

The Case for GroupMe: Rhetorical Thinking Thrives Among Students Using App

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Abstract

This article looks at GroupMe as a space of rhetorical activities. Two questions guided the study: (1) What kind of rhetorical thinking occurs when students use GroupMe? And (2) In what way does the discourse community of GroupMe affect the way students compose messages? Drawing on data from both a pilot study and a follow-up study of students in a first year and junior composition class, results from the surveys and interviews showed that when students used GroupMe, they have a tendency to engage in cognitive thinking (e.g., considering audience, tone, formality). Students displayed WPA's outcome statements like rhetorical knowledge and knowledge of conventions when they compose messages in the app. The researcher argues for writing instructors (and all instructors) to consider using computer-mediated communication like GroupMe in a classroom as a way to not only promote literacy learning (e.g., writing) but also for students to practice communicating in multiple genres as preparation for everyday vernacular discourses.

Keywords: GroupMe, computer-mediated communication, digital literacy, rhetorical thinking

Introduction

Messaging apps and social network sites have become increasingly popular as the preferred multimodal channel of communication among college students. Scholarships surrounding multimodal communication (or digital literacy) have examined topics such as students' digital literacy narratives and the fluidity of their virtual and embodied interactions (Cohn, 2016) or how the use of technology like Facebook has helped students develop language skills and academic writing (Amicucci, 2014). Scholars have recognized the sheer amount of literacy practice students engage in outside of school in modes (Haas, Takayoshi, Carr, Hudson, & Pollock, 2011) that generally require critical literacy skills (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011) that is similarly require in print-base literacies (e.g., taking into account the rhetorical situations). As technology continues to shape the way society communicates, not everyone, even those who are categorized as digital natives, are literate in this area (Bartol, Dolnicar, & Podgornik, 2016). Jacobs, Castek, Pizzolato, Reder, & Pendell (2014) argue for proficiency in information and communication technologies because "[t]his knowledge makes it possible to access instantaneously a range of information, interact with public services, communicate with friends, engage in political activities, gain employment, and participate in ongoing education" (p. 626).

One popular multimodal communication app that students should have knowledge of is GroupMe. Like WeChat and WhatsApp, GroupMe is a free group messaging app that can be downloaded on a smartphone and is used as a tool to talk with people. The GroupMe app functions comparably to instant messaging (IM) and texting. For students, it can act as a digital place where they share details of their personal and professional life; students can announce meeting dates and social events, discuss details of community service and philanthropy functions, ask for homework

help, and talk with professors and supervisors. GroupMe, then, affords students a space to practice and hone their writing skills. Amicucci (2014) believes that instructors should take the literacy practices students already participate in when they are not in the classroom and transfer that knowledge to writing for academic purposes (p. 489). Consequently, writing instructors should draw their attention to GroupMe for further study of students' daily communication as a way to consider how to incorporate students' digital literacies into a writing course.

As a computer-mediated communication (CMC) tool, GroupMe is a rich site where rhetorical activities and critical thinking can occur when students compose messages. Most first-year students at a midwestern university in Ohio become acculturated to college life by joining GroupMe, and unbeknownst to them, may not realize how much learning is taking place outside the writing classroom. There are several Writing Program Administration's (WPA) outcomes that can stem from using GroupMe: (1) *rhetorical knowledge*: "The ability to analyze contexts and audiences and then to act on that analysis in comprehending and creating text. [...] Writers develop rhetorical knowledge by negotiating purpose, audience, context, and conventions as they compose a variety of texts for different situations" (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2014, para. 6); and (2) *knowledge of conventions*: "Conventions are the formal rules and informal guidelines that define genres. [...] Conventions govern such things as mechanics, usage, spelling, and citation practices. But they also influence content, style, organization, graphics, and document design" (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2014, para. 22). Students in a first-year composition class are expected to not only meet WPA outcomes but also apply these outcomes to new settings. GroupMe can offer writing instructors a place to help students meet WPA outcomes by utilizing the app as a complementary writing tool.

In this GroupMe space, students can achieve WPA outcomes by negotiating their identities and voices as they maneuver around the many GroupMe chats to which they belong. In doing so, they need to think about the relationship among genre, situation, purpose, and audience—concepts writing instructors hope students will grasp and transfer into their own writings. GroupMe can also act as a discourse community. Discourse community refers to a community of members with shared interests, ideas, language, and knowledge (Swales, 1990, pp. 21–32). By studying the literacy practices of GroupMe users, writing instructors can learn more about how the app acts as its own discourse community, which can influence how students respond to writing situations.

Perhaps English courses should no longer be confined to teaching students ways to compose primarily print-based text. Writing instructors are seeing students faced with 280-character constraints on Twitter, publishing rules of Reddit, and other guidelines in venues that affect how students disseminate their messages in places in which students either wish to become or are already members. As added pressure, exchanging vernacular discourses with people is taking place as much online as it is in person (Hauser, 2007). It is imperative, then, that students learn to engage themselves in many genres if they are to be productive citizens in a society dominated by diverse communication practices. It is the responsibility of writing instructors to prepare students to learn to read, interpret, and write across multiple platforms (Lenters, 2018), to teach students to compose text outside the four corners of traditional documents (e.g., essays and memos in a Word document), and to spend time writing in an online setting (e.g., Twitter and GroupMe) that makes use of rhetorical knowledge and conventions. Educators need to expand students' digital literacy by expanding the idea of what it means to write in today's standard.

This research relies on a pilot and a follow-up study based on surveys and interviews from first year and junior composition students on their reasons for using GroupMe and the rhetorical

activities involved when they compose messages in the app. This study argues that writing instructors should include, as part of their curriculum, lessons on how to compose messages in CMC as a way to take into account the many ways students are communicating with a diverse audience using varied digital technologies. The study will also advocate that all classes require students to use GroupMe to talk with instructors and other students in the class as part of a real-world application-based learning style. The time is ripe for writing instructors to take an in-depth look into the kinds of technologies students frequently use and to see how technologies shape writing, with the hope instructors can incorporate those technologies into the teaching of literacy.

This article will begin with a review of scholarship on relevant CMC studies and multiliteracies. There will be a review of studies on instant messaging and group messaging apps to provide a foundation for the present study, including a discussion on identity and CMC and textese as a language. The article will also talk briefly about CMC as a discourse community. Then the article will segue into the research questions, followed by a description of the method, and the results from class surveys (from the pilot and follow-up study) and interviews. Finally, the article will discuss the findings and end with some pedagogical implementations for using GroupMe.

Why Computer-Mediated Communication?

Traditionally, CMC could be defined as “communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers” (Herring, 1996, p. 1). But individuals like Carr (2020) and Flanagin (2020) have argued to retire the use of ‘computer’ (given the unclear meaning of ‘computer’ in computer-mediated communication) and focus more on the ‘mediation’ aspect. CMC, then, can be summed up to include any human-to-human communication mediated by technology (Carr, 2020). CMC can include social network sites like Facebook, apps like GroupMe, and online forums like Blackboard. Technology is helping students write constantly, sometimes

without them realizing how much writing they do; technology may even play some role in facilitating students' enjoyment of writing (Hadriana, 2017, p. 152).

In some ways, the composing process in a CMC environment is quite like the composing process in a non-CMC environment to some extent (Hadriana, 2017). In a CMC message, for example, there is usually a planning component (what to write), a writing component (the actual writing), and an editing/revising component (making any necessary changes); these components are usually present when students compose an essay in a Word document on a computer. Rhetorical knowledge and knowledge of conventions are a part of the composing process. Thus, it is crucial that time is spent studying different CMCs to further develop the field's comprehension of the many different ways to teach composition and to continue to build on existing conversations regarding the importance of CMC in complementing a student's writing knowledge and skills.

