

**Weblogging as a Multimedia Literacy Event:
Analyzing the Discourse Space of a Student Blogger's Speech
Community**

Azni Mohamed Zain

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Koo Yew Lie

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Abstract

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is fast becoming the new wave of the future. Weblogging (or blogging) falls under this important branch of CMC as it possesses the ability to bring together participants of an 'invisible' world to partake in discourse via the reading and writing of texts. Blogging is a particularly new phenomenon of multimedia literacy and it often combines visual and textual elements to create meaning-making amongst participants via this mode of communication. The younger generation is especially attracted to this type of multimedia genre as the 'blogosphere' creates a space for them to partake in discourse, develop camaraderie in the form of online friendships and utilize technological features such as visual images, text and sound effects to communicate with one another. The meaning-making that occurs within the blogosphere results in this phenomenon becoming a significant literacy event, as the paper will point out. Focusing specifically on the dissection of how speech patterns used via blogging contribute to the meaning-making process, the Hymes' Speaking Grid will be used as a tool to analyze the discourse space of a tertiary level student blogger. With the understanding of what occurs within this discourse space, educators and observers alike will hopefully be able to gain a better comprehension of how the multimedia literacies of students play a role in their written expression via blogging.

Introduction

The blogging phenomenon can be seen as a new form of multimedia communication as it utilizes both text and visual images in functioning as a vehicle for interaction amongst members of a virtual discourse space. Initially, blogs were merely defined as link-driven sites (Blood 2000), but the phenomenon quickly developed into a widespread practice of people publishing their blogs online and partaking in virtual communication via the reading and writing of blogs, especially with the development of various technological features that began to incorporate visual, audio and textual elements.

Not only does blogging play a role in facilitating communication between speakers and hearers, the fact that blogs are able to infuse conversational styles of commenting with written textual forms also makes this mode of connection indeed one of a kind. Blogging is a unique form of expression that allows communication between participants as it allows a unique feature of two-way communication within the realm of the discourse space called the 'blogosphere.' Because blogging utilizes textual, visual and sometimes even audio effects and images, a person would need to be literate with such multimedia features which facilitate the meaning-making process between participants. Blogging is also a unique genre of communication because of its 'asynchronous' communicative feature which allows a time lapse between interlocutors involved in the interaction (Blood, 2000). Because of this feature, blogs are able to provide a platform for participants to partake in discourse for various purposes with the formation of different speech communities within this seemingly 'invisible' mode of communication which differs from face-to-face interactions.

Marlow (2006) posits that the social and behavioural aspects of the emerging blogging practice represent a large shift towards a new form of interaction which he defines as "a massively distributed but completely connected conversation, covering every imaginable topic of interest." Nardi et al. (2004a) on the other hand, state that blogging is seen more as a social activity which brings together people who share common interests. Thus, whether it is a social, academic or intellectual kind of interaction, weblogs are able to facilitate different types of communication, especially for the purpose of knowledge sharing and exchange of opinions. Within the educational context, multimedia literacy is increasing in importance and has developed to accommodate a large context of participants who are able to connect to one another within Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) modes. These include emails, chats, forums, instant messaging, and more recently, the weblog phenomenon.

Blogging and the 'Younger' Generation

It is increasingly observable that the younger generation has a natural affinity to gravitate towards the latest modes of technology. Be it instant messaging or downloading music, the youth of today are perhaps better equipped with technological capabilities than the older generation. The blogging phenomenon is particularly attractive to this younger generation because of several aspects in relation to their age range and interests.

One reason is that blogging is a new creative form of technology that allows a user to explore various tools such as colours and photos, artistic graphics, and musical features that can all be included into a blog. Secondly, the literacy of the younger generation in these new multimedia technological modes provides them an outlet of expression which gives them a 'voice,' thus the blogging genre is especially attractive to this group of people. Crampton (2003) states that the rise of blogging is a practice of "finding oneself in the world" and this is especially true for the younger generation as they are in the process of making their way through new experiences and ordeals. This situation is especially applicable to students studying at tertiary level, who are going through many new experiences in their pursuit of further education.

Blogging Defined

A blog functions as a type of online diary, which chronicles events that happen on a regular basis, from daily, weekly to monthly. One of the earlier definitions given by Blood (2000) states that blogs are a shortened form of weblogs, or a term for the phrase 'we-blog.' It can be defined as being a website that is updated frequently, with new material posted at the top of the page in reverse chronological order. Thus, a blog can be thought of as something that is published by a person who maintains a website as somewhat of a personal space which is consistently updated with new content posted on a regular basis. Crampton (2003) supports this definition, stating that it can be interpreted as a modern digital equivalent to the memoir or diary.

This paper discusses the findings of a consistent study into the blogosphere, specifically the blog of a medical student, and how a blog that he writes and maintains, becomes a platform of interaction with the feedback received from readers who are also medical students studying at tertiary level.

Background of the Study

Teachers and students often form bonds with one another in the unique relationship of the 'teacher' and the 'learner.' Blogs offer tools for communication that can assist immensely in the teaching and learning activities that educators and students partake in. This paper however does not aim to show the communication between students and teachers via blogs. It is in fact a study that focuses more on the speech patterns employed by students, among students within a discourse space made up of a group of tertiary level medical students via blogging. Through blogging activities these students are able to partake in the reading and writing modes of expression available on the Internet. By studying how these students communicate within a social context situated in a non-academic environment, educators and observers may become more conscious of the interests, context, formation of online camaraderie, and specifically, speech patterns that students employ when communicating with one another within the blogosphere. It will also be advantageous for observers to be able to identify and comprehend the patterns of speech situated within the speech community of a blog writer and his audience of readers

as this may be the starting point for initiation of further communication between educators and students which may be established in the future.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to analyze the interactional patterns occurring within the speech community of a tertiary level medical student; the blog writer. The study looks at three particular aspects of interaction within the context of interaction and these are:

- 1) turn-taking
- 2) politeness strategies
- 3) code switching

Because the subject and the members of his speech community are all bilinguals, elements of *Bahasa Malaysia* are evident within the interactions taking place via blog. This significantly contributes to the literacy event taking place via the multimedia mode of blogging. How the participants master the technological tools needed to partake in blogging activities is also scrutinized, specifically their ability to use the blog post and comment box features to connect between the blog writer and the audience of readers.

