

12-2009

Myspace, Write Space: An Analysis of Student Achievement in Texts for Digital Audiences

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MYSFACE, WRITE SPACE: AN ANALYSIS OF
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN TEXTS
FOR DIGITAL AUDIENCES

A Thesis

by

STEPHANIE MARIE SAUCEDA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2009

Major Subject: English

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STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN TEXTS
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December 2009

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ABSTRACT

Sauceda, Stephanie M., MySpace, WriteSpace: An Analysis of Student Achievement in Texts for Digital Audiences. Master of Arts (MA), December, 2009, 58 pp., bibliography, 22 titles.

This thesis study analyzes students' connection to audience in writing samples, gauging the performance of texts written for an actual audience, the classroom teacher and an implied audience, the web. Using Steven Toulmin's concepts of intimate and stranger interactions, this study suggests that students may make an intimate connection with the mass web audience, thereby allowing an increase in writing performance. On the other end, students identify assignments for classroom teachers as work for the stranger audience, thus creating a writing performance gap. The following is a discussion of possible factors and elements creating this particular paradox in audience identification.

DEDICATION

The completion of my master studies would not have been possible without the loving and support of my family. To my children, Nathan, Zoe and Noah, whose love and laughter keeps me smiling. To my parents, Dr. Noe Saucedo and Magda Saucedo, who have instilled in me a love of learning and without their encouragement, none of this would have been remotely possible. To my partners in crime, my sisters, Jacqueline Denise Saucedo and Jessica Nicole Muniz, thank you for having confidence in me, even when I did not. To Adriana, thank you for helping me cope with the stress associated with composing this thesis. To Grandma Chickie and Grandpa Tony, thank you for your help during difficult times, it is greatly appreciated and will never be forgotten. Lastly, to my beloved Grandma Yoli, who is no longer here with me but who continues to live in my heart forever. I love you all immensely and will forever be grateful for your parts in my success.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I will always be grateful to Dr. Mark Joe Noe, chair of my thesis committee, for all his advice and support, for believing that I had something to write worth reading. Many thanks go to my thesis committee members: Dr. Deborah Cole, and Dr. Moriah McCracken. Their collective patience and advice were invaluable to me during this process.

I would also like to thank my students for allowing me to feature their work in my thesis; through their work my work is possible.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Stanley Fish, an American literary theorist and legal scholar, states that he has encountered a shocking number of students who “couldn’t write and an equal number [that] had never been asked to.” Fish goes on to suggest that these students “managed to get through high-school without learning how to write a clean English sentence, and if you can’t do that you can’t do anything” (1). Fish is correct on two accounts; weak writing is prevailing in student populations, and writing skills are an undeniable necessity. However, it is disingenuous to suggest that secondary school English teachers are not asking the students to write. This is simply untrue, for teachers are asking students to write; however, the act of writing alone is often not enough to aid students in their writing. In my class, students cannot and do not go a day without a writing assignment of some kind. Now, the result of that writing is I think where Fish sees a problem. More often than not, my students produce writing that is bland and simple, sophomoric even. That is, their writing is constructed with simple, short, and choppy sentences, devoid of any real voice or trace of the student writer. Teacher reactions towards this kind of writing foster student frustration, and a sense of urgency. The teacher assigns the piece of writing, generally after the necessary skills have been taught or reviewed. The assignment is laid before the student with careful instructions, “do this”

and “don’t do that.” This educator can now safely assume that all necessary instruction has been disseminated, and will take effect nicely in the student’s mind and on paper. On the other end, the student listens, taking note of the do’s and don’ts. Surely this information, coupled with previous instruction, will yield writing with positive results, a good grade. When the expected outcome goes unrealized, both parties are at a loss. Likewise, teacher and student feel frustrated and tense when the individual goals of each party are unachieved. To fully understand the problem that Fish, and many others describe, we must first ask ourselves what we expect of the student writing.

Student Success and Writing Achievement Defined

For the purposes of my study, it is necessary to clarify what qualities will deem a composition successful. The following is a generic rubric I use to guide my students in their writing.

- 1) Students should choose ideas that are interesting and important. The ideas are at the heart of the piece, and content weighs heavily on the success of a composition. The ideas and content should be chosen to best engage the reader.
- 2) Logical organization is necessary for composition effect. A student’s effective organization will allow the reader to understand the piece, and help assure that the intended message is received.
- 3) Student compositions should reflect voice that is original, individual, and appropriate. A student’s use of voice should allow the reader to estimate the writer’s individual personality through their words.

- 4) Word choice or diction should be specific and memorable. Effective writing will use just the right words to say exactly what the writer intends to say.
- 5) Students should be mindful of sentence fluency. The end product must be smooth and expressive.
- 6) Students should also be mindful of conventions. Grammar, although the least popular element of writing, is what allows us to communicate consistently. Conventions are the ways we all agree to use punctuation, spelling, grammar, etc.

For my students, the grammar and conventions criteria is what most intimidates them in their writing. However, it is important to note that my own estimation of successful writing lies heavily on criterion 1-4. Student success in writing is achieved through thoughtful and creative content, their original and risky word choice, and the appearance and resonation of their voice in a particular piece. This general writing rubric allows me to gauge my students' writing performance.

From my own classroom observation, I have noticed a student performance gap between my students' writing abilities and their application of said abilities in their classroom essays. The student performance gap is a gap between competence and performance, between what the student can do and what they actually do. Competence, here, is defined as what the student is able to do; performance is what the student actually does. This gap is easily identified through day-to-day interaction with the students. The students are not incompetent, nor are they ignoring previous instruction in an attempt to

be generic and annoy the instructor. They do not blatantly disregard their instruction, and yet, they fail to accomplish the writing goals or perform at the level the instructor desires. With respect to their writing in class, many of my students fail to use the talents that I know they have readily available to them. Their writing does not illustrate their many talents. Our classroom interaction builds the foundation for my assertions of their abilities. My students produce insightful and powerful arguments during classroom discussions. Students often surprise me with their wit and unique perspectives. The vocabulary used by my students is always on or above grade level. These observations convey that they have a wealth of knowledge that is not being transferred to their classroom writings. The presence of a performance gap breeds a performance tension for students in writing, which nurtures existing fears and frustrations associated with writing exercises. This performance tension remains an unseen, unknown, but not unfelt, monster weighing on the students' shoulders as they write their assignments, while also lurking in the minds of English teachers as they grade the text. Familiar with this myself, I seek to understand the problem.

The easy, albeit obvious, explanations for ineffective or below performance-level writing are; 1) the instructor has failed in the instruction, or 2) the student has failed to learn or apply. Simply put, the culprit of is usually deemed the lazy student or the inept instructor. The acceptance of either explanation does nothing to relieve the performance tension. Perhaps the culprit is not so easily identified? There are undoubtedly occasions where the simple answers fit, but the reality—as seen in my world, my classroom—suggests otherwise. Simple answers aside, my students and I genuinely attempt to complete our portion of the task well. Therefore, I have concluded that there is

something else to blame. This is not an unfounded conclusion, for my students have produced both shoddy and underdeveloped writing that English teachers deem poor, and writing filled with elements that I want them to use: voice, irony, conceit, diction mixed with their own personal flavor. I have witnessed both kinds of writing—bland and flavorful— from the same students. These students have grasped many of the skills I taught them and are using them well, but, not in my classroom assignments. My students can compose writing that closes their performance gap, and dissolves any performance tension. I stumbled across this type of writing in their personal writings through a creative writing project I assigned on characterization, using the popular social networking site, MySpace.