The incorporation of computer-mediated communication into the pedagogical practices of instructors teaching composition has been present for decades (Ciftci & Aslan, 2019; Herring, 1996). Recent studies have looked at CMC and peer feedback/response (Akbar, 2017; Cha, 2009; Pyo & Lee, 2019) or CMC and EFL/ESL students (Hussin, Abdullah, Ismail, & Yoke, 2015; Mahdi, 2014; Noyan & Kocoglu, 2019; Winet, 2016). There are also studies that support digital CMC environments as sites of language learning, especially for marginalized groups (Dobao, 2012; Mahdi, 2014; Winet, 2016), and for improving the literacy of basic writers (Jonaitis, 2012). CMC has shown to have some influence on students' ability to write such as giving them a less stressful environment to work in since communicating on the internet provides more time to respond, and CMC also provides students with the ability to have direct contact with the instructor and classmates, which can result in positive attitudes about writing (Hadriana, 2017). Researchers have found some advantages commonly associated with CMC in the writing classroom. CMC provides

students with a real audience to write to, provides them a space for equitable participation, provides them with a sense of community among peers, and provides a less leader/teacher-centered communication (Yagelski & Grabill, 1998, pp. 13–14).

A New Approach to Literacy

The direction CMC is going for educators means redefining what counts as literacy. Unfortunately, this task is no simple endeavor. There is no agreed-upon definition of literacy due to the term's variation from context to context (Vaccarino, Comrie, Murray, Sligo, & Tilley, 2013, pp. 2–7). In a four-year project interpreting literacy from the viewpoints of participants in an adult literacy program, employers from the town (e.g., accounting, hospitality, energy), and secondary school teachers, it became clear to the researchers that literacy should not be defined narrowly or broadly, but continue to evolve in meaning to meet the goals of numerous social contexts (Vaccarino et al., 2013, pp. 13–15). The researchers concluded that the perception of literacy needs to be adjusted from its original meaning of reading and writing to consider globalization and information technologies for the 21st century (Vaccarino et al., 2013, pp. 13–16).

A few years prior to Vaccarino et al.'s study, the New London Group (1996) possibly predicted a new wave of communication style that included information and media literacies. The New London Group (1996) argued that students were the designers of the social future. This social future was transforming in the areas of public, private, and work life because of technology and new communication media. The social future, resultantly, existed in a state of flux due to a rapidly shifting social environment from a growing diverse population, both culturally and linguistically. This change led to an alteration in how students needed to prepare themselves for the real world and how their communication style would need to evolve to meet the demands of a changing

society (New London Group, 1996, pp. 65–89). Literacy, the basic ability to read and write, could be regarded, then, as skills needed to function in a particular environment in a particular time (Vacarino et al., 2013, p. 16). GroupMe, as with other CMC, is establishing itself as the norm of literacy among college students in the current times.

This new meaning of literacy, which could be labeled ‘multiliteracies,’ is defined as “the multiplicity of communication channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity” (New London Group, 1996, p. 63). As a diverse nation, the United States will continue to serve as home base for people across national origins. The ways of speaking to one another will branch out and be amplified by what different groups bring with them to their new home and how people’s own cultural backgrounds influence how they interact with others (Pandian et al., 2013; New London Group, 1996, pp. 88–89). At a midwestern university in Ohio, for example, many international Chinese students use WeChat to connect with like-minded individuals. In a sense, when people produce a text in the traditional sense, they are in effect producing a text that is multimodal; that is, meaning can be expressed through several modes used together, including linguistic, auditory, spatial, gestural, or visual (New London Group, 1996, pp. 80–83). GroupMe, in turn, can be classified as multimodal because communication in this context can be accomplished through words, videos, or pictures—modes that dominate CMC discourses.

Students today are regularly communicating in more than one medium, using the modes mentioned above to construct meaning (Clement, 2020). Whether it is posting a Facebook update, live streaming a story on Snapchat, or commenting on a friend’s Instagram picture with emojis, there is no denying that students are displaying versatility in how they express themselves to the world. At the same time, students are not arbitrarily putting random texts in a message to anyone—there is a cognitive process involved (Drouin, 2011). Writing instructors, then, should not be so

quick to dismiss this CMC style of communication, a style that may not be the norm for writing in an academic space, but one that has merits in a college setting because it is still writing and WPA's outcomes are present or can be achieved.

Identity and Voice in CMC

Social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and apps like GroupMe and WeChat, offer users access to a variety of unique communities with their own group values, goals, and lexis. Once students enter college, they are immersed in many discourse communities that can help shape their identity. These discourse communities represent a segment of society governed by a social context. When students consider their use of language in each discourse community before they compose, they are essentially negotiating their identities. It is typical, in fact, for students to hold membership in more than one place. Mary Kalantzis said that “[n]o person is a member of a singular community. Rather, they are members of multiple and overlapping communities—communities of work, of interest and affiliation, of ethnicity, of sexual identity, and so on” (as cited in New London Group, 1996, p. 71). Identity can shift among groups and with this shift, comes a change in values, goals, and lexis, which affects how people make decisions to provide a suitable response (Lewis & Fabos, 2005). For example, a student can have one persona in her sorority GroupMe chat and a completely different persona in a religious GroupMe chat. These differences in persona will affect how a person sounds or is expected to sound in their discourse community, thereby shaping the construction of their overall messages.

In addition, certain modes of communication provide a platform for groups, like students, to articulate themselves and to give a voice to those who may not always have one in other commonly used areas of communication (Keogh, 2017; Morita, 2004). The idea of giving people a platform to speak on has been studied by scholars including Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000),

Scott Lyons (2000), Naoko Morita (2004) and Cynthia Selfe (2009). Cynthia Selfe (2009), for instance, examines how the importance of aurality, which is part of multimodal composition, can give African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos a means of learning, surviving, and preserving their culture (pp. 623–625). Though such scholars have focused their research on marginalized groups, the idea of giving a voice to the voiceless is not limited to traditionally underrepresented groups. Further research, then, needs to be conducted to determine what voice is present for native speakers of English in a CMC mode and whether the use of CMC can help assimilate them into a discourse community more effectively online than face-to-face interactions.

Likewise, expression can come in many forms among students for reasons such as visibility and acknowledgment. CMC could be an ideal space for those who may struggle to be heard and may instead find solace online as a space to increase their participation (Keogh, 2017, p. 99). As stated by the New London Group, “The new multimedia and hypermedia channels can and sometimes do provide members of subcultures with the opportunity to find their own voices. These technologies have the potential to enable greater autonomy for different lifeworlds” (pp. 70–71). Finding their own voices can help individuals like second language learners who face challenges in negotiating their identity, competence, and power relation in the classrooms (Morita, 2004). Aside from second language learners, other groups who may struggle with finding their own voices are the introverts. It is common for instructors to have shy students who do not feel comfortable interacting with other students in a face-to-face social setting. But via CMC like GroupMe, these introverts may find agency in this online space, where they can be noticed and interact with fellow peers a lot easier and within a safe zone.

