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## Effects of Online, Collaborative Discourse on Secondary Student Writing: A Case Study of the History and Ecology of an Electronic Exchange

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THE EFFECTS OF ONLINE, COLLABORATIVE DISCOURSE ON SECONDARY  
STUDENT WRITING: A CASE STUDY OF THE HISTORY AND ECOLOGY OF AN  
ELECTRONIC EXCHANGE

by

JULIE HENDERSON RUCKER

(Under the Direction of Michael T. Moore)

ABSTRACT

Technological environments where teens spend much of their time after school are environments that educators seldom use in classroom instruction. These Web 2.0 environments are participatory, collaborative environments where teens share music, files, pictures, and ideas and are influenced by the information shared by others within their Web 2.0 environments. This study looks at a particular online environment, the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, and how secondary student writing is affected by the collaborative nature of electronic exchanges conducted on this online network.

This study analyzed the history and ecology of one electronic exchange (a technological, participatory discourse community within the classroom) that has been replicated using the described format by hundreds of teachers over the course of the past 15 years on BreadNet, the private, online network of the Bread Loaf School of English. Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory, M. M. Bakhtin's discourse theory, and Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism formed the conceptual framework for this study.

Through the intrinsic case study of Pass the Poetry, an electronic exchange conducted on BreadNet via the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, the researcher traced the writings of four students using the transcript of the year-long exchange looking for

evidence of student transactions with literature, watching for changes in writing fluency and syntactical complexity, observing responses to peer and adult audiences, and searching for evidence that students change their writing as a result of interactions with their audiences. Data sources for the research included the transcript of the exchange, open-ended surveys of four students who participated in the exchange, interviews of the two teachers who planned the exchange, and an outside correspondent/poet who participated directly with students in the exchange.

An ecological metaphor described the components of the exchange. Themes identified in the research included student literary transactions, the role of audience, analysis of syntactic complexity, and online relationship building.

**INDEX WORDS:** Web 2.0, Writing process, Literary transactions, Writing fluency, Syntactical complexity, Electronic exchange ecology, Collaboration, Participatory, Audience, Discourse, Network, Poetry, Case study, T-unit analysis, Constructivism

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JULIE HENDERSON RUCKER

B.A., Georgia Southern University, 1992

M.A., Valdosta State University, 1996

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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JULIE HENDERSON RUCKER

Major Professor: Michael T. Moore

Committee: John Weaver  
Stephen Jenkins  
Dixie Goswami

Electronic Version Approved:  
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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated first to my heavenly Father from whom all blessings flow. Through this experience, You taught me much about understanding Your will for my life.

Next I dedicate this work to the women who influenced my life. To my grandmothers, Mildred B. Henderson and Jewell W. Stone, your strength and character continue to inspire me. To my mother, Charlene S. Henderson, the first woman in her family to attend college and earn her RN, you taught me to believe in myself. To my sister, Dr. Melinda H. Harden, you showed me by example this could be done and kept me grounded through the process. To my daughters, Hannah and Rebecca Rucker, I hope you learn that you can set big life goals and achieve them, no matter the obstacles.

I also dedicate this work to the two important men in my life. To my husband Keith S. Rucker, I would have never completed this degree without you. Your love and encouragement helped me endure. To my father, Earl R. Henderson, Jr., thank you for instilling within me drive, determination, and independence—and most of all, for teaching me how to think for myself.

Finally, I want to dedicate this dissertation to educators who are ready to reform American education but are frustrated by tradition and bureaucracy. Just as this degree was a race of endurance for me, so the race for the minds of our nation's children must also be one of endurance. We cannot afford to lose.

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Thank you to the Georgia Southern University graduate faculty members who formed my committee, John Weaver and Steve Jenkins. John, thank you for pushing me to consider new perspectives of technology and how technology deconstructs our traditional concepts of text. Steve, thank you for stepping into the qualitative research zone and for telling me to remove my blinders and consider *all* of my data.

Thank you Dixie Goswami, Director of the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, for serving on my committee, for your encouragement, and for your insight into the electronic exchange work that happens on BLTN. Your influence on my professional life began almost ten years ago in the LCW class at Bread Loaf. I started listening to you then, and I have continued to listen and learn from you about technology and student writing. You talked about Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Cazden, and Moll; you introduced me to the Web 2.0 concept and new media; you challenged me to find the ecology of the exchange. Your influence on this study is incalculable.

Thank you Jim Maddox , the Bread Loaf School of English, and Middlebury College for allowing me to use the archived Pass the Poetry exchange as the focus of my research. In addition, I want to thank the Wallace Foundations for financially supporting my studies at the Bread Loaf School of English where my passion for online writing as a



pedagogical tool began. To my colleagues within the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, thank you for your knowledge, your support, and your expertise; I draw upon it daily when I connect with you online.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Purpose of the Study

Secondary students are positioned to move directly into the work force, the military, or some type of post-secondary education upon graduation. The literacy skills of high school students often determine the types of jobs or post-secondary institutions students attend after graduation. Obviously, the better the reading proficiency of students, the better their post-secondary choices will be: “Changes in the structure of jobs by occupation and industry and in accompanying job duties have increased the demands for better-educated and more literate workers with stronger communication and critical thinking skills” (Sum, Kirsch, & Taggart, 2002, p. 5).

In order for students to see the relevance for taking challenging, academic courses and improving their literacy skills, teachers must be willing to go to students, find out what is relevant to them in their everyday lives, and then help them make literacy connections. Louise Rosenblatt (2005) wrote, “The teaching of reading and writing at any developmental level should have as its first concern the creation of environments and activities in which students are motivated and encouraged to draw on their own resources to make ‘live’ meanings” (p. 27). While Rosenblatt promoted the use of prior knowledge to help students make connections to what they learn in the classroom, she also pointed out that their environment can be important as well in helping students draw their own meanings for both the reading of literature and their writing. Taking a cue from my students, I wanted my study to consider how the technological environments in which students exist, most often outside of school, affected their reading and writing processes.

Peggy Turner, a veteran member of the Bread Loaf Teacher Network (BLTN) since 1993, pointed out that networked learning helps students and teachers connect to others: “Networked learning, or simply the linking of students and teachers through telecommunications, creates new communities for learning within the traditional classroom, dispelling the isolation that teachers and learners have often felt” (2002, p. 12). Technological environments, such as BLTN, are often second-nature to students outside of school and can be used within the classroom not only to generate interest and make connections but also to improve the literacy skills of students. Many teachers are stymied by students’ lack of interest in schooling yet apparent interests in iPods, cell phones, laptops, personal MySpace or Facebook web pages, text messaging, blogs, Hotmail/Yahoo/AOL email accounts, and wikis.

While many of today’s educators are not as familiar with technology, students are very familiar, and they proficiently navigate in Web 2.0 environments (Madden & Fox, 2006). Web 2.0 applies to technology with the following characteristics: “utilizing collective intelligence, providing network-enabled interactive services, [and] giving users control over their own data” (Madden & Fox, 2006, p. 1). Examples of Web 2.0 applications include creating web pages, blogs, podcasts, downloading music, file sharing, uploading and displaying photos, and taking material found online and remixing it (p. 2). The largest users of Wikipedia, a prominent example of a Web 2.0 application, are those in the 18-24 age group at 24.25% (p. 4). America’s youth see this participatory type of writing as relevant. Notably, these Web 2.0 applications are people-oriented. By accessing this participatory technology, can educators make English studies relevant to the after-school lives of teens, in which they continue to learn?



Since students are communicating in a technological environment, teachers must change their notions of what text actually is. Curriculum theorists argue that text is autobiographical, that students create what they know. Are all texts autobiographical? Do they need to be? Literary critics who explore technology (Gee, 2007; Hawisher & Selfe, 2000; Hayles, 2002; Selfe, 2004; Snyder, 1998; Wysocki, 2004) show us that text is no longer relegated to a printed page but can be both part of printed text while existing with meaning in electronic spaces. English teachers must consider the instruction students need to be able to interpret, critically think about, and write such texts in multiple modalities.

Teachers must also revisit their definition of literacy. The word “literacy” now implies that students must know more than learning how to read. And since the page has moved to a screen in the students’ real world, how has this affected the way they read? Gee (2007) argued that students need to have more than a “verbal understanding.” They also need a “situated understanding;” in addition to understanding words, they must “plug in...images, actions, and dialogue for the words on the page” (p. ix). For kids to be able to solve real-world problems, they must have situated understandings. These situated understandings occur in education when students are exposed to “multiple examples” associated to subject areas and are taught how to “play the game” of that subject area (p. x). The cyberspace environment is an ideal locale for students to gain a situated understanding of how they can successfully communicate not just in English class, but in the world.

This study focused on an environment that produces the participatory writing that students do online with peers through the Bread Loaf Teacher Network. BLTN exists on

Breadnet, an online, private teacher network of the Bread Loaf School of English. Through this network, teachers and students conduct electronic exchanges, creating a technological environment that I later explore in chapter four and describe as a metaphorical ecology. After eight years of reading my students' electronic exchange writing, I am compelled to understand what pedagogical implications this type of writing, in this technological environment, has on teaching and learning. By studying the history and ecology of one particular exchange, I sought to understand the implications of that technological environment on student writing and learning.

### BreadNet

Members of BLTN connect with each other online through BreadNet. After a teacher logs on to the network, an on-screen desktop window appears (see Figure 1.1),

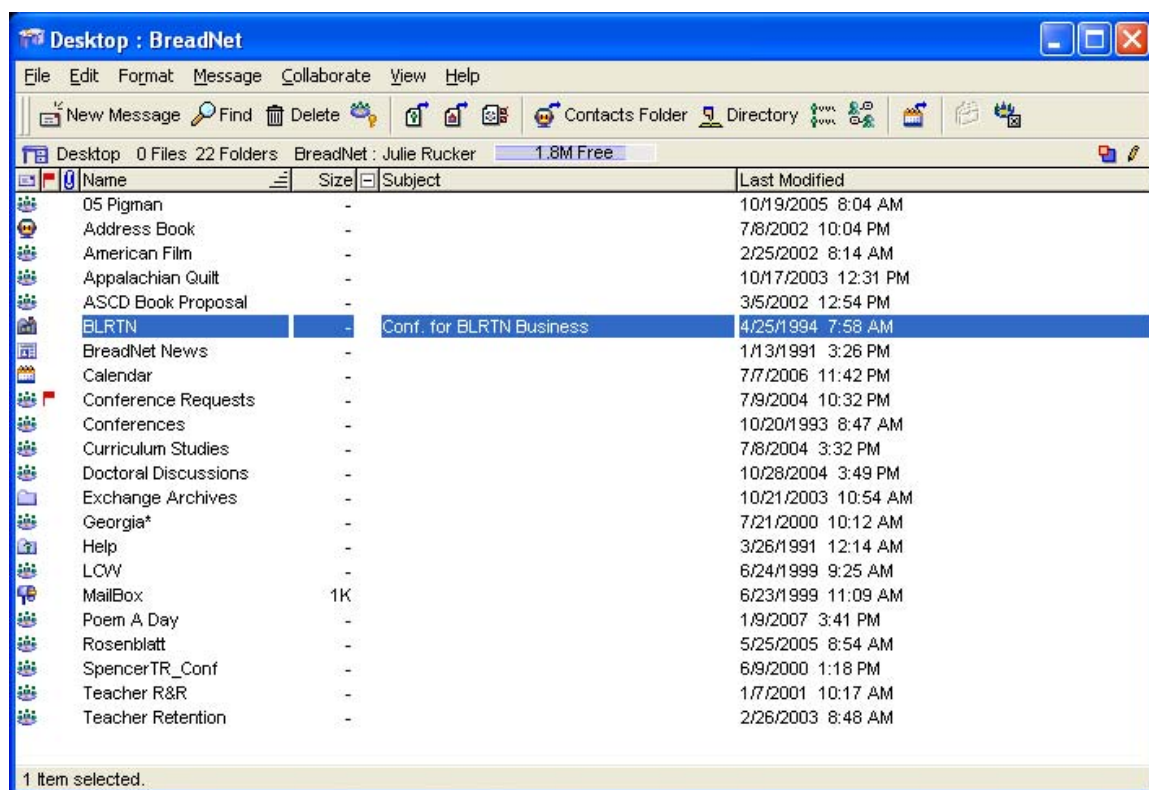


Figure 1. BreadNet Desktop that a teacher sees upon logging in to BreadNet.

which has folder icons labeled with names associated with their purpose within the online community of Breadnet. One such folder, labeled BLTN, is where teachers go when they have a question/comment related to a pedagogical issue that they want the entire community to read and possibly give a response. It is a public folder open to all who have access to BreadNet and facilitates professional discussion among teachers. Other folders on a teacher's desktop can be private conference folders where an electronic exchange is conducted. The messages in an electronic exchange are sent and received through this one folder by those involved in the exchange that must have permission to access it.

Within their individual classrooms, teachers receive writing to "exchange" via BreadNet from their students in a variety of ways. Teachers whose students do have access to technology can have students email their writing to the teacher, or they can submit their writing on a disc (CD, portable drive, etc.). Teachers then read the writing to make sure it is appropriate to send to another classroom, compile it into a file, and send it to the other participating classrooms via the BreadNet conference folder. Once writing has been posted, teachers can download what has been sent to their students. Thus, the "exchange" of writing has occurred.

My students are attracted to these exchanges; I see their engagement and motivation for this type of writing as a result of a different intended audience. If my students are expecting writing from another classroom, they question me about it until they receive it. Students are ready to write again to their peers, sometimes in anticipation over what was written to them, but more often than not, they want to write because they are curious as to what else their online peers might share with them. An electronic

exchange is not traditional writing that occurs in English/Language Arts classrooms, though students often share samples of traditional writing, such as essays or poetry, via this medium. From what I have observed as a teacher-participant over almost a decade of exchanges, I am convinced that this type of collaborative, online work is relevant and motivating to my students writing. I am also convinced that electronic exchange writing makes my students better writers. Meeting our students in this technological environment, having them meet peers online as well, forming these online relationships where there is a give and take in response, provides opportunities for written discourse that expands their situated understanding of English.

#### Research Questions

For my study, I wanted to examine the broad overarching question: **How does an understanding of the history and ecology of an electronic exchange help educators understand its effects on the reading and writing practices of secondary students?**

More specifically, I wanted to answer the following questions:

- Using Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory as a framework, what evidence of transactions between students and literary works can be identified in an electronic exchange?
- Do students self-reflect in their personal written responses to literature, and do students make changes in their own writing as a result of online peer response?
- How are fluency and syntactic complexity (typical measures of writing quality) in an electronic exchange affected?

## Background for the Study

In the summer of 1999, I became a member of the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, an online network of teachers and students sharing ideas, conversations, responses, opinions, writing, and cultures. The sharing is facilitated by Breadnet, the private, online network of the Bread Loaf School of English. This network runs on First Class software, which is a free download for all Bread Loaf students, faculty, and alumni. Access to the network requires an Internet connection.

BLTN members call this sharing “electronic exchanges.” This term feels right; it is specific enough in the sense that it identifies the method by which the exchanges are made (online, via the Internet), yet it is general enough to incorporate the many types of exchanges that have occurred and the ones yet to be thought of by creative and energetic teachers who use this exchange medium as part of their reading and writing curriculum. Reading and writing skills must be used by students in order for the exchanges to be successful. One cannot post a message without first writing one; neither can one respond to a message without reading it. Further, the exchanges I have observed online over the past eight years are usually text-based--literature, non-fiction, film, or some other type of non-print media. These exchanges are “writing-intensive online collaboration[s] focused on a particular interest and limited usually to two or three teachers and their students” (Gooch, 1999, p. 188).

The first year my students participated in exchanges, I observed that the exchanges gave students a clearer purpose and audience, improved their attitudes toward writing, improved their writing styles, allowed for analytical response, improved student engagement, and gave students an opportunity to publish their writing in a new medium.

Another observation I made, which impacted me professionally, is the development of community that occurs on the network, socially, academically, and professionally for me, and socially and academically for my students.

During my first year working with Breadnet, my students and I conducted several electronic exchanges. The first was a poetry exchange between two rural high schools in New Mexico and my rural high school in South Georgia. Another exchange that year was a cross-age exchange on Frederick Douglass between my high school students in South Georgia and second graders in Fairbanks, Alaska. A third exchange between a middle school in Ketchikan, Alaska, a high school on a Navajo reservation in Window Rock, Arizona, and my students in South Georgia, centered thematically on World War II. Not only were these exchanges crossing geographical boundaries, but they were crossing subject boundaries, age boundaries, and cultural boundaries.

Since the first year, my students have read *The Scarlet Letter* with students in Ohio and Colorado, studied Appalachian literature with classrooms in Ohio and South Carolina, viewed and responded to classic American film comedies with classes in New Mexico and Middle Georgia, studied Socrates and Ibsen and read mythology with classes in South Carolina, and discussed the American Dream with classes in Alaska, Vermont, and Mississippi. These exchanges were not perfect, but they were learning opportunities for my students in a participatory, online environment.

Participatory is a key word for the interactions that occur in electronic exchanges. Literacy is a “social process,” an “act of community” (Winkelmann, 1995, p. 433). Through their online writing, students developed their literacy skills via a communal

activity. Because they were a part of this technological community, students were able to gain a measure of autonomy in the classroom, effectively transforming pedagogy:

A different pedagogy can be realized when students work collaboratively, on their own rather than teachers' projects, when their collaboration is collegial and equal (rather than ego-bolstering for one), when there is effort to connect the curriculum to and let it grow out of student experience, and when there is a political project that attempts to work for the betterment of the community. (Hammett & Myers, 1998, p. 104)

The conversations, which were predominantly peer dialogue, were an integral part of an electronic exchange.

As an English teacher, I always stressed to my students the importance of considering their audience when they write. In many classrooms, the audience is usually the teacher and possibly their classmates. An advantage to initiating electronic exchanges between classrooms and developing a community of collaboration was in the authentic audience this community presented. Harris (1989) pointed out that none of us write or learn in isolation: "It is only through being part of some ongoing discourse that we can, as individual writers, have things like points to make and purposes to achieve" (p. 12).

No matter the genre or mode in which students are asked to write, if they have a limited concept of audience, then their writing can be "sterile, dull" and "canned" (Bigelow, 2007, p.108-109). Audience awareness is a distinction made between the novice writer and the experienced writer. Carvalho (2002) wrote that "expert writers produce reader-based prose that reflects the purpose of their thought, which is

transformed in order to be adapted to the audience” (p. 273). Students with real, active audiences whom they know, often will respond to what they have written, think critically and make better choices about what they write and how they write it. Nancie Atwell (1998) said that “Kids write with purpose and passion when they know that people they care about reaching will read what they have to say” (p. 489).

Exchange work between classrooms is often described as “teacher-free” in the sense that the ones contributing to the online dialogue are students. As a teacher, I am involved in the planning work of the exchanges, but students within an exchange have the right to their own words, their dialogue. The exchange itself is not a privilege-maker. Instead, it is a discourse-creator.

#### Research Methodology

This is an intrinsic case study of an electronic exchange, Pass the Poetry (PTP), which occurred over the course of two years between a classroom in rural Colorado and a classroom in rural Alaska. It addresses the history and ecology of this particular exchange, observes the transaction that occurs between students and literary text as evident in their collaborative writing within electronic exchanges, and addresses the effects this collaborative engagement has on students’ writing, particularly audience, fluency and syntax.

My primary data source was the transcript from the first year of the PTP exchange. I traced the writings of four students throughout the exchange, looking for evidence of students’ transactions with the literature per Rosenblatt’s transactional theory, watching for changes in syntactical complexity, and observing their responses to two different audiences. I looked for evidence of students’ integrating prior knowledge



in responses to other writers as well as integrating cultural contexts used within their own original writing. I also used the transcript to identify evidence that students change their own writing as a result of interaction with peers and/or adults online.

In choosing the students for this study, I conducted separate interviews with both teachers involved in planning and implementing the exchange and asked for their insights about which students they felt “grew” as writers over the course of the one-year exchange and why. To test Vygotsky’s social constructionist theory and ZPD, I also talked with them about their students’ and their own knowledge of the poetry genre prior to beginning the exchange and their perceived understanding of the genre after the exchange. I read the online transcript of what students discussed with peers and adults online within the context of the history and ecology of this particular exchange. I did not have the knowledge of how poetry was addressed within the classroom, external to the exchange, without interviewing these teachers, but I did have an understanding of the ecology of an exchange from my personal experiences on the network. I wanted to know how the exchange affected the everyday lives of their students, both in their transactions with poetry as well as their writing, and if they saw any lasting effects as a result of the exchange.

Finally, I evaluated the impact the exchange ecology had on the fluency and complexity of students’ writing by counting the number of words in t-units, the smallest measurable grammatical part of a sentence, at the beginning of the exchange, three months into the exchange, six months into the exchange, and at the endpoint of the first year of the exchange. I used t-unit analysis to measure syntactic complexity of student

writing at each of these points. After conducting the analysis of student-to-student writing, I also analyzed the writing students sent to the online correspondent/poet.

I intended for my qualitative research to corroborate my idea that students who bring their own contextual understanding to a reading and online writing experience, such as an electronic exchange, have not only a give-and-take relationship with the literary text, but also a give-and-take relationship with their audience resulting in measurable growth in both meaning-making and measurable writing maturity.

#### Significance of the Study

Writing is no longer simply thinking on paper; instead, writing should be studied in the context of electronic communities and in terms of the impact that collaborative writing will have on learning and meaning-making in our schools. Students are active, successful members of participatory discourse communities outside of school. My study analyzed the history and ecology of one electronic exchange (a technological, participatory discourse community within the classroom) that has been replicated using the described format by hundreds of teachers over the course of the past fifteen years on BreadNet. BreadNet is a precursor to other collaborative, educational online communities that have emerged in the past ten years such as Blackboard and WebCT. My study will be of interest not only to educators on the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, but also to participants in other online writing communities as well as educators and schools looking for ways to integrate technology into their students' literacy studies. The topics for electronic exchanges are limited only by the imagination and drive of the teachers formulating them. These exchanges do not have to occur solely in a language arts classroom but easily can and have been implemented across the curriculum.

## Limitations

Limitations emerged in the research design for this study. Because of the physical distance (and monetary restraints) that existed between the researcher and the participants, the interviews of the teachers and the online adult correspondent/poet were conducted via telephone instead of in person. Surveys of students who participated in the exchange were conducted via traditional mail.

The primary data evaluated during the study was the transcript of the exchange. No field observations were possible during the course of the exchange as it occurred eight years prior to this study. The context of the exchange was known only through what the adult and student participants revealed in the interviews and surveys as well as their writing in the transcript. How the classroom instruction directly affected student writing for the exchange was inferred through the transcript or described by the teachers in the interviews.

Time was also an issue regarding my choice of participants to interview. The exchange occurred eight years ago, making it difficult to find student-participants from both classrooms to interview. The time it would take to find students from both classrooms would not fit within the time constraints for my study. Therefore, I depended upon the adult participants to connect me with their former students for the purpose of my research. All students in the exchange are now in their early to mid-twenties, and some have moved away from the towns in which they attended high school in pursuit of their own goals, making contact extremely difficult. As a result, student writing could not be randomly chosen for evaluation. Gathering student perceptions of the exchange was not possible beyond what can be interpreted from the transcript and their surveys.

Another limitation involved the choice of students whose writing I analyzed for the study. While I did ask both teachers for help contacting former students, I was only able to contact four students from the Colorado high school. I obtained written permission from those students, and while I made every effort to ensure equal representation among gender, racial, and socio-economic groups, I was limited, again, by time, distance, and accessibility.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I explain the theoretical underpinnings of my work, which include Louise Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory, Lev Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, and M. M. Bakhtin's Discourse Theory. Because I am examining composition practices of secondary students, it is necessary for me to examine, to some extent, the history of the writing process—its relatively recent history and potential direction. Because BreadNet is the tool that lies at the heart of my study and is a significant component within the exchange ecology, I also reviewed a body of literature that stretches over the 15 year history of the Bread Loaf Teacher Network. The contribution of curriculum theorists who write about text and autobiography is clearly important because writing is more powerful when writers begin with what they know (Pinar, 1994). Finally, I consider the growing body of technology literature including new media in relationship to the juncture between the competing discourses of old media and new media.

#### Theoretical Framework

##### *Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory*

Reading and writing have a mutually inclusive connection that is essential for understanding the theoretical underpinnings of what happens in an electronic exchange. While Louise Rosenblatt's (1993) transactional theory is most often connected to the reading students do in the classroom, she clearly addressed the connection between reading and writing and blamed the separation of the two on instruction of traditionalists that occurred in universities. Rosenblatt, who was heavily influenced by John Dewey, William James, and Charles Sanders Pierce, pointed out that language and culture have a

give and take relationship. Rosenblatt (1993, 2005) said that the prior knowledge of the reader or writer played an important role in their literacy transactions: “Each individual, whether speaker, listener, writer, or reader, brings to the transaction a personal linguistic-experiential reservoir, the residue of past transactions in life and language” (1993, p. 381). She defined the linguistic-experiential reservoir as “this inner capital of funded assumptions, attitudes, and expectations about language and about the world” and said that no one in the world has more than their own personal reservoir from which to pull when reading [and writing] a text (1998, p. 891). Just as readers bring their own assumptions to reading a text, so do writers bring their own prior experiences to creating a text.

Rosenblatt used the term “transactional” to describe her theory of reading and writing. In a paper she wrote in 1998, she clarified that her use of the term came from the book *Knowing and Known* written by John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley in 1950. She preferred “transactional” because “interaction” was more scientific and less aesthetic in meaning. To her, transaction implied a relationship of reciprocity between the text and the reader: “Instead of a static reader digging out a determinate meaning embedded in a text, transaction named a developing event in which a particular reader and a particular text, each conditioning the other, contributed to evoking meaning” (1998, p. 890). A later interview with Rosenblatt (2005) further explained that Dewey and Bentley liked the term “transaction” because it implied a relationship of reciprocity, not just in reading but in “all aspects of life”: “‘Transaction’ also applies to individuals’ relations to one another, whether we think of them in the family, the classroom, the school or in the broader society and culture” (p. xviii-xix). While Rosenblatt primarily focused on the

relationship between the reader and the text, the idea of a transaction can be applied to the relationship between a writer and text when written for an intended audience, and it can also be applied to the participatory nature of the transactions that occur between writers, who are also readers and responders, in the electronic exchange process.

Rosenblatt explained that her theory would apply in language situations other than reading: “My transactional view of language applies to all modes of language behavior” (2005, p. xxxi). She continued by saying that both readers and writers “compose meanings”:

The reader starts with the author’s text and tries to build a meaning consonant with it. The writer starts with a blank page; as the text emerges on the page, its author is its first reader. Reading is part of the writing process. (p. xxxii)

Rosenblatt defined two types of authorial reading: “expression-oriented,” where the writer reads to determine if what she or he wrote is the intended message he or she wants to convey to the reader; and “reception-oriented,” where the writer reads by putting him or herself in the position of the potential reader to determine what the reader needs to know to understand the intended message (p. xxxii). A writer in an electronic exchange has both of these reading purposes in mind when writing and is conceivably more cognizant of writing for an audience than the typical student writing a traditional classroom assignment who is either given a hypothetical audience or is writing for the teacher. In an electronic exchange, the writer’s audience talks back, and authentic responses from a peer or online correspondent/poet motivates a student’s authorial reading.