A Discovery in Writing

In an attempt to keep my lessons connected to student interests, I assigned a project where students had to create a MySpace page for a character from a novel we had just finished, William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies*. Each student was given a character from the novel to analyze based on basic facts that could be attained through readings, and also inferences—necessary to fit the structural elements of MySpace—that the students made about their character. Each student would analyze their character and design a MySpace page that reflected their assigned person, including music they might listen to, images they would decorate their page with, heroes the character might have, words chosen for the headliner, and what the character says about himself/herself in the short autobiographical section of MySpace entitled “About ME.” After my students completed their character page, they would then upload it to a page I created for student characters to congregate in. Students would be graded on how well their page (text,

music and images) reflected their character. For example, one student was assigned Jack. In *The Lord of the Flies*, Jack is a power hungry, bloodthirsty tyrant. The student selected music with both ominous and aggressive tones, mostly from the band Metallica. She chose a black backdrop with blood stains dripping down the page. The images on “Jack’s” page were of weapons—mostly knives and other savage tools, anarchy symbols and Nazi Swastikas; heroes included, Hitler and Henry the Eighth. The headliner stated, “There is only one way to do things... MY way”. The “About ME” section included facts about Jack such as, “I am head of the choir” and “I rule with a fist, stay with me and you survive.” A follow up assignment required the students to engage in “conversation” with another student’s character using the MySpace comment section, where people can leave comments, and you in turn respond to their comment in their comment section. This creative project would be repeated throughout the year for characterizations in different novels. My goal was the creation of a page where characters from various literature read throughout the year could come alive, a space where similar protagonists could vent their frustrations, and a virtual study space where students could refresh their memory before six weeks and semester exams.

After the assignment due date, I sat comfortably in front of my own computer screen, checked the submitted assignments and found that students had added their personal MySpace page, as well as the character assignment. I first focused on the character assignments, pleasantly pleased with their creativity. However, my discovery, the hint at the elusive culprit, the source of my students’ performance gap in writing, showed itself not in the student characterization pages, but in their own personal MySpace pages. As I skimmed through their writings, I found that many students’

writing performance had changed, sometimes subtly, but almost always in positive ways. I found that their writing was filled with irony, allusions, metaphors, things that I have tried to inspire them to do in their writings within our classroom walls. I read many of them over and over again, hearing their voice emitted through their words, each adding their own personal flavor, a flavor I had come to know from classroom interaction, but had not seen in their writing. The more I read, the more it was clear that something was helping the students clearly express themselves, even if only by small degrees. My focus then turned to unveiling the source of help or confidence, which prompted careful examination of my students' writings, in-class and online. Many of my students consistently produced in-class writing that fell short of the goals outlined in the general rubric, yet on MySpace they had created a piece which, for some, exceeded the requirements.

Two students whose work will be examined in detail, Marcos (an average student for my campus) and Alyssa (an above average writer in the same class), both create simple and safe texts when asked to write an in-class essay. Marcos's first essay is dry and devoid of voice, completely unlike Marcos. In fact, most of his in-class writing was bland and elementary. His sentences were grammatically correct, but simple in structure. His in-class narrative (which is analyzed in detail later) feels and reads as inauthentic, that is, it is not a good representation of Marcos or his skills, but rather, a construction of an artificial and safe composition, which meets the length and topic requirements alone. On the other hand, his narrative on MySpace exudes a confident voice that strengthens his command of language. Marcos risks the safety of simple sentences and creates a piece that speaks loudly of him. Alyssa, however, prides herself on her writing, aspiring to one

day become a professional writer. Alyssa attempts to compose a piece of writing that reflects who she is, yet there is a safe distance between Alyssa and her reader. She does not fully reveal herself in her in-class writing. Although her in-class writing is a bit more developed than Marcos's, her writing still lacks the elements that are present in her online piece, which make her writing stronger and more developed. It is with these two students, the struggling writer and one who feels confidence in her writing, that I focus my research, and attempt to understand the discrepancies in the achievement of student writings.

My first inclination was to correlate any achievement discrepancy with the location in which the writing takes place, the classroom vs. the comforts of home. What is it about the classroom that hinders a student's natural creativity or flow of writing? This approach proves useful to an extent. However, there are limitations to location as the culprit, for I have assigned essays to be completed at home, typed, and with the use of resources not available to them in the classroom and yet, the writing results remain the same, with the performance gap still a reality. Change of location from the classroom to the home does have some affect on the student's writing; it might be more polished, have fewer grammatical errors, but it would still lack the level of performance in voice, figurative language and diction seen on their MySpace pages. The home is the location, physically, where students have access to MySpace; however, it is this imagined space with real purpose for a familiar audience where student writing is affected positively.

Looking past location as the suspect, I began to focus on the audience tied to a specific space or writing occasion, me, the classroom teacher and an unnamed mass via the World Wide Web. Linda Flower, a composition theorist best known for her emphasis

on cognitive rhetoric, argues that poor writing is a result of student negligence of the readership or their audience, an egocentric form of composition (Flower 19). While this is a valid hypothesis, I would argue that it is not my students' intent to neglect me as an audience; however, there seems to be some confusion, or perhaps intimidation, which interferes with student efforts. The *thing* that I speak of, the source of the problem and my culprit, revealed itself in part through an essay by Stephen Toulmin wherein he discusses the ethical relationship between strangers and intimates and how interaction is effected by the designation of stranger or intimate. Toulmin argues that there are different ethical practices allotted during interactions with strangers as opposed to intimates. This idea of "stranger ethics" resonated with me, and yet, there was something enigmatic about the concept as I applied it. For Toulmin, people will interact more freely and successfully with intimates, making allowances and striving to attend to their needs. Strangers will be treated coldly and are afforded little to no attention. The physical distance between two persons and the frequency of interactions between those same people designates whether a person is deemed intimate or stranger. A stranger will be a person with whom you have very little interaction with, moreover, the physical distance between the parties will be great. An intimate will be someone who is physically located near you, allowing frequent interaction with that person that fosters the intimate connection.

When I applied Toulmin's rationale to my classroom, I assumed that I should be the intimate audience, attended to with care. We, the students and I, share a large portion of each weekday together, building a relationship, a rapport. While all this is true for our interactions in class, there is no evidence of that intimacy in their writing for me

as their audience. That is, the students produce dry and short, forced texts, with little to no attention or allowance to me as their audience, the complete opposite of intimate. I am not the intimate, but instead, the stranger. A closer look at my students' work on their personal MySpace pages and their in-class essays revealed a pattern: I am the stranger, and the unknown mass on the web is the intimate. This juxtaposition of ideas, with contradictory results, guides my focus on student perception of audience in this digital age. My focus will target variations in audience for different writing situations: assignments for the classroom teacher versus the informal web setting with an unnamed mass behind it via the popular internet social community, MySpace.

CHAPTER II

STUDENT WRITING SAMPLES

My discovery of writing differences in the same students prompted me to design a control paper. My hypothesis was based on my knowledge of the students' classroom writing performance. That is, I recollected the type of writing the students produced and used that recollection as a basis for my claim that student writing changed for the implied audiences on the web. As the classroom teacher, I am the actual audience; generally "the meaning of 'audience' tends to diverge in two general directions: one toward actual people external to the text, the audience whom the writer must accommodate," myself, and "the other toward the text itself and the audience implied there; a set of suggested or evoked attitudes, interests, reactions and conditions of knowledge" (Park, 4). I designed the control paper, a replica of MySpace's About Me section in an attempt to get the students to exhibit the same high level of performance seen online. The assignment asked students to try their best to make their essays speak to me about them. They could discuss any information necessary for me to understand who they are. The objective for the paper was for the reader to grasp the writer, who they were, their likes, dislikes, passions, fears, etc. Many students noticed the similar beginning phrase, About Me, and commented on the likeness to the MySpace narrative. Acknowledging the similarity, I urged them to feel free to use any information they might

include in their personal MySpace pages. The outcome of the experiment complimented my original hypothesis: student writing differs, changes, and improves for their implied audience online.

A Look at the Students

Marcos

The students chosen for my primary examples reflect an average student writer, Marcos, and an above average student writer, Alyssa. Their work is representational of other work done in my classes. Both Marcos and Alyssa were extremely intelligent, yet they differed in writing abilities. Marcos has consistently experienced difficulty producing compositions in my classroom. Marcos was an eleventh grader in my regular English III class, an overly outspoken character, sometimes to the point of annoyance, as he himself states. He was a member of the PSJA North drama club and a gifted actor. His classroom behavior included passionate and lively participation in any and all discussions. Marcos gave his opinion freely and decidedly, regardless of who might disagree or become offended. His character, which undoubtedly got him in many a stressful situation, also forced him to learn to gauge a person's boiling point. Luckily he also had the ability to diffuse a stressful and ugly situation. Therefore, Marcos's practice was to argue to the point just before his opponent lashed out, and then make a clever and humorous remark to make amends. Marcos was a pleasure to be around.