Studying Speech Communities

What is a speech community and why the need to study it? What are the similarities shared by a certain speech community and how do these features of communication contribute to meaning-making? These are among some of the questions that the researcher aims to delve into. In relation to speech communities via blogs, Crampton (2003) states that blogging produces community because it is a practice that both takes place in a community as well as produces one. Communities are formed when bloggers read blogs and when they put up blog posts in their own blogs, forming a two-way camaraderie of reading and writing that can create kinship. Similarly, the process of linking as stated by Blood (2000) is a form of creating community as it opens up a connection to other bloggers.

This is supported by Crampton who states that when bloggers link to each other, comment on each other's content, mention each others blogs within the blogosphere, there is a creation of friendship and mutual support seen in this practice (Crampton 2003). Thus when a sense of community is formed, there is kinship, membership and specific speech patterns that are shared distinctly between members of the speech community. Nardi et al. (2004b) mention that there are various reasons for blogging, ranging from keeping an online journal, developing writing skills, sharing expertise and building a community. Miller & Shepherd (2004) also state that blogging is seen as a social interaction often used for sharing knowledge because through interaction participants are able to participate in meaningful conversation that binds them into a 'social' setting. Because of the different reasons for blogging, a range of speech communities may sprout within the blogosphere. This is a phenomenon that becomes a form of interaction which can be studied from various aspects.

The Subjects / Participants

Tertiary education students typically range between the ages of 18-22 years old where most are pursuing various fields of studies at diploma and degree level in institutions of higher learning. This is the stage when most of them are going through changes in their lives as they are in pursuit of further education either at universities or colleges. Within this context, these students are grappling with the challenges and expectations of a vast range of issues. Thus, there is a need for an outlet for expression of opinions and perhaps a connection with other members of society who are at a similar stage in life. Whatever reasons they have for partaking in blogging activities, it is undeniable that the blogosphere provides a suitable platform for facilitating communication for the youth of today as there are numerous blogs being published online by students within this age range.

The blog of a medical student (pursuing medicine at tertiary level), is analyzed in depth to trace a few aspects in relation to his blogging practices. Within this discourse space, a platform becomes available for participants to take part in other conversations due to the content and comments that are brought forth in the writer's blog. A few members of his audience of readers are also selected as participants within a specific discourse space (a chosen blog post and comment box), though these only serve as giving the audience feedback within a blog, which is customary in two-way communication. Interviews are conducted through email and Instant Messaging technological tools, employing full CMC modes of research for collecting data. The method of participant observation is employed in relation to the reading and writing activities that revolve around the participant and his readers with regard to the educational backgrounds, literacy practices and blogging activities of these students.

The blog writer and his audience of readers make up of a community who are studying at tertiary level, pursuing degrees in medical studies from different universities both locally and abroad. The blog writer is from a tertiary level student group, where all members engage in blogging practices as observers who discuss various topics and happenings surrounding their lives as students. Their age range is between 18 to 25, and most of the readers are also bloggers who have blogs of their own.

Background of the Subject (The Blog Writer)

The student blogger of this research initially used the pseudonym “Hiyoshi” as a blogging identity tag, but this name was later changed to his real name, Jamil, due to certain reasons. Thus the name ‘Jamil’ appears in his blog, marking the writer’s identity. Asked as to why the change in his identity tag, it was found that the blogger felt a sense of closeness to his speech community after years of becoming acquainted with his audience of readers. Thus he saw no need to use an anonymous nickname because most of the readers who made up his speech community already knew him quite well after a few years of reading and closely following his blog. This proves that when communities of readers share the membership and kinship characteristics of belonging to a certain

group within a familiar 'speech community', bonds develop and the formation of camaraderie is likely observed. As seen in the case of this blog writer, the online identity he carved out for himself is a significant one as it is able to bring in comments from a selected and regular set of readers who make up a community.

Due to the fact that the blog writer 'Jamil,' is a medical student, a lot of the topics that he selects to write about in his blog and discuss (via feedback from readers), are topics that touch upon aspects pertaining to the medical field, student life, friendships, family, and other such shared interests that his community of readers are likely to relate to. This is a 'shared' topic as a lot of the content can be understood by the readers who are also medical students, pursuing educational endeavours in the same field. The emergence of a virtual community due to common interests is a common phenomenon that occurs as a result of blogging practices, as mentioned by Crampton (2003).

Background and History of the Subject's Blogging Practices

The blog writer's writing style often includes elements of wit, sarcasm and humour, using a mix of linguistic features (in the form of medical student jargon, CMC language, and elements of code switching (*Bahasa Malaysia* and English) in his written observations of life as a medical student. The blog writer is currently a third year medical student at a Malaysian public university and has been blogging for almost five years. Although throughout the years he has kept different blogs under different blog hosts, the current blog he writes in is entitled *Scribblings of an Empty Mind*, published using the Blogger 'blog host,' available on the Internet. Content-wise, the topics that the blog writer chooses to discuss in his blog range from student life to sibling rivalry to puppy love. A large part of his readership (or audience) is made up of tertiary level students, most of whom are also pursuing tertiary level education, in the field of medicine.

Research Site

In this context, the blog of the tertiary level medical student is the research site to be studied, where a speech community has emerged based on the textual writing of blog posts and the response given to these posts via the comment box feature of the blog. According to Bonvillain (2000), bilingual or multilingual communities become a space where speakers develop strategies for use of their languages. These may be strategies employed such as restricting each language to particular contexts, participants, or topics, meaning that the context of interaction is taken into account when they use one language or the other, or even when they switch between both.

It can be observed that there is a formation of camaraderie between those who are 'inside' the community, as the participants share usage of jargon and language patterns that define themselves within this discourse space. Patterns of communication such as code switching and shortened cyber talk, as well as emoticons are employed to give a sense of belonging and identity to the members of this group. Membershopping is based

on how these community members relate to one another and how they partake in discourse using specific strategies that are uniquely found in weblog discourse.

The blog “*Scribblings of an Empty Mind*” (Figure 1) is the research site where the student speech community is situated, and within this discourse space, blog posts are written, and responses are given via the commenting features. The title of the blog is prominently displayed in the centre of the page and subheadings on the right hand side indicate the ‘linking’ feature to other blogs. Jamil, the blog writer, has opted to entitle his collection of links “The Fellowship of Bloggers” which in itself represents the selection of other blogs maintained by his online friends. Most of these links are owned by the readers who make up his speech community. This demonstrates the camaraderie shared by bloggers through the technological mode of the linking feature.