*Vygotsky's Social Constructionist Theory and Zone of Proximal Development*

The work my students did online through BreadNet, as I explained in chapter one, showed me that learning occurred when they were able to come to an understanding on their own, often without much input from me. Courtney Cazden (2001), who was influenced by Vygotsky's work, called this "social constructivism" and defined it as "individual learning" which occurs with "the source of assistance in other people, from patterns of discourse to human-made artifacts like computers" (p. 77). Vygotsky addressed this relationship between learning and child development in his text *Mind and Society* (1978). He began by examining the three major, accepted theories of child development of his time—those proposed by Piaget and Binet, William James, and Koffka respectively—and then rejected all three (p. 84). He used his explication of the three theories to draw connections between learning and development. Vygotsky noted, "Learning and development are interrelated from the child's very first day of life" (p. 84). He theorized that there are two developmental levels to consider: the actual developmental level and the zone of proximal development (ZPD).

Vygotsky defined the actual developmental level as the "level of development of a child's mental functions that has been established as a result of certain already *completed* developmental cycles," or, what a child can do on his or her own (p. 85). He criticized his contemporaries for not questioning or considering the importance of what children can do with the help of an adult or peers: "What children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone" (p. 85). Luis Moll (1990) pointed out in his work that Vygotsky "never specified the forms of social assistance to learners that



constitute a zone of proximal development” (p. 11). Moll continued that classroom discourse was an important component of the ZPD: “the intellectual skills children acquire are directly related to *how* they interact with others in specific problem-solving environments” (p. 11). Cazden (2001) emphasized the importance of adult assistance through the term “scaffolding” (p. 63).

Vygotsky defined the ZPD as “the distance between the actual developmental level determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). To explain the difference between the two levels of development, he used a plant metaphor. The actual development level functions he described as the “‘fruits’ of development” while the functions of the ZPD were “‘buds’ or ‘flowers’ of development” (p. 86). Functions which occur within the ZPD, where a student is working in collaboration with adults or peers, will be the functions that soon become part of a student’s actual developmental level (Moll, 1990; Cazden, 2001).

Thus, interactions students have with peers and other adults online through electronic exchanges exemplified Vygotsky’s key idea of the zone of proximal development. Lee and Smagorinsky (2000) concluded, “Meaning is thus constructed through joint activity rather than being transmitted from teacher to learner” (p. 2). Writing is the backbone of the electronic exchange and plays a key role in learning as well. In the November 2007 *English Journal*, one of the more widely read professional journals among secondary English teachers, Smagorinsky cautioned researchers from doing what I did in the previous two pages—isolating Vygotsky’s definition for ZPD and using it to support my research on the electronic exchange.

Smagorinsky explained:

For Vygotsky, speech is the primary “tool” in the construction of culture. Through speech, people express what is on their minds. They in turn help to structure a society through the ways in which their speech both constructs a reality and brings it to order so that others may move easily within it. Further, speech serves not only as this means of representing a world; the process of speaking itself often serves as a vehicle through which new thoughts emerge....speech is, to use a well-worn phrase, the “tool of tools.” (2007, p. 64)

Although the “speech” involved in an electronic exchange is not the synchronous verbal speech of a face-to-face conversation, it is asynchronous text “verbalized” on a computer screen and still a speech genre.

Smagorinsky gave examples of formal speech genres within the classroom as well as informal speech genres without. He pointed out that the speech genre of a book club is vastly different than a discussion on a book within the confines of a classroom.

“People laugh a lot, they digress with stories that in some way are inspired by the reading or discussion, they use the discussion to think through new ideas, they co-construct meaning by building on one another’s thoughts, they eat and drink, everyone has the same access to the floor, and it’s OK to cry.” (p. 65)

With the exception of eating and drinking, Smagorinsky could very well be describing the atmosphere of a community created online within an electronic exchange. Electronic

exchanges create an online atmosphere of acceptance where “everyone has the same access to the floor.”

Moll (1990) pointed out that the *ZPD* is an important “theoretical construct, capturing as it does the individual within the concrete social situation of learning and development” (p. 4). Clearly, there is a relationship between social spaces and the development and learning of a student. Moll discussed how Vygotsky felt that students in a position to collaborate socially, “internalize” what they learn about problem-solving and meaning-making: “We should think of the zone as a characteristic not solely of the child or of the teaching but of the child engaged in collaborative activity within specific social environments” (p. 11). The electronic exchange is such a social environment within which students interact with peers, teachers, and other adults.

In his introduction to *Vygotsky and Education*, Moll took a three-pronged approach to understanding Vygotsky’s *ZPD*: holistic analysis, mediation, and change. Holistic analysis, Moll pointed out, focused on skills and drills and did not adhere to Vygotsky’s *ZPD*. Moll’s point was that literacy cannot be reduced to discrete skills and instead should be viewed as “the understanding and communication of meaning” (p. 8). Moll said “the search for meaning and significance plays a prominent role in Vygotsky’s theorizing” (p. 7). Classrooms which apply the *ZPD* to instruction use diverse methods to provide “social contexts...so that children, through their own efforts, assume full control of diverse purposes and uses of oral and written language” (p. 9). Electronic exchanges provide a social context, an allowed space, to establish their own purposes for language as well as to explore uses of language which are new to them. But these

exchanges are more than just a space for students to meet online and interact. Within these exchanges, mediation occurs.

The second aspect of Vygotsky's theory that Moll addressed is mediation. Essentially, what students know from everyday life can help them begin to understand new concepts presented at school; conversely, understanding the new concepts also may affect or change how students perceive everyday life. In effect, "everyday concepts *mediate* the acquisition of scientific concepts" (Moll, p. 10). My intent is to connect the idea of mediation to Louise Rosenblatt's idea of the linguistic-experiential reservoir, which I addressed in the previous section on Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory. This linguistic-experiential reservoir, or collection of language experiences, becomes students' prior knowledge of everyday life. Through this linguistic-experiential reservoir, the mediation between the everyday and the acquisition of new concepts begin. But the focus of the ZPD is not solely on the child or the teacher: "The focus is on the *social system* within which we hope children learn, with the understanding that this social system is mutually and actively created by teacher and students" (Moll, p. 11). Prior knowledge serves as a mediator for students when they connect to new concepts, but mediation also occurs when adults or peers offer guidance to students within social interactions.

Cazden (2001) applied the term "scaffold" to the assistance proffered by discourse and identified that the scaffold "has to change continuously as the child's competence grows" (p. 63). She cautioned that the term scaffold should only be used if there is "evidence that the learner's competence does indeed grow over time" (p. 63); therefore, scaffolds need to change over time as the learner's knowledge and understanding change. Moll further explained that according to Vygotsky, "social

interactions are themselves mediated through auxiliary means (most prominently by speech)” (p. 11). Moll and Greenberg (1990) wrote in a study of Hispanic households within which they identified zones of proximal development as the “content and manner of transmission” of “knowledge” (p. 320). Moll and Greenberg said the Hispanic households were mediating factors for making connections and meaning. The act of writing, itself a speech genre, is a method of mediation, and follows the lead of Moll and Greenberg. Based on this theoretical evidence, the electronic exchange itself is a zone of proximal development where students and teachers meet to collaborate and make connections and meaning through writing.

According to Moll’s analysis, the third aspect of the ZPD (change) typically occurred when students who performed something in collaboration with others could perform that same activity alone—the move from the ZPD to the actual developmental level. Moll promoted his own theory of change in relationship to the ZPD. Instead of change as a “transfer of skills...from those who know more to those who know less,” his focus was on “the collaborative use of mediational means to create, obtain, and communicate meaning” (p. 13).

#### *Bakhtin’s Discourse Theory*

Fecho and Botzakias (2007) asked researchers to explore Bakhtin’s theory of literacy education. My study examined peer collaboration and response (discourse) as being a vital part of what happens during an electronic exchange and a component of the exchange ecology. A conversation or dialogue depended on an audience’s response, and dialogue was an essential component of the electronic exchange process. Without a (written) response, there was no dialogue. There was no meaningful communication.

When I went through my initial training with BLTN, teachers who were experienced in electronic exchanges recommended that students always end their responses with questions for their exchange partner or group. Questions encouraged a response from an online peer and invited a partner to continue the dialogue. The work of the exchange was built into the dialogue that began in the initial student messages and continued for the length of the exchange. Fecho & Botzakias (2007) pointed out that meaning is made “through response” (p. 550). They offered five practices that occurred within a classroom operating in the spirit of Bakhtin’s dialogical theory; all five of these dialogical characteristics are found within electronic exchanges and are part of the historical and ecological field work:

- (1) raising of questions and the authoring of response by and among all participants,
- (2) embracing the importance of context and the nonneutrality of language,
- (3) encouraging multiple perspectives,
- (4) flattening of or disturbance within existing hierarchies, and
- (5) agreeing that learning is under construction and evolving rather than being reified and static. (p. 550)

While teachers initiated the work that began the PTP electronic exchange, the students explored their own ideas which were defined and expanded through the online dialogue. Halasek (1999), whose work focused on how Bakhtin influenced composition studies, pointed out that discourse was socially constructed: “an individual’s languages,

discourse, and rhetoric are conditioned and defined by complex, fluctuating social relationships” (p. 4).

Cazden’s (2001) work explained that the learning which happened as a result of social interaction lead to what Vygotsky described as “internalization,” but she explained that there was more than just a passive transfer of knowledge or skill as a result of the internalization (p. 75). She preferred the term “mental transformation” (p. 76). She explained the idea of transformation by examining Bakhtin’s work.

In his “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin (1981) talked about “authoritative discourse” and “internally persuasive discourse” (p. 342). These two forms of discourse were ways to “appropriate and transmit” someone else’s words (Bakhtin, 1981; Cazden, 2001). Bakhtin described two modes of discourse in schools: “reciting by heart” and “retelling in one’s own words” (p. 341). Concerning the importance of assimilating another’s words, Bakhtin said,

The tendency to assimilate others’ discourse takes on an even deeper and more basic significance in an individual’s ideological becoming, in the most fundamental sense. Another’s discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth—but strives rather to determine the very basis for our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior; it performs here as *authoritative discourse*, and an *internally persuasive discourse*. (p. 342)

Cazden (2001) was influenced by the idea of transformation as she saw it in Bakhtin’s authoritative and internally persuasive discourse:

When we transform the authoritative discourse of others into our own words, it may start to lose its authority and become open. We can test it, consider it in dialog—private or public—with other ideas, and “reaccentuate” it (Bakhtin’s term) in our own ways. (p. 76).

Internalization infers passivity, though Cazden said that was not what Vygotsky intended. Vygotsky’s intent was more in line with Bakhtin’s transformation, which is an active, individual learning that Cazden emphasized as “constructivism” (p. 76).

Without an exchange of words or ideas between online correspondents and in-class peers, a student’s understanding of an exchange subject would not expand. Thus, Bakhtin’s Discourse Theory, Vygotsky’s Social Constructivism, and Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory are interconnected and can be applied to the speech or dialogue occurring in an electronic exchange. The exchange is a mode within which the “relationship of reciprocity” is a key element. The give and take to make meaning is evident within the socially constructed discourse of an electronic exchange. The creation and shaping of online discourse is also influenced by the writing process of students. To understand how the writing process evolves in the exchange environment, one must first know the history of the traditional writing process.

#### A History of the Writing Process

In 1963, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer published a meta-analysis, *Research in Written Composition*, which examined just over 500 composition studies. Marshall (1994) identified this work as “one of the anchoring documents of our professional interest in writing and the writing process” (p. 45). Moore (2004) also placed this publication as a turning point in composition research. Moore stated only two studies in



Braddock, et al. were related to the process of writing. The other studies focused on a more traditional view of writing which emphasized constructing meaning through the close reading of a particular text (p. 202). An explosion of research on the process of writing began following the Braddock et al. study of composition.

Marshall (1994) reminded us of the politics of the period—Viet Nam protests, integration, Civil Rights Movement—and how the writing process movement was a product of that change mentality (p. 51). Composition research that contributed to the writing process movement dated to the late 1960s/early 1970s with the work of Janet Emig, James Moffett, James Britton, Peter Elbow, Donald Graves, Donald Murray, and Ken Macrorie (Moore, 2004; Tobin, 1994; Ede, 1994). In the 1980s, the most prominent writer/researcher was teacher Nancie Atwell (1998), who is known for the writing workshop, and whose teaching practice was also influenced by Donald Graves. Tobin (1994) explained that the phrase “writing process” can be misleading because all writing is composed within some process—but the meaning of the writing process for the writers mentioned above is a rejection of formulaic writing and instead is an “*emphasis* on the process, student choice and voice, revision, [and] self-expression” (p. 5).

Emig’s contribution to the writing process movement was the starting point of the research on process writing (Moore, 2004). In her dissertation *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (1969), several chapters of which she included in her text *Web of Meaning*, Emig (1983) identified two categories for student writing, “reflexive and extensive” (p. 88). She identified reflexive writing as what students do for themselves or perhaps for an audience of peers, whereas extensive writing was writing that students do, or in a sense perform, for an audience of the teacher and perhaps a parent. She found

that students' extensive ("school-sponsored") writing originated from literature or assigned topics, and had a short prewriting process, beginning "matter-of-factly" and did not encourage students to ponder their topics, and thus are seldom revised (p. 89). On the other hand, "Self-sponsored" writing originated from manifold topics of interest to students, had long prewriting components, had a specific moment when students know they have finished, contained evidence that students think about what they are writing, and was voluntarily revised by students (p. 88). Her study was a springboard for others on the writing process of students at varying levels of instruction (Moore 2004).

Moffett's research focused on the connection between reading and writing as well as writing to learn. He also differentiated between two types of writing: "writing to know and writing to show what you know" (1994, p. 18). Students' regurgitation of what they read in school was the "writing to show what you know," while the authentic writing was "writing to know." Moffett stated that the way writing was taught improved with the writing process approach because "the so-called process approach amounts to no more than teaching writing as adult practitioners go about it" (p. 22). Moore (2004) pointed out that Moffett "proposed a highly interactive curriculum that stressed drama, writing for different audiences, peer review, and editing and adaptation over formal writing assessment" (p. 204). Moffett's work, and that of others in this period, stressed that student writers should be able to write like adults in the real world for real purposes.

The work of Donald Murray was also important at the beginning of the writing process movement. He promoted writing to learn and peer conferencing, as did Moffett (Tobin 2004). Murray (1994) talked about the process of writing as a way for students to discover what they do not know: "The process is, after all, a process of learning,

exploration, speculation, discovery: the goal was always surprise, the purpose was to write to know” (p. 60). Conversely, much writing done in school today (classroom essays, SAT writing exam, other high-stakes tests) is the culmination of a request of the student by the teacher to share what the student knows about a topic.

Real writing occurs in a recursive manner with planning, multiple drafts and revisions, self-assessments, peer review, and eventual publication; all of which require time—something that often isn’t available for teachers and students in the classroom. It also requires willingness on the writer’s part to look and look again at what she or he wrote. Teacher-writers who focus on the process, as well as their students, realize that a piece of real writing is never done. Proponents of the writing process, if they accept in practice that writing is never done and are open to change when it comes to writing, cannot ignore that there has been great change in the medium in which students can and do write. Four decades after the beginning of the writing process movement, we are now entering another era of change, an era which ushers in writing with online computer technology.

### Writing and Technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

In 2003, the College Board published the findings of the National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges. The commission identified writing as the “Neglected ‘R’” in school curriculum, and said that the time students write in school each week would only equal 15% of the total time they watch television each week (p. 20). This report sounded much like a report written by Donald Graves (1978) for the Ford Foundation where he too lamented the lack of writing done in schools 30 years ago, at the beginning of the writing process movement. Three other challenges were also identified

by the College Board's National Commission on Writing in addition to time: "assessment or measuring results, integrating technology into the teaching and learning of writing, and supporting teaching and other classroom issues" (2003, p. 20).

The commission challenged policymakers and education stakeholders to a five-year timeframe within which changes would be made to address the dearth of writing instruction in America's schools. The commission called for American schools and educators to "apply new technologies to the teaching, development, grading, and assessment of writing" (p. 5). James Moffett believed that students learn as they *write* for their audience on an electronic network. Moffett would agree that students need an authentic audience of their peers with whom they want to communicate. An online dialogue gives them a new incentive for learning: "If students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with the details, wrestle with the facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else" (National Commission on Writing, 2003, p. 9). When reading the written conversations that occur in an electronic exchange, it is evident that students are struggling with those details and trying to make sense and meaning of what they have read in a literary text in order to make connections to the text by what they experienced in their lives. Because they have an interested audience of their peers waiting to read those struggles, they more likely will make the effort required to write for meaning-making.

Christian (1999), thus far the only educator to publish a book on an electronic exchange experience, was one of the first teachers to participate in classroom exchanges on the Bread Loaf Teacher Network. He conducted an exchange with his students on *The Dairy of Anne Frank*, which occurred over a three year period. By asking the question

“What does writing do and what is its effect on the reader?”, Christian identified five functions of writing in an exchange and created a taxonomy that identified how the writing affected the reader (p. 51). He placed at the lowest level of the taxonomy “performing writing,” or traditional classroom writing, and explained that this writing contained no evidence that students made a connection to the subject of their writing (p. 52). Other levels of the taxonomy included “reaching writing,” “connecting writing,” “striving writing,” and, what he considered to be the goal of exchange writing, “talking writing” (p. 53). Christian explained that talking writing occurred when students “spontaneously” created a dialogue within their exchange; within that dialogue students crossed cultural boundaries seldom crossed in the regular classroom (p. 64). While I agree with Christian that writing where students actually “Exchange Lives” (thus the title of his book) is “revolutionary” (p. 79), I also see room for examining *how* students make meaning in the electronic exchange, and how the history and ecology of an exchange informs the writing process. Christian presented the question of how the electronic exchange affected literacy development and connected it to Vygotsky’s social constructivism, but he did little to support the *how* of his question.

Two years after the publication of Christian’s book, another publication, *Electronic Networks: Crossing Boundaries / Creating Communities* (1999) addressed issues related to using technology in the Language Arts classroom. Chapter authors were mainly teachers who used communications technology in their classroom curriculum. The premise of the book was that technology by itself was not effective in the classroom. It was a tool to be used effectively by the teachers before it could have any effect on student learning.

Hilligoss (1999) identified two main categories of projects in the classroom—those involving desk-top publishing software such as Microsoft Office programs (Front Page, Word, PowerPoint, Publisher) or Web page design programs and those focusing on communications (Web 2.0 technologies) such as email, listservs, blogs, online networks and discussion groups. Purposes for the writing that occurs within these categories are manifold. Not only are writers concerned with actual text, but they have to consider multiple modalities of receiving messages such as audio, video, and visual images. Any medium of conceived communication can be viewed, read, or heard over the Internet.

Almost a decade ago, Howard and Perkins (1999) argued that when writers considered the writing process, they were “forced to begin thinking about the ‘rhetoric of the page,’ the relationship between text and graphics, and the importance of visual literacies” (p. 68). Now, when a writer publishes on the web, visual organization is just as important as textual organization. The audience reads and views the writer’s message on screen. Those who write for the web also realize their writing is temporal. Web pages move, expand, disappear, and undergo revision constantly. Those who choose to read and write for the Internet are cognizant of the fluid design of their “page,” which instead of being made of wood fiber and permanent is now fiber optic and fluid.

Howard and Perkins (1999) explained that the person who writes with technology may “conceptualize the production of any document as a collaborative, integrated, and usually recursive process” (p. 70). The use of the writing process when writing and publishing with technology is larger than one person: “Although small hypermedia projects may be ‘singularly’ authored effectively, many projects require collaboration” (p. 70). In the past, students designed and wrote text to be read by others,

and now they may be asked to design and write online text *with* others. The nature of the electronic exchange allows students to experience collaborative writing in a technological environment.

In 2000, Doug Wood wrote a dissertation that focused on espoused theories guiding teachers who attended the Bread Loaf School of English and collaborated on Breadnet. About one of the teachers in his study, Wood pointed out that the teacher made certain pedagogical choices within the classroom based on the teacher's knowledge of content and personal educational philosophy. Wood argued that Bread Loaf and BreadNet played a role in the development of the teacher's espoused theories. Interestingly, Wood pointed out that this teacher "inhabit[ed] the role of student—in a fluid stance from his Bread Loaf classroom to its manifestation in his own classroom [which was] one of the ways that he enable[d] his own students to begin to understand the content" (p. 100). This teacher struggled at Bread Loaf with material that he would soon teach his students back home. My case study did not ignore the importance of a teacher's content knowledge and espoused philosophy; the examination of the role of the teacher and how she used content-knowledge to teach her students was important in understanding the complexity of an electronic exchange. My study takes a step beyond Wood's and gives a complex view of an electronic exchange while recognizing lasting effects on students (and their teachers) To understand more of the teacher's role in an electronic exchange, I examined the history of the Bread Loaf Teacher Network.

#### A History of the Bread Loaf Teacher Network

The Bread Loaf Teacher Network, an online network of approximately 400 educators who live all over the world, began as the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network

on the Bread Loaf School of English (BLSE) Vermont campus in the summer of 1993. Articles written by network members in back issues of the *Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network Magazine* (which later became the *Bread Loaf Teacher Network Magazine*) offered both factual and anecdotal information about the history of the network.

According to the May 1994 issue of the *Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network Magazine*, a grant from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund (now part of the Wallace Foundations) supported 30 rural educators from Alaska, Arizona, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina, and Vermont. The fellowships covered the cost of room, board, round-trip travel, books, and tuition at a Bread Loaf School of English (BLSE) campus as well as a generous \$1000 stipend for teachers to use in their classrooms once they returned home. Teachers could reapply for fellowships for up to three years. While at BLSE, fellows took courses on writing, teaching writing, literature, and theater and were trained on how to use BreadNet, the online telecommunications network of BLSE. Teachers who came to BLSE had a wide range of technology capabilities; therefore, small-group training sessions and individualized tutoring was offered by telecommunications staff at Bread Loaf to instruct teachers on how to use the technology component of the network. After the summer sessions of BLSE concluded, teachers continued to remain in contact, collaborating professionally through BreadNet (Gooch, 1995; Maddox, 1995).

An extension of grant funds from the Wallace Foundations enabled the school to expand its fellowship offerings to include the states of Colorado and Georgia in 1997. Other funding sources began supporting the network, including the Annenberg Rural Challenge (ARC), which supported teachers from within its network of schools to attend



BLSE as part of the Bread Loaf Rural Challenge Network (Maddox, 1997). By 1997, the network expanded to include more than 200 teachers and administrators.

Grant funding for the network expanded again in 1998. NEH and Middlebury alumni supplied funds for teachers to attend BLSE and receive a generous stipend to use in their classrooms. As part of the NEH grant, teachers would work with two or three colleagues to plan an electronic exchange over a common literary text that involved their students as well as a Bread Loaf faculty mentor who was an expert on their chosen text for the exchange (Maddox, 1999).

By 2000, the teacher network was no longer composed of rural educators. Educators from urban and suburban areas participated in professional development and dialogue as well as collaboratively planned electronic exchanges with their students under the umbrella of the newly named Bread Loaf Teacher Network. According to Goswami (2005), “The evidence is strong that BLTN is one of the most powerful and visible professional education networks in the country—all credit to the teachers who have created and sustained BLTN since 1984 [origin of Breadnet], their students, and the Bread Loaf faculty who are their generous partners and mentors” (p. 3).

Fifteen years after the inception of the BLRTN, over 400 teachers from fifteen states and four foreign countries received fellowships to attend one of the BLSE campuses located in the United States, Mexico, or England. According to the Bread Loaf Teacher Network Web site, funding for fellowships over the 15 year history of the network also came from the Carnegie Corporation, the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Educational Foundation of American, the Humana Foundation, the C.E. and S. Foundation, the

Braitmayer Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Educational Testing Service, the Leopold Schepp Foundation, the Gates Foundation, and several state departments of education and school districts.

Wood (2000) offered this definition for the network:

BLRTN is defined by me as a collective of individuals who experience a Bread Loaf summer (e.g., classes/professors, cultural activities, norms, values, signs, symbols, proverb-like summations), take part regularly in online exchanges via Breadnet (the telecommunications project of the Bread Loaf School of English), read and write publications for internal and external distribution within the educational community, and who participate in at least one regional face-to-face meeting with Bread Loaf students and faculty. (p. 16)

Other BLRTN members quickly identified that the network was more than just a piece of software for their computers. Member Kurt Broderson (1995) said,

This network of rural teachers is more than the sum of its many diverse parts, and it is more than just a tool for communicating with other teachers and their students. At its heart, BLRTN is about establishing connections—between and among rural teachers, students, and their interests, curricula, and ideas. (p. 18)

Many articles in the *Bread Loaf Teacher Network Magazine* focused on the importance of connecting rural communities as well as critical issues that faced rural communities and how the network could make a difference by creating an online community for rural

educators and their students (Broderson, 1995; Christian, Turner, Burnham, Porter, & McKenna, 1994; Gooch, 1995, 1996, 1997; Goswami, 1994, 1996, 2005; Maddox, 1995).

One issue focused specifically on the professional development aspect of the network (Benson, 2000). Chris Benson (2002), who served as the editor for the BLTN, stated that through the collaboration on the network, teachers were creating their own quality professional development that could not be offered in expensive one-size-fits-all packages for schools:

In this day when every outside “expert” educator is hustling schools for the big bucks they will pay for professional development services, the Bread Loaf Teacher Network has nothing to sell. We know that good teachers have the knowledge and ability; we only offer support and opportunities for teachers to network, to come together, to connect on line, to study together during the summers at one of the four campuses of the Bread Loaf School of English. With those kinds of structural supports in place, teachers naturally will create their own professional development for themselves and each other, whether they live in Alaska or South Carolina. (p. 35)

Though many BLTN members attended regional and national meetings where they continued to discuss and write about issues affecting education, a crucial component of collaboration occurred on Breadnet.

BreadNet, a computer conferencing system, continues to be the core technology component of BLTN. First used in 1984 by BLSE, Breadnet is more than just a personal email account. It uses FirstClass Intranet Server and gives users the ability to participate in private and public online conferences (Gooch, 1999). BLTN members download the

FirstClass software for free or access BreadNet through the Internet. When BLTN teachers are not on a BLSE campus during the summer or are back at their respective schools during the academic year, they remain in contact through BreadNet and conduct professional development conversations as well as electronic exchanges via this online network.

