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Expressive innovation: How first-year college students introduced emoticons to the curriculum

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Abstract

For the initiated, college may be remembered as a care-free and playful time. However, for contemporary college students the transition to college is challenging with only 1 in 3 returning for their second year of study, and the challenges are even greater for first-generation and low-income students. The interactive digital platform of the current study invited low-income first-year students to write about and reflect upon their transition to college. It was through the higher order cognitive process of writing, which involved deciding which words, symbols, and punctuation to use to express a particular thought to a particular audience, that the students made-sense of their experiences. Our analyses detail how students integrated new approaches for communicating their thoughts in writing and how these techniques changed over time. We show how first-year students used the affordances of the keyboard and an interactive blog to create a reflective and supportive digital writing style somewhere between the formality of the college essay and the freewheeling social media post. The emerging playful style was marked by the introduction of computer-mediated communication (CMC) cues typical of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, including emoticons and emojis, hashtags, repeated capital letters, repeated punctuation, and abbreviations such as *lol*, to the college course context. A path analysis of 209 blog posts and 161 comments over four time points, coupled with a qualitative case study showed that students developed their use of CMC cues first on the social level through comments and later on the individual level in their posts. Our analyses show how students integrated CMC cues to communicate humor and critique as they created a new genre of college writing. The social support and the CMC cues were concretely relevant to the students' development of knowledge and practice of what it meant to write in college and what it meant to become a college student.

Keywords

Transition to college; Blog; Literacy; Computer-mediated cues; Social support; Narrative analysis

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1. Introduction

Tweet, text or post, contemporary adolescents are writing more than ever before (Lenhart 2015; Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). However, despite their prolific computer-mediated communication (CMC), adolescents appear to be struggling to develop their academic writing (NAEP, 2011) and this is likely related to the challenges that many students face in completing college (Bettinger & Long, 2009). The current paper describes a digital writing context where first-year low-income college students called upon their prior knowledge of playful communication techniques from social media to create a system of support on their course blog. We then bolster the theory that development occurs first on the social level and then on the individual level (Vygotsky, 1978) and show how the interactivity of the platform relates to the development of individuals writing over time. We suggest that digital communication networks serve as an important space for students to leverage their prior knowledge of CMC and provide their peers with support as they transition to college.

1.1. Sense-making, writing and thinking

Literacy theorists have argued convincingly that writing is always directed from the writer to an imagined reader and thus always social in nature (Bakhtin, 1986; Black, 1989; Bazerman, 2004; Cohen & Riel, 1989; Daiute & Griffin, 1993; Ede, 1989; Freedman, 1994). The act of writing itself requires an author to structure their thoughts, and to reflect on this structure (Ong, 1986). When writing it is through this higher order cognitive process of structuring thoughts, and then reflecting on this structure that an author makes sense of their life experiences (Berthoff & Stephens, 1988; Daiute and Nelson, 1997; Fulwiler, 1983; Lucic, 2013). Sense-making is particularly important during life transitions, such as the transition to college, when adolescents are working through cognitive challenges such as trying to figure out how they fit in and if they will succeed in the new college environment. These questions are particularly salient for low-income and first-generation students as they transition to college (Clark, 2005; Kreniske, 2017a; Terenzini et al., 1994). Previous research has suggested that for diverse first-year college students, narrative writing about the transition to college leads to improved academic outcomes, such as increased GPA and retention rates (Walton & Cohen, 2011).

In the current study, when students wrote about the challenges of transitioning to college, they engaged in a sense-making process that involved deciding which words, symbols, and punctuation to use to express a particular thought to a particular audience. These written words on a page, or screen, are the physical manifestation of the student's thoughts (Polkinghorne, 1988; Wertsch, 1991). Thus, a systematic analysis of these expressions offers insights into students' cognitive processes (Daiute, 2014). Further, when considering multiple narrative entries over time, such as over the first six months of college, the narrative analysis coupled with statistical analysis can highlight relationships between previous and subsequent writing (Kreniske, 2017a, 2017b). If we accept that writing is in fact a physical manifestation of thought, then an analysis of writing over time may offer insights into the ways students thinking developed over time.