It can be seen that the basic layout of a blog includes text and visuals to make up the blog. Although mostly textual in nature, the blog writer has inserted a picture under the ‘About Me’ section, a cartoon character and not his actual picture. This can be read as the blog writer’s nature of having a sense of humour, and using a caricature to represent himself in the slot reserved supposedly for the blog writer’s photograph. This in itself shows the blog writer’s apt use of multimedia features to bring meaning to his discourse space.

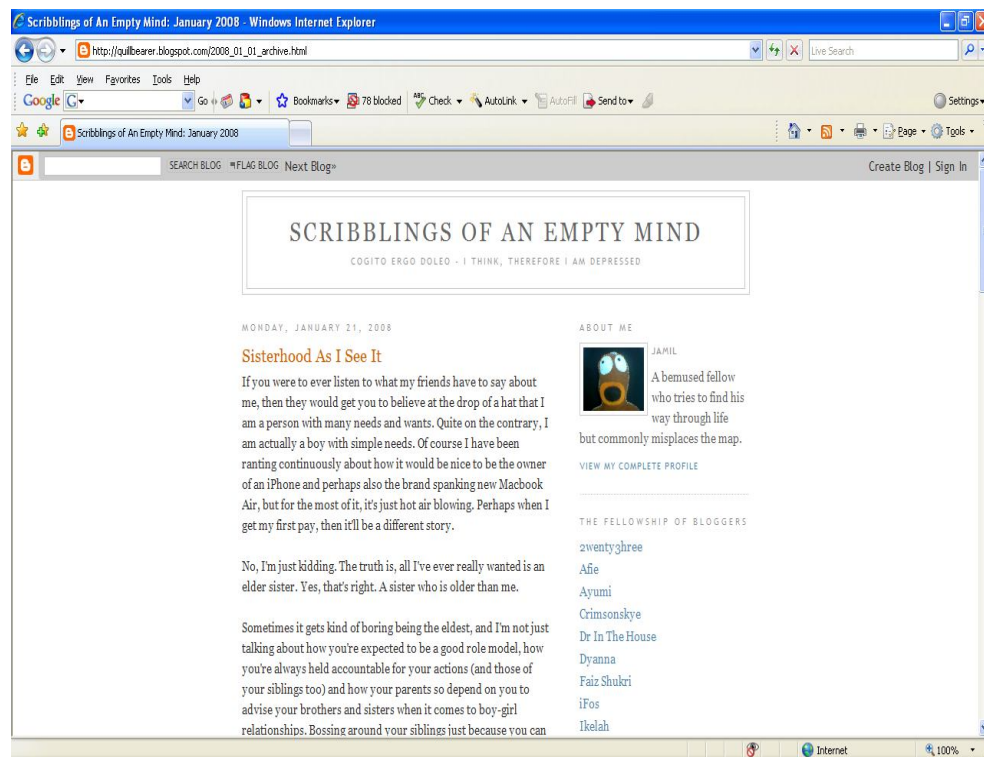


Figure 1: *Scribblings of an Empty Mind*”

Source: <http://quillbearer.blogspot.com/>

The Blog Post

The blog post is the main entry situated in the front page of the blog. Along with the title, there is also information such as the day, date, time stamp and writer of the particular posting. These appear automatically, as the blog host or software has programmed the information to appear in such a way. It can be seen that this particular blog writer has opted to use 'Blogger' as his blog host, and the address for the blog includes the word 'blogspot' which is the domain of its site. The ending of a blog post will typically be accompanied by a statement that informs the reader of who wrote the post and at what time, and how many responses were given to that particular posting. In the figure above, the information reads: *Posted by Jamil at 11:52 A.M 2 Responses*. This statement marks the ending of a blog post and the previous post written will be directly underneath, as can be seen in the excerpt above. These are all cues that must be understandable to anybody who blogs. Thus, the fact that the community of readers is able to use these features, portrays their multimedia literacies via their blogging activities.

The Comment Box

The feature of the blog which enables two-way communication is the comment box which is available for every blog post (Figure 2). All the readers have to do is click on the link provided at the end of a blog post and they are able to write a response to what the blog writer has initiated in topic selection and what has been written in the blog post. The figure below shows a sample of a blog post comment box. When the posting has been read, all the reader has to do is click the link and a box will appear, enabling them to leave a comment, as can be seen below.

Thus it can be seen that the research is situated within the realm of the larger blogosphere but will be focusing upon specific blogs (written by selected participants who participate in the Malaysian blogosphere as a discourse space), using a purposeful selection of blog posts and comment boxes from the participants' blogs. This is the basic platform for the research to be conducted in and to observe interactional patterns that occur within these spaces.

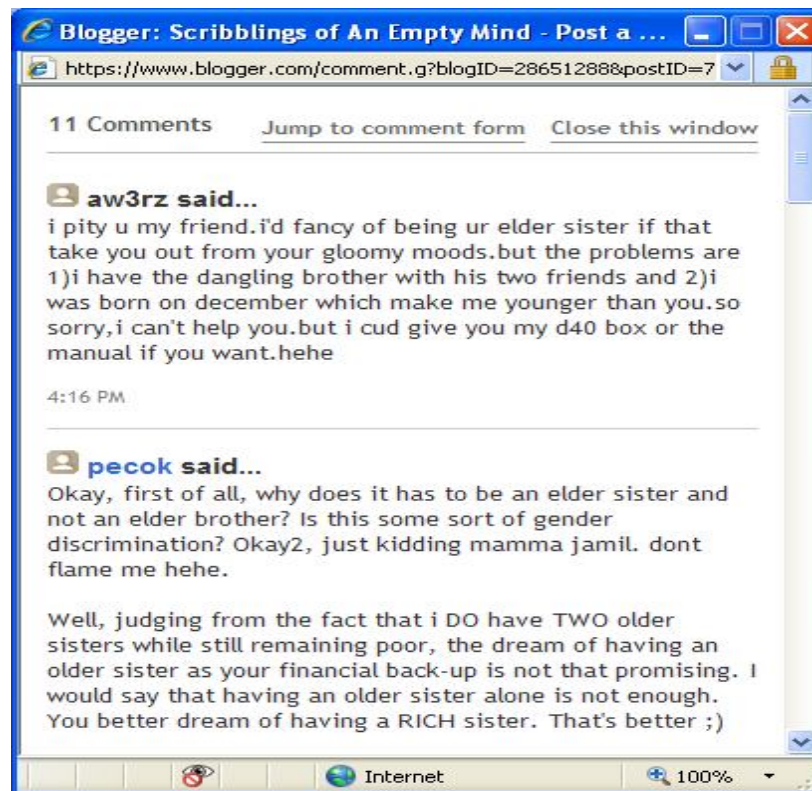


Figure 2: Comment box

Source: <http://quillbearer.blogspot.com/>

Blog postings and Topic Selection

A general survey of the blog writer's blog posts show titles that relate to a significant consistency of topic choices. Some of the topics are recurring themes and some, though from a similar genre, revolve around the same ideas that concern the participant's own self interests and observations, as well as having the potential to affect the readers who form his blogging community. A random survey of his blog post titles (written from November 2007-February 2008) includes the following topics under the titles listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Comments in *Scribblings of an Empty Mind*
(November 2007 – February 2008)