Through the work conducted on BreadNet, whether conversing between colleagues or conducting electronic exchanges involving classroom students, members were experimenting with and refining how technology could be used to improve literacy within the English classroom. Goswami (1999), the BLTN Coordinator, said, “As members of this small-scale network, we find ourselves redefining literacy, discovering new forms of social connection, and noticing that many young people think and write critically and analytically when they care about issues, texts, and their readers—and when there is a rich, cultural context for their correspondence” (p. 23).

#### New Media Texts and Writing

Literature about technology is quickly dated because of the nature of technology development. The *International Handbook of Literacy and Technology* focused on future effects of technology in relationship to literacy and learning. In volume two of this publication, few chapters discussed current research in technology and writing. In his introduction, McKenna (2006) pointed out that we (literacy educators, English/language arts educators) were not as willing to embrace technology in our classrooms as educators in other disciplines such as math or science. Teachers who teach reading and writing cannot hope to keep the technology of the pencil or pen as the primary technology tool in the literacy classroom if students are going to compete in a global society. There is no

denying the globalization of our world with the advent of the Internet, a digital connection for potentially billions of people as the digital divide begins to shrink, as technology becomes available to those in the lower socio-economic levels of all countries (Alvermann, 2006; Bromley, 2006; Edwards, 2006; McKenna, 2006; Selfe, 1999).

Alvermann (2006), believed that there were opportunities for researching technology as “ecosocial systems—digital spaces in which youth produce and enact new literate identities” (p. 330), a term she borrowed from J.L. Lemke (2000). Online youth networks and participatory communities include and are not limited to email, blogs, personal web pages, MySpace, YouTube, listservs, computer online gaming--all of which affect youth literacy practices. The potential for peer assessment as well as collaborative writing is immense within online communities. Students are more willing to share or publish their writing online than on paper; online communication is primarily through written text, though other modalities exist, such as video (YouTube and digital film production), visual images (MySpace or other Web page authoring), and even audio (podcasts). Reflected in the technology use of youth is the “motivation to communicate” according to Verhoeven, et al. (2006): “This calls for a community with which to communicate....The result of this approach is that it gives the children a tangible aim: a publication for all their friends to see and read” (p. 47).

The definition of text should be reconsidered in today’s technological world. Lemke (2006) called for a “broader definition of literacy itself, one that includes all literate practices, regardless of medium” (p. 4). Lemke pointed out that with technology, there were multiple modalities used in the creation of text. An integration of multiple sign systems, not just an alphabetic one, affects the writing process (p. 5). When writing

with technology, we no longer simply put words on paper. Words are now on a screen that can be printed depending on the needs of the viewer; we also use hypertext within text, which can link the viewer to images, video, audio, or any other modality of communication.

Landow (2006) saw hypertext's potential to de-center text. Hypertext, Landow explained, is "text composed of blocks of words (or images) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains, or trails in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality described by the terms *link*, *node*, *network*, *web*, and *path*" (p. 2). Instead of one central line of text, Landow argued that hypertext allowed for multiple lines of text. Simply, readers of hypertext choose which line they want to follow, creating text for themselves based on their need for information, their interests, and their lines of thought. With hypertext, a reader's line of text may not follow the same path as other readers, yet all lines of text are acceptable. Landow argued, "one of the greatest strengths of hypertext lies in its capacity to permit users to discover or produce multiple conceptual structures in the same body of information" (p. 27).

Selfe (2004) defined new media texts as those "created primarily in digital environments, composed in multiple media (e.g., film, video, audio, among others), and designed for presentation and exchange in digital venues" (2004, p. 43). Wysocki (2004) expanded upon Selfe's definition and argued these texts "do not have to be digital" (p. 15). These texts are "composed" with the "reader/consumer/viewer" in mind; the bottom line is that the "materiality" of the text determines how it is composed (p. 15). If it is a text with a digital materiality or a text with a print materiality, those materialities are taken into account when the composer designs the message for communication. Digital

texts' composers consider how the text is presented visually on screen, what modalities will be used when presenting the text on screen, and how the consumer/audience/reader will experience the text on screen. While print materiality also has a visual component, it is one that is static and of a single modality. The Web 2.0 technologies mentioned in my introduction to this study use new media texts that are participatory in nature.

### Views on New Media

An accessible example of a new media text can be found in the work of N. Katherine Hayles. Hayles (2002) took a third-person autobiographical approach to her book *Writing Machines*. She adopted the name Kaye and proceeded to tell the reader about her intellectual and technological background in academia. She presented her views on how new media and print text were interrelated and identified those relationships as “medial ecology” (p. 5). She introduced numerous terms within her texts that needed explanation. One such term was “technotext” (p. 25). In order to understand “technotext,” the reader had to understand Hayles’ position on the materiality of text. In essence, she argued that literary critics don’t normally consider the materiality of a print book when considering a piece of literature. Unless one specifically studied the artifact of the book itself, then literary criticism was based on the immaterial nature of a text. “Technotext” was a literary work that did take into account materiality of the text. Hayles claimed “*the physical form of the literary artifact always affects what the words (and other semiotic components) mean* [italics in original]” (p. 25). She used the now-familiar example of hypertext which takes text phrases and “chunks” them, has a “linking mechanism,” and has “multiple reading paths (p. 26). She pointed out that even some print texts have the characteristics of hypertext, with an example of an encyclopedia

which had multiple reading paths, chunked text, and linking mechanisms as well. It's within the new media modalities though that technotext is most often found. Whenever text is composed for a computer, to be viewed on a screen, the visual and audio components depend on the interface the composer uses for communication. A Web page is limited only by the limitations of the interface or software program used to create it. When writing for new media, the software, hardware, memory, computer hard drive, video plug-ins, audio, Internet connection speed, and even the screen on which the page is viewed, must be taken into consideration.

Another of Hayles' arguments was that literary criticism made "assumptions specific to print" (p. 30), yet she did not choose print over electronic text or electronic text over print. Instead, she thought that they were interrelated and should not be considered mutually exclusive. She argued that because of the electronic text, literary theorists and critics were able to see for the first time that the materiality of the text influenced their perspectives. But the perspective of the reader was not the only perspective that would change. If the message and the recipient of the message were two parts of the communication triangle, and both were affected by the materiality of the medium, then it goes to reason that the writer as well would have to change, just as the method of communication changed: "Books are not going the way of the dinosaur but the way of the human, changing as we change, mutating and evolving in ways that will continue, as a book lover said long ago, to teach and delight" (p. 33). The writer cannot be defined as only a writer just as the reader cannot be defined simply as a reader. Instead, the change in materiality produced a change in the mode of delivery and a change in the method of creating that mode. No longer can a writer for the screen solely



be a writer of text, but the writer is also a creator of image and sound as well as a composer who coordinates the text, image, and sound.

Halfway through reading her book, I realized that Hayles had constructed/composed/created/written a “technotext” that exploded the boundaries of print text. While I held her book in one hand, I used my computer mouse to highlight hypertext on the lexicon linkmap in her book’s online Web supplement, to review her bibliography for her “technotext” (which does not appear in the print text), and to read instructions on how to print .pdf files of her notes identified by chapter and page for the print text (as well as how to cut and fold the paper to fit the size of the print text). If I wanted to read the notes a different way, I clicked on a link that brought me to text superimposed on other text. To clarify, I rolled my mouse over the page numbers and the text at a page which had a note that was illuminated, and when I clicked on a small arrow beside that text, the note for that phrase opened in a dialogue box. It is through the experimentation on these few pages that I realized Hayles had a greater purpose. She intended for this work to be a text used for “Media-Specific analysis, a mode of critical interrogation alert to the ways in which the medium constructs the work and the work constructs the medium” (p. 6). The multiple meanings of her text (electronic and print) weren’t fully realized in the individual modalities. Each modality played a small part which when taken alone did not provide the reader/viewer a clear understanding of how each “medium constructs the word and the work constructs the medium” (p. 6). What does Hayles scholarship have to offer my study of dialogue in electronic spaces? At first I would have said little, for she focuses on how the electronic text is literature, how print text affects the electronic text, how the concept of electronic text is ever expanding, and

how literary critics and theorists can create a new jargon for analyzing this text. I am more concerned with the writing process of students who communicate, or dialogue, via an electronic environment. The instruction students are given in a traditional English/language arts classroom will not meet the needs of many of the students who participate in an electronic environment. But her concept of the interrelatedness of text, print and electronic, is a futural concept I should consider when examining how the writing process must change under the influence of the exchange ecology.

Selfe (2004) argued,

To make it possible for students to practice, value, and understand a full range of literacies—emerging, competing, and fading—English composition teachers have got to be willing to expand their own understanding of composing beyond conventional bounds of the alphabetic. And we have to do so quickly or risk having composition studies become increasingly irrelevant. (p. 54)

Teaching the “standards” as determined by my state, may not be forward-thinking. I have been teaching high school students for fourteen years. The students’ world has changed exponentially, thus necessitating that the education they receive reflect change as well. Writing about literature, persuasive writing, expository writing, and how the writing process informs their writing may not be relevant to what my students will need to know how to do to communicate in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Anne Frances Wysocki believed that new media “needs to be informed by what writing teachers know, precisely because writing teachers focus specifically on texts and how situated people (learn how to) use them to make things happen” (2004, p. 5). My challenge as a teacher of writing is to

investigate how to incorporate new media, which is relevant to my students, into the writing process (or perhaps it is the reverse that is more appropriate) and teach them how “to make things happen” with their writing.

Wysocki (2004) also pointed out the importance of the materiality of a text, the argument that Hayles made with her “technotext.” Hayles’s book, *Writing Machines* (2002), which is a futural text, cannot be read without also reading the electronic text to see the intended message. This is where Hayles’s scholarship enlightened my pedagogy of electronic exchange writing. While Hayles wrote the print text and the language that was included in the electronic text, she did not write the electronic text *alone*. She collaborated with designer Anne Burdick to complete her vision for an electronic text. The electronic text may partner with the print text because there is a sense of multiple interfaces used to intertwine and create a complexity between the two modalities. One is incomplete without the other. It is Hayles’s vision that the creative designer, Burdick, brought to fruition through the use of hypertext, design, image, and movement. The layering Burdick supplied for Hayles’s technotext gave the reader a new experience with new media. The ingenuity of the “technotext” is that it still had the look of a book and the sequential navigation one assumes with a reference text. This was not a complete text without the collaboration of the designer. How can I help my students build collaborative relationships with others for the purpose of communicating a message? How can I incorporate online collaboration into the writing process that I teach in my English classroom? My students who have access to technology already are collaborating, yet they are seldom allowed online for collaborative meaning-making within the context of my classroom.

We are in a period of great technological and educational change. Wysocki (2004) reminded us of the implications this change has for teachers of writing:

“writing, like all literate practices, only exists because it functions, circulates, shifts, and has varying value and weight within complexly articulated social, cultural, political, educational, religious, economic, familial, ecological, political, artistic, affective, and technological webs...we know that, in our places and times, writing is one of many operations by which we compose and understand our selves and our identities and our abilities to live and work with others. And so teachers of writing tend to be alert to how a change in any articulation of that long list above of webs of practice and institution sends waves of change shimmering elsewhere, including—necessarily—through our experiences of self and world (p. 2).

As a teacher of writing, I realize there are skills my students need for a new world where the modalities of communication afford them the audiences they will address and their interrelatedness. Wysocki suggested that teachers of writing continue to use what we have known and learned from the past and apply this knowledge to the new media we will encounter in the future. She pointed out that “new technologies are always designed out of existing technologies and out of existing material economies, patterns, and habits” (2004, p. 5). So while I am concerned that scholarship and research on practices related to technology are quickly dated, there is value in knowing how to apply what we have learned in the past to what our students will encounter in the future.

## Views on Curriculum and Technology

### *Curriculum is Autobiographical Text*

In the fall of 1988, I walked into Mrs. Rosalyn Donaldson's English 101 class as a declared accounting major. English was a required course. When I think back to her class and wonder just what it was she said or did that changed the course of my professional career, I think it must have been the conversations she had with our class. Most were related to composition, while some were related to life. She told us that while we were young, we still had lived many experiences. She said we would write about those experiences in her course. She wanted to read what was on our minds, what was in our hearts, because that was what we knew best. Madeleine Grumet concurred: "People usually make sense when they know what they are talking about" (1999, p. 28). That concept of knowing I learned from my first English professor has served me well.

While Mrs. Donaldson is not a curriculum theorist, her technique for developing writers adhered to the beliefs of curriculum theorists such as Grumet, Mary Aswell Doll, William Pinar, Janet Miller, and Dennis Sumara. They all maintained that curriculum was an autobiographical/biographical text (Pinar, 1994; Pinar, et. al. 1995; de Castell, 1999; Doll, 1999; Grumet, 1999; Miller, 1999, 2005; Sumara, 1999). I wanted to focus on the idea of curriculum as an autobiographical text because I, too, believed that the essence of what we write came from lived experience. Often people write to make sense of lived experience, and in the process of writing, begin to find connections to what they know and recognize as truth. William Pinar would say that writing from what is known is a way "we work from within" (1994, p. 10). In his earliest essay about curriculum and autobiography published in 1972 (just prior to the reconceptualization of curriculum),

Pinar used an interview with Jackson Pollack as a springboard for discussing why autobiography is an integral part of curriculum. He quoted Pollock: ““The thing that interests me is that today, painters do not have to go to a subject matter outside of themselves. Most modern painters work from a different source. They work from within”” (1994, p. 10; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). Pinar used Pollock’s comments to support his assertion that both he and his students came to an understanding of literature because of how they connected literature to their own lives. What Pinar was doing for his students as they were reading and analyzing literature, Mrs. Donaldson was doing for me when she had me take self-knowledge, and reflect, or, as Grumet (1999) would say, “reconceptualize” it for the writing I was to do in her course. As a writer, I continue to take that prior experience and re-imagine it for a present purpose.

In the essay “Autobiography and Reconceptualization,” Grumet (1999) defined reconceptualization as “to conceive again, to turn back the conceptual structures that support our actions in order to reveal the rich and abundant experience they conceal” (p. 24). Pinar (2004), as well as Grumet, reconceptualized curriculum as “*currere*—the Latin infinitive of curriculum—to denote the running (or lived experience) of the course” (p. xiii). People must experience the running of the course before defining it (Grumet, 1999), and when they look back on their lived experiences, those events were never as they actually appeared. People approach these experiences subjectively from their present position emotionally, spiritually, psychologically and “see” these lived experiences from a changed perspective. People do not notice all the details as they were actually lived, but they remember the details of (and how academics acted upon) the

experience that add to their understanding: “*Currere* seeks to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one’s understanding of his or her life” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1996, p. 520). We may concentrate on only one aspect of the autobiographical experience, and we redefine that experience: “Even the selection of those past experiences, according to Grumet (1999), is reconceptualization. It is through reconceptualization, according to Grumet, that curriculum is “reclaimed” (p. 25).

Gee (2007) who was interested in how computer gaming affected literacy, expressed the importance of the autobiographical as well:

“In my view, humans think, when they are thinking at their best, through their bodies and emotions. They have experiences in the world (with those bodies) and they feel a certain way about those experiences, they evaluate or appreciate them in certain ways. In turn, they store these experiences and evaluations in their minds and use them to build mental models or simulations of what might happen before they act in the world.”

(p. x)

Gee made the point that learning was something people do, not in relation to what they read on a page, but in relation to what they experience in life.

As a graduate student working on my doctorate, I constantly find myself going back to what I know, to what I have lived and experienced, in order to make connections for new situated understandings. In the electronic spaces where my students have written, responded to, and experienced literary texts, their understanding comes from making connections to their lived experiences as well: “That collective past structures our present, as individuals and as a collectivity, as teachers” (Pinar, 2004, p. 125).

Going back is only the first phase of curriculum; Pinar (1994; 2004) explained there is a “progressive” phase as well. In addition, the progressive phase contains more than one mode. The first mode is “stylistic” which can “disrupt the somnolence of linearity, as in hypertext” (p. 126). Madan Sarup explained, “[I]t is the way in which we understand our past which determines how it determines us...this understanding is itself intimately related to our orientation towards the future” (1992, 38; as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 126).

The second mode of the progressive phase is “thematic”: “The progressive represents an exploration of what is imagined as futural. In one sense, by imagining the future, the future becomes the present” (Pinar, 2004, p. 126). While there are those who argue its purpose for existence, few people doubt that there is further potential for technological innovation, easily making it a futural subject which exists in the present.

Pinar’s third phase in his method of *currere*, or running the course, was the analytical (1994; 2004). Pinar was careful to explain that analysis occurred when one was “detached” from an experience, loose from the experience, and could conceptualize the experience cognitively instead of physically, much as one who could in the present stop and examine a picture of oneself taking a picture of the present. During the final phase, the synthetical, one was no longer detached from the past, present, or future and was able to take all parts of the Self, the physical, mental (psychological and intellectual), public, or private and put it all together (1994, p. 26-27). This moment of synthesis was the point from which one begins to work from within.



*Literary Text, Subjectivity, and Discourse*

Curriculum is autobiographical text. It is through autobiography that we make connections to literary text, that we find ourselves. When students begin to share these connections, they realize that there are numerous meanings to be found in literary text. Students find information about themselves through the study of literary text, and they share this information within the classroom and within electronic spaces. Morris (2001), who looked at literary texts alongside historical texts, found it was critical for students to connect to memories: “Erasing lived experience, erasing human subjectivities in school life, endangers students and teachers alike because we have no sense of who we are” (p. 1-2). Morris wrote a Holocaust curriculum from a social psychoanalytic hermeneutic framework. Her memories were not hopeful; she says she is not nihilistic, yet she promotes a dystopic curriculum and dystopic thinking that is “skeptical, critical...a way of looking suspiciously at happy texts or utopias” (p. 24).

De Castell (1999) discussed the relationship of the reader to the text. De Castell explained that technology placed us in a “post-literate culture,” one she defined as “fundamentally and irreversibly defined and shaped by literacy,” yet one in which “practices of representation and communication have largely superseded writing and the written word” (p. 399). One of her arguments, influenced by Foucault, was that books help form the self. New media is now more influential in the formation of self than the traditional technology of books. She also implied that books will become outdated, an opinion not shared by other experts. Just because we have new writing technologies does not mean that others will be “obsolete” (Snyder, 1998, p. xxi). According to Snyder, “The future of writing is not a linear progression in which new technologies usurp earlier

ones...a number of technologies will continue to co-exist, interact, even complement each other” (p. xxi). Hayles did this when she used both the technology of the printed text as well as an electronic text.

De Castell also doubted in the sincerity of student voices as they discuss a literary text and what it meant to them and their lives. She found discourse, specifically that discourse which occurred within the classroom, was affected by the conception of power in that space. Therefore, the discussion that happened within the classroom was a “language game” (p. 403). Within the context of the classroom, the participants in the discussion could not hide many differences, could not be invisible, though they could be silent. Even if classroom discussion was promoted as a “liberatory discourse,” de Castell believed that an “authentic voice” was not possible (p. 406). She found the classroom as a place that repressed voice, which inhibited students from expressing their true selves. Students only said what their teachers wanted them to say, or what they thought their teachers wanted them to say (p. 403).

Perhaps the technology that she argued would push books to the wayside will establish a space for authentic voices to be heard. In the electronic spaces of a writing exchange, there is some adult/student interaction and much more peer interaction. The peer who is without a face online only has a writing voice with which to express ideas. There is little color in words unless students want it to be there. A sense of safety exists for students on both sides of the exchange because they are not able to see each other subjectively discussing a literary text. The opportunity for peers to be scornful of difference is diminished by the invisibility created by the technology.

*Lessons for Teachers*

As a teacher of writing, I understand that “writing and technology are...interdependent” (Snyder, 1998, p. xxi). I need to understand certain issues about technology that Selfe clarified in her text *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century* (1999), when she urged classroom teachers to “pay attention” to technology and how it may or may not affect literacy. She cautioned teachers to remember that the labels of literacy and illiteracy are “socially constructed identities which our current educational system reproduces rather than addresses” (p. 137). Those who support programs that tout technology as a remedy for literacy problems are fooling themselves into thinking that minorities and those in lower socio-economic classes will gain an advantage by using computers. Selfe pointed out that technology literacy just shifts the traditional literacy problem related to social class. Those who face technology illiteracy are the same who face traditional illiteracy. All students do not have access to technology (p. 136). She further claimed there is no evidence that a national technology literacy movement reduces illiteracy.

Selfe cautioned that technology was always a “political act as well as an educational effort” (p. 137). If more people were taught to use technology, they would drive the computer industry by continuing to invest in technology. Those who did not learn how to use technology were those who “are termed *illiterate*[...]. These latter individuals provide the unskilled, inexpensive labor necessary to sustain the system” (p. 139). Does American society primarily use technology for convenience? Hawisher & Selfe (2000) pointed out the “continuing efforts of the computer industry, a fortunate child of the marriage of science and capitalism, will supply new products to fuel the

desires and dreams of consumers” (p. 7). In addition, Pinar warned us that “Education is too important to be left to politicians and those parents who believe them” (2004, xiii). Educators must have a situated understanding of how technology is perceived by society and must not be misled by what politics said about the importance of technology for our students. Instead, educators must learn how pedagogy can be improved through the use of technology in the classroom. Educators must heed Pinar’s (2004) warning: “the computer must not become just another screen on which we project private prejudice and national hubris” (p. 142).

In her work, Selfe (1999) cited Heidegger and explained his position that a human dependence on technology is problematic (p. 140). She pointed out that American society can fall into the trap (and may already have) of seeing technology as the solution to our many problems: “When humans have a technological understanding of the world, we see technology in a very narrow way: as a tool for solving problems, as a means to an end” (p. 140). When we have a problem, we look to technology solutions: “a means to an end” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 4). Pinar concurred when he reminded us that computers in classrooms would not solve our ills: “Information is not knowledge, of course, and without ethical and intellectual judgment—which cannot be programmed into a machine—the Age of Information is an Age of Ignorance” (2004, p. xiii).

Finally, Selfe (1999) argued that teachers bear the responsibility to teach students “critical technological literacy” and to encourage students to consider issues related to using technology, such as the politics of technology, rather than choose to use technology solely as a tool or not use technology at all (p. 144). Neither extreme, she said, teach students “how to use technology, or relate to it, in ways that are productive and

meaningful” (p. 144). Her cautions were not meant to discourage the use of technology in classrooms; instead, she was encouraging teachers to be critical of technology’s use in pedagogy and not to be fooled into thinking that technology provided an antidote for all of society’s ills. Teachers must have a critical awareness and share this awareness with students who must also be critical of technology as well.

Computer technology cannot solve all the many problems of public education today; however, I carefully considered how to use technology within my personal classroom pedagogy. This desire to understand how the history and ecology of an electronic exchange affected the literacy skills of many students allowed me to determine the following research questions:

- How does an understanding of the history and ecology of an electronic exchange help educators understand its effects on the reading and writing practices of secondary students?
- Using Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory, what evidence of transactions between students and literary works can be identified in an electronic exchange?
- How do students self-reflect in their personal written responses to literature, and how do students make changes in their own writing as a result of online peer response?
- How are fluency and syntactic complexity (typical measures of writing quality) affected in an electronic exchange?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN, AND DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology chosen for this case study, description of the participant sites in the study, the methods used to collect data, and the method of data analysis. Because my research questions required both qualitative and measurable data of a particular, complex case (the electronic exchange), I chose a case study design. Merriam (1998) defined a case study as “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 27). Stake (2003) defined a case study as “both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry” (p. 136). The single entity being studied was the particular electronic exchange of writing called Pass the Poetry (PTP). It was bounded by a time frame of one academic year; it also encompassed only the written text produced primarily by students in two classrooms 2000 miles apart.

The qualitative data played a primary role and included focused surveys of four students involved in the exchange, interviews of the two teachers who planned the exchange, an interview with the online correspondent/poet in the exchange, as well as inductive analysis of the transcript of the electronic exchange. Documents written by teacher-participants summarizing and analyzing the exchange were also studied. Measurable data collected through t-unit analysis of student writing was required to answer the research question regarding syntactic complexity of student writing in the exchange.

#### Methodology

I used Courtney Cazden’s methodological framework for this case study. In her text *Classroom Discourse* (2001), she explained, “what can be internalized, or

appropriated, from other people still requires significant mental work on the part of the learner” (p. 77). Constructivism is the “mental work.” The “mental work” found through the study of the ecology of the exchange included teacher as well as student participants. While this study looked for evidence of that “mental work” in the students’ writing, I found within the exchange ecology the “mental work” that began with the teacher training and planning to conduct an exchange.

Cazden connected Vygotsky and Bakhtin with social constructivism. She explained that Vygotsky’s “internalization” and Bakhtin’s “appropriation” are both terms that describe “transformations” (p. 76). In other words, students take what they learn from others—whether it be teachers, parents, or their peers—and actively, internally construct their own meaning. Cazden also proposed that what students learn from their peers has more effect on their learning than what students may learn from authoritative sources such as parents or teachers:

Theoretically, it seems possible that students will be more apt to actively struggle with new ideas—rephrasing them, arguing with them, conceptually trying them out and verbally trying them on—when they are spoken by (less authoritative) peers than by the (more authoritative) teacher. (p. 111)

Socially constructed meaning is a two-way cyber-street in an electronic exchange. Students are influenced by what their peers write to them, mentally examine the written discourse, and then construct their own meaning which they share in their own written responses. At some point in the exchange, they fill the roles of both reader and writer, both roles of active communication. Cazden addressed this as yet another meaning for

social, “what Bakhtin calls the ‘addressivity’ of any utterance—the quality of turning mentally to someone and anticipating, hoping for, humanly needing, a response” (p. 116).

### Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods focus on description (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 16; Janesick, 2003, p. 69; Sprinthall, 2003, p. 216). Data is often collected from a small number of participants in order to gain a depth and establish a context that is not possible from a study involving hundreds of participants, as is often the case in positivist, quantitative studies. Qualitative data can come from interviews, narratives, observations, recorded transcripts, photographs, or other documents—all involving in some way the words or images of the participants (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) referred to the qualitative researcher as a “*bricoleur*,” literally a “maker of quilts” (p. 6) not only because of the multiple strategies that can be used within the qualitative research project but also the multiple theoretical paradigms that inform qualitative research. Just as a quilt maker pieces together the individual pieces of fabric to create a quilt, so the qualitative researcher must piece together the data collected to find themes or patterns that lead to understanding of the “central phenomenon.”

Qualitative research demands that the researcher be close to the action. Marshall and Rossman (1999) placed the researcher in the midst of the study rather than on the periphery: “inquiry [is] an interactive process between the researcher and the participants” (p. 7-8). In addition, they identified the researcher as the “instrument: her presence in the lives of the participants invited to be part of the study is fundamental to the paradigm” (p. 79). Because the researcher is a part of the research, it is imperative that she recognize her own biases and offer those to her audience. The researcher’s



personal experiences influence how she collects and analyzes the data and also affect her interpretation of her findings. The heuristic influence is appropriate for this case study. My immersion within other electronic exchanges as both a participant and a teacher allowed me to have a unique perspective with this particular case. When looking for themes and textual evidence within the exchange and when asking teachers and other participants about their own unique experiences with the exchange, I had the advantage of a full awareness of their experiences that a researcher observing from the outside could not intuit.

