a study that examined four experienced fanfiction authors, varying in age and location, focusing on the discourse communities they participate in; primarily, I wanted to analyze how fanfiction may have affected their other discourse communities and vice versa. The study grew to include their varying motivation, engagement, and methods of revision in their discourse communities. The ages of the participants varied, ranging from a middle school student to a college student, as well as their locations, one from the South, the North, and the West (USA), and the fourth from Australia. The results of the study support the findings of those researchers who have found that students participate in multiple discourse communities (Grabill, et. al., 2010; Haven, 2009; Roozen, 2008; Roozen, 2009; Roozen 2010; Shrum, 2011; Wardle, 2007). There have been few instances where the participants' discourse communities outside of fanfiction had conflicted with or transferred into fanfiction; often the participants' fanfiction is so different from what they write in their other discourse communities that they believe none of the other discourse communities affect their fanfiction. In contradiction to Nancy Sommers' findings in her article "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," the results of this research have suggested that these young writers, although students, have revision strategies that more closely resemble those of the experienced adult writers Sommers studied, rather than the student writers.

In this article, I will first explain my research methods; overview each case (Elizabeth, Belinda, Laura, and Sarah), presenting their fanfiction experience first, then discussing their other discourse communities and genres; then conclude with a brief summary of the findings.

Methods

All four participants are fanfiction writers that I have encountered through my involvement in the fanfiction community for the movie 9 on the FanFiction.net website. Prior to the study, I sent them a message through the private messaging system on the FanFiction.net website asking if they'd be willing to participate in a study, briefly explaining the study and how I would conduct the

interview. All four replied that they were very much willing to participate. The participants (Elizabeth, Belinda, Laura, and Sarah) are all female and vary in age and location. Elizabeth, the youngest, is a middle school student from Georgia; Belinda is a high school student from Australia; Sarah is a high school student from Michigan; and Laura, the eldest, is a college student from California. Each participant signed a consent form (and in the case for those under 18, a parent signed the consent form as well) giving me permission to interview them.

This study consisted of an initial interview with open-ended questions and an optional text-based interview where the participants were asked open-ended questions concerning a fanfiction and a text from one of their other discourse communities. Due to the participants' location, the interviews were conducted through either email or the private messaging system on the FanFiction.net website. The data was collected by copying the question asked in the interview and the answer given and pasting it into a Microsoft Word document, having a Word document assigned specifically to each participant. Prior to writing each case, I created a new Word document for each participant, in which I created headings on the basis of how I wanted to organize the case and organized the participant's answers depending on which heading it fell under.

Case Studies

In this section, I present each of my participants, describing their fanfiction, other discourse communities and genres, and their revision strategies in these discourse communities and genres.

Case One: Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a middle school student from Georgia who is a diligent and motivated writer. She was brought to my attention because of her well-written fanfiction for Shane Acker's feature-film *9* and the helpful advice that she has left on my first fanfiction, also for this movie. During this study, she participated in an open-ended interview and a text-based interview. In the text-based interview, I collected three texts which I analyzed and interviewed her about: two of her fanfictions and a poem she's written in her free time. She participates in multiple discourse communities and genres, including fanfiction, academic, extracurricular (non-fanfiction), journaling, and writing competitions. These communities vary greatly; each requires a set of skills that the others do not. For instance, in fanfiction the writer can write however he/she wants, but the best stories are those that are well-detailed and very descriptive with a well-developed plot whereas academic writing has a strict format and prompt to follow, and the emphasis is (more commonly) on grammar and spelling rather than the actual content.

When asked which of these discourse communities was the most important to her, she replied:

Pushing aside the fact that getting good grades is a passion for me, I would have to say writing in my free time. I find my true talent in that, besides being given a topic and told to write on it. Not only that, but writing on your own time and ideas is much less stressful. (Personal Interview, Oct. 15, 2011)

She gave a similar answer when asked in which discourse community she had the most confidence in her writing:

I am much more confident in what I do in my free time, like what I put on Fanfiction[.net] for example. With my free time comes, of course, my own time decisions. I can choose how long I really want to think about what I've written other than given a deadline and such. I also am more comfortable with picking my own topics. I have the abilities to expand or decrease the

plot as I wish, and really get into what I'm writing. With school topics I just get uninterested. (Personal Interview, Oct. 15, 2011)

As seen in these answers, Elizabeth values the writing done in her free time (her fanfiction and non-fanfiction writing) above her school-related writing. This is because it conforms to her interests, she can devote all the time she needs to this writing, and can flex her writing skills where school writing may constrain them.