A Different, but Legitimate Way of Speaking: Textese

While instructors ideally want their students to engage in dialogue with peers, especially since CMC can produce positive environments for working and learning from each other (Dobao, 2014; Hadriana, 2017), incorporating CMC into the curriculum is challenging. It is difficult to readily welcome a multimodal approach to the teaching of literacy given the length of residency traditional print-based text has taken up over the past decades. Selfe (2009) argues that the printed word has been so privileged in composition classroom (pp. 625–626) that it may prevent students from thinking of other legitimate ways to convey their thoughts outside of what they are normally taught. However, this is a new era where students (and instructors) revolve their lives around digital technologies. People outside of academia, including the students being taught, are using forms of CMC as a communication tool for all sorts of purposes. Apps like GroupMe are being treated akin to a public sphere, a discursive space for discussion and deliberation for different matters (Hauser, 1998, p. 86). Writing instructors, therefore, should broaden what they consider “academic writing” and begin to advocate for CMC to have a seat at the table. But before an invitation can be extended, they need to figure out whether CMC can help native speakers of English improve their literacy, as studies have shown CMC has done with EFL and ESL students.

Some writing instructors may hesitate to count the writings in a computer-mediated communication environment (like instant messaging or Facebook posts) as academic writing because of its informal style. Defined as textese, this style is marked by an abbreviated vocabulary that includes initialisms, emoticons, letter/number homophones, contractions, shortening of words, as well as the deletion of words, vowels, punctuation, and capitalization (Drouin, 2011, p. 67). Textese is useful for its brevity. Textese is also useful because it allows users to reflect on their tone within the context of a written message (Lewis & Fabos, 2005). While textese is not considered formal language, and certainly not one that should appear heavily in academic essays,

research studies have found that the use of textese does not have a negative impact on students' literacy skills (Drouin & Davis, 2009). Therefore, textese should be welcomed—or at least be given due consideration—as a valid style of writing.

Textese, in fact, became a hit among teenagers and college students when instant messaging entered the landscape. This population of users sparked a strong interest among researchers to study the role of this internet application in the younger groups' communication practices and maintenance of social relations (Quan-Haase, 2008). Many studies that followed the impact of IM on people's communication style examined the linguistic and textual features of the messages composed and the role of IM on people's relationships. Researchers have looked at how social identities are shaped by uses of IM (Lewis & Fabos, 2005), how the perceived affordances and linguistic resources of IM guide text-making practices (Lee, 2007), and how writers use deixis and intertextuality to build and maintain material context as well as to construct sociocultural contexts (Haas, Carr, & Takayoshi, 2011). Nowadays, GroupMe has become the latest trend to enter the landscape for college students. It is noteworthy to study how this app can build on the knowledge bank provided by IM studies, specifically looking at the cognitive process of native speakers of English during the composing stages in CMC. Whether GroupMe can help shape social identities, guide text-making practices, or maintain social relations needs to be explored.

As the research studies by Drouin (2011) and Lewis & Fabos (2005) have revealed, writing instructors should give some credit to students' rhetorical competence in CMC settings because students have a fairly good idea of the level of formality warranted in their messages. They do not simply throw in slang and abbreviation for the sake of convenience. In Tagliamonte and Denis' (2008) study of IM usage among 72 teenagers, for instance, the authors looked at three levels of registers: formal, informal, and vernacular. They recognized that users employed a hybrid of

registers when they communicate: “the standard variants *will* and formal *must* appear alongside *gotta* and *gonna*” (p. 26). Existing knowledge of CMC like instant messaging has demonstrated students’ conscious ability to employ rhetorical knowledge in the composition and deliverance of their messages. Since GroupMe is the same as IM in some respect, it is plausible to see comparable findings from previous IM studies transfer to studies examining GroupMe and composing.

Undoubtedly, as both a sender and a recipient of genres, students have standards for the messages they send and receive. Based on their experiences and understanding of suitability, students expect a certain degree of informality or formality when textese is used in CMC. In Drouin and Davis’ (2009) study, they found that students used textese most often in text messages and emails to friends (determining those recipients as appropriate), and least often on social network sites and in emails to professors (determining those recipients as inappropriate). Eight years later in Kemp and Clayton’s (2017) study, they too, confirmed Drouin and Davis’s findings. Using undergraduate participants to examine when students found it proper to use textisms, Kemp and Clayton found that messages with a high and medium level of textese were more appropriate for friends and peers, while messages written in standard English were more appropriate for communication with instructors. The results held true regardless of the modalities: Facebook posts, text messages, and emails (Kemp & Clayton, 2017, pp. S144–S154). When students are in the process of using textese, then, they are aware of their surrounding and intended audience; an awareness known as *kairos* that students would usually learn in their composition class (Harker, 2007, pp. 78–80). This perception is what Covino and Jolliffe mentioned in their 1995 book *Rhetoric: Concepts, Definitions, Boundaries*: “rhetors must consider whether, from the point of view of potential auditors, the time, the circumstances, and the intellectual and ideological climate

are right” (as cited in Harker, 2007, p. 81). With CMC like GroupMe, the demands of the situations prompt students to learn how to respond accordingly and appropriately.

Linda Flowers and John Hayes (1981) would most likely categorize their cognitive process theory of writing to the writing process seen in CMC. When there is a message that elicits a response, students are essentially responding to a rhetorical situation. In preparing to respond, students will most likely plan their thoughts, which involves generating ideas, organizing, and setting goals (pp. 372–373). In CMC, students generally need to think about what they should write, how much to write, what words to use, who will see the messages, etc. From planning, students translate their ideas into a language understandable to their audience (p. 373). Considering the conventions and “rules” of a discourse community, students should adhere to the guidelines set forth by their membership in a community and make sure their language will be familiar to their audience. Another component of Flower and Hayes cognitive process theory of writing is reviewing. Reviewing may involve translating a text for further comprehension or reviewing to evaluate the text for possible revisions (p. 374). Before sending a message in CMC, students would most likely re-read their texts and make sure their messages are proper. It is possible that students would have to re-write some parts of their messages, which may include having to go back to the beginning stages and generate new ideas. Flowers and Hayes’ theory is principally recursive in nature (pp. 376–379), which is applicable to the composing stages in CMC.

From IM to GroupMe: The Research Gap

While there is an abundant amount of research regarding CMC (e.g., instant messaging), the present study differs because of its focus. Most studies involving CMC tended to focus on IM and its functionality. Whether it is regarding IM and its functions among users (Flanagin, 2005;

Flanagin & Miriam, 2001), or IM uses among adolescents (Bryant, Sanders-Jackson & Smallwood, 2006), or how students use IM to foster personal relationships and their identity (Hu et al., 2004; Quan-Haase, 2007), very few researchers have taken an in-depth look at group messaging apps. This research will look at GroupMe and students' cognitive side in composing—what students think about while they compose and why they make the choices they make. Finally, this research differs because of the type of participants. Research on past CMC studies tended to sample EFL or ESL students, but few studies have looked at native speakers of English and their daily usage of CMC, which this research does.

Computer-mediated communication researchers have added to their growing list of apps to study for research purposes. In or around the year 2017, researchers began to look at group messaging apps like Slack. Slack has grown in popularity over the years, particularly among researchers and scientists who use it for team collaboration and document management (Gofine & Clark, 2017; Perkel, 2017). Tuhkala and Karkkainen (2017), for instance, found that students in a Masters-level seminar course preferred to use Slack (based on 24 responses from the study). Slack provided students with a number of benefits, including the convenience of asking questions and receiving a quick reply, ease of use and a relaxing environment to contact other students and the teacher, and a better format to share information to the class (pp. 2386–2387). But such study fixated on the functionalities of Slack and did not examine the composing process, nor were any rhetorical knowledge or knowledge of conventions examined from the group messaging app.