### Case Study

Stake (2003) identified three types of case studies, intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Of the three, this particular study is most like the intrinsic study, one in which the researcher chooses the study because the case itself is of interest to the researcher. Stake defined the instrumental case study as one which “provide[s] insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization” (p. 137). This study does neither. The final type of study he identified, the collective case study, is defined by its name—a study of multiple cases. My research design involved only one case of study. In addition, Stakes’ ideas about case studies are not definitive.

Yin (1989) also offered a definition for case study that differentiates it from other types of research designs:

*A case study is an empirical inquiry that [italics in original]:*

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which

- multiple sources of evidence are used. (p. 23)

Yin identified six sources for evidence that can be used in case studies: “documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts” (p. 84). Four of his six sources for evidence were used in this study. The primary source of information is a transcript of the Pass the Poetry electronic exchange, electronically archived by the Bread Loaf School of English on BreadNet. Other written documents used to determine the teacher perspective of the exchange were reports written by each teacher-participant at the end of the exchange as well as planning emails prior to the exchange. No other writing samples or physical artifacts which include teacher/adult-participant or student-participant writing were examined. Open-ended interviews of the two teachers who planned and carried out the exchange with their students as well as an open-ended interview with the online correspondent/poet were conducted. Focused surveys with four students via traditional mail offered an additional layer of insight to the study. When examined in its totality, the collected evidence created a history of the exchange and revealed how all of the components, working together, created a metaphorical ecology for the exchange itself.

#### Positioning the Researcher on BreadNet

My position as a member of the Bread Loaf Teacher Network placed me in a unique position to study an electronic exchange. I am an insider with knowledge of both the people involved in the network as well as how electronic exchanges are planned and completed; I am part of the action. First-hand knowledge of the network prompted my pursuit of a case study to study the phenomenon of the electronic exchange. Lincoln & Guba (2003) agreed that “objectivity is a chimera: a mythological creature that never

existed, save in the imagination of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower” (p. 279). These are strong words. While I cannot claim to be objective in the truest sense, I chose to study an electronic exchange involving classrooms and students other than my own to establish distance from the data and minimize bias based on my personal knowledge of the student writers in the exchange. While I do know the teachers who planned the exchange, I have no knowledge of their students or their literacy skills outside of what is in the transcript of the exchange and what I learned from their surveys.

My experiential knowledge with exchanges and the language and terms that describe them affects the types of questions I asked in my interviews as well as inferences I made about the exchange transcripts. For instance, instead of spending interview time asking the teacher-participants to explain what an electronic exchange is, I already understood how one worked and could begin with questions focusing on teacher-participants’ choice of focus and design of the exchange. I readily admit my bias toward electronic exchanges because of this same experiential knowledge of using the exchanges with my own students; however, a study of the exchange is important. Hundreds of teachers over a 15 year period would not continue to conduct exchanges with their students if there were no value, intrinsic or otherwise, in the electronic exchange.

After my summer of study at Bread Loaf School of English, I returned to my classroom and began planning and conducting electronic exchanges with my students. Almost nine years later, I continue to conduct exchanges with my students that support curricular standards for English/Language Arts. During the writing of this dissertation,

my own students participated in exchanges on *Lord of the Flies*, *Oedipus Rex*, and *A Doll House* with students in South Carolina.

I chose the Pass the Poetry Exchange (PTP) for two reasons. Many exchanges which occur on BreadNet are relatively short (usually four to six weeks in length). PTP lasted a total of four years, making it unique in its length. The first cycle of the exchange lasted two years. The teachers then chose to take a break for a year before conducting another exchange cycle that lasted another two years. I chose to examine the transcript from the very first year of PTP, which began in fall of 1999 and ended in the spring of 2000. The length of the exchange offered a more complete historical portrait as well as a depth of insight into an exchange's ecological components. The second reason was my familiarity with the exchange. I followed the exchange as an interested outside observer as it progressed that first school year. While I did not observe consistently or for research purposes, I did have a pre-established relationship with both teachers involved in the exchange and grew interested in its progress after being prompted by emails from Annie in Alaska. She was excited about what was happening with her students in her classroom, and I wanted to vicariously participate. I did not interact directly with any of the students during the exchange; the extent of my participation was primarily as a reader, though once I suggested a poem for classroom study to the teachers.

#### The PTP BreadNet Sites

Two classrooms of secondary school students were involved in PTP, and I used the general names of Alaska High School and Colorado High School respectively to protect the anonymity of the participants in the study. The two classroom teachers wrote about their exchange experiences in professional journals. (Van Wyhe, 2000; Rossbach,

2002). One teacher described her school as “a rural school in the midst of the Alaska wilderness,” (Van Wyhe, 2000, p. 60). Because of the school’s small size, the students in her school were grouped into English classes with 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders in one class and 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders in another. PTP involved Alaska High School’s 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students (almost a dozen) and Colorado High School’s 9<sup>th</sup> grade class, itself small with about a dozen students as well (Rossbach, 2002, p. 4). In the articles, both teachers described the phenomenon of the electronic exchange as it happened in their classroom. Two qualifying words used by the Alaska teacher to describe the exchange were “passionate” and “surreal,” and those same thoughts were echoed in the Colorado teacher’s article, where she called the exchange “freaky” because of the extraordinary outcomes both teachers experienced with their students.

#### Data Collection

The PTP exchange (and all online BreadNet exchanges) was electronically archived. Middlebury College and the Bread Loaf School of English granted access to the complete text of the first year of the exchange in both electronic and printed format. Dixie Goswami, Director of the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, facilitated my access to the 455 page transcript, which included a Teacher Talk (PTP-TT) folder as well as the PTP folder which contained the student writings. When I first approached Goswami with a kernel of an idea for my dissertation studies, she suggested several exchanges, and I chose PTP.

After the PTP electronic exchange occurred, the only tangible record of its existence were the electronic messages posted to BreadNet and organized within an online conference folder, reminiscent of the folder system a writer uses to store word

documents on a personal computer. An electronic and hard-copy transcript of the exchange was created simply by copying all of the postings into a single text and organizing the text chronologically according to the date of the postings.

To gain a broader perspective of this one case, I chose to interview adults associated in the planning of the exchange. Because the exact exchange could not be reproduced, it was essential to talk to those who were instrumental in planning and conducting the case (Merriam, 1998). Through these interviews, I had to reconstruct the exchange, not just the archived components but also the planning and thought that occurred outside of the electronic network. To get a clear understanding of the exchange ecology, I had to investigate the roles of all of the exchange participants and then tell their stories. Directly involved in the framework of the exchange were two teachers who met at the Bread Loaf School of English in the summer of 1999. For the purpose of this study and to maintain anonymity of the teacher participants, I refer to the Alaska teacher as Annie and the Colorado teacher as Louise. The other adult participant in the exchange was the online correspondent/poet from South Carolina, Chris Benson. With his permission, Chris is identified by his real name in this study because of his important contributions to the exchange. .

The interviews themselves were semi-structured and the questions open-ended for Annie and Louise as well as Chris (Merriam, 1998; Fontana & Frye, 2003). Two content experts on my dissertation committee reviewed the protocol for the interviews and the student survey, which satisfied the issue of validity for my study. I used the same questions for Annie and Louise (Appendix A) and created a separate set of questions for Chris (Appendix B). Chris's perspective of student work would not include what

happened within the classroom, unlike Annie and Louise, whose memories were influenced by the context of their classroom interactions with students as well as the student writing online. Because they live literally thousands of miles apart, I conducted a telephone interview with the three adult participants. In an effort to preserve the interviews for analysis, they were digitally recorded, and I took notes as I talked with the exchange participants.

With the help of Annie and Louise, I identified several of their former students who participated in the exchange and gained permission to focus on the writing of four Colorado students. In the transcript, I looked for evidence that students connected prior knowledge to the current text, evidence that they made changes to their writing as a result of peer and adult interaction, and evidence of improved fluency and syntactic complexity in their writing. In addition, I also asked each of the four students to complete structured surveys to gain a more holistic view of the PTP exchange. The only interactions I had with the former students were through the mailing of the surveys (Appendix C) and permission forms (Appendices D-F). Other insights into student performance during the exchange I gathered from narratives written by the teachers at the end of that first exchange year as well as journal entries made by the teachers within their planning sub-folder of the exchange (PTP-TT folder).

### Conducting the Interviews

My first data collection task was to interview both Annie and Louise about their PTP exchange experience. Because of the great geographical distance between us, I asked each teacher to conduct a telephone interview with me. I also conducted a telephone interview with Chris Benson, the online correspondent for the exchange. I

used both audio and computer technology to help me record the interviews. I used a telephone with a headset to free my hands to take notes during the interview. For recording purposes, I connected my phone to my computer using a cord that could be purchased at any electronics store.

Next I downloaded a free software program from the Internet, Audacity 1.2.6, which is a digital audio editor typically used to record and edit podcasts. The primary tools in the software program I used were the ones on the control toolbar to record, play, and pause. The audio track had a wave form indicating there was sound recording on the track, and it also indicated the length of time of the recording, making it much easier to find my place in the interview when later transcribing. After the interview was over and I was transcribing the audio version into a Word file, I began at any point in the interview by clicking on the time indicated on the bar above the wave track. All three interviews were one and a half to two hours in length and took six to eight hours to transcribe into a word document. After I finished the transcription, I formatted the three Word documents with line numbers so that I could easily quote from the transcript.

After conducting my interviews with both teachers, they told me they began thinking about the exchange again and went back through their electronic and paper files for more information that could help me in my research. Annie mailed a packet with student surveys she conducted at three points during the course of the first year of the exchange to get student feedback about the project. She also sent me an electronic version of her end-of-the-year report she submitted to BLTN as part of her fellowship that discussed in detail student performance and progress during the exchange. Louise also unearthed (or should I say un-cyberspaced?) her end-of-the-year report as well as an



unpublished manuscript she had written after the first year of the exchange. Annie was able to go to the online archives of BreadNet to find the original exchange plan she and Louise wrote at the end of their summer at Bread Loaf and before the beginning of the exchange. In addition, Annie forwarded their first planning emails that were not in the PTP-Teacher Talk folder of the exchange. All of the data collected offered insights into the exchange ecology and provided tangible evidence to support the history of the exchange.

### Approaching the Transcript

The transcript of the complete PTP exchange itself was daunting. I began reading the transcript in its hard copy form but found it difficult to manage. In the original hard copy form Dixie Goswami gave me, the transcript was 455 pages, single-spaced with ten point font, and included both the student postings folder (PTP folder) and the teacher postings folder (PTP-TT folder). Much of the student writing, though data rich, was extraneous for the purpose of my research because I could not get consent from all students to use their work. I struggled to find a solution. I contacted Caroline Eisner, the Technology Coordinator for BreadNet, who did not have an electronic copy of the transcript I received from Dixie Goswami. Even though I had almost ten years of experience using BreadNet, I did not know all of the tools available on First Class software. By trial and error, I found a tool that would summarize selected postings into one document. First I opened the BreadNet archive for the PTP 99-00 exchange year and then selected all the postings in that folder by clicking on the first message at the top of the postings window, holding down the shift key, and then scrolling to the bottom of the postings window. Then I right clicked for a tools menu and clicked “summarize

selected.” Another window then opened in First Class which had all of the highlighted postings listed in their entirety in the order they were posted.

This document would not allow me to search and find particular words or phrases, so I selected all of the text, used the copy tool, and then pasted it into a Microsoft Word document where I could then code the transcript by changing font colors and using the highlighting tool; I could also look for certain words/phrases within the transcript using the “find” tool in Word. In addition, I formatted the Word document so all entries would be 10 point, Arial font and numbered the pages for easier reference. This new document was larger than the original hard copy. It consisted of 538 pages and contained only the student postings of the exchange. I created a separate transcript from the PTP-Teacher Talk (PTP-TT) folder which was primarily used by Louise, Annie, Chris, and a few other outside adult observers from the BLTN.

While the reformatted transcript was easier to manage and code, it still contained too much information extraneous to the scope of my study. Using the search feature, I searched for each individual student participant’s name in the transcript. I copied any message written to that student or by that student and pasted them into a new document. I also copied and pasted the date/time stamp of each posting so that I could easily refer to a specific message within the transcript as well as quickly identify at what point in the exchange the writing occurred. After I mined the large transcript, I also mined the PTP-TT transcript to find any postings where the teachers or online correspondent/poet may have mentioned each student and his or her work. When I found writing from one of my research subjects, I changed the font color of his or her writing. Brooks’ font was gray, Tatum’s font was turquoise blue, Vivian’s font was red, and Josie’s font was dark green.

I also changed the font color of the adults: Annie's font was bright green, Louise's font was burgundy, and Chris's font was bright blue. After mining the PTP and PTP-TT transcripts for each student, I had four new, working student transcripts, each 45-55 pages in length, containing writing specifically to, from, or about each student who agreed to participate in my project. The PTP-TT transcript I decided would remain intact, and I would code it separately after I finished working with the student transcripts. I used several versions of the PTP transcript. To summarize, at times I needed to use the complete PTP transcript, but I also used the separate transcript for PTP-TT and four abridged, individual transcripts I created for each student who gave consent for the research project, a total of six transcript documents.

My next task was to determine how to code each student transcript document while looking for emerging patterns or themes. To distinguish the postings from the PTP and PTP-TT folder with the student transcripts, I used a pink highlighter within Word and highlighted the date/time stamp of the messages from the PTP folder. Messages from the PTP-TT folder were fewer, and they were highlighted with a bright green.

One of my secondary research questions focused on students making transactions with literature based on the theory of Louise Rosenblatt. I decided to begin looking for evidence of students making connections to the literature they were reading and/or writing. I looking for wording that indicated a student liked/disliked a poem or wording that indicated a student made a connection, whether positive or negative, to a poem he or she read in class. I used the "Review" feature of Word to insert comment boxes where I saw these transactions occurring. I also found I could differentiate between aesthetic and efferent transactions.

Another of my secondary research questions focused on the social constructivist theory of Vygotsky. I highlighted in yellow any evidence of substantial peer interaction about poetry or writing. For instance, if a student asked for help with a poem he or she had written or a student offered a writing suggestion, I highlighted those interactions in yellow. I also highlighted any other student recommendations in yellow. Similar interactions occurred between Chris, the online correspondent/poet, and the students, so I used the yellow highlighter for those as well.

Third, I remembered from my interview with Annie that she thought her students began to use more content vocabulary later in the exchange. I decided to use a light blue highlighter to highlight any words within the postings by the students, as well as the writings from Chris to the students, to see if her recall was correct. After reading the transcripts, I also journaled or made jot lists about my impressions of the transcript and any patterns I saw emerging from the transcript.

Because the transcript was the physical evidence of the exchange, it was also the primary data source. I chose to look for potential evidence, which addressed my research questions as well as possible themes evident in the transcript. A researcher may find those themes by looking for and discovering patterns within transcripts using inductive analysis. The patterns or categories derived from that inductive analysis were not evident prior to collecting the data, according to Janesick (2003). Moustakas (1990) identified six phases of heuristic research which Janesick (2003) narrowed to five and applied to inductive analysis:

First, immersion in the setting starts the inductive process. Second, the incubation process allows for thinking, becoming aware of nuance and

meaning in the setting, and capturing intuitive insights, to achieve understanding. Third, there is a phase of illumination that allows for expanding awareness. Fourth, and most understandably, is a phase of explication that includes description and explanation to capture the experience of individuals in the study. Finally, creative synthesis enables the researcher to synthesize and bring together as a whole the individual's story, including the meaning of the lived experience. (p. 65)

Janesick's method of inductive analysis was reminiscent of the writing process which began with the generation of ideas prior to the actual writing (explication, explanation, persuasion, argumentation, etc.) and then crafting.

In addition to using inductive analysis to analyze the transcript, I also used t-unit analysis, a method of measuring syntactic complexity within student writing, to quantifiably analyze student writing at four different points in the exchange: the beginning of the exchange, approximately three-months into the exchange, approximately six-months into the exchange, and the end of the exchange. I looked at writing that was student-to-student as well as student-to-online correspondent/poet. I also conducted a word count of these same student postings to measure any change in students' writing fluency.

Other documents created as a result of data gathering include three interview transcripts as well as three structured surveys. For these data sets, I chose to use analytic induction, which is a "process of continual refinement of hypotheses as the researcher finds instances that do not match the original hypothesis" (Merriam, 1998, p. 160). Because of the complexity of PTP, when I studied different perspectives of the case, I

had to reevaluate my original research questions in order to find a better fit between my research questions and my data.

To summarize, this chapter explained why a social constructivist methodology is appropriate to this particular case study. I refer again to Cazden (2001) who stated,

*Social constructivism* highlights the source of such assistance in other people, from patterns of discourses to human-made artifacts like computers; *sociocultural* and *sociohistorical* call our attention to the origins of social resources in a particular culture with a particular history.

(p.77)

The data gathered included a 455-page transcript of student writing which was later divided into several smaller transcripts for manageability, teacher reports of the exchange written at the end of the school year when it was conducted, three semi-structured adult participant interviews, and four structured student participant surveys. All were evaluated using inductive analysis. T-unit analysis was conducted on student writing within the exchange as well as a count of words within student postings to determine changes in fluency over the course of the exchange.

## CHAPTER 4

## PASS THE POETRY ELECTRONIC EXCHANGE ECOLOGY

Ecology, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is “the branch of biology that deals with the relationships between living organisms and their environment. Also: the relationships themselves, esp. those of a specified organism.” A more social definition then follows: “The study of the relationships between people, social groups, and their environment; (also) the system of such relationships in an area of human settlement.” Thirdly, it defines an “extended use: the interrelationship between any system and its environment; the product of this.” Using the OED, a historical dictionary, to begin looking at the word ecology and how it could apply to what occurred within the PTP electronic exchange is appropriate. The definitions of ecology which focus on its social aspect are about relationships, a key word to what happened within this electronic exchange.

Relationships imply collaboration and participation, key components in Web 2.0 technologies as discussed in chapter two. Later in this chapter, I will discuss the importance of relationships to the Pass the Poetry electronic exchange. The social definition of ecology, according to the *OED*, is often prefaced with a descriptive word such as “cultural.” Other definitions use ecology in a social sense and involve computer technology and the Internet. When searching for a way to define an electronic exchange as a whole, I looked for other ways researchers have used the term that could connect with technology and writing. “Information ecology” (Nardi, B.A. & O’Day, V.L., 1999) is a “system of people, practices, values, and technologies in a particular local environment” (p. 49). In their work, Nardi and O’Day gave several examples of

information ecologies, such as hospital ICU's or libraries—both places where technology is a tool for human activity. Their concept of information ecology identified relationships between the technology and the humans who use it: “An information ecology is a complex *system* of parts and relationships...exhibits *diversity* and experiences continual evolution” (p. 49-50). The use of the first BLTN electronic exchanges occurred in 1993. Since that time, just the evolution of technology alone has required those educators and students interacting online to adapt and evolve. While electronic exchanges themselves possessed similar key features, the relationships of the people involved differed from exchange to exchange. Thus, no two exchanges conducting on BreadNet were ever exactly alike, yet they all had their own particular structure and relationships with an essential set of technological tools and practices.

“Learning ecology” (Looi, 2001) moved beyond the concept of information ecology. Looi said that learning ecology goes beyond a system that allows for access of information via technological tools. He uses ecology as a metaphor comparing the biosphere and life with the learning environment and learning. Learning ecology occurs on multiple levels from the individual to a community. Looi maintained that the relationships formed between the people within the learning communities “determine[d] how problems [were] solved or opportunities exploited. These social networks of human ties of trust and reciprocity generate[d] much of the capital on which the participants can leverage” (p. 14). Essentially, Looi used ecology to help define the system of learning that occurs online using technology and the Internet.

My goal in this chapter is to define the electronic exchange ecology for the particular case of the Pass the Poetry electronic exchange. The main challenge in



defining exchange ecology is identifying the factors that create and affect the environment in which the exchange occurred and accepting that the environment created for one exchange cannot be exactly duplicated by another teacher for another class in another school. That is not to say that electronic exchanges cannot be replicated in other classroom online partnerships; they can. Each individual electronic exchange has its own unique features dependent on its particular exchange ecology with particular relationships created as a result of the exchange. Throughout my research I looked for the features of the PTP electronic exchange that made it work, that made it a successful classroom endeavor. It was a tool the teachers chose to use, in this case, not just one school year, but for four successive years. All of the following features are integral to Pass the Poetry. Removing just one of these features would drastically affect the ecology of this particular exchange.

#### Bread Loaf Summer Study Component

In order for the teachers to become a part of the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, they were required to attend one of the Bread Loaf campuses for summer study. Both Annie and Louise attended the main Bread Loaf campus in Vermont on fellowships for rural educators. While on campus, they took two content- intensive courses that helped to shape the focus of the PTP exchange.

Both teachers first met in the “Language, Culture, and the Teaching of Writing” course (LCW). A requirement for this course was to partner with another teacher to create an online electronic exchange to be conducted with their students during the upcoming school year. Another component of the course open to all other Bread Loaf students was the guest speakers. In her interview, Annie mentioned the influence of Herb

Kohl, a poetry and education expert, on her perception of integrating poetry into her classroom instruction:

I remember he [Kohl] spoke in the Barn one night and talked about the importance of poetry in the classroom and how every teacher needed to make time for it, and he talked about his book *A Grain of Poetry*, and I went up to him after he spoke and said, “You know, this all sounds really great, but I simply don’t have time for this, you know our state standards require this, this, and this, our district curriculum requires all of these things and there is just not time to fit poetry in there on a regular basis.” And he looked me straight in the eye and said, “I challenge you to look at every single thing you do in your classroom, literally minute by minute, and tell me that it’s all so essential that you couldn’t carve out ten minutes a day for poetry.” And I just stood there like an idiot, speechless, because I knew he was right. (interview, March 8, 2008)

Annie also mentioned that another guest speaker, Nancie Atwell, spoke of using poetry in her classroom instruction. She recollected that the influence of these two speakers had her thinking about poetry, and when she began casually talking with Louise, they realized they were both hesitant to teach poetry because of their own bad experiences with the genre.

While Annie credited the guest speakers with planting a seed for an exchange topic, Louise pointed to the classroom influence of her instructors:

I think it [the idea of a poetry exchange] was just simply something that Dixie [Goswami] had thrown out that one class period. You could get an

exchange going and students could read and write poetry is what I'm remembering. And then it was, um, something, I enjoyed poetry and I always saw poetry as a means of, uh, covering theme quite quickly, and I was thinking specifically of American literature at that time because our district standards were to cover the themes of American literature and sometimes poetry was a more economical way to do it because you could go through poems more quickly than you could short stories and essays. And so I always saw poetry as something real functional for that purpose, and then I kind of enjoyed poetry but didn't feel comfortable in teaching students how to write it. And then I know part of the conversation I had with [Annie] way at the beginning was that, was I found out that neither one of us really felt comfortable with that genre. We could read it, and we could discuss it, but to, uh, teach it so that our students could actually come to appreciate it, I think neither one of us felt comfortable in that area. And so it was kind of a challenge, I think; something we could learn along with them. (interview, March 9, 2008)

The choice of the focus for the Pass the Poetry exchange evolved through their content-intensive study and experiences on the Bread Loaf campus. Both teachers came to the same topic through different experiences, and both felt they had been challenged through those experiences—the influence of outside experts for Annie and the influence of their instructor for Louise—to teach a genre that they had previously shied away from because of a lack of experience with the genre.

Another resource Annie sent to me while I was collecting my data included a narrative she wrote the summer following the first year of the PTP exchange for a course she took at the University of Alaska Southeast. In this narrative, which she also posted on BreadNet on Friday, June 23, 2000, she commented on how she was able to tailor her studies within the LCW course to help her prepare for the poetry exchange:

My “reading pathway” project for a course entitled “Language, Culture, and the Teaching of Writing” with Jackie Royster offered me a reason to dive into the literature supporting the teaching of poetry; it also offered me a window into classroom approaches to this genre of which I was admittedly ignorant. This pathway led me to a great variety of professional readings promoting poetry as a highly accessible genre, a genre of great interest to students, a form of writing that all students can “handle.”

Annie’s narrative emphasized how the content-intensive summer study helped prepare her for the exchange by giving her the opportunity to study the literature surrounding her poetry problem. The academic focus was not the sole advantage of the summer study. Teachers such as Annie and Louise benefitted from the relationship building which occurred on campus over the seven weeks of the summer semester.

Chris echoed the importance of the Bread Loaf summer study to electronic exchange work by focusing on the social factor of the campus experience:

Of course, all the theory and literature that you read at Bread Loaf is a key ingredient. None of this would happen without those experiences. Those bonding experiences. It’s not just the theory you get at Bread Loaf which

is essential, but I think also those bonding experiences that you get with those teachers. I think if you were to take teachers somewhere for, like, a three-day seminar, and I've tried and failed miserably because there wasn't enough time for teachers to understand each other well enough to want to work with each other. And I don't know what the minimum time of being together is, but I bet it's something like three weeks or something to really give the training and show them the usage, the use value of it, and let them get to know each other. (interview, March 26, 2008)

Chris's opinion of the Bread Loaf summer study expanded the influence of Bread Loaf School of English beyond content into relationship building.

Relationship building began on a professional level during the summer study. English educators attending Bread Loaf School of English as students on one level were influenced by their professors. Students who were also members of the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, like Annie and Louise, had another professional network outside of the classroom, in person and online, where they could bond with others who would be conducting exchanges during the school year. They met face-to-face weekly, usually in the barn, to conduct BLTN meetings. At least one of their classes, LCW, was composed entirely of BLTN members.

When Annie and Louise began creating their exchange plan, they had the support of others who were working on their own plans as well as the support of their instructors. Annie recalled how one of their LCW professors, Dixie Goswami, sat down with them in the Barn (a student union of sorts) and helped them to shape the exchange:

We met with Dixie Goswami, and she was really the one who helped us to shape the exchange itself. I remember vividly sitting with her in the corner of the Barn on the Bread Loaf campus as she talked about choosing poems by different poets and how we could approach the exchange just by sharing the poetry with our students and talking about it and sharing our own insecurities as teachers, as students, and coming to understand the genre together, Louise and I learning it right along with our kids.

(interview, March 8, 2008)

Louise also remembered this meeting and talked about how it helped to shape the direction of their exchange plans:

So I just kind of, my memory tells me that I approached [Annie], or maybe she approached me, I don't even remember. And uh, and I said, would this be something you'd be interested in, and then Dixie agreed to meet with us. I remember sitting in the Barn and Dixie tossing out ideas on how we might make this happen. And it was Dixie that mentioned getting Chris Benson involved. I sometimes think Chris is what really made that exchange or gave it the quality. (interview, March 9, 2008)

Through the professional guidance of their instructor, Annie and Louise were able to formulate their idea for the PTP exchange. In addition, their instructor's influence and experience with the exchange process motivated the teachers to involve an outside correspondent, Chris Benson, who became an integral component of the PTP exchange for both the teachers and their students.

