

The writer in the reader: Building communities of response in digital environments

Introduction

Digital texts and digital interactions permeate our daily lives (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008), while digital reading environments are redefining the relationship between reader, text, activity, and sociocultural context (McEneaney, 2006; Rand Reading Study Group, (RRSG), 2002; Reinking, Labbo, & McKenna, 2000). The International Reading Association (IRA) (2009) emphasized the importance of integrating information and communication technologies (ICTs) into current literacy programs. An important step towards such integration involves redefining the notion of what constitutes text, as teachers seek alternative text sources including digital texts and electronic books (Booth, 2006; Kucer, 2005). Digital texts in electronic book formats offer the possibility of “scaffolded digital reading” environments (Dalton & Proctor, 2008, p. 303), which are flexible, supportive and responsive to the needs of students, through embedded multimodal supports, such as text-to-speech functionality, built-in dictionaries, and customizable font size (Hall, Strangman & Meyer, 2003). Furthermore, digital texts afford readers the role of writers, as they annotate or highlight passages or words within the text and author digital thinkmarks, or notes, to capture and archive fleeting responses and thoughts as they read.

In a traditional literacy classroom, students read print texts, respond to reading in written response journals (whose only audience may well be the classroom teacher), and exchange ideas in traditional face-to-face literature discussions. In such instances, knowledge is mostly transmitted, not conducted (Carico, Logan, & Labbo, 2004). However, in the new literacies

classroom, students assume diverse responsibilities as consumers and producers of information and effective learning is increasingly dependent on social and collaborative learning strategies which can potentially reach far beyond their classroom walls (Dwyer, 2013; Larson, 2009; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro & Cammack, 2004; Malloy, Castek & Leu, 2010; Wolsey & Grisham, 2012). The National Council for the Teachers of English (NCTE) (2013) urges teachers to use technologies to intentionally build cross cultural connections and collaborative relationships within a global community. In this way, students can redefine the boundaries of the classroom (Beach, 2012) to move beyond local context and culture to build “cosmopolitan dispositions and habits of mind” (Hull & Stornaiulo, 2010, p. 89). In this chapter, we will describe how students from Ireland and the United States read e-books on digital reading devices (Amazon Kindles) and participated in ICT-based literature circle discussions where they authored responses to text on an asynchronous message board. These experiences allowed them to interact with and respond to the texts in new and innovative ways.

Theoretical perspectives

The study was underpinned by a range of diverse theoretical perspectives to allow for the consideration of “multiple perspectives from a constellation of theories and methodologies” (Harrison, 2008, p. 1292). These viewpoints included (a) new literacies perspectives, (b) sociocultural perspectives, and (c) reader response theories. Each of the theoretical perspectives, explored in the sections which follow, affords us a lens to view the complexity of literacy in the 21st century from cognitive, cultural, social and affective dimensions.

New Literacies

At present there is no single, unifying, theoretical perspective in the research literature to explain the evolving and deictic (Leu, 2000) nature of literacy in the 21st century (Reinking, 1998; Rideout, Foehr & Rideout, 2010). Perspectives include ‘Multiliteracies’ (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; The New London Group, 2000) drawing on the multimodal nature of digital literacies within a global communication network in a flattened world (Friedman, 2005). ‘New Literacies Studies’ (Gee, 2003; Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Street, 1998) situate digital literacies within sociocultural perspectives, viewing literacy in terms of semiotic contexts, new discourses, social purposes, events and practices. Rooted in socio-constructivist and cognitive theories, ‘New Literacies’ perspectives (Leu, Kinzer, Cammack & Coiro, 2004) recognize that “social contexts have always shaped the form and function of literate practices, and been shaped by them in return” (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek & Henry (in press, p. 1151). Therefore, new literacies are constantly evolving, requiring new skills, strategies and dispositions to fully exploit the potential of digital literacies to enhance literacy, communication and learning. The juxtaposition of these multiple perspectives challenges educators to transform reading and writing instruction in response to emerging technologies and new possibilities for communication and collaboration across the world (IRA, 2009).