No.	Blog Posting Title	Date Written	Number of Comments
1.	<i>Playing the Love Doctor</i>	6 th November 2007	6
2.	<i>www.stupidcupid.com</i>	20 th November 2007	11
3.	<i>Starstruck</i>	22 nd November 2007	18
4.	<i>The Woes of Jay Pee, eyh?</i>	15 th January 2008	4
5.	<i>Sisterhood as I See It</i>	21 st January 2008	14
6.	<i>Which One's the Real Doctor Now?</i>	1 st February 2008	13

Source: <http://quillbearer.blogspot.com/>

Generally, the six entries all deal with the topics that relate to and interest the blogger on a personal note. *Playing the Love Doctor* is a purposeful and intended pun on his role as “doctor” giving advice to people on the topic of love. Similarly, the blog post entitled *www.stupidcupid.com* is a witty and sarcastic take on the wonders of online dating. These two posts both demonstrate the blogger’s interest in two things; medical jargon and young love. The post entitled *Starstruck* is the blogger’s observation of a news item from a national newspaper, relating to the topic of medical student jargon. Based on the selected excerpt of the news item, the participant adds some of his own views in relation to the topic at hand. The posting on *The Woes of Jay Pee, eyh?* is the blogger’s reflection upon the difficulty of students getting a scholarship in university, relating to a common problem shared by many tertiary level students, who are under government sponsorship.

On a different note, the posting entitled *Sisterhood as I see it* laments on the blogger’s wish to have an elder sister, and the potential benefits that an older sister could provide. The blog post entitled *Which One's the Real Doctor Now?* is a humorous account of the modern day ‘*bomoh*’ (witchdoctor), and how this particular character tries to entice a crowd to buy his medicinal product, which supposedly can cure ailments of all sorts. It is obvious that the posts have some sort of shared interest among the readership as can be seen by the number of comments given to each respective posting. Although the number of comments include the response of the blog writer to his readers, it can be seen that more than one person has responded to each of the six postings surveyed in the table above. The posting entitled *Who's the Real Doctor Now?* will be given an in-depth analysis, to note the specific patterns that occur within this speech community.

Blogging Patterns and Style

Different bloggers bring in different styles, jargon, speech patterns and experiences into their blogging practices due to many factors. Language proficiency, background literacy practices, gender, age, and motivations for blogging are among some of the factors that determine the blogging patterns and styles adopted by various bloggers. Blood (2000) states that with blogging, there is an emergence of self-realization and development that perhaps had not existed before an individual had engaged in the practice. Over a period of time, this development will be enhanced as more and more readers communicate with one another via blogging, thus, enabling a feeling of camaraderie to emerge between the members of the speech community made up of participants who share similar goals, motivations, and common interests. They are tied into the community based on the interests that they share, and that is the determining factor that keeps the members of the speech community reading and commenting within a particular discourse space of a selected blog.

As Marlow (2006) stresses, the more time is invested into the practice, the stronger the relationships between the participants that will be established. In the case of the blog writer, a few regular readers and commentators have been identified, due to their patterns of commenting and the tone and manner of interaction that is distinguished by how they communicate with the back and forth interactional patterns that develop within the blog. The readers all use identifiable pseudonyms or identity tags that allow them to be set apart as significant 'regular readers' of the blog. Most of the regulars leave comments on a consistent basis and contribute significantly to the discussion. To simplify the discourse pattern that occurs via blogging, Figure 3 demonstrates the back and forth interactions between blog writer and readers.

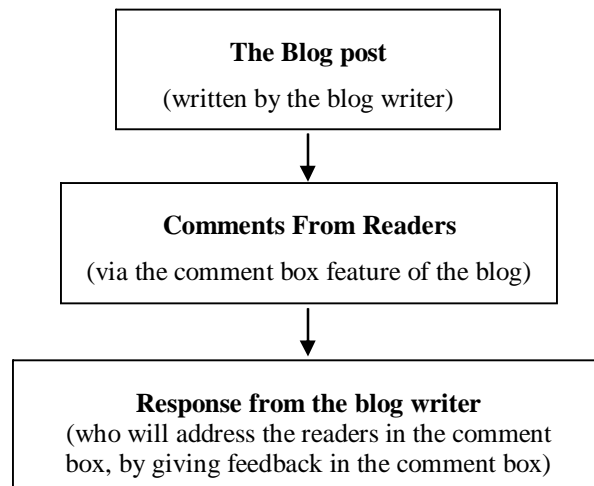


Figure 3: Process of Blog Discourse via Comment Box

Methodology

The Hymes' SPEAKING mnemonics was used to identify the language patterns occurring via blog. These patterns developed the sense of camaraderie between the blog writer and his audience of readers. The basic procedure for analysis is to fit the grid into the definition of a literacy event. By connecting the framework of Hymes (1974) to the occurrence of interactions within the realm of the blogosphere, this study attempts to shed light on what the meaning-making procedures signify in the context of the literary event. Thus, using the elements found in the SPEAKING grid as the main tool for analysis, the discourse occurring via blog, is given an in-depth analysis. The basic framework for conducting this study can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: The Hymes' SPEAKING Grid

Letters of the Mnemonics	Communicative Feature
S – Setting	The setting and scene where the interaction occurs.
P – Participants	The speakers and audience in the speech event.
E – Ends	The purposes, goals and outcomes of the interaction.
A – Act Sequence	The form and order of the event.
K – Key	The cues that establish the "tone, manner, or spirit" of the speech act.
I – Instrumentalities	The forms and styles of speech, including registers of formality or casual manner.
N – Norms	The social rules governing the event and the participants' actions and reaction
G – Genre	The kind of speech act or event taking place.

