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Running head: DISCOURSE IN FAN FICTION COMMUNITIES

Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

ANALYZING DISCOURSE IN FAN FICTION COMMUNITIES FOR EVIDENCE OF  
WRITING INSTRUCTION

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Learning Technologies

by

Hue-An Wren

August, 2014

Paul Sparks, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## VITA

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June 2004 - present

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- Served as a mentor teacher to numerous student teachers enabling them to become credentialed teachers meeting the criteria for the state of California.
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- Substitute taught for a district with 24 elementary schools and experienced in all grade levels.
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- Trained and monitored grade-level teams on the implementation of research-based teaching strategies within the classroom.
- Lead the Fundraising committee to raise funds for the Parent Teacher Organization for field trips and school needs.
- Lead on-site training for teachers in new curriculum and pacing guides distributed by the district.
- Designed classroom models to integrate best practices for the grade level.
- Coordinated the implementation of Educational Technology into the classroom as the Technology Representative for the school.
- Served as a mentor teacher for the Peer Assistance Review Program for teachers within the Garden Grove Unified School District.



- Served as the mentor teacher for many student teachers implementing the district's Co-plan/Co-Teach model to empower student teachers and improve instruction for both students and student teachers.

### **RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS**

- Able to learn and incorporate new technology into classroom practices in order to meet curriculum guidelines.
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## ABSTRACT

At present, it can be difficult for teachers to teach writing effectively in the formal classroom due to large class sizes and unreasonable standardized testing criteria. As a result, many students are unable to learn how to communicate well in writing. Teachers will need to look outside the traditional methods of writing instruction to find ways to teach writing strategies effectively and efficiently. Informal learning occurs frequently in online spaces. Online communities, such as fan fiction websites, offer an opportunity for experts and novices to work in the same digital space where one can learn from each other through interactions within the community.

This dissertation analyzes the discourse among participants in an online fan fiction website, [fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com), in order to find evidence of writing support and effective writing instruction. Participants in the community contribute to the success of writers as they comment on stories and in the forums. Members of the community interact with one another in three different ways: through comments on stories as they are being updated, through comments in the Beta Forums, and through private interactions between beta readers and authors. Comment feeds and threads from the Beta Forums were coded for evidence of writing support and elements of effective writing instruction. Findings of the study centered on motivation and support for writers as they continue to update their stories.

The study creates theoretical constructs to contribute to existing research on educational technology and writing instruction. Based on the evidence of this study, informal learning in the community can be harnessed to teach writing to novice writers. Technology and new media prove to be a useful tool for educators who are looking to for new ways to teach writing. This grounded theory research plans to provide teachers in the classroom with more effective tools. Online fan fiction communities offer students a chance to interact with other writers about stories

they have written. Learning from the community has potential to provide motivation for students to write more often and frequently. Informal learning through the community has the potential to give educators a tool to teach vital writing skills.

## Chapter One

Due to overwhelming class sizes and a wide range of learners in the classroom, teachers in public schools in the U. S. have a difficult time reaching every student and ensuring success for all. Strict laws, unreasonable class sizes, and a lack of professional development affect the quality of instruction in the classroom. Quality writing instruction, for example, has dramatically declined due to a lack of accountability for both teachers and students (Applebee & Langer, 2006). The implementation of best practices in writing instruction, such as using the Writer's Workshop model, is becoming more and more difficult due to the increasing number of students enrolled in classes. Currently in California public schools, writing is only assessed in fourth and seventh grade, and the results of the test do not affect the school's report card. As a result, many students are unable to learn the writing skills they will need when they graduate.

Fortunately, technology has afforded students the ability to learn informally outside the classroom through online communities and digital media. Many students improve their writing skills on their own in online communities where they work with other students. They are fortunate enough to be able to supplement their classroom experiences with independent learning.

### **Recent History of the Issue**

The standard United States curriculum has changed dramatically since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001), which holds school districts accountable for the progress of students enrolled in public schools. Unfortunately, in many states (including California), progress is measured by standardized testing, forcing good teaching, like the teaching of writing skills, to be left by the wayside in order to teach test taking skills. The NCLB policy requires that all students will have met proficiency in both Language

Arts and Math State Standards by the year 2014 on their state assessments (No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], 2001). With the year 2014 quickly approaching, politicians and administrators have ascertained that the assessment standards required by NCLB, although well intended, will not be met.

English writing curriculum in the public school setting has greatly diminished due to increased pressure of standardized testing as implemented by the NCLB legislation. Under this legislation, the focus of instruction is on phonemic awareness and vocabulary; there is little mention of writing skills in the law (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012). As a result, teachers did not feel pressured to teach writing in the classroom because students were not assessed in that manner. Effective writing instruction has not been a key skill for teachers due to the fact that accountability for English Language Arts standards are assessed with multiple-choice testing that requires no writing. Students no longer need to be proficient in writing to pass exams and graduate high school, and as a result, decision-makers no longer consider writing proficiency to be an area of need. American students are now graduating high school and continuing on to higher education with a lack of writing skills. Writing in the classroom has become laborious for both students and teachers, resulting in poorer quality writing instruction (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). Therefore, little effective writing instruction occurs in most public school classrooms.

In addition to the lack of accountability for writing instruction, the new Common Core assessments will also create obstacles for educators who do not teach writing. These assessments will force students to answer open-ended responses in written form on a computer-based test. Currently, California assesses state standards via multiple choice standardized testing. Adopting

the Common Core State Standards in California requires the state to reevaluate current methods of assessment as well as curriculum (California Department of Education, n.d.).

The U.S. Department of Education has approved a set of national Common Core State Standards that focus on college readiness and other skills necessary for success in higher education. These Common Core State Standards offer the country an opportunity to recover from the detriment of standardized testing and create a more uniform set of standards so that students are prepared to enter college and succeed. These new standards are vastly different from the state standards previously used under NCLB and require educators to teach students differently. Under the previous policy, each state created its required content standards. The new Common Core State Standards are uniform for all states. In addition, the new standards focus on critical thinking and problem solving skills with education content standards embedded into assessment. Current curriculum in schools will need to be evaluated to ensure that students are being taught the necessary skills and as a result are more prepared for a different type of assessment. Writing instruction will become integral to the curriculum because of the new standards. Under the Common Core State Standards, students will need to demonstrate proficiency in writing in every grade level on every exam (Smarter Balanced Consortium, 2012).

According to the Smarter Balanced Consortium (2012), California will be required to assess students on the computer instead of using a pencil and paper-based assessment. On these new assessments, students will be required to use critical thinking skills to answer problem-based questions and substantiate their responses. Without the writing skills to formulate a clear and concise response, students will fail these tests, not because they do not know the material, but because they are unable to communicate what they do know in writing.

The adoption of the Common Core State Standards forces teachers to change their curriculum and integrate more writing so that students are able to perform on the new assessments. The previous policy, NCLB, only briefly mentions writing and makes assessing it even more difficult. The Common Core State Standards forces teachers to embed writing into lessons by focusing on content as well as writing. Many of the standards require students to demonstrate understanding of content through writing, placing more pressure on schools to focus on writing instruction. Adding writing instruction to the curriculum will be the priority of many school districts now that the majority of states have adopted the Common Core State Standards. Fortunately, technology allows educators to look for solutions in other areas. By looking outside the classroom, schools can choose to integrate the learning potential that is already happening in online communities (Black, 2009; Jenkins, 2006).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Many teachers are unable to teach writing effectively due to different reasons. A large number of students in the classroom, as well as a lack of resources and professional development that expose teachers to best practices are a few examples that hinder good instruction for many teachers. Unfortunately, high-stakes testing in the form of standardized multiple-choice tests have resulted in the lack of quality writing instruction. The adoption of the Common Core State Standards forces administrators and policy makers to reevaluate current teaching methods placing a more equivalent emphasis on writing instruction. Since many students are learning to write informally in online communities outside the classroom (Jenkins, 2004), teachers have a possible resource for more effective writing instruction, but little has been done to make the connection from online communities to the classroom for the purpose of writing instruction.

**Statement of the Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to identify effective writing strategies and support available in communities outside the classroom. Studies of informal learning on fan fiction websites have shown that students learn to communicate in writing when they are involved in a community that helps them develop their skills (Jenkins, 2004). Through involvement in fan fiction communities, English Language Learners feel motivated to write more and improve their quality of writing (Black, 2009). Informal learning from online communities such as fan fiction websites can be studied so that their learning potential can be brought into the classroom.

This study will explore the interactions among members participating in a fan fiction website that offers the opportunity to learn effective writing strategies through their involvement in this Community of Practice. The Constructivist learning theory suggests that students learn when they interact with other students. This interaction leads a novice through the experience necessary to improve his skill by working within his Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) alongside an expert practitioner (Vygotsky, 1978). Examining the discourse among participants on the website can help to identify best practices in writing instruction already accessible to school-aged participants involved in the online community as they interact with more experienced writers. This study will help identify tools to supplement the current adopted methods of writing instruction in schools.

**Recent Statistics**

In 2011, only one quarter of public school students in grades 8 and 12 performed at a proficient level in writing (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Many students attending high school in the United States will be left at a disadvantage when trying to enter college because, according to college professors in the United States, 50% of high school



students are unable to demonstrate content learning in writing when they enroll in college courses (Achieve, Inc., 2005) and at least a quarter of incoming students are enrolled in remedial writing classes so that they can make up for deficiencies in their writing skills (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007).

Entering the workforce after high school without adequate writing skills proves to be difficult as well; 81% of employers describe recent high school graduates as being unable to communicate effectively in writing (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). It is estimated that private companies in the U.S. spend \$3.1 billion per year in teaching employees to write. The U.S. government spends \$200 million on writing instruction for employees (National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, & Colleges, 2004; National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, & Colleges, 2005). Based on these statistics, it is evident that U.S. public schools are not providing students with the skills they need to be successful, either in college or the workforce.

Teachers have tried to implement effective writing instruction in the classroom for many years. Best practices in writing instruction, like the Writer's Workshop model or writing for content mastery, place all of the workload on teachers. With a growing number of students in the classroom, teachers are unable to read and provide feedback on writing as much as they would like to (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). Traditional methods of writing instruction are not enough to integrate good writing skills successfully. Classroom learning needs to be supplemented with a way for students to write and receive feedback sooner than they would in the physical classroom; looking outside the classroom may provide much-needed answers.

Some students do not learn to write in the traditional classroom. Instead, they improve their writing skills when they engage in online conversations with peers. Burnett (2003)

states that using certain strategies, online chatting can be an effective way to tutor and promote learning discussions. Fan fiction offers students a way to engage with the media they enjoy in the company of other fans (Jenkins, 1992). Posting writing to an online community allows other members to read and comment on written work, giving writers feedback they would not normally receive in such a speedy fashion in the classroom. Fan fiction online communities are still growing in both numbers of stories written as well as number of users online. The world's largest fan fiction community, fanfiction.net, houses over 2.2 million users with over 650,000 stories in the Harry Potter fandom alone (Fanfiction.net Site Info, n.d.). The site hosts stories written in 30 different languages and consists of a community where one third of the users are ages 13-18 years old and the majority of users are female.

One of the largest fan fiction communities revolves around the Harry Potter fandom. This community of writers and readers interacts with fans of the book series as well as the movies. One Harry Potter fan community, mugglenet.com, houses a separate area just for fan fiction. The term "muggle" is a word from the book series meaning "non-magic folk." Therefore, the name of the website revolves around the fact that members are muggles and not wizards and witches like the characters from the books.

Fan fiction communities offer a certain level of motivation that cannot be found in the classroom. These communities encompass a multitude of topics and genres to cater to many areas of interest for today's students. In addition to exposure to a variety of writing, members of the online community see this space as a social network. Writers post stories to the site in hope that they will receive comments from readers (Black, 2009). Online fan fiction communities offer students motivation to write more, access to many other participants, and a way to receive valuable feedback from others.

**Research Questions**

This research will explore the following questions:

1. What evidence of effective writing instruction elements is found in the discourse of participants in online fan fiction communities?
2. What evidence of writing support is found in online fan fiction communities?

**Significance of Topic**

With numerous stories being uploaded on various fan fiction websites, it is clear that many students are writing outside the classroom. These online communities offer school systems a way to motivate students to write more as well as an opportunity to receive immediate feedback from other members. Effective writing strategies that are being used in online communities can offer students a chance to learn vital writing skills and give teachers an opportunity to have meaningful conferences with students about their writing. Students who write fan fiction have motivation and a community of practice in which to work, thereby creating more opportunities to engage in writing. In the traditional classroom, students are forced to write while teachers dread grading numerous, monotonous drafts from unmotivated writers. Fan fiction websites offer a way to address this problem for both the student and teachers.

**Key Definitions**

*Fandom:* Audience members that engage in semiotic productivity in the form of textual production so that as to share with other members of the community of fans. Fandoms have pre-established rules of behavior for membership and consist of members of all ages, races, and genders (Fiske, 1992). Members in the fandom tend to organize around popular media: books, movies, television shows, etc.

*Fan fiction:* Fiction created by the fandom of certain books, television series, movies, etc. Fan fiction can be found in the form of artwork, songs, music videos, poems, and narrative writing. For this study, the term *fan fiction* will be used specifically to refer to the narrative writing of stories that include pre-established settings and characters from original works. Fan fiction is not created by the original author(s) and is a way for fans to continue to read and write about the culture they love (Jenkins, 1992).

*Community of Practice:* A community of people that consists of experts and novices who come together to practice a skill and hone their craft. In the community, these novice members have the opportunity to learn from the experts in an apprentice model. A digital community of practice can also be found online in the form of online groups of experts who offer advice to novice members in order for members to improve their skill, such as fan fiction websites (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

*Common Core State Standards:* A national set of standards adopted by many U.S. states. These standards focus on college readiness skills, require students to use critical thinking skills in order to succeed, and are intended to replace the state standards. Future assessments will be correlated with these Common Core State Standards. In California, mastery of the Common Core State Standards will be measured through a computer-based adaptive assessment administered to all students (Smarter Balanced Consortium, 2012).

*Content Standards:* A set of minimum requirements that students should meet prior to moving to the next grade level. Prior to the adoption of the Common Core Standards, each individual state was required to draft its own set of standards and then create an assessment to measure progress toward those standards. These assessments were generally standardized multiple-choice tests administered to all students (California Department of Education, n.d.).

*No Child Left Behind Act:* This legislation, drafted in 2001, holds schools accountable for students achieving mastery of state standards. The policy requires that all students be proficient in both English Language Arts and Math standards by the year 2014. In the meantime, students should be making adequate progress towards proficiency, and those who have reached proficiency are expected to maintain it (NCLB, 2001).

*Effective Writing Instruction:* Instruction that results in better student writing skills. Numerous strategies can be used in effective writing instruction: for example, process writing, collaborative writing, and writing to summarize and synthesize. A report to the Carnegie Corporation from the Alliance for Excellent Education described 11 different writing instruction strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness (Graham & Perin, 2007). The following table describes the 11 elements as defined by the study.

Table 1

*11 Elements of Effective Writing Instruction*

Element	Description
Writing Strategies	Involves teaching strategies for planning, revision, and editing pieces.
Summarization	Involves explicitly and systematically teaching writers how to summarize text.
Collaborative Writing	Involves assigning specific, reachable goals for writers to complete.
Specific Product Goals	Involves assigning specific, reachable goals for writers to complete.
Word Processing	Involves the use of computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing.
Sentence Combining	Involves teaching writers to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences
Prewriting	Involves activities designed to help writers generate or organize ideas for composition.
Inquiry Activities	Involves engaging writers in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for particular writing tasks.

(continued)

Element	Description
Process Writing Approach	Involves integrating numerous writing strategies into a workshop environment.
Study of Models	Involves providing writers with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing.
Writing for Content Learning	Involves writing as a tool for learning content material.

### **Key Assumptions**

Quality writing instruction should be comprehensive enough to cover all aspects of writing, such as persuasive writing, writing in content areas, and writing to summarize and synthesize text. This study will examine writing fiction narratives in online communities. Students' involvement in the online fan fiction community is assumed to be supplementary to current methods of teaching other genres of writing.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although, the study aims to look at explicit writing instruction found in the discourse among participants, much of the assistance in these communities is inferred. It is not clear that the writer who receives feedback is actually learning from contributing experts. It is also not possible to gauge whether or not writing skill has been positively or negatively affected through this study. There is no way to see improvement in writing ability since participants will not be tracked. In addition, anonymity among the participants in the community also makes it difficult to distinguish experts from novices. Beta readers have the distinction of being more qualified to provide constructive feedback in the beta forums as approved by the site administrators, but the other forums are open to all members, young or old.

### **Summary**

The current method of writing instruction is not effective as it needs to be, as evidenced by the fact that many students are entering college and the workforce with a lack of writing skills

necessary to succeed. In California, the demand for a new writing curriculum is increased by the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, which will be tested via a computer-based adaptive assessment. Proficiency will be measured via open-ended answers that require students to demonstrate thinking in writing.

Fortunately, students can learn to write in many different ways. This study will examine online fan fiction communities to find effective writing instruction strategies and support found in participant discourse. On the fan fiction website, participants post written narratives based on the fandom to which they belong. Other participants are able to read and provide feedback on both the content and grammar of the stories, allowing the author the opportunity to write another story or chapter using the feedback provided.

In the classroom, certain skills are necessary for teachers to teach writing effectively. If these skills can be found in an online community, such as fan fiction websites, teachers will have the opportunity to create those types of spaces for students to use as they are learning to write. Teaching students how to engage in these communities and use them for their potential can reduce the workload among teachers and increase effectiveness of writing strategies currently used in the classroom. These communities can also serve as a way for educators to provide students multiple opportunities to write. Therefore giving students a place to practice writing.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

Teaching writing skills to students effectively can be more difficult to implement now than ever before. Teachers find themselves in crowded classrooms, making traditional writing pedagogy difficult to implement faithfully. Best practices in writing instruction developed many decades ago and still prove to be effective in the classroom today. Unfortunately, the changing climate of the formal classroom has made these practices more difficult to implement.

National legislation has played an integral role in the changing face of the writing curriculum in the United States. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) forced states to adopt a set of standards to be measured by a series of multiple-choice exams known as the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) for all students in the state. Increased pressure fell on school districts as funding became available to schools through students meeting proficiency. Eventually, teachers began to dedicate more time in the instructional day for test taking skills. As a result, untested subjects, such as writing, became a secondary lesson; only taught if there is time. Despite the need for writing in every aspect of school, teachers did not have time to explicitly teach it anymore.

Fortunately, the United States Department of Education, with the help of other education researchers and organizations, adopted a new policy for education reform. The Common Core State Standards is a new set of national standards that will help foster learning in students who are ready for college and/or a career. The standards imply that writing is a basic function and should be incorporated into all aspects of education. Students should be writing in order to effectively communicate ideas. Now that the emphasis on writing has been returned to the classroom, teachers are looking for more ways to teach writing to students. Graham and Perin's (2007) meta-analysis of effective writing instruction elements outlined 11 key strategies for



effectively teaching writing. These elements are:

- writing strategies,
- summarization,
- collaborative writing,
- specific product goals,
- word processing,
- sentence combining,
- prewriting,
- inquiry activities,
- process writing approach,
- study of models, and
- writing for content learning.

The study proposition was these 11 elements, when used in the classroom to teach writing, produce more proficient writers.

The Writer's Workshop has been instrumental in developing current writing pedagogy. In this workshop model, students and teachers have independent writing time to write. During this workshop time, students have the autonomy to choose what they want to write about and can begin pieces as they see fit. Students also have time to confer with peers and the teacher so they can receive critique on their work. The Writer's Workshop also includes a mini-lesson that teachers can use to teach general grammar concepts or genre-specific lessons. The implementation of process writing strategies has also been influential in writing pedagogy. Process writing is explicitly teaching students the phases of the writing process. These phases,

prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, emphasize that writing is a process and that it should be continuously evolving.

In addition to the Writer's Workshop and process writing, educators in the United States have also used a variety of other strategies in the classroom to help students learn to write better. Teaching basic grammar skills such as sentence combining or collaborative writing can help students build and practice writing skills in the classroom. Some teachers have also looked to new media to help students learn to write.

