


More Knowledgeable Other(s): Sensemaking and Networking in Digital Ad-Hocracies

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ABSTRACT

Vygotsky's (1934; 1980) sociocultural theories of learning posit that learning is a socially negotiated activity. Learners can sustain this activity, and specifically how they engage in literacy practices, through participatory experiences with experts, known in sociocultural theory as a more knowledgeable other (MKO). However, hierarchies in academia can make these possibilities for collaboration scarce or difficult to break through for doctoral students, sustaining traditional hierarchies and bureaucracies of education. Digital platforms, though, can afford the possibility of subverting these divisions of social order in the academy and make room for different interlocutors to not only better access these MKOs but to also become an analogous MKO. In socially-mediated spaces such as Twitter, otherwise known as X, an acceptance of ontological and epistemological plurality can occur in virtual communities of practice. Through three examples with the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Writing and Literacies monthly Twitter chats, the authors showcase how Vygotsky's concept of the MKO can appear in digital spaces, demonstrate the participatory nature of online writing communities, present the possibilities in providing opportunities for online collaborative experiences, and highlight the importance of a plurality of knowledge in public scholarship.

KEYWORDS

digital literacies, sociocultural theory, ad-hocracies, writing community

According to Pollard and Kumar (2021), the relationship between students and faculty mentors is a key variable in determining the success and quality of graduate education. Similarly, graduate students' abilities to form meaningful connections with peers plays a vital role in ensuring a sense of connectedness that fosters student wellbeing and creates future opportunities for productive collaboration (Martin, 2021; Roberts, 2010). With the recent COVID-19 crisis shifting programs across the country into distance or hybrid formats, there has been increased pressure on doctoral students and faculty alike to cultivate those connections in virtual spaces. While most colleges use formal networks and platforms to facilitate those connections, Ardichivili (2008) claims there are unique affordances to virtual communities of practice that form organically online. More specifically, there are a number of studies suggesting Twitter is a particularly useful platform for fostering such relationships (Ebner et al., 2010; Gao et al., 2012; Risser, 2013). Considering EdD programs are primarily designed to cater to working professionals (Perry, 2012), online communities provide opportunities to better network and collaborate with scholars and fellow graduate students who would not be accessible otherwise.

We posit that digital communities of practice can increase opportunities for networking, mentoring, and promoting one's research and scholarship, and we offer our own experiences as doctoral students to illustrate this claim.

As members of the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Writing and Literacies Special Interest Group's Graduate Student Board, the authors of this article were uniquely positioned to explore the digital affordances offered by virtual communities of practice through organizing and hosting monthly Twitter chats with senior scholars in the field of literacies research. On the last Tuesday of every month, the board would invite prominent literacy scholars to tweet a series of questions based on a self-selected topic related to their research. Respondents would reply to the provided questions using the #literacies hashtag, share resources related to chat topics, and engage with fellow chat participants. To access the chats, participants often view advertisements from various social media outlets, including Facebook and Twitter. Within these platforms, members of the Writing and Literacies community, as well as the broader community,



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retweet and share the advertisements with the aim of reaching a diverse audience of participants. The Writing and Literacies Twitter chats serve as an exemplar of how digital platforms can provide a context for scholars to form impromptu communities of practice and connect over shared research interests. Additionally, the public nature of Twitter chats means that practitioners, professional learning facilitators, and administrators were and continue to be able to access and join the discussion as the chats are archived. The brief intersection of knowledge, skills, and perspectives offered by these different groups allows for the creation of systems that Doctorow (2003) refers to as ad-hocracies, which contrast sharply with the traditional hierarchies and bureaucracies of education.

As emerging scholars ourselves, one a current EdD student, one a PhD student, and one a recent graduate of a doctoral program and current assistant professor, we have frequently been told or heard the stories of other scholars being told, "You need to read more, you need to do more research, you need to network." We have discovered that it is almost impossible to meet everyone we want to meet or read everything we need to read. Serving on the Special Interest Group's Communications Team, we were exposed to researchers and scholarship via Twitter chats, which transformed the game for us and encouraged additional research. We recall a conversation that highlighted how many graduate students experience intimidation while meeting with established scholars. Over time, we learned Twitter chats may assist with alleviating apprehension in this situation since they do away with the hierarchical structure of face-to-face dialogue and instead promote informal, pleasant conversation.