Elizabeth's Fanfiction

Although involvement in the fanfiction community for the movie 9 brought her to my attention, she also writes for multiple other fanfiction communities. Since she began writing fanfiction midway through 2011, she has written about ten fanfictions for around ten different fanfiction communities. Her involvement in this discourse community began with reading fanfiction for a video game she was a fan of, but grew to writing for this video game as well as other games, books, and movies she was interested in once she created an account on FanFiction.net.

For Elizabeth, the hardest part with learning to write fanfiction was learning how the FanFiction.net website worked. She says that she really didn't have any difficult writing fanfiction stories other than struggling with how to get a story started, how to "get every character involved, hint what the plot could be about, and other small details that need to be in a chapter are just a few examples" (Personal interview, Oct. 20, 2011).

Writing Process

Elizabeth described herself as "technically hav[ing] no process" for writing fanfiction. However, her interview comments suggest that she does have one. Maybe her idea of a writing process is limited to what schools declare as a writing process: a strict order of planning, drafting, and editing. In one of our interviews through the private messaging system on FanFiction.net, she explained that she'll get ideas for potential stories from watching a movie, reading a book, or playing a game, then "jot" it down and start writing her story; after this, she will "review over it, see what is decent and what is not, and add or take away information that may or may not be needed."

An important aspect behind every writer is inspiration. Elizabeth's inspiration for her fanfiction is mainly just the movie, book, or game that her stories are based off of. However, she later told me that she is also inspired by her "want to be a part of the FanFiction[.net] website" because "everyone on the site enjoys the same thing: writing" and that she is "very glad to be surrounded by that."

Elizabeth's Versatility

Elizabeth's complex writing process and deep motivation with writing fanfiction lead to incredibly versatility in her writing. Her ability to easily shift her tone across her stories is a remarkable gift for any writer, much less one who is so young. This versatility became obvious in the portion of the text-based interview concerning two of her fanfictions. Her two stories discussed during the interview, "Armor of a Guardian" based off of the book series/movie *The Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole* and "New Earth" based off of the movie 9, presented two drastically different tones. The difference in these tones was evident from the moment you start reading them. Below is the introduction to her fanfiction "Armor of a Guardian":

"And so they say, Naira escaped. And Kludd? Well, Kludd was never found...Should I stop?" Soren paused in his story, wings spread and an amusing smile on his beak.
"Wha'?" One owlet chirped. "Please, don't stop! There must be more, there must be!"
Soren was about to answer when Ezylyrb entered, laughing wholeheartedly.
"Ah, listen to them Soren." He playfully jumped at an owlet, drawing a fit of giggles from it.
"They want more stories! Let's not disappoint them." He walked to the door in the hollow, and

sighed in contentment. "There's a good storm brewing," he spread out his wings, the feathers slowly rocking in the breeze, "and hopefully, it will be chock-full of baggy wrinkles!" He lofted into the air, flying in the direction of the Sea of Hoolemere. Soren shook his head, smiling, and swiveling his head to the side, nodded to his band. Together, Soren, Twilight, Digger, Gylfie, and Otulissa took to the skies, silently following their teacher as they met each others excited gaze. Everyone was content, except for one, who was lost in his thoughts.

The tone, which is evident here, is light and playful through a majority of the story, but as hinted at the end of introduction, it does shift to a more serious tone at times. However, this tone is very different from the tone in "New Earth", where the tone, which is held throughout the story, is a much darker one than that of "Armor of a Guardian":

They say that the world is a haven; that it will offer hope and survival for everyone and everything. No matter where you were, just like the creatures that inhabited the region, you could survive, because if an animal could, humans could.

It was quickly proved false.

In fact, the human race was wiped out...completely. Without mercy, pity, or falter, they were destroyed, leaving the Earth without a trace. The only way to tell it had been inhabited was by the cruel effects of the...war. A hole was ripped into the sky, and the sunlight destroyed everything. The killing of the plants lead to the death of the animals, the death of the plants and animals eventually killed off whatever lucky humans were in hiding.

I had stumbled upon a few bunkers in my lifetime, and trust me when I say, I have never forgotten. The smell of deceased flesh had eventually disappeared, fortunately, but the skeletons were never easy to get by. I couldn't imagine the fear of the unknown; of being stuck in a metal hole for years, too scared to come into the world, for the pure horror of wondering if you did, would a mechanical beast take your life?

Although this is only a portion of the introduction to "New Earth", the dark and serious tone, which is present throughout the entire story, is evident.