Academically speaking, Marcos's performance was average to, at times, below average. The act of composition was a task that gave Marcos great difficulties. His inclination was to "push" it all out hurriedly, revise for grammar, and "get it over with."

During an interview following the administration of my control paper, I asked how he felt when he completed an assignment for me; he stated that he always felt “unsure” of what I would think and felt uneasy about his grammar. All of Marcos’s in-class essays were safe productions of what he thought was appropriate for me.

Alyssa

Unlike Marcos, Alyssa was an above average student in my English III class. As the only sophomore in the junior level course, Alyssa’s work stood out above her older peers. Alyssa was a very quiet, but opinionated girl. She did not give her opinions as freely as Marcos, but when questioned, always had her answer ready. Like Marcos, Alyssa was an actor and had many talents, singing, acting, photography, and writing. However, Alyssa did not share Marcos’ apprehension about writing activities, and would often write on her own for pleasure. There was little to no struggle with Alyssa for her products, which were always above the class average. She allowed herself the freedom to play with her words, and take some compositional risks.

Sample Essays: Marcos and Alyssa

The following samples include Marcos’s in-class narrative essay and his online work and Alyssa’ in-class narrative and online essay. It is important to point out that all online essays were completed prior to the in-class control essay and are, therefore, not revisions of the students’ in-class essays.

About ME: Hello, my name is Marcos Santos and I am 17 years old and a junior at PSJA North High School in Pharr, Texas. My birthday is November 22 and my favorite color

is either red or blue. I live with my mom, my sister and my grandparents...and my dog Tobey. She's very skinny and she shakes a lot. I love picadillys from Tropical Island. When I go, I get them for free...if I'm lucky. I'm really loud and often get on peoples nerves. Well, this is my life in a nutshell. Bye!

--Marcos, in-class essay

About ME: Name, Marcos. I spend my days surfing the amazing waves that SPI has to offer... no. that's not it. I'm seventeen and obviously required—by law... to attend an institution of learning... my current place of imprisonment is PSJA North High School...I know what your thinking...it's a hood... but there's a great sense of camaraderie.... We stick together...and if need be...will shank someone in your defense. my fav numbers are 10 and 17. Why include this information (you might ask???)... because these about me things are silly and chances are you already know me. Tobey is the female that holds my heart...I love her and im pretty sure that I'm the milk in her bones...you know your jealous of my baby girl... she pees from excitement when she sees me....how many guys can say that about any girl....ha! you know my pup....she's super fly and super hyper. HmMMM what

comes next? Oh yes... i play soccer and tennis, (its kind o
an obligation to include any extracurricular activities....you
know...its appealing) there are so many things to say about
my numerous achievements at the very young age I
currently am...but I don't want to give peeps inferiority
complexes....I'm a humanist....go peace.

--Marcos, MySpace page

About ME: May 11, 1993 is the date I opened my eyes to
the world of the living. I'm Alyssa Ortega, no middle
name. I'm a really creative person. I'm a thinker. I'm the
kind of person that can over think things. Go Raiders! I
attend PSJA North High School as a sophomore. I'm
currently involved in the school's drama department. I love
being in drama because I feel I can express my creativity
there. I honestly don't have much school spirit, but I do
love this school. I love to write. You have no idea my
longing to be an author and photographer. I would love to
attend NYU. I'm conservative and have trust issues. Some
basic things about what I do are writing, reading, singing
and fooling around. I also listen to music a lot on my spare
time. Rock, techno, alternative, elctronica, classic rock are
my jams.

--Alyssa, in class essay

About ME: Let me begin by saying meh name...Alyssa Ortega. And for those that are reading impaired, it's said like this [al-is-ah]. Uh huh. That's meh. Well enough for my babbling. The first thing I want to say is that I'm Hispanic... Viva Los Latinos! I love the fact that I'm part Mexican and that Hispanics have all this slang Tex-Mex way of talking. Yeah just wanted to say that because I feel like my cultural influences make a big part of me. It's who I am. :D ... I'm NO... Vegan...Sorreh!! It's just not my thing. But I am an Eco-friendly person. You know, TREE HUGGER...quite literally ;) I try hard to diminish my Carbon Footprint. Um... let's see. I'm involved in my school's Drama Theater Department. Which I LUV and taught me that life is better lived outspoken. If I haven't said my age... it's 15 yeah I'm super little and young. Sometimes I may act less, my age, or more than my age. It varies. Hehe... I'm a writer. Just throwing it out there. I like to write about basically anything (Poetry, Fiction short stories). I would also consider myself an over achiever... sucks to be me. I try so hard to do in what I'm doing, and do it good. It's a hard job. But I can't complain, well... maybe just a little pity party... for 1. I hope to be an

novelist writer/ photographer [*Whoa, Dream Big!* I know.] and have an ambitious need to be body art display for tats... even though I have none but I KNOW what, and where my first is going to be. I'm a pretty calm person, shy at inopportune times, labeled quiet to a fault, I like to think of it as pensive and precise... waste not, want not. It just depends on what kind of person you are to me. I'm a really obsessed with stars, icons, Jacob Black [HOTTEST Shape shifter I know of], Twilight, clothes and books! I'm a quite sucker for Twinkies, Cheeseburgers, and Cookies. It's the reason I have NO endurance and why, well I think, prevents me from looking like a stick...

--Alyssa, MySpace page

Marcos's writing was always brief and dry. His in-class narrative is an excellent example of the kind of writing that he produces for school assignments. Alyssa, on the other hand, prides herself on her ability and desire to write well. While, Alyssa displays better use of vocabulary in her classroom writing, her online writing improves in voice and in depth of development. In both cases my students' online writing surpassed the level of performance of their in-class writing. As mentioned previously, many of my students submitted their personal MySpace pages; however, not all of students had a MySpace page. But for those that did, it was always the case that the level of writing performance improved. The simple fact that their writing increased in volume online drew my attention to a staggering difference in the two writing situations.

A critical analysis of Marcos and Alyssa' writing will serve as the basis for my definition of student writing achievement (additional student samples will be included in an appendix), and also illustrate the difference in student writing for different audiences.

Analysis of In-Class Essays

Marcos' in-class essay consists of 92 words written in eight sentences. He begins with a generic salutation, followed by his name, age and school. The "hello, my name is Marcos" is unnecessary and ineffective for the purposes of the assignment. As I am Marcos' English teacher; and the primary reader of the piece, the audience, I do not need to be told his name, nor given an artificial greeting. Marcos then continues down a list of general facts, favorite colors, parents and siblings, and his pet. His dog Tobey is allotted more depth of description than himself: "and my dog Tobey...She's very skinny and shakes a lot." Marcos has yet to create an effective image or sense of himself within his writing because he describes himself in terms of others rather than himself. Marcos uses the remainder of his essay to quickly comment on a favorite food, and comes to a close with first real information about him, "I'm really loud and often get on people nerves". The last sentences states that the above essay is his life in a nutshell, and then concludes with a "Bye!" All of Marcos' sentences are short and choppy. There is also a pattern to the composition, simple statements connected with a conjunction. There is little to Marcos' voice and style.

Using my classroom interaction with Marcos as bases for comparison, I can attest to his essay being a gross misrepresentation of himself. As previously mentioned, Marcos is in fact loud, comical, vivacious, argumentative, and always outspoken, yet

none of these qualities are conveyed through his personal narrative. Instead, there is in his essay artificiality. The appearance of Marcos' voice is subdued and what remains is the construct of something safe: something Marcos thinks I "expect" of him. The teacher expectation, although seemingly clear, is obviously ambiguous to the student. Although I specifically stated the expectations of the assignment, mentioning things not to do (i.e. hello for beginnings and bye, or any variation of bye as an ending), the result was a bland and simple composition, which does not illustrate the writer in any way.

Alyssa, although a more accomplished student writer, still creates a bland and stale narrative that fails to show the reader her talents, and paints an inaccurate representation of the student. Alyssa's in-class narrative is slightly more developed than Marcos', however, her work still lacks the representation she is capable of offering the reader. To begin, the word count for her composition is 148 words. This increase in word count reflects her above average work. She begins her essay with a different approach, an attempt to be creative, "May 11, 1993 is the date that I opened my eyes to the world of the living." Alyssa begins with a more creative opening sentence than her classmate; however, she quickly slips into a safe mode stating facts, her name, school, activities, etc. She tells the reader everything she is, a thinker, a really creative person, a drama student, a conservative, and yet, there is no real sense of the great thinker, or creative person behind the writing.

