

**Critical Participation in Literacy Research through New and Emerging
Technologies: A Study of Web Seminars and Global Engagement**

Peggy Albers, PhD
Professor of Language and Literacy Education
College of Education
Georgia State University
malbers2@gsu.edu

Christi Pace
Ph.D. Student
College of Education
Georgia State University
cpace4@student.gsu.edu

David W. Brown, Jr.
Ph.D. Student
College of Education
Georgia State University
dbrown97@student.gsu.edu

Abstract

The explosion of social media and online delivery platforms offers a host of possibilities for sharing literacy research and practices worldwide, gateways to digital technologies have increased teaching and learning opportunities across educational spaces, including web seminars. Global Conversations in Literacy Research (GCLR) is a critical literacy project, a series of web seminars that engage global audiences in discussions about literacy research and practice. We are now in our second year of a longitudinal study of this project. Our overarching question is To what extent can or does GCLR as an emerging critical literacy project influence and impact the literacy community? In conjunction, we studied the following: a) What do participants and speakers identify as the affordances and constraints of GCLR as an online platform for literacy scholarship?, b) What literacy issues emerge in and across GCLR web seminars, and how are they taken up (or not)? and c) How do the website analytics and social media offer insight into how web-based literacy projects like GCLR emerge and extend its reach? Qualitative methods of data collection include chat transcripts, interviews, and website analytics, and data were analyzed using constant comparison (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Findings show specific types of interaction occur within web seminars, common issues around literacy emerge across global and geographic boundaries, and that growing interest depends on web presence, highly recognized speakers, and free and open access.

Keywords: new literacies, literacy, technology-mediated settings, professional development, interactions, new technologies

The explosion of social media and online delivery platforms offers a host of possibilities for sharing literacy research and practices worldwide. These gateways to digital technologies have increased teaching and learning opportunities across educational spaces, including web seminars. Global Conversations in Literacy Research (GCLR) (www.globalconversationsinliteracy.wordpress.com) is a critical literacy project, a series of web seminars that engage global audiences in discussions about literacy research and practice. We are now in our second year of a longitudinal study of this project. Our overarching question is To what extent can or does GCLR as an emerging critical literacy project influence and impact the literacy community? In conjunction, we studied the following: a) What do participants and speakers identify as the affordances and constraints of GCLR as an online platform for literacy scholarship?; b) What literacy issues emerge in and across GCLR web seminars, and how are they taken up (or not)?; and c) What information and insights about online global participation can be gleaned from GCLR through its website analytics and social media?

Grounded in critical literacy, GCLR acknowledges that access to diverse, multiple, and global perspectives are vital resources for changing consciousness around literacy research and practice through exchange of international ideas on literacy issues, and that new and emergent technologies contribute to these changes. Information about GCLR seminars and speakers is publicized through listservs, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Linked In), and its GCLR website. Delivered through Blackboard Collaborate, GCLR hosts seven web seminars annually, with the capability for up to one thousand people to participate in a single web seminar. As an on-going critical literacy project, GCLR is committed to providing access to literacy scholarship and democratic participation in this scholarship.

Theoretical Framework and Relevant Literature

Unequivocally, 21st century technologies--social media, mobile technologies, new pedagogical formats, and others--have transformed and significantly influenced how we learn and how we access learning. Appadurai (1996) suggests we live in a world of “cultural flows” of products (e.g., technologies, people, ideas, practices, knowledge, beliefs) (p. 33), which cut across various boundaries such as geography, culture, language, time zones, and spaces. As members in this highly connected and diverse world, we are establishing new skills, values, and practices in response to changes in life, especially in light of new and emerging technologies. According to Internet World Stats (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>) as of June 30, 2012, of the approximately 7 billion people living in the world, 2,405,518,376 use the Internet. Since 2000, usage across all continents has increased 566%. Such accelerated growth indicates an epistemic change in the belief that knowledge is not static, but rather fluid and multi-dimensional, and communication immediate (Bouchard, 2011). As such, new and emergent technologies are shaping and being shaped by how people interact and engage with others virtually. They feature new models and structures to support knowledge acquisition, and position educators and educational institutions as no longer holding principality over learning (Kop & Fournier, 2011). People across the globe are seeking out “on demand” knowledge about their jobs/careers (van Dam, 2012); literacy researchers and educators are no different.

A large part of the literature locates online delivery and design almost exclusively within the context of classroom disciplinary learning (see Garcia & Hopper, 2011; Karchmer, Mallette, Kara-Soteriou, & Leu, 2005; Lukinbeal & Allen, 2007; Morrison, 2010), commercial gain (Berg, 2008), and business training models (van Dam, 2012). In literacy, we found no extant studies,

just information on organizations launching webinars (IRA, 2010). Research about how participation in web seminars works, evolves, and influences thinking is timely and necessary (Albers, Pace, & Brown, 2012), and can offer new possibilities for literacy research and practices by the very nature that they transcend boundaries (e.g., time, space, geography, populations, languages) that otherwise might represent barriers (e.g., cost, travel, time). Negotiating these cultural flows invites creative and imaginative participation, and positions the world to envision how we, as global members, might participate with each other through such technologies (Silverstone, 2007).

This study is theoretically situated in Janks's (2010) four orientations to critical literacy: domination, access, diversity, and design. These orientations take seriously the relation between power and language in literacy education. *Dominance* understands language in all of its symbolic forms as a means of "maintaining and reproducing relations of domination" (p. 21). Analyzing all types of texts (e.g., visual, written, spoken, and so on) through critical discourse analysis makes visible issues and interests related to power. Further, dominance assumes that power is negative and productive of inequitable social relations. *Access* is understood as knowing how language operates to maintain power. The catch is that while it is critical that readers and viewers have access to dominant forms of language, by participating in these forms, language sustains and extends its power. *Diversity* is situated not only in social and cultural interactions, but the modes through which literacy is experienced and learned are "a central resource for changing consciousness" (p. 22). We participate in discourses, as Janks argues, which are "linked to wide range of social identities and embedded in diverse social institutions" (p. 23). As people engage in new discourses they acquire new dispositions and alternative ways to understand their ways of being in this world. Diversity as signified through difference is also situated in power; who gets

to name what difference is or how the word “difference” is marginalized against that which is “normal.” Language, culture, expressions (e.g., visual, spoken, written, gestured, etc.) are all part of diversity, which, according to Janks, help us “re-remediate and re-present” our understandings of the world (p. 23). *Design* recognizes that representation occurs across semiotic systems, situates creativity as essential, and positions meaning making as infinite. People draw and select from the many resources to construct, interpret, and generate meanings. Design assumes conscious selection and integration of the semiotic resources in play, and makes visible to what extent power and dominance emerge or are challenged (Author, 2011).