In addition to receiving input from their own teacher, they also received input on their exchange plans from BLTN teachers who were the first to implement electronic exchanges in their classrooms. These mentor teachers were the first to be a part of the BLTN. Annie recalled meeting with those teachers and how they responded to the initial plan she and Louise created:

I remember well, oh man, I very, very clearly remember when we met with some other experienced exchange teachers and they reviewed our plan, which was very valuable because they were able to give us a lot of good ideas and insights based on the experience they'd had in their own classroom exchanges, but I remember at least a couple of them, Ceci Lewis, whom I respect a great deal, from Arizona, she really cautioned us and thought our schedule was too tight and too rigid and we weren't leaving enough room for the what-ifs and text glitches and illnesses and whatever. (interview, March 8, 2008).

Being able to talk with experienced BLTN colleagues on an informal level prior to implementing a new learning strategy in the classroom provided an additional layer of collaboration for Annie and Louise prior to implementing their exchange plan.

Much of the initial relationship building occurred face-to-face during the Bread Loaf summer study, but once Annie and Louise returned to their respective schools, they were thousands of miles apart. The technology aspect of the BLTN via BreadNet then provided a medium to continue their relationship building as well as their exchange planning.

Training to use BreadNet occurred during the summer at Bread Loaf School of English. That summer, Rocky Gooch, the Director of BLTN Telecommunications, introduced all new network members to BreadNet no matter their level of computer expertise, whether they were novices or had quite a few years of experience using computers in the classroom. Louise said that she had only used computers in her classrooms prior to Bread Loaf “to type worksheets or write letters of recommendation for students, so that was probably my first experience with computers and that was like a year before I started at Bread Loaf. So it was just a totally new learning thing for me” (interview, March 9, 2008, p. 3).

Gooch worked with all new BLTN members at the Vermont campus in small groups and one-on-one if the members asked for his help. Sadly, Gooch, the first telecommunications director for BLTN, died in September of 2001. To gain insight into his role, I looked to the back issues of the *Bread Loaf Teacher Network Magazine* to discover how he introduced teachers to this particular use of technology in their classrooms:

At the beginning of each summer new BLRTN Fellows arrive at the Bread Loaf campus in Vermont with a wide range of computer skills and networking experience. After years of observing English teachers learn how to use computers and telecommunications, we’ve learned what’s required to bring teachers online and engage them in dynamic and useful networks. We know that user-friendly technology and substantial technical support are important. We use current software that supports the needs of teachers. Training is integrated into summer course work at



Bread Loaf. Weekly individual or small group lessons assure that teachers have a clear understanding of the technology and are able to experiment with it to meet their own academic and social purposes. Beginning in their first week at Bread Loaf, new Fellows begin communicating on-line: they definitely move at their own paces from that point. (Gooch, 1996, p. 15)

BreadNet was used for instruction in the LCW class, which is currently archived on BreadNet. Both Louise and Annie were required as a part this graduate course to post their own writing about classroom topics and read and respond to the writings of others online so that they would have an idea of what it was like to be a student-participant in an exchange.

#### Technology Component

Teachers in the Bread Loaf Teacher Network were introduced to BreadNet during their studies at the Bread Loaf School of English during the summer; however, the use of BreadNet was not limited to the summer term. Technology was a critical component of the ecology of an electronic exchange, and without the technology, the exchange would not have occurred. BreadNet, specifically, was the technological tool that supported the exchange from the planning stages to the actual online interaction stage and then to the archival stage. Its role was one of connectivity and storage. In addition to being a technological tool, BreadNet also helped the educators continue to develop their personal and professional relationships.

All BLTN members were allowed free use of BreadNet, which they could download onto their home or school computers from the appropriate Bread Loaf Web site. The first requirement, beyond having a computer itself, was Internet access. At the

time of the exchange, Annie explained that her school in Alaska had one computer lab that teachers and their classes shared. Many of her students did not have computers at home at that time:

At that time, not very many of them did [have computers]. Some did, but it was still, we were still very much in a dial-up age, and the kids who did have computers at home were our rich kids who were very much middle-class kids. There were just a handful who had computers at home, and we only had dial-up access out here at that time. So their experiences in any kind of on-line arena, especially when I think of today's online chat forums, MySpace, Facebook, and all that stuff. That was like a foreign land. It hadn't even been invented yet. So their technology experience was limited to what they had at school, and even what they had at school was very limited. (interview, March 8, 2008)

Most of her students' work on computers prior to the Bread Loaf exchange included word processing, some PowerPoints, and basic research on the Internet, though that was limited because of the unreliability of their Internet connection.

Well, the technology part of it was not a concern. In their postings, it was a simple word document they were using. They just typed up their letter as a word document and had to save it in a certain way so that I could easily retrieve it. And at that time, technology was still, man, that's just so weird. That was only, it wasn't that long ago. But it was still kind of a novelty. To like go into the computer lab was this really big deal because

they didn't get to use the computers very often. (interview, March 8, 2008)

Interestingly, the only major technological obstacle Annie faced as a teacher was keeping the students up-to-date with their postings and on schedule, especially in the winter time:

The biggest problem was when I would have students absent and just the nature of our rural school district and the climate here, there are a lot of the kids who are gone a lot of the time when there are temperatures 30, 40, 50 degrees below zero. There are a lot of families here who won't let their kids go to school, especially if they have to walk a mile to the bus stop and stand there in temperatures like that so lots of kids are gone a lot of the time...without electricity and running water when it is 40 degrees below zero, just keeping yourself alive in your house is kind of a full time job. When those kids would come back to school, finding time for them to get on the computer and for me to access whatever they had written and get it to [Louise] in a timely manner, that was one of the biggest technology challenges, keeping that dialogue between the kids always going. We did have that schedule in place so if somebody didn't get a letter one week, it messed things up for that student's partner. They didn't have a letter to respond to. (interview, March 8, 2008).

Intermittent dial-up access was not as crucial a problem to Annie and her students as attendance issues and staying on schedule. Though Louise's students did not have to face the harsh climate that Annie's students did, Louise also found that keeping her students posting regularly and on schedule was her biggest technological challenge. In addition to

having one computer lab in her school, she also had access to AlphaSmarts, portable word processing keyboards that students could use to create a word document to be saved and then downloaded onto a school computer. Louise did not accept excuses, even illness, for students to miss writing a letter to their partners.

Once in a while when students were absent, then their letters wouldn't get in on time to get them posted on time, and I'm thinking [Annie] did the same, and we just kind of put the screws on. I'm sorry you're sick, but you can send this to me by email, I don't care how you get it to me but you get it to me [Louise laughs], and then once in a while we would have to post that particular letter a week late or something or you know, because sometimes they couldn't help it. We were just pretty hard-nosed about it. Hey, you've got to get these to us. And uh, so that was, that put a little kink in the exchange because their partner wouldn't get a letter, and then they would have nothing to respond to, but I wouldn't say that it was an overwhelming problem. But it was a little glitch from time to time. (interview, March 9, 2008).

Computer and Internet technology, as well as BreadNet, the telecommunications network, were the wheels that moved the exchange forward. Annie and Louise maintained their specified schedule and posted student letters regularly through their Internet connection. There were a few bumps in the road at the beginning of the exchange, especially with Louise's knowledge of technology, as one can see when reading through the PTP-Teacher Talk folder. She turned to Annie for advice when she had computer problems:

I have to be the Idiot of the Techno World. It seems like I'm spending hours getting the students' work posted. I tried having the students email their work to me, and that was a lot of fun. But some of the text was grayed over when I forwarded it to a message to be sent. How do you get the work from your students? Do they type it directly into a message? Do they give it to you on a disk for you to download into a message? Give me some hints that you have found work well. THANKS! (PTP-TT, Sept. 19, 1999, lines 38-42).

Annie shared with Louise her own method of managing the student letters, and the next week, Louise was working toward streamlining the posting process. Louise shared that managing the postings at first was a major issue for her:

Probably my biggest frustration was how to get all of these letters posted to [Annie] in an expedient manner so I didn't spend hours and hours copying and pasting and that kind of thing. And so I'm not even sure if we started out with a network folder or not, but I think I talked to a tech person eventually and said how can I get this streamlined so I'm not spending two hours every week just posting letters or downloading letters. So I think that was my biggest frustration how to get those postings out. (interview, March 9, 2008).

According to the PTP-TT folder, Louise was able to set up a network folder at her school to manage the student writing so that she could get the postings ready for Annie in a more expedient manner.

Early in October, Louise mentions in her journaling within the PTP-TT folder for the first time the possibility of changing the exchange plan so that they can have more time between postings. She was still bothered by late postings:

The technology aspect of the exchange is still frustrating for me and for my students. At this time we have one printer in the entire school that works well, so that slows us down a bit. Then our server was down for the last two days, so we didn't get last week's letters posted. Hopefully, tomorrow things will be up and running! I'm beginning to wonder if [Annie] and I should try to post on alternating weeks, rather than both of us posting every week. But I'd like to try posting every week for a bit longer, and then we can reasses [sic] everything at the end of the quarter.

(PTP-TT, Oct. 3, 2999, lines 611-616)

After discussing the issue with Annie, Louise again journaled about technology problems in regards to their posting schedule the following week:

The week of October 4th turned out to be a time for reassessment. I believe our plan to post on alternating weeks to each other should work a bit better. I hope, though, that it doesn't diminish the excitement. I like [Annie's] idea of each group corresponding with Chris on those weeks they aren't posting to their "poetry pals."

We went to the computer lab on Thursday to type letters to Chris. I thought thirty minutes would be sufficient! But I always am amazed at the host of problems technology presents, especially for students who just now are starting a word processing class. Some forgot their passwords

and couldn't log onto the network to get into Microsoft Word; others still don't remember how to save their documents into a folder, etc. But we will get there. (PTP-TT, Oct. 10, 1999, lines 704-712)

While Annie appeared to be the more technologically proficient of the two teachers, she also experienced frustration in the beginning:

The pressure of posting "on time" is demanding in many ways. I have been at school for two hours this Sunday afternoon and am finally almost done with my BreadNet work. I find that it takes SO long to read new postings, print the things I need, file them in my binders, respond appropriately, copy, cut, & paste my students' work, and then get the student response postings online! Mary B., Judy K., & I also started an Anne Frank Conference this past week with 8th graders, so now I have two groups going. The "lucky" part is that I have a relatively small number of student responses to work with. I can't imagine having 50-plus students' responses to read through, paste together, & post each week! (PTP-TT, Oct. 10, 1999, lines 737-743)

These minor technology glitches worked themselves out, and by the end of the semester, Louise, Annie, and their students had worked through the major technology issues affecting their exchange postings. They decided not to try to send a posting each week but instead began alternating weeks, having their students write to Chris Benson instead of each other on the weeks in between.

On a more positive note, the technology of BreadNet also had a "cool factor" for students. Early in the exchange, Annie used an LCD projector to show students what

BreadNet looked like on her computer. As she was showing them BreadNet's features, their new outside correspondent/poet, Chris Benson, who lived thousands of miles away in Clemson, South Carolina, signaled that he wanted to chat with Annie online via BreadNet:

Chris, you have no idea how great the impact of your perfectly timed "chat" request was today. I had BreadNet up on the LCD panel/overhead & was showing the students the new Young Poet's Blue Cyber Parlor folder. We just finished reading through the "about this folder" intro & those who were ready were given instructions about how to submit a poem for publication there...and then your request to chat popped up as it was all on the overhead. There is NO way I could have planned it any better. Definitely a matter of fate! All 13 students were crowded around the main computer or the screen, reading each line of dialogue as it appeared. They were fascinated and thought it was sooooo cool. When the bell rang & they headed for their lockers, it was all the news in the hall (and we only have one hall, so it was serious!). (PTP-TT, Oct. 14, 1999, lines 916-924)

This was an a-ha moment for Annie's students, who experienced the immediate synchronous nature of BreadNet. The instant chat between Annie and Chris made their worlds smaller in the sense that though they were thousands of miles apart, they could make real connections to real people via the Internet.

To clarify, BreadNet allows for synchronous, or real-time, discourse as exemplified with the instant chat between Chris and Annie as well as asynchronous discourse. With the asynchronous discourse of the exchange, management was Annie



and Louise's major issue. When they organized the exchange, they requested that the technology director create a main folder for the PTP exchange where they posted the letters their students wrote to one another. Within the main PTP folder was a Teacher Talk subfolder (PTP-TT) where Louise and Annie would post notes to each other about the exchange or just journal about the experiences they and their students were having in regards to their exchange work. In her end-of-the-year report for BLTN, Louise mentions what happened with the journaling over the course of the school year:

[Annie] and I had decided to do Journal Talk once a week, but “the best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men...” gave way to more sporadic reflections, often when we find a moment to do some reflection or evaluating. Most often these postings result after some exciting (only occasionally, frustrating) experience spurred by the exchange.

Chris Benson also would respond to postings within the PTP-TT folder as would a few other BLTN members who were outside observers of the exchange. Their original exchange plan was not posted in the PTP folder itself. The copy I received had been archived by Annie in a personal folder on her desktop. Any email that occurred between Annie and Louise within BreadNet could conceivably have been saved by one or the other teachers. Once the PTP folder and PTP-TT folders were created on BreadNet, the need for individual emails was not as great, and the bulk of the tweaking that was done to their exchange plan occurred within the PTP-TT folder throughout the rest of the school year.

### Teacher Partnership Component

The decision to pair two teachers or more for an electronic exchange is not random. The first exchange a teacher completes is with someone he or she met during the summer session of the Bread Loaf School of English. There are no particular requirements for choosing a collaborator, though one does seek another educator who is studying a similar text, topic, or theme. When I asked Chris Benson to tell me how he would describe the ecology of an exchange, he talked about the pairing of Annie and Louise.

Well, I think you chose an interesting word, ecology. I had never heard anyone use that word when analyzing exchanges. And it makes sense, you know, when you think about the things. You know ecology is kind of about everything growing together, you know, and benefiting each other, right? If you mess with one part of the ecology, it messes with everything. So I think it is kind of like a harmony of parts. So what are the things? First, you need teachers like [Annie] and [Louise]. That's the main thing. They are just really dedicated. If you've got a teacher who's just doing this because it's required and doesn't really take an interest in it theoretically, in the theory of it, social construction of it, and how that aids writing instruction, well then, that's one way you mess with the ecology.

(interview, March 26, 2008)

Chris pointed out that both of these teachers were dedicated to the exchange. Louise also mentioned the importance of choosing a teacher who was committed to the exchange and the exchange plan. She and Annie developed a plan that was straightforward and, in the

opinion of some experienced BLTN members, too rigid. This dedication to the exchange was important to Louise, and it arose in the interview when she was explaining why she chose poetry for the topic of their first exchange:

And so Dixie had said something in class, and uh, I was thinking, “Oh, I might like that,” and I had visited with [Annie] informally and had that gut feeling that this was a teacher who would follow through on things, and, uh, just kind of like you, Julie. It makes a difference when you have a teacher who commits to posting regularly. But anyway, I just kind of had that sense, and I think I kind of knew [Annie] better than I knew you because we had just happened to visit or sit next to each other or something. So I just kind of, my memory tells me that I approached her, or maybe she approached me, I don’t even remember. And, uh, and I said would this be something you’d be interested in? And Dixie agreed to meet with us. (interview, March 9, 2008)

Louise’s “gut” feeling was that she could trust Annie to follow through on her obligations with the exchange. Teachers who have completed exchanges know that following through with the exchange is not just important from the teacher’s perspective but also from the students’ perspective. If one class participates and the other does not follow through, the participating class can be disappointed.

Annie also had her own “gut” feeling about working with Louise that she discussed in her interview when she was talking about how experienced BLTN members had critiqued their exchange plan:

We listened to all of the people who reviewed our plan, but [Louise] and I, just because we met a lot to talk about the exchange, and I don't know, I can't explain it, there was a connection we had. There was a significant age difference. Her own children are older than I; she's quite a lot older than I, but we just really connected, and we were really willing to speak honestly about our classroom style and management, and I really liked to have things set in a schedule so that I know where I'm headed. And we were a lot the same in those respects, so we decided to stay with our rigid schedule, and that save us. (March 8, 2008, lines 282-289)

Annie's interview also verified their commitment to the exchange:

It was very organic in the way it [the exchange] developed, and um, just because [Louise] and I were both very committed to the project, we were just like in constant communication, I mean, some days we would talk online 5, 6, 7 times a day. A lot of phone conversation occurred at first as we were getting things figured out. (March 8, 2008)

The communication Annie spoke about occurred at the beginning of the school year, after their classes in Vermont. They were both back home at their respective schools trying to work through the initial kinks of the exchange.

One of the main difficulties they had in the beginning, as I mentioned in the previous section, was managing the student postings for the exchange. This issue caused no small amount of distress for Annie, who journaled in the PTP-TT folder about it. In that journal posting on Oct. 10, 1999, Annie was worried that Louise had second thoughts about the exchange:

I was so worried after [Louise]'s "Time to Assess?" posting. Thought this Utopia existed in my mind alone and she would want to drop the exchange! I feel so fortunate to be working with someone that I "know" a bit and have spent some time with, and with whom I share common interests. I called [Louise] & we were able to clear everything up on the phone...and it was so nice just to visit with her. It seems we are both very, very busy (no surprise!) and the added pressure of posting weekly is just too much (for both of us). The alternating weeks postings should lift quite a burden and will give us more time to pursue other poetry-related avenues: publishing, poetry writing, responses to Chris, etc.

All in all, the first quarter of the school year has been stressful but successful. The exchange is being fine-tuned and is in great working order. (PTP-TT folder, Oct. 10, 1999, lines 792-801)

Annie's journal entry emphasizes the importance of the teacher-to-teacher relationship that she and Louise began to build earlier that summer. The two teachers, though different in age and teaching experience, were in rural schools of similar size with similar issues. They found common interests and developed a method of communication that worked for them, both online and, when necessary, over the phone lines. The transcript indicated that they worked together to solve their management problem and came up with a solution satisfactory to both them and their students.

Before the exchange could begin, a plan was outlined. For the PTP exchange, the exchange plan was completed at the end of July 1999. The initial, planned components of the exchange were as follows:

- Exchange participants
- Explanation of exchange
- Conference folder needs on BreadNet
- Materials the teachers would need for the exchange
- How they would select common poems
- Schedule, week-by-week, beginning August 30 and ending after the ninth week on October 29, 1999
- Tentative thoughts about continuing the exchange beyond their initial timeframe
- Possible culminating activities that showcased student exchange work
- How they would document what happened in their classrooms during the exchange
- Other administrative ideas related to the exchange
- Possible research questions for the teachers

The inclusion of plans to document the exchange as well as the inclusion of research questions indicated that both Annie and Louise planned to conduct their own teacher research during the exchange.

In her spring report, Louise detailed how she and Annie documented their work during the PTP exchange. One method was through the Journal Talks. Louise said that she noticed teacher reflections written when she and Annie would send student postings. These were just comments of incidents she felt were important enough to document in an informal, yet permanent way. In an exchange with Chris on March 6, 2000, which she mentioned in her end-of-year report, what she was seeing in her students' writing was the primary subject of her posting to Chris which she sent with student postings for that

week. She used phrases such as “I see,” or “I want to comment on,” or “I’ve talked to the students about,” or “I wonder” when she related her observations about student work at that point in the exchange. This anecdotal evidence provides another layer of context to the data from this exchange. Even though this researcher did not experience the classroom environment during the exchange, Louise’s first-person account provided important contextual insights into the progress of the Colorado students participating in the exchange. The journaling by the teachers was integral to writing the history of the exchange.

Other intentionally collected data from that year included box notes written by students who alternated as ethnographers each week of the exchange. Both Louise and Annie gave their students attitudinal surveys at more than one point during the exchange. Both gave a survey in the beginning month and again mid-way through the school year. Louise does not mention a final survey, but Annie did give one to her students to judge changes in their attitudes toward poetry.

#### Outside Correspondent/Poet Component

The role of the outside poet/correspondent, held by Chris Benson for the PTP exchange, is a key component in the ecology of this exchange. Not all electronic exchanges include outside correspondents; therefore, the conclusion may be that the outside correspondent role is not integral to the ecology of the exchange. Chris’s role in PTP led me to three findings that support the inclusion of an outside correspondent in electronic exchanges and explain why his role was important to the ecology of the PTP exchange: 1) students formed an online relationship with Chris that affected how they responded to him online; 2) Chris’s adult interaction created a “zone of competence” or

“zone of proximal development” (Cazden, 2001, p. 63) for students who needed the support that his feedback provided so that they could grow as writers; 3) student responses showed a measurable increase in the number of words per t-unit when writing to Chris versus writing to peers.

The role of the online poet/correspondent was not to make curricular plans. Chris did not know what Annie and Louise were teaching in their classrooms outside of the exchange:

You know, I was totally unaware most of the time of what they were doing in class. Whatever [Annie] and [Louise] were teaching, I had no idea what it was. I responded to the writing, and that was it. It all existed online for me. And I think [Annie] and [Louise], they did a lot in class. This was sort of part of the class, but they were doing stuff that was part of a regular English class. They were reading literature, they were doing their grammar and their vocabulary and stuff like that, I'm sure. But I never really became a part of that. (interview, March 26, 2008)

Chris also stressed that it was extremely important to remember that the Pass the Poetry exchange was not the main focus of the teaching and learning that happened in the two classrooms. His role was only a small one: “And for me, I have to remind myself of that because I was getting just this small part, and that's all it was to me. And I guess in my own mind, it's easy for me to think that's all they were doing. I know they would tell me they had other things to cover in their textbooks to read, etc.” (interview, March 26, 2008).



Chris's role was one that developed over the course of the exchange. In the planning stages, Dixie Goswami suggested that Chris participate as the outside correspondent/poet. Louise remembered sitting in the barn talking with Dixie about the exchange when she suggested Chris's participation: "I sometimes think Chris is what really made that exchange or gave it the quality" (interview, March 9, 2008). Annie was generous in her description of Chris's role in the exchange:

But with Chris, especially in that first year, he, his influence in that first year was, I don't even know what the word is, it was huge. Because what he did, he elevated the, hmmm, not the purpose, he elevated the tenor of the exchange, I guess. The kids were confused, I think, at first, about why in the world this guy from a University in the first place and why he wasn't, like, asking them "teachery" questions and why he was talking to them, like, a pal, you know, or an adult friend, and um, at first they were a little puzzled, because they didn't know how to react to him, and then they just started to develop these very sincere relationships online with him. And just respected him. (interview, March 8, 2008)

Brooks, one of the students in the exchange, also credited Chris with helping shape his writing and understanding of poetry. Brooks said, "Seeing the creative abilities of Mr. Benson and individuals in [Colorado] motivated me to push my creativity and expand my writing" (survey, 2008).

I was not able to directly talk with students about Chris's influence on their writing, but I found evidence of his influence in Louise's end-of-the-year report. Louise asked her students to reflect on the writing they had done over the course of the year.

She included an anonymous quote from a student who called Chris a “second teacher” and helped students “dissect poetry down to the meaning of it.” Louise also pointed out later in her report that “every student remarked (in their written reflections) on Chris’s influence.”

In a narrative Annie wrote for a college course the summer after the exchange, she identified social implications resulting from students interacting with peers and Chris:

The social self is the center of the universe for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. Miraculously, the power of the online relationship removed the ties that bind so many personalities, and some students took on completely new selves with their online partners and with Chris Benson. They were free to be who they really are beneath the socially-approved or socially-unacceptable selves. (Annie’s project narrative)

Later in the narrative, Annie reflected on the power of Chris’s online role. How one is perceived online can be drastically different from real life. She recalled an incident in class where students, who were studying Greek mythology, likened Chris to a god. They had not met him, and their only basis for comparison was the exchange of words online they shared with him. He did get a chance to visit their classroom in February 2000, and this is how the students felt about him after his visit:

After meeting Chris when he visited our school in February, others reflected on his actual appearance: his graying hair and the thought that he would be younger...or older...or shorter...or taller. But all had a personal connection to Chris after his visit. I believe this is significant again, because of the nature of the relationships in the online exchange.

Appearance didn't matter: the person appeared as you drew him or her in your mind. I was worried that for some students, Chris's visit to [AHS] would change things. It did, but in no case was it a negative change. After his visit, Chris became a member of the class rather than an online being...They mattered to him; their writing mattered enough for him to comment critically on its merits and faults; and they listened...more intently than they have ever listened to me or any other English teacher, probably. (Annie's project narrative)

The online relationships that Chris had fostered with the students during the first half of the school year were cemented by his visit to their school in remote Alaska (and in the winter, no less). They were involved with him because of the personal online dialogue he fostered through his individualized postings to each student, and they knew he cared about them when he made the trip from Clemson, S.C., to visit with them face-to-face.

An analysis of their writing showed three of the four students in this study wrote more words in postings to their online peers, and the postings that students wrote to Chris showed a measurable increase in the number of words per t-unit, as explained later in this chapter. Students who use more words per t-unit produce writing that is more complex and mature. I cannot draw the conclusion, by measuring t-units in postings over the course of the exchange, that student writing became more complex and matured as a result of the exchange, but there is clear evidence that students changed their writing depending on their audience. When writing to their peers, students wrote more words; postings to peers also included more personal information such as sports team results or other school and at-home activities. When writing to Chris, students limited their online

conversation and concentrated on poetry, the focus of the exchange, while including few details of their personal lives.

#### Online Conversation Component

The fifth component of the PTP electronic exchange ecology is the online conversation that was generated by the exchange. The first type of conversation occurred during the planning of the exchange between Annie and Louise. The Teacher-Talk folder they created at the start of the exchange documented their planning in the beginning months of the exchange as well as their continued discussions—pedagogical, curricular, and personal—throughout the exchange.

The student-to-student conversations were documented in the main folder for PTP. Those conversations were superficial, yet appropriate for students' learning level, according to Chris:

I'm going strictly on memory here. I think the student interactions were a little shallower. You know how they go. "How are you doing? What's up?" They have that chatty stuff at the beginning of their note, and then they get down to the nitty-gritty of the poem they are supposed to be responding to or whatever the note was they were responding to. And, um, they, you know, they are just not that, uh, able yet, at that young age, to ask provocative questions, which I would do...I was a little more, you know I had more knowledge than they did, so I would ask more provocative questions, to provoke them to think more. Whereas their responses were more, I hate to use the word "shallow." They were

appropriate. Their responses were appropriate for their level of learning.  
(interview, March 26, 2008).