Another method of incorporating different teaching strategies is integrating technology into the curriculum. The availability of technology in schools has made new media very accessible to students and teachers. Harnessing this unique tool has been a way for teachers to creatively teach writing to hesitant learners. The use of blogs and wikis allow students to write about content under the guise that they are having fun.

In order to supplement their learning experiences in the classroom, some writers have turned to online communities to find the support they need to improve their writing skills. Online fan fiction communities have the potential to teach novice writers vital skills they need to communicate effectively in writing leading to college and career readiness. Fan fiction websites offer students the connection from reading to writing that can help them improve their reading comprehension skills as well as their writing skills. Fan fiction websites have the potential to offer teachers an alternative that other strategies may not be able to compete with. This study looks at these communities in order to recommend this type of learning environment to supplement learning in the formal classroom. Students need more in order to learn strong writing skills.

### **Historical Background of Writing Curriculum in the United States**

Education curriculum in the United States has been influenced greatly by numerous policies and legislation. For example, NCLB (2001), changed public school education drastically. The well-intended, but unrealistic, goal of the policy is that all students enrolled in public school will score proficient or above in English Language Arts and Math on state assessments by the year 2014. Under the law, students are to be assessed yearly with state-approved standardized tests. In California, the solution to a state standardized test became a series of multiple-choice exams administered each May to all students in the state (California Department of Education, n.d.). The onslaught of standardized tests resulted in a massive teach-to-the-test approach that has changed pedagogy for public school teachers. Emphasis in the curriculum switched from a conceptual, well-rounded understanding of all concepts to teaching specific state standards and test-taking strategies. Schools unable to meet the proficiency standards are forced to adopt a Program Improvement (PI) plan, where the faculty and administrators are subject to changes dictated by an outside state-approved consulting firm. In dire circumstances, the district may choose to restructure the school, resulting in redistribution of faculty and administration (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

In addition to these changes after becoming a PI school, the legislation also requires the school to notify the community that it is not meeting state standards, thereby creating a negative reputation for the school in the eyes of the community of parents and students. The fear of becoming a PI school forces teachers to take drastic measures. As a result, instruction began to focus on test-taking skills for multiple-choice exams, leaving students unable to articulate their thought processes on open-ended responses. As the year 2014 approaches, policymakers try to rebuild the education system after this legislation with the introduction of a national set of

education standards. With the adoption of a new set of national standards, the country looks forward to a new beginning where students leave schools ready for college and a career (National Governors' Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

In 2010, an organized group of parents, teachers, school administrators, and experts developed a series of national standards intended to help level the playing field among state education departments. These national standards, known as the Common Core State Standards offer states an alternative to NCLB policy. Led by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors' Association Center, this state-led initiative was designed and vetted by education professionals. The new common set of national standards is intended to help the various states meet the needs of a changing global economy. These standards focus on a more well-rounded curriculum that allows students to develop problem solving and critical thinking skills. Teachers will be able to focus on higher level thinking skills that require students to analyze content and synthesize material into their own ideas. The standards are also more general and vague, allowing teachers to have autonomy to teach the skills necessary for a deeper understanding of the content. Students will be required to do more than simply recall facts; instead, they will need to be able to demonstrate their thinking in more ways than a multiple-choice test alone can capture (National Governors' Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

As a result of these new standards of instruction, multiple-choice exams will no longer be able to assess students accurately. Students will now need to be assessed in more authentic settings so that true evaluations can be made. Gone are the multiple-choice test stems that ask students to engage in rote memorization during the school year; students will now need to be

able to articulate their understanding. In order to be more prepared for the Common Core State Standards, California has joined with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium to create dynamic assessments that can better evaluate student knowledge. These assessments gauge student knowledge through multiple-choice questions, open-response questions, and performance tasks (Smarter Balanced Consortium, 2012). Students will now need to be able to synthesize and articulate their answers in written language. Adding a writing component to the assessment creates a complicated new layer to the assessment. Unfortunately, some students who understand the concepts will not be able to articulate their thinking and thought processes if they are unable to write clearly with a strong command of the English language.

Sadly, the age of standardized testing has left many students unable to write. The focus on writing in the standard curriculum has diminished because there was no need for students to write well; they were not assessed in it, and national and state funding did not depend on it, so students did not need to be proficient in it. In California, the advent of the Common Core State Standards and a new type of assessment requires students to be able to communicate in writing, which affects student performance not only in the writing standards on the new state assessments, but also in other content areas as well. On the Math section of the state assessment, for example, students will need to be able to explain mathematical concepts in open-ended responses as well as in performance tasks that require them to explain their thinking when answering a complex problem. As teachers begin to prepare their students for the new assessments, they will realize that good writing skills are crucial to the curriculum, which will result in a critical examination of current models of writing pedagogy.

### **Writing Pedagogy**

**Writer's workshop.** Writing pedagogy in the U.S. has been most widely influenced by Lucy Calkins' Writer's Workshop model (Calkins, 1983; Graves, 1983). In this model, teachers designate a portion of each school day to writing when students work independently on pieces. Students have free choice to write about what they want, adhering to suggestions made by the teacher. During this independent writing time, teachers have the opportunity to conference with students about their writing, allowing for one-to-one interaction with the teacher. At the beginning of the Writer's Workshop time, the teacher leads the class in a mini-lesson that addresses common misconceptions in grammar or other needs of the class. This lesson is delivered to the whole class, so the content needs to address the needs of the majority of the students (Calkins, 1986). Unfortunately, this method does not address learners' individual needs. These mini-lessons can range from content specific guidelines for different writing genres to grammar conventions for writing. An example of a mini-lesson can be teaching students how to combine sentences to create more complex, sophisticated sentences. Explicitly teaching how to combine sentences in the form of a mini-lesson can help students learn to evaluate their own writing by looking for simple sentences that need to be revised. Other mini-lessons include teaching students inquiry activities, which help novice writers learn to analyze data and identify engaging topics about which to write, therefore creating the motivation to write. These activities also help students who are working in a workshop environment where they are able to choose their own topics. In general, mini-lessons can also serve to help students generate ideas, find focus, or create goals for their own writing.

After the mini-lesson, the teacher allows the class to go into independent writing time where students can write about what they choose. The freedom of choice allows students to

explore different genres and write about what motivates them. When students are able to write about what is important to them, they will want to write more (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983). The Writer's Workshop model gives them that freedom and autonomy; students can move at their own pace, starting and beginning pieces as they see fit. Students can be working on multiple pieces before finishing the first one. Their mood dictates their writing and how much they write on the topic they choose. In the Writer's Workshop model, teachers can serve as an audience for the writers, which also helps motivate students to write (Atwell, 1987; Graves, 1983). During the independent writing time, the teacher is able to conference with students on a one-on-one basis. These conferences allow the teacher to monitor their writing and help address each student's needs. During these conferences, the teacher can discuss any difficulties a student has or read his writing and offer feedback.

In addition to the conferences with the teacher, students also collaborate with peers. Peer-to-peer conferencing gives students an opportunity to work with other writers within their range of abilities (Atwell, 1987). Peer writers can use this time to offer feedback on content, flow, organization, and misunderstandings in their colleagues' writing. Working with a peer can offer many benefits beneficial, including helping students learn new skills. The more experienced writers show their peers ways to write that differ from their usual style (Calkins, 1986), which can help novice writers explore different styles of writing with the help of another student, and as a result, grow as writers. Working with peers can also be beneficial for the peer editor. Students can learn how to analyze other students' work and therefore be able to approach their own writing in the same critical manner. Graham and Saddler (2005) state that students who receive instruction in grammar, specifically sentence combining strategies, produce better writing when

assisted by their peers. This peer-assisted type of instruction works well in the Writer's Workshop model.

Since the students write what they choose to write, adding specific product goals to the workshop time can help them achieve a more diverse writing experience. Requiring students to write different genres can be a specific product goal. This gives them an opportunity to write in a genre in which they may not feel comfortable or that they would not have chosen if they had not been assigned the goal. In the workshop environment, students can take risks with different genres and feel free to conference with the teacher or peers to improve their weaker areas. Students tend to be more proficient writers of narratives, so they will tend to choose this genre most often because they feel comfortable with it (Atwell, 1987). However, it is imperative that they experiment with other areas, such as informative and opinion writing, in order to become well-rounded writers. The Common Core State Standards in writing require students to write informative and persuasive compositions, in addition to narratives (National Governors' Association Center for Best Practice & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). They also require students to be able to articulate their thought processes in writing in all content areas.

Setting specific product goals can also help students understand and create specific components of writing. For example, for a persuasive writing piece, asking students to include components of persuasive arguments instead of asking them to simply write *better* can be more beneficial to the end result (Ferretti, MacArthur, & Dowdy, 2000). This further proves that writing is a goal-oriented activity and students need to have—and strive towards—specific goals to achieve in order to write well.



**Process writing.** Even though the Writer's Workshop model has greatly influenced writing pedagogy, it is not the only strategy that can be used to improve writing. Teaching Process Writing is another strategy that can be used to improve writing skills by teaching students to take their writing through phases: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Often, Process Writing is interwoven into the Writer's Workshop Model so that teachers and students can benefit from both instructional strategies. In Process Writing, teachers instruct students about the individual phases and ways to write in each phase explicitly (Graves, 1983). In the prewriting phase, students learn how ideas can be organized differently for different writing genres. In this phase, graphic organizers are often introduced as a tool for writers to organize their thoughts prior to writing them in the piece. Brodney, Reeves, and Kazelskis (1999) found that prewriting after reading text is the most effective prewriting strategy for composing coherent and organized essays. Often, the prewriting phase in this process is considered the most important phase due to the fact that this is when students find their ideas and organize them coherently.

After the original organization process, students are taught how to revise and edit, learning to go back and reread what they wrote to ensure that they are communicating what they intended. They also learn to verify if their writing contains the specific requirements for that particular genre. Revision is often a skill that writing students do not practice (Atwell, 1987). When a student revises his writing, he should be going back to reread the work. Unfortunately, many students do not reread their work for clarity and flow, or when they do go back, they are unable to find the mistakes that they have made on their own. The revising and editing phase can help students clean up their writing so it makes more sense (Calkins, 1986). A variety of mini-

lessons for grammar and mechanics can be offered, but this particular phase in the writing process is often difficult for teachers.

Revision and editing are areas in which current writing pedagogy is lacking because it is so difficult to teach. Teachers rarely instruct students in this skill because they are unaware of how to do so, even though they may know how to revise and edit their own work. Explaining the difference between the revising and editing phases can help to clarify the process for these two phases. Teachers need to be able to show students that revision occurs when the author reviews his work for misunderstandings in content, coherence, and organization. During the revising phase, the writer should develop his ideas to make it more comprehensive (Calkins, 1986). The editing phase, however, takes place when the writer revisits the composition to check for mistakes in language conventions: spelling, punctuation, or grammar. In the editing phase, students do not change the meaning of the original work, they simply fix mistakes (Graves, 1983). Rarely do teachers make the distinction between revising and editing for their students (Noden, 1999).

Little research has been conducted on how to teach revising to students in a mini-lesson format effectively. State-adopted core curriculum includes teaching revising strategies, but this type of lesson is not individualized for the writer. Often, revising is taught to students in the one-to-one conference with the teacher. In that instance, however, the lesson is only pertinent for that particular writing assignment, and it is not guaranteed that those skills can or will translate to other pieces. This also creates complications for teachers with large classes, making it difficult for the teacher to conference with each student in the classroom regularly.

During the revising phase, teachers show students how to edit their writing for grammar and other language conventions. Grammar is often taught within the base curriculum for

Language Arts, but applying these grammar lessons to writing can be difficult for students. Since students can make a wide variety of mistakes and each student's needs vary widely, this phase can be difficult to teach to the whole class in the form of a mini-lesson. In addition to the difficulty of having such a diverse group of student needs, the English language includes many grammar rules that dictate appropriateness that can be confusing and cumbersome for students when they are writing, especially for English Language Learners. The Writer's Workshop Model offers one-to-one conferences, both with the teacher and peers, that can help students find their mistakes in their writing. Of all the present pedagogical tools that teachers have to teach revising and editing, the Writer's Workshop conference has the potential to be the most effective (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983).

The final stage in process writing is the publishing phase, during which students publish their pieces so that other writers can read them. Publishing can be done in the form of neatly writing it out on paper, printing it out on the computer, or displaying it on the classroom website. The key is that during publishing, the writer is able to share his work. During the publishing phase, teachers can add instruction in word processing skills to help students learn to use software for publishing a digital composition. Students who write with word processing software produce more superior writing pieces (Lowther, Ross, & Morrison, 2003). In addition, when the word processing software is readily available to students, they are better able to revise and edit as they write, producing longer pieces with fewer errors (Bangert-Drowns, 1993). It is important that students have experience developing word processing skills due to the fact that technology skills are essential for citizens of a global economy. In this global workforce, students will have a difficult time finding a satisfying career that does not involve word processing software.

In addition to being prepared for the future, students will also need to be proficient in technology so that they are able to perform on the new state assessments. In California, the Smarter Balanced Consortium uses exams that require students be tested on the computer in an adaptive assessment. An adaptive assessment is one that changes with the test taker; as the student progresses through the exam, the difficulty level will change. In essence, students who are not scoring well will receive easier questions and students who are performing better will receive more complex questions. The assessment for the Common Core State Standards will require students to write well on a computer to substantiate their understanding of various concepts. They should be able to apply the skills from the word processing software that they learn in their writing classes to the answers on the assessment (Smarter Balanced Consortium, 2012).

**Writing strategies.** The Writer's Workshop and Process Writing both play a large role in writing curriculum for school districts, but these are not the only strategies that have been beneficial to students. Other strategies that can be used to improve writing can include collaborative writing, teaching summarization, and writing for content learning (Graham & Perin, 2007). Collaborative writing allows students to work as a collaborative group on a single composition to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the assigned task (Daiute & Dalton, 1993). This process allows students to learn from more experienced members in the group as well as learn how to critically analyze and evaluate other students' work. This instructional strategy can also be used in other content areas, such as science or history. Writing for content learning can be an effective strategy to improve students' writing skills because it gives them the opportunity to synthesize what they currently know with new content knowledge, creating a new understanding of the material. In science or history, students can write to

demonstrate their understanding of the lesson being taught (Boscolo & Mason, 2001; Knipper & Duggan, 2006), which will solidify both writing and reading skills.

Teaching students to summarize can improve their writing skills as well as their reading comprehension skills (Calkins, 1986). Students need to be able to understand what they read before they can summarize it; then, they can use this understanding to create new knowledge for their response. Summarizing can be a key strategy in many content areas because it allows teachers to assess whether or not students understand the material being presented. Summarizing text can be used as a quick formative assessment as well as a way to ensure that students receive appropriate writing practice. Summarizing can also be used to supplement reading instruction because it offers an understanding of the material and students can then use the summary to conduct a critical analysis of the literature. In the Common Core State Standards, responding to literature in writing is necessary for students to establish an understanding of the given text; students will be required to write a response to the literature that they read (National Governors' Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

It is also important for teachers to expose students to professional writers of different genres (Atwell, 1987; Graves, 1983). Students who have access to good examples of writing tend to manifest those writing skills in their writing (Knudson, 1989). Having role models both in the classroom as well as in the literary world can give students a new perspective on the piece that they are writing. Models of good writing will give students a chance to emulate good techniques and styles of which they may not have been previously aware. Exposure to different forms of writings from other writers can provide one way for students to experience different genres and possibly explore that style of writing in the classroom, a risk-free environment (Calkins, 1986). Other examples of good writing should come from a variety of sources to show students different

ways to approach writing. Students should also be exposed to more experienced writers of different styles or genres. Although teachers may not have access to this type of role model in the classroom, there are a variety of writers for students to emulate online.

**Teaching writing through technology.** Instructional technology in the classroom can have many benefits. Technology in the curriculum can be used to enhance the learning experience for students. By integrating technology, teachers are able to teach pertinent subjects, such as writing, as well as technology standards so that students are able to live productively in a digital and global world (International Society of Technology in Education [ISTE], 2012). One way that teachers have been able to teach writing through technology is by using blogs in the classroom. A blog is a website that contains dated entries that can be contributed by a person or a group of people (Boulos, Maramba, & Wheeler, 2006). Blogs offer students many opportunities to write online. Students can take ownership of the blog by creating prompts or teachers can designate prompts for students to respond to. This type of learning can be fairly easy to set up and maintain. Teachers and students have complete control over the material that is being presented. This type of writing fosters collaboration among writers and allows them to present material in a multimedia format. Twitter, a website that allows microblogging, is one tool that teachers can use when integrating technology with writing curriculum. Microblogging is the posting of brief messages, 140 characters for Twitter, to the community. Twitter can be used to improve editing/revising skills or even as a tool to foster inquiry activities (Grosseck & Holotescu, 2008). Students and teachers can use these formats to communicate understanding of concepts or to ask questions in order to delve deeper into the material.

Another tool found online is a wiki. Wikis have also proven to be effective in teaching literacy among students in the classroom. A wiki is a website where members of the site can

contribute to the development of its content (Boulos, Maramba, & Wheeler, 2006). This type of learning tool also fosters collaboration among students and helps them learn to communicate with each other. Similar to blogging, wikis are also very easy to set up and maintain. There are many websites that cater to education and teachers and encourage the use of the wiki in the classroom. Teachers set the site and add students to members to the wiki. Members have permission to edit and maintain the content on the site. Students are left with the responsibility to create a website, forcing them to communicate their learning in writing and other multimedia formats.

Unfortunately, wikis and blogs also share some disadvantages. Both formats are more susceptible to vandalism (Boulos, Maramba, & Wheeler, 2006). Students have access to these sites and can publish or change and content they choose. Completed content can be deleted by other members of the website and copyright material may be difficult to control when students are unaware of strict copyright laws. The convenience of a computer allows students to easily copy electronic material without documenting sources. Closely monitoring these sources can help alleviate some of the vandalism and copyright infringement, but this process may be quite cumbersome considering the number of students enrolled in most public school classrooms.

Another way teachers use technology to teach writing is by using Internet Workshops. In these Internet Workshops, educators designate which Internet websites students use to gain access to the concepts they need to learn (Sweeny, 2010). Using this tool, students can offer feedback, ask questions, and research other topics from the website. This has the same collaborative nature as a blog or wiki with little monitoring from the teacher. Due to the vast expanse of material on the Internet, students are able to find many different resources to contribute to their learning. Teachers can lead students to websites that belong to famous authors

so that they may act as a mentor for the learner (Sweeny, 2010). Students have the opportunity to learn from and meet authors through their websites and videos. Unfortunately, rarely do students have the ability to interact with these authors other than in the form of a comment left on the website. This provides no real learning experience, as the learner is not engaged in a knowledge-constructing endeavor.

Many teachers have tried to teach writing through comprehensive writing strategies like the Writer's Workshop and process writing strategies. Some have even tried to teach in more unorthodox methods through the use of technology and social media. These methods, however, can be difficult to sustain over the course of the school year. One resource, on the other hand, has been linked to improving writing skills in adolescents. Fan fiction communities have the potential to offer more immediate feedback and interaction in a controlled environment due to its social learning potential.

### **Fan Fiction**

Fan fiction writing offers a nontraditional way for writers to improve their craft. Since there is no age requirement for participation, fan fiction writers can begin creating whenever they like. Unlike the classroom setting, fan fiction communities are found online and writers choose to participate on their own, learning informally from other members of the community.

Fan fiction is original work created by fans using pre-established worlds of popular culture in the form of artwork, music, fictional stories, and poems. Fan fiction provides a way for fans to participate within the fandom of their movie, book, cartoon, or television show (Jenkins, 1992). Fan artists are members of the fandom known to create visual images of their beloved characters while fan writers write narratives with characters and settings that have already been developed in the original work. With the ubiquitous nature of technology, fans have more ways



to connect with other fans and share their interests, thus creating a growing fandom for many popular genres. The participatory nature of fandom allows fans to interact with other members in the community. Although most forms of fan fiction have remained part of an underground culture available only to other fans, recently fan fiction writing has moved quickly into popular culture, primarily due to the popularity of numerous television series and books (Jenkins, 1992).