Janks’s (2010) perspective is apt for this study. Literacy has been a long-standing and contested social issue, and those with power determine the scholarship that emerges to inform curricula and teaching. National legislation such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top positions language learning and experience as decontextualized and skills-based, with educators’ promotion and pay tied to student test scores. Such legislation has given rise to highly scripted programs that have had negative impact in public schools. The newly adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) embed power in written language, particular genres (e.g., persuasive texts), and definitions of “text complexity” to fit characteristics that drive learning back into early 20th century thinking (Shannon, in press). Assessment of CCSS will most likely fall victim to similar testing as mandated by previous legislation (Pearson, 2012).

Access to literacy research and practice that challenges this power is warranted and needed, research that is grounded in critical literacy and social justice. Using networked technologies, web seminars offer innovative global participation in literacy research and learning, and have the potential to impact large populations. Projects designed with interactivity and immediacy of access to language and literacy, argue Janks & Vasquez (2011), must be

explored. GCLR is at the crossroads of the “information highway,” and bridges literacy scholarship with networked technologies. Sustained investigation of projects that use such technologies to disseminate literacy theory, pedagogy, and practice is timely and necessary.

Methodology

This longitudinal qualitative study is grounded within an interpretivist design (Schwandt, 2000). Aligned with critical literacy, interpretivism holds that meaning is constructed through social interaction and is changeable as people flow in and out of social, cultural, political, and ideological environments and contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). Further, interpretivism serves as an appropriate methodology as it allows for multiple layers of critical analysis of the participation in and across web seminars, which is reflective of reality in emerging and networked technologies.

Data collection for this study occurred from September 2011- November 2012 across 11 web seminars and is ongoing. Researchers collected data from the following: a) semi-structured interviews with 12 of the 13 speakers and 26 participants; b) chat transcripts; c) transcribed web seminar audio/video recordings; d) website analytics; and e) email correspondence. In general, we followed this data collection procedure. We introduced this study at the beginning and conclusion of each web seminar, presented the research questions, and invited participants to volunteer for a recorded 15-20 minute structured, online interview. Those interested in being interviewed typed their email into the chat area, and interviews were conducted within two weeks and recorded. Speakers were interviewed immediately following their web seminar and recorded through Blackboard Elluminate. We collected web statistics/analytics at least twice a day for the duration of the study and entered these data on a spreadsheet. We received and responded to email queries and stored these documents in a secured folder.

Semi-structured interviews (deMarrais, 2004) enabled us to understand the affordances and constraints of GCLR as an online platform; how (or if) GCLR web seminars have the potential (or do) contribute to literacy discussions on a global level; how participants and speakers responded to issues that emerged from the content of the web seminars; and to what extent GCLR's social networking contributed to their participation. The timeliness of these interviews allowed researchers to capture fresh responses about the speakers' experiences, participant and speaker interactions, and affordances and constraints of the web seminar. *Chat transcripts* enabled us to capture literacy questions and issues raised across seminars, and how they were taken up (or not) within seminars. *Transcribed audio/video recordings* located within the periphery of transcribed chats afforded us a means to understand the exact moment in the speakers' talks that generated participants' questions and issues that emerged across a seminar. We aligned the chat transcripts (both public and private messages) with the transcribed recorded seminars. *Website analytics/electronic correspondence* (GCLR website, Wordpress, Facebook, Twitter, listservs, emails) allowed us to study global interests in literacy as they pertained to speaker and topic, the relationship between the website and participation in web seminars, publicity blasts (emails, posts), web seminar attendance, and geographic access. We studied the number of GCLR website hits and views; which GCLR website pages were accessed and how often; and the time, location, and date of access. ClustrMap (Figure 1) allowed us to capture concentrations of interest, location, and time of access. Bi-monthly, we captured bar graphs of website data. Listserv/email correspondence helped us track global interest and comments about GCLR.



Figure 1. ClustrMap captures concentrations of interest, location, and time of access.

Data were analyzed using the constant-comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) with data sets coded, themes generated, and understandings identified. Researchers engaged in preliminary analysis of data immediately following each live seminar. During the seminar, we recorded analytical notes regarding issues raised, taken up (or not), from where participants accessed the seminar, and studied the comments about GCLR and/or the seminar that participants wrote in the chat area after a speaker's presentation. We conducted cross-seminar data analysis, which began after the second web seminar and up through the 11th seminar.

In general, we used a recursive approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to compare and contrast themes generated from the most current seminar to the previously analyzed ones. Researchers independently read and reread data sets, and discussed and negotiated findings at our bi-monthly meetings. When we confirmed findings, we then recorded these. Specifically, for written and spoken data (chat, interviews, email correspondence) researchers took a discursive approach. Gee (1996) defines discourse as “socially accepted ways of using language, other

symbolic expressions and artifacts of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify yourself as a member of a socially meaningful group” (p. 144). Discourses are always intertextual and linked across time, place and speakers. Within a discursive approach, we studied each data set (including symbols and emoticons) to understand inter-seminar connections regarding which issues and questions were raised; types, length, and content of interactions; and ideas expressed by speakers and participants through chat and/or interviews. We also studied email correspondence for intertextual links especially noting common ideas expressed across queries or comments. We studied website analytics (e.g., number of hits, access points) for access trends within and across web seminars, especially noting significant shifts in numbers in relation to promotional publicity blasts. Across these data sets, when we could confirm findings, we recorded them (e.g., content: difficulty following chat while listening to the speaker; applying the speaker’s information to practice; technology: difficulties or not).