1.2. The affordances of digital writing platforms

The concept of affordances, formulated by Gibson (1979), relates to the characteristics of an ecological environment or object that allows for certain uses and also has certain constraints (Thanem, 2008). For example, a typical bedroom affords sleeping more than a kitchen, or a plate affords eating more than it does drinking. The term affordance has been used across disciplines to describe a broad range of relationships including the features of digital environments (Graves, 2007).

In contrast to desktop-based word-processing software, the primary affordance of a blog is that an *author* can write what is called a *post* directly on the Internet. After publishing this post, multiple readers can instantaneously respond using the affordance of the comment. It is this Internet-based composition that creates the potential for instantaneous sharing of and commenting on writing, which distinguishes blogs and other interactive writing platforms from conventional word processing software (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). In our previous work we have shown that these technological affordance, which allow for increased social interaction, influenced students writing on a first-year course blog such that bloggers invested more thoughts and intensity as compared to their peers who were randomized to only word-process (Kreniske, 2017b).

1.3. Developing on the social plane

The affordances of face-to-face communication allow for prosody, intonation, gesture and facial expression to communicate the meaning of an utterance. However, the ways that people communicate on digital platforms are constrained by the letters and symbols of the standard computer keyboard. Given the constraints of the keyboard, CMC cues were created to communicate complex thoughts on digital platforms from author to reader. It was after all, in an attempt to communicate humor within the constraints of CMC that the first emoticon was used in 1982 (Baird, 2002), while letter repetition and strings of capital letters are used to communicate nuances of tone and meaning (Kalman & Gergle, 2014). Computer-mediated communication (CMC) cues, such as emojis and emoticons, punctuation repetition, and letter repetition are all symbols that communicate emotional and psychological messages in computer mediated environments (Kalman & Gergle, 2010; McSweeney, 2017; McWhorter, 2013). Additionally, abbreviations, most commonly *lol* – short for “laugh out loud” (McWhorter, 2013) – may be used for a variety of purposes ranging from flirting to showing empathy, to communicating complex and at times even contradictory meanings within a single utterance (McSweeney, 2017).

For contemporary adolescents, digital writing platforms have ramped up the social nature of writing, and allow for exponentially increased inter-personal interaction and rapid communication with multiple readers, and this has direct implications for sense-making and the way that writers, and writing styles, develop. While they may seem like small symbols, CMC cues are loaded with meaning and serve as embodiments of thoughts and emotion in digital contexts. Thus, the current analysis of how students used CMC cues over time offers insights into how these students developed techniques for communicating thoughts and emotions to their peers in the transition to college. The current paper has two interrelated aims: first we show how comments with CMC cues differed from comments without CMC

cues. Second, we show how students use of CMC cues in comments predicted their use of CMC cues in their subsequent individual post. To address this second aim, we use mixed methods including a path-analysis and a brief qualitative case study. Together these analyses show how writing in CMC contexts facilitates the cognitive and emotional process of becoming a college student.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

This study grew out of a two-year collaboration with administrators, faculty, and students at the college of study and with the New Media Lab at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Participants were recruited from a first-year seminar for students in the Percy Ellis Sutton Search for Education Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK) educational opportunity program at a four-year urban public college. Educational opportunity programs like SEEK provide funding and support for students from low-income households. As part of the program, all first-year students were required to enroll in a summer bridge program consisting of no-credit college level math and humanities courses. Students were recruited to participate during their first week of this summer program.

The participants were from diverse backgrounds: 54% reported being born in the United States and 46% reported being born elsewhere. There was a near even gender split between men and women. Overall, 60% of the students reported being fluent in another language, including Spanish, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Uzbek, Urdu, Punjabi, Georgian, Turkish and Tagalog. Nearly all of the students reported being 18–21 years of age, with only three students reporting being younger than 18.¹ The greatest number of students, 55%, reported their ethnicity as Asian, 30% reported Hispanic, 10% reported Black, 3% reported White, and 2% reported Pacific Islander.