Source: Hymes, 1974 <http://www1.appstate.edu/~mcgowan/hymes.htm>

Research Procedure

The research was based on blog posts that were written in the participant's blog over a period of four months. Selection of particular blog posts were based on a few criteria including the basic layout of the blog, content, topic selection, readership audience, consistency in topic selection, participants' language choices and speech patterns (including jargon, code switching, turn-taking and politeness strategies). The blogging practices and history, in relation to literacy practices are also observed in relation to the participant's engagement with his audience, via the blogging activities of reading, writing and commenting that the bloggers partake in. The patterns of communication are studied, specifically how certain interactional patterns are developed and retained through the reading, writing and commenting activities of both the blog writer and the readers.

Aspects of politeness, turn-taking and code switching are scrutinized, along with elements of Netspeak (Crystal, 2001), and Blogspeak (Nilsson, 2005), to show the integration of computer technology and linguistic cues that are employed by the participants; both the blog writers and their audience of readers, in a multimedia literacy event.

Speech Patterns in the Blogosphere

Within the realm of the blogosphere there are speech patterns that can be uniquely defined by specific linguistic features. Bloggers interact with one another, employing politeness and turn-taking strategies as a form of pragmatic communication. With bilingual bloggers however, there exists another unique form of interacting, which is by using code switching. Blom and Gumperz (1972) observe that there are two types of code switching used in various situations and these are situational and metaphorical code switching. In conversational code switching, more of the first type (situational) is employed. This is due to the fact that blogging is a mode that facilitates conversational-like features, even though it is a written form of textual communication. Thus, when bloggers employ code switching strategies within their discourse, it is a form of meaning-making that relates to the situation or context of the conversation.

In blogging, the commenting function is a unique feature which allows readers to give feedback to the blog writer, with regard to content and opinion. It is this particular feature that connects writer to reader, via the blog, and allows the 'spoken' form to emerge within the blogging practices of its participants. The commenting activities between the blog writer, Jamil, and his audience of readers will be scrutinized, focusing upon three primary aspects, turn-taking, politeness, and code switching.

Methods of Data Collection

The research employs the combination of qualitative research with ethnographic methods, beginning with the observation of blog posts and comments done over a fixed period of time, interviews with the subject (the blog writer), and identifying his blogging practices and readership audience. As a follow-up, questions are posted via email, in relation to the blogger's writing practices information about members who read and make up the speech community of the discourse space of his blog. The data gathered was triangulated through three main methods:

- 1) Observation of blog posts and comments
- 2) Interviews through Instant Messaging
- 3) Follow-up questions through email

The research site of the subject (the blog writer) was then analyzed using the Hymes' SPEAKING grid, to identify the interactional patterns occurring between the participants. The incorporation of other CMC methods of data collection also addresses the multimedia literacy utilized in the course of this study.

Observation of blog posts and comments

For a fixed period of time, the blog posts and comment boxes of the subject (the blog writer) were observed. Specific features were duly noted down as the basis for analysis and within the observational period, these features were identified. One blog post was selected for specific analysis, and the comment box of that particular posting will be analyzed, as it will make up the basis of the researcher's data.

Interviews through instant messaging

After the blog posts and comment boxes were observed, and specific ones selected, interviews were conducted via instant messaging, to gather more information and also as a means of validating what had been observed. As Tellis (1997) mentions, interviews are important as a secondary source of information and it is essential for validation of data.

Follow-up questions through email

In order to gather further validation and support the data gathered, follow up questions were emailed to the participants to gauge their feedback, and also to gain further insight into the blogging practices of the bloggers, in relation to their relationship with the readership audience. As Creswell (1994) states, emails provide a rich source of data gathering and benefit both the participants and the researcher, provided both are literate in these modes of communication. It is, however, aptly pointed out that the researcher also has to be literate in these modes in order to conduct a meaningful research and not fall into problems of data gathering, recording, and analyzing, due to illiteracy in CMC modes of data collection (Dunn, 2002). This is the best mode to apply as both the researcher and the participants utilize CMC modes in everyday communication, specifically in blogging activities situated within the writing, reading and commenting practices in the blogosphere.

Analysis of Blog Post

Apparently the witchdoctor had with him a plant so mysterious that he would only call it by the name 'Pokok Mati Hidup Semula'. The name already drew a few brave speculations as to what it could do among my bedazzled friends, but I was more interested in what the witchdoctor had to say.

"Hah, abang mari mari mari..pokok mati hidup semula ni mujarab untuk semua jenis penyakit. Siapa-siapa yang ada gout, darah tinggi, kolestrol semua boleh sembuh lepas minum air yang dah direbus dengan pokok ni. Tak ada ubat yang boleh hilangkan semua penyakit kecuali pokok mati hidup semula. Abang pegi la kat doktor untuk rawat gout abang, dia akan cucuk abang dan kenakan bayaran RM60. Lepas tu, dia akan kata abang tak boleh dah makan udang, ketam, kacang tanah. Tidak dengan ubat ni. Abang amalkan minum dua gelas sehari, InsyaAllah dengan kuasa Allah, abang akan sembuh. Kalau ada yang tak percaya, boleh cuba minum segelas sekarang dan InsyaAllah dengan izin Tuhan, abang memang akan rasa kelainan dia lepas habis sembahyang Jumaat".

Figure 4: Excerpt 1

In Excerpt 1, the whole instance is related in direct reported speech, to show that it is something that the blog writer had heard being said in BM. A whole portion of the blog post is written in complete BM as it is supposedly a report of what a man had said, speaking entirely in BM. The blogger however, responds to this in English, as his postings are mainly written in the English language, with very minor code switching or code-mixing. The participant's response to this is analyzed further, in the Excerpt 2.

I couldn't believe my ears! Finally, a cure-all that will save mankind bucketfuls of money on medication that needs to be taken more times in a day than you would pass wind! Doctors can at last chuck their diagnostic tools out of the window and retire for good! And while they're at it, why not burn down hospitals and build theme parks in their place? Thank goodness for the witchdoctor and his Back-From-The-Dead Plant!