Findings

Four major findings emerged from our analysis. First, web seminars were anchored, situated texts in which speaking, writing, and thinking are often navigated in nonlinear ways, and made visible participants’ experiences and knowledge about communication in online spaces like Blackboard Collaborate. Second, web seminars have clearly identifiable affordances and constraints in terms of presentation and participation. Third, literacy issues and questions are taken up as larger discourses that cut across seminar topic and speaker. And fourth, networked technologies are important factors in a web seminar’s evolution and growth.

Web Seminars Generated Anchored, Situated Texts

Web seminars anchored a speaker’s topic and content, and generated situated texts, represented as chat and emoticons, in which participants, and the speaker when possible, reacted

and responded verbally and visually to each other's comments and thoughts. In terms of design, web seminars allowed for real time access to participants' written comments--on the spot assemblages of conversations. At times participants navigated their conversations non-linearly even though chat is captured linearly. At other times, participants engaged in longer discussions not visually interrupted by what we call "rogue" comments, or stray comments that because of their position in the linear display of chat did not fit with the context of previous or subsequent comments. Such navigation offered insight into both the content of these comments as well as their communication patterns in Blackboard Collaborate's online space. The nature of live web seminars captured chronologically and linearly "in the moment thoughts and reactions" through chat; however, participants often navigated non-linearly to respond to others' comments. In the short excerpt below, three comments were made and are linear as chat allows, and P3 navigated through P2's rogue comment to respond, in part, to P1.

1:56:30 – **P1** Wish all parents were this active in reading!!

1:56:58 – **P2** It's lonely in the hashtag! #GCLR Twitter, anyone?

1:57:12 – **P3** This is interesting< and goes along with some research suggesting that students become less motivated to read as they progress through school.

As situated texts, the chat allowed participants' to share their thoughts and reactions which were taken up (or not), new conversations were initiated, and thoughts clarified and/or confirmed. As situated texts, participants were able to respond immediately to a speaker's point, visual, audio, or video; there was no wait time between what the speaker said or presented and her/his response. Chat enabled participants to engage in longer situated discussions.

The excerpt below was generated around the speaker's mention of Frank Smith's holistic and critical work in opposition to literacy work mandated by politicians (Figure 2).

- | | | |
|----|---------------------|--|
| 1 | 1:46:29 – P1 | I LOVE Frank Smith's work. |
| 2 | 1:47:03 – P2 | me too! We use his text in our foundation course. |
| 3 | 1:47:39 – P1 | Yes, [to P2], Frank Smith makes sense |
| 4 | 1:48:03 – P2 | Yes, he's a slow read to understand and a reread to internalize! |
| 5 | 1:48:07 – P3 | Great book: Understanding Reading by Frank Smith |
| 6 | 1:48:30 – P4 | LOVE THAT BOOK! Smith is brilliant |
| 7 | 1:48:42 – P5 | [P6] made me practically memorize that book in the 70's!! Right |
| 8 | | Mom? |
| 9 | 1:48:42 – P1 | <u>We</u> have indeed backed the wrong horse, [to Speaker]. |
| 10 | 1:48:58 – P6 | yes, indeed! |
| 11 | 1:49:02 – P1 | I want [P6] to be my momma, too. |
| 12 | 1:49:15 – P5 | <u>It</u> was his first book before Understanding Reading- |
| 13 | | Psycholinguistics and Reading? |
| 14 | 1:49:26 – P5 | Reading <u>wWithout</u> Nonsense? |
| 15 | 1:49:35 – P6 | Yes! |

Figure 2. Participants engaged “in the moment” and “assembled on the spot” conversations.

The conversation in Figure 2 was representative of the “in the moment” and “assembled on the spot” (Gee, 2005) conversations which positioned these participants as members of a meaningful group who, through a networked seminar, shared common experiences reading Smith's work. P1 initiates a conversation around the speaker's mention of Frank Smith, and five others take up this conversation. P1 and P4 state generally that they “LOVE” the work of this scholar. P2 identifies Smith's work as “foundational” to literacy, a statement that to P1 “makes sense.” P3 narrows the discussion to a particular book title, a title that P5 “practically had to memorize.” The “Right Mom” (Lines 7-8) by P5 situates this conversation within the personal; she refers to P6 as her “Mom”—a familial term she used to describe her close relationship with P6, her former professor. P1 wishes this same relationship by expressing that she wants P6 “to be my momma too” (Line 11). P5 asks a question and adds information about Smith's book, “It was

his first book...?”), corrects this information and writes the second title; P6 confirms P5’s second title. As a member in this 3 minute chat, P1 initiated three separate conversations and was joined by five other participants: Frank Smith, backing the wrong horse, and being P6’s academic child. Two of these conversations were taken up (one more than the other) and one is not (academic child).

Chat, as part of the design of web seminars, generated on the spot and situated conversations, anchored by a key text (that of the speaker’s). This design feature offered access to the thoughts of global participants 1000s of miles apart, and thus enabled them to share insights, questions, and comments about literacy topics. Although nearly linear, these participants understood how to navigate within these situated texts as nonlinear threads (Lines 9-10). They could converse even when rogue comments interrupted the physical linearity of chat.

Content and Technology were Identified as Clear Affordances and Constraints

Based upon our analysis of our interviews and chat, technology and content emerged as two main categories under which speakers and participants each identified affordances and constraints. Table 1 contains representative comments from speakers and participants.

	Affordances		Constraints	
	Content	Technology	Content	Technology
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks again, all, this was again terrific. I am hooked! • Excellent content and speakers both last year and this year. • "I love Global Conversations. They are TRULY cutting edge and inspiring." • These seminars keep pushing the boundaries of my literacy and literacy education understandings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interaction with international scholars and scholarship • "It was amazing. I will come back for the rest of the lectures." • "You guys saved us a several thousand dollar plane ticket!" • "It was nice to see the presenter this time!" • Anonymity through usernames • Willing to take risks: speak online through chat but not in public forums like conferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks for the typed discussion, as I had no sound. • Amazingly informative, give [the speaker] more time to talk. • It would be nice to have speakers from other places [than US, Canada, England, and Australia]; these seminars would be global 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I finally figured out that I needed to update Java. If you put in the email announcement that it works best with the latest Java, it would probably help people with connection problems." • I would have loved to be able to download this. • Time zone issues • Software issues
Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "One hell of a large seminar. These are the kind of conversations we need to be having." • "These are great forums for international discussions" • "We have added these seminars to our doctoral courses." • "I'd like to present at 3:00 so that students I know in South America can attend." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dual presenting: "afforded the one not talking to interact with the chat area." • "Incredible to bring all these people together from all over the world on a Sunday night, Labor Day Weekend. It just speaks to the value of this work. Just wonderful!" • "I like that I am able to present from the comfort of home. I can just go to bed now!" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "One hour is just enough time; more than that is too much time listening." • Cannot hyperlink to videos or webs in PowerPoint and cannot "fancy up the presentation." • PowerPoint is static in Elluminate and does not allow for effects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I couldn't see the audience. I couldn't gauge what they were thinking or if I needed to repeat something." • Stress of not being able to connect on the night of the seminar • "I wish I could have read the chat comments. I was so focused on my presentation that I couldn't respond."