In engaging with these digital literacy practices, emerging and practiced researchers can find more joy and opportunity for community and collaboration (Hodges, 2017; Hunter et al., 2018; Loomis, 2018). In this article, we explore the possibilities of writing in the online world through illustrations of three monthly Twitter chats, born from our experience as three doctoral students who are current or former members of the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Writing and Literacies Graduate Student Board. As Hunter and others (2018) argue, those in academia can generate connections between novice and veteran scholars and "contribute meaningfully toward new understandings that could emerge from such investigative partnerships" (p. 44). This article has implications for teachers, researchers, and emerging scholars, particularly EdD students, who want to cultivate educational experiences to be more accessible, equal, and conducive to collaborative learning and knowledge sharing.

SOCIOCULTURAL THEORIES OF LEARNING

We borrow Vygotsky's (1934; 1980) understanding of sociocultural theories of learning as a springboard of inquiry into graduate student experiences with online learning communities. Hodges (2017) sustains that sociocultural theories "emerged from the work of Vygotsky (1980) who posited that children learn about the world around them from more knowledgeable others (MKOs) or those who have a greater mastery of the subject matter" (p. 140). Sociocultural theories thus postulate that social interactions with those who are more expert, or rather those who are the MKOs, aid learners in knowledge construction. Further, Vygotsky (1980) argues that learning does not only follow a top-down model, but it can follow horizontal or bottom-up structures, too, encouraging epistemological plurality in all learners.

Through the avenue of Twitter, users can encourage this kind of meaning making with various opportunities, like "initiating new conversations, joining ongoing discussions, [and] revisiting and rereading portions of the text" (Hunter et al., 2018, p. 43). Thus, in connecting concepts of digital literacy with Vygotsky's sociocultural theories of learning on the focus of MKOs, we propose that immersing oneself in nontraditional ways of networking allows one to share their thoughts and readily engage with MKOs, engaging with the world around them through digital interactions. In this case, our experts or MKOs at any point can be the host or a participant of one of our Twitter chats. Knowledge construction, as we showcase, happens in varying directions, and the Twitter chats encourage a plurality of knowledge.

With sociocultural theories of learning in mind, we exhibit how interactions in Twitter chats can lead to growth in participants and hosts. Additionally, we discuss how the participatory nature of digital culture de-emphasizes traditional hierarchies in ways that allow for more collaborative knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer learning (Jenkins, 2006). As we showcase these Twitter chats, one can find an important note on Vygotsky's connection to digital writing on the application Twitter in Smagorinsky's (2024) work. He shares, "It's hard to say what Vygotsky would have thought of tweets, emojis, cultural dialects, and other compositional elements of the multicultural 21st century, especially in a society built around free-market capitalism and its rapid changes, and the inequities it inevitably produces" (p. 237). Even with the change in title of the application to X in 2023 and the change in ownership over time, the foundation of Twitter remains the same despite its entrenchment in growing one's followers through viral, sometimes funny, or shocking messages. Though we cannot go back and ask Vygotsky what he would think now about digital literacies or the evolution of 21st century online spaces, we want to offer these monthly Twitter chats as examples of opportunities for collaborative knowledge building, reflection, and meaning making in the digital world.

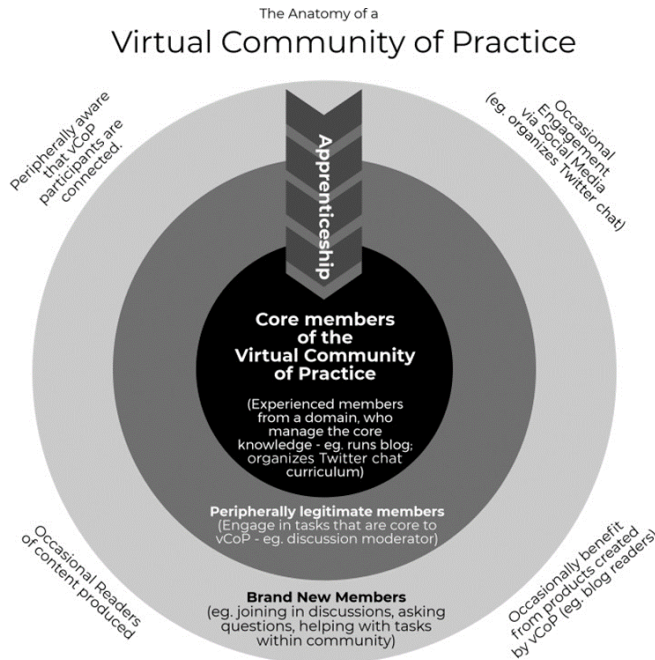
UPLIFTING EXISTING LITERATURE

Literacy is a process where writers learn to comprehend, connect, and question the world in which they live through use of their language and community (Heath, 1983; Smagorinsky, 2024; Warschauer & Tate, 2018). Literacy exists offline and online, but many have found that online platforms afford greater opportunities for collaboration and even epistemological plurality (Hodges, 2017). With the innovations of the 21st century, there are more paths to engage in digital literacy events with people from all over the world and from all walks of life. Reddy et al. (2020) define digital literacy as "the use of digital technology, communications tools, and/or networks to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information in order to function in a knowledge-based society" (p. 82). With digital literacies in mind, we went forward in this study with the understanding of the possibilities that online communities can afford.