Analysis of On-line Essay

The most obvious change in Marcos's writing is the volume, which increases from 92 for the in-class essay to 200 words for his online narrative. The fact that his

online narrative is double the length of his in-class product is significant in itself, however, volume is the least striking positive change realized in his online work. Marcos begins his online essay with, “name, Marcos,” putting very little emphasis on his name, which suggests that he feels his audience knows him, or that this information is less important than what follows. Then, he immediately begins to illustrate the sarcastic and humorous personality that I have come to know from our classroom interactions, but have yet to see in his in-class essays. Marcos plays with the reader, utilizing conceit and creating extended metaphors. Marcos states that he “spends [his] days surfing the amazing waves that SPI has to offer,” which again conveys that he is writing to a reader that he feels is accessible to him. That is, anyone from this region, the Rio Grande Valley, knows that South Padre Island (SPI) does not have amazing waves. He uses this opening to transition towards reality, the life of a student forced “to attend an institution of high learning.” Marcos goes further and uses “imprisonment” to describe his situation at PSJA North High School, which is a bland, stark building completely surrounded by fences that create the appearance of a prison. This statement transitions to a comment about the socio-economic stigma placed on students from PSJA North High School. Marcos speaks against the stigma, recognizing that it’s a “hood” or, lower on the economic ladder than other areas; but despite that, there are positive aspects, such as “camaraderie” and loyalty. He attests to the defensive nature of many students on campus, but clarifies any violence associated with a “hood” to situations when danger for friends provokes defense. Moving forward to the middle of his essay, Marcos presents “the female that holds his heart.” Later the reader learns that his object of love is not a person, but his dog. He does not divulge that fact until later, playfully misleading his

reader—although he does give subtle hints to the truth such as, “I’m pretty sure that I’m the milk in her bones,” and other less subtle hints, such as “she pees from excitement when she sees me.” His About Me portion of his essay really captures his voice and persona. Later, Marcos mentions his “obligation to include any extracurricular activities,” because it is “appealing” to the audience. His list includes soccer and tennis, but fails to mention his important contributions to the PSJA North Drama Club as one of the most valued actors. This, at first, seems strange; however, after carefully analyzing his choice of words and content, I correlated that deletion of information with the fact that Marcos at time is insecure about his masculinity. His reference to the “numerous achievements” describes his success in theatre arts as best actor in many UIL One-Act plays. However, because he does not mention that particular extracurricular activity, the reader is left to assume that his talents are more sport oriented because he believes it’s more “appealing” for his audience.

In addition to the conceit, Marcos’s diction changes in positive ways with his utilization of more advance vocabulary. It is clear from Marcos’s online work that he is equipped with an expansive vocabulary: however, effective diction is not applied in his in-class writing assignments as it is in his MySpace work. Marcos uses specific words to help describe himself and the world around him. He alludes to the social hierarchy present in high school circles and the implications on student self-esteem. Marcos, often the target of ridicule for his effeminate nature, states he is a “humanist.” For his description of Tobey, he could have (and I suspect would have, if this had essay had me for the audience) said that he loved his dog, Tobey, and she loved him back. Instead, he alludes to the fact that she is a dog by making reference to the snack she adores, Milk

Bones. The different ideas within his essay have a smooth fluency, moving from one idea to another with little effort. Marcos uses a variety of sentence structures, which deviates from his safe in-class production of short and choppy, simple sentence construction. Marcos blossoms as a writer in his online piece, carefully moving away from the writing safe zone where his in-class writing remains. The audience really receives a clear perspective of who Marcos is and what he cares about through his confident voice, a voice muffled in his in-class writing assignments.

Like Marcos', Alyssa's online narrative volume more than doubles in length: from 148 words in her in-class narrative to 357 words for her online piece. Increased essay volume was a consistent improvement for all students in the class, most doubling, and at times, tripling their essay length. Alyssa moves quickly from her name to what she is most passionate about, her heritage, spending some time describing her Hispanic heritage and her interest in the language of "Tex-Mex" that is specific to our region. Alyssa chose to begin her piece with this information and a *grito* (or cheer), "Viva Los Latinos," which immediately illustrates her passion and her voice, or flavor, as a writer. She embraces her "cultural influences," and remarks that they have shaped her into the person she is today. After her Mexican pride, Alyssa, like Marcos, speaks to a prevailing trend at our high school, Veganism, a diet or life style that excludes any and all products and by products—food, clothing, make-up, etc—that contain elements or parts from an animal source. Many girls on campus subscribe to this lifestyle as a means to stay thin, because veganism restricts so many food choices, from meats to milk and cheeses. Alyssa states that veganism is "not her thing" and I suspect there are many reasons for this, such as her ability to remain independent from influence and her confidence in self

image. Although she does not subscribe to the elimination of animals from her food, she does feel it necessary to mention that she is “eco-friendly,” a “tree hugger... quite literally,” and makes an honest effort to “diminish her carbon footprint.” Alyssa is silly and carefree, which is illustrated in the image of her literally hugging a tree. She is, like Marcos, a member of the PSJA North Drama team, and states that it has “taught [her] that life is better lived outspoken,” which is important to Alyssa because she is by nature, quiet and reserved. She describes herself as an “overachiever,” and states that sometimes it’s “hard” to do what she does. Alyssa also plays with her reader by stating that she “can’t complain” about her goal oriented nature, then asking for a “little pity party of 1.” Alyssa discloses that she is “label[ed] quiet to a fault” and that she is “shy at inopportune times,” then explains that what we (the readers) mistake for shy silence is but the “precise” act of a “pensive” person. She changes this “fault” to a strength, where she “waste[s] not, want[s] not” with respect to her words. She illustrates a careful and thoughtful thinker, with specific things to say to the world. The next significant element refers back to her rejection of veganism, stating that she is a “sucker” for junk food, meat products—such as cheeseburgers—included.

Like Marcos, Alyssa’s online narrative word choice changed in positive ways. However, more than diction, her content itself was more telling and illustrative. Alyssa takes the time to intimately disclose faults and strengths. She carefully arranges words to express her message. For instance, Alyssa states that she has “NO endurance... [which] prevents her from looking like a stick,” which conveys a very particular message and discloses important information about her. Alyssa chose the word “prevents” which

indicates that she does not fall into the teenage trap of low self esteem, or, as I've heard her say, "the sickly thin girl syndrome."

The Diminished Performance Gap

Both Marcos and Alyssa's online performance changed in positive ways. As stated above, the most obvious and consistent improvement is the increase in volume. The students elaborate on ideas that are left underdeveloped, or unmentioned in their in-class essay. The volume for both primary examples doubled in length and, likewise, in ideas, for more of the writer is conveyed through the added information. Voice, the driving factor for narratives, is enhanced by both student writer's style and diction. Marcos, however, displays a greater change in diction in his online piece. Alyssa's diction did change, however the change is minimal; perhaps her confidence as a writer, and strength as an above average writer in-class, makes the difference less obvious. In all, both students effectively grasp the audience, adding their personal flavors to the text. It is in their online essay that the performance gap is bridged. My classroom observations drove me to believe that both students were capable of meeting the goals for our narrative papers: but it is in their online MySpace narrative, for a massed audience, where they achieve these goals.