Sociocultural perspectives

Sociocultural perspectives view literacy practices and learning as social activities where personal knowledge is co-constructed (Bruner, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978) through peer collaboration and the social construction of meaning. Knowledge is created within a social activity and evolves through negotiation. When students collaborate in constructing meaning from text, they have what Kucan and Beck (1997) referred to as “multiple resources at the

reading construction site” (p. 289). Therefore, as students interact in social settings, they acquire both knowledge and the processes by which knowledge is constructed (Putney, Green, Dixon, Durán & Yeager, 2000). Knowledge is not merely “the sum of individuals’ knowledge” but is rather “distributed among participants as the nature of their participation shifts” (Gutiérrez & Stone, 2000, p. 160). In co-constructing meaning, group members may participate in collaborative communities to develop literacy practices and construct identity (Alvermann et al., 2012), develop a participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), or an affinity space (Gee, 2004). In this way they can develop response and agency while examining their own knowledge and beliefs with those of others (Alvermann, 2009; Azmitia, 1988; Barron, 2000; Daiute & Dalton, 1993). Recent research (Castek, 2008; Dwyer, 2010) suggests that peer collaboration is an important component for developing new literacies in inquiry-based learning activities on the Internet as students co-construct effective online skills and strategies in collaborative learning environments. Talking about books in literature circles, book clubs, or other forms of oral response, fosters a desire to share personal connections and conversational reactions to literature within a community of readers and writers (Daniels, 2002; Raphael, Florio-Ruane, George, Hasty, & Highfield, 2004). With greater access to technology, online discussions are becoming increasingly common as a means to encourage learner engagement and literature discussions. Classroom studies posit that online literature discussions may foster literacy skills, strengthen communication, and build community (Carico, Logan, & Labbo, 2004; Evans & Po, 2007; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Larson, 2009; Maples, 2010; McWilliams, Hickey, Hines, Conner & Bishop, 2011).

Reader response

Louise Rosenblatt's (1938, 1978) transactional reader response theory suggests an active, constructive experience in which readers create "meaning *with*, not from, the text" (Galda, 2010, p. 3, italics in original). In this transaction, the voices of the reader and author are blended, resulting in opportunities to create meaning by applying, reorganizing, or extending personal experiences and encounters with texts. In other words, meaning does not reside *in* the text or *in* the reader, but rather occurs during the transaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 2005). By challenging the notion of one true meaning of text, reader-response theory allowed for a range of student-constructed responses and interpretations of texts, recognizing each reader's unique perspectives as well as the social and cultural contexts in which the reading takes place. Consequently, this belief replaces the teacher's role of single authority of literary knowledge to one of literacy facilitator, creating room for increased student interpretation and collaboration (Karolides, 2000; Larson, 2009; Park, 2012).

Since the zenith of reader response research in the 1990s, educators have adjusted their focus to reflect continuing educational changes, including technological advances and increasingly diverse classrooms, while remaining devoted to honored reader response research traditions and perspectives (Hancock, 2008). Hence, many literacy educators advocate for moving beyond students' personal responses to more "critical and culturally responsive versions of reader-response pedagogies" in which students conceptualize reading as critical and collective practice (Park, 2012, p. 191). In addition to traditional literacies of paper and pencil, the increased use of digital literacies challenges educators to consider students' reactions to digital texts and the potential uses of ICTs to discuss and respond to readings. Technology can clearly provide a new vision and dimension for reader/writer response research and classroom practice.

In this chapter, we will discuss how sixth-grade students from Ireland and the United States reached across a global community in time, space, culture, and context to share and expand personal perspectives in response to literature.

Framing the Study: Participants and Setting

Two groups of sixth-grade students; one in Dublin, Ireland (Katie, Hanna, Jane, Colm, Niall, and Paul) and one in Kansas, USA (Judith, Elizabeth, Grace, John, Duane, and Ben); read and responded to e-books. To protect privacy, all students were assigned a pseudonym which they used throughout the study. Using purposive sampling (Patton, 2002), all participants were identified as strong readers and effective communicators by their classroom teachers; however, none of them had previous experience with literature circles or other forms of literature discussion groups. In an online pre-reading survey, students were asked about their perceptions of themselves as readers. Responses indicated that these students were motivated and engaged readers who read a range of literary genres including fiction and informational texts. Their perceptions of reading ranged from the functional aspects to aesthetic dimensions of reading. For example, Elizabeth, a student from Kansas commented, “I am a good reader I have been in reading enrichment for two years in a row. I also have never gotten lower than a 90 percent on a state assessment.” Jane, a student from Dublin noted, “I LOVE reading! It’s my favourite pastime! I would definitely call myself a bookworm! I like reading Juvenile Fiction or just Fiction. I am a good reader because I know your language improves by reading and you learn more words and I have.” Each student was given a digital reading device (Amazon Kindle) loaded with e-book versions of two young adult novels: *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* by Kate DiCamillo (2006) portrays the account of Edward Tulane, a haughty porcelain rabbit who loves only himself until he is separated from Abilene, the little girl who loves and

adores him, and encounters new places, new adventures and many new owners until he finds the true meaning of friendship and love; in John Boyne's (2006) *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, Bruno, the son of a Nazi officer befriends a boy in striped pajamas who lives behind a wire fence of a large camp. While considerably different in content, both titles elicited heartfelt responses from the students. None of the students had any prior experience with either book.