Further, several studies posit that online communities allow space for subverting traditional expectations of learning and embrace participants' many ways of being and knowing (Cook & Smith, 2004; Kinloch, 2007; Martin, 2021). Yarris and others' (2019) model of The Anatomy of a Virtual Community of Practice, presented in figure one, represents the ancillary nature of the Twitter chats and the varying levels of participation.



Figure 1. Anatomy of a Virtual Community of Practice (Yarris et al., 2019)



Though focused on medical education, their model illustrates the possibilities of online communities of practice and the importance of supporting “members at all levels of engagement” so they can “experience benefits from participation and feel included and intrinsically motivated to continue” (p. 3). Martin (2021) also highlights the benefits of finding one’s online community for purposes of support, guidance, and intellectual stimulation during and beyond one’s doctoral journey. Martin (2021) argues, “[It] was necessary for me to develop ways of maintaining contact with the [communities of practice] of which I consider myself a member. This was through contact via social media, email, telephone, and other forms of electronic communication” (p. 38). In becoming digitally literate and growing with the new technology introduced in educational spaces each day, we can grow in community and participate in discourses that grow our collective knowledge base (Reddy et al., 2020). Despite the affordances of this technology to create safe spaces for networking, it is important to note that social media is not without drawbacks: increased anxiety (Vannucci et al., 2017), exposure to toxic attitudes or perspectives (Akram, 2017), and even hate speech based on race, gender, and ethnicity (Matamoros-Fernández, 2021) are all possible issues one might face online. In addition to understanding the tools provided by Twitter/X to safely participate in chats and curate our audience, we have taken several steps to prevent these issues. By limiting our external advertising to academic spaces, using hashtags strategically, and focusing chat topics on identity affirming and culturally sustaining pedagogies, our chats have avoided the potential pitfalls of platform networking.

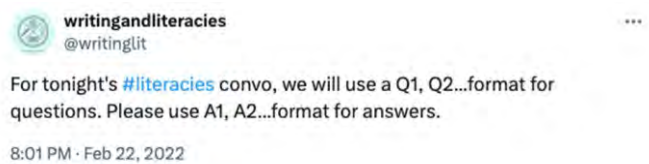
CONTEXT: EXPERIENCING EXPERIENCES

Except for a pause during the month of the AERA annual conference and for a holiday break, each month the AERA Writing and Literacies Graduate Student Board finds a host(s) for monthly

Twitter chats. The host(s) then chooses a critical topic of their choice, and the Graduate Student Board Members help them create a variety of questions to pose to the Writing and Literacies community on the last Tuesday of the month to generate community, to support collaboration, and to advance our collective knowledge of that topic. This experience with online writing and with digital interactions with these expert scholars is one where many people from all over the world join to answer the questions with the #literacies hashtag and to communicate with other like-minded scholars.

Each month, the experience of participating in a Twitter chat teaches participants something new and helps them to network with the MKOs who were that month’s host or who were other users in this chat. This digital space provides users with 280 characters, up from 140, to respond to other participants; therefore, this forces users to be concise in their writing and to choose the most meaningful and impactful responses to questions (Larson, 2017). The rules at play during these chats were that each time we responded to a question, we needed to respond with a tweet that showed which question we were answering. For example, for question one, we answered by starting our tweets with “A1” for answer number one (Wellington, 2022). Another rule of the Twitter chat is that users need to write the hashtag #literacies with each tweet written. This helped all who were participating in the chat to see each tweet in one easily accessible space. The hashtag allowed users to tap the blue #literacies (see figure two) to generate a list of all tweets created with this hashtag.

Figure 2. Rules of the Twitter Chat



Despite Tweet restrictions, the chats are a friendly, intellectual space. Smagorinsky (2013) writes of Vygotsky’s idea of *perezhivanie*, a Russian term which encapsulates what he has deemed the meta-experience, or “the manner in which people experience their experiences” (p. 195). He provides an example of a student who feels shame in schooling because his teacher often corrects his speech to a more dominant form of English. This situation makes this student associate learning with shame, and thus, this learner will feel inferior in education spaces and associate schooling with negativity. The way we experience participating in and helping to facilitate the Twitter chats is meant to be completely counter to this example; instead, the chats are positive, uplifting, and welcoming. Speech, as Vygotsky (1934) defined it, is “a means of social interaction, a means of expression and understanding” (p. 45). As we operated in the chats, the precise language we used helped users to communicate with other participants hours and miles away and to cultivate a strong sense of community.