Table 1. Representative comments from speakers and participants.

In general, participants spoke to a range of affordances that web seminars offer. GCLR's regularly scheduled web seminars allowed participants to return time and time again with one participant attending all 11. For her, "These seminars allow me to connect with others and hear speakers that I would not hear otherwise." When we met her at a conference, she became emotional and related that GCLR's community enables her to feel great affinity and a space where she has voice to share her thoughts and responses to literacy topics. Across the 11

seminars, GCLR has “regulars,” or participants who attend frequently. A number of participants referenced the free and open-access aspect as most salient to their participation. One participant remarked about his attendance at Allan Luke’s seminar: “You guys have saved us a several thousand dollar plane ticket!” Other participants were “hooked,” and saw these seminars as a “great way to spend Sunday evenings.” For the speakers, web seminars allowed them to present their most current work, and offered space for “kinds of conversations we should be having.” Many of the speakers recognized the affordance of GCLR as an online critical project to effect change, and offered names of future speakers, promoted it to their own websites, colleges, and classes, and provided insight into marketing and publicity. At their own web seminar, speakers enjoyed seeing familiar “faces,” (“So great to know there are friendly faces out there...even though I can't see you :)”), made themselves available through video to greet the audience, and appreciated participants’ comments that recognized their scholarship (e.g., “The interplay of the four lines of discourse was very thought-provoking.”). For seminars that had two speakers, GCLR as an online platform afforded them ways to alternate between speaking and chatting, which was a constraint for single speakers. As a free and open-access project, speakers noticed audience size, and one asked whether his 300+ audience “was a good number?” Participants and speakers voiced constraints in terms of content. Participants wished that this forum would “give the speaker more time to talk,” while speakers saw their 50 minutes “just enough time.” All speakers noted that presenting through PowerPoint limited their potential of doing a “fancy” presentation with transitions or seamless sound/video bytes. Most of them agreed that not seeing their audience was challenging, “[It] feels awkward in some ways.” In an email comment about content, one participant wrote that these conversations were “hardly global,” as we had speakers

from only the U.S., Canada, England, and Australia, and wished for “more diversity in speakers.”

In general, technology was both a strong affordance as well as constraint. Participants were highly enthusiastic about interacting with global others, including the speakers, and overall saw technology as affording them “wonderful opportunities to spend an evening with an international speaker.” They also enjoyed seeing colleagues from other universities, and catching up with each other before the seminar began with such comments as “How’s your dissertation coming along?” Others joined in on the “hellos” and “shout outs,” often proudly identifying themselves, their universities, or where they were accessing the seminar.

P1: Hello all. This is [P1] from University at Buffalo, New York.

P2: Hello from Brisbane, Australia but have no sound.

P3: Hello! [P4], University of Pennsylvania, Reading/Writing/Literacy

These “shout outs” occurred most often before a seminar began, but continued throughout the seminar as either a public or private message, depending on the extent of knowledge participants had about sending private chats in Blackboard. While some participants enjoyed chatting, some participants found the chat “disrupting”, sometimes even “frustrating.” For instance, since chat moves in a rapid, continuous, and linear pattern, by the time one participant typed a response/comment, other unrelated comments had likely made their way into the discussion. Several speakers noted that they had to try not to look at the chat so that they would not lose their train of thought. We also found that participants were willing to take risks in this virtual environment that they might not otherwise take in a face-to-face seminar. Many participants took

on pseudonyms and established anonymity in their participation, while others felt more at ease chatting than they would “in large public spaces like conferences.”

Literacy Issues Cut Across Topic and Speaker and Were Taken up as Larger Discourses.

Our third finding involved identifying literacy issues, concerns, and thoughts that emerged within and across web seminars. Regardless of topic, there was a set of common Discourses (e.g., assessment, standardized testing and curricula, language and culture, struggling readers and writers, access [language, technology]) that were raised as responses or as questions in the chat. These Discourses appeared to be of importance to participants, and when a speaker introduced a concept/term, participants often “stepped away from the speaker’s talk” to engage in a conversation. We explain these conversations as *situated discursive asides*, or conversations that emerged in the chat, situated within a point the speaker made, and that addressed the larger issues that underpinned these points. Situated discursive asides were initiated by a single participant who explicitly or implicitly wrote a comment in the chat, and by nature of the comment’s visibility, invited others to respond. If the invitation was taken up, interested participants stepped aside from the current live presentation, and carried on “assembled on the spot” conversations. The excerpt below represents one of these conversations in which seven participants discussed Standard English, initiated by the speaker’s mention of family speech patterns (Figure 3):

1 2:06:07 P1 Well.... we all modify our speech depending on the audience.... in speaking,
2 and also in writing.
3 2:07:10 P2 I'm wondering if we are putting too much emphasis on Standard English- so
4 much that african american students are totally separately home life from
5 school life? Sounds like what . . . did.
6 2:07:33 P3 Students need to know how and when to modify their speech and writing.
7 There is a discourse that students need to be able to reach.
8 2:07:43 P4 Whose language counts? school or home?
9 2:07:54 P5 but code switching is not just modifying our speech depending on the
10 audience. Code switching is switching between two languages and in this
11 case the standard English and African American English
12 2:08:03 P1 I don't think so.... I think we need to have high expectations (not that you
13 don't, [P2]!) for their speech and writing - because the truth is, they will
14 need to use traditional speech to succeed in middle-class society.
15 2:08:05 P3 School language eventually reaches into the work place.
16 2:09:48 P6 [P3] and [P2], I am torn about that as well. We need to allow students to use
17 their own language but point out when it is appropriate.
18 2:10:45 P2 I think that too much emphasis discourages social learning. What can we do
19 about this?
20 2:11:32 P7 while you are pointing out when language is "appropriate" you may want to
21 have a conversation on why it is appropriate who gets to define
22 "standard"...some historical context to the students

Figure 3. Participants discuss larger Discourses that underpin literacy issues.