Over a six-week period, students read pre-assigned chapters in the e-book and recorded digital thinkmarks and highlights on the digital reading device. Then each group met twice weekly in a face-to-face literature circle at their respective school. At these meetings, students shared their responses to and interpretations of the text. They also formulated questions and discussion prompt threads which they posted on an online, asynchronous message board. The message board functioned as the host of a larger global literature circle in which all students collaborated and engaged in discussion. The authentic voices of the students (including occasional errors in spelling and conventions) will be quoted throughout this chapter to bring their literature discussions to life. However, due to publication restrictions, it is not possible to truly capture the way the students created identity through the use of color, font size, font type, and highlighting features on the asynchronous message board. As an illustrative example, Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the message board.

While reading, participants physically interacted with the texts by using e-book tools. For example, they adjusted text size, listened to the story through text-to-speech features, highlighted key passages, accessed the built-in dictionaries, and searched for key words or phrases within the book. In response to the readings, the students also annotated the text with notes or digital thinkmarks. These digital thinkmarks offered insights into the students' meaning-making

processes and served as conduits to ongoing response writing and literature circle discussions (Larson, 2010; 2012).

[Insert Figure 1 here **Figure 1 Illustrative example of asynchronous message board discussion**]

Methodology

A qualitative case-study methodology was chosen to provide an expressive, narrative description within a natural setting (Creswell, 2003). Case studies are generally categorized as exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory depending on the nature of the research problem and questions (Yin, 2009); this study was exploratory in nature as the researchers aimed to investigate what happens when Irish and American students, in different social and cultural contexts, interact and collaborate in an online global literature circle while reading and responding to e-books. The strength of case study research is in providing a rich description of complex phenomena, often derived from a qualitative research approach, focused on participants' experiences within the case (Creswell, 2003; Stake, 1995). Data sources included online discussion board transcripts, digital voice recordings of face-to-face group discussions, students' digital annotations in e-books, interviews with participants, pre- and post-reading surveys, and researchers' field notes.

Data sources were triangulated and coded, drawing on inductive methods of analysis, such as the constant comparative methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), deductive methods of analysis (drawing on theoretical frameworks used within the study) and abductive methods (abstracting the best explanation for understanding one's study results) (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) to discover patterns within the data until themes emerged (Bogdan &

Biklen, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The coding process was carried out independently by the two researchers; one situated in Ireland, the other in the United States. Each researcher read all message board posts, segmenting them into descriptive units and finally classifying each unit through inferential and interpretive coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) as belonging to certain indicator categories, such as reader/writer-response categories (immersion, involvement, and interpretation) or building community categories (including constructing identity, affinity or participatory culture). Initial coder-consensus (Kozlowski & Hattrup, 1992; Olsen, 2011) was calculated at 90% agreement, based on a sample of 20% of the total posts ($n= 422$). Subsequently, the researchers negotiated the disparate posts in a series of Skype video calls until reaching 100% coder consensus.

Findings

Findings which emerged from meticulous examination of the data suggested that peer collaboration in an online literature discussion forum encouraged (a) a sociocultural situated response through the construction of a community identity and an affinity space, and (b) deepened reader/writer response to the literature. These findings are discussed below.

Constructing a community identity and an affinity space: Writing with divided attention

The students met in face-to-face literature circles and discussed the digital thinkmarks and highlighted passages they had created within the e-book texts. Then they participated in threaded discussions on an asynchronous message board. Analysis of the message board threads suggested that the students were writing with divided attention, i.e. they were authoring response to the literature while concurrently constructing a community culture, identity and affinity space.

Initially, the students drew attention to the affordances and supports provided by the digital reading devices (“we really like the vocabulary in these chapters. We used our Kindle dictionary to look up words”). They also created individual identity through the use of style signatures and emoticons (“From Katie! xx :) :)”), font theme and size, use of color, and highlighting features to proclaim who they were (“Heyyyy its Judith!!”).