The speech of the Twitter chats is concise through its technological affordances and restrictions to the 240 characters. The dance in the digital space is an expression of social interactions and a mesh of different cultures; in the Twitter application, rules of play are established, and through interacting with MKOs, other Twitter users strengthen their knowledge and widen their communities. We illustrate the rules of the Twitter chats to show how at once these

chats are open to all languages and thoughts. However, they are still restricted by the digital avenue of Twitter. Despite the character restriction, we present these chats as a supportive online community that is both a learning network as well as a community that cultivates positivity and shows the complexity of the participatory nature of the digital world.

METHODS

The findings in this article stem from a post-hoc analysis (Heaton, 2004) of experiences participating in three online Twitter chats in 2022. These chats serve as sounding boards for important topics in literacy education, and as graduate students, being on the same metaphorical playing field as our hosts was new. We began to grow more confident in our own learning and writing and in discussion with each other, and in reading past chats, we began to create a line of questioning about the power of the digital space. These questions that guided this study included but were not limited to the following:

1. How can graduate students utilize digital avenues like Twitter to interact with senior scholars in their field?
2. How do online communities of practice in academia encourage an acceptance of epistemological plurality?

Guided by these questions, we conducted an initial analysis of January's, February's, and March's Twitter Chats to interpret our experiences. We narrowed our analysis to three chats conducted at the beginning of 2022 because of the rich diversity of experiences that our participants and our hosts offered and because January's chat was the first one for two of the authors. We set out to analyze past chats with our own autoethnographic reflections of our community (Hughes & Pennington, 2017; Schmid, 2019), which became cyclical in nature as we moved back and forth between our thoughts and connections to participants' tweets. As we read through the tweets demarcated by #literacies, we more thoroughly read Vygotsky's (1934; 1980) words to help situate our analysis and findings. His words helped us to think more deeply and better understand our interactions with hosts and other participants.

To gain insight into each other's comprehension of and involvement with the Twitter chats, we also debriefed after our reflections. We reflected on our own positionalities and our initial interactions and understandings of the text of the chats. In doing so, we better ignited our understanding of the data. For reference of our identities, author one is a white, monolingual, and neurodivergent cis-gender woman, and she is a third-year doctoral student but was in her first year at the time the authors collected this data. Author two identifies as a white, neurodivergent cis-gender male and third-year doctoral student. Author three identifies as a transnational woman and was a fourth-year doctoral candidate at the time of data collection. Understanding and interrogating our own identities helped us to better view the Twitter chats with critical eyes, lending an element of reflection that strengthened our analysis.

More specifically, our debriefing sessions operated as an extension of the chats themselves. We three as the Writing and Literacies Twitter team met to discuss various topics that led to our analysis. These topics included our own participation, audience participation, moderation of the chat, shared resources, and host interaction with participants. Our iterative reflections led to our discovering the collaborative, welcoming atmosphere that these digital spaces offered. While no formal coding took place in our

analysis sessions, our debriefing conversations led us to discover critical junctures in each Twitter chat as representative of their collaborative nature and their possibilities. Our positionalities differently informed our participation, so our discussions afterward saturated what points in the conversation were most impactful and illustrative to our themes of the collaborative possibilities of the online community of practice.

Additionally, we want to explicitly underscore that we investigated potential ethical complications of our autoethnographic work, referencing Edwards' (2021) guidelines. Before undergoing the analysis of our work, we made sure to receive consent from anyone, including our Twitter hosts, whose names or tweets would appear in this study. If we did not seek permission but those users' names appear in a conversation that we share here, we block out their names for protection of their identities. With the Twitter participants whose names and handles we show, we provided them context for how we would use their tweets to further our analysis and offered to share excerpts from our writing with them. We also thank them for graciously lending their thoughts to this examination of Twitter chats that follows.

Following our recursive analysis practices, we wrote the findings as reflections of our own experiences during these chats as we learned from the hosts and they from us in return.

FINDINGS: THE TWITTER CHATS FROM JANUARY-MARCH 2022

Vygotsky (1934) writes that "[the] meaningful word is a microcosm of human consciousness" (p. 284). The Twitter chats themselves uplift each of the participants' ideas and connections into its own microcosm of the AERA community. Through the following presentations of January's, February's, and March's Twitter chats in 2022, we aim to show the unfolding knowledge of this small community and the potential for impact, connection, and breaking hierarchies of knowledge.