Fan fiction writing is a narrative written by the fandom that uses the characters and settings from the original story as a starting point for the new plot. This form of fan fiction appeals to both readers and writers in the fandom because writers enjoy publishing their work for others to read and readers enjoy reading stories written with alternate endings, new relationship twists, and crossing plot lines from one book, television show, or movie to another. Writers of fan fiction have little restrictions on the type of story that they write. As a result, a variety of genres within fan fiction have developed. For example, role-playing describes the writer remaining true to the story, its characters, and setting. Authors simply take the character into a different plot, therefore keeping the new story plausible in the constraints of the original world. In contrast, slash writing, or shipping, takes different characters and develops relationships that were not initially a part of the original story, using the slash to denote which characters are in a relationship with whom (Jenkins, 1992). Writers can also extend the story by creating different endings they like better or simply keeping the story alive so they can continue to be a part of the fandom. Fan fiction is not limited to the end of the pre-established story; it can be written prior to the start of the original work, in the middle of the work, or following the end of the work. Many writers choose to write fan fiction because certain books, television shows, and films come with rich and diverse setting that allow the writer the freedom to create a new story plot (Collins, 2006). The accessibility of diverse characters or holes in the plot creates space for a writer to add

a new story, character, or point of view. These numerous possibilities add to the appeal of fan fiction writing for the fandom.

Fan fiction writing has been an ongoing phenomenon for many years; evidence exists of fan fiction writing for Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (Hellekson & Busse, 2006). The development of fanzines (magazines for fans) for science fiction fans offered writers a venue for posting fan writing. Fanzines became home to many fan fiction authors as the audience for these magazines became interested in the stories being posted (Jenkins, 1992). With the explosion of Internet capabilities, fans now had a new place to post writing. Fans of popular media were now able to upload and house fan fiction stories online in order to reach a much wider audience, contributing to the popularity of fan fiction literature for both writers and readers (Hellekson & Busse, 2006). Now, fandoms have a place to house their written work and a wider community to enjoy it.

Fan fiction websites create a community of readers and writers that share a common love of the popular culture. Fans in these communities can choose to hang out in the periphery of the community by simply reading the posted stories and comments or by choosing to interact with the members by creating a profile and commenting on the story. As the novice members of the community begin to gain expertise, they start to interact with the community more, making friends and honing their skills as writers.

With the ubiquity of fan fiction websites, fans have more opportunities than ever before to share their work. The largest fan fiction website, Fanfiction.net (n.d.), has millions of uploaded stories, different types of media about which to write, and 2.2 million users in its community. The enormity of the site results in a multitude of genres and groups, which enables writers to find the perfect category in which to write. The size of the site also allows for many

users in the community to offer feedback to novice writers in grammar and/or story development. This community provides a variety of means by which developing writers can learn to write better.

When posting fan fiction to a website, other members of the community have the opportunity to comment on the work. This feedback from members of the community serves a dual purpose. First, the community can offer advice for those who are struggling with plot development, flow, coherence, or grammar. Secondly, the feedback from the community also gives writers motivation to write more. Youth involved in these types of communities are more motivated to learn from peers than from adults (Ito, 2010). When work is posted, the comments that follow determine the level of popularity it receives. The more comments one receives, the more popular the story is. When a story is good, the members of the community can recommend it and, as a result, it gains popularity (Young, 2007). Often, members in the community ask writers to continue to write the story so that they can continue to read it. This proves to be highly motivating to writers because the more comments they receive, the more they feel like they belong in the community (Black, 2009). Readers in the community can offer advice on story development: for example, by showing authors what is lacking in the plot and what plot elements are strong.

On many fan fiction websites, beta readers offer feedback to help edit posted writing. A beta reader, as described by Fanfiction.net is, “a person who reads a work of fiction with a critical eye, with the aim of improving grammar, spelling, characterization, and general style of a story prior to its release to the general public” (“Beta Readers,” n.d., para. 1). Many fan fiction websites discourage writers from posting stories prior to having a beta reader vet the writing (“Mugglenet Fan Fiction Submission Rules,” n.d.). Interactions between beta readers and fan

fiction writers provide many opportunities for the development of writing skills. With this constant peer-to-peer feedback, authors of fan fiction can develop into better writers as they continue to post their work and receive feedback.

**Harry potter fan fiction.** Another large fan fiction website is Fanfiction.mugglenet.com (n.d.), which houses over 10,000 stories about the Harry Potter book series. This website is an extension of the Mugglenet fan website for members of the Harry Potter fandom. Harry Potter is a fictional character from the children's book series written by author J.K. Rowling. Rowling published the first of six books in the series in 1997 and its reputation has grown exponentially since. In 2006, the Harry Potter series had sold 300 million copies before the seventh book had even been published (Brown & Patterson, 2006). The popularity of the book series later developed into the release of all the books into live-action movies that grossed over \$3 billion dollars worldwide ("Box Office History for Harry Potter Movies", n.d.). Evidence of the Harry Potter fandom is overwhelming.

Mugglenet.com became one of the fan sites for Harry Potter fans to engage with one another. Since its inception in 1999, the website has since developed a fan fiction section for fans who like to share stories about the young wizard. In 2005, Fanfiction.Mugglenet.com (n.d.) became an online community for writers. In 2013, the website has had over 10,000 uploaded stories and now has a private area for beta readers to engage with one another, thereby creating another community for beta readers and writers.

A strong sense of community contributes to the motivation of participants on the website. Many fan fiction communities have strict behavior guidelines for members. For example, figure 1 illustrates one website's terms of service for members posting and reviewing work.

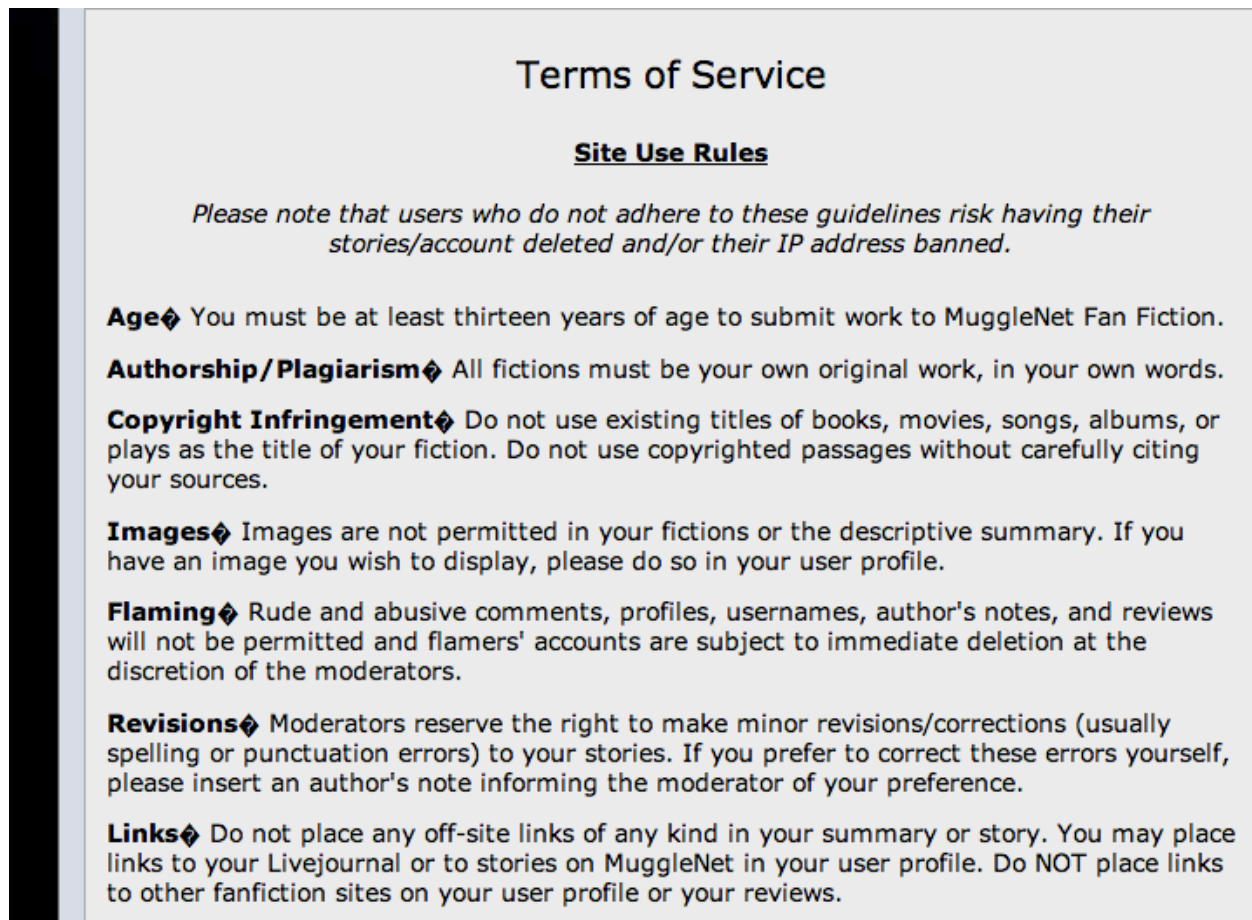


Figure 1. Screenshot of the terms of service found on fanfiction.mugglenet.com

Many communities reinforce a strong code of ethics when participating with members online.

With a strong code of ethics, the community helps writers in the fandom work with other members to improve their stories.

**Current research in fan fiction.** Recently, education researchers have begun to look at fan fiction and its potential uses in the classroom, especially for struggling writers. Jenkins's (2004) study of fandom states that fan fiction offers students a way to learn how to write, as the community gives writers insight into the writing process. Black (2009) studied the impact of fan fiction writing on students designated as English Language Learners in school. The process of writing daily and gaining feedback from those around them helped the students perform better in school. In addition, their experience on the site improved their grammar and other language

conventions, which was already difficult for the English Language Learners to learn in the classroom. Students participating in an afterschool program claimed that they were more motivated to write on the website than in the classroom. They stated that writing on the site was more fun and they would prefer to write there than with pen and pencil in the classroom on the same topic (Lewis, 2004). Fan fiction writing can be easier for novice writers because it provides scaffolds. Younger writers do not have to imagine original characters and settings; they can simply start from where the original piece left off, making it easier for writers to start.

Other potential advantages from fan fiction websites for the classroom come from the fan fiction community itself. The community is made up of peers, both expert and novice, who share the same interests. This natural community of practice offers students a place to work within their ZPD, helping them construct new meaning with their prior knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Beta readers on the website provide feedback to writers on grammar and language conventions, therefore making it more personal and applicable than a whole-class lesson on the same grammar concept. In fact, fan fiction websites offer educators another tool to teach writing if implemented along with other writing strategies in the classroom.

### **Reading Writing Connection**

Many factors contribute to young students' difficulties in writing, and participating in fan fiction communities can help bridge the gap between reading and writing for struggling writers. The physical act of writing requires students to use multiple functions in order to do so well. Proficient writing requires the student to be able to think and write at the same time (Graves, 1983). When a student struggles with articulation about a topic, writing about it will be difficult as well. Reading can help students understand and see examples of good writing. While reading, a student has access to the ways a different person articulates the thought process, and, as a result,

the writer can begin to develop the writing skills necessary for composing work. Reading gives writers a sense of what other people already know and what the audience will expect from the writer (Writing Study Group of the NCTE Executive Committee, 2004).

The relationship between reading and writing should not be separated. In the classroom, students should be exposed to different genres and writing styles. Fan fiction communities offer these varied genres and give students more practice reading the posted stories. Access to ideas different from their own, will allow students the ability to try out different strategies for writing. When young writers find what works for them, they will start to emulate it (Calkins, 1986). In addition, fan fiction websites offer students a place to read writing from peers, giving them the ability to experience different styles of writing as well as the possibility of editing another student's work.

### **Fan Fiction Websites Teaching Writing Strategies**

Fan fiction websites, like [fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com) and [fanfiction.net](http://fanfiction.net), offer many of the effective ways to teach writing that conventional writing classrooms offer in a more engaging manner. One effective motivating tool used in the Writer's Workshop is the ability for students to write whatever they choose. On fan fiction websites, writers can choose to write about what they want. [Fanfiction.net](http://fanfiction.net) (n.d.) offers nine fan fiction categories and nine crossover categories, and within these categories, there are countless characters and settings for a writer to use. Students can choose to stay in one story adhering to the rules of the particular canon, or combine plot lines of more than one story, choosing to ignore the rules of any of the canons. Participants can write about any character or story they choose, therefore giving them more motivation to write.

Similar to the Writer's Workshop model, fan fiction websites also allow students to work at their own pace, which is another motivating factor. The freedom of choice in writing motivates students to write (Atwell, 1987; Graves, 1983). In order for student writers to maintain progress, teachers can set goals for writers to meet. Having these goals can help students stay accountable for the amount of work they choose to write in the community. Setting specific product goals for writers has been identified by Graham and Perin (2007) as an element of effective writing instruction.

Fan fiction websites also offer students a community of readers and writers to assist in improving writing skills. The accumulation of fans in one virtual space creates a community of practice for fans of the genre. Fan fiction websites offer students the same type of community of practice for writers. Members of the fan community have a place to gather and share stories with other members who vary in expertise. Expert writers in the community can help novice writers develop their skills. Experts, such as beta readers, have a multitude of ways to offer feedback and motivation to writers. Novice writers have access to a community that can comment on the stories and provide the same peer-to-peer feedback that is offered in the Writer's Workshop model.

Fan fiction websites also offer students a way to collaborate with their peers in their writing. According to Thomas (2006), Middle Earth Insanity is a website developed by two authors that wanted to collaborate on one story. The authors, Jandalf and Tiana, wanted to work as a group on the stories so that they could highlight each other's strengths in the writing. At the end of their collaboration, they found that they learned from each other when they were reading the other's work (Thomas, 2006). This type of collaboration offers a way for fans to come together and learn from each other through the collaboration process. In the classroom,



collaborating on a piece can be physically difficult to do, but in a digital space, writers can work easily on the same piece at the same time while receiving real time updates from the rest of the collaboration team.

By integrating technology into the classroom, educators will be armed with a tool that is more engaging and effective in the writing curriculum. Fortunately, youth have been learning how to write at home informally through their networks in the fan fiction community. Giving students a place to work on writing and interact with others can bridge the gap between what is being learned informally at home on a network and what should be taught in the classroom. Unfortunately, parents and teachers see this type of Internet participation as unproductive learning. However, by giving students independent time to work online, they can have access to explicit information that they may not understand in their formal classrooms. Students should be allowed free time to work online in a space that allows them time to explore and learn on their own. Often, students can learn more through exploring the community than they might in the classroom (Ito, 2010), which can be beneficial to students if it is integrated into the writing curriculum.

The peer-to-peer feedback found in fan fiction communities is an integral part of the learning process for writers. Working with other students in these interactions can provide the scaffolding needed for learners to improve their writing skills. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the ZPD asserts that development of the mind is a process that starts within a range. At the beginning of the range is what the learner can do independently and the end of the range is what the learner can do when assisted by more experienced or knowledgeable agents. The furthest one can move within the ZPD is what the learner is capable of accomplishing when assisted by another person. Vygotsky refers to the assistance provided by more capable experts as scaffolds intended to

assist the learning process. When the learner has had sufficient support from the scaffolds, the expert can begin to remove it so that the learner has a new ZPD.

The ZPD is a result of Vygotsky's (1978) work in Constructivism, which takes the responsibility of learning from the instructor to the learner (Johnson, 2001). In traditional schooling, the teacher is responsible for distributing new knowledge to the students. In this model, the learning is unidirectional and there is one expert in the room who imparts knowledge to the many novice learners. Learning is built through experiences with the other learners in the room; the teacher is the facilitator of learning.

According to Vygotsky (1978), working independently will not help the learner build new knowledge. In the current writing model, the student will not learn to fix his mistakes because he lacks the knowledge within himself to find them; it takes another expert to provide the scaffolding to help the learner build new knowledge of proper mechanics and content. On fan fiction websites, students will be working within their ZPDs so as to build their capacity for editing and revising their written work. Students can develop within their ZPD with the help of their more experienced peers and teachers. By working as a collective, the group can help the student achieve his goal of writing a coherent and engaging story. Working in the community, students will be able to edit and revise their writing to achieve levels that they were not able to do independently, therefore moving higher into their ZPDs. As the writer becomes more proficient, feedback from experts can address different concepts that expand his skill set, resulting in a shift of the ZPD to higher levels. It is crucial that students in the formal classroom have access to a community of both experts and novices so that they may learn from each other through these types of interactions.

### **Learning from the Community**

Learning from peers within social groups is a teaching strategy that has been adopted in the classroom for many years. Cooperative learning in the classroom is evident in table groups, group projects, and other project-based learning strategies that utilize peers to learn. Best practices for educators dictate that teachers use students within their classrooms to help their peers achieve their full potential (Slavin, 1987). Learning is always *situated* in circumstances that can provide the learner with many opportunities to construct knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In school, students are situated within a physical classroom along with a teacher and their peers, which provides the relationship that will develop the context in which students can learn from one another. By working with other students of varying levels, learners are able to scaffold their experiences to gain new understanding. At school or in a digital space, students can work in the proximity of other writers. Being situated among peers of varying levels can be beneficial to the learner because the student can choose how much participation he is comfortable with and proceed deeper into the community when he is ready, thereby removing some of the scaffolds required for new knowledge.

Often, in the classroom, the teacher provides the scaffold, but research on social learning theory indicates that other, more experienced students are also able to provide a scaffold for new learning. Students who are not able to understand the lesson immediately during direct instruction from the teacher have the opportunity to learn from other students within the classroom in a more social setting. As a part of effective instruction, many teachers use social strategies, such as *talking to your neighbor* to help solidify or enrich learning experiences. Learning from peers can provide a scaffold to help students achieve what could not have been

possible on their own, which allows the teacher to develop curriculum that lies within the ZPD for each student.

Learning from other, more experienced peers can be found in many other situations outside of the physical classroom. Adults are situated within certain circumstances and learn from one another as well. Using scaffolds provided by their associations—for example, midwife and tailor apprentices—learn their craft by participating within the proximity of an expert. Lave and Wenger's concept of Legitimate Peripheral Participation describes how the novice learns from his experiences with the expert (Gherardi & Nicolini, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991). By staying within the periphery of the expert, the novice can watch and participate when he feels capable. This gives the learner the freedom to explore facets of the experience in a risk-free environment. Being within the periphery of the experience provides a scaffold for learners to become more proficient in their craft. As the apprentice becomes more proficient, the scaffolds are removed and the learner can begin to work side by side with the expert.

As novices and experts begin to associate, learning communities begin to form. In these communities, experts engage with novices to practice or hone their craft. These Communities of Practice allow experts to interact with other experts as well as novices. The relationship then becomes reciprocated when members of the community begin to improve their craft as a result of the interactions with one another. Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss the phenomenon of copy machine repair people who maintain membership in a Community of Practice with one another so that they can improve their skills. Within this community, they share experiences so that one may learn from the other, allowing each member of the Community of Practice to improve his skill because he is able to learn from the mistakes of another repairperson.

Students working within the proximity of other, more experienced students can learn from each other. This community of learners can be harnessed to help students achieve more because they are working within their ZPDs and are interacting with more capable peers. The interaction between peers allows the novices to learn from the experts and experts to learn from each other (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Online spaces provide a place where youth turn to both adults and peers to gain specialized knowledge. These online *hang outs* offer youth a new way to engage with other members of their community, making new friends with common interests (Ito, 2010). Learning from these new acquaintances can motivate students to engage in content when the classroom does not meet the needs of the student. This type of learning can be crucial when analyzing students' literacy difficulties.

Fan fiction communities have become Communities of Practice for writers. Stories are posted to the website so that all members within the community may read and comment. The interactions within the community help writers hone their skills and create better pieces.

### **Summary**

In order to improve writing curriculum in the United States, educators and administrators need to look outside of current practices. Fortunately, best practices in writing instruction have been consistent for the last three decades. Using the Writer's Workshop model in the classroom has helped some students learn to write as they progress through school. The autonomy to choose what to write and conference with both teacher and peers allows students to practice and hone their skills. Mini-lessons that accompany the Writer's Workshop time have also been shown to be integral parts of a comprehensive writing program. These lessons allow the teacher to teach specific strategies and grammar rules that students need to learn as they are writing combining

the effectiveness of the Writer's Workshop model and other effective writing instruction strategies. The mini-lesson is intended to address common misconceptions in the classroom as they arise for novice writers (Calkins, 1986).