CHAPTER III

TOULMIN ON AUDIENCE: STRANGERS VS. INTIMATES

Stephen Toulmin's concept of "stranger ethics" in his "Tyranny of Principles" provides insight towards understanding the discrepancies in student narratives with respect to the audience that is directly correlated with a particular space, namely, the classroom, with the instructor as the audience vs. the internet space, MySpace, with a mass known (and unknown) audience. Toulmin, scholar and philosopher, is best known for his contributions to rhetoric, which provided a structured model for analysis and criticism of rhetorical arguments. The "Tyranny of Principles," although not written specifically for the English discipline, provides useful categories of human social interaction. These categories can be used to describe the types of audience that student writers evoke in their writing. Toulmin states that "by looking at the effects of changing social conditions" —in our case the availability of the known teacher audience and the unknown audience via the internet—"and modes of life on our ethical perceptions, I believe we can best hit clues that will permit us to unravel this whole tangle of problems" (100). Toulmin, here, speaks in reference to the argument between "equity" and "equal" (99). Although applied for different needs, his analysis of societal changes proves useful. He continues to explain the dynamics that differentiate the dealings of "intimates" with those of "strangers" (100), the "problem that most concerns me. Toulmin uses Leo

Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* to illuminate his point, which includes the space between people and its effects on their actions. As Tolstoy saw it, "genuinely moral relationships can only exist between people who live, work and associate together: inside a family, between intimates and associates, with a neighborhood" (100). Toulmin makes reference to Tolstoy in an attempt to depict, using the story's characters, the types of interaction that occur between people who are located near each other and those that are separated with great distance. Although Toulmin's ideas apply to dealings, both, ethical and moral, they can easily be transferred to audience/writing scenarios.

For Tolstoy, the realm of "intimacy" would be the space or distance a person could travel on a regular basis. With this space and distance in mind, one might think that the distance that is between the student and their audience via MySpace would prove too large, thereby creating a non-intimate, or stranger relationship. Toulmin and Tolstoy both emphasize the "sharp difference that exists between moral relations with our families, intimates and immediate neighbors or associates, and our moral relations with complete strangers" (101). Toulmin explains further that with "intimates" people are more inclined "to make allowances" and use "discretion" (101). As for dealings with complete "strangers," the allowance afforded to the "intimates" is none and "the opportunities for discretion are few" (101). Furthermore, Toulmin describes stranger interactions as "rule designated" (101). The prescribed rules in a society are followed to the letter. There is no diversion from the set rules if the person is to feel safe from unethical behavior, for "in the ethics of strangers, respect for rules is all" (101). For the stranger, communication and prolonged interaction is not sought, making each stranger encounter short and dry, which does not allow for the benefits of intimacy, such as

positive reinforcement, feedback or extended dialoguing. Stranger interactions display detachment from normal interaction because the focus is not the fostering of something, a relationship or conversation, but rather the quick follow through of what's necessary and what is appropriate based on the set of rules. This adherence to the understood rules is key to understanding the safe and bland nature in my student samples. The adherence to rules and the idea of moral dealings between and with "intimates" and "strangers" can be transplanted to analyze the correlation between the audience/space and student writings. In the case of writing done in the classroom, for the teacher as the audience, the rules of engagement that limit student writing performance are the more advanced grammar conventions. If a student lacks confidence in their ability to properly follow grammatical conventions, then they are likely to stick to a basic, simplified application of their knowledge. For intimate encounters, rules are not the primary concern, but rather, communication, mutually beneficial accommodations, and positive reinforcement are key.

There are limitations to Toulmin's "stranger ethics" if merely transferred to writing and audience scenarios without altering Toulmin's concern with ethics to my concern with writing achievement. Students do not perform better because they feel a moral or ethical obligation to one audience or the other; rather, they simply care more for the intimately felt audience's opinion. This care for one audience over the other and the misunderstanding of the appropriation of rules is at the root of the intimate/stranger paradox within writing instruction. If students feel an intimate connection with a space's implied audience, they are likely to feel less constrained by governing rules, thereby increasing the students' performance in voice and other areas of performance. The

designation of “intimacy” to an audience allows students to perform differently, opening up the channels of communication and lessening the constraints of rule governed writing interaction.

I should, by all accounts, be the “intimate”; for my students attend class on a daily basis, thereby building a relationship deserving the allowances of intimacy. While the MySpace audience, an unnamed mass, should be the “stranger”; for the distance between the participants is immeasurable. As I have already disclosed the paradoxical situation, it should come as no surprise to find that the classroom teacher is the strange party, afforded no benefits of intimacy or diversion from known prescribed rules. While the parties on MySpace are the intimates, thereby allowing students the freedom and discretion to bend writing rules, which transfers to success in their online writing. A close examination of both implied audiences and work produced for that audience will allow some clarity towards understanding student performance.

Actual Audience: Classroom Teacher

The teacher and the classroom are associated with academic writing and, most important, grades. There is an almost immediate and certain aversion to both. Students, like Marcos, feel that “regular writing in the classroom is to be boring, or not boring but stuffy sounding, uptight and to the point.” These feelings stem from what Bracha Alpert refers to as “the superiority of school knowledge” versus their student knowledge, which they feel is inadequate for both the teacher and classroom (361). As a teacher, I try, on a daily basis, to create a space where the students feel comfortable to speak up and work through ideas. However, when it comes to essays, I find that my “discretion” with regards

to making allowances for errors is reduced (Toulmin 100). So, although I have consciously tried to create a comfortable sense of community with an open atmosphere through classroom discussions and the validating of their ideas, in the end, I still grade in the “superiority of school knowledge” mode (Alpert 361). Also, the ideas connected to the comfortable place I attempt to create within the class do not match the ideas connected to the comforts felt with intimates. Comfort, as it pertains to intimate relations, does not mean relaxed or carefree, for in intimate dealings, care for the opposite party is most important. Comfort between intimates is the feeling that mistakes can and will be made; however, communication and positive feedback between the parties will rectify any shortcomings. One of my duties as a teacher is the assigning of grades, using the artificial rules of Standardized of English as my rubric, which is obviously strictly rule governed. The grade becomes currency within the classroom, the fruit of students’ labors and a comment on not just their writings, but also their character. There should be no wonder that students are not willing to (or comfortable with) take compositional risks on teacher assigned writing tasks. With grades as currency, students cannot, and more importantly will not, play with or take risks in their writing. This “superiority of school knowledge” and thereby, teacher knowledge, coupled with the teacher’s responsibility to assigned grades, are substantial factors impeding the teacher’s possibility of “intimacy” from student perspectives (Alpert 361, Toulmin 100). Furthermore, the elements of stranger ethics that pertain to rule adherence create added difficulties. As Toulmin states, relations between strangers are based on the prescribed set of rules designated acceptable between parties. What this means for student composition is a strict adherence to the rules of grammar that are familiar to them. That is, most students have a firm grasp of

the simplest sentence structures and grammatical scenarios that they can use properly and confidently. Although most students have knowledge of more complex grammatical constructs, they are less confident in their use and thus, feel likely to break a grammar rule in the misuse of the complex, which would be a grave error for stranger interactions. Students then stick strictly to grammar rules that they can confidently apply. Like the assignment of a grade, the rules associated with the implied audience of the classroom teacher hinders student use of complex, creative sentence structure and compositional risks. Marcos and Alyssa's in-class essay reflect writing that adheres strictly to the prescribed rules of grammar. Marcos, in particular, utilizes only the basic sentence structures and grammatical constructs. As a struggling and intimidated writer, he commits his writing to safe structures to avoid breaking any rules, which might lower his grade. This adherence to safe structures limits the creativity and interest of his piece. Alyssa ventures slightly past the safe zone, but remains consistently close. Marcos and Alyssa, take the intended reader through a brief and flavorless account of who they are. Their essays fail to exhibit the intent of genuine communication about themselves, but rather, a simple creation that meets the basic classroom requirements. Both in-class student samples reflect Toulmin's concept of stranger relations applied to the classroom teacher.

Implied Audience: the Web

Students are already sophisticated owners, occupants, inhabitants of their online spaces; from blogs to e-zines and Twitter to MySpace, students are entering global communities and interacting well with global audiences. These digital locations allow students with like-minded interests to connect to and share with each other in intimate

and meaningful ways. Students are creating “all sorts of content” and, as Will Richardson—“Learner in Chief” at Connective Learning and the author of Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms—states, “they do all this creating publishing and learning on their own” outside of the school and the classroom (1).

MySpace and its audience are not governed or driven by strict adherence to rules. There are of course rules about inappropriate material; but apart from obvious restrictions, MySpace is a tabula rasa. The MySpace template can be used as is or changed to meet the needs of the individuals, with virtually no limitations. Users create a private community via their private page and can share photos, journals, music, blogs, videos and interests with their growing network of mutual friends. The number of views a person’s page receives gets recorded in a tally, the more hits the better. People can comment on photos, blogs, and journal entries (if they wish to have them made available to the public) and may, in addition to any comments, leave kudos for a job well done. MySpace makes an intimate audience accessible to student writers, wherein users’ friends can engage in ongoing communicative activities.