However, a prompt posted by the students in Dublin, with questions about the initial chapters in *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, expressed concern about a spate of recent tornadoes in Kansas (“Hello!, how is it over there? We heard about the horrible tornado”). Students in Kansas, such as Duane, responded with similar concern for the Dublin students who lived in a coastal region beside the Irish Sea, “Oh ya thanks for our consern [concern] about the tornados. Starting now I'll watch the news for tsunamis or floods in your area.” In the following example John, a student from Kansas, responds to the concern about the tornadoes, creates a sense of context, while simultaneously constructing a response to the text.

Hey, this is John and just like Abiline in the book, we have a town in Kansas and it is called Abiline also. Yes, there were 127 tornadoes that touched down and we are all ok. Thanks for thinking of us and we hope you enjoy the book, too. Well, a big change for Edward was when he felt his first emotion, being afraid. We really look forward to blogging with you.-John

Following this series of posts, students began to create threads which almost seamlessly shifted between response to text and creating a community culture. The students (a) engaged with one another, “I Think we all really need to pay attention to Pellegrina..... She is really mysterious and we should keep an eye on her”; (b) affirmed one another (“John you brought that to my attention, so thanks and good point”); (c) valued opinions (“We thought of these questions because we wanted to know what you thought”), and (d) contested (“I don’t think every book has

to have a happy ending to be a good book") in creating a community of readers and writers. The topics explored by the students in creating a community identity, affinity space, culture and social connection (Jenkins, 2006) included issues related to education, culture, religion and personal topics. For example, topics related to education involved the length of the school day and year and the subjects the students were studying. The students also commented on cultural aspects, such as Christian names which were common in both countries and the languages spoken by the students.

Paul interpreted the journey undertaken by Edward Tulane in religious terms when he annotated the e-book with the following digital thinkmark, "it reminds me of Jesus didn't eat or drink for forty days and nights. ...he looks like Jesus on the cross when he was crucified. I think that is very sad and mean :(." When Paul later posted a comment related to this religious interpretation of the story ("Edward's story is a bit like the story of Jesus-40 days and 40 nights in a rubbish dump- and being on the cross as a scarecrow and rising from the dead"), it resonated with many of the students. For example, John's response suggested a valuing affirmation and ease of response as a member of a community,

"I think that Edward is becoming more lifelike. He was afraid and then he kind of felt love. I like how you pointed out the Jesus thing with the 40 days and nights. I think that Abiline maybe would care for Edward and would take better care for him. I loved the saying that the fishing lady said, "What I say is, theres a use for everything, and everything has its use, thats what i say."

The students also related the texts to their own personal lives where they could be seen constructing identities as individuals who would be acknowledged and recognized by others in the community as "just like us" (Gee, 2008, p.3). The characters, Bruno and Gretel, in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, were similar in age to the participating students and their relationship was according to Niall a "typical sibling relationship." He explained, "[I] love proving my

siblings wrong but to be honest I'd be absolutely lost without them." The sibling relationship between the characters in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* elicited a number of digital thinkmarks in the e-books with comments related to the students' own lives. In response to the post, "we could make connections with the books from our lives because Bruno and Gretel sometimes fight but sometimes get on well," there were a considerable number of posts and replies (n=13) on the asynchronous message board. For example, a reply from Colm suggested the volatility of relationships between children in families but also their powerlessness and inability to control the future. He noted,

I have a younger brother who is ten and we sometimes get along and sometimes we don't. But it was the same like how Bruno moved from fancy and great to a small and awful house. I used to live in Australia and we had a nice house and a pool and pretty much everything but when we moved to Ireland I got stuck in this little house with no pool or anything and I had to leave all my friends as well <:(

Concurrently to building a community affinity space and culture, students' written responses to the literature transformed over the six-week study. Reader/writer response to literature in e-book format through peer collaboration is discussed in the following sections.

Peer collaboration in an online literature discussion forum deepened reader/writer response to literature

Adapting Hancock's (1993) categories of literature response as a springboard for coding, analysis of the message board transcripts suggested that reader/writer response included immersion in, involvement with, and interpretation of texts (see Table 1 for definitions of these categories).

Table 1 Reader/writer response: Immersion in, involvement with, and interpretation of texts as defined in the present study

Reader/writer response	As defined in the present study (adapted from Hancock, 1993)
Immersion in texts	Readers make sense of emerging plot and character by (a) moving beyond summary to reflect personal understanding; (b) gaining insights into feelings, thoughts, and motives for behaviors of characters; (c) predicting events; and (d) expressing confusion or puzzlement through questions.
Involvement with texts	Readers become personally involved with the character and/or plot by (a) identifying with the characters; (b) judging or acknowledging the plot or characters' actions, values, and growth.
Interpretation of texts	Readers engage with the text at a higher level by (a) making intertextual connections, text-to-life connections, or text-to-media connections; (b) evaluating literary elements or the author's craft; and (c) changing the outcome or authoring parts of the text.