In addition to the Writer's Workshop model, teachers also use Process Writing strategies. In process writing, students will be able to take their writing from the prewriting phase of writing through drafting, revising, and editing, ultimately to the final stage of publishing. Each phase has unique characteristics that help students improve their work as they move through the process. Understanding that writing is a process can help novice writers learn to improve their writing on their own. Process Writing can be taught in conjunction with the Writer's Workshop, thereby increasing the effectiveness of writing instruction time (Atwell, 1987; Graves, 1983).

Other strategies used by educators can also be infused into the classroom learning experience. Outside of the Writer's Workshop, students should have opportunities to write about concepts being learned in other content areas. Science and History are common areas where students can use writing to solidify their understanding of a chapter or even raise their own queries about the topic. Writing in other content areas can also be used as a kind of formative assessment so that educators can gauge whether concepts have been mastered or not (Graham & Perin, 2007). According to the Smarter Balanced Consortium (2012), students will be required to communicate their understanding of various content subjects through writing. Without a strong command of the English Language, students will not be successful regardless of whether or not they understand the material.

Writing in other content areas offers the perfect opportunity for teachers to teach students how to write summaries. Summarizing text requires students to understand the text and then articulate their understanding in written form; an even more complex task than simply writing an

assigned narrative. Summaries force students to analyze their understanding of the text critically. Many of the strategies that teachers use in the classroom are effective in teaching students to write, but there are clear deficiencies in the curriculum, because not all students are engaged and learning in this context. Outside the physical space of the classroom, however, students are learning to do many things informally, including writing.

Fan fiction online communities give writers a place to share stories they have written about pre-established fictional worlds. Writing fan fiction allows members of the fandom a way to participate in the culture of their media. Fans in the digital community enjoy reading and writing fan fiction narratives, creating an outlet for many fans to enjoy the new media. In this community, informal learning occurs when members are able to learn from other participants as they receive comments on posted stories. This type of informal learning can be effective for younger writers. Technology allows these young authors of fan fiction to come together in a digital community of practice. The fandoms of books intended for younger audiences have grown exponentially due to the availability of this participatory culture (Black, 2008; Jenkins, 2004).

Online fan fiction communities are a perfect example of informal learning in a community of practice. The ability to receive feedback from so many other participants is not available in the formal classroom. Integrating these online spaces with current practices in writing pedagogy can create a better curriculum for students. Participation in online communities offers many of the strategies that the Writer's Workshop conferences offer, but in the digital community, the writer receives more immediate feedback, motivating writers to write more. These online spaces can offer a vital resource for teachers in the formal classroom. According to the literature, fan fiction offers many of the elements of effective writing instruction as identified

by Graham and Perin (2007). This study aims to find evidence of these elements in fan fiction websites so that educators can harness the potential for learning in places outside of the classroom.



### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Due to the changes brought on by the Common Core State Standards, the writing curriculum for students in the U.S. has started to evolve. As a result, teachers are in need of more effective and efficient strategies for writing instruction in the classroom. The goal of the newly adopted standards is to develop college and career readiness among students graduating from high school. Unfortunately, many high school students are unable to achieve writing proficiency by the time they reach college and as a result must enroll in remedial college writing classes to gain proficiency (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). This needs to change if the United States is to compete in today's global economy.

The decline of students' writing ability can be associated with recent education policy dictating that teachers focus on reading comprehension and phonemic awareness. NCLB (2001) required that all students be assessed by the state, creating a demand for mass assessment, which manifested mainly in the form of standardized multiple-choice testing. Unfortunately, as education policies become stricter and stricter, teachers begin to feel pressure, as these state assessments are linked to teacher accountability. Moreover, focusing on multiple-choice exams leaves quality writing instruction by the wayside.

Luckily, new legislation focuses on a more holistic brand of education through which students learn to demonstrate their understanding in writing. The adoption of the Common Core State Standards offers teachers, administrators, and policymakers an opportunity to reevaluate the curriculum to ensure adequate instruction in all areas of education. Under this new legislation, writing has become a new focal point in the curriculum due to its applicability in all areas of content learning (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Recent research has allowed educators to look for solutions outside of the classroom to meet the oncoming demands of the Common Core State Standards (Black, 2009; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Mackey & McClay, 2008). Informal learning occurs outside the classroom in different physical and digital spaces. Online communities, for example, offer students a place where they can learn more about their areas of interest, watch others participate, or become leaders in their craft (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In online fan fiction communities, students hone their writing skills by participating in the group and receiving feedback from other members, which allows them to rewrite their work while applying received feedback and improve as writers.

This study analyzed the existing discourse among fan fiction participants when they are writing reviews for a posted story. Observing the online community of practice for writers can illustrate different ways to incorporate social learning theory into the classroom to improve instruction.

### **Restatement of Research Questions**

This research explored the following questions:

1. What evidence of effective writing instruction elements is found in the discourse of participants in online fan fiction communities?
2. What evidence of writing support is found in online fan fiction communities?

### **Description of the Research Methodology**

This qualitative study looked at the website [fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com) to analyze comment feeds from participants in the community. By analyzing the comment feeds, the researcher looked for examples of writing support and effective writing instruction strategies within the social learning constructs of a digital community. As a result of this study, the

researcher was able to create theoretical constructs to contribute to existing research on educational technology and writing skills. This grounded theory research provides teachers in the classroom with more effective tools to teach writing.

The study looked at the discourse of fan sites to determine whether participants are learning to write informally through naturally-occurring communities. In the online fan fiction community, participants have the opportunity to post reviews of stories that other participants post to the website. This study analyzed comments on the forums that offer support for writers from the fan fiction community. Instructional writing support can be defined as comments that provide assistance or help the writer carry out one or more processes involved in writing (Graham & Perin, 2007). Positive comments that encourage the writer to continue to write can be identified as writing support, as well as comments that ask probing questions to help the writer improve the content or of the story.

The study also analyzed effective writing instruction strategies that are commonly used in the physical classroom. Through a meta-analysis of existing research, Graham and Perin (2007) identified 11 elements found in classrooms that are evidence of effective writing instruction for adolescent writers: teaching writing strategies, summarization techniques, collaborative writing, having specific product goals, word processing skills, skills in sentence combining, prewriting, inquiry activities, the use of process writing, study of models, and writing for content learning as elements of effective writing instruction. Evidence of these strategies in the discourse among the participants would imply that effective writing instruction is occurring in the community.

This study used grounded theory methods to look at informal learning in the online community as a potential tool for classroom use. Data found within the discourse of online participants was used to formulate and establish a relationship between learning to write and the

constructivist model of learning. Glaser and Strauss (1967) state that grounded theory research methods are intended to provide a systematic way to derive theory from data. This methodology required multiple iterations of data collection and analysis to ensure theoretical saturation.

Theoretical saturation, which occurs when data collection and sampling continues until the categories are saturated with data, is required in order to validate the theoretical constructs of this study.

Public comment feeds from stories from the website were sorted according to the number of comments received. Stories with more than 50 comments were included in the sample for the study in order to focus on substantive interactions rather than superficial comments. The sample size was 12-15 stories in order to focus on the depth of the interactions rather than the quantity of comments. The researcher also analyzed the interaction found in the Beta Forum of the website. This forum is a general area where members can interact with one another to receive support for their writing.

An a priori codebook developed by the researcher was used to analyze the data for evidence of effective writing instruction in both the comment feeds from the stories and the Beta Forum. In this codebook (Appendix A), Graham and Perin's (2007) 11 elements of effective writing instruction have been defined along with key words to help the researcher code the conversations. The researcher coded the discourse until theoretical saturation was reached and there was a clear pattern emerging from the data.

### **Data Sources**

Since the Internet has such a vast number of communities, participants, and uploaded fan fiction, the researcher focused on participants who write Harry Potter fan fiction in order to attract younger writers as well as more male writers. As previously mentioned, Harry Potter is a

fictional character from a series of well-known children's books written by J.K. Rowling. Many young readers decrease their reading by age eight due to the fact that they are unable to find interesting books. Harry Potter readers, however, begin reading at age nine and continue to do so as they grow older. More than half of children and families have read the series and the favorable effect of reading the series is stronger for boys than girls (Yankelovich & Scholastic, 2004). However, most fan fiction writers tend to be female (Jenkins, 1992). As a result of choosing participants in the Harry Potter fan fiction community, the study tried to maximize the amount of male participants being observed to create a more gender-neutral study.

Stories for the study came from the [fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com) community, a community comprised of members of the Harry Potter fandom. The primary website, [mugglenet.com](http://mugglenet.com), is a fan website for members to interact with each other. A subsection of the website, [fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com), is a public area for fan fiction writers in the Harry Potter fandom to post writing.

Transcripts of the fan fiction stories uploaded on the fan fiction community were gathered. These transcripts are found as a long string of comments that create a conversation among the community and possibly the writer. Each story can have anywhere from 0 -135 reviews from other participants on the website. Over 10,000 stories have been posted to the website with correlating reviews. All stories and reviews are available to the public.

Participants in this community have complete anonymity because of the structure of the website. Members of the public are only allowed to read the posted stories and comments. Participants in the community however are allowed to post stories and comments to the website, if they create a username and follow the rules of the community ([Fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://Fanfiction.mugglenet.com),

n.d.). Creating a username ensures anonymity for all members of the community and allows writers to freely explore in their writing.

In addition to the comments from the stories, [fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com) offers a beta reader's forum for members of the community that need assistance with writing. A beta reader is a member whose primary role is to edit stories for writers prior to their uploading it on to the website. It is important to look for comments from beta readers because their primary role in this type of community is to edit writing. Their feedback to writers can deeply affect participants' activity online as well as their writing skills. This is an area for writers to post dilemmas in their writing or ask for assistance in clarifying a story. Members in the community are encouraged to post comments to ask for feedback as to why a story has few reviews. In the beta forum, comments are more frequently posted by beta readers than by other readers or fans. It is important to include these comments in the study so that the discourse can be analyzed for evidence of writing instruction from the beta readers. Writing instruction found in these forums would support the theory that fan fiction communities support effective writing instruction strategies.

### **Process for Selection of Data Sources**

A grounded theory study requires a large data sample. Data sources came from the large fan fiction website [fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com), which includes multiple users in the community. Since there are so many stories on the website, the most recent stories with more than 50 comments were analyzed first. Then the researcher continued to collect data until saturation had been reached. The website includes six categories of fan fiction (or fic): general, contest submissions, alternate universe, dark or angsty fics, romance fics, and humor fics. In the general category, authors post fan fiction that follows the established world that was created by the

original author, J.K. Rowling. This category is the most vague one and it has the most stories uploaded. In the contest submissions category, authors in the community enter posted stories in a contest hosted by the website's administrators. The alternate universe category allows users to write stories that set in a *non-canon universe*. For example, the writer can write about the characters in space or in another country. Dark or angsty fics is a section for writers who choose to write gloomy stories with a premise centered on death or anguish among the characters. The romance fics category is the second largest category in the forum and it offers a place for writers to post stories that focus on romance between the characters. Humor fics is the final category in the forum; this section is dedicated to work that is intended to be humorous and lighthearted. In order to avoid distractions with other elements of fan fiction, only the stories from the general category were used in the study. The general category includes over four thousands stories uploaded by members of the community. The other categories add a different dimension to the motivation for writing, which could lead to miscellaneous variables that may contribute to the results of the study. The researcher continued to examine stories and corresponding reviews for coding and analysis until theoretical saturation had been reached.

The Beta Forum was located in a different area of [fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com). When a member clicks on the link to the Beta Forum, he will be redirected to another webpage. The homepage of the Beta Forum is divided into three different sections. Each section is divided into smaller sub-forums. Many forums were not selected because the discourse was not intent on improving writer's craft but to create a sense of community in the website.

In the Beta Forum, *The Hospital Wing* is where users go to find help with their writing. In this area there are four sections: *Madam Pomfrey's Character Clinic*, *Skele-gro Plot Potion*, *The*

*Reference Desk*, and *General Fan Fic Discussion*. Figure 2 shows the categories of *The Hospital Wing*.

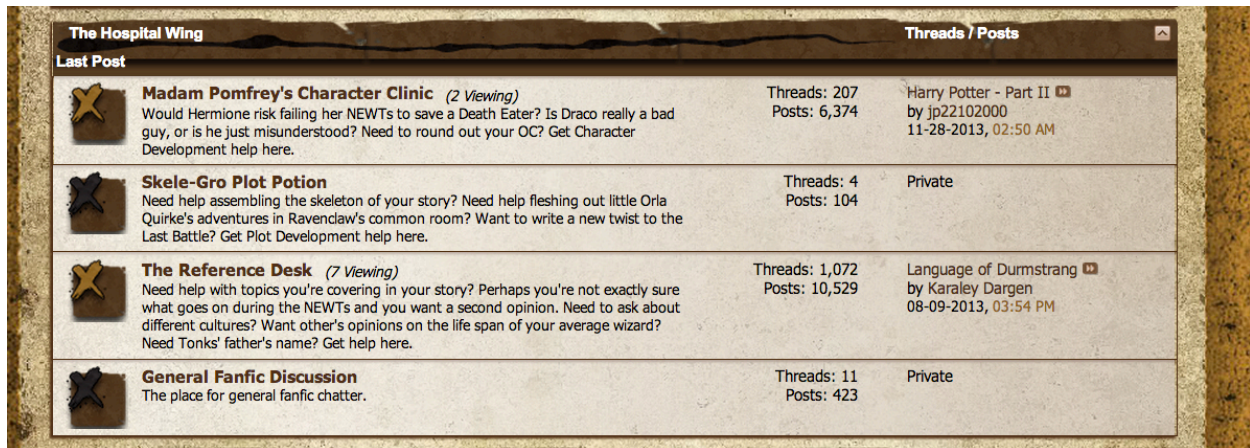


Figure 2. The Hospital Wing section on the homepage of the Beta Forum on Fanfiction.mugglenet.com

*Madam Pomfrey's Character Clinic* is a forum where users can post questions to the general community about character development. Here, users can ask about the motivation of major and minor characters in the story. *The Reference Desk* is where users go to ask questions about detailed parts of the original canon. These questions can range from the life span of the average wizard to proper use of British slang. The other two sections in this subforum were not chosen because their access is restricted to the public.

For this study, the researcher decided to use *The Hospital Wing* as the main source of data in the beta forums because the content in this area reflected discourse within the community to improve writing skills. The other areas of the Beta Forum are intended to help users navigate around the site and to establish a community among the participants on the site. For the purpose of this study, the focus should be on the discourse that provides assistance to writers as they work on their stories. *The Hospital Wing* consists of those forum threads that will show the discourse among writers and the community.



In *The Character Clinic* of *The Hospital Wing*, members of the community post questions they may have about characters they choose to write about. *The Character Clinic* is divided into three different sections: *major characters*, *minor characters*, and *original characters*. The researcher decided to start coding with the *major characters* section because there would be rich and substantive discourse about the main characters of the story. Figure 3 shows how the *major characters* thread is divided into different sections.

Title / Thread Starter	Replies / Views	Last Post By
Sticky: Major Characters: Character List Started by luinrina, 09-21-2011 04:25 PM	Replies: 0 Views: 800	luinrina 09-21-2011, 04:25 PM
Harry Potter - Part II Started by go go ravenclaw, 06-23-2008 05:50 PM 1 2 3 ... 13	Replies: 120 Views: 7,393	jp22102000 11-28-2013, 02:50 AM
Hermione Granger - Part II Started by luinrina, 03-02-2009 12:38 PM 1 2 3 ... 11	Replies: 108 Views: 6,376	Purple Dragon 11-18-2013, 02:13 PM
Draco Malfoy - Part II Started by luinrina, 09-19-2010 09:12 PM 1 2 3	Replies: 22 Views: 2,601	Däenerys_bella_girl 11-09-2013, 06:11 AM
Luna Lovegood Started by king_to_pine, 11-21-2007 03:36 AM 1 2 3 ... 10	Replies: 93 Views: 5,821	Purple Dragon 10-21-2013, 05:26 PM
Lily (Evans) Potter - Part II Started by mudbloodproud, 08-31-2009 04:12 AM 1 2 3 ... 7	Replies: 66 Views: 9,181	AldaLuthien 10-27-2012, 05:25 AM
Ginny Weasley - Part II Started by OliveOil_Med, 09-23-2009 07:20 PM 1 2 3 ... 7	Replies: 65 Views: 5,310	Lost_Robin 07-30-2012, 08:22 PM
Ron Weasley Started by Weasleyboyfreak, 12-04-2007 02:48 AM 1 2 3 ... 6	Replies: 57 Views: 4,051	Ginny Weasley Potter 07-26-2012, 08:32 PM
Sirius Black - Part II Started by luinrina, 03-26-2010 02:22 PM 1 2 3	Replies: 26 Views: 2,901	epiphany212 06-18-2012, 06:06 PM
Severus Snape - Part III Started by luinrina, 08-29-2010 02:15 PM 1 2 3	Replies: 29 Views: 3,606	Equinox Chick 06-17-2012, 02:13 PM
Remus Lupin Started by padfootgirl1981, 11-18-2007 10:47 AM 1 2 3 ... 9	Replies: 82 Views: 6,428	iwannabeanauror 04-21-2012, 12:13 AM
Bellatrix Lestrange Started by Mistletoe, 11-17-2007 04:18 AM 1 2 3 ... 7	Replies: 62 Views: 4,600	welshdevondragon 04-16-2012, 07:07 AM
Nymphadora Tonks Started by Mistletoe, 06-06-2006 12:08 AM 1 2 3 ... 9	Replies: 80 Views: 5,397	Eleanor Lupin 03-17-2012, 09:56 PM
Fred/George Weasley Started by ... 1 2 3 ... 7	Replies: 64 Views: 4,017	Maple_and_PheonixFeather 01-26-2013, 06:30 PM

Figure 3. Page 2 of the Character Clinic in the Hospital Wing forum on fanfiction.mugglenet.com

This page in *the Character Clinic* shows that Harry Potter and Hermione Granger, two of the canon's main characters, have the most activity within the threads. Therefore, both threads were coded using the software. The other threads were not chosen because there was a clear pattern developing during coding for the Harry Potter and Hermione Granger threads. Once the researcher began coding these two threads, the data reached theoretical saturation because the comments were similar in both forums. Theoretical saturation occurs when continuing data

collection in the study does not provide new or relevant data (Bryman, 2012). Since both forums contained over 100 comments pertaining to the development of the character, there was no need to continue coding because all the comments were similar in content and purpose. After these threads from the Harry Potter and Hermione Granger forums were coded, the next section available for sampling was *The Reference Desk*.

*The Reference Desk* in the Beta Forum is further divided into 15 subforums. The subforums were categorized by topic, eras, magic, animals, etc. Within each topic, the number of threads varied from 11 to 196. In addition to the subforums, the moderators have also created a thread for *Spelling, Capitalization, Grammar, and Canon Issues*. Due to the content of these posts, this thread was chosen for the study. Other subforums within the *Reference Desk* were examined for threads containing more than 10 replies to ensure a good overall sampling of the forum. The three subforums with the most activity were selected for coding.

### **Unit of Analysis**

One analysis unit is defined as one story on the website. Since each story has reviewers' comments attached to it, the story's comment feeds were analyzed for evidence of writing support and effective writing instruction elements, as identified by the literature. In addition to the stories from the general category, one thread from the Beta Forum was also considered a unit of analysis. Each comment thread includes the posts from the members of the community as they interact regarding the writing.

### **Data Gathering Process and Analysis**

When collecting data, the researcher used the 11 elements of effective writing instruction as an a priori protocol during data collection. As previously mentioned, in a report to the Carnegie Corporation, Graham and Perin (2007) identified 11 elements of effective writing

instruction for students in grades 4 through 12: teaching writing strategies, summarization, collaborative writing, having specific product goals, teaching word processing, sentence combining, prewriting, inquiry activities, process writing approach, studies of models, and writing for content learning. The report states that by implementing these 11 elements into classroom instruction, teachers will be better equipped to teach writing to students effectively.