For the MySpace audience, creativity and individualism are the keys to success; the implied audience looks for them. For this virtual audience, the intimate party, the focus or goal is communication, mutual cooperation, and constructive feedback. The structural framework in MySpace creates the perfect place for intimate parties to congregate. My students’ online work demonstrates communication connected to intimates, which includes generous amounts of information, playful audience engagement, and more interesting and advance word choice. The MySpace audience is

the intimate audience because student writers feel comfortable expressing themselves to an open and accessible audience.

The discrepancies in student writing performance with different audiences, intimate and stranger, prompts a review of audience pedagogy. How do intimate audiences and stranger audiences play into audience pedagogies in secondary English classrooms?

CHAPTER IV

ON AUDIENCE PEDAGOGIES

There is an expansive, though vaguely described, agreement on the importance of a writer's analysis and consideration of their audience in composition studies.

Composition history and trend argues that "a writer's sense of and ability to adapt to an audience should govern organizational patterns, syntax, diction, and information" (Puma3). Following this mantra, "composition theorists and teachers recommend that school-sponsored writing tasks specify audience and purpose" (Puma3). While scholars might agree to audience importance in composition, there is little understanding or clarification of reasons audience affects writing so deeply, apart from the classical rhetorical views concerning orators. Obviously speakers/writers must engage those that can and will listen/read their message. Effective engagement of the audience is accomplished in my students' online narratives; therefore, I must ask myself if I can teach writing to an intimate, perhaps I can replicate the intimate audience. Assuming that I could conceive a way to mimic the intimate audience, this approach will only be useful for students while they are students in my class. Once students go to different instructors, the stranger audience interference might begin anew.

Linda Flower attributes unskilled writer performance to the writers' lack of audience awareness (19). Her article on "Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for

Problems in Writing,” brings forth a valuable perspective on acts of writing. Specifically, her focus is what she calls, “writer-based prose” (19). Writer-based prose are written for the benefit of the writer, an “under transformed mode of verbal expression” (19). Flower argues that although the prose is a work for the reader audience, it is, largely, a work for the writer. A student writer’s inattention towards the readership is the crux at ineffective writing as Flower sees it. Students whose writing skills, such as the development of ideas through revisions, are underdeveloped tend to offer work that is merely a raw expression of what they are trying to say. For Flower, effective writings will transform the simple or complex expressions of the writer into certain “describable” ways that cater to the needs of the reader or audience. Simply put, Flower asserts that although writers often feel confident that they have “said what they meant to say,” it is often the case that what they meant to convey to the audience was not successfully illustrated, and therefore, not understood fully.

There are undoubtedly many contributing factors to ineffective writing, writer-based prose being only one culprit. In my experience, students produce prose that is solely “writer-based,” saturated with “privately loaded terms” (20). Yet, it has also been my experience that my students’ prose for other audiences, intimate audiences, are effective reader-based and thoughtfully and artfully articulated. So, there must be more than just a lack of clarity on the writer’s part. There may not be a clear vision of correct audience for the student writer—the intimate audience; it is here that I believe there is confusion which produces stranger prose. In this case, where the audience is identified by student writers as a stranger audience, students will undoubtedly have difficulty creating intimate prose, thereby, enabling the creation of writer-based prose that Flower

describes. Keith A. Roberts's discussion of Flower's writer-based/reader-based compositions helps illustrate the idea that a misunderstanding connected to audience will affect student's ability to produce adequate works. Flower suggests that ineffective writers fail to connect to the reader, ignoring audience needs. While this is true for ineffective writing, it is not true for ineffective writers. I believe that my students do connect and attend to a specific audience: the stranger audience. To my students' knowledge, they have identified the audience and written their essay according to the implied rules of engagement with the stranger party, the classroom teacher. Roberts believes that there are ways to nurture student writing, by way of clear assignments, allowing students to grow comfortably with writing in a social context and also, allowing students to be the audience for each other, so as to build comfort and familiarity. Roberts, although he does not use these words, suggests that instructors attempt to create intimacy or the intimate audience.

If a misunderstanding of audience or lack of awareness of audience is associated with unskilled writing, then one can only assume that mastery of audience identification will lead to more skilled writings. The task is then, as it has been for some time, to seek out places where students' audience identification has succeeded. Walter Ong and Wayne Booth both suggest that a writer creates or "fictionalizes" their audience (Ong, 1). Lisa Ede and Andrea A. Lunsford in their article, "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy," point to some limitations in Ong's ideas of audience fictionalization. Ong's central premise is that in writing acts, the audience is not physically there, as in speech acts and is therefore absent or missing. The task is then left to the writer to create or fictionalize their audience and

also, to leave cues for the audience to follow in order for readers to engage in the text. For Ede and Lunsford, “when one returns to precise, concrete situations, the relationship between speech and writing can become far more complex than even Ong represents” (162). It is true that a physical audience is absent in most writing acts; however, a very real audience exists just the same. Although Ong and Booth move in the right direction with regard to writers “fictionalizing” their audience, I believe that what they create is not the audience itself, but *the connection to audience*. There might be something in a task or assignment that signals a student/writer to create a level of intimacy with the task’s implied audience. If this hypothesis for audience intimacy creation is correct, then the rules for teaching audience must be re-evaluated.

Emphasis on audience: shouted through the corridors, whispered in textbooks

With all the emphasis on audience and “reader-based writing,” one would assume that a substantial amount of effort, energy and course work involves divulging the secret behind audience analysis and its use in the classroom. Allow the following excerpt convey the lack of meaningful discussions about audience in the public school textbooks:

From Glencoe’s *Grammar and Composition Handbook*:

...It is important to evaluate your audience—to know their concerns, their general opinions and beliefs, and their prior knowledge of or biases towards the subject. After all, your purpose is to influence their opinions and perhaps change their actions. As you evaluate your audience, answer the following questions:

*Does the issue apply to my audiences' lives?

*What is the current attitude of my audience?

*What do they already know about the issue?

*What types of evidence will have the strongest
impact on my audience?

From your answers to these questions, you can evaluate the audience for the topic you have chosen. If the audience seems appropriate...

This is not only an excerpt from the textbook on audience, but also the only mention of it in the chosen textbook for all secondary schools in the district where I work. It is not that Glencoe's guide to audience is incorrect, but rather that it falls monstrously short of giving students real tools by which to move forward on the subject of audience. In addition, this textbook reflects little if any traces of audience theories past that of a rhetor at a podium and his physical audience. In Lisa Ede's, "Audience: and Introduction," she acknowledges the attractions to generic, yet "apparently practical, concrete checklist and schemata for 'audience analysis'", but also asserts that the complexity of audience as a concept for writing does not lend itself well to use of such "practical" lists (140-41). These lists come from a general assumption dating back to Aristotle, "the best way to learn about audience is through observation" (142). Thus, writers can assign general characteristics, which they have observed and apply them in their speech/texts for specific audiences based on previous observation. Other

approaches to audience analysis direct the focus to the writer's purpose. Theodore Clevinger's, "Audience Analysis," quoted by Ede, states, "instead of initialing the analysis by asking some standard set of questions about audience characteristics, {purpose-oriented analysis} begins by asking what about the audience is most likely to be important in light of the speaker's purpose" (Ede, 142). This approach places author's purpose as the driving force for audience analysis. Russell Long suggests that both audience analysis strategies, characterization of intended audience and purpose-oriented audience analysis, are "misguided and dangerous" because they make bold assumptions and create "noxious stereo-typing" (Ede, 144). Also mentioned by Ede, and possibly most insightful for my study, is Douglas B. Park in "The Meanings of Audience," and his belief that current audience analysis pedagogy falls short and "pays inadequate attention to the intimate interrelationship of sense of audience, genre and convention in written writing" (Ede, 144). Parks alludes to the same relationship between a writer and an intimate audience that I seek to understand. Although no fail-safe method of audience analysis is agreed upon, it is clear that there is more to be measured than the excerpted textbook suggests.