Analysis of the message board transcripts are presented in Table 2. *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* consisted of 27 chapters. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* was a shorter text consisting of 20 chapters. Table 2 presents the percentages of responses at key stages for both texts (beginning, middle and end). Due to time constraints (ending of the school year), the number of responses were fewer for *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. However, it is interesting to note that the average length of responses grew from 195 characters in *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* to 324 characters for *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*.

Table 2 Percentages of types of student reader/writer response at immersion, involvement and interpretive levels for both e-books in the study

	<i>The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane</i>			<i>The Boy in the Striped Pajamas</i>		
Reader/writer response categories	Beginning (chs.1-5)	Middle (chs.11-15)	End (chs.21-27)	Beginning (chs.1-5)	Middle (chs.11-15)	End (chs.16-20)
Immersion	70%	41%	9%	32.5%	1%	7%
Involvement	27%	59%	33%	35%	8%	14%
Interpretation	3%	0%	58%	32.5%	91%	79%

Crafting reader/writer response at an immersion level

Early posts of the asynchronous message boards strongly supported students' immersion in *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* as they attempted to make sense of the emerging plot and characters. As shown in Table 2, 70% of students' message board posts were at the immersion level as they discussed and responded to the first part of the book. These responses (a) reflected personal understanding of plot and character, moving beyond basic summary ("I

think edward is like an antique to show how rich they are. I also think that pellagrina is a really important character because she knows that edward has a mind”); (b) reflected students’ insights into characters’ feelings, thoughts, and behavioral motives (“I think that Pellagrina was telling Edward the story because she has some connection to Edward that Abilene doesn’t know or a relationship of sort”; (c) predicted events (“Abiliene’s mom or dad might buy her another bunny”) and; (d) expressed students’ confusion through questions (“But does Edward have feelings?... That is what I wander [wonder]”). While immersion responses were often short in length, they did serve as a foundation for thoughtful response and community building. Members from both groups contemplated others’ posts before submitting thoughtful replies to answer direct questions or offer personal opinions or ideas.

Immersion responses were also found in the digital thinkmarks crafted by the students within the e-books. For example, Duane consistently authored digital thinkmarks that supported his understanding (“so Abilene already has a kid”), predicting of events (“I think the chef will be arrested”), and confusion (“Can Edward drown i mean he doesnt have a nose and his mouth is glued shut”). When asked about his digital thinkmarks, Duane stated “I write things that help me remember what I’m reading.”

Crafting reader/writer response at an involvement level

As the plot evolved and students established a stronger community of readers and writers, they also became more involved in the story. As shown in Table 2, students’ responses to *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* moved from the immersion level to the involvement level indicating students’ ability to (a) identify with the characters or (b) judge or acknowledge the characters’ actions, values, and growth (Hancock, 1993). For example, Elizabeth put herself in Edward’s shoes as he longed for his home and original owner, “I would get so sick of being

away from my family. I couldnt stand it.” After reading about the abusive father of Bryce and Sarah Ruth, two young protagonists who cared for Edward, Elizabeth quickly judged the father’s actions: “The father is ridiculous and very rude I cant believe he would treat his family like that. I wonder if they had child abuse services back then if they do he should be turned in immediately.”

Clearly, the students were angry with the father, but they also tried to make sense of his actions. Katie stated, “I think that Bryce's father shouldnt be judged too soon, We never know what happened in his past, I think maybe he didnt want to get too attached to Sarah Ruth because of something that maybe happened to her mother. :)” Ben agreed, “ i think Bryce's dad didn't realize that he loved her [Sarah Ruth] untell she died some people don't love untell someone is lost.” On the message board, responses at the involvement level often sparked longer threads, inviting multiple perspectives and strong opinions. At times, students' thinkmarks served as a springboard for subsequent message board posts. For example, before joining the passionate discussion concerning Bryce’s abusive father, Elizabeth had already noted to herself, “Why does he [the father] slap Bryce to get out his frustration? there are better ways to deal with life.” John’s digital thinkmarks suggested that he kept upcoming message board conversations in mind as he composed questions for the other students, “the dad has no right yelling at bryce. why do you think he is yelling at him?” and “what do you think of the guy that said it’s a sin for a rabbit to dance?” clearly prepared him for both written discourse and face-to-face discussion.