Elizabeth explained that many things contributed to this drastic change in tone: experience writing fanfiction (for "Armor of a Guardian" was one of her first fanfictions, while "New Earth" is her most recent one), realizing that she needed to be more patient and take her time, and the difference in theme and tone between 9 and *The Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole*.

Elizabeth's Other Discourse Communities and Genres

Elizabeth is involved in a number of other discourse communities including academic writing, extracurricular writing separate from fanfiction, writing in a journal, and writing competitions. However, her involvement in these discourse communities did not influence her fanfiction as much as previous research would lead us to expect. The only evidence found of influence of another discourse community in fanfiction was the transfer from her English teacher's (who she's had for several years) focus on improving vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and descriptiveness.

School

As stated above, Elizabeth described her academic writing as having aided her fanfiction in that her English teacher (who she's had for a few years) strongly encourages improving students' vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and descriptiveness and that she has incorporated what she's learned from her teacher into her stories the best that she can. Other than that, Elizabeth feels that there is no other transfer between her fanfiction and academic writing because she feels that there is a big difference between the topics of her fanfiction and academic writing. She feels that with her

academic writing, the topics are just too bland and constrained for her to flex her true writing capabilities.

Journal

Elizabeth was inspired to keep a journal by a story she had once read about a man who had recorded every day of his life for forty years. After reading this story, she wanted to follow in his footsteps “at least a little,” recording the small events in her life. Although she is inspired to keep a journal, she describes it as being very brief and not very detailed; “scribble” as she called it in an interview, the “plainest kind of writing possible.” This, combined with her little mention of this activity in the interviews, leads me to believe that this genre has very little influence (if any) on her fanfiction.

Writing Competitions

Elizabeth became involved with writing fairs and contests through her own interest in the events, viewing them as a way to practice for her other stories, and also through encouragement from her teachers (who have noticed her talent). She described the writing done in her writing competitions as being creative stories she can choose her own topics for. Although it is because she can choose her own topics that she enjoys this activity, she feels that she focuses more on what she feels the judges want to see rather than what she feels is best. There is a very strict writing process she must follow for her writing competitions that includes prewriting, drafting, revising/editing, and publishing, very similar to the writing process she follows for her academic writing. There are many similarities between this discourse community and school, including the writing process and audience. It is because of these similarities, that she feels that her writing competitions have little influence on her fanfiction.

Comparison of Texts

In the text-based interview, not only did I interview her about two of her fanfiction pieces but also about a poem she has written in her free time: “Harvest Moon.” Her process with writing “Harvest Moon” was very similar to her writing process for her fanfiction pieces. Her methods of planning, writing and revising her poem were similar to her fanfiction texts in that it was just a “matter of getting all of the information down” then reviewing it to see that aspects of the story/poem turned out the way she intended them to. Another aspect that this poem was similar to her fanfiction was the similarity in her state of mind while writing. She mentioned writing with a “darker state of mind” in “Harvest Moon”, very similar to her state of mind while writing “New Earth”; this was due to both containing dark images and themes of loss, battle, and death.

Summary

Elizabeth participates in a number of discourse communities and genres including fanfiction, academic, extracurricular (non-fanfiction), journaling, and writing competitions. Fanfiction is the discourse community she values the most and has the highest confidence in because of her freedom in writing what she wants, how she wants—a freedom that is rarely, if at all, present in her other discourse communities and genres. Her deep motivation and complex writing process has led to her fanfiction writing having great versatility and a revision process that is more complex than Sommers’ research gives student writers credit for.

The results of my interviews with the next case participant, Belinda, give very similar findings. Belinda’s fanfiction isn’t nearly as versatile when it comes to shifting her tone so drastically across her writings as Elizabeth does. This, however, does not make Belinda any less of a gifted or experienced writer, nor her stories of any less quality; for her stories normally revolve around the same themes so the quality of her writings—as well as the development of the plot—can be her main focus.

Case Two: Belinda

Belinda, a motivated and punctilious writer, is a high school student from Australia. As numerous researchers have already found (Grabill, et. al., 2010; Haven, 2009; Roozen, 2008; Roozen, 2009; Roozen, 2010; Shrum, 2011; Wardle, 2007), Belinda participates in numerous discourse communities including fanfiction, school, extracurricular, and blogging. Belinda takes great pride in her writing but feels that she has the most confidence in her fanfiction, something she also feels is her most important discourse community. During this study, she participated in an initial interview with open-ended questions and a text-based interview where she provided me with a fanfiction and a poem she had written as an assignment in her French class (translated into English).