Figure 5: Excerpt 2

In this part of the post, the blog writer expresses incredulous disbelief regarding the irony of the situation. Being a medical student, he is sensitive to the issue at hand, seemingly mocking the man's claim that his product can cure medical conditions. He also translates the phrase used in the reported speech part of the excerpt, giving an explanation to the phrase; "Pokok Mati Hidup Semula" is literally translated to "Back-From-The-Dead Plant." Further code switching is seen when the blog post ends with a mix of both BM and English (Excerpt 3).

But that's still not the best part. Oh, definitely not. One of my friends went up to him and asked "*Ubat ni boleh semuhkan penyakit Type I diabetes tak, bang?*".

To which he asked back, "*Type I tu apa?*"


POSTED BY JAMIL AT [6:08 PM](#) [6 RESPONSES](#) 

Figure 6: Excerpt 3

The blog post ends with an indication of who posted the blog entry and at what time. There is also an indication of how many comments have been left for a particular posting. The posting ends with a question that marks the summation of the issue being exposed in the particular blog entry written by the participant. As a medical student who understands terminology and jargon related to the medical field, the blog writer and the readers would naturally understand and be aware of the term 'Type 1 Diabetes.' Thus, the critique of the blogger regarding the issue is that here is a man who proclaims that his product can cure any ailment, but when asked about whether it could cure a particular type of diabetes, the man was not aware of what the term meant.

Analysis of Comments

For a member of this speech community, the topic and humour of the situation would be easily understood, as they are all conscious of terms such as these within their daily lives. For an outsider, unaware of the situation, and how the irony of a man trying to sell medicinal products, devoid of any knowledge about certain ailments, the topic would not possibly have the same impact as it did within this particular speech community. With regard to the comments received regarding this situation stated in the blog post, Excerpt 4 shows how the readers responded to this posting.

[sarahss](#) said...
 Jamil!!!
 I SO have been missing a lot out of your writings i presume past this one month. Couldn't stop giggling. Talking about sisterhood - sometimes i do have daydreams of having an elder brother myself - which, of course, is biologically impossible (but may turn the other way round as in direct-malay-translation - ahah). It's why they say men just can't be grateful enough - desiring the non-possessed, yet loathing about the ones in hand.
 witchdoctors? they're too 'witch'-y. indeed.
 aiyayayayay~
 8:04 PM

[dith](#) said...
 Have you heard of DokMoh? That's a doctor acting like a bomoh, hehe
 7:18 AM

bukan aw3rz said...
 owh.he asked back?i thought he said that the plant can cure type 1 diabetes and even turner syndrome.
 10:13 AM

Figure 7: Excerpt 4 (Comment Box)

In the above excerpt, three commentators have left comments regarding the post that the blog writer wrote. The first comment is left by 'sarahss' who leaves a considerably lengthy statement, which has elements of a long turn (in terms of turn-taking), politeness strategies (stating how much she has missed the blog writer's posts), and casual language use such as an exclamation at the end of her comment which reads 'aiyayayayay.' Her reference to a previous posting (the blog post entitled *Sisterhood as I See It*) shows that 'sarahss' is a regular reader of the participant, Jamil's blog and has been following his posts long enough to know that he has been posting regularly, though she has been absent from reading and commenting within his blog. This is evident with the statement that she has missed his postings.

The next comment left by 'dith' shows elements of possible code switching; using words taken from BM with mention of the codified term for doctors perhaps, who possibly coined the term 'Dok Moh' as a combination of 'Doctor' and 'Bomoh.' The commentator who states that his name is 'bukan aw3erz' poses a question back to the blog writer asking: "owh. he asked back? i thought he said that the plant can cure type 1 diabetes and even turner syndrome." This is a reference to the posting that the blog writer wrote, as well as a request for clarification. From these cues, the blog writer knows that it is his turn to respond as seen in Excerpt 5.

[Jamil](#) said...
 Sarah - I'm sure you have been pre-occupied with more important stuff such as your exams :) how was it?

 DITH - *laugh* I'm not rather sure if he was a doctor to begin with.

 Kalau bukan aw3rz siapa lagi - Oh, yes. He did say that his magical plant could cure diabetes. I heard that next time, my friends are going to ask him whether it can heal SLE
 12:12 PM

Figure 8: Excerpt 5 (Comment Box)

As it can be seen, the blog writer has an identifiable pattern for addressing his commentators by name or identity tag followed by a dash before writing the actual comment. The first commentator, Sarah, is given a response which reads as a politeness strategy. He excuses her absence from the presumed regular blog discourse that she partakes in as a regular blog reader of his and turns the discussion over to her by asking about her exams. An emoticon in the form of a virtual smiley or happy face is also used in this comment.

In addressing DITH, the blog writer also uses cyber symbols in the form of a virtual laugh, written as *laugh*. The statement which refers to him being quite sure that the person mentioned in his blog post was not a doctor, definitely shows the relation between the blog genre in relation to the background of a medical student's knowledge, both of which are common ground for him as the blogger, and his audience who come from the same background. The comment that follows next shows an element of code switching when the blog writer deliberately addresses the commentator who stated his identity as '*bukan aw3erz*,' improvising this to become a BM phrase '*Kalau bukan aw3erz siapa lagi*' thus, making the name into a whole statement in itself. There is further mention of a medical term 'SLE' which stands for a disease (Systemic lupus erythematosus), and which would not be familiar perhaps to those who are not in the know of medical terms and short forms in relation to diseases. Again, it can be observed that elements such as the identity tag of the commentator followed by the word 'said,' and the time-stamps which show the exact hour whether a.m or p.m, function to report who said what and when within the comment box, which serves the purpose of the commenting feature to track the interactions occurring via blog. These visual functions are used extensively for back and forth communication within the two-way interaction of the blogosphere, signifying a marked level of literacy to pick up these multimedia cues.

Methods of Data Analysis

Analysis of blog posts and comment boxes using the Hymes' SPEAKING grid

The Hymes' SPEAKING grid, centred around eight different criteria, bases the context of interaction on elements that serve to analyze the communicative aspects occurring within the discourse space. In this context, it is the activity of writing a blog post, and having readers who read and comment via the comment box. These activities are centred upon the research site, which is the blogosphere.