Changing Faces, Changing Spaces: A Thin Line Between Study and Reality

January's Twitter chat, hosted by Dr. Rae Oviatt, a former member of the AERA Writing and Literacies Graduate Student Board and now current assistant professor of Teacher Education, was the first chat of 2022. Two authors, Caroline and Trevor, of this article were new to the Twitter chat experience, but the welcoming nature of the host and the other participants helped create an inviting and low-stakes online community. As the only member of the team in a part-time online EdD program, this chat took on even more significance for Trevor. Often, such students forgo the opportunity to network, engage, and collaborate with scholars outside their institution in exchange for more flexible programming and an emphasis on applied research. This first chat helped Trevor realize the power of Twitter chats to grow his network and connect with scholars with similar research interests.

The first question of each month's chat always asks for participants to introduce themselves and state where they are joining from to both establish a community and to ease into the chat's more thought-provoking questions. The Writing and Literacies Twitter account frequently reposts, or rather retweets, responses from Twitter users participating in the chat to embrace community.



Caroline's first answer was retweeted by fellow board member and W&L Media Scholarship Coordinator, Dianne, who was moderating the chat (2022). Users can find this retweet that was alongside so many others, from fellow doctoral students to full professors, to be a positive, productive start to the chat, and then those users can steal themselves to engage in the topic at hand.

Figure 3. Example of a Welcoming Digital Environment



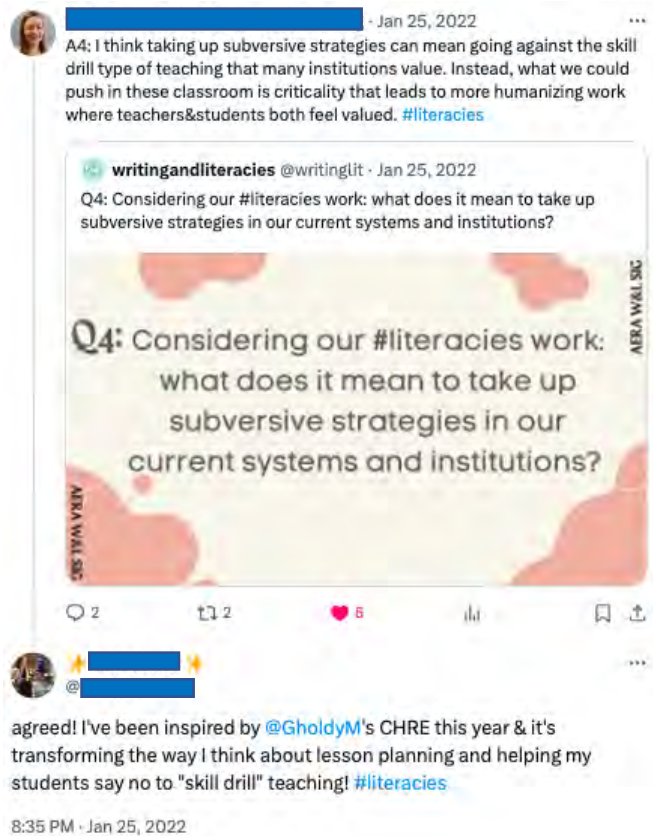
These chats allow for our hosts to highlight critical topics, and for January's chat, Dr. Oviatt wanted to discuss self-care, subversive strategies in the classroom, and uplifting scholars who are critically engaging in literacy scholarship in moments of change. To illustrate the collaborative nature of the Twitter chats, we want to highlight Dr. Oviatt's answer to question three of the chat, which asked, "What are the subversive tools that we engaged in our classroom careers that could be recalled, remembered, and repurposed for our #literacies work in the academe?" (Wellington, 2022). In her answer, Dr. Oviatt wrote of "creative insubordination" and shared a recent piece she authored (Oviatt, 2022). In figure four, Dr. Oviatt engages in conversation with Trevor, building on this user's tweet to show where the term "creative insubordination" originated. Their dialogue here represents the relationship of a host and a participant where both parties participate in sharing their thoughts that emerge from the chat.

Figure 4. The Host Engages in Conversations with Users



In Caroline's response to question four, which asks participants to consider what it means "to take up subversive strategies in our current systems and institutions," she answered with her emerging knowledge on "subversive strategies" from this chat's host, Dr. Oviatt (Wellington, 2022). Caroline's tweet generated more replies than she expected, one which was a positive affirmation to her thoughts and two replies that built off of her ideas, centering her in this conversation as an MKO. See figure five for the partial conversation. In this discussion, spearheaded by Caroline's growing ideas from Dr. Oviatt's knowledge she was sharing, participants responded to her tweet by discussing Dr. Gholneskar Muhammad's book *Cultivating Genius* (2020) and sharing their favorite ideas from this text.