Belinda's Fanfiction

Belinda was brought to my attention because of her vivid and well-written fanfiction for the movie *9*, in particular her most recent story "The Apartment." Although it was because of her fanfiction for the movie *9* that I had decided to interview her, she writes for multiple other fanfiction communities, having written about 24 stories for 8 different fanfiction communities, mostly for *9* and Disney (revolving around Mickey Mouse and his friends) posted on FanFiction.net and DeviantArt. Nikki, Shrum's participant who was also a fanfiction writer, was not very attentive to her grammar and spelling in her writing; however, Belinda takes pride in being a fanfiction author who pays particular attention to the quality of her grammar and spelling, because, as she said, "the amount of stories you find on this website [FanFiction.net] these days that are practically incomprehensible due to their atrocious lack of care for grammar/spelling is really sad."

Belinda began writing fanfiction in 2007, and mostly writes stories with a romantic element; however, she has touched stories that are family or friendship centered. Her involvement in this discourse community began when she heard that her cousin and a friend were writing a Harry Potter fanfiction and was inspired to write one of her own. She didn't feel too confident in the quality of this first fanfiction but as she continued to write more fanfiction, her confidence in the quality of her fanfiction increased.

The only difficulty Belinda has mentioned to have experienced while writing fanfiction is that if she isn't "in the zone" she can't write. It is because of this that it could take her months to complete a story, and the reason why there could be weeks or months between updates of a story.

Writing Process

Belinda states that all but two types of her fanfiction texts follow the same kind of writing process:

It all starts with a scene in my head. I usually think something up by listening to music, and once I have this one scene figured out, I'll imagine more and more scenes. If I feel motivated enough or feel as if I can come up with enough ideas to write the story, I begin to write. ...most of my planning happens as I write each new chapter. (Personal interview, Nov. 3, 2011)

The time it takes her to write a story, or a chapter of a story depends on how much inspiration she has and how deep in "the writing zone" she is. If she is not really in the mood to write, she may "just write a sentence or two and then leave it," and she may not touch a story for months before having "a light bulb moment" and writing a chapter in a "decent timeframe" (to her, this is about 2 hours).

The two types of fanfictions that she has written that don't follow this process are her fanfiction "The Apartment," which is an adopted story, and when she collaborated with another writer in writing a fanfiction.

Belinda adopted the idea behind “The Apartment,” a fanfiction for the movie *9*, from a user who was posting ideas for potential fanfictions up for adoption on FanFiction.net. It was on this website that she had encountered the idea and, before contacting the user and asking to adopt the story, she first figured out the past of the main character and the events that would lead to the climax. After being given permission to adopt the story, she shared with the user some of her ideas for the story (such as the events prior to the story and the characters’ personalities) prior to actually beginning to write. She again consulted with the user before posting the first few chapters to assure she wasn’t going to manipulate her original idea. However, for the most recent chapters she has taken on a “more independent approach.”

Belinda has mentioned writing two fanfictions in collaboration with other authors; she talks about the one that she has done for the movie *9* more so than her other one, the first one she did, in her interview. Based on how she described this first collaboration fanfiction, it sounds like either this story was not as successful as the most recent one or that she was not satisfied in the quality of her writing. In writing this fanfiction, she and the other author both contributed ideas for the story and alternated who wrote the chapters.

Belinda has said numerous times over the course of our interviews that her fanfiction writing was heavily inspired by music that she listens to. She mentioned two stories in particular that involve Mickey and Minnie Mouse (along with other characters like Donald and Goofy) where the idea for the story was inspired by songs she’d listened to.

The writing Belinda does in school is dependent on the task. Most of the prompts she’s assigned she feels are very similar to fanfiction, if you look at them “in that light.”

Her mood and personal experiences are also inspirations for her stories. When Belinda is in a happy mood she is quoted in saying that she writes “really fluffy stuff,” stories full of cute romantic moments between a pairing, whereas when she’s depressed she writes “angsty” poetry. She has mentioned one story in particular, a fanfiction for the movie *9*, “Her Furnace,” which was inspired by a personal experience. In the story, the main character wakes up to find herself unable to get warm, only finding warmth in another character, her romantic interest, and using him as her “furnace” for the night. Belinda mentions that this story was thought up when she woke up in the middle of the night and was really cold.

Belinda’s Other Discourse Communities and Genres

Although fanfiction is Belinda’s primary discourse community, she participates in numerous other discourse communities and genres including school, extracurricular, posting on Facebook, and blogging. The extracurricular writing and what she posts on Facebook is poetry that she writes that “typically doesn’t rhyme,” mostly about how she “feels at the time.”