In this 5 minute 15 second chat, seven different participants moved from initial reference to the speaker's situated discussion of speech patterns, and into a larger Discourse focused on power and language, especially as it concerned code switching in Standardized English and African American vernacular. P1 initiates the conversation on modifying speech patterns, which P2 takes up as an issue of language and power in schools, especially as situated in Standard English and African American vernacular. In Line 6, P3 enters the discussion, and suggests that students must know certain aspects of language, a "discourse that students must be able to reach." P4, in seeming agreement with P2, challenges P3's beliefs about Standard English and discourse, and invites P3 to consider the issue of whose language becomes standard. In

agreement with P3, P5 enters the conversation and directly links modifying language to code switching, which P5 then links language to economics—a larger Discourse that often governs how language gets taught in schools. P5 argues that “traditional speech” represents “high standards” in school, and it is because of these “high standards” and use of “traditional speech” that students will “succeed” in a “middle class society.” P3, in seeming agreement with P5, links language to the work force, and an implied “good job.” The discussion moves into larger issues of language and success, language and workplace, and the need for students to understand the difference, conversations that, at times, clearly raised tensions among audience members.

As Janks (2010) suggests, diversity is located in the social and cultural interactions, and become central in changing consciousness. What we found interesting about situated discursive asides is that participants from different places and cultures were able to express and discuss issues that mattered to them, issues that may challenge another participant’s opinion. P4’s question, “Whose language counts?” challenges P3’s statement about what P3 believes students should know. Once written in the chat, participants’ comments can be taken up and discussed in terms of power and access. As asides, these conversations were written and once written, opened to challenge, confirmation, and/or extension. This excerpt illustrates how issues within a live web seminar occurred on the spot, initiated by a speaker’s point at that moment, but extended into discussions on larger Discourses at play. Further, this excerpt provides some evidence that there is impact of web seminars and participants’ thinking. Given that these participants do not know each other, exist 1000s of miles apart, these situated discursive asides allow for an exchange of ideas, “social and cultural interactions” that position participants to alter their current thinking because such asides can happen in online spaces.

Not all conversations were long or were taken up in the same fashion as the one above. Chat transcripts across web seminars indicated that participants chose whether or not to take up an idea. For example, in this 4-minute chat segment, P1 raises a question in Line 1 to the speaker and an issue in Line 9; however, none of the participants took these up as invitations to engage in conversation with him.

2:07:33 – *P1* [to Speaker]: Do you see a difference in interpretative theory in differing modes (i.e., print vs. visual art)?

2:08:08 - *P2* You used Rosenblatt's theory--she talk literary texts

2:08:56 - *P3* It seems like semiotics suggests that meaning making is meaning making—regardless of mode. I agree with your response.

2:11:30 - *P4* There's an argument that poets are synesthetic. “

We also studied to what extent chat moved too quickly for participants to respond. However, it was unclear whether this was a result of the chat moving so quickly or a matter of topic interest.

Networked Technologies are Important Factors in a Web seminar's Evolution and Growth

We found that Internet/networked resources, including a free Wordpress blog site, social media (Facebook, Twitter, listservs) mattered in how an online critical literacy project like GCLR emerges and grows, and to what extent it has global interest, and ultimately, impact.

Although seemingly common sense, such findings support that to make global impact, available Internet resources—including networked technologies and social media--afford this impact.

Before the launch of the GCLR website, we worked with email listservs only. This limited our outreach as it depended highly on whether members of the listserv thought the project was

important enough to send information to others. Attendance at early web seminars averaged fewer than 35; however, with increased Internet presence and our increased efforts at social networking, the average audience numbered 250 in 2012-2013.

From the website's launch in December 2010 to August 2011 and publicity blasts to listservs, GCLR's Wordpress site recorded approximately 1700 visits to the main page. However, by the end of the 2011-2012 series and the start of 2012-2013 series, the website recorded 10,388 visits. During that time, we launched our GCLR Facebook page and began posting on other literacy-based Facebook pages. From September 2012-November 2012, the number of visits was 6923, well on track to exceed the 10,000 number from last year. GCLR's Wordpress site recorded over 21,000 hits across individual pages within the website (as of this writing). These technology-Internet tools afford projects like GCLR to track its progress and growth, and use this information to plan for expanded growth. Figure 4 indicates the growth across the project's existence, and makes visible the extent to which Internet resources grow interest in a literacy project.