To better grasp why this study focuses on GroupMe over other CMC options, it is important to know why GroupMe is so prevalent. One plausible reason has to do with the carryover features that made IM popular in the first place during the 1990s to early 2000s: interactivity, synchronous forms (Boneva et al., 2006; Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Quan-Haase, 2008), convenience of talking to

friends (Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Ling & Baron, 2007), and informal expressions and simultaneous conversations (Quan-Haase, 2008). Aside from the functionalities, some of the GroupMe features drive its own success. GroupMe, for instance, allows anyone to create small or large chat rooms with unlimited users. Unlike IM (e.g., AOL Aim), where if users wanted to talk to ten people at one time, they had to have ten chat windows opened on their screen, GroupMe makes talking to multiple people at once easier. For example, people can create group chats for their co-workers, for their family, and for their classmates (with as many members as necessary). Within these chat rooms, a person can send photos, videos, emojis, and even create polls (i.e., the app is multimodal). GroupMe can also be used on a computer or tablet, and it even works over short-message service. The versatility of the app has made it a fashionable choice among users, especially college students, where they can negotiate their identities and voices among the different chats/discourse communities and use the app to hone their literacy skills.

The GroupMe description sounds no different from regular texting, or messaging apps like WeChat and WhatsApp in areas of contacts, messaging features, content sharing, and security (Versus, n.d.-a; Versus, n.d.-b; Versus, n.d.-c). Initially, CMC like IM was compared to text messages due to the similarities between the modes. In a study by Ling and Baron (2007), they found that when American college students use either modes of communication (text message or IM) to produce their messages, they often craft them in similar veins with respect to emoticons and lexical shortenings, sentence punctuation, and transmission length (pp. 291–298). Those linguistic characteristics can also be seen in GroupMe as well. But unlike traditional text messaging on an iOS or Android, where a user is limited to the number of people in a group chat, GroupMe allows for countless people to be part of the same conversation—a distinguishable factor that makes it an attractive choice for users deciding which group messaging app to get. Moreover, GroupMe is

growing in popularity. As of September 2019, GroupMe had over 10.75 million active monthly users (Clement, 2020). Regardless of the choice in which to communicate, there appears to be analogous rhetorical thinking that takes place in identical modes. And given the staggering number of users, and the rising popularity of the app, there is much to be learned about the cognitive process of students' composing processes in GroupMe.

Research Questions and Rationale for This Study

This study examines GroupMe as a site of composing among students at a midwestern university in Ohio. At this university, GroupMe is the main form of communication among fraternities and sororities to provide information regarding the operation of the organizations and about events taking place. Among classmates, GroupMe chats are created to build a community where students can ask questions about assignments, send reminders of homework due, form study groups, or talk to instructors. The kind of writing that is emblematic of GroupMe can be referred to as interactive networked writing (INW), which is “writing, accomplished with a keyboard or keypad, which is distributed via networked technologies and happens mostly in real time” (Haas et al., 2011, p. 277). Other forms of INW include short message service, chat functions in Skype and Facebook, and social network sites (Haas et al., 2011, p. 278). Two questions form the basis of this study: (1) What kind of rhetorical thinking occurs when students use GroupMe? and (2) In what way does the discourse community of GroupMe affect the way students compose messages?

Unlike previous studies analyzing computer-mediated communication, this study concentrates on students' cognitive thinking as they compose and what students may learn from this process of thinking. The meaning of ‘cognitive’ in the process of writing is derived from the work of Kumari (2016): “defining the rhetorical problem, identifying the rhetorical situation, determining the audience, setting goals for writing, planning for the text by generating, and

organizing ideas” (p. 1). Research shows that learning does occur in a synchronous form because of the mental tasks that goes into the construction and composition of a message: “When learners juxtapose different languages, discourses, styles, and approaches, they gain substantively in meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic abilities and in their ability to reflect critically on complex systems and their interactions” (New London Group, 1996, p. 69). By studying what goes through students’ minds as they compose, and why students make the decisions they do as they compose, writing instructors can make a strong case to continue to study CMC as a genre. They can also advocate for GroupMe’s presence in the curriculum as an acceptable venue for learning about composing and for practicing writing skills in a digital environment. Furthermore, writing instructors can harness this group messaging app to enhance students’ digital literacy and to create alternative assignments that augment the skills students tend to use in this messaging app for broader applications as well as promote learning transfer outside the university.

The final reason why the researcher chose to study GroupMe is due to the positive learning outcomes that can be derived from using CMC. For example, in Blackburne and Nardone’s (2018) study, they tracked students’ emails over a ten-year period to see the effects of technology on their lives. Blackburne and Nardone wanted to know whether students in the current times, because of the large presence of digital media in students’ lives, are more rhetorically aware when they write to their instructors than before without this looming digital presence. The researchers measured five criteria in evaluating the emails: type of content, tone, authoritative level, attention to audience, and success of communication (pp. 421–428). The results revealed that students’ new email messages scored higher in the rhetorical awareness department as opposed to the old messages (59% vs. 71.7%) (p. 429). Given the results of Blackburne and Nardone’s study, there are some possible connections between CMC and rhetorical knowledge and knowledge of conventions.

There is, unquestionably, a link between the kinds of rhetorical activities students partake in when they use GroupMe and when they engage in other forms of communication style in other contexts. As such, it is worth investigating the GroupMe app to see why writing instructors should integrate this CMC into their classrooms as another approach to meeting course outcomes.

Method

The data reported in this study were based on an IRB-approved qualitative study that examined students' rhetorical activities in GroupMe and its role in their literacy practices. Data consisted of responses from surveys and semi-structured interviews. The follow-up study occurred in the spring of 2019. The survey in the follow-up study was based on a survey from a pilot study conducted the semester before. In this revised survey for the present study, there were 17 questions, six of which were based on demographics (name, gender, age, year in college, and two questions regarding race), and the remaining questions were related to students' composing practices in GroupMe. Some of the questions from the pilot study were carried over to the follow-up study, but there were questions that were deleted, reworded, and added.

In the spring semester of 2019, students were informed on the first day of class that they were going to be using GroupMe (in addition to email) as a regular tool to receive information from the instructor and to talk to their peers about anything related to the class. In the pilot study conducted on GroupMe the previous semester, students were asked whether they used GroupMe, and all 18 of them responded in the affirmative. Given that result, the researcher was convinced the students in the follow-up study were going to be familiar with the app to some extent. If students were not familiar with the app, the researcher was confident they would become experts at using the app in a matter of days due to its similarities to other CMC. Students in the present study were not given any restrictions on how or when to use the class's GroupMe chat other than to avoid

writing inappropriate messages or comments that should not be in a professional environment (in other words, students had to use their best judgment when they wanted to be active in the chat). Students were also free to use the app for other purposes outside of class.

Like the pilot study, the survey in the follow-up study was distributed through Qualtrics; students were emailed the Qualtrics survey within the last month of the semester. The pilot study in the fall of 2018 was based on data surveyed from a junior composition class (all native speakers of English) and no interviews were conducted. In the follow-up study, the survey and interviews were based on responses from two classes taught by the researcher. The follow-up study, like the pilot study, took place at a large, midwestern public research institution located in Ohio. All participants consisted of native speakers of English. The first-year composition class had 19 freshmen and 2 sophomores, and the junior composition class had 3 sophomores, 10 juniors, and 7 seniors. Both classes mostly comprised white students, with age ranging from 18–22 years old. Students had a variety of college majors (e.g., accounting, mechanical engineering, physical therapy, social work, sports management). From the first-year composition class, 16 (out of 21) students decided to participate in the study. And from the junior composition class, 15 (out of 20) students decided to participate in the study. The study's sample size had 31 students total (17 males and 14 females), resulting in a 75.6% response rate. Students who participated in the study by completing the survey were awarded extra credit toward their final course grade.