School

Belinda’s writing for school involves creative writing assignments, a description of a school trip to see a musical, and a story which had ended up in her school’s yearbook.

The piece that had made it into the yearbook was a very condensed version of a story she had written for an English assignment, where she had to write a short story based on the themes of a short story they had read in class. Her teacher had liked her story and asked for a copy to put in the yearbook. Considering that this assignment sounds very similar to fanfiction, it could explain why she was so engaged in this assignment and why the quality of the writing impressed her teacher. However, upon reading her piece in the yearbook, it became obvious to Belinda that only a fraction of it had actually made it into the yearbook. This did disappoint her but she understood it was just a matter of space in the yearbook.

The writing she does in school is dependent on the task. Most of the prompts she's assigned she feels are very similar to fanfiction, if you look at them "in that light." She explains what she means by this by describing a creative writing assignment she had a few years ago:

In year 9 [9th grade] we had a creative writing elective (chosen class) in which we would write our own stories using a list of prompts throughout the year; one I have kept was 'Red Shoes,' a prompt which I used to write a short piece about a girl who is supposed to be a more modern Dorothy Gale... only instead it is a girl named Dot who I think had OCD and was also prone to panic attacks. Instead of ruby slippers she had sparkly red Converse shoes. (Personal interview, Nov. 2, 2011)

She may feel that the prompts for some school assignments are similar to fanfiction, but she made it clear that the planning methods that teachers force students to use conflict with how she writes and plans best, saying that they "don't understand that I don't work that way."

Poetry

The writing that Belinda does on her free time and on Facebook is poetry. These poems sometimes rhyme (however, they don't most of the time) and often reflect how she feels at the time, usually being angst poetry. She describes her method of writing poetry as just "writing down sentences that rhyme and make sense together."

Blogging

Blogging is something that Belinda rarely does. She describes it as something that "never got off the ground." In her blogging, she talked about subjects she was angry about or things that she enjoyed; it was pretty much what you'd write in a journal/diary just not her secrets. I assume that this wasn't one of her more important writing activities considering how little she mentioned it.

A Comparison of Texts

In the text-based interview, I interviewed Belinda about two texts she had written: a poem and a fanfiction text. The fanfiction she chose to be interviewed on was "The Apartment," her fanfiction for the movie *9* that, as mentioned earlier, was a story that was adopted from another writer; it is also a work-in-progress. The poem she supplied me with, "Je Voudrais Voir Votre Sourire" ("I Want To See Your Smile"), was one that she had written for an assignment in her French class; she had originally written it in French, but then translated it into English.

Belinda feels that there are no similarities between these two texts other than the love theme. Her writing process differs between the two because she tries to get her school writings "as perfect as possible," whereas with fanfiction she is more laid back. I, however, do see something that is similar between her poem and her fanfictions. Although it is a little too early in "The Apartment" to see the romantic tone, the tone of the romance in her poem is very similar to the tone she has in the romance of her more developed fanfictions.

The only revisions that Belinda made to her poem were just correcting grammatical errors, no major changes to what she wrote about. However, "The Apartment" did undergo some revision in plot, based on the feedback she received from the user whose idea the story was originally. Many of her other fanfictions have undergone similar revisions as "The Apartment." Sommers (1980) claims that the revision process of students is limited to only word choice and grammar; Belinda has already proved that her revision process is beyond this by describing that she has revised the plot at times. Therefore, she has described a revision process much more complex than Sommers claims that student writers have.

Summary

Belinda participates in a number of discourse communities and genres including fanfiction, academic, poetry, and blogging. Fanfiction is the discourse community that she values the most and has the most confidence in, and, like Elizabeth, this is because of the freedom to write what she wants, how she wants. It is probably the lack of this freedom in academic writing that results in her frustration with it. Belinda manages to work against this frustration and is highly motivated and driven to write in the highest quality possible with all of her discourse communities. Since her revision process is complex and is not done merely during one time period, it is incredibly accurate, resulting in a quality of writing that she takes great pride in.

My next research participant, Laura, is just as motivated and has just as complex a writing process as Elizabeth and Belinda. Unlike my other participants, Laura is a college student whose involvement in art and creative writing has led her to develop an interest in pursuing a major in a relevant field. Like Elizabeth and Belinda, she highly values fanfiction; however, it is in her academic writing that she has the most confidence.

Case Three: Laura

Laura, a college student from California, is a devoted and diligent writer. During this study, she participated in an initial interview with open-ended questions and a brief text-based interview where she provided me with a fanfiction and one of her original stories. She participates in a number of different discourse communities and genres including fanfiction, academic, extracurricular, and a journal. She has an amazing imagination, having written about 50 fanfictions and over 20 original pieces (stories and poems).