As for their parents' or guardians' highest level of education, 45% reported a high school degree or the equivalent, while 20% reported their parents had only completed 8th grade, and 7% reported that their parents had no formal schooling at all. Overall 63% of the students were the first in their family to attend college. All students completed a media use survey in order to assess their levels of familiarity with blogging and other social media. The survey asked participants if and how often they used media such as blogs, Twitter, and Facebook. The majority of students, 78%, reported using some type of social media program on a regular basis, and 76% of students reported having a Facebook account. Instagram was the next most used social media followed by WeChat and Snapchat, while only 13% of the students reported having used blogs prior to the study.

2.2. Procedure

2.2.1. The writing activity—The students blogged ($N = 66$) four times during their first six months of college as part of a first-year seminar course. The first of the four writing sessions began in the summer bridge program as part of the required humanities course and

¹These three students were recruited using a slightly modified consent process as dictated by the CUNY Institutional Review Board (IRB).

continued through the fall semester with the final assignment completed on December 2, 2014. In addition, students completed a brief demographics and media use survey that also included the question “Do you think writing about your transition was helpful?”. The researcher personally assisted faculty and students at the college to administer the writing prompts and the survey.

During four writing sessions, students responded to prompts about their transition to college that were adapted from Walton and Cohen (2011). The first prompt asked students to reflect on their first week at college, the second on their first month at college, and so on. At each writing session, following a brief introduction, the researcher provided a written copy of the prompt to each participant and then read the prompt aloud. The researcher asked participants to focus on sharing their ideas and not to worry about spelling and grammar. Towards the end of the first writing session the researcher called the students attention to the blog’s comment functionality. Students were asked to comment in a respectful manner, as they might if they were interacting with their peers in a college classroom. The researcher also shared a few comment examples: including supportive, “Nice post”; elaborative, “When you wrote about feeling like a new person in the class – I really understood that. I often feel that way too!”; and questioning, “It’s interesting how you talked about your experience in the first month. I’ve felt really differently. What do you think helped you adjust so quickly?”. The researcher then asked students to read and add comments to posts of their choice.

This writing activity was distinct from the majority of other content-based work that these first-year students were assigned, as the prompts were designed to elicit expressive writing focused on students’ psychological and emotional development in relation to their transition to college. The prompts were designed to create a meaningful writing and thinking activity that would encourage participants to tell a story about their transition to college. The prompts situated the participants as people with important experiential knowledge whose audience was future students like them. The writing activity was also a way for students to share their experiences with their current peers and interact in subsequent discussions related to the transition to college experience.

2.3. The blogging medium

The blogging medium was generated as part of a WordPress Multisite install where the researcher acted as a *Super Admin*, undergraduate research assistants acted as *Administrators* and the participants were *Authors*. These terms refer to settings established by WordPress software designers and delineate specific user capabilities. For example, Authors can only edit their own writing, while Super Admins have complete control of site settings, access and modifications to the site, including the ability to edit or even delete any content from the site. To create user anonymity, the researcher modified the theme so that author emails were not visible to other authors. The blog, Fig. 1, was set to use the WordPress 2013 Theme (Version 1.1). The researcher purchased the domain name, thiscollegestory.com, and with the assistance of the New Media Lab hosted the site on The Graduate Center university server.

WordPress automatically creates a url for each Author on a blog. This url can be accessed by clicking on the Author’s name from anywhere it appears on the blog. The researcher set the

Display Authors Widget plugin (Version 1.1.1) to display all of the authors' hyperlinked pseudonyms in the main widget area. In addition, when an Author wrote a post or comment these were displayed in the respective Recent Post or Recent Comments that were designated to appear in the Secondary Widget Area as shown in Fig. 2. Students were encouraged to read each other's posts and to write comments. The blog was not publicly accessible and the network was password protected using the More Privacy Options plugin (Version 4.0).

Undergraduate research assistants – who also self-selected pseudonyms – added one comment to all blog posts that had not received at least one peer comment after a week of being posted. The undergraduate research assistants were instructed to select a comment from one of five comment types with each of these comment types including five comment exemplars. The comment exemplars were based on previous studies involving a similar population of SEEK undergraduate students (Kreniske, 2014) and from a review of the blogging literature (Bolander, 2012; Lee, 2010; Mazur & Kozarian, 2010; Stonehouse et al., 2012). The five comment subtypes were enthusiastic, elaborative, questioning, encouraging, and intuitive. An example of an enthusiastic comment was “nice post!”; an elaborative comment starter was “it’s interesting that... (followed by a detail from the selected post); one questioning exemplar was “I wonder how it might have been different if...”; an encouraging comment exemplar was “I know you’ll make it”; and intuitive comments were based on the research assistant’s intuition or gut feeling about what kind of comment to write.