Data were also collected from semi-structured interviews. Reviewing students' responses in the follow-up survey suggested that some of their responses had potential in helping shed insight into the research questions. Thus, conducting interviews with students was necessary for them to elaborate and clarify their responses. For the interview, the researcher was interested in an introspective analysis of students' writing process: what did they think about before and during

their composing process in GroupMe and what drove their decision-making process? A few students were selected to come to the researcher's office (or to one of the classrooms) for the interview. Students were not required to participate in the interview to receive the extra credit.

Any interviews conducted were based on voluntary participation by the students. Consent was received prior to scheduling the interview appointments, and interviews were recorded for transcription purposes. In total, 3 students (1 male and 2 females) were interviewed from the first-year composition class and 5 students (4 males and 1 female) were interviewed from the junior composition class. Each interview was preceded by restating the purpose of the research project and providing students with an opportunity to ask any questions before beginning. Based on the student responses from the survey, they were asked questions intended to best understand how GroupMe has played a role in their literacy practices (i.e., what rhetorical knowledge or knowledge of conventions were present). Students were free to answer the questions how they saw fit and follow-up questions were asked where necessary. No interview went past the ten-minute mark.

Survey Results, Interview Findings, and Discussion

The survey data from the follow-up study revealed that GroupMe is one of the main, and arguably, dominant channels of communication for students, at least at this midwestern university in Ohio. Students appreciate using the app, as it represents perhaps the easiest and fastest way to send and receive messages. Even though students have a wealth of communication channels to choose from—phone calls, text messages, emails, messaging apps—it is apparent from the data that GroupMe is the “go to” choice for students when it comes to conversing with members of their network. When students engage in this app, they are simultaneously displaying several forms of rhetorical thinking when they compose messages. They may, for example, think about what tone

to use when crafting a message to a professor, what may be the best time of the day to send a message to a classmate, or when may it be acceptable to use informal language to a superior.

When asked how often students used GroupMe in their communication practices, 54.8% (17/31) of them said ‘sometimes’ they used GroupMe, with 32.2% (10/31) saying they used GroupMe ‘most of the time.’ Of all participants who were users of GroupMe, 51.6% (16/31) have been using GroupMe for approximately 3–4 years, and 41.9% (13/31) have been using the app for 1–2 years. The students surveyed were members of several GroupMe chats. The data showed that the minimum number of GroupMe chats students belonged to was 3, with a maximum of 83, and the mean falling at 16; the standard deviation was 16.58. Students used the app to chat with classmates mostly, followed by graduate teaching assistants and professors, with friends and employers following closely behind. None used the app to chat with family, according to the data.

While the focus of this article is mainly on the follow-up study, it also introduces results from the researcher’s pilot study conducted the previous semester. Findings from the pilot study is intended to provide more data on the research questions, which will show the consistency in student responses to similar survey questions. In the pilot study, students in a junior composition class (Writing, Reading, and Rhetoric in the Profession) were surveyed. They were asked whether they thought about what they wrote before they wrote it, and 94.4% (17/18) of the students said they did. While the survey questions did not specifically use the word ‘audience’ in any question in the pilot study, students were asked whether the members who belonged in their GroupMe chats influenced what they wrote, when they wrote, or how they wrote. In turn, 88.2% (15/17) believed the members did play some role in the construction and outcome of their messages.

Just like in the pilot study, the researcher was still curious as to how the audience may affect the construction and outcome of a message. There was a heavy focus on the role of audience in the

revised survey for the follow-up study (by specifically using ‘audience’ as a term of art in the survey questions). Students were asked whether the audience (i.e., the members of their GroupMe chats) affected their messages in some way, and overwhelmingly 90.3% (28/31) said they did. During the interviews, all the participants said that because their professors were in some of their GroupMe chats or because they were writing a message in their class’s GroupMe chat, they wanted to sound formal; and formal in the students’ words meant avoiding slang or jokes or abbreviations (i.e., students used proper grammar and punctuation as a sign of formality). But when students wanted to talk to their friends in other chats, none of them minded sounding informal because their friends expected a different level of formality. Courtney, for example, felt that if she were to sound too formal in some of her chats, her friends would find it weird. The data from this study mirrors the findings from Drouin and Davis (2009) and Drouin (2011) on the proper application of textese for the right audience.

The rhetorical situation sometimes calls for students to account for tone and formality as a measurement of appropriateness to an audience. In the follow-up study, then, students were asked when they compose a message in GroupMe whether they worry about tone and level of formality. In turn, 51.6% (16/31) said they do worry; Michael, for example, said “since I use GroupMe for a lot of my courses at University, usually I would just keep a professional tone.” Frank even gave an example of why he finds the tone to matter: “especially reading something, you can’t hear the person say it. It’s really important to know how that’s going to sound when you read it back.” The survey proceeded to ask whether students put in the same amount of effort in terms of thinking about the quality of their messages (i.e., do they think about format, structure, mechanics, tone, style) when they compose in GroupMe as they would an email. The data disclosed that 83.8%

(26/31) said they do not put in the same amount of effort in composing in GroupMe, with 16.1% (5/31) saying they do put in some kind of effort to produce a quality message.

Given the evidence of CMC studies offering students a space to develop and improve on their knowledge of lower-order writing concerns, students were asked if they paid attention to their spelling, punctuation, and grammar when they write in this particular CMC (i.e., GroupMe). The data uncovered that 54.8% (17/31) said they do pay attention. These findings are consistent with the results of the pilot study when students were asked this same question, where more than half of them (55.5% or 10/18) said they paid attention to their spelling, punctuation, and grammar as they composed their messages in GroupMe. In the follow-up study, Austin and Tyler, for instance, found the presence of errors in sentences to be distracting—something they both try to avoid. Austin said the following: “I think enough grammar mistakes, even in an important message that everyone needs to see, will distract from the point of the message entirely.” In addition, some of the students interviewed, such as Michela and Sonny, mentioned that because they did not have rapport with everyone in their GroupMe chats, they wanted to have error-free sentences to help maintain their sense of professionalism. This sort of mindfulness of others’ grammatical issues could heighten students’ self-consciousness of their own mistakes and encourage them to learn more about grammar rules and proper sentence constructions for future applications.

When this GroupMe study first began, the researcher was interested in whether the students used any concepts they learned from their English courses (e.g., rhetorical knowledge or knowledge of conventions), past or present, in their GroupMe chats. In the pilot study, students were not provided a list of concepts from which to choose in the survey question. Rather, students had to write in their responses because providing pre-determined choices to select from could limit what they wrote, and students might end up checking boxes without knowing exactly what any of

the concepts might mean. Of the 13 responses from the pilot study, 7 said they did not employ concepts they learned from their English courses. Four students responded with using grammar and punctuation concepts in their GroupMe chats (“proper grammar and punctuation”; “punctuation, conciseness”). And two students responded that they were aware of their audiences as they composed (“I use rhetoric, in terms of knowing what your audience wants from you”; “Being professional, awareness of the discourse community”).