Crafting reader/writer response at an interpretative level

Not surprisingly, the students engaged in very little interpretation of text (see Table 2) at the beginning of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*. While the level of interpretation grew to 58% at the end of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* the level of interpretation in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* increased as the students became more confident in expressing opinions and interpretations and critiquing the author's craft within a community of readers and writers.

The following sections explore aspects related to interpretative reader responses (as defined in Table 1) in relation to (a) making intertextual links and connections; (b) critiquing literary elements, including those related to author's craft; and (c) authoring the text or the writer in the reader.

Making intertextual links and connections. The students authored threads and responses which suggested that they made intertextual links and connections to themselves, the media, and the world around them. In crafting responses they also created community and social connectedness and drew parallels between each other's lives at a personal level and in cultural, educational, religious and social contexts. The example below illustrates the initial post addressing chapters 1-5 in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, in which students in Dublin made intertextual links between the characters of Edward and Bruno in the two e-books. Additionally, they made connections to themselves and their world knowledge at age twelve (they had studied the second world war) which they acknowledged is very different from that of Bruno, (a "vulnerable nine year old" who "didn't understand what heil hitler meant"). Interestingly, the students in Dublin engaged in subtle community building where they ascertained the prior knowledge of students in

Kansas vis-à-vis this period in history (“did they know who the fury [führer] was? and what was outside the house?”).

The book was very well written especially the ends of the chapters... it made us want to read on. This book is very different from Edward Tulane although we were making connections between the two because both Edward and Bruno had to move away from their homes. The story is told through the eyes of a nine year old boy, he is very vulnerable because he didn't understand what heil hitler meant. We could make connections with the book from our lives because Bruno and Gretel sometimes fight but sometimes get on well. We thought that his father treated him like an adult because he shakes his hand instead of giving him a hug and because his office was out of bounds with no exceptions. We've done projects and research on the history of the second world war so we know a lot about that time. Who do you think the Fury is? Do you know what's outside the house?

Critiquing literary elements, including those related to author's craft. It was clear from the numbers of digital thinkmarks created and responses posted on the asynchronous message board that the students had a number of critical points to make regarding literary elements in the text. They critiqued the author's craft and technique with regard to the ending of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*. Elizabeth stated,

The author left us hanging just a little ...the story didn't seem done...They need a sequel because there is a lot of things we still need to figure out I wonder if it was like that dotes [Doctor Seuss] book that he never finished before he died.

Jane commented on the author's use of flashbacks in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* noting,

it was strange how the author chose to write the book because most of the chapters were flashbacks, the Fury coming to dinner, the fight between grandmother and father at Christmas. I don't want to criticise the author but I don't think it was a good way to write a book”

In general, they approved of the literary decisions made by the authors (“The chapters were described really well and I think that the author put loads of thought into the chapters. I love the way they described Bryce's eyes. 'brown with flecks of gold shining in them.' Finally, they often became emotionally involved in the stories (“oh my god!! It's Abilene and she never stopped

loving Edward!! She wore his pocket watch around her neck!! This made me really happy!!...This was by far one of the best books I have ever read”).

Authoring the text or the writer in the reader. Analysis suggested that while the students made intertextual links and connections and commented on the author’s craft, they were also identifying with the author and reading like a writer (Smith, 1988) to become what could be termed co-collaborators with the author in writing the text. For example, the students in Kansas commented on the author’s use of a coda in the *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*

At the end of the book, did you guys read the coda. We were curious what it meant so we looked it up. It means the end or the summary of a book and it comes from the Latin word tail. What genre would you consider this book? I think it's fantsy but i am not sure. I think it's fantasy because it is a rabitt that is halfway alive. I'm not sure, but i'm curious what you guys think.

Again this elicited comments from the students on the inclusion of a coda. If John ever “made” a book he would definitely have a coda. Niall “really enjoyed the coda!!! :).” He observed, “I think that every book should have a coda. I liked how it was like the whole book on a page and a bit!!”

Further, in discussing big ideas from *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, both Elizabeth and John agreed that the book needed a sequel because “there is a lot of things we still need to figure out.” Grace would have been “really mad if Edward and Abilene had not been reunited. Hanna wanted to “jump inside the book” as she explained in a post,

Hello! It's Hanna here!! Overall, I really enjoyed the book!! It really showed me a true meaning of friendship and seperation [separation]. He was owned by so many people, but then got sperated [separated] from them. When he said he wasn't going to love anymore so he wouldn't get hurt, I just wanted to jump inside the book and tell him to never give up!! What do you think the meaning of the book is?? If I was the author, I wouldn't know whether to make Edward go back to Abilene. Yes, it is a good ending, but when Neal cracked his head, I probably would've made him go to heaven and stay with Sarah Ruth. If you were the author, who would you make Edward stay with?