2.4. Comment values analysis

The comment values analysis will provide the reader with a sense of the general types of comments that students' wrote and how the comments with CMC cues differed from comments without CMC cues. Consistent with the theory of narrating as a means of cognitive development, we used a values analysis (Daiute, 2014; Daiute & Kreniske, 2016; Kreniske, 2014) to code students' comments. We present examples and codes in Table 1. Values analysis involves identifying the principles and norms of a set of narratives. What authors choose to write communicates what the author views as important given a particular audience and purpose. In the context of this study, students were deeply involved in the process of becoming college students, and across their comments the most common value was that supporting peers is important. All of the comments were coded with one of the four values listed with exemplars in Table 1. The third and fourth authors coded all 161 comments and established a high level of inter-rater reliability, $\kappa = .855$, $p < .0001$. When disagreements arose the first author served as the tiebreaker. After coding all of the comment values we used information from the CMC cue analysis, described below, to separate comments that did not use CMC cues and comments that did use CMC cues and we present these differences in the first subsection of the results.

Generally, the value that having a sense of humor is important could be interpreted as a subset of support. In contrast to strictly supportive comments such as the below, or “I feel you!!!”, we distinguished the humor comments when there was an added indication of

laughter as in “haha! Elevator story well told”, or as in the example above that included a joke or gentle tease.

2.5. The CMC cue analysis

Our second analysis focused on the ways that students used CMC cues in their posts and comments over time. Table 2 shows the eight types of CMC cues that we identified throughout the student’s posts and comments.

The publishing platform, WordPress, often automatically transformed emoticon symbols into emojis making it difficult to determine the author intent. We therefore use the term *emo* to denote the CMC cues of emoticons and emojis.

2.6. Reliability and CMC cue analysis exemplars

The researcher and an assistant used the qualitative software ATLAS.ti (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development 2014 Version 8.2.2, 2018ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development, 2018ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development 2014 Version 8.2.2, 2018) to manually code the CMC cues in the posts and comments. ATLAS.ti is a computer program that is widely used by qualitative researchers. When using ATLAS.ti, qualitative researchers must import the narratives to be analyzed and create *codes*. In this study an undergraduate who did not participate in the coding process created individual rich text files for each first-year student post, and in doing so separated the posts from their comments so that the researchers who conducted the coding were blind to the relationship between post authors and comments.

The coding schema draws from previous work with significance analysis and from our previous work on first-year bloggers (Daiute, 2014; Kreniske, 2017b). The first and the third author established inter-rater reliability using a randomly selected set of 20% of the first-year student posts. Cohen’s κ indicated there was a high level of agreement (Landis & Kock, 1977) between the coders, $\kappa = .90$, $p < .0001$. The third author then coded all of the posts and the first author coded all of the comments. After all of the narratives were coded we used ATLAS.ti to generate quantitative output of CMC cues. We then grouped student comments and posts by the variety of CMC cues. As in the following example, many comments included more than one type of CMC cue, “Oh wait noooooo!!!!!!”. In this instance the commenter used both repeating letters and repeating punctuation. Therefore, this comment was categorized as using two varieties of CMC cues. We categorized comments and posts into four groups based on the variety of CMC cues used: 0 CMC cues, 1 CMC cue, 2 CMC cues, and 3 or more CMC cues.

2.7. Brief qualitative case study

In the brief case study, we present an example of the ways that the social commenting related to the individuals’ post writing. This qualitative example serves to add context and texture to the CMC Cue analysis of statistical trends. We focus on one student who selected the pseudonym Newbeginnings. Newbeginnings was 18–21 years old and identified as a monolingual African-American woman. Further, Newbeginnings reported that she was the first in her family to attend college, and like all of the students in the study came from a low-

income household. In the final results subsection we will present the two comments Newbeginnings wrote at Time 1, and the post that Newbeginnings wrote at Time 2.