Chris's opinion of the students writing bears weight, as he is an experienced professor of writing. Student transcripts were rife with the type of writing Chris described in his interview. Here are examples from each of the Colorado student writers participating in this study:

Brooks

What's up? The weather's pretty good here. I have a Honda 150, motorcycle, and a snow jet snowmobile. On my motorcycle I mostly ride around in pastures or on the road. I don't ever ride my snow machine though (no snow). Well, I haven't written to you for a while. This week we read the poem "The Land God Forgot". I thought that it was really good. I thought that the word usage was really weird. I thought that he used cruel words to describe a place that I always pictured as a beautiful place. Anyway, I thought that it was a good poem. (Brooks' transcript, Nov. 8, 1999, lines 780-785).

Josie

Hello, how are you? Pretty good here. Our basketball season is officially over. Both our boys' team and girls' teams lost in the second round of districts, so everyone's kind of bummed. The previous games I told you about we won. Girls and boys, so that was good.

The poem you wrote with the Five Easy Pieces was REALLY good! That was pretty good, especially since you didn't spend very much time on it. I

like the first line that describes the girl's hands as being so lush and beautiful. Very good! (Josie's transcript, Feb. 28, 2000, lines 1796-1801)

Tatum

How are you doing? Everything's great here. It's getting colder down here too. I'm sure it's not as cold as it is there though. There hasn't been any snow yet. How was hockey practice? What was your job this summer?

I also wrote a poem. We have an actor from Denver and she is helping us write a recipe poem. You just have to write about something and put it into recipes, and that's your recipe poem. (Tatum's transcript, Nov. 8, 1999, lines 470-475)

Vivian

How's it going? That really sucks that you guys have had to cancel a bunch of your games due to bad weather. I don't know if I would like it being that cold all of the time! I'm used to it being pretty warm down here. We just played a team called "L[---]" in basketball. They have some really big girls on their team. Some of them are 6' to 6'3!!! Pretty big, huh? We played a really good game, but they ended up winning. We also have another game tomorrow against a team called "W[---]."

Thank you very much for your ideas for the title of my poem "Music."

Your suggestions were really good, but I'm not sure which suggestion I liked the best. I like all of them! We also read a common poem this week which was called "The Ad-dressing of Cats." I thought that it was a really

good poem. I think Mrs. [Louise] sent it for you guys to read. Didn't she?  
So, did you like it? Reading the poem kind of inspired some of us to tell  
stories about our cats. (Vivian's transcript, Jan. 17, 2000, lines 662-671)

The examples above were spread across the year of the exchange. I chose these because they were representative of much of the "superficial" writing that occurred between peers in the exchange. In these samples, students talked about benign topics such as the weather and their sports teams before broaching the topic of poetry or before tagging on their own poem at the end of the posting. This is an observation, not a criticism, of the student writing. For many students, it was easy to talk about something with which they were familiar and comfortable before sending their own personal writing to a peer who was unknown thousands of miles away.

Writing in student conversations was more personal in nature; students were comfortable talking about their school activities, their likes and dislikes in social activities, or their family and friends. This willingness to share about themselves on a more personal, yet superficial level, was an unthreatening way that they could connect to each other online. Three of the four students in the study wrote more words per posting when they were writing to their peers when compared to the writing they posted to Chris.

Another type of conversation found in the transcript was that of teacher-to-student. These postings were initiated by either Annie or Louise. The postings that fit this category were more often written by one of the teachers to give information to the other classroom as a whole. The first instance of this type of posting came at the beginning of the exchange when both Annie and Louise wrote an introduction about their geographical location, community, and school. Others were written to engage the

students and help them generate ideas for postings. At the beginning of the exchange, Annie posted a message for Colorado High School signed from the Alaska class:

Hey, students in [Colorado]...

We've been reading poetry for four weeks now and we've found some really neat poems that have been read by all of us in class. [Our teacher] told us that your class and our class are reading one poem that is the same every week. We have a question for you. Which one has been your favorite so far? What other poems have you read in your class that we probably haven't read here?

Write back! (PTP transcript, Sept. 15, 1999, lines 725-734)

This was an early posting from Alaska. Annie's posting is meant to stimulate interest as well as help students generate ideas to use in the postings they write next.

Other teacher-to-student writing occurred when a student was absent. Louise wrote to an Alaska student in one such situation where a student in her classroom was unable to write to his exchange partner. In this instance, she did not want the student in Alaska to go a week without hearing from her partner. She begins with an explanation of why she was writing to the student, included some personal background, and finished with a comment on a common poem for the week:

Dear H.,

I decided to write to you this week because your partner J. and his family went to Maryland for a week to attend a wedding. I didn't want you to be the only one who wouldn't receive a letter, so I thought this would be my chance to write to you.



My husband is a minister, so our three children were "preacher's kids." I think you can identify with some stereotypes that go with that, but there are also a lot of blessings.

Right after I got out of college, another teacher and I went to Scandinavia, Germany, and Holland. We enjoyed visiting the Anne Frank home, but it is very sad to realize how she died. It's a very interesting country. You would like it.

I am really enjoying the exchanges my students are doing with your class. Your teacher is a "gem," and I also love working with her.

I liked the religious words used in "Rodeo." It made me remember going to rodeos when I was a child growing up in North Dakota. Do you think Lueders meant to draw a comparison between the ritual of church services and the ritual of riding a bull. It's a possibility, I guess. I admired how Lueders compared the two just by using three or four well-chosen words.

Take care,

Mrs. R. (PTP transcript, Sept. 24, 1999, lines 1399-1417)

The teachers also wrote general postings to the other classroom to give background on a writing assignment or to provide insight into how students went about writing particular poems for their partners. This posting from Louise is one that describes the process students went through to create a "nature" poem:

Dear Alaskan Poets,

Here are our letters to you for the week of October 11th, and they contain some "nature" type poems. We had gone out to our school playground

early one morning to notice what each of us could see, hear, feel, smell, and taste (using the five senses) as we wrote journal entries. Later, when we went back into the classroom, each of us underlined or highlighted the phrases in our journals that we liked. Then we used those phrases for the poems we are sending to you.

But we are stressing that these are only rough drafts. They are not finished poems, but just our first writings. We would like you to tell us which lines are especially good, but we would also like you to tell us what we could each do to make our poem better. Give us ideas for improving certain lines, our closing lines, or our titles. We appreciate all of your help.

We also want to tell you that we too have started a "culture" package that we will be mailing to you some time in the future. But we have a question: Is it safe to send food in the mail to Alaska? Would canned foods freeze? We look forward to your answer.

Sincerely,

Mrs. R.

Most of the postings written by the teacher to students in the other classroom were not mean to be reciprocated by individual students. The only teacher-to-student postings which created dialogue between a teacher and student were the very few postings made by the classrooms teachers to a student whose exchange partner was missing. These postings gave the missing student's partner an opportunity to dialog online with someone when the regular partner was unable to write. When reading through all of the collected

data and artifacts of the exchange in order to understand the history and identify the ecological components of the exchange, I recognized four themes related to my research questions.

### Themes in Research

#### *Students Making Transactions*

One of my secondary research questions was based on Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory. Many electronic exchanges are text-based exchanges, so I searched for evidence in the student transcripts where students connected to the literature they read for an exchange. I chose to use Rosenblatt's transactional theory as a starting point because it offered a continuum for students to make connections to the literature they read.

The aesthetic stance on one side of the continuum is subjective and reflects a more emotional response on the part of the reader while the efferent stance on the other side of the continuum is more objective and scientific. When reading the postings written by students in the exchange, I found that while students were willing to say they liked or did not like a poem they were reading, they did not always support their opinion with an explanation that helped me identify whether their stance was efferent or aesthetic. I looked for phrases that indicated students were connecting to the literature they were reading for the exchange, whether the literature was a common poem studied by their whole class or the poem of their writing partner to which they were responding. Students would normally begin by saying "I think/thought," or "I liked it because..." There were numerous instances where students phrased their postings so that I could identify there was a transaction, but making a clear-cut distinction between efferent and aesthetic was

not always easy. Students also posted writing that addressed more than one poem and indicated a different stance for each poem.

After reading through two student transcripts looking for the two stances, I realized that when students were taking an aesthetic stance, their connections were personal and contained words about feelings. When the postings took a more efferent stance, students were using content vocabulary, or the language of a poet, to describe why they liked a poem. Vivian took an aesthetic stance when she identified a poem as a favorite because of the way it made her feel:

One poem, that I really liked, was called “Rodeo” by Edward Lueders. Something that really struck me about the poem was how well he describes the cowboy. This poem made me feel confident about myself because I think this cowboy is trying to make his dreams come true in rodeoing, and I know that I can make my dreams come true too. This poem reminds me about where we live because people do some rodeoing out here. (Vivian’s transcript, Sept. 24, 1999, lines 60-64).

The poem made her “feel confident,” think of personal dreams, and remember people she knows who also rodeo.

In another posting, Brooks took an efferent response to a common poem from a class reading assignment: “Last week we read the poem that had no title. It was No. 33 by Ferlinghetti. I thought it was very odd, because the poet put no title on the poem and used no punctuation. I like how he compared the elk and the humans in the meditation” (Brooks’ transcript, Dec. 15, 1999, lines 1262-1264). The underlined words are content vocabulary words. Brooks is making more objective observations about the poem based

on his knowledge of poetic elements. The first two observations, that the poem had no title and no punctuation, were superficial, but he also indicated a metaphorical element of the poem, the comparison between animal and human. He also used the phrasing “I think,” and “I like,” but the support following his opinion was objective and a search for meaning with the form of the poem itself rather than the poem’s content.

I read through each student transcript and identified one posting from each of seven months of the exchange that the students wrote to their peers as well as one posting from each of seven months of the exchange that the students wrote to Chris Benson.

Table 5.1 indicates the aesthetic and efferent responses from those postings when students were writing to peers, and Table 5.2 indicates the aesthetic and efferent responses from those postings when students were writing to Chris.

Table 1: Aesthetic and Efferent Responses When Writing to Peers

	September 1999		October 1999		November 1999		December 1999		January 2000		February 2000		April 2000		Totals	
	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E
Brooks	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	4	3
Vivian	1	0	--	--	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	1	3	4
Josie	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	2
Tatum	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	4	3

The responses of these four students, as the table indicates, are fairly balanced. While students did not make both an aesthetic and efferent response within each posting, they did make both types of responses when writing to their peers. Three of the four students made more aesthetic responses to the literature. In the first postings of all four students, only aesthetic responses were made. The September postings were the first postings where students made any references to poetry in their writing to their exchange

partners. The only other writing they had posted was an introduction to begin the exchange. At that point, the students had only studied poetry for three to four weeks, so it is reasonable to say that their transactions would be more aesthetic because they would not have been as familiar with poetic elements in order to talk about poetic forms with their partners. Content, though, was something to which they could easily make connections, especially when the teachers were choosing place poetry early in the exchange.

Table 2: Aesthetic and Efferent Responses When Writing to Adult Correspondent

	October 1999		November 1999		December 1999		January 2000		February 2000		March 2000		April 2000		Totals	
	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E
Brooks	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	5
Vivian	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	4
Josie	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Tatum	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	4

When students wrote to Chris, they noticeably made less aesthetic connections and more efferent connections to the poetry. All four students took an efferent stance with poetry at least twice as often as they took an aesthetic stance. I conclude that this finding indicates an awareness of audience. Brooks wrote about one particular poem to both his peer partner and Chris in different postings. The posting to his partner is on the aesthetic side of the continuum:

#### Aesthetic Stance

This week we read a common poem called "Addressing of Cats." I thought it was pretty stupid though. It didn't make sense. The guy that wrote it decided that when he didn't have a word or phrase that fit he

would put, "a cat is a cat and a dog is a dog." I just thought that it was dumber than heck. (Brooks' transcript, Jan. 17, 2000, lines 1417-1419)

When he wrote to Chris about the same poem, he clearly took a more efferent stance:

Last week we read a common poem called "The Ad-dressing of cats." I thought it was pretty confusing though. It didn't make sense. The guy that wrote it decided that when he didn't have a word or phrase that fit he would write "a cat is a cat and a dog is a dog." I thought that that would be a pretty lazy thing to do, if you can't even think of a phrase that rhymes. Poetry is supposed to mean something, not just be random words. I just thought that it was dumber than heck. Also we read another poem about mice and all sorts of things. I thought that it wasn't as good, but it was sort of fun. (Brooks' transcript, Jan. 25, 2000, lines 1662-1667)

Brooks uses more content vocabulary words in his posting to Chris, and he also supports his opinion of the poem with an explanation of why the poem did not make sense to him. As a whole, when these four students were writing to Chris, they made more references to poetic elements or forms and fewer references to personal responses to the literature. I will return to audience awareness when I discuss the t-unit analysis later in this chapter.

### *Role of Audience*

Before I talk about audience awareness, I want to talk about the different audiences found within the exchange as well as their roles. The primary audience for the students was their peer audience. Other audiences included the online correspondent/poet, their teachers, and their classmates. When reviewing the four student surveys received for this study, I found three of the four students (all female) said they

were online social butterflies who enjoyed writing to and getting responses from their peers. Tatum commented, “It was encouraging to be critiqued in a positive way by other students my age” (survey, 2008). Vivian said she appreciated feedback from exchange partners: “[The exchange] helped me express my ideas and get valuable input to apply towards my writing skills. We didn’t know (have never met) the person we were writing to either, so they weren’t judgmental” (survey, 2008). Josie spoke more specifically to audience when she was asked about her participation in the exchange:

Once I got started with the exchange and developed an “online relationship” with my exchange partner, I found I truly enjoyed getting response back and did become somewhat of an online social butterfly. The idea of having to participate eventually turned into wanting to participate. (survey, 2008)

The exchange audience was a motivator for three of the four students surveyed about the exchange. Only Brooks, the one male participant surveyed, said “I didn’t like someone I didn’t even know criticizing my work” (survey, 2008).

Students wanted and appreciated positive feedback from their peers, according to the four surveys. The anonymous nature of the exchange also made that feedback less threatening. Josie said that feedback from her online correspondents was less threatening: “Rarely, would we share our poems in front of the entire class, so it was nice having the opportunity to share my work with someone who couldn’t criticize my poem to my face. It was easier to get constructive feedback through a letter than from someone face-to-face” (survey, 2008). When asked whose responses—the online poet, exchange partner, or classroom teacher—helped shape his writing and/or understanding of poetry,



Brooks said, “[The] online poet and my classmates. Seeing the creative abilities of Mr. Benson and individuals in [Colorado—*his* classmates] motivated me to push my creativity and expand my writing” (survey, 2008). Not only did Brooks consider the online peer, online poet, and his teacher as potential audiences, he also considered his own classmates to be another audience for his writing.

The audience of adults, both teachers and the online correspondent/poet, received positive comments from the participating students. Brooks specifically pointed out that the online correspondent/poet encouraged his creativity. Tatum identified her exchange partner as well as her teacher as audiences who helped her improve her writing: “They both provided constructive criticism and positive feedback” (survey, 2008). Josie identified her classroom teacher as the audience who helped her improve her writing the most: “Mrs. R. is the person who helped shape my writing and understanding of poetry the most. I constantly remember correcting errors that I had made on papers, which helped me learn more than anything” (survey, 2008). She felt that the practice that resulted from her teacher’s lessons helped her improve her writing.

For Chris, the role of audience was important not just for the students, but himself as well: “I often did share stuff just because it was fresh in my mind and I wanted a response myself. I’m not different than the students. I wanted them to respond to my work as much as they wanted me and the other students in the other school to respond to their work” (interview, March 26, 2008).

Even the transcripts reflected the students’ awareness of audience in two major ways: students wrote more and created more personal postings for peers rather than

adults, and students wrote with more syntactic complexity when writing to adults rather than peers.

### *Analysis of Syntactic Complexity*

Kellogg W. Hunt (1965) conducted a ground-breaking study that analyzed the writings of students at grades four, eight, and twelve to develop a quantitative method of studying grammatical structures in writing. His study also looked for “developmental trends” (p. 1) in those grammatical structures.

Hunt defined “maturity” as “nothing more than ‘the observed characteristics of writers in an older grade’” (p. 5), and he did not consider maturity to mean writing that was “better” stylistically by students in older versus younger grades.

To determine this quantitative measure, Hunt identified the t-unit, short for “minimal terminable unit,” which was the smallest measure of a grammatical unit that one can punctuate as a sentence (p. 21). The t-unit is an independent clause along with any of its modifiers. In a simple sentence, there would be one t-unit. Compound and compound-complex sentences could be divided into two or more t-units. The length of the t-units for students in younger grades, according to Hunt’s study, was shorter than those of students in higher grades.

Hunt found that younger students wrote shorter t-units and older students used longer t-units. He identified lengths of t-units as short, middle-length, and long according to the number of words in each: short contained one to eight words, middle-length contained nine to 20 words, and long contained more than 20 words (p. 30).

In Hunt’s study, he analyzed 1000-word samples. For the purpose of my study, I analyzed passages that had a minimum of 100 words. As these passages were online

postings written by the students as letters, I eliminated the obligatory greeting at the beginning of the posting as well as any salutation at the end. I also did not include any poetry in the analysis, though I did find one study that used t-units to evaluate the structural complexity of poetry (Hallen & Shakespear, 2002). In the posting below written to Chris Benson from Vivian, I underlined an example of the greeting and salutation as well as a poem, all parts of the posting I eliminated from the t-unit analysis:

Dear Chris,

Hi, how are you? I'm fine. I really enjoyed meeting you when you came done [*sic*] to [our town]. The poem that we read made a lot more sense when you were here because you could explain it so well. I also enjoyed your singing and playing the guitar.

I liked the poem that you sent us ("The Compleat Baker"). It is a really good poem. I really like poems that rhyme like this one. I also liked how the women got kind of mad because the man and his boy thought that she couldn't cook. That was funny!

We wrote some poems similar to the poem "I Hear America Singing." I didn't spend a lot of time on this poem, so it isn't the best. I still need some help on revising it. If you see anything in this poem that you think is good or that I could change, please tell me. Well, I better go. Bye!

#### Music

I hear [name of town] singing, various tunes and melodies,  
Those of students, each one singing on this joyous Friday,  
The teacher's tired songs, as if they've been singing for years,  
The janitor whistling as he mops the classrooms,  
The secretary singing as she scuffles papers around her desk,  
The cooks humming as they get the food ready,

The principal's song at lunch intermission, as he walks into the sweet smelling aroma of the lunchroom,  
The song of the athlete, the strong, triumphant melody,  
The parents' song and the coaches' song, unlike in many different ways,  
Each singing their hearts away--to the quiet, listening world,  
Each singing their own kind of music.

Sincerely,

Vivian (Vivian's transcript, Dec. 7, 1999, lines 455-485)

To determine the length of the t-units for the posting above, I counted the number of t-units in the portion that was not underlined and divided the number of words in that passage by the number of t-units to determine the average number of words per t-unit. In the passage above, Vivian wrote 146 words and 13 t-units for an average of 11.23 words per t-unit.

When I began studying the writing in the exchange, I was not sure what I would find with the t-unit analysis. Would the students begin to use fewer but longer t-units through the course of the exchange? Would there be any change at all in the number and length of t-units students wrote when writing to a peer compared to writing to an adult? Could I find a change in syntactic complexity of student writing in an exchange? After doing some preliminary investigation, I noticed that students were writing longer sentences using fewer t-units when they wrote to Chris Benson.

For my official content analysis of t-units, I identified four student-to-student posting dates as well as four student-to-poet posting dates for each student which spanned the course of the one-year exchange. When a student had more than one exchange partner to whom he or she wrote on a particular date, I counted the first posting only. Also, at certain times in the exchange, Louise or Annie may have posted a student's writing later than the rest of the class, possibly because that student was absent when the

original posts were made, or in some cases, the teachers missed sending the student's writing on the date she posted the others. I then looked for a posting within a week to ten days of the other students' posting. I counted the total number of t-units in each posting, the total number of words in each posting, and found the average t-unit length.

I also determined the mean for the total number of t-units, total number of words and average t-unit length for each student across the exchange year. Most students had four postings with passages which were measurable, so, to find the mean, I divided by four. If a student had less than 100 words in his or her passage, it was not measurable, and I divided by the number of measurable passages, which were no less than three. The results of my content analysis can be found in Table 5.3-Table 5.6.

Table 3: Analysis of Brooks' Peer-to-Peer and Student-to-Poet Postings

<b>Peer-to-Peer Postings</b>	Total # T-Units	Total # Words	Avg. T-Unit Length
Sept. 24, 1999	11	158	14.36
Nov. 8, 1999	12	122	10.17.
Dec. 15, 1999	10	125	12.5
May 12, 2000	19	197	10.37
<b>Mean for all measurable postings</b>	13	150.5	11.85
<b>Student-to-Poet Postings</b>	Total # T-Units	Total # Words	Avg. T-Unit Length
Oct. 16, 1999	10	146	14.6
Dec. 7, 1999	12	134	11.17
Feb. 21, 2000	21	290	13.81
April 24, 2000	12	133	11.08
<b>Mean for all measurable postings</b>	13.75	175.75	12.67

Table 4: Analysis of Tatum's Peer-to-Peer and Student-to-Poet Postings

<b>Peer-to-Peer Postings</b>	Total # T-Units	Total # Words	Avg. T-Unit Length
Sept. 24, 1999	19	227	11.95
Nov. 8, 1999	n.m.	n.m.	n.m.
Dec. 15, 1999	14	133	9.5
May 12, 2000	20	198	9.9
<b>Mean for all measurable postings</b>	17.67	163.5	10.45
<b>Student-to-Poet Postings</b>	Total # T-Units	Total # Words	Avg. T-Unit Length
Oct. 24, 1999	10	113	11.3
Dec. 7, 1999	16	140	8.75
Feb. 21, 2000	18	183	10.17
April 24, 2000	10	108	10.80
<b>Mean for all measurable postings</b>	13.5	136	10.26

Table 5: Analysis of Vivian's Peer-to-Peer and Student-to-Poet Postings

<b>Peer-to-Peer Postings</b>	Total # T-Units	Total # Words	Avg. T-Unit Length
Sept. 24, 1999	31	333	10.74
Nov. 8, 1999	37	331	8.95
Dec. 15, 1999	25	259	10.36
May 12, 2000	33	294	8.91
<b>Mean for all measurable postings</b>	31.5	304.25	9.74
<b>Student-to-Poet Postings</b>	Total # T-Units	Total # Words	Avg. T-Unit Length
Oct. 24, 1999	13	193	14.85
Dec. 7, 1999	13	146	11.23
Feb. 21, 2000	16	189	11.81
April 24, 2000	25	283	11.32
<b>Mean for all measurable postings</b>	16.75	202.75	12.30

Table 6: Analysis of Josie's Peer-to-Peer and Student-to-Poet Postings

<b>Peer-to-Peer Postings</b>	Total # T-Units	Total # Words	Avg. T-Unit Length
Sept. 24, 1999	27	279	10.33
Nov. 8, 1999	34	313	9.21
Dec. 15, 1999	15	148	9.87
May 12, 2000	22	181	8.23
<b>Mean for all measurable postings</b>	24.5	230.25	9.41
<b>Student-to-Poet Postings</b>	Total # T-Units	Total # Words	Avg. T-Unit Length
Oct. 24, 1999	11	109	9.91
Dec. 7, 1999	11	129	11.73
Feb. 21, 2000	15	151	10.07
April 24, 2000	10	121	12.1
<b>Mean for all measurable postings</b>	11.75	127.5	10.95

Brooks averaged writing more words and a slightly higher number of t-units when writing to the online correspondent/poet than he did when writing to his peers. When looking at the averages for the three female students in this study, I see a contrast. The three girls each consistently wrote more words and had a higher number of t-units when writing to their peers. In fact, both Vivian and Josie consistently averaged over 100 more words when writing to their peers versus writing to the online correspondent/poet. They also averaged almost twice as many t-units when writing to peers versus when writing to the online correspondent/poet. The mean for the average t-unit length was 1.5-2.5 times larger when writing to the online correspondent/poet than when writing to peers. While Tatum wrote more words and t-units to her peers, her average t-unit length was slightly larger when writing to her peers versus writing to the online correspondent/poet.

I found in the t-unit analysis that three of the four students participating in this study wrote more words to their peers than the poet. When I looked qualitatively at the

postings, I saw more references to their personal lives when they were talking to their peers. When students wrote more about their personal lives than the poetry, there were more words in the postings. There was less personal information in the student postings to Chris Benson; students focused mainly on the poetry they were reading and writing in the classroom. The only time students strayed from the focus of the exchange in postings to Chris was when they were talking about his upcoming visit to each of their classrooms or commenting on his visit after the fact. Also, student writing was more syntactically complex when writing to Chris Benson. They used fewer t-units as well as fewer words, and for three of the four students, the average t-unit length was longer when they wrote to the online correspondent/poet.

#### *Online Relationship Building*

The idea of establishing a relationship online with someone sight unseen is not unusual to students who embrace Web 2.0 technologies. Many friends on MySpace or Facebook social networking sites are known solely by a profile picture, which may or may not be an accurate representation of their real selves. Relationships do occur within online communities, such as the one established for the PTP exchange. Students in both classrooms began writing to peers thousands of miles away and shared personal details of their lives with them. They also wrote to an adult online that they readily accepted as an expert. Such discourse revealed evidence of those online relationships.

When I asked Chris Benson about his role in the exchange and whether or not it expanded over the course of the exchange or stayed the same, he replied:

I don't know if my role expanded, but my relationship grew. I got to know the students individually. I eventually met them. I went out there in



the wintertime. It might have been the spring semester of that first year I went out to visit [Louise's] students, and I knew all their names but had never seen their faces. But I felt like I knew them. And that was an intimate, uh, no, it was an intimate thing to get their writings like that. I enjoyed that. And I was astonished often by some of their work.

(interview, March 26, 2008)

Chris spoke directly to relationships he established with students prior to meeting them in person. Even though he was anonymous to the students at first, he was also a real person with whom they established a student/expert relationship:

I remember one of them [the teachers] saying to me once that it was really great to actually have someone who writes poems to our students because they understand that it's not something that just appears in anthologies and textbooks, and they understand it is not just somebody, um, who's faceless or dead. It's a real person. (interview, March 26, 2008)

Chris Benson actually was faceless to these students for a period of time. Chris alluded to the students' typical experience of studying writers in literary anthologies. They may actually have a picture of the writer in their books, but the writer will not respond to them on a personal or professional level. The writer is not "faceless," but he or she is probably dead and to the student is not a real person. Conversely, Chris Benson was "faceless" for a time, but through the online discourse he created with the students, he was very real and very much alive to them. His online interactions with them helped to create an online relationship that only deepened after his visit to their two classrooms. Annie said that her

students “just started to develop these very sincere relationships online with him. And just respected him” (interview, March 8, 2008).

Students formed relationships with their peers online. One possible reason, as Chris pointed out in his interview, was the size of their schools:

Both schools were small, and that’s not necessarily a necessity, but that made it attractive because they had that in common. They were also really rural and really into the same kinds of things. It wasn’t like one of these exchanges where you have the ghetto kids exchanging with the country kids. This was like, you know, real rural places where people are resourceful and share a lot of the same values of country living.

(interview, March 26, 2008).