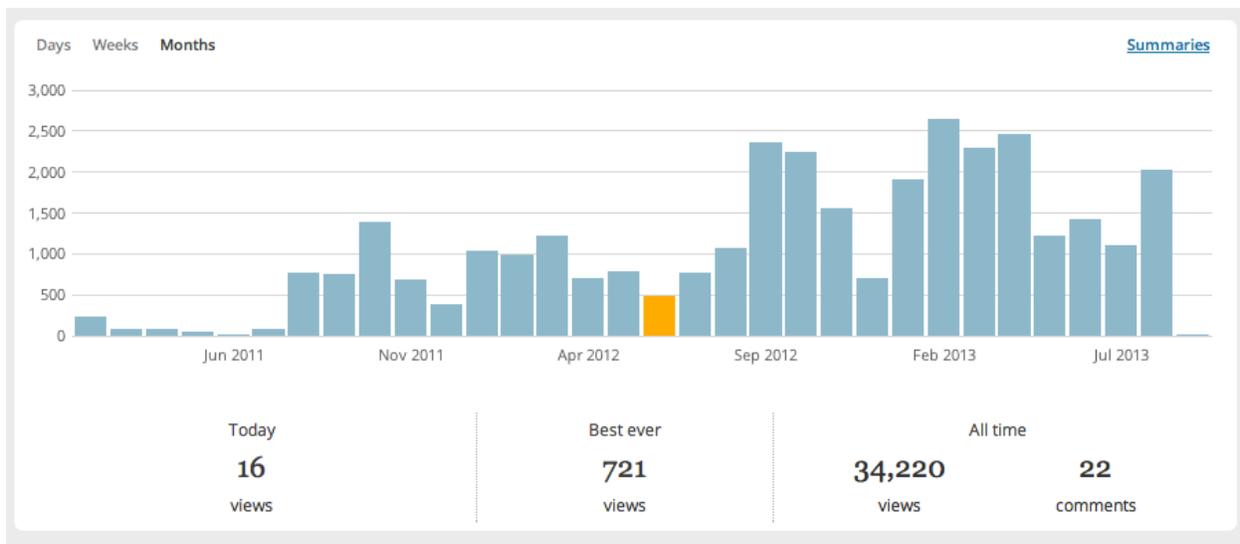


Figure 4. Bar graph indicates the growth across the project's existence, and makes visible the extent to which Internet resources grow interest in a literacy project.

Figure 4 puts into visual perspective the highs and lows of website access, months that saw more access, and for us, why these highs and lows occurred. This graphic shows how there was little interest or awareness of this project prior to January 2011, even with our email blasts. However, with website presence, by August of 2011, awareness and interest grew exponentially. When we added Clustrmap in September 2011 to the GCLR website, we could then see from where people accessed this site. As of November 2012, ClustrMap recorded 7,751 hits from all 50 U.S. states and over 80 countries. As of this writing, we have had over 15,879 hits, and over 125 countries that have accessed the site. GCLR's statistics indicate that across the lifespan of the website, GCLR's visibility via views has increased three-fold. In 2011, GCLR had 4822 views, while in 2013 (so far), the site has recorded 15,195 views. We suggest that these statistics indicate that literacy is of global concern, and that people from six of the seven continents accessed the Internet, including the GCLR site, to search out resources. The high concentration of hits from the U.S., Canada, England, and Australia was no surprise; this project is English-based, seminars presented in English, and by scholars from these four places. Further, access to information on this site required that the viewer speak and/or read English; however, since November 2012, GCLR now has a translation widget to the site to increase outreach and access. We found a correlation between the number of hits to our publicity blasts through Facebook and listservs; the more we publicized, the larger the number of visits/hits. We suggest that to market a critical literacy project such as GCLR, a website is imperative to its initial infrastructure and growth. Overall, we interpret the growing interest in GCLR as an indication that website

presence, social media, and electronic correspondence are important to a web seminar project's evolution and growth.

Discussion

Networked technologies have had a highly visible impact on our social and cultural lives, and the ways through which we participate and compete for participation in this highly networked world have become highly diverse. From Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, distributions lists, Facetime, Go to Meeting, texting, and so on we are not just connected, but networked, socially, technologically, and intellectually. Networking, once done through professional conferences, has taken on alternative definitions—networking through new media, social media, and technology tools enable us participate synchronously and asynchronously. As young scholars enter the field, how scholarship is circulated and shared is shifting; it is not surprising that literacy educators and scholars are grappling with how new practices might be conceptualized and actualized within and outside school settings. A longitudinal study of GCLR as an online open access platform for scholarship not only is timely, but warranted; it offers insights into how participation happens in online spaces, what emerges from networked participation, and to what extent networked technologies can propel critical projects into larger and global arenas. We discuss our findings through the concept of participation: participation as situated discursive asides, participation as affordance and constraint, participation as networked technologies, and participation as disruptive technology.

Participation as Situated Discursive Asides

As a free and open-access project, GCLR affords real-time, on-the-spot participation with people across the world, many unfamiliar to each other, about literacy issues that matter. We

found that conversations in the chat were situated, anchored and contextual. We explain this type of participation as situated discursive asides: participants stepped aside the live presentation to discuss an issue often prompted by a speaker's point (e.g., code switching); carried on situated discussions alongside and within the live action (their chat made visible to large group); and stepped back into the live presentation. There is significance in these "asides;" virtual spaces allow for participants to engage with each other immediately and quickly with minimal disturbance to the live action. Participants have access to diverse perspectives and can challenge dominant Discourses, such as evidenced in the excerpt focused on Standard English and African American vernacular. Participants were able to discuss, at the moment that the speaker presented the idea of situated language in teaching, their perspectives on which language is valued in schools, to get to name the power behind these decisions, and the role that language should play in students' lives (to participate in middle class society, workplace). Perceptions and beliefs certainly may change when participants read professional and mass market journals, and can be shared on blogging sites, email, and/or distribution lists; however, web seminars by design allow for situated discursive asides, moments in the presentation that allow for discussions on a particular issue to happen in real time.

Further, as asides taken up in a public and open forum, such as offered by an open access web seminar project, participants who may never meet online or in person in other venues can effect some change in another participant's thoughts through the chat as situated text and as discursive asides. As a critical literacy project then, there is some evidence to suggest that discursive asides produced through the chat may have potential to effect change in the beliefs and stances of others who live miles and continents apart. In physical spaces (e.g., conference sessions), protocol often dictates behavior and participants often ask questions at the end of a

presentation directed at a speaker. However, online spaces where situated discursive asides can and do happen provide space to engage others in situated, on the spot, discussions that may challenge and/or concur with particular viewpoints. Additionally, asides allow participants to pose questions to the speaker or others, which can be, and often are, taken up by other participants in the seminar. Knowledge and perspectives are not owned by the speaker, but are shared by the audience in attendance. Further, from these asides, Discourses were made visible by those participating in these asides. Situated discursive asides run alongside, merge into, and can shape or reshape the thinking of all participants—audience as well as speaker. Entry into such access and participation significantly positions not just the content as significant, but also the Discourses that guide the content.

Participation as Affordance and Constraint

With all communication media and sign systems come affordances and constraints. While predictable constraints emerged (e.g., getting “kicked off,” facility with Blackboard Collaborate tools, audio issues), we contend that these issues are transitory as technology advances. We found that the affordances outweighed the constraints in access, chat, and presentation format. The open access aspect of this project affords outreach participation, with “regulars” participants attending across seminars. Social and electronic media reached more participants, and attendance increased across the study. Participants appreciated that these seminars were free, and the interconnectedness with global others afforded them opportunities to discuss online between themselves possibilities for future collaborative work, and two participants did just that. Chat capabilities allowed participants to share classroom practices, thoughts, and ideas related to a speaker’s topic; however, chat also allows for individuals to dominate, as illustrated by P1 in the Frank Smith chat. This may be why some participants found the chat distracting or why some

people did not engage in the discussions. As such, chat sometimes made ripe the opportunity for power differentials.