3. Results

The results are divided into three sections: first we present the results of the values analysis of CMC cue comments compared to comments without CMC cues. Second, we present the results of the path-analysis showing how the use of CMC cues in comments predicts the use of CMC cues in their subsequent individual post. Third, our qualitative analysis illustrates the statistical trend presented in part two and shows how one student's comments at Time 1 related to her post at Time 2.

3.1. Comment values

Out of the total 161 comments written over students first six months in college, 88 included at least 1 CMC cue. CMC cues were used in 95 out of 209 posts. Table 3 shows that the majority of comments both with and without CMC cues were supportive. Comments with CMC cues more frequently used humor than comments without CMC cues. Interestingly, many more comments with CMC cues were critical as compared to comments that did not include CMC cues.

We performed a path-analysis using Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) to see if students' interpersonal use of CMC cues in comments would be predictive of the CMC cues in their subsequent individual post writing. For example, would the CMC cues in students comments at Time 1 predict the CMC cues they used in Time 2? We used the adjusted mean and variance weighted least square (WLSMV) estimator to account for the ordinal nature of the variables. WLSMV is based on polychoric correlation matrix, which, compared to Pearson's correlation matrix, produces more accurate estimates. Probit regression coefficients express the probability of using CMC cues in a post based on the number of CMC cues present in one's previous post. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistic counts and percent for the variety of CMC cues used in students posts and comments.

Fig. 3 then shows that at each time point the variety of CMC cues a student used in their comments was predictive of the CMC cues that they then used in their own subsequent post.

It was the variety of CMC cues in comments, not their previous post, that was the better predictor of their future use of CMC cues.

3.2. Brief case study

In this brief qualitative case study we trace Newbeginnings development of CMC cues by examining her comments and subsequent posts. This qualitative example offers context to the statistical relationship and illustrates how the CMC cues in comments were related to the use of CMC cues in the subsequent post. Specifically, we show how Newbeginnings wrote two CMC cue comments at Time 1 and then incorporated not only the CMC cues but also the concepts from her peers' posts into her individual writing at Time 2.

In one instance Newbeginnings reads Ty95's Time 1 post, shown in Fig. 4, and then responds with a CMC cue comment.

In this post, Ty95 relates the very real challenges of transitioning to college, among them the difficult commute, his family expectations and the balancing of school work and social life. Newbeginnings shows support for the ideas expressed in the post and specifically picks up on Ty95's CMC cue "YEAH I GOT NO SOCIAL LIFE". Newbeginnings responds "I thought I was the only one loosing (sic) my social life lol at least we're not alone". In this context, Newbeginnings use of the CMC cue *lol*, can be interpreted not as laughter, but as a technique for communicating a complex set of thoughts and emotions (McSweeney, 2017).

This idea of social challenges seemed to resonate with Newbeginnings. In the other comment that she wrote at Time 1, Newbeginnings communicated a similar supportive message relating to social challenges in the transition to college:

Dont feel embarrassed im shy too and the easiest thing to do is to just come up with a question to ask somebody and start a conversation like that. Everyone is still pretty new so they wouldn't pass up the opportunity to make new friends! 😊

In this comment Newbeginnings uses the CMC cue of an emo to communicate support and empathy to her peer.

In her Time 2 post, Fig. 5, Newbeginnings not only uses the CMC cues that she developed in her Time 1 commenting, she also centers the post on the topic of forging social connections.

As she did in her comments, Newbeginnings uses the CMC cues of abbreviation and emos. In fact, she even uses an emo as the title of her post. She also uses capital letters to emphasize that the college was "EXTREMELY diverse".

Beyond the CMC cues, Newbeginnings has also further developed her writing and thinking about social relations. No longer does she seem to be "loosing (sic) her social life," but rather the unifying sentiment from this post is one of social connections and bonding with classmates. In the first paragraph of the post she writes of feeling more comfortable and knowing more people. As the narrative progresses it seems Newbeginnings gains momentum and confidence, by the second paragraph she writes, "I love the diversity of this school and the many different personalities that I've met". The focus of Newbeginnings third paragraph is on how she has changed and "become a lot more friendly because everyday I made the effort to talk to people". Consider how this quote relates to Newbeginnings comment at Time 1 where she acknowledged her shyness and advised her peer to "just come up with a question and ask somebody and start a conversation like that". The final paragraph brings the emphasis back to the group and how salsa class "was a great bonding moment". Both the use of CMC cues and the concepts included in Newbeginnings Time 2 post can be traced back to her comments on peers' posts at Time 1.