Forum postings were downloaded from the website in their entirety and then converted to a rich text format, which will allow the researcher to import them into the HyperResearch software for coding. The HyperResearch software is a program that qualitative researchers use to code data. This program allows the researcher to create codes with annotations as well as themes within the codes if necessary. The software allows the researcher to write a working definition for each code in order to maintain objectivity throughout the coding process.

### **Validity of Qualitative Analysis Software**

The HyperResearch software helps to generate validity of the research because it strengthens the researcher's coding process. By creating a set of definitions for each code, the researcher can maintain those criteria as the data are being coded. This ensures that the researcher is still looking for the same evidence for each new data source.

Using Graham and Perin's (2007) meta-analysis of the 11 elements of writing instruction as an a priori protocol is valid because they analyzed multiple studies in order to reach these conclusions. Their research has been cited in numerous education research articles. For example, Fletcher and Vaughn (2009) cite the 11 elements when they introduce a study that examines a response to an intervention for students with academic difficulties. Reynolds and Shaywitz (2009) cite the meta-analysis in their research on an intervention model for students. In a longitudinal study of levels of language in reading and writing, Abbott, Berninger, and Fayol

(2010) cite the research to substantiate their findings. Due to the large number of researchers that have cited this study as criteria for effective writing instruction, the information that resulted from the meta-analysis can be assumed to be valid and accurate.

### **Reliability of Analysis Process**

Use of the HyperResearch software can ensure reliability of the study. By entering the a priori coding scheme, the researcher can use the software to code the large numbers of comment feeds that will be available online. Collecting the comments consisted of downloading comment feeds from the stories posted in the general fan fiction category. The software allows the researcher to maintain copious notes when coding for the elements of effective instruction.

The software also strengthened intra-rater reliability because it allowed the researcher to create criteria for each of the codes, keeping the coded data as accurate as possible. When the codes are clearly defined, there is little room for erroneous interpretation of the data.

### **Data Gathering Procedures**

The researcher began collecting data by gathering comment feeds from stories, starting with the general category on [fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com). Since the comment feeds are public, the participants will not be aware of the research conducted on their interactions. Each member of the community has a username to ensure anonymity so that the researcher will have no bias related to the participant. Each comment feed was analyzed for common key words or phrases using the HyperResearch software. These key words or phrases were defined clearly in the codebook prior to coding. The codebook in Appendix A defines and illustrates the 11 elements of effective writing instruction in detail to ensure that the researcher has a clear understanding of all 11 elements as well as a clear definition of writing support. This assisted the researcher in analyzing the text found in the comment feeds so they can be interpreted the same way every

time a comment is coded. Using the software will guarantee reliability that the same a priori coding scheme was used during all analysis, and the codebook will ensure that the researcher used the same criteria for codes every time. The researcher continued to make analytic memos during coding so that her thought processes were annotated in case the particular way that data was coded is called into question. To ensure validity of the study, colleagues were able to validate the codebook used during coding.

After completing the first cycle of coding, the researcher revisited the data so that it can be coded again. During this second cycle, the researcher revisited the analytic memos to make sure that the codes were still appropriate. In order to refine the codes and look for themes present in the data, the researcher needed to be more specific when looking for evidence of the elements of instruction or justification of writing support. In this iteration, the researcher looked for overall themes that emerged with the coded data. Grouping similar themes, for example, can help to establish more prominent writing strategies.

Once the collection of the codes is complete, the researcher used the HyperResearch software to compile the data from all comment feeds on writing support as well as all 11 of the elements of effective writing strategies on a single table so that it can be analyzed for frequency and themes.

### **Analysis Processes**

Coding continued until the data reached theoretical saturation. The data was analyzed via both the analytic memos created during coding as well as the data report that was run through the software. The analytic memos illustrate the theory that is forming as the researcher codes the data. In addition, the code reporting illustrates the frequency of each element as it appears in the data. Counting the number of particular codes demonstrates which areas are more prevalent and

which areas are lacking in these types of communities. During the second cycle of coding, the researcher was able to analyze the data more carefully for recurring themes.

### **Sample Table for Proposed Data Analysis**

Table 2 shows the how the 11 elements of effective writing instruction were analyzed. By putting all 11 strategies on the same table, the researcher can see the frequency for each strategy found in the community. If one of the 11 strategies occurs frequently in the stories, one can conclude that there is evidence of that particular writing strategy present in the fan fiction community.

Table 2  
*Analysis of Elements of Effective Writing Instruction*

Elements of effective writing instruction	Story 1	Story 2	Story 3	Story 4	Story 5	Story 6	Story 7	Story 8
Writing Strategies								
Summarization								
Collaborative Writing								
Specific Product Goals								
Word Processing								
Sentence Combining								
Prewriting								
Inquiry Activities								
Process Writing Approach								
Study of Models								
Writing for Content Area Learning								

*Note.* Adapted from “A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York,” by S. Graham and D. Perin, 2007, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 99(3), p. 445. Copyright 2007 by Carnegie Corporation of New York. Adapted with permission.

### **Human Subjects Protection**

Members of the online fan fiction community identify themselves using anonymous usernames. No identifiers were linked directly or indirectly to subjects during the study. During data collection, stories were copied from the posted forum along with the comment feeds. Beta forums were also copied for data collection. The participants in the forums are required to use

usernames so they will remain anonymous as well. Since the subjects cannot be identified, the research remains anonymous.

The researcher was not involved in any interaction among the participants in the community. In order to analyze the discourse among the members, transcripts of the comment feeds were downloaded and stored in the researcher's hard drive. The comment feeds were then uploaded into the HyperResearch software where the coding is kept. These codes will be kept in the software until the conclusion of the study. The data has been published in the proposed table and the comment feeds are deleted. No other records will be kept for the security of the participants in the community.

According to Federal Guidelines, research involving the gathering of stories written by anonymous authors is not considered to be human-subjects research. Stories, as well as feedback from other participants in the community posted to the fan fiction community are publicly available and contain no identifying information. As a result, an application for non-human subjects' research was submitted and approved by the GPS-IRB (Appendix C).

### **Summary**

Informal learning outside the classroom has been an effective learning tool for many students. Participants in the online fan fiction community have the advantage of receiving timely and frequent feedback. Unfortunately, teachers who teach writing in the physical classroom are unable to provide feedback in a timely manner. Recently, California has adopted the Common Core State Standards, which brings more focus to effective writing instruction in the classroom. To improve the writing curriculum, teachers will need to find more ways to reach all learners in the classroom. Learning within communities of practice allows students to make their own paths.

This study looked at the online community of fan fiction writers. As writers post stories to their forums, other members comment and provide feedback on those stories. The discourse among the participants was analyzed for evidence of writing support and the 11 strategies of effective writing instruction identified by Graham and Perin (2007). Since there is little research on using fan fiction communities to support writing instruction in the classroom, this grounded theory study provides theoretical constructs for more effective tools for teachers to use when teaching writing.

Participants in fan fiction online communities play many roles as they interact with each other. Many identify themselves as readers: those who enjoy reading the multitude of fan fiction narratives posted. Others identify themselves as writers: those who write narratives with the intent of sharing it with other fans. The interaction between these members creates a community of learners where novice writers can learn from experts through their comments on posted work. Looking at the discourse among users in this community can help to identify effective writing strategies that teachers can use in the classroom to supplement current writing instruction.



### **Chapter Four: Results**

Given the various problems with writing instruction (Achieve, Inc., 2005; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007; Cassner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006) and the power of learning in a community (Jenkins, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991), online fan fiction communities were studied as a source of support and motivation to writing students. This study analyzed the discourse found in the comment feeds of one fan fiction community for examples of the 11 Elements of Effective Writing Instruction (Graham & Perin, 2007). In addition the study also analyzed the discourse between members of the community for evidence of general writing support themes for novice writers. The findings and analysis are presented here.

#### **Demographics and Process**

Participants from the fan fiction website [Fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://Fanfiction.mugglenet.com) were observed as they commented on stories published on the website by other members. Evidence from the comment feeds shows that the community was made up of both expert and novice writers from the Harry Potter fandom. These participants were anonymous because all members need to create a username to participate in the community. Although this study aims to look at data from school age students, there is no concrete way to tell if the author or reviewer was the target demographic.

To analyze the discourse of the participants on the website, the comments from select stories were downloaded as well as the discourse from the Beta Forum. These interactions were examined for key words that would indicate evidence of the elements or writing support. The coding process for this study examines evidence of the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction (Graham & Perin, 2007) as well as evidence of general writing support for novice writers. The

following table shows the occurrence of the codes in the two areas of the website where data was retrieved.

Table 3  
*Occurrence of Codes in the 12 Stories and the Beta Forum*

	Stories	Beta Forum
RQ1 Elements of Effective Writing Instruction	X	
RQ2 general writing support	X	X

Evidence of the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction was found only in the stories from the general forum. General writing support, however, was found in both the stories and the Beta Forum.

The stories on the website were organized in different genre categories. These categories ranged from authors staying true to the canon to authors who create an alternate universe for the characters from the canon. For this study, only the general category was selected for the data. Within the general fan fiction category, there were pages of stories organized by the date they were uploaded. Each story and its corresponding comments were grouped together in threads that were labeled with the number of comments for each story.

Threads were filtered to find stories that had more than 50 comments to insure comment richness. After looking through 275 stories, 263 (96%) stories posted had fewer than 50 comments and 12 (4%) had more than 50 comments. The stories with more than 50 comments were then uploaded into the HyperResearch software for coding using the codebook (Appendix A) developed by the researcher prior to selecting the data. The codebook was based on Graham and Perin's (2007) study of the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction.

After coding the comment feeds from the 12 stories with more than 50 comments, the discourse from the Beta Forum was then prepared for coding for the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction. On the website, the Beta Forum was organized differently from the general forum so filtering these threads required a different selection process to ensure more substantive discourse between members of the community.

### **Research Question 1: Evidence of the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction**

The comment feeds from the stories found in the general forum were initially coded with the a priori codebook for research question 1.

RQ1: What evidence of effective writing instruction elements is found in the discourse of participants in online fan fiction communities?

The a priori codebook for this study is based on the 11 elements of effective writing instruction as identified by the literature: writing strategies, summarization, collaborative writing, specific product goals, word processing, sentence combining, prewriting, inquiry activities, process writing approach, study of models, writing for content learning. The a priori codebook gives the researcher code words to look for that will show evidence of the element of effective writing instruction. Table 4 illustrates the frequency of each of the elements of effective writing instruction found in the general forum of the website.

Table 4  
*Frequency of Elements of Effective Writing Instruction in 12 Stories*

	Description of code	Frequency
Writing Strategies	Involves teaching strategies for planning, revising, and editing pieces	113
Summarization	Involves explicitly and systematically teaching writers how to summarize text	0
Collaborative Writing	Involves working together to plan, draft, revise, and edit stories	8
Specific Product Goals	Involves assigning specific, reachable goals for writers to complete	10

(continued)

	Description of code	Frequency
Sentence combining	Involves teaching writers to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences	0
Prewriting	Involves activities designed to help writers generate or organize ideas for composition	4
Inquiry Activities	Involves engaging writers in immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task	75
Process Writing Approach	Involves integrating numerous writing strategies into a workshop environment	3
Study of Models	Involves providing writers with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing	17
Writing for Content Learning	Involves writing as a tool for learning content material	9

Of the 11 elements, writing instruction occurs most often and summarization and sentence combining were not evident in the general forum. It is interesting to note that although the other elements were present in the discourse, they were sporadic and rare.

*Writing Strategies* and *Inquiry Activities* were evident in much of the discourse. *Writing strategies* was coded more frequently than all other codes. This element seemed to be the most common way that members in the community interacted with one another. When providing a review for the story, a small critique to help the writer was met with gratitude from the author in the author's response. *Inquiry activities* was also coded frequently in the discourse of the members of the community. These activities were ways that the reader could interact with the author possibly contributing to the future installments of the story.

The Beta Forum, however, showed no evidence of the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction. All the comments that were collected in the Beta Forum were similar in nature. This area is intended for writers to ask questions and experts to answer them. So most of the discourse

in this area pertained to details from the canon. The findings of RQ1 are presented in order of the most occurring element to the fewest.

**Writing strategies.** Of the 11 Elements of Effective Writing Instruction, *writing strategies* was the most prevalent in the discourse among participants in the community. The *writing strategies* code was used when there was a comment that involves teaching strategies for planning, revising, and editing pieces. This includes comments that make suggestions for improving content or grammar, which were numerous. Many of the comments focused on helping the writer improve his writing. Many readers chose to point out grammar flaws or flaws in the plot so that the author could go back and rewrite it. For example:

Story 1: Sorry, if I didn't make that clear. You will be pleased, however, that I intend to build on Snape's backstory in the near future, though.

This illustrates that the author plans on using the feedback provided by the reviewer to improve the story in the future. The author will use the feedback from another review to build the foundation for a character in a future installment. Another author expresses gratitude toward the reviewer for pointing out the misunderstanding:

Story 2: Thanks for the feedback! I should probably say 'run away' instead of disappear, you're right! Cybele's panic attack is explained by later chapters, ;)

This author realized after the review that the word choice was inappropriate for that context. In the future, the author can use this knowledge for other areas. Using writing strategies to revise one's writing requires being able to identify areas where a writer can improve. This code was used when participants in the community offer comments that suggest how the author can improve his story:

Story 2: Just have one thing to say though, I think that the last 2 chapters seem a bit rushed... I don't mean it in a bad way, I just think that there is a lot left unsaid... But maybe you will be developing that in the next chapters!!! Please keep up the good work and update soon.

This comment illustrates the reader's interpretation of the pacing of the story. The reader tempers the comment with a positive remark at the end, but the intent was to help the writer improve pacing in the next installment of the story. A reviewer in Story 3 gives a thorough suggestion to the author by explaining the logic behind particular word choices in writing:

Story 3: I suppose that there may be a confusion of terms here, because 'conceal' and 'disguise' could be read as synonyms. I don't see it that way though 'conceal' is here meant as 'hide,' while 'disguise' is meant as 'to make one thing appear as another' The point I was intending to make was that you couldn't hide hatred. But you could make it look like it was something else. Or perhaps more specifically that the reasons behind it could be twisted to cloud it.

The shades of meaning can be difficult for novice writers, especially English Language Learners (Black, 2009). This review allows the reader to differentiate between the words "conceal" and "disguise." This comment can contribute to the author's understanding of these words in future writing.

Other evidence of the *writing strategies* code is illustrated when readers make suggestions for the plot to help the author. This example demonstrates a suggestion made to an author so that he can develop more personality traits to the main character through plot:

Story 2: Just a suggestion but what if you had her go to fred's and caroline's funerals? That would allow for a short break in the pace and would make Cybele more human. I also would have liked to see more of what she did in the battle because with all of her abilities you would think that she would be able to make a real impact and it would be cool if maybe in a flashback or something we hear about what she did in that year with Caroline because it seems like so much could have happened then.

The discussion of the attendance at the funerals helps the writer develop a foundation for the character. This suggestion can be helpful to a writer if he feels it can be beneficial to the character development. In addition to suggestions on plot and character development, members of the community are also available to make comments on grammar. These examples illustrate

how members in the community can use writing strategies to help the author become better writers:

Story 3: A grammar suggestion: be careful about your punctuation, especially erroneous comma usage.

Author's Response: I am aware that commas give me a lot of trouble. I am a bit dependent on beta readers for this as well, as I re-learn the rules, I thought it was getting down to coming into control. It should be to the point where none are technically incorrect but, they may still be unnecessary in some cases. In any case it is an area I am working on. Thanks for the comments.

Comments on specific areas that can be improved give the writer a place to focus on when revising or editing writing. In the first example, the reviewer gave a suggestion on where to look for grammar flaws, but did not overtly tell the author which sections. The author will need to go back and look through the chapter to find areas where there are too many commas. This will also be useful when the author writes the next installment of the story. In this example, the reviewer comments on the use of adverbs.

Story 7: As for a general area where I think you could improve is your usage of adverbs. The frequent usage of adverbs in movements and dialogue are clear signs of telling something that should be conveyed.

This reviewer gives the writer a lesson on how to convey meaning instead of telling. This lesson for writing is beneficial for novice writers because it helps the writer create a more fluid story. So when the author goes back to revise the chapters, he can keep in mind the specific comments about writing strategies from the community.

In addition to commenting on grammar mistakes, the *writing strategy* code was also used when a member of the community made a "nit pick" comment. Some comments, called "nit picks" address minor grammar issues that the reviewer feels are necessary to point out. For example:

Story 6: Oh, I also have a nitpick- you spelled Alastor wrong. Great chapter anyways!

Story 7: Bit of nitpicking: But Severus is capable. – A mysterious dot has appeared between “is” and “capable.”

Story 8: I have one little nit-pick and that is that at the end of your sentence’s don’t really flow as well as they could. It feels kind of broken.

*Author’s Response:* Oooops! \*Goes to fix typo\*. Next chapter is posted so the wait is over! Thanks for the review! :-)

When a reviewer leaves a comment about nit picking, the intent is that the story is still good even with the small error. Based on this evidence, discourse between the reader and writer seems to play a significant role in the planning, revising, and editing strategies for a writer.

**Inquiry activities.** Inquiry activities involves engaging writers in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help writers develop ideas and content for a particular writing task. Inquiry activities in the forums are evident when members of the community challenge the writers to think about what they are writing. Many of the comments exemplify the true dedication fans have for the original canon. These comments stem from a deep understanding of the world created by J.K. Rowling found in all of the books. The examples illustrate how readers challenge the writer’s understanding of the story or how it is written to help the writer improve the story:

Story 4: Dumbledore could create a portkey with a single spell, in the space of a few seconds. His specialty is transfiguration, not artificing, and while he may have spent ages learning how to make a portkey that quickly it is highly unlikely. Portkeys in HP are considered fairly common and easy to manufacture, even if their use is regulated by the Ministry. Therefore I find it a little difficult to believe that they would be so expensive in America, and artificers spend ages sweating over their creation, if they were used so readily and easily (such as the quidditch world cup in book 4, for example).

*Author’s Response:* The issue with Portkeys is actually not something anyone else has brought up. You make a fair point.

Story 7: I think that could use a little more backstory, for why have the gods if the Horcruxes do the trick? And without the gods, you lose Maeve...So, that’s a loose thread I’d like to see pulled in line.

These reviews make suggestions to the author about the use of Portkeys and Horcruxes in the fan fiction. These products were introduced in the original canon, therefore giving the community



license to have knowledge about it. The reviewers felt that the use of these items in fan fiction should stay true to the canon. Based on their interpretation of the characters from the story, the reviewers felt the fan fiction should have been more accurate.

This type of comment requires the author to think about what he is writing and how the details fit in with the original canon. In this particular area of the forum, only stories that stay true to the canon are allowed. Non-canon stories have a different forum. The use of inquiry strategies by members of the community allows the author to plan and develop the plot for his story based on the original canon with the support of other members in the community.

**Study of models.** A study of models involves providing writers with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing. Due to the fact that this is a Harry Potter Fan Fiction community, the primary model of good writing is J. K. Rowling herself. This code was only found when members of the community comment using Rowling as the model. Many of the authors in the forums comment on continuing her work or filling the holes that she left in the stories. For example:

Story 1: JKR had a different approach (Patronus messages), but the idea stuck in my mind that there was so much untapped potential in that notion.

Story 1: Remus and Snape are my favorite characters to write; I couldn't just let them gather dust on the shelf where JKR left them.

Story 1: Glad you liked the conversation. There's always so many details that were never fleshed out in canon and it's so much fun to spin them out.

In these comments, the only model was J.K. Rowling. There was little evidence of other writers in the community, but that could be due to the fact that this community is dedicated to J.K. Rowling's work. Even though there were other more experienced authors in the forums, there was no mention of studying their work to improve one's writing.

**Writing for content learning.** Writing for content learning involves using writing as a tool for learning content material. There were not many instances of students using fan fiction to learn other content material as this was not considered an education website intent on teaching new concepts. There were, however, some reviewers who mention integrating an understanding of history or Greek mythology into their writing. For example:

Story 1: I loved the connection to ancient history as well as the interdiction to the merpeople to Dumbledores “Disciple”.