As students co-constructed responses to text it was clear that engaging in a community of readers and writers allowed them to act on textual possibilities with others (Hancock, 2008). Interacting in a malleable digitized reading environment blurred the lines between reader and writer, enhanced reader engagement, and deepened reader/writer response.

Discussion and implications

Reinking (2008) reasoned, “online reading and writing, even more than their printed forms can never be understood entirely as simply literacy events. Instead they instantiate literacy practices because they are more overtly and consistently social acts” (p. 1178). Evidence from the study presented in this chapter suggests that digital texts by their nature tend to cultivate interactivity with text and a blurring of lines between reader and writer. Students in the study made sense of text through multimodal dialogue to co-construct meaning while building a community of readers and writers. Literacy as a social practice contributed to the construction of social identities (Alvermann et al., 2012) as students constructed an affinity space (Gee, 2004) which promoted agency (Cope & Kalantzis, 2010) and equality among members of an online participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006).

Results from the study suggest that peer-to-peer collaboration enabled the development of both generative and reflective processes (Daiute & Dalton, 1993). Collaboration among peers facilitated multiple transactions with the text and the co-construction of response. Such collaboration expanded individual response as students reflected on, examined, contested and evaluated their ideas with those of others within the global literature circle. Crafting response on an asynchronous message board provided both an archive for the students where they could revisit and reflect on response and also a powerful thinking tool for the students. While working

both collaboratively and individually in response to the literature, students established a community of inquiry in which their questions, prompts, and personal commentary elicited divergent responses inspired by diverse and multiple perspectives (Dwyer, 2010; Larson, 2009). The Internet has truly “collapsed time and space” (Fridell & Lovelace, 2008, p. 179). Virtual literature discussion circles promote active engagement (Huang, 2006), provide authentic audiences (Boling, Castek, Zawilinski, Barton & Nierlich, 2008), deepen engagement with texts (Bowers-Campbell, 2011) and promote a socially constructed and collaborative learning environment (Dwyer, 2010; Larson 2009). The study presents a vision onto new possibilities of grand conversations, across time, space and cultures, in global communities of readers and writers as students exchange responses to literature.

While Birkerts (1994) argued that the level of personal reflection and engagement is not maintained in a digital environment; others (Agosto, 2002; Kuiper & Volman, 2008) pointed to the largely minimalist and consumerist nature of students’ learning in such environments. When moving from page to screen it is important that what we value most in terms of reader/writer response survives the transition (Reinking, 2009). Evidence from this study suggests that digitized text enhanced rather than negated a reflective reader/writer response as the students engaged in close reading, personal interpretation, critical thinking, and deep response to text through immersion in, involvement with and interpretation of text within a community of readers and writers. Digitized text not only afforded an enhanced reading experience, through the presence of scaffolds and supports, but also provided a malleable reading environment where students could annotate the text through digital thinkmarks and highlights to capture fleeting thoughts and responses. The asynchronous message board also provided an archival space where students could thoughtfully, through written discourse, create dialogue and response (Grisham &

Wolsey, 2006). Recently, Karchmer-Klein and Shinas (2012) addressed the potential fear of new literacies replacing or hindering traditional literacies; they suggested that teachers “must set aside those concerns and replace them with knowledge that, when taught well, new literacies can support and extend students’ abilities to read and write for real purposes” (p. 293). The asynchronous format provided students equitable opportunities to share their thought and voice their opinion about the readings. In a traditional literature circle, some students - particularly those who are shy, linguistically diverse, or struggle as readers - may hesitate to share their thoughts in group settings (Larson, 2009). While all participants in the study were proficient readers and strong communicators, they too benefited from the extra thinking time provided by the asynchronous format to formulate and post responses. As e-books, along with opportunities to respond to literature through ICTs, become increasingly common in today’s classrooms, it is crucial that researchers and educators alike consider the affordances of such technologies. However, existing research is rather limited, focusing on feasibility and efficacy in controlled contexts or small cases (Biancarosa & Griffiths, 2012). Undoubtedly, future research will benefit from larger, longitudinal studies, as well as research with specific focus on how English Language Learners, struggling readers, or students with special needs can benefit from using e-book features including built-in dictionaries, text-to-speech functions, and options for customizing a wide range of text features.