4. Discussion

For the initiated, college may be remembered as a care-free and playful time. However, for contemporary college students, the transition to college is challenging with only 1 in 3

returning for their second year of study (IPEDS, 2016) and the challenges are even greater for first-generation and low-income students (Wine et al., 2011). Despite, their prolific use of social media, students entering college today may feel underprepared for the demands of college writing (Bettinger & Long, 2009; Snyder et al., 2004). The first-year course blog of study provided students with a space to engage in low-stakes writing that was somewhere between the familiar social media and the potentially daunting college essay. Students then called upon their prior knowledge of CMC cues to support their peers and to engage in the higher order cognitive process of developing their individual writing styles. The playful style marked by the introduction to the college course context of a variety of CMC cues first developed on the social level, through the interactive commenting, and then was integrated into student's individual posts. We suggest that the relationship between CMC cue use in comments and subsequent posts sheds light on the authors' cognitive developmental process as they created a new writing genre first on the interactive social level and then on the individual level.

The most frequent types of comments, regardless of CMC cue use, were supportive. While true to their origin as a symbol of humor in CMC (Baird, 2002), CMC cues in comments were more frequently used in the network of study to communicate humor or laughter than comments that did not include CMC cues. Without sound or the ability to use images, CMC cues were the tool of choice to initiate playful interactions, in the form of light-hearted jests, and to indicate laughter and amusement at their peers' writing. Further, it was through these frequently playful interactions that students developed new approaches for expressing their thoughts about becoming a college student that would later be integrated into their individual writing. In essence, it was through seemingly lighthearted computer mediated play that students began to change the way they wrote, and simultaneously the way they thought about college.

While there were few critical comments, the existing critical comments more often included CMC cues. Drawing on the more frequent uses of CMC cues as indications of empathy and support, CMC cues in critical comments may be used to temper a critique. As in the example included previously, the commenter first offers support then critiques the author's style telling them to be "professional" next time. This critique is then followed by two CMC abbreviations and repeated exclamation points. Ironically, the commenter uses CMC cues to provide a critique of the original author's colloquial style. CMC cues used in this fashion appear to serve as a way to communicate a complex mixture of empathy and critique.

The CMC cue comments were not only for jests and jeers. As the commenters wrote they were using a variety of techniques to communicate powerful thoughts and emotions that they would later incorporate into their own college writing: The variety of CMC cue techniques in the comments was the best predictor of the variety of the CMC cues in their subsequent posts. On the social level of comments students interacted with new techniques for communication that they would later use in their individual level posts. Students developed this communication style first in the interpsychological activity of the comment and then incorporated it intrapsychologically into their individual posts.

Their writing stands as a physical representation of the students' thoughts (Polkinghorne, 1988; Wertsch, 1991). Further, writing itself restructures thought (Ong 1986), and we suggest that through commenting students were restructuring the way they were thinking about the transition to college. Through the integration of CMC cues into their individual writing, students created a genre that was somewhat more formal than a social media post and somewhat less formal than the traditional college essay. Deciding where and when to use CMC cues as they negotiated genres was a cognitive process (Bazerman, 2009; Daiute, 2017) and our analyses suggest that this process unfolds longitudinally, first on the social plane and then later on the individual plane. Through their writing and reflecting on the transition to college these first-year students were figuring out what it meant to be a college student.