Setting

The setting or context of this interaction is set around the narration of an event that has previously happened. The blogger has given details about how an incident involving a 'witch doctor' seemingly playing 'a real doctor' triggered his amusement at this experience and observation, prompting him to blog about it. The discourse space of the blogosphere is the setting for this interaction, and the specific breakdown of zones is split into two areas; the blog post (where the message is sent from the sender - the blog writer), and the comment box (where two-way interaction is facilitated between the sender and receiver of the message). The identification of different discourse spaces, the blog posting and the comment box, shows that the participants are literate in this medium in order to utilize the spaces significantly. Thus, the topic selection has already been done, based on the incident that the blogger has chosen to relate to, and within the two zones of communication, the platform and context for conversation has been set for interactions to occur between both parties.

Participants

According to Hymes (1974), participants consist of the speaker and the audience, hence, the speaker would be the sender of the message, and the receiver (or hearer) of the message. In the blogging context, the sender of the message would be the blog writer who posts a topic in his or her blog post. The readers would then be the receivers of the message, who read and respond to what is written. In the context of the blog writer's speech community discourse analyzed for this research, the participants other than the blog writer include the respondents or commentators to this particular blog post. The identified readers use specific identity tags which serve as their 'names' in this context. Some of the blog writer's regular readers have been identified as *aw3rz*, *sarah*, *dith*, and a few others. The use of identity tags and pseudonyms also signify that these students are aware of the different 'character' that they adopt via this mode of communication.

Ends

The context of the conversation revolves around an event that occurred, observed by the blogger (Participant 1). It is the relating of an event that he found amusing, and because of the selection of topic in relation to the shared knowledge of both the blog writer and the audience, who are all pursuing medical studies, this topic would naturally be understandable among the blog writer and the readers. The title itself “*Which One’s The Real Doctor Now?*” indicates a question as to roles regarding medical/medicinal knowledge. The expected Ends of the interaction would be to share the humorous tale, in relation to the audience’s knowledge of medicine, and this is what the blog post’s initial objective is able to achieve, with the responses that it initiates.

Act Sequence

Within a blog, the turn-taking strategies used by the participants serve as the act sequence. A blog writer would post up an entry, taking the first turn, followed by readers who would leave comments, followed by the response given by the blog writer. Because of the awareness of two different speaking ‘zones’ (the blog post and comment box), the participants are showing their ability to differentiate multimedia modes of communication, in the form of the significant features used to separate the posting and the commenting areas. In the analyzed posting of the blog entry dated 1st February 2008, the blog writer uses italicized font for a large portion of what is reported speech, in a whole paragraph written in *Bahasa Malaysia*. In this context, he relates how a certain type of medicine in the form of a plant, can supposedly cure all ailments and sicknesses, according to the “witch doctor” who was promoting the product. The use of italics is also a way for him to signal a difference between languages, when he writes.

Key

The tone of the blog post is sarcastic and funny, in relating a tale that is quite ironic and amusing to the blog writer. There is no formality in the exchange between blog writer and readers, and the casual tone of conversation shows the familiarity of the participants with one another. There is a balance of humour that all the participants mutually share, which shows the kinship ties they have developed within their speech community. A shared understanding of the medical jargon also signifies that they comprehend the blog writer’s message via the blog posting. Use of emoticons and cyber language in the form of smileys and asterisk symbols (i.e. ☺ and *laugh*) to show action for example, are clear indications that these participants are literate in cyber talk as mentioned by Crystal (2001) and Nilsson (2005) as being Blogspeak and Netspeak, respectively.

Instrumentalities

Using politeness strategies, turn-taking and code switching, the blog writer is able to relate the story to his readers, by writing out the blog post in a brief, yet detailed

narration. The blog post serves as the tool for him to connect and relate the story and his observations to his reading audience. The comment box serves as a medium to get the readers to give feedback, and also for Participant 1 to respond to the comments given by his commentators. Thus, the instrumentalities work two-fold for both parties, creating a discourse pattern within the blogosphere that facilitates two-way interaction, centering upon a topic, connected by text (the blog post). It can be said that the availability of the blog host (Blogger), in accessing the different zones of communication (the post and commenting sections), contributes to the flow of the conversation between participants.

Norms

The in-group and out-group boundaries are established with specific invisible “rules” within this context of interaction. The topic initiated by the blog writer is clearly a shared topic of interest as it relates to both parties who are students pursuing medical studies at tertiary level. An out-group, non-member might not be able to relate to the topic selected due to the inability to see the humour within their in-group, shared views upon the topic at hand. Similarly, the contextual cues, exclusive to bloggers (such as certain jargon and emoticons used to communicate meaning), would also not be easily read by an outsider, who would be unfamiliar with the interaction. Thus, topic initiation, politeness strategies, turn-taking and also code switching, all mark this context of interaction being uniquely one of a kind. A non-blogger, non-bilingual, non-tertiary level medical student, might not be able to read into the interactions occurring within this discourse space, due to the invisible “rules” set by the members of this internal community.

Genre

The genre of interaction is the blog discourse genre. However, the fact that it is a speech community made up of tertiary level medical students, who are also bilinguals and who are all bloggers, set the group apart as a genre of its own. The type of topics, shared interests and initiation of talk around the text, are centred upon the criteria mentioned above, as it defines this speech community, and influences the interaction that occurs within the group. Based on Hymes’ SPEAKING mnemonics, it can be seen that the literacy event taking place fulfills all of the criteria laid out as being the basis for interactions within a discourse space. Each of the criteria differs slightly according to the context or situation of the specific interaction.

Findings and Discussion

The subject — the blog writer Jamil, has demonstrated how his kinship ties with fellow bloggers who come from a tertiary level medical student background, is developed and retained through consistent reading, writing and commenting via the blog. The readers of his blog can be seen as leaving consistently significant comments that pertain to the chosen topics he has selected to write about in his blog postings. The language patterns that were observed which included use of emoticons, virtual symbols to indicate laughter,

short forms and condensed spelling, as well as some elements of code switching were identified to serve certain functions within the context of interaction. Pragmatic features such as politeness strategies and equal turn-taking are also elements to note within the blogging interactions that take place within this discourse space. Simpson (2002) states that blogging unites writing and speaking, and this can clearly be seen in the blog interactions taking place within the subject's discourse space, as the commentators seem to be 'speaking' to one another via written text.

All eight of the Hymes SPEAKING mnemonics have been applied to the literacy event revolving around the genre of a medical student's blog, all of which have been aptly applied to each of the functions that are found within this context of interaction. The Setting is a discussion of an event that relates to medical knowledge familiar to the Participants, most of whom are also medical students who are familiar with the jargon as well as the situation described by the blog writer, relating his experience and the amusement he felt at observing that particular scene. The Ends of the interaction resulted in a meaningful discussion and expressions of amusement by the Participants who were able to relate to the topic, given that they understood the jargon and hilarity of the situation, based on their respective medical backgrounds.