There are obvious and substantial limitations to the traditional rhetorical analysis of audience, which includes evaluating characteristics from a list of general human characteristics: intelligence, age, socio-economic status, occupation, educational level, etc., hopefully, "suggesting the type of speech appropriate to each type of soul" (Plato174). To begin, the audience for oration usually is visible or readily accessible for evaluation, known for sure; thereby, making the characteristic evaluation a simpler task. For my students work online, their audience is an abstract body of people with a few

exceptions. Yet, students can negotiate that audience and create texts that close their performance gap. On the other hand, the classroom teacher audience is explicitly stated, defined and visible to them for classroom assignments; therefore, student products appear dry, forced, ineffectual, what Flowers would call writer-based prose. Keith Roberts' attests to the ambiguity of the teacher as a student's audience. Should students attempt to size their audience using the textbook evaluation of audience, students will misunderstand the reality of the audience and identify the stranger audience; consequently, the writing will be less effective. Even the most astute writer will have difficulties assessing any audience, actual or implied, using these general human characteristics. And, should they answer all questions concerning the audience make up correctly, does that necessarily ensure a student writer command in his/her task. That is, will a students' conscious concept of audience facilitate more effective writing? Or, is the concept of audience, for writers', primarily a subconscious matter, more a feeling or inexplicable sense of something familiar, something intimate.

Various studies attempt to create a specific concept of audience which students might connect to, thereby, prompting a performance change in student writing John Chesky and Fufrieda H. Hiebert's study "The Effects of Prior Knowledge and Audience on High School Students' Writing" tested the effects on student writing when the audience was the classroom teacher and then again, for their student peers. Their hope was to find substantial differences between the writing produced for the different audiences; however, they found the opposite. The study sought to mask the teacher audience behind that of a faux-peer audience; unfortunately, students saw through the attempt. No substantial changes in student writing were noticeable between the two sets

of writing. Chesky and Hiebert's study validates my theory and proves that a surface change in audience had little to no effect on the students' writing performance. They strengthen both, my hopes and my arguments for audience, in that, Chesky and Hiebert's test provided an artificial, mock-peer audience that the students quickly identified as the stranger audience. That is, their research asks a group of student to complete two writing assignments, one for the classroom teacher, and another for a peer. However, the assignment simply designates a surface change in audience, meaning that the assignments deemed for a student audience has serious undertones of the core teacher audience, the stranger, assignments. This is precisely the reason for the minimal, if any, change noticed between the two assigned writings. The student subjects can and did recognize the authoritarian audience masked under a student/peer audience. A more accurate view of the effects of audience on student writing will present itself when the assignment designated to the audience is one of real purpose written for an intimately felt audience.

Research says: Student/Audience relationship

In "Relationships between Writer-Audience Proximity, Register, and Quality in the Essays of First-Year College Students," Vincent D. Puma revisits past attempts to clarify the mysterious relationship between students, their writing tasks and audience, while adding his own research to the legacy. To sum past related research findings, Puma states that "several studies have shown that audience awareness appears to exert a significant effect on writers as they write or learn to write" (Puma 4). Though the culprit is identified, "other studies designed to examine and discover the specific textual effects that audience exerts on syntax, semantics, and writing quality have not agreed quite consistently" (Puma 4). Scholars can agree that audience plays a significant role in

products of writing both positively and negatively, but cannot pin point the source of interference with audience identification. Puma's study focuses on proximity as a means of analyzing the effects of audience in student works. Puma directs his research for audience effect down another, less traveled path. Like Keith Roberts, Puma understands that writing is a social activity and thus constructs his study to incorporate various factors that have been overlooked in previous studies. Communication theory, which views speaking and writing "as poles on a continuum of language", and ideas connected to "psychological speaking stance" are ideas that set Puma's research apart from his predecessors, and I believe, closer to the root of audience related problems (Puma 8).

If speaking and writing are on the same language continuum, with speech as writings predecessor, then there is merit to analyzing audience and how children gauge audience in social speech settings. For Puma, the "psychological speaking stance" is the equivalent to summing the receptor up. That is, when my son is introduced to a new person, he reacts in a certain way. He stands close to my legs, looks down and is not quite ready to give a smile until certain ease is gained with the stranger. After he has accommodated his speaking stance and gauged the new friend as benevolent, he will likely tell every family secret. This psychological summation occurs in all speech interactions, written communication included; therefore, Puma suggests that there is something that a writer identifies with, a psychological writing stance, or as I have said, write-fright, that allows them to connect to the audience in ways that a skilled writer does.

For effectual writing, I believe that the writer must feel a connection to the audience, an "intimate" sense of what is expected and how to appropriate language to

transfer a message, an intimate psychological writing stance which bridges a student's performance gap (Toulmin 101). This appropriation of language is a subconscious act, a reflex of writing in a comfort zone for an intimate audience, writing devoid of "write-fright."

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

To be clear, my estimation of audience awareness hinges on the ability of a student writer to connect to an intimate or stranger audience. My students identify me as the stranger audience even though when I would like to be identified as an intimate audience. This is not a misunderstanding in audience on the students' part. I suspect that my students have a very clear perception of me as their audience, a stranger audience. The products of ineffectual writing are not products of student negligence, failure to identify with audience or writer-based prose, but rather, prose carefully directed to an actual audience. Writing is an intimate task, one that makes a person feel vulnerable. These feelings are multiplied exponentially when the writing task will receive judgment, via grades, from a teacher. The default reaction for student writers is to play it safe and stick to the basic rules of engagement, to write for a stranger audience. If my students are correctly identifying the intended or implied audience, then it might be that I have to rethink my pedagogical practices. The task is then to look closely at components of online social communities such as MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, etc... and attempt to gauge what elements trigger the intimate designation of audience. The benefits of such analysis might help educators to emulate some of those qualities that evoke student intimacy. If educators can project a clear audience, an intimate audience, then student-

writing products might improve, closing the performance gap that so many teachers lament. It is important to note that intimate-prose can be used past the realm of narrative writing. For instance, if we look for them, there are characteristics of intimate-prose in technical writing. There does not need to be concrete familiarity with an audience for intimate prose to occur. Instead there is an established reciprocal set of expectations, beliefs, and mutual interest and concern. This point is particularly important for students who need to compose writing for other disciplines in academia. That said, understanding intimate-prose and the creation of pedagogies and assignments that foster such writing will help students transfer writing skills cross-curricularly.

This study has, indeed, prompted a change in my audience pedagogy. Maybe we should not teach abstract or generic bodies ideas of audience. Instead we should attempt to create/emulate an intimate audience in our writing assignments. With the designation of intimacy comes a set of obligations that the student-writer willingly fulfills. For audience analysis, it seems clear to me that one useful exercise is to have students analyze their own writing. Some scholars, like Russell Long, discount the value of teaching “audience analysis” (Ede 148). However, when I discussed Marcos’s in-class and online narratives with him, he was struck with the differences. The positive attributes associated with intimate-prose were apparent to Marcos through his own writing. Marcos was then able to conceptualize how one writing “spoke” to a different audience and how the change in audience effected his writing performance. Long is correct in his estimation of abstract audience analysis, but when such analysis is focused on the students and the students’ work for different audiences, stranger and intimate, they

may begin to think about why they made certain compositional choices and how those choices affect the paper.

Other professionals are increasing focus on the importance of understanding the aspects of online communities, specifically MySpace, that create a “difference” with student writing (Phillips). According to Richard Sterling, former director of the National Writing Project and a faculty member at Berkeley University, web communities like MySpace “have the potential for improving a student’s ability to write” (Phillips). While Sterling acknowledges the potential for student writing improvement, others are questioning the source of the sparked potential. Assistant Director of the University of Miami’s Writing Center, KC Culver, cites audience as the key to MySpace’s influence. Like me, Culver believes that students need a “real audience” and MySpace does exactly that, “rather than the outdated ‘student-to-teacher’ writing” (Phillips). Culver also points to MySpace’s set-up, where student’s ideas are commented on by other users, giving immediate feedback. If no one comments on your work, then you must revise or scrap it all together to appease, or perhaps attract, an audience. Culver states that “students put more effort into their critical thinking and writing because they want to be the post that gets commented on”; students want to continue the dialogue with the audience, maintain the channels of communication associated with intimates (Phillips). However, in class, students dread teacher comments on their writing. Moreover, “in composition, we like to talk about reading and writing as an ongoing dialogue,” and with MySpace that “ongoing dialogue” is a reality (Phillips). Comments in the classroom are not dialogic, but rather a one-way street. Another essential area of improvement is unveiled in the interactions online: how can I create comments that will foster growth in the student writing? Online

writing interactions allow students to digest comments, identify strategic characteristics and audience needs and then revise accordingly. The writing process online is then an ideal picture of a writing process, one that continues to grow through feedback and revision. All these qualities, audience awareness, digestion of feedback, open dialogue, and constant revisions, should prompt educators to consider the benefits of online writing environments and attempt to transfer some of the positive traits back to the classroom.