Though chat capabilities allowed participants to interact with each other and the speaker and receive responses in real-time, they do not foster longer, more in-depth literacy conversations. Often, by the time a response is initiated, the lines of chat have already moved up and are no longer visible. As for presentations, of the 13 speakers across 11 seminars, only 4 had previous experience presenting web seminars. Most had participated in web seminars and were comfortable with it as a presentation format, yet several others felt unsure of themselves as they stepped out of their face-to-face “comfort zones” and into the virtual world. This enabled speakers to participate in ways that they might not have imagined as a result of digital tools. Even with the best of intents, issues of power and access were not entirely disrupted. GCLR web seminars are presented in English. Although English is spoken approximately by only 25% of the world’s population according to linguist David Crystal (<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-faq-the-english-language.htm>), presenting web seminars is an affordance for the 1 in 4 who speak English, but a constraint for the 3 of 4 who do not. As such, a comment posted on the GCLR website that indicated that GCLR was “hardly global” is valid and valued. Can a project truly be global when only 25% are included? Further, the project’s outreach is limited by language and cost to those who can afford Internet access. Viewed critically, GCLR web seminars serve only those who have Internet access.

Participation as Networked Activity

The website statistics and analytics evidence interest in a critical project that offers open access to leading literacy scholars and scholarship. As an open forum, issues of dominance are lessened; people from various geographic spaces may participate, not just those who can afford

to attend presentations that feature leading literacy scholars. Clearly, although not the newest of technologies, web seminars continue to open possibilities for many across the globe who might otherwise not have access. Additionally, the synchronous feature adds to the interest and the interaction with scholars that many educators can interact through their publications. Participants recognized that connection to scholarship presented in real-time was one of the most important factors to their regular attendance; this suggests to us that networked technologies are significant to participation. However, time zones are a clear constraint when access is limited to time zones that favor the U.S. and the speaker's time zone. In fact, a number of those living in Europe joined Allan Luke's web seminar even though it was 2:00 a.m. Within the past year, GCLR archived web seminars; yet archived web seminars are not the same as being able to interact with interested others in synchronous spaces. Live interaction provides an avenue to achieve a goal of educating for a global citizenry (Author, 2010; Janks & Vasquez, 2011) with those who are willing to engage digitally and critically in a vastly different but interconnected world. A project such as GCLR has the potential to encourage transformative changes concerning literacy research and the practices associated with literacy and literacy instruction. Participants can share resources, such as represented in the Frank Smith excerpt (Figure 2), challenge and support thinking, and network with interested others on research projects.

Participation as Disruptive Innovation

Finally, we see GCLR web seminars as disruptive innovation in which participation in what, for many in the world, are new and emerging technologies spur imagination that leads to innovation. Used in the disciplines of business and technology, "disruptive technologies" (later termed disruptive innovation) was coined by Bower and Christensen (1995) to describe innovations that improve a service or product that the market does not anticipate or expect, all

with an eye towards a future and different set of consumers. As a disruptive innovation, GCLR web seminars critically position people to engage in literacy scholarship in a different way, one that both resembles traditional formats (speaker's talk to an audience) but puts a twist on how participation happens in such a format through chat and live interaction at the end with speakers. We liken this to Janks' (2010) concept of "re-design," which enables us to envision alternate possibilities for communication and representation. In light of re-design, participants in an online critical web seminar series like GCLR can envision an alternative possibility of engaging with scholars and scholarship in real time, can interact, respond, and move aside with others to discuss issues, all within features of web seminar delivery platforms. The design of synchronous web seminars like GCLR offers interested participants access to multiple perspectives, diverse ways of interaction, and opportunities to shift dominant ideologies about language and power. Further, web seminars as networked technologies threaten traditional formats by offering convenience and low-cost/no cost opportunities to stay professional current. Learners and learning no longer resides in physical spaces but have tremendous international outreach as evidenced by the explosion of Massive On-line Open-Access Courses (MOOCs).

Implications for Research and Practice

We see interesting implications for research, teaching and scholarship. Although literature does exist on online learning spaces, little research on synchronous participation in online platforms designed for literacy scholars and educators is scant. More research, especially into the importance of human interaction (e.g., seeing and reading the expressions of an audience) in physical spaces (e.g., conferences, workshops) alongside human interaction in online scholarship spaces, is warranted and needed. Should convenience and cost trump attending conferences or workshops? Or would a disruptive innovation like free and open access

web seminars kill the conference as “video killed the radio star” (Woolley & the Camera Club, 1979). We do not see the professional conference moving away in favor of online learning; however, online engagement with scholarship provides access to those who are unable to participate physically in professional venues. In terms of teaching, web seminars designed with critical literacy in mind can offer educators and their students with invaluable real-time interaction with international scholars, and cutting edge research and thinking. Educators alongside their students can join in on global conversations about issues that matter. Finally, in terms of scholarship, with the oppressive plethora of mandates around literacy, access to critical scholarship that disrupts dominant ideologies underpinning legislation around literacy (e.g., assessment, teacher performance, English learners and learning) is critical. Online projects that speak against dominant ideologies are needed and necessary to garner a groundswell of support to take social action.

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Figures/Captions

Figure 1. ClustrMap captures concentrations of interest, location, and time of access.



Figure 2. Participants engaged “in the moment” and “assembled on the spot” conversations.

- 1 1:46:29 – **P1** I LOVE Frank Smith's work.
- 2 1:47:03 – **P2** me too! We use his text in our foundation course.
- 3 1:47:39 – **P1** Yes, [to P2], Frank Smith makes sense
- 4 1:48:03 – **P2** Yes, he's a slow read to understand and a reread to internalize!
- 5 1:48:07 – **P3** Great book: Understanding Reading by Frank Smith
- 6 1:48:30 – **P4** LOVE THAT BOOK! Smith is brilliant
- 7 1:48:42 – **P5** [P6] made me practically memorize that book in the 70's!! Right
- 8 Mom?
- 9 1:48:42 – **P1** We have indeed backed the wrong horse, [to Speaker].
- 10 1:48:58 – **P6** yes, indeed!
- 11 1:49:02 – **P1** I want [P6] to be my momma, too.
- 12 1:49:15 – **P5** It was his first book before Understanding Reading-
- 13 Psycholinguistics and Reading?
- 14 1:49:26 – **P5** Reading wWithout Nonsense?
- 15 1:49:35 – **P6** Yes!