The Act Sequence within this context of interaction demonstrates equal turn-taking between the blog writer and the readers, showing that each comment is addressed and responded to within the comment box. The Key reveals that the interaction includes elements of cyber language, indicating the ability to utilize multimedia modes of communication in the form of emoticons and various symbols. The Instrumentalities clearly show the technological modes, whereby this type of communicative event requires the use of blog tools provided by a blog host. Features such as the blog posting and comment box show the ability of the participants to use these effectively for the purpose of communication. In terms of Norms, the members of the speech community show that they are aware of the do's and don'ts within the discourse space and the casual mode of turn-taking show that they are all the 'in group' members of the community. As Pluempavarn & Panteli (2007) state, blogging creates social identity, and the use of pseudonyms in the commentators' section proves that each of the 'speakers' have indeed, created a social tag for themselves within the discourse space. This creates the Norms within the blogging activity that the participants partake in, thus it is a common feature of the blogging practice. Lastly, the element of Genre, clearly shows that this type of interaction is uniquely that of the blogging genre, as the various tools used, signify the multimedia literacies of the participants.

Summary of Findings

In analyzing the elements existing within the speech community of the medical student's blog, a number of interactional patterns were traced. The main aspects of turn-taking, politeness strategies and code switching were identified as playing a significant role in the type of communication occurring within this multimedia literacy event. Turn-taking strategies were used by the participants to communicate meaning and were important in establishing kinship bonds, which could be seen in the banter between the blog writer and

the readers. Politeness strategies were used, especially on the writer's part, as he played the role of welcoming his readers into the realm of his discourse space, his blog. Lastly, because the members of the speech community are bilingual participants, they are able to incorporate code switching into their 'conversation' via the blog, and this marks a significant exchange in the meaning-making process as well. It is evident the participants of the discourse space utilize both mainly 'situational' code switching (Blom and Gumperz, 1972) as their usage of *Bahasa Melayu* terms are related to the situation and context of the conversation. The jargon and topic selection within this speech community is also a factor that binds them, as they are seen as 'insiders' who share a joke that perhaps 'outsiders' might not be able to relate to. These kinship bonds formed between the participants show a significant camaraderie that relates to what Crampton (2003) and Marlow (2006) state as having a significant impact on the formation of virtual communities.

Implications for Educators

Understanding the way students communicate in modes they are literate in (via CMC networks such as instant messaging, online chats, and blogging), may have implications to educators in many forms. Huffaker (2005) states that Internet technologies continue to evolve, thus, it is important for educators to examine the latest development in 'CMC arenas' in comparison to past research to enhance more creative learning solutions. Wrede (2003) supports this by mentioning the importance of blogging as a platform for knowledge-sharing and discussions, specifically for the field of higher education. Based on these views, the researcher would suggest that one way that an educator can utilize blogging technology is by critically examining how the participants of a multimedia literacy event partake in the CMC technology of blogs, in bringing significance to a meaning-making process. The benefits are two-fold because not only can teachers learn speech patterns via these new multimedia modes, but the understanding can also benefit both parties, in the sense that the technology can be used to facilitate communication in both formal and non-formal environments, be they teaching related, or just a casual exchange of keeping in touch. By gaining additional knowledge of multimedia literacies, specifically blogging, teachers and educators are able to:

- 1) become a participant in a multimedia literacy event by understanding the speech patterns that exist within the blogosphere
- 2) initiate further communication via this mode (i.e. starting up a blog of their own, and having students come to the space that has been created to facilitate discourse)
- 3) promote and motivate usage of more creative technologies, as the communication established via blogging can enhance the relationship between students and teachers to provide a better teaching and learning experience

Thus, in understanding the speech patterns employed by students within their respective speech communities, educators would be able to initiate their own modes of communication in forming their own blog discourse within the blogosphere. Teachers can use blogs as a tool for teaching and reaching out to their students, and students are

able to communicate with teachers without the formality that is perhaps required of them in a rigid classroom setting. Teachers can even make blogging into a fun class project, and because students are attracted to this mode of communication, it could provide them with a better learning experience, namely language learning.

Suggestions for Further Research

Blogs are powerful tools for sharing opinions and influencing viewpoints, and teachers could very well take advantage of this mode to better understand the minds of their students. Because of its advantage as a vehicle for knowledge-sharing, blogs can undoubtedly contribute a lot to the field of education. Thus a lot of research could probe into the aspect of how blogs shape the aspect of education. In terms of language learning, blogs can be used as diary projects, essay and journal writing practice, discussion of weekly themes, and other such activities that facilitate knowledge sharing. In teaching literature, teachers could use the blog as a tool for sharing opinions and gaining feedback from students, even making use of the technological functions of pictures and videos to be included into the blogs to attract a more creative mode of teaching and learning. Ojala (2004) states that the concepts of weblogs as vehicles for knowledge management is a relatively new concept, yet, through the development of blogging, blog writers are able to partake in a number of knowledge sharing activities via blog, which includes the exchange of knowledge for research projects, sharing of industry and product knowledge, capturing and disseminating pertinent news from outside the enterprise, and contributing valuable insights on specific subjects.

Thus, teachers could in fact, use this vehicle to promote knowledge sharing, and even carry out their own research on students, via the blogging phenomenon. They could make full use of this mode of multimedia literacy and incorporate it into the set guidelines of theories and frameworks, in relation to classic teaching methodology. The marrying of new technology in the form of multimedia literacies, with the traditional concepts of teaching, will undoubtedly create a new formula for teaching and learning that would provide a more dynamic teaching and learning experience for students and teachers, alike.

Conclusion

The multimedia resources that the blogosphere provides in terms of technological features are a rich site to explore. This study has shown that students are able to utilize the discourse space of a blog for meaningful communication, using specific linguistic cues, based on the Hymes' framework. Because of their literacy in modes of various multimedia tools (such as those provided by the blog host 'blogger'), the participants within this discourse space are able to partake in 'conversations' that bring meaning to create a significant literacy event. With the means afforded by multimedia technologies, specifically those situated within the realm of the blogosphere, numerous conversations can occur and the meaning-making, knowledge sharing and community building done via this mode becomes a fascinating phenomenon to explore.

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