Story 1: Hmmm...Snape and Lupin attempting to re-enactment Orpheus’s journey? Reminds me vaguely of Lewis and Clark, rather other-directed (but with much better spelling!). The journey is interesting, but I expect that your reason for including it will become clearer with time.

Story 1: I hope he (Harry) has a safety valve – boiler explosions tend to be nasty. (There was a really big one in 1883, between Java and Sumatra-nearly destroyed a smallish island & gave the world beautiful sunsets for the next 3 years from the volcanic dust in the atmosphere.)

These reviews were coded for content learning, but knowledge of history was already present in these reviewers. In these examples, the reviewers mention history and how it relates to the fan fiction. These authors did not write to learn content knowledge. Ideally, the code for writing for content learning would be used when writers are writing to understanding something other than the Harry Potter series, but this fan fiction community is not conducive to that type of learning. These examples were evidence that the writer had an understanding of this concept and chose to include it in the writing.

**Specific product goals.** Setting specific product goals involves assigning specific, reachable goals for writers to complete. In the classroom, setting goals is a result of the teacher telling the student what goals to meet. In this type of setting, the authors set their own goals and their readers keep them accountable for reaching their goals. Some authors make comments explaining that the next chapter is on its way.

Story 1: The chapter with Harry/Ginny that everyone's clamoring for is just around the next bend, I promise.

Story 1: Next chapter should be up soon. It's taking me longer than expected as the tone is rather tricky and I want to make sure I get it right.

Story 1: I have the next one almost ready, a few tweaks away from submission. Definitely this week though.

In some cases, the pressure to update a chapter comes from the community. Some readers request updates giving the writer a goal to meet. For example:

Story 3: I really look forward to seeing the rest, but I hope you can get it up a bit quicker.

These comments help to keep the writer accountable and continue to write. Setting goals, either by the writer himself or other members in the community, can be motivating for writers.

**Collaborative writing.** Collaborative writing involves working together to plan, draft, revise, and edit stories. In this community, the collaboration of authors is not explicitly stated. However, there are some comments in the forums where authors mention working with others on particular parts of stories:

Story 1: Thank you for teaming up those who redeveloped the Deluminator.

Story 3: Loved working on it with you.

In story 1, the statement is a blanket statement to certain people, but those members are not identified. In story 3, the comment is vague and unclear as to which parts were results of collaboration. In the 275 stories in the forum, the researcher did not see stories written by more than one author. It is assumed that any discourse between authors who collaborate on stories would be private and only available through personal interaction with the writing team.

**Process Writing Approach.** The process writing approach involves integrating numerous writing strategies into a workshop environment. This includes spending time on numerous projects and publishing when it is appropriate. In fan fiction communities, the amount

of time spent working on a project is not explicitly stated. Authors do not post stories until they have finished writing and this often involves multiple iterations and collaboration with a beta reader, but this is not done on the website. So as a result, there was little evidence in the forums about using the writing process to write stories, although it is clear that authors work on stories in phases. One author commented:

Story 3: Another chapter is almost through the Beta/rewrite process and will be submitted real soon.

This illustrates the fact that there is a process in the writing, but there was no public discourse available for the study since the author is working privately with a Beta reader.

**Word processing.** Word processing involves the use of computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing. It is apparent that the writers on [Fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://Fanfiction.mugglenet.com) use computers to write their stories because the stories are published digitally. There was no discourse on how the use of technology assisted writers as they worked on stories. However, the researcher did find some comments that imply the use of technology was not helpful to one's writing. The following examples highlight how certain tools in word processing programs such as Spell Check and the T9 word recognition software can be unfavorable:

Story 6: A note: Sometimes it seems like you typed a word with T9 and it guessed the wrong word. I can't find an example right now, but I've seen it a few times in this chapter and a few prior. Other than that, it's great!

Story 6: Only suggestion: I think the translation software (?) that you use mistranslates at times. The incorrect words distract me for a bit, and then I'm hooked by your great characters again.

This particular story had many comments about the author learning English as a second language. Based on the evidence, the author used translation software as an assistive device. It is clear that writers use word processing software to publish their work to the community, but the researcher was unable to find discourse about this particular tool being helpful.

**Prewriting.** Prewriting involves activities designed to help writers generate or organize ideas for composition. In the fan fiction forums, the interaction between reviewers and authors occurs after the first draft has been written. However, each story is uploaded one chapter at a time, so the authors can use reviews left by readers to help generate or organize ideas for the next chapter.

For example:

Story 8: Wow, nasty manipulating Dark Lord supporters. Hope they get captured some how!

*Author's response:* They will, but not for several years (in a story which is still in the planning stages.)

The idea for the author's next story is being developed while readers continue to comment. This author suggests that while there is planning, there is no discussion of that planning in the discourse for that chapter. Therefore, the author is able to work on new ideas for the next installment.

**Summarization, sentence combining.** Summarization and sentence combining elements were not explicitly found in the discourse among participants of this fan fiction community. Summarization involves explicitly teaching writers how to summarize text. There is some indication that summarization is necessary because the community requires writers to write a summary about their story as a preview. The website administrators provide some advice on how to write a summary, but this was not found in the discourse of the participants. In addition, this particular skill pertains to writing summaries of text in order to gain a better understanding. This skill is not necessary for writers in the forums. However, some readers are able to practice this skill as they summarize parts of the story prior to commenting on them. Those interactions were not coded because this element of effective writing instruction is intended for writers to use the summarization skill to learn another concept, not summarize the text of their own story.

Sentence combining involves teaching writers to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences. This element was not evident in the forums because it is assumed that this skill is often addressed in a private conversation between the writer and his beta reader. Due to the private relationships between writers and beta readers, these interactions are not publicly available on the website.

The 12 stories from the general forum showed some evidence of the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction, especially *writing strategies* and *inquiry activities*. The following figure illustrates the frequency of these elements in the 12 stories.

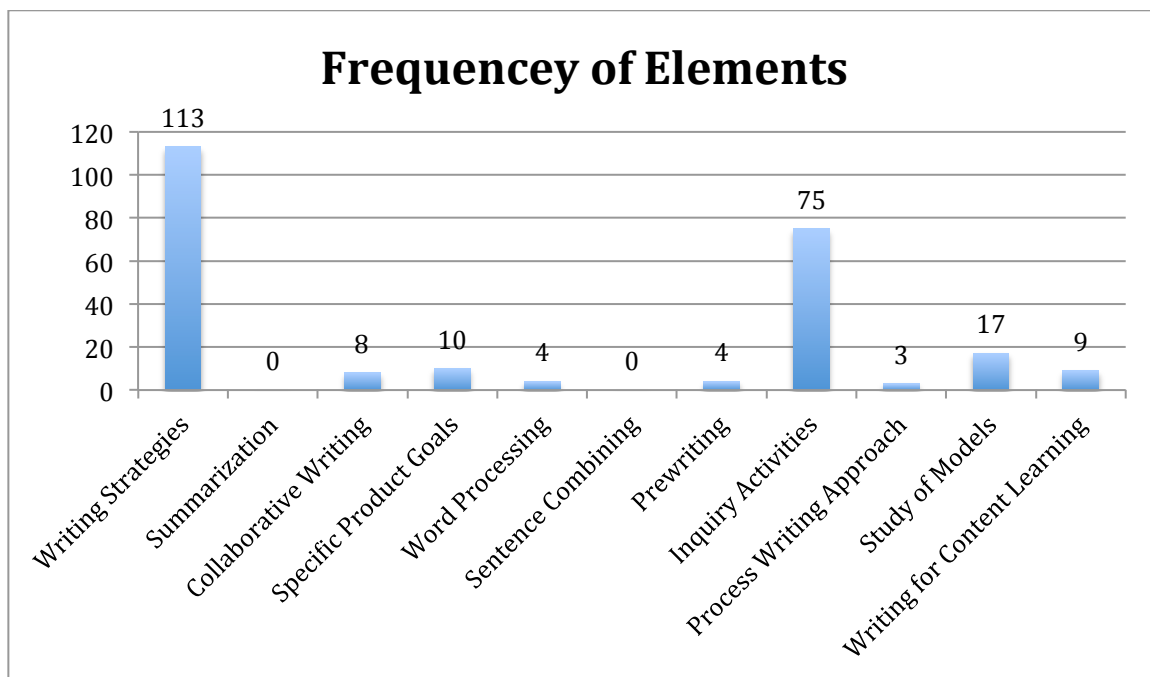


Figure 4. A comparison of the frequency of the 11 Elements of Effective Writing Instruction found in the discourse of the 12 stories from fanfiction.mugglenet.com

**Evidence of 11 elements in beta forums.** After looking at the stories from general forum for the 11 Elements of Effective Writing Instruction, the researcher then moved to using the a priori codebook to code the discourse found in a different area of the website, the Beta Forum.

When coding with the a priori codebook, the researcher found no discourse in the Beta Forum pertaining to the 11 Effective Elements of Writing Instruction. The discussion in these

boards all pertained to developing the writer's story through general questions about the canon. In these forums, writers are able to ask specific questions about story plots, character developments, or the difference between British English and American English. The boards are divided into different areas for different needs. In essence, the entire forum is considered a space for a question and answer session for various topics. The Elements of Effective Writing Instruction were not found in the discourse of the participants of the Beta Forum.

After coding the discourse in the 12 stories from Fanfiction.mugglenet.com and the Beta Forum for the 11 Elements of Effective Writing Instruction, the data was then coded again to find evidence of general writing support.

### **Research Question 2: Evidence of Writing Support**

In order to examine Research Question 2, the 12 selected stories and the Beta Forum were analyzed for evidence of writing support.

RQ2: What evidence of writing support is found in online fan fiction communities?

Comment feeds collected from the stories from the general forum were analyzed a second time looking for additional evidence of writing support found in the discourse of these forums. Codes for this phase of the study focused on the purpose of the code. If the reviewer wanted to leave a positive comment, then it was coded with *general praise*. Comments where the reviewer left advice for the author was coded as *advice*. The following table shows the frequency and description of the codes found in general forum as well as the Beta Forum.

Table 5  
*Frequency of Writing Support*

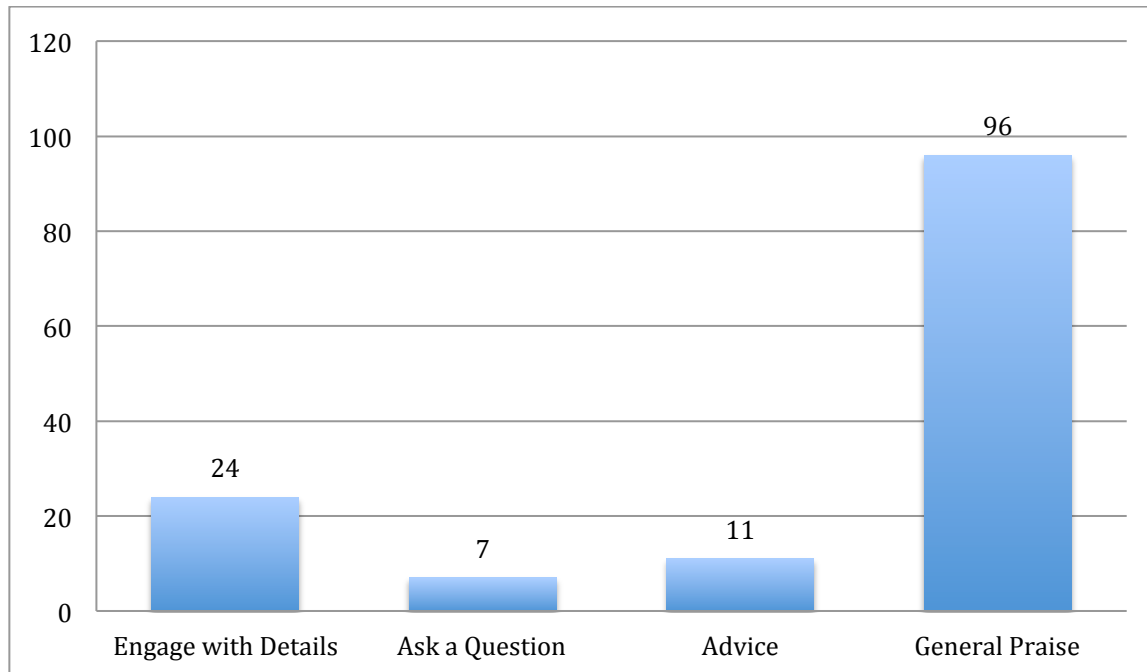
Type of Writing Support	Description	Number of examples in the data
Advice on how to find information	Participants offer advice on where to find more information.	2

(continued)

Type of Writing Support	Description	Number of examples in the data
Clarify details in the story	Participants are looking for clarification on events in the original canon or how a character would behave based on details in the canon.	6
Ending the story	Participants are concerned that the author is ending a story abruptly.	7
General Writing Support	Participants in the community offer positive comments on the story.	32
Predicting what comes next	Participants engage with the story by predicting what will happen next.	1
Probing questions	Participants ask questions that can lead to more depth in the story.	1
Request Updates	Participants request updates to the story so they can continue.	23
Requesting something specific	Participants request a specific detail in the story.	2
Specific Content	Participants comment on a specific detail in the story.	21
Writer's Craft	Participants comment on well-written parts in the story.	23
Writer's Craft- Beautiful Description	Participants comment on beautiful descriptions in the story.	7
Writer's Craft- Dialogue	Participants comment on well-written dialogue in the story.	3
Writer's Craft- Pace	Participants comment on the well-developed pacing of the story.	1

The 14 codes found in the data were then grouped into four themes; *engaging with details*, *asking questions*, *asking for advice*, and *general praise*. These four themes exemplify the type of interaction that can be supportive to the writer. The figure 5 shows the frequency of the four themes.





*Figure 5.* A comparison of the frequency of the four themes found in the discourse of the 12 stories and the Beta Forum of [fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com)

There is evidence of writing support in both the stories and Beta Forum, but the discourse found in the Beta Forum was different because members were not reviewing one story, but asking questions in order to write their own story. The following table displays the difference in the frequency of support found in the Beta Forum with support found in the 12 stories.

**Table 6**  
*Writing Support Themes Found in the 12 Stories and the Beta Forum*

	Engaging with Details of the Story	Ask Questions	Advice	General Praise
12 stories from the general forum	24	0	0	96
Beta Forum	0	7	11	0

The comments that pertained to specific requests for assistance were only found in the Beta Forum. All other comments that pertained to specific details of the story were found in the 12 stories from the general forum. The findings from RQ2 are presented and explained.

**Engaging with details of the story.** The general forums for stories are a place where members of the community can interact with authors of their favorite stories. By engaging with the story details and creating that dialogue with the writer, the community members are more engaged with the story making it more interesting as well as more motivating for the writer. Engaging with details is evident in many ways in the forums. Participants of the community can comment on specific parts of the stories, request specific details, or predict what will happen next in the story.

Comments that refer to a specific part of the story were coded as *specific content*. The majority of the comments in the general forum were comments about specific parts in the story that the reviewer wanted to share with the author. For example:

Story 3: I know that Neville's Gran was a force to be reckoned with, but this just takes that even further. I thank you for a very believable history lesson. That sounds so right. Amazing. I got a kick out of both Mrs. Longbottom's patronus and her Animagus.

Story 2: I think my mouth hit the floor and then I giggled when I realized your translated Cybele's name to Astoria Greengrass!!! I loved the interaction between her and Severus, her and Draco, and the twins, Lee, Neville, Caroline! It was fantastic! Well done!

Story 3: And the Whisper, of course, was lovely! Very imaginative, and it fits so perfectly into the world that it seems like it could be a JKR invention.

In these examples, the reviewer engages with specific details of the fiction that were exemplary. This author not only mentions specific parts that he enjoys, such as the patronus and animagus, but also provides a positive comparison to the original author, JK Rowling, as a compliment.

When the community is able to interact with the author, they often request specific parts to a story or try to predict what will come next. This allows the community to engage with the

story therefore enjoying it more as the author continues to write. For example, in story 1, the reader asks the author to write in a specific part to the story:

Story 1: But I've noticed that Dumbledores chocolate frog card has not been part of the story for a while. And when will Alistor be able to come back?

The writer has already included the chocolate frogs in an earlier chapter of the story, but the reviewer is hoping to see that plotline resurface. This specific detail was important enough to the reader to mention it in a comment. In this example in story 2, the reader comments on the relationship with Draco and Cybelle and the author uses this specific detail to foreshadow the events of the next installment:

Story 2: Aww! I had hoped that Draco would stop being the git he is and finally go out with Cybelle, because she brings out the best in him and they seem meant to be together in their own strange, special way.

*Author's Response:* Keep reading- there's still hope until the final chapter ;)

The author acknowledges the reader's interest level and that will in turn create motivation for the writer. When engaging with the details of the stories, members of the story use comments to predict what they think will happen next. For example:

Story 1: I have an idea as to what Hermione is up to, but again I'll defer.

This lets the author know that the reader is invested in the story and quietly anticipating the next installment. By engaging with the author with specific comments or making requests, the community encourages the writer to continue writing stories. This type of writing support was found in all the forums except the beta forum because there are no stories posted there.

**Ask questions.** Another way for community members to interact with the writers is by asking questions. In the forums, the authors have the option to respond to comments. In the forums, authors have the option to respond to comments. The Beta Forum is entirely made up of questions asked by the participants in the community.

Asking questions in the forums allows the author to engage with the community. It also helps members of the community develop ideas for their own writing. By engaging with the community, authors have the opportunity to use this constructive criticism to build on the existing story. In the Beta Forum, for example, where the community can ask about character development, one member responds to a post asking probing questions to help develop that foundation for the Harry Potter character in the story:

Beta Forum: As for more probing questions: how would Harry tell his children what he had done when he was seventeen? Is Harry slightly resentful that they got to have a childhood that he never had? Would Harry have considered playing professional Quidditch? What is Ginny's role in the development of Harry Potter, the fifty year old wizard, from the seventeen year old "Chosen One"? Just something to think about...hope it wasn't too off topic.

This review was written in response to another question about how Harry Potter as a 50-year old wizard would behave based on the interpretations of other members of the community. After answering the original post, the reviewer added these probing questions to continue to help the writer build a more solid foundation of the main character.

Many of the comments in the Beta Forum ask the community for advice on how to write the behavior of a particular character. Since the three main characters in the canon, Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger, have such developed characters in the original canon, they are frequently included in fan fiction. As a result, many of the members in the community use the forums to ask about what a particular character would do based on the interpretation of the original canon. In the Beta Forum, one member asks a series of questions in order to help his characterization of Harry Potter. The response was as follows:

Beta Forum: When would Harry tell Teddy Lupin about the War and how his parents died?

*Response:* I guess he would tell him before Teddy starts at Hogwarts, maybe even earlier. I can imagine Teddy would want to know about his parents quite early, around the age of 4/5 maybe. At this age, though Harry will probably only tell him that his parents died to

ensure Teddy a peaceful life. Andromeda is probably going to tell Teddy about at least Tonks when he starts asking the questions. Then again we know Harry has more insight information on what happened during the battle. Therefore I imagine he would tell Teddy the last battle in detail when he's around 13/14, old enough to understand his parents' motives.

The response to the previous post is purely speculation from a member of the community. A solid understanding of canon helps this member answer the question as best he can. Thus helping the writer formulate a strong foundation for the character in the fan fiction.

In another example from the Beta Forum, one author asks for advice on something that could possibly happen to Hermione before she realized she was a witch:

Beta Forum: I need to come up with a few instances of accidental magic that Hermione would have had as a child before getting her letter to Hogwarts. How do you think her parents might have reacted to such instances? How do you think Hermione would have reacted?

*Response:* Hm, well her parents were dentists so I was thinking Hermione got some fillings when she was younger and she HATED them so much that they popped out the next day. A little like how Harry's hair grew back after Petunia cut it.

This participant used his knowledge of the canon to draw conclusions that may be helpful to the writer as he develops his story.