Figure 5. Digital Conversation about Humanizing Practices in Education



Through this chat, we learned more about approaches of self-care during a worldwide pandemic. With tweets promoted by the #literacies hashtag and by the @writinglit Twitter account, participants were able to interact with MKOs as well as be an MKO for others in the social world of Twitter.

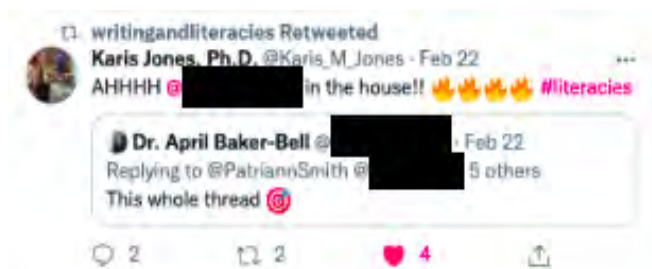
Black Lives and Literacies: Who's Included and Who's Often Overlooked?

February's Twitter chat brought Dr. Patriann Smith as the host, and her joyous interactions with participants further instilled the positive construction of knowledge brought on by these monthly events. Dr. Smith's communication with participants that evening consisted of her sharing ideas from her newest book, *Affirming Black Students' Lives & Literacies* (Willis et al., 2022), and our collective

knowledge of the Black Diaspora grew as a result of this chat. Coincidentally, Dianne pre-ordered Dr. Smith's book, so the conversation with her furthered her understanding of what it means to affirm Black students. After beginning with introductions, the chat continued by asking what scholars we know who affirm Black lives and literacies in their research and practice. Having just read Baker-Bell's (2020) book, Caroline eagerly typed a tweet and mentioned her, and Dr. Patriann Smith shared her own list of scholars, consisting of "Pat Edwards, Kisha Bryan, April Baker-Bell, Jamila Lyscott, Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz, Gholdy Muhammad, Detra Price-Dennis, Allison Skerrett, Cheryl McClean, and so many other Black scholars" (Smith, 2022). Only three of these scholars are ones whose work Caroline had heard of in her so far brief experience in the academy, so she quickly added the other names to her growing to-read list. For Dianne, she was affirmed by the list of scholars Dr. Smith mentioned as she was studying for her qualifying exams, and these were some of the scholars she had been studying. This positioned Dianne as an expert in this respect, for she was able to share her growing knowledge of these scholars during the chat.

April Baker-Bell was mentioned many other times throughout this chat, with many people promoting her knowledge from *Linguistic Justice* (2020) and sharing their takeaways. The public nature of Twitter chats opens up opportunities for other voices to be "tagged in" to the discussion in ways that provide recognition for scholars' work and to provide them with the opportunity to comment, question, or critique the ways other participants are engaging with their ideas. Baker-Bell in this sense was also a proverbial MKO during this chat, as we used her work to leverage our engagement with the chat's topic. However, at one point during this chat, Baker-Bell herself joined and showed her support for our community's ideas (Baker-Bell, 2022). In response, one of the Writing and Literacies members retweeted her tweet with excitement, shown in figure six (Jones, 2022). The interactions of this evening brought Dr. Baker-Bell to our discussion, and her support showed that our ideas were important and timely, as evidenced by her use of the dart emoji.

Figure 6 An AERA W&L Member Retweets Dr. Baker-Bell's Tweet



An additional tweet we would like to highlight is one where Caroline responded to the question of affirming, honoring, and respecting Black lives and literacies in our current education system. Caroline highlighted the work that her university engages in, and Dr. Smith replied to commend that work (see figure seven). From Caroline's positionality as a white woman, many of the concepts from this evening's tweets were ones she was happy to learn from and to show her emerging ideas.

Figure 7. The Host Responds to a Participant's Tweet

A5: In my classes as a doc student, I see my peers always supporting and uplifting each other with our various cultures&backgrounds. My profs in @ [redacted] have also in my experience done great work making room for various Black voices in the readings we engage with! #literacies



Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022) argue, "Who we are ultimately shapes the analysis that we complete. There is no need to pretend that it does not or that we can bracket our subjectivities out" (p. 151). Upon reflection, Dr. Smith's connections to everyone's thoughts and to the topic at hand helped Caroline as a novice researcher learn from the more experienced host with her wealth of knowledge and with her support of Black lives and literacies. Further, her insight provided a deeper understanding of how Trevor's positionality might influence his future literacies research and scaffolded his efforts to write a full positionality statement in his first research methods class. Dr. Smith's conversation also supported Dianne's research as she was completing her qualifying exams at the time of the chat. The chat affirmed Dianne's thinking and solidified some of her thoughts relating to her own research.