Furthermore, this study suggested a blurring of the lines between readers and writers, consumers and creators, and authors and audiences as students co-constructed response to text. The participants added digital thinkmarks to their books in support of their reading comprehension. Reflective of comprehension strategies commonly taught in classrooms, most digital thinkmarks started out at the immersion level with students making predictions, restating

main ideas, and asking questions. Over time, the digital thinkmarks evolved into a deeper involvement with and interpretation of the text, often progressing into posts on the online message board conversations.

It is commonly known that students, when provided opportunities to discuss language in books, learn to notice what writers do; they come to understand that authors constantly make deliberate choices as they compose and they draw upon this knowledge in their own writing and their own evaluation of and appreciation for texts (Galda, 2010). As exemplified by Hanna who wished to “jump inside the book,” the students in this study expressed a strong desire to manipulate the story outcome and offer suggestions to the author. Smith (1983) explained that true engagement takes place when readers read like a writer, anticipating what the author will say; the author becoming an unsuspecting partner in helping children respond to what they have read and express themselves in writing. Hence, teachers have the critical responsibility to offer relevant reading materials and provide opportunities for students to engage as writers. Today’s technologies provide further options for interacting with, responding to, and composing texts. As the students read the assigned literature on digital reading devices, they were able to add annotations and interact with the digital text in multiple ways. The online message board offered a forum for an authentic audience of peers. As students posted literature responses, they quickly became accustomed to frequent and collaborative peer feedback (Corrigan, 2010). This study supports Hancock’s (2008) claim that “the exchange of reader response to literature between related groups of readers is no longer confined by distance or contexts” (p. 108). The aesthetic and cognitive domains of reader response to commonly read literature promise interactions and experiences through ICTs that share and expand personal perspectives on response to books.

Research in technology as a mode of reader/writer response is still in its infancy.

Exploring how students of all reading capabilities and backgrounds respond to various forms of digital texts; utilize blogs, message boards, or social media to discuss or respond to literature; and access online resources to extend and enhance reading experiences are just a few research possibilities for the future. Even as the context of Rosenblatt's transactional theory is preserved, technology itself can offer fresh insights into the responses that occur through digital reading, writing, and communications about literature (Hancock, 2008).

As today's students encounter a plethora of new literacies in addition to the traditional literacies associated with paper, pencil, and print texts (IRA, 2009), it is important to keep clear literacy goals and outcomes in mind. Rather than something to be fitted into an already crowded literacy curriculum, technology should be conceptualized as affording tools that support teachers in empowering all students to become engaged and capable readers, writers, and communicators in a global society (Dwyer, 2012). As epitomized in this study, technology can support students' deep engagement with literature as they establish communities of readers and writers across time, space, and culture. In accommodating (Reinking, Labbo & Mc Kenna, 2000) technology tools, researchers and educators should shift the focus from the technology tools themselves towards the technological, pedagogical, content knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) necessary to construct a curriculum to enhance literacy development and deepen engagement with text; thereby enriching student learning.

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Figure 1 Illustrative example of asynchronous message board discussion

Hanna Kindle (nannakindle)	RE: Chapters 16-20
Posted: 27/04/12 09:25 Edit Delete Lock Reply	Heyyy Katie.. Hanna here :D I think the same, about something happening to their mother.. I never thought about that, how the father might have not wanted to get attached to Sarah Ruth...Good point!! Do you think their mother died? If so, how do you think she died?? Hanna :) Xoxoxo
Jane Kindle (janekindle)	RE: Chapters 16-20
Posted: 27/04/12 11:07 Edit Delete Lock Reply	Hey! Maybe the dad and mother had a fight? Maybe the mother is still alive? Or maybe Bryce did something to his mother? and now his dad doesn't like him? Jane :)
Grace Kindle (gracekindle)	RE: Chapters 16-20
Posted: 01/05/12 20:03 Edit Delete Lock Reply	Hey Hanna! I think that the mom died and the reason she died was the same way Sarah Ruth died. I think that the mom and Sarah Ruth had the same illness and that's why the dad wasn't there to look after Bryce and Sarah because he knew that Sarah was going to die and he didn't want to become attached. Grace
Duane Kindle (duanekindle)	RE: Chapters 16-20
Posted: 30/04/12 08:36 Edit Delete Lock	Ya I agree with Katie, you never what somebody's dealing with I mean his wife could have died and he never got over it. What do you guys think?