The case study further elucidates this point, showing that the CMC cues may in fact stand as just one quantifiable marker of a larger process of development that the students engaged in as they reflected on their college transition. The case study suggests that through commenting students were developing more than just CMC cues. As we illustrated with Newbeginnings, her comments that used CMC cues at Time 1 addressed issues of social acceptance and peer relationships that became the focus of her Time 2 post. Writing about their college transition experiences on an interactive blog may be particularly beneficial for students like Ty95 and Newbeginnings who were both the first in their family to attend college. Newbeginnings comments communicated to Ty95 that he was not alone, rather he was involved in a shared struggle that among other challenges involved balancing his social life and academic responsibilities. As with the CMC cues, these ideas were first communicated by Newbeginnings through the interactive comments and then integrated into her subsequent individual posts.

We also acknowledge the limitations of this study such as the relatively small sample size. In addition, beyond our survey of prior social media use we did not have further background measures of students' digital writing or academic writing in general. Despite these limitations our analyses offer insights into the small mechanisms at play as students developed their writing and thinking on a social digital platform.

The seminar blog served as a low-stakes platform where students were encouraged to make-sense of their college transition. It was through this interactive writing activity and their playful use of CMC cues that the students developed first on the social level and then on the individual level. The social support and the CMC cues were concretely relevant to the students' development of knowledge and practice of what it meant to write in college and what it meant to be a college student.

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Fig. 1.
Screenshot of the This College Story Blog Homepage.

Transition to College ry Part IV

Uncategorized pkreniske Edit

This College Story. To create your fourth and final post please click the plus (+) top of the page.

nd to the following prompt:

ou to tell a story about your first semester at college.
1 has shown that during the first semester students often
out whether or not professors and other students at their
will accept them, and how eventually students become
able there and find a family of people with whom they are
d feel they belong.

describe how you have experienced your first semester at
College. Be sure to illustrate your writing with examples
r own experiences in classes, seminars, lectures, study

What people are writing

So What Happens From Here December 6, 2014

My First Semester of College Experience December 2, 2014

First semester December 2, 2014

My Experience as a Freshman.... December 2, 2014

Yes! Its almost over! December 2, 2014

A New Fairytale December 2, 2014

The First Semester December 2, 2014

Approaching the End December 2, 2014

First Semester December 2, 2014

First Semester December 2, 2014

Comments

grey on ★ ☆ ◇ ~ 1st Semester ~ ◇ ★ ☆

pj2015 on College Transition

kc33 on 1st Semester..

Fig. 2.

Screenshot of Recent Writing and Comments Widgets in Secondary Widget Area.

Fig. 3.
Students' CMC Cues in Comments Predict Subsequent CMC Cues in Posts Over 4 Time Points.

College Ain't High School

Graduated high school, damn I made it. I rule this world because I made it to college and I will be breezing through college. Oh wait noooooo!!!!!!! there is WORK to be done in order to get through college. First few weeks at College had taught me that and made it clear that in college I am by myself to make sure I do what I need to do in order to gain my bachelors degree. I was so excited to come to college and meet new people but what I forgot about is the actual work I need to do in college. High school was just too easy special senior year which made me lazy. I wanted to leave high school ASAP. Coming to College and in the first week had put me into more diverse experiences than I had in high school. High school was just 20 mins away from my house and I was able to get enough sleep for the next day but in the first week College my sleeping hours are almost at half the time of what it used to be. Then in the morning the 1 hour 45 minutes train ride is the worst thing ever specially because of how packed and slow the train runs. then come to class and by that time all the sleepiness and laziness has to be out the window and focus on the lesson in order to make sure I pass the class. In high school paying attention in class everyday was just a joke. The only time we paid attention was 2 weeks before the finals. Well after all the classes and workshops get home by 6-6:30 pm and freshen up and get back to doing homework and other assignment as well as studying. That takes me straight to my "sleeping time". Friends text me everyday to ask when we can chill next but I barely have any time. Monday thru Thursday college and Friday thru Sunday work. YEAH I GOT NO SOCIAL LIFE. Not for now, but what I think to myself is that this is all worth it. All this hard work will pay off one day. Loosing sleep and loosing Social life which I had plenty of in high school will drive me and get me where I wanted to be all along. Sometimes in life you have to sacrifice something in order to gain something greater and right now I am scarifying my sleep and social life in order to get an education that can put a smile on my people face especially my parents who are looking up to the first person that is in college from the family.

Fig. 4.
Post 1 by Ty95.