On her survey, Josie said that she “developed an ‘online relationship’ with my exchange partner.” You could also see the relationship building through the superficial discourse of students who talked about similar musical tastes, their sports events, as well as the spring prom. In both schools, they participated in similar activities and shared about the ups and downs they experienced with those events.

They also shared heart-rending events such as the Alaska students sympathizing with Louise when her mother was diagnosed with cancer. The Colorado students also mourned with the students in Alaska when one of their friends committed suicide on New Years Day.

In one of her journaling entries within the PTP-TT folder, Annie commented to Louise on the relationship building she saw happening within the electronic exchange:

I find it interesting how they are building these long-distance friendships with your students...they refer to your students by first name and talk about things they wrote as if they've been pals for years. In a small school like this one, it is wonderful to see the circle of "friends" broadening. I also like it that we haven't shared photos of individual students. They base so much on appearance...I love it that ALL of the kids have this new confidence in being the people their words convey instead of the face a photograph shows. My students are DEFINITELY more conscious of what they are writing, how it "sounds," and the nature of the conventions in their writing. I've been very impressed. (PTP-TT transcript, Sept. 29, 1999, lines 483-490).

The friendships students established in the exchange did outlast the exchange. Students were able to meet each other in the spring of 2000 after the Colorado High School raised enough money to travel to Alaska. Tatum said, "At the end, we were fortunate to personally meet our exchange partners. Ever since then, I am still in contact with a few of them" (survey, 2008). Brooks also commented on meeting his exchange partners: "The meeting near the end of the exchange opened my eyes that the students in AK, a world away, were just like us" (survey, 2008).

In her survey, Vivian gave a passionate response about the relationships she and her classmates formed during the exchange:

I had talked about the online partners not being judgmental [*sic*] to you individually because we had never met or even seen a picture of our partners during the whole experience. Once our class and exchange was

over, we had such a connection with our exchange partners that we desperately wanted to finally meet them! We raised enough money in our community to take a trip up to this small town [in Alaska] and spend a week with these kids who we only knew by their written work. We had bonded so much during this exchange that we felt like we had known each other forever. I will never forget what that trip meant to all of us kids and it showed such gratification and happiness in our lives and school work.

Not only were the online relationships important for the students, but the relationships the teachers formed at the BLSE prior to the exchange were paramount to the success of the exchange.

I previously stated that being a part of the Bread Loaf Teacher Network gave me an insider perspective to this study and an advantage of being able to talk the talk of the participants and being able to make a particular connection with them because I had walked their walk. But it also has given me a disadvantage in that I did not have the “fresh” eyes of an outsider studying this topic. When reading through transcripts of the exchange and interviews, it was difficult for me to identify themes because the exchange work was second nature to me. What a person unfamiliar with exchange work could see, I had difficulty seeing because I accepted it as part and parcel of what I had done and continue to do when I conduct exchanges with my own students and other classrooms.

The most obvious theme in this study was “relationships,” yet it took me until the end of the dissertation process to realize it. Relationships influenced me to choose this exchange to study for my dissertation. I was a classmate of Louise and Annie in the LCW class that summer in 1999. We ate meals together in the Bread Loaf dining room

that summer and had both personal and professional conversations around the dinner table. We learned the Bread Loaf traditions, such as crossing the silverware at meal time to save a seat, picking up a Crumb newsletter daily to enjoy the wit and wisdom of that year's writer, leaving room doors open with no fear of someone intruding (except for chipmunks now and again), swimming in Johnson Pond, attending the "Suppressed Desires" dance, and eating cashews and having a drink at numerous socials.

We spent quite a bit of free time together in the Barn listening to speakers, square dancing, watching movies, and discussing classroom assignments. We experienced the mountain atmosphere of the Bread Loaf School of English Vermont campus by sitting in an Adirondack chair on the grounds, reading a book for class while lathered in DEET bug spray to deter the notorious black flies. We listened to poetry readings in the Inn's Blue Parlor and sat on the front porch late into the evening in the rocking chairs, talking with other new-found friends and colleagues about life back in our towns and schools. The seeds of future exchanges were planted during those relationship-building conversations and shared experiences.

Annie and I lived in the Inn that summer just down the hall from each other, went shopping together, traveled together, talked about our families, and met each others' spouses when they came to visit us on campus. Annie invited me numerous times to visit her in Alaska; hopefully, one day I will go. Once in the past eight years, Louise and I partnered our classes for an electronic exchange, and we often connect via BreadNet just to ask how the other is doing. I respect both of these women for their knowledge as teachers and often turn to them for advice because I know they understand the frustrations and difficulties I face in my own classroom. Our school demographics were

not the same, but we found that the educational issues affecting our classrooms were eerily similar. We developed both personal and professional relationships through our summer study together; we bonded.

Students involved in the exchange were no different in their relationship building than their teachers were prior to the exchange except in one respect—they grew to know each other through their words online rather than through their face-to-face conversations. They developed a respect for their peers and the adults in the exchange through sharing their writing as well as their personal thoughts and feelings online. Their relationships were so important that some students continued to communicate with each other through high school and into their college years, and the PTP exchange remained a pivotal moment in their lives.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE HISTORY OF PASS THE POETRY

Through my case study of PTP, I wanted to find evidence to help me explain my primary research question: How does an understanding of the history and ecology of an electronic exchange help educators understand its effects on the reading and writing practices of secondary students? Keeping in mind that both reading and writing can be interrelated, my secondary research questions focused on what I specifically thought I would find in the exchange:

- Using Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory, what evidence of transactions between students and literary works can be identified in an electronic exchange?
- Do students self-reflect in their personal written responses to literature, and do students make changes in their own writing as a result of online peer response?
- How are fluency and syntactic complexity (typical measures of writing quality) in an electronic exchange affected?

While the secondary questions could be answered by transcript analysis, my case study would not be complete without perspectives of the participants of the exchange. The perspectives of the participants in the exchange provided more than what I first anticipated. Through these different perspectives, I was able to create the history of this particular exchange. I had to expand my focus and consider how understanding the history of the exchange would help me understand the exchange's influence on the reading and writing practices of these students in Alaska and Colorado. I conducted telephone interviews with the two teachers who planned the exchange, Annie and Louise, as well as the adult outside correspondent/poet, Chris Benson, who was the publications

coordinator for the BLTN and a poet. In addition, I contacted four students who participated in the exchange and gave them open-ended surveys to help me understand their perspectives of the exchange. I also analyzed their writings within the exchange transcript to help answer my research questions.

Writing a history of the exchange involved knowing the communities and schools where the exchange occurred. I also needed to explain the origins of this particular exchange as well as detail its framework. After positioning the people in their physical spaces, I looked at the data from the perspective of the students, the teachers, and the adult online correspondent. To preserve the anonymity of the people involved in the exchanges, I referred to their schools as Alaska High School and Colorado High School. I avoided the use of any real names of their towns that could identify their schools. Names of teachers and students, with the exception of the outside correspondent/poet were changed to maintain anonymity.

#### The Origins and Framework of PTP

Both Louise and Annie attended the Bread Loaf School of English in the summer of 1999 Louise as an Annenberg Fellowship recipient and Annie as a DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fellowship recipient. Both teachers took two graduate-level English courses; all new Bread Loaf Teacher Network (BLTN) members were required to take "Language, Culture, and the Teaching of Writing" that year as one of their two courses. Through that course, new BLTN members were introduced to BreadNet, instructed on how to access the network, and required to talk to peers and share thoughts on course readings online. It was within the common course that Louise and Annie first met and started collaborating online with their classmates in their BreadNet course folder. At



some point during the summer session, classmates were expected to pair and create a plan for an electronic exchange.

During the summer sessions at BLSE, guest speakers often came to campus, talked informally to classes, or gave more formal presentations to all students on campus. That year, Herbert Kohl and Nancie Atwell were both visitors to campus who influenced Louise and Annie. Both speakers talked about ways they used poetry with students in class, and Annie received a personal challenge from Kohl to carve ten minutes out of each class period to read poetry with her students. In an interview on March 9, 2008, Louise recalled that the idea to conduct an electronic exchange on poetry was an idea one of their instructors, Dixie Goswami, had discussed one day in class. Louise said that she liked using poetry to teach themes with her students in American literature but that she was not as comfortable teaching students how to write their own poetry:

I know part of the conversation I had with Annie way at the beginning was that, was I found out that neither one of us really felt comfortable with that genre. We could read it and we could discuss it, but to, uh, teach it so that our students would actually come to appreciate it, I think neither one of us felt comfortable in that area. (interview, March 9, 2008)

Annie indicated a similar recollection about their choice of subject for the exchange: “It may have been in casual conversation that Louise and I started talking about poetry, and we both had this common fear of poetry based on bad experiences we had when we were college students, not really feeling like we knew how to teach it, so she and I teamed up” (interview, March 8, 2008). Influenced by the outside speakers and

encouraged by Goswami to pursue this type of exchange, both teachers agreed to map out a plan for an online exchange focusing on poetry.

Annie and Louise posted their plan on BreadNet in a folder called “Project Mall” where teachers went to request an online conference for their students. BreadNet’s technology coordinator would then create folders on the participating teachers’ desktops. The original name of the exchange was “‘Please Pass the Poetry’: An Introduction to Reading and Writing Poetry of Place.” The plan itself contained a clear focus: poetry that “establish[ed] and create[d] a sense of ‘place’ in each of the participating classrooms” (original exchange plan, July 28, 1999). The two teachers decided to map phase one of the exchange, which would last for one semester. At the end of the semester they planned to reevaluate whether or not the exchange should continue between their two classrooms.

They asked the technology coordinator to set up three folders on BreadNet for their exchange. One folder would be the main PTP conference folder where student work would be posted. Within the PTP folder was a sub-folder for “Teacher Talk” (PTP-TT). The final folder they requested for a public area of BreadNet, the BLRTN folder. All teachers on BreadNet had access to the BLRTN folder. Within BLRTN were numerous conference folders on topics of interest to teachers. One of the folders in BLRTN was called the Blue CyberParlor where BreadNet users could post their own poetry and respond to others’ poetry. A sub-folder, “Young Poet’s Cyber Parlor” was created in Blue CyberParlor in October 1999 for the PTP exchange and opened up to any BreadNet user. Annie posted the first message in the folder and explained that the purpose of the Young Poet’s Cyber Parlor was to promote student publication of poetry. (This public

conference folder continues to exist on BreadNet but is rarely used; the last postings were in 2002.)

Both teachers decided to use common poems for their students to read, shadow, and respond. Louise and Annie developed a simple odd/even alternating schedule with Annie providing a common poem on odd- numbered weeks of the exchange and Louise providing a common poem on the even-numbered weeks. In addition to the common poem schedule, they also devised a weekly schedule, specifying what they would do with their students in regards to the exchange each week beginning in September 6, 1999, and running through the end of October that same year. Annie and Louise reported that they were warned not to set such a rigid schedule by teachers who had been a part of BLTN since its inception and had pioneered the electronic exchange concept. Annie commented that they listened to those experienced teachers about their concerns: “But we were really willing to speak honestly about our classroom style and management, and I really liked to have things set in a schedule so that I know where I’m headed. We were the same in those respects. So we decided to stay with our rigid schedule, and that saved us” (personal interview, March 8, 2008). Later, on February 24, 2000, Annie added a post-script to one of her postings to the PTP-TT folder which referred to their scheduling and how it worked for them that year:

Remember last summer when we first posted our plan and a few people made comments re: our tight week-by-week planning, suggesting we needed more flexibility? At that time, I thought perhaps we would really end up hating our stringent deadlines, but honestly, I think the deadlines

and specific plan we set up helped to create an exchange that kind of runs itself. (PTP-TT, lines 4147-4150)

The electronic exchange was not the only English/Language Arts focus in their classrooms that year and in retrospect only took about 20% of their class time. Louise, who was able to meet with her students daily, set aside one day a week to read, respond, and write for the exchange. She made the writing for the exchange a part of the writing curriculum for her classroom: “When these kids wrote the letters, they were expected to write with voice, complete sentences, check punctuation and spelling and all of that. And I made it like an individual grammar exercise” (personal interview, March 9, 2008). Annie’s school was on an AB block schedule. The first 15 minutes of their class on Monday—which was 50 minutes long—they would focus on the common poem, annotate, and sometimes discuss. Then she would ask them to shadow the poem for a homework assignment. Her classes met twice more each week in 100 minute blocks. One of those days they would spend 50 minutes reading their exchange partner’s letters, share their shadow poems on the weekly common poem, and then go to the computer lab to compose responses for their partners.

The first week of the exchange, the teachers spent time explaining the exchange to students and sent home permission forms to parents for student participation. They conducted a class survey to assess students’ experience with and attitudes toward poetry. They began exposing their students daily to poetry. The second week, students wrote personal introductions to go along with introductions their teachers had written about their communities and schools. For each week that followed, the schedule remained similar. Students would read the common poem for the week, respond to partners’

responses/narratives and ask a question to continue the conversation. By week five, students were beginning to write and post their own original poetry either based on the common poem format they studied in a particular week or shadowing a poem they chose and read during the week.

While Louise and Annie wanted to maintain their original exchange schedule, by early October, Louise realized that adjustments for posting responses needed to be made. Some technology problems, including having only one working printer in the entire school, slowed down Colorado's progress:

Our server was down for the last two days, so we didn't get last week's letters posted. Hopefully, tomorrow things will be up and running! I'm beginning to wonder if [Annie] and I should try to post on alternating weeks, rather than both of us posting every week. (PTP-TT, Oct. 3, 1999, lines 612-615)

Annie suggested that they go with the alternating schedule, with her students posting one week and Louise's students posting the next. In addition, on the weeks the classes weren't scheduled to post to the exchange partners, they would post a message to Chris. Annie also journaled about changing the schedule:

The pressure of posting 'on time' is demanding in many ways. I have been at school for two hours this Sunday afternoon and am finally almost done with my BreadNet work. I find that it takes SO long to read new postings, print the things I need, file them in my binders, respond appropriately, copy, cut, & paste my students' work, and then get the student response posting online! (PTP-TT, Oct. 10, 1999, lines 737-740)

By mid-October, Annie was convinced that the exchange was “wonderful work” (PTP-TT, Oct. 14, 1999, line 1043). Louise admits that “the exchange is taking on a life of its own...It will be fun to see where this goes as the year progresses” (PTP, Oct. 16, 1999, lines 1100, 1107).

Participants in the exchange not only included the students in Louise and Annie’s classes. Before leaving BLSE that summer, they approached another member of the BLTN, who was recommended by Dixie Goswami to be an outside adult correspondent in the exchange. In addition to his position as BLTN publications coordinator, Chris Benson was a research associate at Clemson University during the regular school year. He agreed to write to the students in both classrooms over the course of the exchange. When students would write to their exchange partners, most weeks they would also write a message to Chris, often including an original poem and asking for his advice. With two exceptions during the school year, Chris responded to each student individually and maintained an online discourse with each one over the course of that year’s exchange. The two exceptions were when he commented to both classes in general about a particular format of poetry they were using, and he felt that his comments were best said to the PTP community rather than to a few individuals. Chris’s responses to the students were not canned responses or repeated responses, as I discuss when I present another side of the exchange from his perspective later in this chapter. Instead, his responses were well-developed, individualized, authentic feedback for each student.

#### PTP’s Physical Spaces

When teachers and students began their first communications during the electronic exchange, a typical starting point was an introduction of themselves, their

schools, and their communities to their new exchange partners. To create a portrait of the schools and the communities surrounding each, I asked each teacher in her interview to tell me about the size of their schools, whether they were rural, urban, or suburban, and the demographics of the students in their schools when the electronic exchanges took place. I also returned to the original PTP exchange transcript to find more information about their communities from their original introductions to each other. In the original transcript, the teachers provided in-depth descriptions of their communities while the students provided individual introductions of themselves and their families.

### *Alaska High School*

Students at Alaska High School (AHS) lived in an extremely rural community, though not the most rural in Alaska. According to Annie, English teacher at AHS, they were located near the end of the road system but were easier to access than “bush schools...that can only be accessed by air or by boat” (personal interview, March 8, 2008). The nearest metropolitan area was Anchorage, almost a five hour drive. Their school was in the Copper River Basin, which covered 23,000 square miles and had a total population of 3,000. The town where their school was located was not on a map: “We are one of the most remote schools on the Alaska road system and EVERYTHING is far away” (PTP transcript, September 15, 1999, lines 21-22)

Annie estimated that almost 80% of the students at her school qualified for free or reduced meals, but she pointed out that many families would not complete required paperwork to get free or reduced meals: “There are many independent souls in this part of the state who don’t want or like if it has anything to do with the government; they don’t want to have anything to do with the program” (interview, March 8, 2008). To give a

better idea of the poverty level of this community, Annie shared that many families had no electricity or running water and got their water from a community well. Some of her students were bused from a traditional Native American village about 23 miles from the school, and these students lived a subsistence lifestyle: “Their families rely on the fall moose hunt and on summer salmon at fish camps, gardens, that kind of stuff for their food” (interview, March 8, 2008). In her estimation, students considered wealthy at her school would live a middle-class lifestyle in other parts of the United States. She said that most of her students did not worry about living a fashionable lifestyle, wearing the latest trends, or driving fancy cars. Demographically, 60% of the students were Native Alaskan, but Annie pointed out that over the last ten years, in the town where the school was located, that number fluctuated anywhere from 40-60%. While that sounded like a large number, with the small population it took only a family moving in or moving out to change the percentages that much. The nearby village was 98% Alaska native. A few Caucasian families lived in their community.

In school year 1999-2000, AHS had 120 students grades K-12, and many of the grade levels were combined. Class sizes ranged from 10-12 students, and students in grades 7/8, 9/10, and 11/12 took classes together. In the 1999-2000 school year, 12 students in grades 9/10 participated in the PTP exchange.

### *Colorado High School*

Located in the Great Plains of Colorado, Colorado High School (CHS) was a rural PK-12<sup>th</sup> grade school with 150-175 students at any given time, though the population of the town was around 90. Most students were bused in from farms within a 20-mile radius



surrounding the school. Denver was the closest metropolitan area, 150 miles away. Students lived in a ranching and farming community, primarily growing grain crops.

According to Louise, only 14.3% of the students who attended their school in the late 1990's were on free or reduced meals, but the statistics have since risen to 60% (personal e-mail, March 10, 2008). The majority of students at the time of the exchange were Caucasian, but they also had Hispanic, Vietnamese, and African-American students. Class size ranged from 12-14 students; 10 students from CHS participated in the electronic exchange.

#### PTP from the Student Perspective

This section provides a slice of the exchange from the student perspective, including what the students wrote to their exchange partners as well as what they wrote eight years later in their open-ended surveys about the exchange. Just as their teachers wrote introductions about their schools and their communities, so too did the students begin the exchange writing introductions about themselves and their families. I began with their self-introductions and continued through the online discourse they created with their various peer exchange partners as well as Chris, the online adult correspondent and poet. Upon examination, I found evidence of transactions students made with the literature they were reading as well as writing. I also found that the discourse created within the electronic exchange via BreadNet provided a scaffold (Cazden, 2001) for student learning.

#### *Vivian and her Online Discourse*

A freshman at CHS, Vivian was the middle child in a family of five who lived about 16 miles outside of town on a farm. Her father ran the farm while her mother was a

housewife. Vivian was active in sports in high school, playing basketball as well as junior varsity and varsity volleyball. She had some knowledge of Alaska because of a previous trip to Anchorage to visit friends. Her introduction revealed she was open to experiences with poetry: "I'm not a person that really enjoys poetry, but I'm starting to like it, more and more. We've read some great poetry in class" (Vivian's transcript, Sept. 24, 1999, lines 59-60). Eight years later, Vivian recalled that she had no prior experiences with poetry before the 1999-2000 school year and had never composed her own poetry before the PTP exchange (survey, 2008).

Students wrote a more detailed introduction to their specific exchange partners after their initial posting. Vivian's discourse revealed an aesthetic transaction that she had with the poem "Rodeo" by Edward Lueders. She said,

Something that really struck me about the poem was how well he describes the cowboy. This poem made me feel confident about myself because I think this cowboy is trying to make his dreams come true in rodeoing, and I know that I can make my dreams come true too. This poem reminds me about where we live because people do some rodeoing out here. One thing that I was wondering about the poem is why he added all of the religious words to it. (Vivian's transcript, Sept. 24, 1999, lines 61-65)

Vivian connected to the focus of the poem, a cowboy in a rodeo, because it reminded her of where she lived. Both Louise and Annie wanted to have their students read poetry that gave students a sense of place, and this particular poem did just that for Vivian. She had a transaction with the poem because of its similarity to the people she knew in her

hometown who also participated in the rodeo. The last sentence she wrote about the poem revealed a comment more efferent than aesthetic. She picked up on the poet's use of religious words in the poem and wondered why he included them. She did not include any literary analysis beyond this "wondering."

When Chris first began corresponding with CHS students, he sent a copy of a poem he had written about his brother who died ten years earlier. Vivian again connected with this poem, but her transaction focused on what she liked about its language:

I am very sorry about your brother dying, but I thought you had an excellent poem. I really liked all of the adjectives in the poem; I felt as if I was dreaming along with you. Some phrases that caught my attention were, "I see his eyes fixed in some place else, turned in, not focused on this world or me" and "so still and lightless that the only way I know I'm back inside this quickened world is by the heaving of my flailing breath inside my breast." I think that these phrases are very good and have a lot to do with the meaning of the poem. (Vivian's transcript, Oct. 24, 1999, lines 166-171).

Once again Vivian was drawn to the language of a poem, yet she was still unable to form her own analysis. She said that the phrases supported the "meaning of the poem," yet she did not identify what she meant by "meaning" or whether she was referring to the subject of the poem or to the theme of the poem.

In her next posting, Vivian's discourse with Chris moved beyond transactions with poetry to a discussion of a poetic form she had used in a previous post as well as suggestions for revision. In her Oct. 24, 1999, posting, Vivian described a poem she sent

to Chris as a “meditation” poem. In Chris’s posting on Oct. 27, 1999, he asked if her meditation poem had a specific form and requested that she describe it. He also discussed what he noticed about the lines in her poem, specifically that the poem was written in couplets which worked together. He walked her through her own poem and focused on each pair of lines and how they did or did not work well as she had written them in her draft. In her next response to Chris, she answered, “The meaning of a ‘meditation’ poem is that in the alternating lines of the poem, the poet will pose a challenge and the pupil (you) will reply. To reply correctly, you must keep your mind relaxed but focused (that’s what a meditation poem is about)” (Vivian’s transcript, Nov. 14, 1999, lines 301-303). Vivian used the word “meaning” when she meant “form” in her reply to Chris, though she did give a detailed description which revealed a grasp of the meditation form. She also included a revised form of her meditation poem. There was an exchange of discourse, a back and forth that emerged as a scaffold (Cazden, 2001) for Vivian’s composition of her meditation poem.

Chris’s discourse with Vivian provided the support she needed to revise her mediation poem (see Draft 1 and Draft 2).

#### Draft 1

#### COUNTRY

This is a meditation:  
 a flower with pedals [*sic*],  
 a five-pedaled [*sic*] flower,  
 a sound of a tractor,  
 a way of life,  
 a bright yellow sun,  
 a shining sun,  
 a tree that is weary and old  
 a dying tree,  
 a windy day,

a whistling day,  
 a pasture,  
 a field of green grass,  
 a large, red barn,  
 the kind of the farm,  
 a big, old farmhouse,  
 a place full of memories.

Draft 2 (changes underlined by student)

“Country”

This is a meditation:  
 a flower that's blooming,  
 a picture perfect scene,  
 a bright yellow sun,  
 a morning crow,  
 a dying tree,  
 a tree that is weary and old,  
 a windy day,  
 a whistling day,  
 a good crop,  
 a farmer's prayer,  
 a sound of a tractor,  
 a way of life,  
 a large, red barn,  
 the kind of the farm,  
 a big, old farmhouse,  
 a place full of memories.

Other changes not underlined by the student were also evident and initiated by the discourse between Chris and Vivian. Chris wrote,

Because this form is new to me, I want to look closely at it and study each pair of lines. First, I believe you mean five petals not pedals. How is the second line any different or more complex than the first line. I think you should study and rewrite the second line. The second pair of lines about tractor is very good. See how you take the first line about the tractor and show how it signifies something far more complex: a "way of life"; the

tractor could well be the most important thing in prairie culture, no? Good job there. The lines about the sun: these seem weaker than the tractor couplet. Is the "shining" sun much different from the "bright yellow" sun. The couplet seems a little redundant, no? The tree couplet: this is good, but I think you should reverse the lines, put dying first and weary and old second. I say this because the form you're using requires you to give the concrete simple thing first, then find the meaning in the second line. The idea of a tree being "weary" is complex. The line suggests other human characteristics, like weariness, which trees might possess. A windy day; a whistling day. That's good! The pasture couplet. I would say it's redundant in the same way the sun couplet seems redundant. Barn couplet. How about: "palace of the farm?" Does that get at it better? Last couplet: excellent. I also might suggest putting the tractor couplet as the next to last couplet, so the poem moves from things to people to culture, in a movement that goes from small things, such as a flower, to big things, such as prairie farm culture. (Vivian's transcript, Oct. 27, 1999, lines 218-232)

Vivian switched the position of the lines in her tree couplet in lines six and seven of her second draft, a suggestion that Chris gave her in his Oct. 27 posting when he said that the second line of a couplet should contain the more complex idea and specifically suggested that Vivian switch those lines. Vivian also removed the pasture couplet in lines 12-13 of her first draft at Chris's suggestion because he found them redundant. Her composition process was affected by her discourse with Chris.

In this early discourse, Chris provided support for Vivian in this composing process to which she was new. Cazden (2001) said that Vygotsky's zone of proximal development was "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with peers" (p. 63). The discourse between Chris and Vivian was a "zone of competence" (p. 63) where Vivian needed Chris's adult experience to help her with the composing process of the meditation poem. Cazden also said that with social construction came a "shift in competence" where the student began to take on more of the adult role (p. 63).

In a Jan. 10, 2000, posting, Vivian's peer exchange partner sent a copy of a poem she wrote in the Villanelle form, an assignment Annie gave her Alaska students as part of their end of semester exam. The Alaska student asked for Vivian's help to revise her poem. She explained to Vivian that the poem's format was strict, but she did not give her any other information about the pattern the poem was supposed to have. The level of discourse that Chris had with Vivian when she asked for assistance with her poem does not occur between Vivian and her exchange partner. Vivian responded, "I really enjoyed reading your poem 'Selfish Soul.' I thought that it made a lot of sense and fit together really well. I don't think that I would change anything in it. I like it how it is" (Vivian's transcript, Jan. 17, 2000, lines 672-673). In her response, she does not provide any suggestions for revision or any questions about the poem for her peer exchange partner to answer, both techniques Chris used in his response to Vivian.