Since the community is made up of so many different types of fans of the original series, the level of understanding in the canon also varies. Different levels of expertise on the books helps to develop a community where one can ask questions that draw on a deeper understanding of the books. This helps the writer develop his foundation for writing.

**Offering advice.** Another example of writing support in the forums is when an author receives advice from the community about different ways to improve the piece. Many participants make suggestions through the forums on how writers can improve their stories. For example, one member posts a request in the *Reference Desk* of the Beta Forum asking about

writing when switching points of view within the characters. One member of the community responds:

Beta Forums: This is a very personal opinion. I'm thinking it'd be better if you edited it. Since you said, "Basically just got it from Sirius PoV only" I'm thinking something from another POV would at least attract my attention unnecessarily to the narrative, in other words meaning, it'll break the flow.

The respondent was clearly trying to be respectful of the other perspectives on the topic, but made a very clear point. At the end of the comment, he acknowledges that the decision still belongs to the author. The advice was given, but the reviewer empowered the author by making it his decision.

Instead of offering advice on how to improve writing, participants in the community also request information on grammar and proper usage. This type of interaction is often found in the Beta Forum in the *Reference Desk*. One example shows a member asking for assistance with the use of commas:

Beta Forums: Anyone who has had the misfortune to have to beta for me will know I don't understand commas. I am trying. However, there seems to be two ways of explaining them- one whereby commas define separate clauses e.g in the sentence (this will make no sense) "Abraxas Malfoy turned from the window, and by chance, say the pot plant exploding" the "and by chance" is a separate clause and therefore separated from the rest by commas. Which makes sense. Most of the time. But sometimes- like this is from the back of a book I'm reading "It deserves many prizes and, better than that, the affection of generations of readers." Now I'm pretty sure if I sent this sentence to my betas, they'd put the comma before the 'and'. However, surely the commas just separate the part which is unnecessary to the sentence. i.e. without the "better than that" the sentence still makes sense so the comma should go before the 'and'. Does that make any sense at all? Any help/answers would greatly appreciated

Another member responded with advice on the reasoning behind the placement of commas:

Alex, in the latter scenario, the 'better than that' is more of an appositive than anything. Generally, anything that is supplementary information and is used more for clarification/enhancement purposes is encapsulated with commas. I'm sure it has a different name, but this concept and that of appositives, at least in my experience, is along the same lines. The thing to remember is that most betas have comma issues to some extent, as well, but have a good sense of when something looks right. Commas in

the proximity of coordinating conjunctions throw me here and there, but how I work through it is trying out different ways of punctuating the sentence in question and picking the one that looks the more correct. More often than not, this yields the best results when you're not certain of the rules governing the structure you're going for. Hope this helps!

The use of commas in one's writing can be addressed with a beta reader, but some of the writers in this community do not use beta readers. The writer does comment on the possible interaction with a beta reader, but this question is intended to help the writer understand the nuances of the commas used in that context. The community has a place for authors to seek advice when necessary. This type of writing support is significant for authors who may not be using a beta reader to edit his work.

**General praise.** The most prevalent example of writing support in the fan fiction community is general praise. Positive comments about details or the writer's skills can be encouraging to authors. In the forums, requesting updates, positive feedback on writer's craft, fear of ending a story are all examples of comments that show general praise.

Many of the comments posted in the forums include requests for updates. Since authors post stories one chapter at a time, readers are frequently looking for updates because they are excited to read the next installment. This is can be flattering to the writer. Many readers post very simple comments to convey their request. For example:

Story 2: I just want to say though that I really like your story, think you're a great writer and I hope the next chapter comes soon!

Story 3: Really love it so far, Can't wait for you to post more!

These comments are not specific and intended to convey an appreciation for the author's work. This type of motivation is found throughout the forums. Many readers post this type of general comment in addition to specific comments that refer to parts of the story that they enjoy. For example:

Story 3: I'm glad you posted this chapter. I love your take on Harry's coming of age, at least so far. I look forward to the next part. Harry is so noble and so right in going slow. I am wondering why there hasn't been any hint of Riddle and his thugs. I'm sure he's not going to be silent much longer. Don't make us wait too long.

By commenting specifically on Harry's character traits, the reviewer gives the author points that he finds strong in the story. Then the reviewer finishes the comment with a request for more of the story because he enjoyed it.

Just as reviewers feel obligated to write reviews as they read each chapter, authors also have an obligation to update often. Updating often is important to writers because the community can become invested in the story. In Story 3, a series of reviews expresses the concerns of the readers to the author. After a few reviews from various readers, the author finally makes a comment apologizing for the delay:

Story 3: Another great chapter... I'm glad you decided to rejoin the world of HP..  
 Author's response: Very sorry about the long delay. I'll see if I can't prevent that from occurring again. Thank you for reading and reviewing.

After this response, other reviewers comment about the author resuming the story:

Story 3: Finally! I've been waiting for this update for a while, and I must say its worth the wait! Keep up the good work, and don't be discouraged!

Story 3: Wow I am so excited this story is going to continue. Please not so long a wait next time!!

Story 3: YES STILL INTERESTED

Story 3: I absolutely loved this chapter and am definitely still interested! Please update soon!

Story 3: Jeograph- what a wonderful alternative to DH, please keep up the fantastic writing!

*Author's Response:* I realize that I have been horribly slow lately. But rest assured I am still here and I intend to keep going. Wonderful comments like yours are always very encouraging, and I do thank you so much for taking the time to read and comment. Thank you again!!!



The existence of a reader's request for an update implies that the reader wants to read more. This is a general compliment to the writer and a form of *general praise*. Rapid updates keep the readers coming back to the story to read. When an author doesn't update quickly, readers can become confused. A series of readers in Story 6, for example, begged the author to complete the story with updates to the chapters:

Story 6: Okay, I love this story. I have loved it for awhile. And I recently decided to re-look it up, and now I can't stop thinking about it. Please, update soon. It's been a while and I adore these characters, these plots, everything. So please, please, update as soon as you can. I write on fanfictionnet so I totally understand the difficulties of pumping out new chapters, but I really would love to see this continued. Truly.

Story 6: Hello, I'm sorry to hear that you've decided to discontinue your fanfiction. I'll miss it dearly. But I understand how inspiration...well inspiration is like a goldfish (google the phrase and you'll understand).

These final comments were the end of the thread. One can assume that the author did not continue the story and did not respond to the readers' request. This example is evidence that the community will provide the general praise, even when the author has abandoned the story. Most authors, however, do respond to readers. One comment in Story 11 illustrates the way an author comments:

Story 11: Great story! Please update soon so the story won't be left unfinished... :(  
*Author's Response:* I've totally failed at updating this, I'm sorry. It's my goal to finish this by the end of the summer, along with Persephone =]

Evidence of this type of interaction substantiates the fact that reviews from readers on the website keep the authors motivated to finish their stories. This comment is still considered general praise for the author because the community wants to read more. When a writer doesn't update regularly, the fear in the community of readers is that the author has abandoned the story. One reader makes a comment on a story that seemed to be abandoned, the author, however, was delayed on getting the new update posted.

Story 7: aww good chapter I love maeve and severus together... what happened to Hogwarts!!!! Update much faster then you did for this last chapter I was getting really nervous that you might abandon it or something! Don't scare me like that!

*Author's Response:* Sorry for the scare! I've updated again and am already writing the next chapter, so updates should be coming along more regularly now. And thanks for the review!

This type of writing support can contribute to the motivation of writers to write more. Authors of good stories know that there are readers looking forward to another installment of the chapter.

Another example of general praise in the fan fiction community is a positive comment on writer's craft. When the comment was coded as *writer's craft*, the comment from the forum is a positive statement about the writer's ability to write clearly and beautifully. There were many comments in the forums that pertained to specific strengths that the writer demonstrated. Beautiful descriptions, dialogue, and pacing were specific examples of strengths that were discussed in the forums. Therefore, many comments were simply coded as writer's craft if it did not relate to beautiful descriptions, dialogue, or pacing of the story. An example of a general comment on writer's craft is when a reader comments on the writer's beautiful writing style and the author responded with gratitude:

Story 1: Your writing style never ceases to amaze me! Brilliant as always!

*Author's Response:* Thanks for the encouragement. Hope you didn't have to wait too terribly long for the next installment. I lost the battle with Real Life again...

When referring to the writer's craft, readers usually reference to something specific that the writer does well. For example:

Story 3: Overall, I thought this was a great chapter for characterizations, with Dumbledore's lessons, Harry's growth, and his communications back from the Burrow. Great job with those; they really make the story real!

Story 7: Your prose is fresh, lyrical and deep. They are enlivened by your nice usage of active verbs, verbs that are great tools to give the sentences energy and move those forward and concrete nouns.

In Story 4, the writer receives comments on her beautiful writing. The comments reference the fact that her stories are so well written that they can be published:

Story 4: I admit to liking fanfictions like AQ which only includes the world/universe of the series it is inspired by, but uses original characters and plots- creating a fresh storyline in a familiar world, so to speak. Yours is the first really decent one I've read so far though, and I agree with other reviews that your writing and plot/character management, especially the AQ series, is easily publishing standard (if that's the correct phrase). Perhaps more so than a lot of well known books on the shelves today.

This particular story received many positive comments on writer's craft. The author continued to write many more chapters for this series.

Other comments on writer's craft specifically targeted certain strengths. These other strengths, beautiful descriptions, dialogue, and pacing, were mentioned in comments more frequently. For example:

Story 4: I've been reading your Alexander Quick novels obsessively for the past week and I must say I am blown away. The level of care you've taken in developing an American wizarding culture is astounding. The Harry Potter universe is still there propping it up, but you've taken this story far beyond the normal realm of fanfiction.

Story 1: Brilliant! I loved the pace and the dialogue.

Story 7: Your dialogue and character development is rich. Would like to see more.

By identifying specific strengths in the writing, readers are able to encourage writers to continue with the story, therefore offering writing support in the form of general praise.

The most common comment in the forums is the general praise of the work. Many readers leave positive feedback in hopes that the comment will encourage the author to continue to write for the community. The interaction between the reader and the author is evidence that the positive comment is encouraging to the author:

Story 3: What a wonderful alternative to DH, please keep up the fantastic writing!  
*Author's response:* Wonderful comments like yours are always very encouraging, and I do thank you so much for taking the time to read and comment. Thank you again!

Story 9: I have yet to read all the chapters you have written, but I must say this is one of the most interesting fics I have read in while. I rather enjoy your style of writing. Keep it up! I'll review again when I have read more (which should be ver soon).

*Author's Response:* Thank you very much! Hearing someone say something about liking my "style of writing" makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside. I quite enjoy writing this story and it makes me glad when it's enjoyed by people- The ones I have never even met are especially exciting to hear from. Thanks again!

Providing general praise gives the author motivation to continue writing. This type of writing support was found in every forum post for the stories that were included in the study, but not in the Beta Forum because there was not story for the reviewer to comment on.

### Interpretation

Since nine of the 11 elements were evident in the discourse of the community, this researcher assumes that some of the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction are found in the discourse of the participants in the community. However, there were only two elements that had numerous instances in the comment feeds and the other seven were rare occurrences. Table 7 shows the frequency of the elements by stories.

Table 7  
*Frequency of Elements of Effective Writing Instruction in Each Story*

	Writing Strategies	Summarization	Collaborative	Specific Product	Word Processing	Sentence Combining	Prewriting	Inquiry Activities	Process Writing	Study of Models	Writing for Content	Total
Story1	11		6	9	1		2	8	1	17	9	64
Story 2	11				1				1			14

(continued)

	Writing Strategies	Summarization	Collaborative	Specific Product	Word Processing	Sentence Combining	Prewriting	Inquiry Activities	Process Writing	Study of Models	Writing for Content	Total
Story 3	28		1	1				1	1			32
Story 4	2							16				18
Story 5	2							5				7
Story 6	3				2			7				12
Story 7	24		1					13				38
Story 8	11						2	7				20
Story 9	8							3				11
Story 10	3							3				6
Story 11	3							2				5
Story 12	7							10				17

Even though the study focused on the existence of all 11 elements, only two were common in the discourse of participants. With the exception of Story 2, both *writing strategies* and *inquiry activities* were present in every story. The two stories with the most evidence of the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction were Story 1 and Story 3.

In Story 1, there were many comments about a controversial topic in the fiction. The author added a section about Harry having to give up his fortune to his cousin and many of the reviewers did not like to see the hero of the canon perform such a selfless act for another, more selfish character. The readers expressed discontent with the writer's choice in many ways,

therefore adding to the comments in that particular story. They did not like what the author had written and felt it was contradictory to the original canon. In this story, the author was very responsive to the reviews left by the community and asked for help when the community made a suggestion.

The author in Story 3 wrote a story that received many suggestions in writing style. This implies that the posted fiction was not as good as other stories. It is interesting to note, though that it did receive a significant number of comments compared to other stories in the genre. This story also contained comments about compliance to canon. The character most often discussed was Draco Malfoy and the community felt that his portrayal in the story was not true to canon. This also contributed to the number of codes found in the discourse of this story.

The discourse among participants on the website helps students build knowledge as writers practice writing skills. The peer-to-peer feedback provided by the rest of the community gives writers a chance to learn skills that may be difficult to achieve in the formal brick and mortar classroom. Discourse from the study show that participants in the community are leaving constructive criticism for writers to improve their writing. Members of the community help peers write in ways that may differ from what they are used to writing. In addition, these members of the community also engage in explicit grammar instruction in the forums of the stories. Working with more capable peers helps writers improve their own skill. Peers in the community also serve as role models for aspiring writers by engaging in conversations with readers.

Members of the community are exposed to role models, professional writers as well as unpublished writers honing their craft. Writers who have good role models tend to emulate good writing style and can learn from their mentors. This community offers participants many

different role models in their fandom. As participants read other stories, they can develop their own writing style.

The online fan fiction community also offers other advantages to novice writers. A digital community forces writers to use word processing software to post to the website, therefore giving writers the opportunities to use the tools available in the software. Participants in the community are able to upload as many stories to the website as they like, pending approval from site administrators. For example, the website offers six genre categories for writers to submit to and more categories within each genre. This offers writers many opportunities to write, therefore increasing writing practice time for emerging writers. Posting many stories to the website gives the community many opportunities to comment on the writing. According to Black (2008), authors are more motivated to write when they receive positive comments on their work.

### Results Summary

After analyzing the discourse on the website, 12 stories were found to have a substantial amount of discourse in order to analyze for writing support. In addition, the discourse found in the *Hospital Wing* of the Beta Forum was also analyzed for evidence of writing support. Of the 11 Elements of Effective Writing Instruction as identified by the literature (Graham & Perin, 2007), nine elements were found on Fanfiction.mugglenet.com. *Summarization* and *sentence combining* were elements not evident in the public discourse of this website.

The other nine elements were found in the website with *writing strategies* being the most prevalent. *Writing strategies* was evident in the comment feeds when participants on the website offered advice on how to improve the story. This type of advice ranged from help with the details of the original canon to proper use of commas and adverbs. Since this strategy was the most

evident in the discourse, it would appear that members in the community are receiving writing support as they participate on the website.

The second research question explores various types of writing support found in online fan fiction communities. Writing support, in general, is also prevalent on [fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com) (n.d.). This general type of writing support was found in four different areas: members of the community commenting on details of the text, members asking questions of each other, members offering advice to one another, and general praise between readers and writers. When members comment on details of the text, the reader makes a positive comment about a specific detail of the story. Writing support is also evident in the form of members asking questions of each other. Readers on the website can ask questions about where the writer intends to take the plot or ask the author to clarify unclear parts of the story. Offering advice to other members is a common form of writing support on [Fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://Fanfiction.mugglenet.com). Advice is most often given in the beta forums from beta readers in the community. General praise is the most common form of writing support on this website. Praise in this community came in many different forms from very simple to very detailed and complex. By offering writing support, [fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com) (n.d.) gives novice writers a place to go observe experienced writers, ask questions, and receive more immediate feedback on their on writing.

Online fan fiction communities, such as [fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com), offer a digital Community of Practice for novice and experienced writers. These communities allow members to participate with each other when reading posted stories and commenting in the forum. Evidence of writing support found in the discourse of the participants implies that online digital communities can be beneficial to novice writers.



### **Chapter Five: Conclusions**

Fan fiction websites do have the potential for writing instruction for novice writers (Black, 2009; Jenkins, 2004; Lewis, 2004). To illuminate this idea, the study looked for Elements of Effective Writing Instruction in the discourse of online fan fiction communities. Fanfiction.mugglenet.com, for example, is a fan fiction website for members of the Harry Potter Fandom. This website, which is a division of the main site, mugglenet.com, provides a place for Harry Potter fans to post fan fiction about the fictional world created by J. K. Rowling. Writers upload stories to the site and members of the community are able to post comments, reviews, and feedback on the story. This provides the type of feedback that writers so often lack in the traditional brick and mortar classroom.

The purpose of this study was to analyze this type of digital community for evidence of the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction. Using an a priori codebook developed by the researcher based on the literature (Graham & Perin, 2007), discourse in the community was analyzed to see which elements were found in this website. 12 stories were chosen from Fanfiction.mugglenet.com because of the amount and richness of comments received for each. The researcher wanted to focus on depth of discourse rather than a broad lens. The comments posted by readers for these 12 stories were then analyzed for evidence of the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction. Their existence provided the basis for the understanding that fan fiction communities provide certain social interactions that lead to quality writing.

This study also analyzed the discourse for evidence of general writing support within the same data set. Writing support is evident in many forms from positive comments about character development to grammar critique. The following research questions were explored.

RQ1: What evidence of effective writing instruction elements is found in the discourse of participants in online fan fiction communities?

RQ2: What evidence of writing support is found in online fan fiction communities?

To analyze the data for both RQ1 and RQ2, the comments from the 12 stories and the Beta Forum were examined for key words. To look at the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction for RQ1, the researcher used the a priori codebook developed based on the literature (Graham & Perin, 2007). To look for evidence of general writing support for RQ2, the researcher coded comments that exhibit writing support for the novice writer.

### **Discussion of Key Findings**

#### Elements of Effective Writing Instruction Found in Fan Fiction Communities

After analyzing the discourse among readers for 12 stories and the Beta Forum on the Fanfiction.mugglenet.com website, nine of the 11 Elements of Effective Writing Instruction were evident in the discourse of the participants in the community. The fan fiction community observed did indeed have some Elements of Effective Writing Instruction.

There was a wide range of frequency of the elements. Two elements were not evident in the 12 stories or in the Beta Forum. Several elements were limited to a few occurrences. Two elements comprised 80% of all: *inquiry activities* and *writing strategies*.

The most prominent Element of Effective Writing Instruction was explicitly teaching writing strategies. An example of explicitly teaching writing strategies is when a member of the fan fiction community uploads a story into the community and other members have an opportunity to comment, or leave reviews, on the story. The interaction between the reader and the writer provides another opportunity for the writer to learn from the comments. Readers can leave comments about grammar flaws or flaws to the story structure. As a result, the writer can

choose to go back and revise or edit the current chapter or use this advice to help write the next chapter. Many of the reviewers left comments for the writer to improve their writing. These comments were coded as *writing strategies*. This advice ranged from helping with a grammar lesson to asking questions that help to develop the plot line. Members of the community work together to help a writer produce a better chapter for the story. The input from the community is a valuable learning tool for the novice writer. Posting stories to this community gives writers a place to publish their writing. It is important for the community to post constructive feedback so that the writer continues to write. Since the community is made up of writers and readers of the fandom, it is important that writers continue to post so that the readers can continue to read. As the writer becomes more prolific, he can then start to participate in the discourse for other stories. Therefore, adding to the learning experience for other writers in the community.

Inquiry activities were also common in the discourse among participants of the community. Inquiry activities on the website were intended to help the writer think about what he was writing about. The readers leave comments asking about the details of the story so that the author can develop a good foundation for the next installment of the story. When this occurs, the researcher coded the comment as *inquiry activities*. These comments ignite a dialogue between members that can be beneficial for the writer trying to draw out a more insightful perspective of the story. Writers need to have these inquiry activities in order to produce quality writing. Readers need to post these comments so that they have an opportunity to engage with the text as they become involved with the story. Inquiry activities give readers a chance to ask the author about specific parts of the story. This interaction is important to the process of developing stories for readers in the community. These inquiry activities are the result of

members engaging with one another to help the writer develop a better foundation for his story. This can help the writer finish the next chapters for his story.