Laura's fanfiction is what she values the most because "it displays the largest collection of [her] writings from any community." However, this is not where she believes to have the most confidence in her writing. It is in her academic writing that she has the most confidence because her assignments also include creative writing, and she receives mostly positive feedback.

Not only is Laura a talented writer, but also a rather talented artist, having a large collection of fanart and other artwork posted on her DeviantArt account. Although she is unsure what she wants to major in, her experience and interest in "storytelling through print and visual media" has driven her to become interested in pursuing a degree in related major, such as illustration or creative writing.

Laura's Fanfiction

Laura was brought to my attention by her vivid and well-developed fanfiction pieces for the movie *9*. Although it was her fanfiction pieces for this movie that I decided to interview her about, she has written overall 48 fanfiction pieces for about 14 different fanfiction communities. A majority of her fanfictions are written for the play *Little Shop of Horrors* and the movies *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Happy Feet*, and *9*.

Laura has been writing fanfiction for about four years, mostly in the genres of romance and family. Her involvement in this discourse community began in high school, when she became a fan of Tim Burton's film *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and became involved on the "primary fan site" for the movie. It was on this site that she had first encountered fanfiction, and it was during her sophomore year that she wrote her first fanfiction and posted it on this website.

She learned to write fanfiction by simply "trying it," and as she continued to write, she figured out "what worked and what didn't." Her only difficulty when it came to learning to write fanfiction was having to "learn [her] style." To explain what she meant by this, she clarified that a lot of her older stories had too much description leading to an undesirably high word count. By having to recognize her style, I can assume that she adjusted the aspects of her writing that didn't please her so to improve to quality of her writing.

Writing Process

Laura's process for writing a piece of fanfiction varies. Usually she'll write out a summary of the story and figure out where she wants to divide it into chapters, but sometimes she'll "jump right into writing a story with little to no planning." Before starting a story and devoting time to it, she likes to "play around" with scenes from her idea and see if the idea is interesting enough to devote a full story to. For stories that have been requested by readers and/or other authors, she returns to what the requested story is based off of and pays attention to the characters before beginning to write.

Laura has many inspirations for her fanfiction. Positive reviews, music, the movie/play/book that her stories are based off of, and family all encourage her to write:

[T]here are a lot of things that help me write and get me inspired. Encouraging reviews are my main inspiration. Music allows me to separate from life and sit down and write. Experiencing the movies, plays, or books the fics are based on usually makes the wheels in my head turn. On a more personal note, I often dedicate my fanfictions to my deceased grandmother and father, as they were both inspirations in my life. (Personal interview, Nov. 22, 2011)

Laura's Other Discourse Communities and Genres

Besides fanfiction, Laura participates in a number of other discourse communities and genres including extracurricular, academic, and a journal. Laura's extracurricular writing, and sometimes her academic writing, take the form of original stories.

Extracurricular

Laura's extracurricular writing involves the numerous original pieces she has written. She has written over 20 original pieces (both stories and poems), most of these having been posted online on her Fictionpress.com (a website devoted to original creations) portfolio. Her original stories follow close to the same writing process as her fanfiction does: writing it and then reading it over and revising until she can't find any more errors. Just like with her fanfiction, music and her family are heavy inspirations in her original writing. Also, considering that most of her original stories are about animals, fantasy, and the supernatural, many things in nature, horror, and her imagination inspires her to write.

School

Laura's experience with fanfiction and her original pieces has led her to take classes revolving around her interest in creative writing. Because of this, her academic writings involve mostly essays and short stories. Like her original stories, her academic writing follows the same writing process as her fanfiction; essentially just writing, and then reading over and revising. Considering that many of her school writings are short stories, it can be assumed that these have the same inspiration as her original projects. However, her essays are inspired only by her opinions and morals.

Journal

The journal that Laura keeps, which can also be considered a blog of sorts, is on her DeviantArt account, and most of her entries can be seen by other users. In her journal, she posts about her personal life and stories that she is working on, but also includes other topics. She is a "little less careful" with her writing in her journal since it's mainly just a social activity, but her writing process is essentially the same as her other discourse communities.