In the semester following the pilot study, the researcher was still curious whether students used what they had learned in their English courses when they wrote messages in the GroupMe chat (as a measurement of WPA outcomes achievements), so the same question was asked in the follow-up survey. As with the question format in the pilot study, students were not provided with a list of English concepts from which to choose for the same reason mentioned above. The results from this study aligned with those from the pilot study. Most students answered in the negative: 77.4% (24/31) said they do not rely on past knowledge, with 22.5% (7/31) saying they do. The responses here were disappointing, but had students been provided with some examples of English concepts that students were taught or should have learned during their time in their class, perhaps the data would have been different, perhaps more enriching. But because students did not have any choices from which to choose, they may have had some trouble coming up with specific English concepts, or some may have not wanted to put forth the effort to provide a response.

Based on some of the interviews from the students, GroupMe has, at the very least, pushed students to think about how to tailor their messages to the demands of their audience more often than usual, leading students think about the rhetorical situation habitually in a CMC environment. For instance, Frank said that with GroupMe, students understand who their audience is, and students have a better understanding of how their messages should read when they have to address

different groups (e.g., friends, classmates, professors). Michela said the following: “So if I’m typing in my sorority, I’ll send it like a text message. Like I won’t really even regard the grammar or spelling or anything. But if it’s for a class, I’ll make sure I’m more formal. I watch out with my grammar and my spelling.” It can be argued, then, that CMC writing is a goal-directed process, a term proffered by Flowers and Hayes (1981) to label composing that drives writers to think about how purpose and audience may affect the creation of messages. Cognitive process is involved when students have to make choices in creating a message for the right opportune, which was the case with students from the researcher’s study.

GroupMe has also given students a space to think about their ethos—a common artistic appeal students are often taught in a first-year composition class. Students are aware that if they are in a group with some people they consider important, such as professors or professional student organizations, they would want to represent themselves with a sense of professionalism. Courtney, for example, wants to be taken seriously and wants to be perceived as sophisticated: “I don’t want them to think that I’m not educated enough. If I’m in a group chat for a specific student organization, I don’t want them to think that I’m not credible and therefore I don’t belong there if I’m talking informally and joking around and using slang and stuff like that.” Once students are in college, they may begin to worry about their credibility, reputation, and future. Many of the students, in fact, mentioned ‘professionalism’ at some point during the interview when it comes to making rhetorical choices in GroupMe. Understanding the significance of projecting a certain voice to the public is what Hauser (1998) would consider as possessing a keen sense of sound judgment when it comes to engaging in dialogue between one’s identity and that of a social entity (pp. 96–98). Students are able to recognize that the words they utter are an extension of themselves (and who they represent), and their words can travel beyond the app and live in the public sphere.

Finally, the survey asked students whether they believed GroupMe has improved their writing skills. What ‘improved writing skills’ meant was not defined for participants. Rather, students generally know where they are with their writing skills and where they want to be, so students were in the best position to pass judgment on whether GroupMe has helped them improve some aspect of their writing skills, however big or small. In response to this question, 90.3% (28/31) said their writing skills did not improve, with 9.6% (3/31) saying it did. The affirmative number is low, but there were some students who found the use of GroupMe to be beneficial to their learning and writing skills, nonetheless. Sonny, for example, learned how to be concise for the type of mode he was using: “Just to be concise instead of beating around the bush ... I can just cut it down to what’s important and what’s factual, what needs to be said.” For other students, GroupMe has given them a chance to reflect on their messages and to see the value of writing accurate sentences. GroupMe has compelled Austin, for instance, to re-read his messages out loud to himself so that he can hear it back and catch any mistakes: “I would have a habit of writing exactly how I would talk, which is not a good practice in certain situations. But GroupMe ... I’m saying in my head what I want to type ... and I look and like okay, well that sounds a lot better coming out of my mouth than it does when I read it. So then I’ll go back and change it to where it looks better in a message.” These findings suggest that GroupMe, while it may not help everyone with improving their writing skills, the app can help some students see the value of the writing process and help them appreciate the importance of editing and revising messages before submitting a final product.

Discussion on Research Questions

Reviewing the research questions posed beforehand, the first question this study attempted to answer was figuring out what kind of rhetorical thinking occurs when students use GroupMe.

As the data demonstrate, it appears that students seem to be engaged in cognitive thinking when they compose messages in GroupMe. Professors and graduate teaching assistants should embrace this form of technology as part of the curriculum to teach students to develop and hone their literacy and rhetorical skills to be applied in a range of social contexts and to give them additional exposure to writing round the clock. Instead of having students just write essays for an imaginary audience, writing instructors should also have students use GroupMe to write to a real audience. When it comes to writing for a real audience, students may approach the prompt differently and write with a different mindset. They would most likely take this type of writing seriously because it has real-world consequences. Austin's conscious perception of his actions in GroupMe (mentioned above) is indicative of this consequence, which may be referred to as practical reasoning. Practical reasoning "is concerned with making choices about the preferable and the good specific to their situations" (Hauser, 1998, p. 96). Messages authored in GroupMe can remain in a chat room for an indefinite amount of time. Once a message is sent, it cannot be undone (unless the owner of the chat room deletes that specific chat). If a mistake is made in a message, it could be costly to a sender's reputation. Thus, students should think about the choices they make in constructing their thoughts, which may mean having to revisit earlier steps of the writing process.

Members of GroupMe chats can influence how students write to some degree. It is noticeable from the interviews that students pay attention to lower-order writing concerns such as spelling and grammar when they use GroupMe, similar to how they would pay attention to these concerns in writing a traditional essay in a Word document. This attention to detail may be explained by Winet's (2016) study, which found that when students know that their classmates and teacher can see and critique their messages, there is a tendency by students to carefully craft their sentences to make sure they are perfect (pp. 1–6). The findings from Winet's study can be

confirmed in the present study because the students mentioned how much they paid attention to the minute details in their sentences. The fear of being critique by others if students spell something wrong or have grammatical errors may lead them to being more careful about how they formulate their sentences and how the content of their messages reads once it is sent. One of the participants, Tyler, said the following: “I think about who I’m messaging because I do have GroupMe that don’t have professors versus ones that do have professors ... making sure I use the right ‘to’ or the right ‘there’ and it’s more grammatical in a sense.” This deep reflection in sentence-level errors means that there may be some level of cognitive process involved (e.g., achieving a set goal for an identifiable rhetorical situation) as a message is being assembled and translated.

Even when students write in a less-traditional space like GroupMe, the criteria for good writing still applies. The data from the researcher’s surveys and interviews validated that most students still believe that good writing is about grammatically correct sentences. This belief was the case with the four students from the pilot study who mentioned that grammar and punctuation were English concepts they apply to their messages in GroupMe, as well as more than half of the participants from the follow-up study who also tended to pay careful attention to structural concerns. While grammatically correct sentences are indicative of good writing, good writing also involves more than a pure focus on local concerns. Writing instructors, then, need to continue to teach students that good writing, no matter the place one writes, is also about logical arguments, plausible claims, good organization, creative ideas, and more (including a consideration for the rhetorical situation). Students recognize this high standard of writing when they work in CMC, being aware of the dynamic relationship among variables like genre, audience, and context, as they strive to be effective writers in the spaces they use for routine communication.