Explicitly teaching writing strategies and engaging in inquiry activities are two teaching strategies that require the use of one-to-one interaction. During the Writer's Workshop, novice writers receive this type of instruction during the one-to-one conference with peers and the teacher (Calkins, 1986). Online communities are unique because the interaction from these communities is also one-on-one. When a member posts a review to a story, the author is the recipient of that feedback. This is similar to the peer conference found in the Writer's Workshop model in the brick and mortar classroom. In the digital platform, novice writers can receive feedback more quickly.

These two elements were most prevalent because this is a community. In this community, expert writers assist novice writers with feedback on writing strategies because they feel obligated to help due to the strong sense of community established on the website. This also contributes to the reason why reviewers filter comments to protect these relationships (Black, 2008). Readers engage with writers so that they can interact with the story. These interactions provide a place for fans to engage with one another through narrative fiction.

The other elements found in the discourse of the community include collaborative writing, specific product goals, word processing, prewriting, process writing approach, and study of models. These elements were all found as the members were interacting with one another helping novice writers hone their skill and craft as they continue to update their stories. Collaborative writing was evident as two members discuss their experience working on a chapter of the story. Members of the community alluded to the fact that they were setting their own product goals as they were trying to upload new chapters to their stories. Writers felt

obligated to update quickly as readers request updates frequently in the comment feeds. Word processing was evident as writers are required to upload a digital copy of their chapters before it is published in the site. Prewriting was evident when writers can get help with their ideas before writing from other members of the community. The Process Writing approach was also evident when authors referred to revising a piece after receiving advice from the community. The website provides a large database of models for writers to study. Writers can read stories written by other members or look at the author of the original canon, J.K. Rowling. Working together allows the novice writer an opportunity to learn from those around him. The website gives the students a chance to learn from other members in the community. These other strategies, however, were not as frequent as *writing strategies* or *inquiry activities* because the digital community is not conducive to writing instruction in the traditional sense. Many of the elements are present in the community, but not in the discourse of the participants.

The literature states that these Elements of Effective Writing Instruction need to be present in order to have effective writing instruction (Graham & Perin, 2007). This study examined the discourse in one online fan fiction community and only found two consistent elements in the discourse. Therefore, the discourse in this community lacks evidence of the elements necessary for effective writing instruction.

**Writing support found in fan fiction communities.** General writing support was evident in the discourse among participants in the community. The writing support came in the form of general praise and requests for more frequent updates to the stories. This type of support is the reason why fan fiction communities are so popular (Black, 2009; Lewis, 2004). Having a place to share your work with other like-minded readers and writers can be a very motivational incentive. Many authors responded to the community by expressing gratitude for praise.

Members of the community feel obligated to leave reviews for work that is well written. Stories with more reviews are stories that are more popular. Negative reviews are rare and intended to help the writer improve. This type of praise for written work can be a motivating factor for writers to write more. By writing more stories for the community, the novice writer gains much needed writing experience.

The four themes found on this website, *general praise*, *advice*, *engage with details*, and *asking questions* are examples of ways that the reader can interact with writers in the community. Comments coded as *general praise* are positive remarks about the story. Some of the comments included in this theme are positive remarks about writing style, requests for speedy updates, and positive interjections. *General praise* was the most common code found in the discourse of the participants in the community because it displays the community's enthusiasm for the work while being supportive of the writer.

*Engaging with details* was also common in the discourse of the members of the community. These comments include statements where members of the community try to predict what will happen next, request a specific detail in the next installment, or discuss specific details about the story. Discussing specific details about the story frequently occurred in the general forum where readers can engage with a specific story. This type of comment was also frequent in the forums because of the loyalty of the fandom. Members of the community are passionate about the book series and they engage in the details as a form of entertainment.

The two themes with the fewest comments were *advice* and *asking questions*. *Advice* was coded when a reader left a suggestion for the writer and *asking questions* was coded when the reader asked a question of the writer. These comments were rare in the forums because they were only found in the Beta Forum. The Beta Forum is where members in the community will go to

seek assistance on their writing. Many readers do not assume that the writer is looking for advice on how to find information through his story's comment feeds. In this community, when a writer is looking for help, he should visit the Beta Forum for assistance.

These common themes in the reviews of this community are similar to the themes found in another study of another fan fiction community. According to Black's (2008) ethnographic study on four members of the fanfiction.net community, the themes that emerged in the reader reviews were categorized as *OMG Standard*, *Gentle Critique*, *Focused Critique*, and *Editorialized Gossip*. Black defined the *OMG Standard* as "a simple form of positive feedback" which is similar to the *general praise* theme found in this study. The *Gentle* and *Focused Critique* theme found in fanfiction.net is defined as positive feedback suggestions for improvement. This is similar to the *advice* theme found in this study. The final theme in Black's (2008) study is the *Editorialized Gossip* theme, which focuses on the characters of the canon as if they were real life characters, which is similar to the *engage with details* theme for this study.

## **Conclusions**

Best practices for writing instruction have centered on key elements found in effective writing classrooms. The Writer's Workshop model describes how using social interactions, with both peers and teacher, can benefit novice writers (Calkins, 1983; Kieczkowski, 1996; Noden, 1999). The peer-to-peer feedback found in this model allows writers to work with other writers within their range of abilities (Graham & Saddler, 2005). This model, however, limits writing instruction to the physical constraints of the brick and mortar classroom. Technology has afforded educators with a new perspective on how to use social interactions to benefit novice writers. Based on this study:

*Conclusion 1: Technology and new media can contribute to effective writing instruction.*

This particular fan fiction community did offer a few of the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction, specifically *writing strategies* and *inquiry activities*. Based on the literature, these Elements of Effective Writing Instruction contribute to a quality writing curriculum (Graham & Perin, 2007). Participation in online fan fiction communities can supplement the writing curriculum in the classroom.

*Conclusion 2: Informal learning through the community can be used as a tool for effective writing instruction.*

Online fan fiction communities offer many elements of writing support, especially praise and immediate feedback. Praise creates motivation for writers to write more often (Black, 2008) and the immediate feedback is a necessary component in the Writer's Workshop model (Calkins, 1986; Graham & Sadler, 2005). Writers need motivation to write more frequently so as to improve by practicing. Immediate feedback is necessary for writers to develop well-written stories.

Interactions among participants in a digital community offer novice writers some of the same type of support found in effective writing classrooms. These digital communities bring together novice and expert writers to hone their craft. This study contributes to the idea that writing can be learned through interactions and discourse with other writers, regardless of the physical space of the members of the community. These digital communities offer writers a place to learn to write. Using social interactions to teach writing offers teachers a different way to teach an age-old skill. Gone are the days when teachers are expected to let students work alone on their writing projects. Teachers can now work as facilitators of the writing process as students engage with peers and experts in the community.



### Unanticipated Outcomes

The Beta Forums for this fan fiction community was not what the researcher expected. In the initial proposal, the researcher expected the beta forums to be an area where writers go to ask for help with writing functions and conventions. However, it is clear that the role of the beta reader is not simply to edit for grammar and punctuation, but also for content. The majority of the forum focused on content of the writing and not conventions of language.

Although the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction were present in the discourse of participants on the website, only *writing strategies* and *inquiry activities* were coded frequently. The other strategies were evident but with very few examples. This implies that fan fiction websites have the potential to effectively teach writing, these sites should not be the only method for teaching writing because it does not have all 11 elements of the effective writing instruction.

Two of the Elements of Effective Instruction were not evident in the discourse of the members of the community: *sentence combining* and *summarization*. Since many writers on the website work with beta readers, an assumption can be made that those that needed this instruction would receive more one-on-one lessons through direct interactions with the beta reader. The website does offer a *help* page where members of the community can go to find information on commonly asked questions. This *help* page has a section on grammar and punctuation, but the concept of sentence combining is not discussed. In addition, sentence combining is a skill that is used to improve one's writing. The advice found on this page is intended to help with editing stories for proper grammar.

Summarization was also not evident in the discourse among participants in the 12 stories and Beta Forum. However, there is a small section on the *help* page where the website administrators offer general advice on how to write a summary of the submitted work. Writers in

the community must submit their stories to the queue to be read by the administrators before it is posted to the website. When it is approved, the story must be accompanied by a summary of the story to get other members to read it. When the summary is inadequate, readers will not choose to read it and there will be little activity on the story. The website administrators offer advice to make the summary appealing enough so readers will want to read the story. Some tips from administrators include:

- do not use quotes from your story,
- use proper grammar and punctuation, and
- do not allow your summary to go over 300 words.

Along with a few other tips, these tips explicitly teach writers how to write summaries of the text they intend to submit. According to Graham and Perin (2007), incorporating summarization skills means having to read someone else's text and summarize it. This would not be evident in the community, since writers have no need to summarize someone else's work.

In addition to the lack of the other Elements of Effective Writing Instruction, these online communities were quite selective when participants decide which stories to read and leave feedback. In the general forum, 275 stories were examined to find more than 50 comments. Of those 275 stories, only 12 stories had more than 50 comments. Many stories had no comments at all. This implies that the community will only comment on stories that they like. If a novice writer submits a story that the community does not like, there may not be very much interaction with readers. This leaves the author at a disadvantage because there is no feedback and very little motivation to continue writing.

The literature states that the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction are necessary to create a curriculum that develops vital writing skills (Graham & Perin, 2007). These elements,

however, may be difficult to find in the public discourse of members in a fan fiction community even if they are present in the community. Other, more reliable methods for measuring writing instruction can be used for future studies for a more comprehensive view of the writing program.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

According to the literature, a good writing curriculum possesses all the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction (Graham & Perin, 2007). This study found that not all Elements of Effective Writing Instruction were found in the Fanfiction.mugglenet.com. In order to promote the use of fan fiction websites as an instructional tool, the focus of the writing lessons should be centered on writing strategies and having multiple opportunities to write. Nine of the 11 elements were evident in the discourse of this fan fiction community, but only two elements were consistently evident.

The literature states that all 11 Elements of Effective Writing instruction needs to be present for writers to develop their skill (Graham & Perin, 2007), but some of these elements were not evident in fanfiction.mugglenet.com. Digital communities, like fan fiction websites, can be a supplemental resource for teachers. In addition to teaching writing through the adopted curriculum, teachers can enhance their instruction with the use of online digital communities.

The use of preexisting online communities may cause hesitation among teachers due to the lack of student-friendly safety filters. Instead, teachers can establish a new digital community available only to students through their server or school server. Many external educational companies, such as Edmodo.com, offer websites for educators that can leverage the digital space to enable a writing community.

Due to a lack of pedagogy and resources, teachers struggle with teaching writing in the classroom to students who are unmotivated to write and have no idea how to improve.

Leveraging the research-based practices with other resources alleviate some of the obstacles that classroom teachers face when trying to teach writing in a traditional classroom.

Teaching writing using the Writing Process and other writing strategies is necessary to produce quality writing, but implementing these necessary elements in the classroom can be difficult to do. Writing instruction, however, does not have to be a teacher-centered process. Participation in a digital community allows the writer to work with other writers to gain feedback on published stories. Members of the community help the writer by providing immediate feedback that can be used for the next writing installment. Allowing the teacher to become a facilitator of the learning will help alleviate the obstacles of writing instruction. Peers become experts as they help each other learn to write.

The use of digital communities, especially fan fiction communities, allows the teacher to become the facilitator of their learning experiences. The discourse among participants in these communities has evidence of some of the elements of effective writing instruction for novice writers. These digital communities also offer many opportunities to write and publish writing. Writers can use the time in these communities similarly to the independent time spent during the Writer's Workshop. The open website gives writers a space for many opportunities to write and the members in the community offer the motivation to write as they provide the feedback.

Writing instruction should be viewed through the lens of social interactions. In order to write well, one must have individualized and immediate feedback about the work. One must have many opportunities to write and freedom to choose the topic. Members of a digital space can work to help novice writers learn as they offer the individualized and immediate feedback. Digital communities give novice writers a place for many opportunities to write and the freedom to choose the topic. Students can work within these communities as they see fit. As novice

writers become more proficient, they become experts within the community and impart their expertise on to other novice writers. Teachers become the facilitators of these learning experiences.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Much of the findings of this study centered on motivation and support for writers in the community. To further analyze the motivations of this community, this research would need to include interviews of members and beta readers. This study was limited to what was publicly available through the discourse of the members within the community through comments posted on stories and in forums. Future studies can take a closer look at the private interactions of writers to have a more comprehensive perspective on the learning opportunities within fan fiction communities. Interactions with beta readers and writers can illustrate the scaffolding and process necessary to create quality writing.

Beta readers in the community play a large role in the learning experiences of writers. Future research can also look at why these members choose to read and analyze the writing of novice authors. Writers and readers share the common love of the canon and that creates a special bond between author and story. This research would require personal interaction with beta readers through an interview. Without these beta readers, many of the writers in this community would not be able to produce quality writing. A teacher can leverage this type of passion in the classroom to help foster better peer critiques.

Without the fandom, readers may be hesitant to participate in these communities or may be unable to offer advice for writers. If teachers were to leverage this type of learning model, there would have to be some sort of motivation for writers to write and readers to read. Additional research for motivation for writers and readers can help illustrate the ideas behind

why members of the community choose to write, read, or offer advice. The research can add to the literature on motivation for writers where it is lacking.

Since fan fiction communities are solely comprised of narrative writing, writers in this community have experience writing in this genre. The Common Core State Standards, however, require students to learn to write persuasive and expository pieces as well as narrative pieces. Future studies on social learning theory with writing can focus on these other writing genres. This can lead to more discussion on how technology can be leveraged in the classroom to teach all writing genres.

### **Limitations of the Study and Means to Ensure Internal Validity**

Due to the nature of the study, analyzing only discourse limited the conclusions to what was written in the forums. Interviews and surveys could have provided more concrete evidence of writing support in these communities. In order to minimize this limitation, the researcher gathered a large number of comments to gain a more complete understanding of the author's work and support being provided by the community.

Conclusions from this study are a result from one fan fiction community, [fanfiction.mugglenet.com](http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com), and may not represent the findings from another community. Some participants in this community, however, did mention that they participated in more than one fan fiction website. This may lead to the assumption that the code of conduct is similar in different communities, but the conclusions may not be the same for support for writers.

Efforts were made to ensure internal validity of the study despite the limitations. The codebook was developed prior to coding the data to provide criteria for coding (Appendix A). This a priori codebook was developed based on the 11 Elements of Effective Writing Instruction (Graham & Perin, 2007) and vetted by researchers outside of this study for inter-rater reliability.

Using the HyperResearch Software also provided intra-rater reliability by providing consistency as the researcher coded the data. The software also provided a way for the researcher to organize codes that were later grouped into themes. Multiple iterations of coding were necessary to formulate the theoretical constructs for this study.

### **Summary**

Based on promising writing support potential (Graham & Perin, 2007) an online fan fiction community was analyzed for evidence of 11 writing elements (Graham & Perin, 2007) and writing support themes. While most of the elements were found in the analysis of one online fan fiction community, only two of the elements were frequent in the findings of this study. General writing support themes were identified in the same data. Members of the community interacted with each other in the form of praise, probing questions, and requests for more writing.

Online fan fiction communities offer a place for writers to be motivated by other writers, both experts and novices. This provides the essential peer-to-peer feedback that is necessary in the Writer's Workshop. The discourse in the fan fiction community showed some evidence of the Elements of Effective Writing Instruction, but there were numerous examples of general writing support, such as advice on how to improve grammar and content.

It is clear based on this study of one fan fiction website that writing support is variable and strong in just a few areas deemed necessary by the literature (Graham & Perin, 2007). Additionally, there are other known issues with fan fiction websites that should be considered and participation in these communities should be used only as supplement to instruction where inquiry and writing activities are necessary and only when other outside influences are controlled.

A strong writing curriculum is not made up of one tool. Online fan fiction communities do possess some of the Elements of Writing Instruction, but not enough to conclude that they are an effective writing program by themselves. Writing support in the community plays a large role when providing feedback to writers. This motivates writers, helps writers build strong backgrounds, and sets the stage for their newly developed characters or plots. A sense of community contributes to the unique online space where kids are learning how to write.

Additional research should include studies on the motivation of the community and the part it plays in motivating writers to write and readers to read. Additional research should also include studies on beta readers and the motivation for those members to contribute to the community. These participants are crucial to the fan fiction community, but their work is not explicitly clear on the website.

Fan fiction communities are a unique space where writers and readers come together to share a love of the canon. Interactions with members in these communities can unleash the potential for learning in so many ways. Learning to write in these online communities may be an alternative to a mediocre writing curriculum where students are not motivated to write and teachers are unable to help. Looking at writing instruction through the lens of social interaction, whether it be a fan fiction community or otherwise, can help educators find the tools they need to properly teach writing. Therefore, giving our students what they need to succeed.



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## APPENDIX A

## Eleven Elements of Effective Writing Instruction Codes

Table A1

*Eleven Elements of Effective Writing Instruction Codes*

Strategy	Definition	Examples of Key Words
Writing strategies	Involves teaching strategies for planning, revising, and editing pieces	Plan, revise, fix, edit, clearer understanding
Summarization	Involves explicitly and systematically teaching writers how to summarize text	Summarize, meaning of the text
Collaborative writing	Involves working together to plan, draft, revise, and edit stories	Collaborate, work together
Specific product goals	Involves assigning specific, reachable goals for writers to complete	Goal
Word processing	Involves the use of computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing	Typing, spell-check
Sentence combining	Involves teaching writers to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences	Combine sentences, simple sentences, complex sentences
Prewriting	Involves activities designed to help writers generate or organize ideas for composition	Prewrite, brainstorm, organize
Inquiry activities	Involves engaging writers in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing tasks	Analyze, look at the data, starting point
Process writing approach	Involves integrating numerous writing strategies into a workshop environment	Process, writing phase
Study of models	Involves providing writers with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing	Examples, models, authors, experts
Writing for content learning	Involves writing as a tool for learning content material	Subjects, summarize the concept

*Note.* Adapted from “A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York,” by S. Graham and D. Perin, 2007, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 99(3), p. 445. Copyright 2007 by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Adapted with permission.

**APPENDIX B**

## Permission Request

9/19/13

Gmail - Permission request for permission

**Permission request for permission**

1 message

ADF &lt;ADF@carnegie.org&gt;

Tue, Aug 20, 2013 at 11:56 AM

To: '

Dear Hue-An,

Permission is granted, royalty free from Carnegie Corporation. Please include a citation

Graham, S., &amp; Perin, D. (2007). Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents

in middle and high schools – A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education

Best,  
Adrienne Faraci

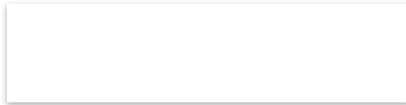
## APPENDIX C

## Non-Human Subjects Determination Notice

## PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate &amp; Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

10/16/2013

**Protocol #: E1013D01****Project Title: Analyzing Discourse in Fan Fiction Communities for Evidence of Writing Instruction**

Dear Ms. Wren,

Thank you for submitting the Non-Human Subjects Verification Form and supporting documents for your above referenced project. As required by the Code of Federal Regulations for the Protect for Human Subjects (Title 45 Part 46) any activity that is research and involves human subjects requires review by the Graduate and Professional Schools IRB (GPS-IRB).

After review of the Non-Human Subjects Verification Form and supporting documents, GPS IRB has determined that your proposed research<sup>1</sup> activity does not involve human subjects. Human subject is defined as a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information. (45 CFR 46102(f))

As you are not obtaining either data through intervention or interaction with living individuals, or identifiable private information, then the research activity does not involve human subjects, therefore GPS IRB review and approval is not required of your above reference research.

We wish you success on your non-human subject research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thema Bryant-Davis".

Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis  
Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB  
Pepperdine University

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives  
Ms. Alexandra Roosa, Director Research and Sponsored Programs  
Dr. Paul Sparks, Faculty Chair

<sup>1</sup> *Research* means a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Activities which meet this definition constitute research for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported un-der a program which is considered research for other purposes. (45 CFR 46.102(d)).