Possibilities of Healing: Moving Towards Foundations of Restoration, Joy, Love, Peace, and Abundance

For March's Twitter chat, Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya joined us to discuss her expertise on healing, love, joy, and peace in one's literacy practices. This chat on healing was also important in helping the Writing and Literacies group support each other and remind us to take time away from strict rules of academia. As we prepared for the chat, Dianne found that some of her research overlapped with Dr.



Bhattacharya's insight. Dianne learned quickly in preparing for the Twitter chat, she was not going to write that day but take a moment to learn. Similarly, Dr. Bhattacharya's expansive framing of both literacy learning and qualitative research blurred the boundaries between Trevor's academic research and his personal reading of thinkers and storytellers whose work falls outside the traditional parameters of academic scholarship. Seeing as the planning of the call took place on Zoom, we were afforded an informal space to connect, share, and learn from Dr. Bhattacharya outside the confines of traditional academic and institutional structures. In fact, Trevor was able to join from his classroom in between classes during a normal school day, further demonstrating how the affordances of the digital word allow part time EdD students the ability to have the same opportunities to learn from senior scholars as their full time PhD peers. Dr. Bhattacharya's insights were incredibly valuable for each of the Special Interest Group's members in different ways, but they were more than welcome in our shared corner of Twitter.

In our initial planning conversation for the Twitter chat, Dr. Bhattacharya discussed border crossing via Anzaldúa's (2007) work with the members of the Writing and Literacies board. With Dr. Bhattacharya's encouragement and ideas in mind, Caroline replied to a question during the Twitter chat asking about border crossing in the academy by noting Anzaldúa's (2007) book *Borderlands | La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (see figure eight).

Figure 8. Two Users Discuss Literacies of Healing via Border Crossing



Dr. Bhattacharya's expert knowledge on the SIG members' burgeoning knowledge gave Caroline the confidence to mention Anzaldúa during this chat, and Dr. Bhattacharya echoed their conversation by retweeting her answer with a comment of her own: "I love me some Anzaldúa. If you liked *Borderlands*, wait till you read *Light in the Dark* which was supposed to be her dissertation. That book changes as my awareness expands. I joke that she is writing and updating the text from the other side of the veil" (Bhattacharya, 2022). Her support and suggestion helped Caroline to better understand *Borderlands* (2007), and like other chats, Dr. Bhattacharya's position as the MKO afforded her the opportunity to grow other participants' thoughts as well. Dr. Bhattacharya's suggestion helped Dianne to further conceptualize her dissertation study as Dianne was interested in healing, joy, peace, love, and well-being. Dianne went on to read *Light in the Dark* (Keating & Anzaldúa, 2015), and it changed her understanding of her work; she learned that Gloria Anzaldúa's work influences her thinking. This chat even allowed Dianne to build an ongoing relationship with Dr. Bhattacharya.

During the chat, participants engaged with ideas of supporting research participants, crossing borders, and immersing oneself in care and joy in life. Through the digital platform of Twitter with the use of the hashtag #literacies, we were all able to comment on each other's thoughts and build ideas based on the host's initial questions and accept and learn from each other's knowledge. One particular tweet we want to showcase is where Dr. Bhattacharya notes the avenue we are all using to connect with each other, seen in figure nine.

Figure 9. The March Host Replies to a User About Online Spaces



In this tweet, Dr. Bhattacharya acknowledges a person's "unfolding" knowledge and being a witness to this work (Bhattacharya, 2022). Following sociocultural theories of learning, Dr. Bhattacharya is showing the interconnected web of knowledge generation happening in this social interaction. Through this Twitter chat, chat participants helped build each other's knowledge and share resources to bolster the community.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The graduate board members' positive experiences coordinating and running Twitter chats suggests social media networks have unique affordances for researchers and educators looking to connect with other scholars in the field. It allowed for participants to learn directly from MKOs in an accessible and non-

intimidating way and to even become an MKO, for all participants learned from each other and not just the host. Over the years, the Graduate Student Board has received feedback about graduate students not feeling worthy enough to engage in conversation with well-established scholars in the field, so this non-intimidating factor was essential. Importantly, the informal nature and virtual context of the Twitter chats did more than provide a space for senior scholars to mentor graduate students. It also invited opportunities for shared knowledge creation and reciprocal sharing of ideas and resources. The interactions shared in this article complicate static conceptions of MKOs as having sole epistemic authority and instead engender a more dynamic and equitable epistemic plurality.