The second question this study attempted to answer was to understand how the discourse community of GroupMe affects the way students compose a message to an audience. To start, the functionalities and characteristics of GroupMe can be categorized as a discourse community. John Swales (1990) identified six characteristics that define a discourse community: “(1) a broadly agreed set of common public goals; (2) mechanisms of intercommunication among its members; (3) uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback; (4) utilizes and possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims; (5) acquired some specific lexis; and (6) has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursal expertise” (pp. 471–473). Whether a GroupMe chat was created to further the mission of an on-campus organization or a class, students join, or are asked to join, these communities to help meet the primary goal of the group. This public goal is generally inscribed in some governing document like a bylaw or a constitution, or even a class syllabus. In addition, discourse communities are marked by intercommunication among members that is done to provide information to a relevant audience. For GroupMe, this can be seen in creating polls to figure out when meetings should be held, asking for feedback on an event flyer, or having direct conversations with a group about something related to a class.

As far as the genre element of a discourse community, GroupMe is a genre that is used as a form of communication on a recurring basis for certain groups about anything fitting to the moment. Given that GroupMe does have similar features analogous to text messaging, readers expect messages to be short and concise, and in some contexts, be marked by formal or informal language. But some communication needs to be done in other ways, aside from GroupMe, simply because of the nature of the message. For example, at the midwestern university in Ohio, members of student organizations like student government use email to distribute minutes, which may run

several pages long and may be easier to read on a computer instead of the interface of GroupMe. Students may also use email to send a draft of a project (which may be a large file) and to send a reminder in GroupMe for their classmates to check their email for this information. There are cases in which GroupMe may be the ideal genre and other cases in which it may not be. The appropriate genre depends on the situation, which students would learn to identify through practice.

Furthermore, discourse communities have a lexis that members of a community would generally know by virtue of association. When people are part of an exclusive community, they recognize certain vocabularies that are usually not common to outsiders. For example, students at the midwestern university in Ohio may use terms like ‘connect’ to refer to a Spanish homework assignment or may use ‘cluster’ to refer to a collaborative business project. Or members of a fraternity may use terms like ‘76’ or ‘27’ to refer to the location of houses in the town. When composing a GroupMe message, students would ideally use a lexis that is discernible to other members in that particular chat. Cheng (2010) looked at how the use of CMC promoted collaborative dialogue, which helped L2 graduate students developed their academic literacy in the applied linguistic discourse community. As such, being a part of a discourse community means being able to speak the language. Knowledge of the lexis, then, is bestowed upon membership most likely through frequent discourses and observations. Members, therefore, would articulate specific lexis during the composing stages in GroupMe as part of their normal exchange. In return, the author of a message expects other members to know what they are talking about without needing an explanation to accompany the messages.

Finally, membership in a discourse community (e.g., GroupMe) has its requirements. To be part of a discourse community, people should learn about the community they wish to enter. They generally should learn about the group’s ideals, beliefs, values, and ways of talking to each

other. If a student wants to be part of the discourse community of journalism majors, for example, they should know about the field, how journalists communicate with other journalists, how their industry writes, and how to disseminate their work to the public. Membership is not automatic but is acquired, learned, or earned; they leave or are removed once their membership expires. For a GroupMe chat used for a student organization or a class, admittance may be based on factors such as membership dues or class registration. Once they are admitted, members would generally portray the identity associated with that membership and speak and act accordingly. Members may also learn the ways the people in their discourse community interact with each other by observation and then may apply such knowledge to their ways of communicating. There are rules (written or unwritten) that members should abide by to keep the communication in the network running smoothly. And like any discourse community, members are expected to follow conventions (and to acknowledge their existence) to showcase their belonging to the group. Seeing GroupMe as a discourse community may help explain why students address their audience in particular ways, and this recognition may help explain why certain choices are made when students partake in their vernacular discourses. This conscious awareness may explain why some students employ rhetorical knowledge or knowledge of conventions or both in their messages. Hauser (1998) would most likely view the public nature of a discourse community as evidence that participation in the public life entails “more than brute impulse or caprice” (p. 96).

While the second research question looks specifically at GroupMe as a discourse community and the ways members in those spaces can affect how a message is composed, discourse communities can also extend beyond serving as a space for the development of rhetorical thinking to serving as a space for a support system. For example, studies have shown that support can be critical for personal development. Timmis (2012) found that instant messaging has helped

support and sustain “personal relationships, trust and intimacy amongst participants” (p. 14). Being connected to a group over an extended period can naturally contribute to sharing feelings, needs, and fears among members, which can help maintain the ties of communities and build collaborative partnerships (pp. 15–16). During the interview for the researcher’s follow-up study, some students mentioned having several types of GroupMe chats, including those for their fraternities and sororities. Those students may have a closer bond to the members in their Greek organization GroupMe chat than from the members in a class GroupMe chat. In both the first year and junior composition class for the researcher’s study, students used the class’s GroupMe chat for posting homework questions, including asking what readings were due and how to cite sources. Communication among the various GroupMe chats can offer affective support, such as encouraging peers to meet assignments deadlines and providing motivational support to do well in their classes. Additionally, Karapanos, Teixeira and Gouveia (2016) argue that CMC messages can be more expressive. They found that through WhatsApp, the 254 users facilitate intimate communications that are absent in face-to-face and other synchronous communication channels, such as the ability to craft detailed, emotional messages and the capability to share rich media (e.g., memes and funny videos) to allow users to feel present in events (p. 895). This type of communication that appeals to emotions is known as *pathos*—a rhetorical concept students typically learn in a composition class. Though none of the students interviewed in the researcher’s study had mentioned using GroupMe as a venue to express themselves emotionally, studies such as Hu, Wood, Smith, and Westbrook (2004) have shown that frequent uses of CMC with friends resulted in high levels of verbal, affective, and social intimacy.

Aside from personal support among friends and classmates, students can also use GroupMe as a space to grow their network for their careers. For example, Alexandra from the researcher’s

study wants to portray a good image of herself (i.e., ethos) when she types in her GroupMe because anyone can affect her professional life: “I see professors as connections ... I feel it’s good to have a good relationship with not only your classmates and your co-workers, but your professors as well.” When students think about how their identity will be reflected in their messages and how they want to be perceived by people in their network, they would most likely put some effort into producing quality messages—a sign of rhetorical thinking. Regarding professional development, once students enter their chosen profession, they can further use GroupMe to help them transfer their school knowledge to the real world. Pimmer et al. (2019) found that mobile instant messaging, such as WhatsApp, can serve as a platform to bridge the learning from school to the workplace. In a study of 114 nursing graduates, participants agreed that WhatsApp contributed to an enhancement of knowledge acquisition and professional connectedness and to fewer experiences of professional isolation (pp. 102–112). Being a part of GroupMe chats that are specialized in nature (e.g., clubs for college majors) can help students develop their professional identities. In the real world, students may continue to use GroupMe to stay connected with friends and classmates as a way to offer support and to continue to strengthen bonds already developed; Gronseth and Hebert (2019) examined GroupMe usage among graduate students and found that some students wanted to extend classroom conversations and collaboration beyond the course. Hence, the GroupMe app used in the real world can serve as a link to help students make a transition from seeing the app as a genre used for academic purposes to an app as a genre used for career goals.

Pedagogical Implementation

Though their article is dated, the New London Group (1996) realized that literacy in the future (i.e., the information technology era) was going to become complicated and that the teaching of literacy, in turn, was going to meet the same fate. The New London Group arguably did not

believe that students should just be experts of solely writing and interpreting essays. Even Vaccarino et al. (2013) said that “[l]iteracy should enable individuals to achieve their potential in order to participate fully in their community and wider society” (p. 16). Writing instructors today cannot continue to instill in students the power and status of just print-based literacies because communication is multimodal and dynamic, which includes the technologies (e.g., CMC) utilized to speak and write to each other. In fact, Mellati and Khademi (2014) learned that some students who did not possess technology knowledge (e.g., how to communicate in a CMC environment) faced obstacles to achieving their educational goals (p. 224). Consequently, it is important that students get comfortable with the available means that people are using to interact with one another and that writing instructors see these means as an opening to expanding students’ digital literacy.