© August 19, 2014 Uncategorized newbeginnings Edit

I can't honestly say that I'm excited that the Seek Summer is over because we only have 6 days and then we officially start college. Losing my summer vacation was not going to be ideal but I can say that I've learned a lot and made some good friends to start my fall semester with. I feel more comfortable at college now that I know some people and I know how to get around. I definitely feel less intimidated of college life because I got a taste of what it will be like.

One huge thing that I learned this summer was to speak up and engage in the classroom discussions. The class that intrigued me the most was Social Justice because we talked about issues that are very important in general and important for attending college. We discussed racial stereotypes and how to be sensitive to one another's background. This is very important because college is EXTREMELY diverse. The high school I went to claimed to be diverse but it was mostly white kids and a few minorities here and there. But at college I met so many different people that speak many different languages. And this is just in the SEEK Program! I love the diversity of this school and the many different personalities that I've met. In my group we all got along very well and I noticed that in this last week we all seem to have become comfortable with each other.

Another thing that I've realized is that I have become a lot more friendly because everyday I made the effort to talk to people. I'm normally pretty introverted but I made myself talk more and it has paid off. Making friends here wasn't as intimidating because everyone was in the same position as you and they were willing to make friends. I think that because of Seek I have grown as a person and I'm very thankful for it. (even though I desperately wanted to dorm at a college but I think I could like college 😊)

One last thing I'd like to say is that the one activity that really brought our group together was the salsa class. I was in no way, shape, or form looking forward to salsa lessons! I am clumsy and I don't really dance well so I was scared that I would fall or start sweating because I would get nervous. But I have to say that even though I was hesitant it was really fun. Most people had never done this before so that was comforting. But then it was time to dance with partners and I almost died.. I thought great now I get to mess up and step on some guy's feet! But luckily I didn't and it was actually fun getting to twirl around. And none of the guys smelled so that was a plus LOL 😊 It was a great bonding moment and a pretty cool way to end SEEK..

Fig. 5.
Newbeginnings Time 2 Post.

Table 1

Comment Value Categories and Examples.

Comment Value	Example
Supporting students is important	Nice title!
Asking questions is important	Do you think having homework every night helps you to master the material? Have you considered getting a tutor to help with your math?
Being critical is important	You Talking Too Much BRUHHHHH
Having a sense of humor is important	OMG, this is so funny. next time, be professional. lol JK. keep up :) i totally agree with ya bruh!!

Table 2

Computer-Mediated Cue Codes.

CMC Cue Code	Example Quotation
Emo	We all want to make new friends so now it's the time! 😊
Affect Sounds	My other classes are just blsh!
Repeating Punctuation	I feel you!!!!
Hashtags	#ImGrown
Capital Letters	HOW EMBARRASSING IS THAT??
Abbreviations	Do you still feel "OMG" to give up your whole summer?
Repeating Letters	I'm glad they're going toooooo be in my class next semester.
Symbols	First Semester? Done ✓

Table 3

Total Value Coded Comments with and without CMC Cues.

Types of Comments	NO Cues	CMC Cues
Supporting	60	44
Questioning	10	5
Critical	2	10
Humor	0	29
Total	72 (<i>n</i>)	88 (<i>n</i>)

Use of CMC Cues as Predictor of Future Writing.

Table 4

Use of CMC Cues in Posts and Comments Over Time.

		Time 1 N(%)	Time 2 N(%)	Time 3 N(%)	Time 4 N(%)	Total N(%)
Student Posts						
	0	32(57.1)	21(38.9)	21(40.4)	16(37.2)	94(45.0)
	1	13(23.2)	15 (27.8)	13(25.0)	14(32.6)	55(26.3)
	2	5(8.9)	12(22.2)	6 (11.5)	3(7.0)	26(12.4)
	3 or more	6(10.7)	6(11.1)	12 (23.1)	10(23.3)	34(16.3)
Student Comments						
	0	44(78.6)	34 (61.9)		40(80.0)	118(73.3)
	1	5(8.9)	8(14.5)		2(4.0)	15(9.3)
	2	4(7.1)	7(12.7)		5(10.0)	16(9.9)
	3 or more	3(5.4)	6(10.9)		3(6.0)	12(7.5)