Further, in the AERA Twitter chats, our hosts rejected notions of writing and speaking in only the idea of standardized speech (or what Baker-Bell (2020) writes is White Mainstream English), and they instead uplift one's flexible and multiple ways of speaking and engaging with our small corner of Twitter. For example, Dr. Patriann Smith in February 2022 chose to title the chat "Black Lives and Literacies: Who's Included and Who's Often Overlooked?" (Smith, 2022). In this chat, Dr. Smith shared with the #literacies community how she affirms Black lives and literacies in her work "[by] illustrating how race, language and immigration intersect to influence the languaging of Black youth in border-crossing" (Smith, 2022). She proceeded to share a visual of what she coined the transraciolinguistic approach to illustrate her answer. In sharing her current work with a community of scholars, Dr. Smith shared her critical practice and how we, on the spectrum of emerging to veteran scholars and educators, can engage in a multitude of linguistic approaches.

Thinking about public scholarship, we understand this platform creates spaces for humanizing approaches in the academy as it is one of the few times all scholars can be positioned equitably. Working with senior scholars while utilizing this platform can promote and shift the audience's consciousness to acknowledge the plurality that exists in public scholarship. It has the ability to encourage self-inquiry regarding what an individual considers scholarship and to help broaden the perspectives for others and their conceptualization of scholarship. Utilizing this platform and learning alongside the hosts essentially recognizes the diverse worldviews and interactions that exist with the broader public like scholars, teachers, youth, and community members.

As a note, while we continue to reiterate the supportive nature of the chats, it is possible that some participants had more negative experiences. Namely, many members, including the authors, possess misgivings about hosting these conversations on the platform Twitter/X. With X/Twitter having a team of leaders with questionable values, we find it difficult to not feel like we are inadvertently supporting those views by continuing to hold these conversations. This platform could inherently give Writing and Literacies members uncomfortable feelings, leading to their non-participation. However, while the Writing and Literacies board has discussed finding a new application to hold our monthly chats, other options have not appeared as ideal as this one. Its accessibility and its longevity make it difficult to move to another space, but we trust that wherever our chats happen that the collaborative nature between audience, host, and moderators will continue.

LIMITATIONS

Regarding limitations to this work, there are a couple to note. While we found that participation in these chats was collaborative and positive, it is possible that if this study analyzed non-Graduate Student Board members' experiences that our findings would be different. The three authors of this paper of course have a vested interest in the success of the monthly chats, so our preparation for each one was for their benefit. However, this likely is not the same for other participants who would not be privy to that evening's questions beforehand. Secondly, we have learned in the past that at times our chats go very quickly for participants. Our chats last an hour once a month, and questions are paced about five minutes apart. For some participants, thoughtfully answering the host's questions and interacting with others can be a lot to keep up with in a short time span. The authors have noticed this quick pace as well, and we typically write each question's answers before the chat begins to give ourselves time to interact with others while moderating the conversation. We try to assuage this issue by reminding participants that the chats are available after the hour is up, and often people do decide to participate after the official time is over. Still, we understand that time could have existed as a limitation to our understanding our audience participation. Still, as noted, the questions and responses remain present even after the hour is up, so we hope that this solution alleviated some of that tension in our analysis.

CONCLUSION

Twitter as a sociocultural digital space during our monthly chats allowed for increased connection, meaningful engagement, and for the creation of ad-hocracies (Doctorow, 2003). As doctoral students, we found that these chats provided us a widened access to scholarly activity that we previously did not have. These three illustrations follow Vygotsky's concept of the More Knowledgeable Other in sociocultural theory because, as Vanderburg (2006) writes, "[Vygotsky] strove to prove that social interactions enable humans to develop advanced thoughts through repeated interactions with more experienced individuals in the community" (p. 375). In interacting with MKOs like Dr. Oviatt, Dr. Smith, and Dr. Bhattacharya, participants' knowledge grew and caused them to interrogate their understandings about concepts such as literacies of healing and of translanguaging. Further, participants became MKOs in their own right as we shared knowledge and made room for discourse and collaboration.

These chats allowed for a space where a community could come together and discuss topics of interest to generate constructive conversation through digital, collaborative discourse. Hodges (2017) argues that "[historically,] writing has been viewed as a solitary activity, but with the significance of sociocultural theory, writing is now supported as a collaborative, social activity in which novice writers can learn from more experienced writers" (p. 141). With sociocultural theories of learning in mind, EdD programs should look to Twitter and other forms of social networking to help their doctoral students find community and find their own MKOs to bolster their work and their own growing literacy practices. These opportunities for engaging in online literacy practices refer to "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes," (Heath, 1983, p. 93) which we argue can happen in the space of Twitter or other online



applications. What these illustrations of the AERA Writing and Literacies Twitter chats should show is that the digital space supports joyful, multimodal possibilities between new and emerging scholars in the academic environment, and this practice can improve and increase professional opportunities for doctoral students.

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