Comparison of Texts

In our brief text-based interview, I interviewed Laura concerning two of her texts: her fanfiction “Clumsy” written for the movie *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and an original story she had written for a project in her creative writing course, “The Siege of Carvak.” Both stories were planned out in a similar fashion, with her starting off with just an idea or the whole plot in mind and both being inspired by her interests (interactions between the two main characters of *The Nightmare Before Christmas* for “Clumsy” and her interest in dragons and fantasy for “The Siege of Carvak”). In writing the stories, she let both go where they’d please, letting the conversations and twists and turns in the stories come as even a surprise to her. Both stories were also revised with a similar method, with her writing an early draft and proofreading it several times before asking for feedback on it from her peers. After receiving feedback and suggestions from her peers, she would then revise the piece some more before deciding that the piece was presentable. This revision process is fairly constant across all of her discourse communities and genres.

There are many aspects of her writing that remain the same across her discourse communities and genres including her writing process and inspiration. Since she wrote a lot of fanfiction before she started writing original stories and blogging, what she has learned from writing fanfiction may have transferred a little into these discourse communities and genres.

Summary

Laura is highly motivated and engaged in writing fanfiction and original stories. It is because of this high interest in creative writing that she is so engaged with her academic writing, something that consists of creative writing assignments. There are many aspects of her writing that remain the same across her discourse communities and genres including her writing process and inspiration. Since she wrote a lot of fanfiction before she started writing original stories and blogging, what she has learned from writing fanfiction may have transferred a little into these discourse communities and genres.

My next case participant is different from the others; for although she has written fanfiction, and actively participates in the discourse community, it is not her primary discourse community. Her primary discourse community, the one she holds the highest value in and the most confidence in, is roleplaying.

Case Four: Sarah

Sarah is a high school student from Michigan and a highly motivated writer. During this study, she participated in an initial interview consisting of open-ended questions. She participates in a number of discourse communities including fanfiction, roleplaying, and extracurricular activities. However, unlike the other participants, her activity in fanfiction has been limited as a writer; she is more active as a reader. In fact, the discourse community she values the most and has the most confidence in is her roleplaying, which is done on a roleplaying website that she is very active in. She values this discourse community so highly because it is here that she spends most of her time writing and where her writing is of a higher quality.

Sarah’s Fanfiction

It was Sarah’s participation in the fanfiction community for the movie 9 which brought her to my attention. She has only published one fanfiction (that I am aware of): a well-written and rather deep poem for the movie 9. Although she hasn’t written many fanfictions, it was because of the helpful advice she had left on the fanfiction that I have been working on that I was driven to interview her, for she spoke as an experienced writer.

Sarah has been involved with the FanFiction.net community for about three years; however, her writing has been limited. She learned of fanfiction and the FanFiction.net website from a friend and decided to become involved in the community, particularly the fanfiction for a movie she had recently become a fan of, *9*. She had learned how to write fanfiction by observing the fanfiction of others and how they write, and learning to incorporate her own ideas into that style.

Writing Process

Sarah's fanfiction is heavily inspired by music; so, her process for writing a piece of fanfiction includes listening to music "non-stop" for inspiration, and trying to "picture the entire story as a film in [her] head." From this, she'll normally have a vague idea of what she wants the story to look like, but she says that she's learned to just let her story "go where it pleases."

As mentioned, music is a heavy inspiration for Sarah's fanfiction. However, she has also mentioned that many of the works of other fanfiction writers have been inspiration for her stories.

Sarah's Other Discourse Communities and Genres

Sarah participates in a few other discourse communities and genres, including the discourse community she values the most, roleplaying, and her extracurricular writing. Sarah's extracurricular writing involves stories done purely for fun between her and her friends.

Roleplaying

Sarah described the writing done in her roleplaying as being "comical, casual, or very structured." She termed this form of roleplaying that she participates in as being "novel style": "Novel style' is the type of roleplaying. It's posting in larger paragraphs instead of lines of dialogue followed by a little action," (Personal Interview, Oct. 24, 2011). From this, it can be assumed that this style of roleplaying follows a certain format that all, or most, participants in this discourse community use.

Sarah's inspirations and writing process in roleplaying is essentially the same as in her fanfiction. The only difference she has mentioned between her fanfiction and roleplaying is that her roleplaying may be a "little more thought out"; however, music still heavily inspires her and visualization and letting her story "go where it pleases" are still her techniques for writing.

Extracurricular

Sarah's extracurricular writing is comprised mostly of "fun, random" stories involving a few of her characters and her friends' characters." Since this is done purely for fun, her writing here is very casual and rather comical. Her inspirations and writing process here is the same as in her other discourse communities: heavily inspired by music, and planned out through visualization and letting her imagination take control of her writing.

Summary

There are many aspects of Sarah's writing that connect across her discourse communities and genres. Her inspirations and writing process are fairly constant across her discourse communities and genres. Each of her discourse communities or genres could have contributed to the other in some way—roleplaying more so than the others because of the amount of time she spends and the value she holds in this discourse community.