With the introduction of multiliteracies comes a new way of teaching (New London Group, 1996, p. 64). Hinged on the findings from the researcher’s study, there are benefits that students reap when they use GroupMe. How can writing instructors integrate GroupMe into the classroom? To start, writing instructors should require GroupMe to act as a primary (or secondary) form of communication for class. It is important for students to get familiar with CMC like GroupMe. The instructor would be a member of the same group chat as the students, and the instructor would set requirements regarding what content is permissible to post. By having a GroupMe chat for a class with an instructor, this discourse community will encourage students to not only consider audience and context during composing, but also to be cautious of sentence structures and tone.

CMC studies have shown that EFL and ESL students can learn grammar rules through continuous CMC usage, but this outcome can also be true for native speakers of English. Using CMC in which there is an audience of classmates and instructors would hopefully encourage students to watch out for grammar and punctuation errors (i.e., engage in cognitive processes of

writing). As a byproduct, students will continue to enhance their understanding of lower-order writing concerns; a study by Hardiana (2017) discovered that 56.7% of students agreed CMC helped them detect and correct errors in their own writing (p. 157). The instructor and the students can also help educate each other on grammar rules and accurate uses of idioms and proper sentence constructions, among other writing techniques. This acquisition of knowledge is based on the idea that everyone possesses different levels of knowledge on a variety of things and that people complement each other strengths and weaknesses (Dobao, 2014; Donato, 1994; Keogh, 2017).

CMC should also be employed in a class to help certain groups of students learn more effectively. Having the option for some students to receive feedback on their writing via CMC has shown to help reduce writing anxiety. In Hussin et al.'s (2015) study, they investigated the effects of CMC applications on EFL/ESL students' writing anxiety. The findings revealed that students preferred to receive teacher and peer feedback within the CMC applications rather than face-to-face (p. 169). CMC helped students "feel more comfortable and confident" (p. 169); and when students had a positive attitude toward writing, their writing ability increased (p. 170). Writing instructors, then, can apply the results from Hussin et al.'s study to their own teaching in a broader sense. Introverted students, specifically, can benefit from using CMC to boost their experiences in the classroom. Writing instructors, for instance, can answer these students' questions in a private chat and can provide them support at a moment's notice, all in a less intimidating setting. In the researcher's follow-up study, there were some students who were quiet in class and some that rarely participated in class discussions. But such students were active in GroupMe and constantly have asked questions through the app. Nine students from the first-year composition class and 5 students from the junior composition class had sent the researcher private messages on class-related matters

rather than ask them during class. CMC like GroupMe can help reduce writing anxiety, and it can also help students become more comfortable interacting with the instructor.

At the same time, incorporating CMC into the classroom allows students to witness and reflect on the writing process in apps like GroupMe more acutely. Writing instructors often teach students that writing is not just about a polished product but that the process of getting there holds some weight. With the use of GroupMe, students will have opportunities to practice the revision stage of the writing process (and other stages like generating ideas) because they will be more inclined to re-read their sentences and make any necessary changes before they send their messages off to the public sphere. When people write emails, especially to recipients like a supervisor or a co-worker, they sometimes like to have their friends or colleagues review their messages to make sure the email reads well and is void of errors. GroupMe is no different. Students can ask their peers to read over their CMC messages to make sure the tone, level of formality, or sentence structures are appropriate and correct for their purposes. This reliance on others to help make sure the product is acceptable is an essential part of the writing process. As an assignment, students could be asked to reflect on their writing process through class discussions and explain how variables like audience, purpose, context may have affected the overall composing process.

At the end of each month, or even week, students could be asked to write a reflective essay on their rhetorical choices in GroupMe. Questions could include the following: What kind of rhetorical knowledge or knowledge of conventions were used to create and respond to messages? Why did students choose to write a message in GroupMe over email? How was the writing process of constructing a message in GroupMe different from constructing an academic essay in a Word document? In what ways did students' identity in one of their discourse communities (i.e., one of the GroupMe chats) affect how they were expected to sound in their messages? This short

exercise/homework assignment could also serve as a guide to see if any learning transfer (i.e., what English concepts did students apply to their messages?) occurred from the classroom to the digital space and vice versa. In effect, when students reflect on their styles of communication, they essentially engage in thinking about their cognitive processes, which could serve as a measurement to see which Writing Program Administration outcomes were met.

Conclusion

The transition from print-based literacies to multiliteracies as a principal communication medium is real and happening (Garcia, Luke, & Seglem, 2018). Writing instructors—and all instructors—should consider incorporating this group messaging app as part of their curriculum to prepare students for the multitude of digital methods being used in society. Students are among the pioneers for the latest technologies, and studies have shown enormous learning benefits when it comes to writing from using computer-mediated communication. Given the features, benefits, and functionalities that come from CMC such as GroupMe, this is a space that instructors need to consider as a way to improve students' writing skills and to encourage students' continued practice of writing. Researcher like Howard (2012) has already suggested an instructional paradigm to help instructors integrate CMC into a pedagogical context.

It is important to note that this study is not dismissing print-based literacies nor is it advocating to privilege CMC over non-CMC as a better learning context. There are cases that show students absorbing information in both contexts effectively. Noyan and Kocoglu (2019) found that EFL students exhibited equal success in content, grammar, organization, and mechanics (i.e., writing competencies) using WhatsApp as well as pen and paper (pp. 41–43). But there are cases where one learning environment is more effective for students. Vendityaningtyas and Styati (2018) noticed that students' writing quality was better after face-to-face communication than it was after

using CMC. There are findings, on the other hand, that demonstrate the success of learning writing skills via CMC over face-to-face instruction (Fattah, 2015; Hadriana, 2017; Keogh, 2017). Such discoveries cement the very fact that instructors are teaching students who have distinct learning styles and preferences. Whereas some students may shine in the classroom, others may shine online, so consideration for teaching to both kinds of students should be taken into account.

The researcher's present study argues in favor of including other avenues for literacy learning (such as GroupMe) as a legitimate academic genre, especially given the diversity of student population who communicate in many genres using many modes. In thinking about the common channels people use in school and the workforce—email, Facebook, Twitter, Slack, GroupMe—there is a reminder that vernacular discourses take place in digital spaces just as often as they do in non-digital spaces. Educators across the board have a duty to prepare students to be marketable, well-rounded, and skilled citizens in a democratic society. Students, therefore, need to be taught how to be literate in more than one style of communication.

From the researcher's study, it is apparent that native speakers of English who use GroupMe and other similar apps do so with rhetorical competence. When students write in CMC, they are not just communicating without any cognitive processes involved. They are learning and displaying rhetorical knowledge and knowledge of conventions, at the minimum. Studies on CMC have confirmed considerable improvement in areas such as language acquisition, audience awareness, social context/situations identification, and even increased editing and revision skills. As students' place of education evolves, so too, must instructors' place of teaching. Computer-mediated communication is a valuable space, one that can be regarded as its own discourse community (and public sphere), that is rich with rhetorical activities, critical thinking, and identity/voice negotiations. Instructors who disregard the potential and possibilities of CMC like GroupMe as a

contender for students to develop writing skills and digital literacy are doing harm to their students' future as they transition into a more globalized, transnational society, where communication is happening at all levels.

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