Technology has changed our perception of space and time, creating the possibility of intimacy between expansive boundaries entering imaginary space and with those changes comes an evolution of our sense of intimacy with those around us. Teachers cannot erase the implied distance created by the traditional classroom and felt in the student; however, we may attempt to create a community of “intimacy” within our classroom that reflects the positive aspects of the web community students hold dear (Toulmin 100). Our goal should be to identify classroom strategies that would change the student identification of teacher-stranger audience to teacher-intimate audience, wherein students feel the classroom as a community where their voice and existing literacies are validated and applauded, which would help foster the creation of a bridge in their performance gap.

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APPENDIX A

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MYSFACE CHARACTER ASSIGNMENT

MYSFACE profiles –novel characterization project

As with any good piece of fiction, well-developed characters are essential. We learn about characters through what they say, how they react to conflict, and how others talk about and to them. We are also able to imagine beyond a text and reasonably guess at other aspects of characters' lives, based on the evidence given by an author or playwright. This is part of the task you each have when creating MySpace profiles for your chosen character(s).

When this assignment is completed, you will have a live, publicly accessible MySpace website that shows what your character is like. Some of the details will be found in the text; others will be created by you. **However, all elements need to be plausible based on what we know of each character from the text.** You will also submit the separate "planning sheet" which itemizes the required elements for your MySpace page. This has additional information which will not necessarily find its way onto your final page, although it certainly could.

Finally, once all pages are up and running, your character must comment on at least two other characters' pages. These comments should reflect knowledge of the conflicts in the play, but may be funny in nature if you so choose (keep these classroom appropriate).

Keep in mind that you are not to put any personal information on this project. Even the school name is optional. I am the only one who will know which students are connected with which characters online. If parents are concerned with the nature of this assignment, please have them contact me immediately.

PARENTAL NOTIFICATION

This is to verify that the MySpace assignment is indeed legit and is a requirement for the English classes at the 11th level. Students will need to spend time at home on the computer accessing MySpace; they will have plenty of time at school to work on the drafts and logistics during the day. Students will also be grouped together, so your son/daughter does not necessarily even have to be the one on the website. This is **not** a permission slip, but rather a chance for you to understand the reasoning behind this activity. Please sign below that you have read this handout; if you have further concerns, you may email me: nxm_zam@yahoo.com

I have read the requirements and rationale for the novel characterization MySpace assignment.

Signature of parent: _____

Date: _____

Characterization Planning Sheet

Student name: _____

Character name:

Briefly describe character's role in the novel or play (particularly involvement in conflicts):

List four adjectives to describe this character: _____,

_____,

_____, _____

List two quotes either by or about this character that are particularly pertinent:

•

•

Next – go to MySpace (www.myspace.com) and sign up!

Once you've gone to the website and registered, list the name and URL that Ms. Saucedo can access. Then find our class page and add your character page!:

Fill in the following sections on this paper, as well as on the website.

Headline:

About me:

I'd like to meet:

Interests:

Music:

Film:

Television:

Books:

Heroes:

List the profile song you choose and write one-to-two sentences for why you think this fits your character well:

Finishing touches:

- Write at least one blog entry “in character.”
- Add at least one photo for your main profile picture. **Do not use copyrighted material.**
- Comment on two other characters’ profiles.

Note: Fancy backgrounds and other graphics are optional.

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

MORE STUDENT SAMPLE ESSAYS

Leo Bandi

About ME: I would describe myself as a person that is caring, loving, and especially very supportive. There is never a day where I cant make a person smile. That's my special talent I can always make someone smile. I never talk behind someone's back because I never want to be the bad guy in the end. I keep to myself and yet I talk a lot. My special skills is reading and playing music. I play the trombone, baritone, guitar and drums. My passion is music. To me music is like a bridge from the earth to the heavens because when you are in a sense of trouble with music you have peace. When it comes to school I'm really busy, but yet most of the time I get really lazy. My favorite subject is English Ms. Saucedo is awesome! Math is my least favorite because it haunts me. I pass most of my classes which is good. Well, that's basically it for my narrative.

-In-class essay

About ME: "I think I should have no other mortal wants, if I could always have plenty of music. It seems to infuse strength into my limbs and ideas into my brain. Life seems to go on without effort, when I am filled with music." I havnt read much of Elliot... but I can definitely relate his feelings on music. It would be wrong to say that I love music cause the feeling is much more powerful than love... whats more powerful, more filling... well, one answer is GOD. I know what your thinking... JESUS FREAK (that's a JEHOVAH freak... thank YOU). But seriously, there is something pure and celestial about music and the connection it makes in humans. You might notice that I love JEHOVAH for all that he has blessed my family with. Through and in HIM I will achieve my dreams..... yeahhhh, I was going there. I believe that if everyone made their career out of something or from something they love... this big bad world would be a whole lot better!. My dreams are modest and include.... Bum bum bum bummmmmmmmm..... music... maybe a band director. I am a member of the fighting RAIDER BAND. I'm awed by the power of us all... coming together in harmony... its pretty uplifting. I might be interested in writing someday... I really enjoy a good book... not sure yet if I can come up with material that millions would like to read... that's awe inspiring as well... to be able to do that... ok... now your thinking...

JESUS FREAK and gets excited or awed to easily! I guess Im more sensitive to things than most boys my age. I am caring and considerate. I don't like people who are not what they seem or people who purposely project a fake them... its always very disappointing to learn that someone you cared for.... Actually bites the big one! GOD BLESS!

-Online essay

Julia Gonzalez

About ME: To start off, my name is Julia, but I rather be called Jules (like everyone calls me). My birthday is August the 15th and I'm 16 years old. I'm a really outgoing girl, I'm rarely shy. I love to go out, have fun and be with friends. I don't like to stay at home. My favorite color is aqua. I think its kinda awesome. My favorite sports are volleyball and football. When I play football, I think I kind of release some anger or whatever, though I don't tackle all bad or anything cause Im a girl. I love music. Most of the time when I am at home I listen to the radio. I cant live without music. At home I am the youngest, I have an older brother and live with my mom and dad. So since I am the youngest one I'm the spoiled one. All things considered, I hope you got an idea of who I am and what I like to do.

-In-class essay

About ME: I'm my mamas baby and my dadys princess... my brother just the dude that eats all our food! Jk... bro, I have much luv for ya! I'm soooooo excited.... And I just cant hide it...I'm about to lose control and I KNOW I LIKE IT☺ k, Im Julia G and I got my name from my beloved great grandma... she was supposedly a rich fancy lady from Spain... but I never met her... her stubbornness was her trademark... and I think that when they gave me her name, they also gave me that too... thanks a lot parents. Im a great friend because I value the greatness of a good group of friends. God gave me one family... the one I was born to... and then I got to choose another kind of family, my friends. And that is something I feel honored about.... Ugh, A TEAR 0:-) I can always tell my true friend from my loser friends.... True friends remember my birthday even though its not during our school year... shitty ones... let august pass them by...well... you get the point. I'm petite... and love to play tackle football!... no Im not promiscuous... don't wanna touch the boys... I just like the adrenaline rush I think.... Maybe I like to think I can do what the boys can do... not sure... im not Heisman material or anything... but it feels nice to knock a boy on his ass sometimes.... Quite literally!

-Online essay

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Stephanie Marie Saucedo graduated in 2004, from the University of Texas Pan American with a Bachelor of Arts, her major concentration in English and minor concentration in philosophy. Stephanie has since worked as an English Language Arts teacher, from 2004 to present.

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