Summary of Findings

As Wardle found in her study, a student's level of engagement on a writing assignment depends on his or her motivation. She identified the characteristics of what the students who participated in her study considered an engaging writing assignment. Many of the characteristics

identified could be supported by the findings of my study. One of the characteristics of an engaging assignment that all of my participants identified as what they enjoyed most about fanfiction or the discourse community they valued the most, was having “some autonomy/freedom while being given the necessary structure to help them succeed” (Wardle, 2007, p. 78) Most fanfiction pieces are written with the same format/style, being very similar to a novel. However, this doesn’t mean one has to write in this format; writers have complete freedom to write about what they want, how they want to in fanfiction. It is the lack of this freedom in academic writing that is the reason why many of my participants, Elizabeth and Belinda in particular, have grown frustrated with academic writings. Another characteristic of an engaging writing assignment is that the “assignment relates in some way to students’ interests/future” (Wardle, 2007, p. 78). This is another reason why my participants are so engaged in many of the discourse communities and genres. The fanfiction that my participants write is done purely because they are interested in creative writing and in whatever their fanfiction is based off of, be it a movie, book, play, etc. The writing relating to their interests also plays an important role in many of the other discourse communities and genres that my participants are highly engaged in, such as roleplaying, journals, poetry, and writing original stories. Many of my participants have expressed disdain for academic writing because of the lack of interesting topics; however, others, Belinda and Laura in particular, have expressed interest in academic writing because of being assigned a writing topic that relates to their interest in creative writing.

As Kevin Roozen (2008; 2009; 2010) and Autumn Shrum (2011) found in their research, my cases also suggest there has been some evidence of connection, repurposing, and transfer across the discourse communities of my participants. This is mainly because many of their discourse communities and genres relate to their interest in creative writing. All of my participants have expressed that their writing processes are fairly similar across all of their discourse communities and genres. By “writing process,” I mean how they plan what they’re going to write and their process during actually writing. Their revision process is another thing that connects across their discourse communities, for many of the participants have expressed that their revision process is fairly constant across their discourse communities. One case of repurposing from one discourse community to the next is in the case of Laura, concerning her fanfiction and original stories. Prior to beginning to write original stories, Laura had plenty of experience writing fanfiction. Since these are both forms of creative writing, many techniques and processes that Laura used in writing fanfiction could have been repurposed to be used for her original stories. Another case of repurposing is with Sarah and her roleplaying. Sarah has expressed that the people she interacts with on her roleplaying site have helped her greatly with her writing. Considering that this is where she spends a majority of her time writing, there is a possibility that what she has learned from this discourse community has been repurposed to be used in other discourse communities and genres. A few of my participants have expressed belief that knowledge of grammar, spelling, and vocabulary they have gained from school has transferred into their numerous other discourse communities and genres.

My participants have complex planning methods and writing processes, and the quality of their stories suggest that their revision processes is much more efficient than Sommers gives student writers credit for.

In “Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers,” Nancy Sommers researched and identified the revision strategies of twenty student writers and twenty experienced adult writers. She found that student writers had a very narrow view of revision, seeing it as only being a linear process and being constrained to only word choice; while the experienced writers viewed revision as being not defined by time (unlike the students’ view of it being linear) and by finding the best way to get their point across (Sommers, 1980). From those I

have interviewed, I can assume that these young writers, although students, have the revision strategies more closely resembling those of experienced adult writers.

Revision is never a linear process to these young writers; they do most of their revision and restructuring while they are in the process of writing. This revision may pertain to only word choice or it may pertain to the whole storyline. For example, Belinda shares an experience she had while writing a chapter to one of her fanfictions where she decided that it “wasn't going anywhere and simply scrapped it and started over.” This process was never reported by the student writers that Sommers had interviewed; it was only reported by the experienced adult writers.

In her research article “Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers,” Nancy Sommers claims that students are inexperienced writers, particularly when it comes to revision (1980). However, the findings of my study contradict this claim. My participants have complex planning methods and writing processes, and the quality of their stories suggest that their revision processes is much more efficient than Sommers gives student writers credit for. Many of the fanfiction pieces of my participants have been highly praised by readers and other writers for both their content and quality. Several of my participants have also received praise and recognition from their teachers and other writing professionals for the writing (creative writing in particular) they have done outside of fanfiction. From the recognition they have received for their writing both in and outside of fanfiction, it can be assumed that they are, in fact, much more experienced with than what Sommers claims to have found in her article.

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