Figure 3. Participants discuss larger Discourses that underpin literacy issues.

1 2:06:07 *P1* Well.... we all modify our speech depending on the audience.... in speaking,
2 and also in writing.
3 2:07:10 *P2* I'm wondering if we are putting too much emphasis on Standard English- so
4 much that african american students are totally separately home life from
5 school life? Sounds like what . . . did.
6 2:07:33 *P3* Students need to know how and when to modify their speech and writing.
7 There is a discourse that students need to be able to reach.
8 2:07:43 *P4* Whose language counts? school or home?
9 2:07:54 *P5* but code switching is not just modifying our speech depending on the
10 audience. Code switching is switching between two languages and in this
11 case the standard English and African American English
12 2:08:03 *P1* I don't think so.... I think we need to have high expectations (not that you
13 don't, [P2]!) for their speech and writing - because the truth is, they will
14 need to use traditional speech to succeed in middle-class society.
15 2:08:05 *P3* School language eventually reaches into the work place.
16 2:09:48 *P6* [P3] and [P2], I am torn about that as well. We need to allow students to use
17 their own language but point out when it is appropriate.
18 2:10:45 *P2* I think that too much emphasis discourages social learning. What can we do
19 about this?
20 2:11:32 *P7* while you are pointing out when language is "appropriate" you may want to
21 have a conversation on why it is appropriate who gets to define
22 "standard"...some historical context to the students

Figure 4. Bar graph indicates the growth across the project's existence, and makes visible the extent to which Internet resources grow interest in a literacy project.

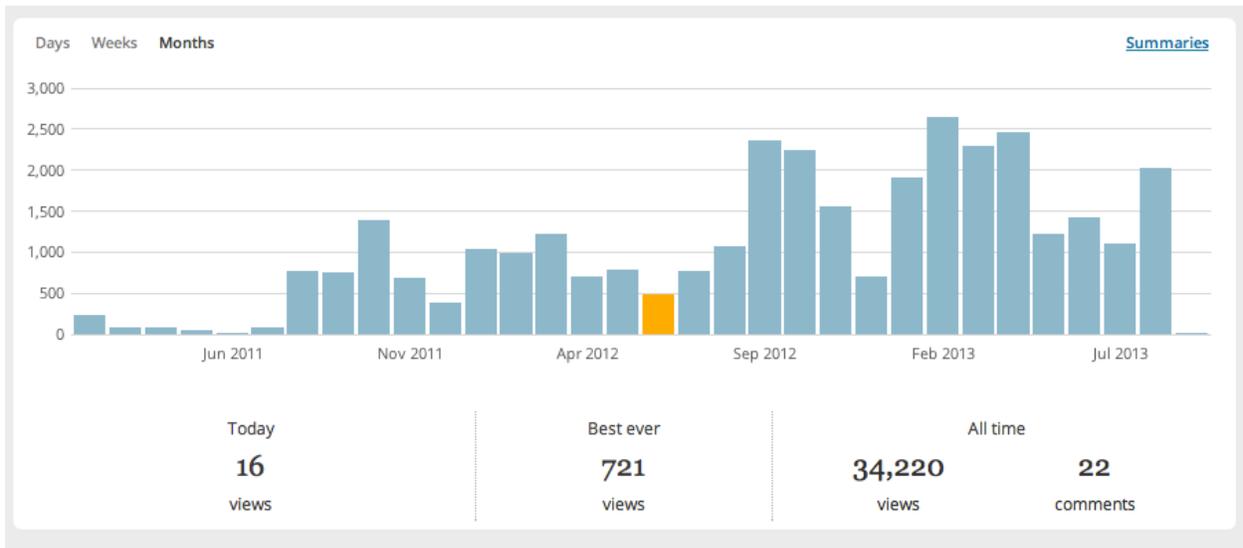


Table 1. Representative comments from speakers and participants.

	Affordances		Constraints	
	<i>Content</i>	<i>Technology</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Technology</i>
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks again, all, this was again terrific. I am hooked! • Excellent content and speakers both last year and this year. • "I love Global Conversations. They are TRULY cutting edge and inspiring." • These seminars keep pushing the boundaries of my literacy and literacy education understandings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interaction with international scholars and scholarship • "It was amazing. I will come back for the rest of the lectures." • "You guys saved us a several thousand dollar plane ticket!" • "It was nice to see the presenter this time!" • Anonymity through usernames • Willing to take risks: speak online through chat but not in public forums like conferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks for the typed discussion, as I had no sound. • Amazingly informative, give [the speaker] more time to talk. • It would be nice to have speakers from other places [than US, Canada, England, and Australia]; these seminars would be global 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I finally figured out that I needed to update Java. If you put in the email announcement that it works best with the latest Java, it would probably help people with connection problems." • I would have loved to be able to download this. • Time zone issues • Software issues
Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "One hell of a large seminar. These are the kind of conversations we need to be having." • "These are great forums for international discussions" • "We have added these seminars to our doctoral courses." • "I'd like to present at 3:00 so that students I know in South America can attend." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dual presenting: "afforded the one not talking to interact with the chat area." • "Incredible to bring all these people together from all over the world on a Sunday night, Labor Day Weekend. It just speaks to the value of this work. Just wonderful!" • "I like that I am able to present from the comfort of home. I can just go to bed now!" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "One hour is just enough time; more than that is too much time listening." • Cannot hyperlink to videos or webs in PowerPoint and cannot "fancy up the presentation." • PowerPoint is static in Elluminate and does not allow for effects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I couldn't see the audience. I couldn't gauge what they were thinking or if I needed to repeat something." • Stress of not being able to connect on the night of the seminar • "I wish I could have read the chat comments. I was so focused on my presentation that I couldn't respond."