In the second semester of PTP, Vivian began to write analysis of a metaphor in a particular poem, which reflected deeper thinking on her part about the selection she was reading. In a posting to Chris on Feb. 21, 2000, she wrote,

This week our common poem was “Lonely, White Fields” by Mary Oliver. I think that everyone in our class enjoyed this poem very much. I think that the author is relating the owl to a human. I think she is telling of both an owl’s and a human’s life. She starts from the beginning of their lives to the point when they die or fade away. I think that Mary Oliver is trying to say that people have hardships, etc. during their lives, but they will overcome these things and get on with their life. Also, there will be a time to die, but the world will go on as perfectly as it did before. I like the following lines, and I think that they really sum up what I am trying to say: “the owl fades back into the branches, the snow goes on falling flake after perfect flake.” I think that it is an excellent poem. (lines 575-582)

Vivian offered a more sophisticated response to the poem their class read that week. She saw a comparison within the poem between an owl and humanity, identified similarities between the two, and offered a line from the text of the poem as her support. Previous postings on poems had little to no analysis, and usually she only said that she “liked” the poem.

Vivian’s responses to Chris about her own writing grew more sophisticated in the second semester as well. She sent a sonnet she wrote to Chris, and he responded positively to her effort at composing this form while questioning her writing decisions and making suggestions for revision:



I like your love poem. I like the imagery of the doors, and those rhymes as well. There is a sense of weariness in the poem. Is that intentional or did it just creep in there? What do you think that means? What is this weariness? I have questions about it. What is a weary love and why would one yearn for it (first stanza)? The third stanza brings the who, what, and where of the poem into focus for me. The first two stanzas are confusing, but then “confusing” is the title, so perhaps that confusion is intentional...the lost sense I get from the first two stanzas and the final couplet ending in a question suggest that the poem is not finished. Keep working on it.” (Vivian’s transcript, March 09, 2000, lines 1894-1902).

Instead of thanking Chris for his response and revising based on his comments, Vivian chose to explain why she wrote this sonnet a particular way:

Thank you very much for reading and commenting on my poem, “Confused?” I tried to make this poem a little confusing, and that’s where my title fits in. The weariness in the poem is the two people’s relationship. Their love for each other is slowly getting weary, but they don’t want to realize this. Even though there is something wrong in their relationship, they still love each other. I ended this poem intentionally with a question because I wanted the reader to decide whether she stayed with the boy or left him. (Vivian’s transcript, April 24, 2000, lines 2072-2077).

Vivian sounded confident about her choice of topic as well as the decisions she made while writing her poem. Instead of agreeing with Chris’s comments about her writing,

she justified her authorial decisions and explained why she made them. She did not offer a revised version of her poem as she did in previous postings. This response to Chris revealed a maturity as a writer that she did not have at the beginning of the exchange. As an adult looking back at the exchange, Vivian reflected on how the exchange affected her writing as well as her attitude toward poetry: “I believe that since I became interested in poetry during the exchange, it helped me explore my writing skills outside of the classroom where I could express my ideas and feelings in different formats (not just what we were supposed to do in class)” (survey, 2008). Vivian’s defense of her authorial decisions for this particular poem is an example of “appropriation” (Cazden, 2001). Vivian has internalized the language of the poet and is able to justify her writing decisions with her new understanding of poetry.

#### *Brooks and his Online Discourse*

Brooks, a ninth grader, came from a family of five. His father and mother both had white collar jobs. In his initial introduction he briefly described his family as well as his pets and his hobbies. A couple of his hobbies, playing the guitar and playing sports, became topics of conversation for him and his exchange partners throughout the year. He also presented his initial attitude toward reading and writing poetry in his introduction: “I have never read much poetry; I have no favorite poet; but I did have a poem published in the second grade” (Brooks’ transcript, lines 15-16). Brooks’ adult reflection on his knowledge of poetry prior to the exchange was blunt: “I saw no use for poetry outside of the creative realm. Science had been the base of my education. There was no need for the creative side” (student survey, 2008). He entered the exchange with a negative opinion of the exchange process itself. As a sixth grader, he was asked to participate in a

pen pal exchange. He said it “fell through, so I figured the poetry exchange would fail as well” (student survey, 2008).

Because the AHS class had two more students than the CHS class, Brooks was paired with two AHS male students during the first semester of the exchange. His posting on September 24, 1999, was an in-depth introduction to his two exchange partners. The majority of the discourse that contained any type of supporting details centered on his guitars, his video games, and the Denver Broncos. He did write two separate messages to both exchange partners, but the content was almost identical. In both messages, he wrote only one sentence about poetry: “My favorite poem so far would have to be either ‘Rodeo’ by Edward Lueders or ‘Footprints’ by an unknown author because they are so significant and spiritual” (Brooks’ transcript, lines 64-65). He used the same sentence to his second partner but said he liked the poems because they were “spiritual and representative” (lines 83-84). Because he said he liked these two poems, he made some connection, but at that point in the exchange, he was unable to describe to his partner what the connection was, and his transaction cannot be determined as aesthetic or efferent in this instance. To be *efferent*, according to Rosenblatt (1991), his response could focus on a technical aspect of the poetry, identified through his use of content vocabulary, while the *aesthetic* transaction would focus on his “associations, ideas, attitudes, sensations, or feelings” (p. 2) about the poetry. The only content vocabulary words he used at this point were variations on the word poetry, and the fact that he liked the two poems cannot in itself be determined aesthetic.

In his next posting on October 3, 1999, Brooks responded to one of his exchange partners who mentioned a poem both classes read called “Wallflowers Envy,” which was

written by Chris Benson. Brooks responded that he liked the poem but did not give an explanation why. He added a personal chat that included a mention of the weather and the Broncos, and then he included three haikus that he wrote in class. Haiku was a poetic form Louise had them study that week. He also asked his exchange partners to help him with a line in his final haiku:

Today we started writing Haiku's. Here are some that I wrote. If you see anything wrong or think that a word fits better, please tell me.

Spring  
Drip, drip on the ground  
The melting snow falls always down  
Alas, spring is here.

Winter  
White puffs falling down  
Not always sticks to the ground  
Winter has appeared.

I need an ending line with five syllables. If you could help, it would be greatly appreciated:

Fall  
Red, brown, yellow, and green  
It is a beautiful scene  
???

Thanks for your help. Talk to you later. (Brooks' transcript, lines 154-174)

The content vocabulary Brooks used in this exchange centered on the poetic form his class had studied and practiced. Reaching out to his exchange partner for help was a social interaction to prompt discourse on his poetry. The following week, one of his exchange partners did offer a suggestion for a last line for his "Fall" haiku while the other partner had no suggestion.

On that same date, Louise posted student writing to Chris, the outside correspondent/poet. Students had paired to write a poem, and Brooks had paired with another student to write a poem titled “From the Cheap Seats.” No other discourse was included in the posting—only the poem itself. The first interaction between Brooks and Chris occurred as a result of this poem. Chris wrote back to Brooks and his partner on October 4<sup>th</sup> and gave a detailed response to the poem. Chris used more technical content vocabulary such as “conceit,” “metaphor,” and “mock heroic poem.” In addition to using the technical vocabulary, he also explained what the words meant. He offered in-depth suggestions on how Brooks and his partner could revise the poem and improve it. Instead of just telling the two students, Chris gave them questions to consider when revising:

Some questions if you want to revise:

Who is the opposition? Do you want to extend the military metaphor by describing them?

Do you want to elaborate on the battle? Does the battle seem to begin and end too quickly? Is there enough of a struggle in the poem to do justice to the military metaphor you're working with?

Can a set of downs in the football game be written as separate military maneuvers within a battle? Can the suspense be built up over who will win through such a series of maneuvers? Remember the poem about Casey at the bat? Remember how that poem built up the suspense over the three strikes at bat? (Brooks’ transcript, lines 247-256).

Brooks’ response to Chris came the following week.

Thank you for going over “From the Cheap Seats,” written by G. and me. I also think we should revise it to make it clearer. I think we should make it more visible to the reader of what the battle is supposed to be about; I think we should be specific about whom we are playing or battling in the poem. We were sort of running low on time when we wrote the poem, and that’s why we didn’t go longer on the battle. I think we should also be a lot more elaborate in describing the whole military based theme. We wrote about our general being small because our football coach is sort of short. (lines 522-530)

The discourse Chris brings to the exchange requires Brooks to use higher-order thinking skills as well as have a working understanding of technical content vocabulary. In Brooks’ response to Chris, he focused on how changing the content of the poem would improve it. While Chris used eight content vocabulary terms, most specific to literary elements related to poetry, the only content vocabulary Brooks used was “revise,” “elaborate,” and “describing.” Brooks does not offer a revised version of the poem to Chris at any time during the exchange.

In his next posting to his exchange partners on October 17, 1999, Brooks called his partner’s haiku “cool” but did not offer a specific reason. In response to a poem both classes read that week, “Lobstering,” Brooks thought it was good “because of the words he [poet Jonathan Tindal] uses. I like words that just seem to roll off your tongue and paint mental pictures” (lines 425-426). Brooks’ transaction was aesthetic, though he was looking for a literary element, imagery, to explain what he liked about the poem.

At this point in his postings, his transactions with poetry are still aesthetic. The class assignment for that week's posting was to write a nature poem. He offered a rough draft of his nature poem, "In a Dream," and he again encouraged his exchange partners to help him improve his poem: "If you could give me any suggestions that would be greatly appreciated" (line 461) and "Please feel free to make changes if you like" (line 477). Of his two partners, only one offered a comment related to Brooks' nature poem in the next posting; the other did not offer any suggestion for changes.

Brooks wrote a second message to Chris and included the same nature poem he sent to his peer exchange partners. He again requested help with his poem, but his choice of words requesting help was different from the ones he used with his peers: "Here is a poem I wrote that I thought was pretty good. It's not quite like yours, but I thought it was pretty good. It's only a rough draft, so don't be too critical" (lines 670-671). When writing to his peers, he asked for any input and gave them the freedom to make changes. When writing to Chris, he stressed that his poem was in a draft form and requested that Chris not be too critical.

When responding to Brooks, Chris did not give the criticism Brooks may have expected, thus his admonishment for Chris not to be too critical. Brooks' discourse indicated a desire for what Cazden (2001) defined as a "third meaning of social...what Bakhtin calls the 'addressivity' of any utterance—the quality of turning mentally to someone and anticipating, hoping for, humanly needing, a response" (p. 116). At this point, I should point out that Chris did not use criticism with Brooks. Instead, he used what Cazden (2001) called the "critique":

- Criticism is about finished work; critique is about work still in progress.
- Criticism is often given by persons who do it as their primary job...critique is a temporary role offered by one artist to another.
- Criticism is one-way, from critic to creator and potential audience; critique is a two-way, reciprocal relationship. (p. 116).

Chris's response to Brooks' poem came while the poem was in a draft stage rather than a finished piece. Chris also pointed out what he liked about the poem before he asked Brooks questions to make him think deeply about his poem:

The most interesting thing in the poem is where the speaker describes himself as the boundary between good and evil, light and dark. I can see the light moving, probably through a window, over the speaker; one half of his body is in shade, the other in light. And it leads to this realization that he is placed, for the moment only perhaps, between good and evil. What occurs to the speaker placed in that position? You don't really dwell on it; instead you move to other sensory images and details, but I think the poem was more interesting with that idea of being momentarily in a place of flux...What does it mean to find yourself between light and dark? In the poem it is actually the early morning and the sun is coming up, but you might turn this physical phenomenon into a metaphorical meditation.

(lines 718-729)

The next posting to Chris occurred on November 14<sup>th</sup>. Interestingly, Brooks made substantive changes to his poem. Below is the original draft of the poem followed



by the draft Brooks revised based on Chris's critique. Brooks underlined the parts of the poem that he revised:

Draft 1

In a Dream

Early in the morning as I sit on a bench in the park,  
 I can feel the coldness of dark and evil receding,  
 And the heat of the sun and goodness coming arising,  
 I feel like I'm the boundary between good and evil,  
 Cold and heat, light and dark,  
 With the sun at my right and my shadow covering my left,  
 I all of a sudden get a feeling of reassurance,  
 For I know good and light will always penetrate dark and evil.  
 I can smell the sweet aroma of a new day,  
 The smell of freshly cut grass,  
 I hear the birds chirping in the trees over-head,  
 Trying to shake off the bitter cold of the night,  
 I feel like I'm in a dream,  
 Like I'm one with nature,  
 Like I'm no more unusual than a leaf on a tree,  
 I look up and see the trees sway back and forth,  
 This tells me that there is a wind,  
 I cannot feel the wind for I'm in the shelter of a large building,  
 I hear the cars pass on the highway and this tells me that the day is  
 proceeding,  
 Whether I want it to or not it won't stop,  
 Then I snap out of it and I'm back in reality,  
 And all the hustle and bustle of life are on me again,  
 But I do not fret for I know that another day will come,  
 Where I can just sit and enjoy life,  
 Even if it's just for a split second then I will continue with my day,  
 For there will be another and another and another after that,  
 Until the day I die I will always be able to just sit and enjoy life,  
 As if in a dream. (Brooks' transcript, Oct. 25, 1999, lines 673-702)

Draft 2

A Crusade Around Me

Early in the morning as I sit on a bench in the park,  
 I can feel the coldness of dark and evil receding,  
 And the heat of the sun and good things arising,  
 I feel like I'm the boundary between light and dark, good and evil,  
 Like I'm the battlefield of a great war between good and evil,

With the sun shining on my right and my shadow covering my left.  
I feel the heat and goodness almost smothering the cold and evil,  
And then a sudden charge of coldness and evil pushes back,  
As if trying to regain territory over myself.  
And just when I start to shiver,  
I heat back up,  
For I get a feeling of reassurance,  
Like the good and heat just defeated the cold and evil,  
And I know that evil and dark will never penetrate goodness and light,  
Not tomorrow, Not ever,  
For goodness is godliness. (Brooks' transcript, Nov. 14, 1999, lines 933-949)

Brooks offered his own explanation for why he made the revisions:

Thank you for looking over my poem "In a Dream." I have decided to make a big change. I'm going to stop and go on about the evil and good. Many people have told me that it gets pretty boring after that point, including you. So I decided to take all of your advice and cut off the rest of the poem and go on with that part. Well, here is a revision of what I did. I also wanted to change the title to something in the general area of "A Crusade Around Me," or something to that effect. Please feel free to make suggestions, including the title. The parts I have underlined are the ones I have decided to change or add on to the poem. (lines 925-931).

Brooks did not specifically attribute his revisions to Chris's critique. Instead, he said "many people" had given him advice, and he chose to take "all of your advice." No other evidence of revision suggestions occurred in the exchange transcript. Classmates may have given advice to Brooks, but the only online discourse that revolved around this poem occurred between Brooks and Chris. The discourse did not end with the revised draft. In Chris's next response to Brooks, he responded to the revised draft: "I think your

revision is indeed better than the first draft. It could be made tighter still, by excising a word or phrase here and there, but it has the feeling of being a complete poem” (lines 976-978). In an email communication, Chris said, “The willingness to cut a draft drastically and re-envision it, as Brooks does above, is a sign of mature writing, even if it’s only a momentary maturity. Many good writers lack this willingness” (personal communication, July 14, 2008).

By the end of the first semester that year, Brooks’ class had studied and posted poems with various formats and subjects: haiku, nature poems, recipe poems, diamond poems, and poems shadowing “I Hear America Singing.” The technical content vocabulary Brooks used in his postings was limited primarily to those terms used with the different poetry formats he studied in class.

At the beginning of the second semester, Annie decided to change exchange partners. Instead of having two partners second semester, Brooks had one male partner. The first substantial discourse for Brooks that semester was with Chris about a sestina Brooks had written. Previous transactions by Brooks I noted in the transcript regarded his reading of poetry. Interestingly, he has an aesthetic transaction with his own sestina:

Here is the Sestina that I wrote yesterday. I was sort of mad when I wrote it, so it sort of tells how I’m sick of everybody trying to make something out of me, and trying to mold me in their image and supposedly make me a better person. I just want to do the things that I want to do, not what everybody else wants me to do or be. You know what I mean, just let me be myself. If you have ever felt like that, then you might get where this

poem is coming from and it might be a little bit clearer. (Brooks' transcript, Jan. 25, 2000, lines 1669-1673).

Instead of a poem invoking an emotional response in Brooks while he was reading, Brooks' emotional reaction to an undefined life event prompted his writing of the sestina. Brooks sent the sestina to his first exchange partners, but his explanation to his peer partners regarding his motivation for writing the poem was not as detailed as his explanation to Chris: "I was upset when I wrote it, so it sort of tells how I'm sick of everybody trying to make something out of me. Just let me be me" (Brooks' transcript, Jan. 17, 2000, lines 1421-1422).

Instead of responding to students' sestinas individually as he had done earlier in the exchange, Chris chose to give a generalized response to all students at CHS about the sestina in his January 16, 2000, posting. He also suggested in this posting that the students create their own literary taxonomy to critique poetry written by their exchange partners. The only student writing Chris specifically mentioned in this lengthy posting full of content vocabulary was Brooks' sestina:

I think Brooks did an outstanding job. His poem seemed to be all of a piece. There was no patch work in it, and all the lines had to be included; no line was disposable. It seems to me that Brooks did what is the hardest thing to do in writing a sestina: he created a whole, organized line of thought out of many separate parts and the total is more than the sum of the parts. (Brooks' transcript, lines 1796-1800).

When Brooks later responded to a sestina written by another female student, his language was reminiscent of the language Chris used to describe Brooks' sestina: "We read a

poem that D. wrote. She told how her dad died climbing and how a friend of hers committed suicide. I thought that it was a very good sestina. I thought that all lines fit together nicely and none could be left out” (Brooks’ transcript, lines 1960-1964).

Brooks’ use of content vocabulary visibly increased in his February 19, 2000, posting. In a previous message, Chris asked students to create a literary taxonomy to critique peer writing. Brooks used the taxonomy to help him write a message to one of his exchange partners from first semester about that peer’s poetry. I have underlined the content vocabulary he incorporated into his message:

I thought that J. wrote some good poetry about his interests. I don’t think he ever used any metaphors. He did use similes though; he compared himself to the devil in a poem entitled “Why?” His poems were mostly narrative. He didn’t use much figurative language, but usually he put something into his poems. Mostly the poems were in the first person, talking about himself, but in one instance he did use the second person. In a haiku he wrote he talked as if he were an onlooker. Mostly the stanzas were of varied size, and the lines were not too short and not too long. There was usually a rhyming scheme included, but it wasn’t the general aa, bb, cc. He wrote more complexly. He wrote about things that interested him. I thought that he was pretty cool about the whole thing. (Brooks’ transcript, lines 2028-2035).

The use of content vocabulary continued with later postings that are not prompted by the literary taxonomy. In addition to an increased use of content vocabulary

(underlined below), I also noticed a more analytical turn in Brooks' postings. He wrote to Chris about writing sonnets on Feb. 21, 2000:

I think that sonnets are the hardest to write because you have to get that iambic pentameter sound going, and all the lines have to rhyme with another one. I haven't written one yet, but I am trying. We also read some other poetry on life. Life is such a vague description that you could just say about anything is about life. We read a great poem by Robert Long called "Goodbye." We think that it's about the writer talking about his love and how they were born and how they will die and everything is just passing of time. I liked this poem because it was talking about death and how the owl comes and goes, and in between the mice and rabbits are in fear of their lives. It sort of said that you should fear death's wrath.

(Brooks' transcript, lines 2350-2357).

In addition to using appropriate content vocabulary, he supported why he liked a poem by giving a short analysis of theme for Robert Long's poem. Instead of having solely an aesthetic transaction with the poem, his explication revealed an efferent transaction.

In late February and early March, the CHS students read Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and wrote their own sonnets. Brooks thought writing an original sonnet was very difficult and instead chose to write a "copy poem." He revealed a change in attitude toward poetry with his posting for Chris:

We were trying to write sonnets this week and I could not come up with one, so I wrote another copy poem. I am still going to try to write a sonnet. It is going to make me crazy thinking about it until I do it. Well,

here is a poem that I copied. I took one and modified it so that it was about something that I can relate to...I really don't like doing these poems because I have to follow someone else's form, and I really like making a form of my own. I really can't ask for suggestions that you can make because I didn't really write this poem. (Brooks' transcript, lines 2568-2571, 2586-2588).

In his initial introduction at the beginning of the school year, Brooks said he had no favorite poet and had not read much poetry; later he resented not being able to create his own form for a poem that he was asked to write.

The PTP transcript offered only a small glimpse into the attitudinal changes students had about poetry and writing as well as changes observed in their writing during the school year. I looked to the PTP-TT folder where Louise and Annie often journaled about their students to find anecdotal evidence of changes in attitude toward poetry as well as noticeable changes in student writing. Louise journaled about a change in Brooks' writing at the end of October: "[Brooks] has started to work symbolism into some of his poetry; he's beginning to understand that poetry often has meaning below the surface words" (PTP-TT transcript, Oct. 31, 1999, lines 1678-1680).

In February, during the second semester of PTP, Louise added a question at the bottom of students' literary taxonomies to ask them what they had learned about themselves as a reader or a writer by analyzing their exchange partners' poetry. Ben responded, "I discovered that in order to get really good writing, it has to be coming from within. You really have to put a lot of emotion into it. If you don't, it really has no meaning, unless it is just a funny poem" (PTP-TT transcript, Feb. 19, 2000, lines 3982-

3984). Also that month, Louise journaled about responses she had received on student surveys and commented on a change in Brooks' attitude toward poetry. In August Brooks had written that the most experience he had with poetry was publishing a poem in second grade. In his November survey, he revealed "I wrote two or three good poems in school and several more (6 or 7) in school or on my free time" (PTP-TT transcript, Feb. 19, 2000, lines 5932-5933). In this same posting, Louise also pointed out that through information revealed in the November survey, she saw the most dramatic change in Brooks' attitude toward poetry.

In March, Louise commented to Chris on the writing of several students, including Brooks:

Some of these six actually end up writing something close to expository essays with each poem they post to you or their Alaska partner. One of my concerns a few months ago was that they wouldn't be writing enough essays this year, but these six are writing admirably. Their voice is clear and strong, and I rarely have to edit their writing. I've rarely had more than fifty percent of my freshmen write prose so well. (PTP-TT transcript, March 6, 2000, lines 5603-5610).

She also commented to Chris on the level of analysis she saw in Brooks' writing and attributed it partially to Chris's professional discourse with her students.

Throughout the discourse between Brooks and his exchange partners, the personal connections they made in their writing revolved around music, favorite bands, and sports such as skiing, snowboarding, and football. These common topics provided a comfort zone to begin their online conversations, and there were no online postings between the



boys without at least one of those topics included. On the other hand, the discourse Brooks exchanged with Chris focused on poetry and contained very little extraneous details about his life that did not relate to the poetry they had written, read, shared, or revised together.

Looking back on the exchange, Brooks' described himself as a reluctant writer who only participated because his teacher required he participate. He said, "I wrote well, but I didn't want to. The poetry I wrote was artificial and only for a grade, in the beginning. Towards the end of the exchange, my poetry began to reflect perhaps who I was/am" (student survey, 2008). Brooks did not like an outside person reading and responding to his poetry and thought it was the writing of the poetry itself that "improved my articulation abilities" (student survey, 2008). He credited Chris and his classmates for their help in shaping his writing and/or understanding about poetry: "[They] motivated me to push my creativity and expand my writing" (student survey, 2008). Eight years later, Brooks said he still composes his own poetry and now sees a "need for creative aspects of education to get in touch with oneself" (student survey, 2008).

#### *Josie and Her Online Discourse*

A freshman at CHS, Josie was the youngest of three siblings and lived on a farm. Her family had livestock and grew grain crops. In the original exchange introduction, Josie described herself as an active student involved in numerous school clubs and activities. She did not have much experience with poetry and said "I like some poetry, but it just depends on the mood I'm in that day" (Josie's transcript, Sept. 12, 1999, lines 15-16). In an open-ended survey, Josie described herself as a reluctant writer who only participated in the exchange because her teacher insisted. She felt that she was more

dedicated to her sports and extra-curricular activities in high school and would not have chosen to participate in the exchange if it had not been part of her course work.

Josie's teacher, Louise, asked her students periodically throughout the school year to give their thoughts on the poetry they studied in any given week. Josie's first attempt at student research notes, that Louise later called "box notes," showed little use of content vocabulary and focused more on the aesthetic connection to poetry: "Most [classmates] seemed to enjoy... 'Little Poem'...very much, mostly because it was really short...Everyone seemed to enjoy the details in 'Rodeo' very, very much...Everyone seemed to enjoy 'The Waterfall' because it had a lot of powerful words" (Josie's transcript, Sept. 20, 1999, lines 57-59). Josie identified the poems to which they connected, but her supporting comments revealed a superficial and general, emotional response to what they had read at that point.

Josie began the exchange with one female partner. Both girls had farming backgrounds and began their personal chats talking about animals, school activities, and what they did with their friends on weekends. In her first posting to her partner following her introduction, Josie identified her favorite poem and offered more support for her opinion than she did in her previous box notes:

My favorite poem that I've read so far would have to be 'Rodeo' by Edward Lueders. I think the reason why I like this poem the most is because it really reminds me of the county fair that I attend every year. I love to watch the bull riders and barrel racers. The poem made me feel anxious because I didn't know what was going to happen next. The only thing I didn't understand about the poem is why he used all the religious

words. I mean I think that's cool and everything but I was just wondering.

What do you think? (Josie's transcript, Sept. 24, 1999, lines 101-105)

In this conversation, Josie explained the aesthetic transaction she had with the poem "Rodeo." It reminded her of the people in the county fair rodeo. This social interaction also involved a first attempt at collaborative problem solving. She was not sure why the poet used religious terminology in the poem and wanted her exchange partner to help her find an answer. At this early point in the exchange, Josie's partner did not help her answer the question she had about the poem's language, merely answering that she did not like the poem in the next AHS posting.

Through the end of the first semester, Josie and her partner exchanged several original poems in different formats. Whenever they exchanged poems, they both asked for the other's opinion, most of the time with a brief "What do you think?" In most instances, both girls replied that they liked the poem but would not give a substantive reason why. One posting from Josie in mid-October was more in-depth both in her request for help as well as her response to her partner's previous posting. That week, Louise had asked her students to go outside and pay attention to nature and write a poem using their five senses. Josie wrote a rough draft of a poem, "Autumn Days," that she sent to her exchange partner with this request: "If you could give me some suggestions on the second line that would be great! I just don't like it at all. Also could you help me find another word instead of 'warm' to use, so that I don't use it twice in my poem" (Josie's transcript, Oct. 17, 1999, lines 347-349). She included in the same posting a response to her partner's last shared poem. While she liked her partner's poem, she could not give support that moved beyond the literal meaning of the poem: "The poem you

wrote last week was really, really good. I liked the way you described everything. I especially like the part where you say ‘Spinach was my enemy and candy was my friend.’ I don’t really know why, but that line really stuck out to me” (lines 361-363).

Josie’s response to the rough draft of a poem Chris wrote also focused on her literal comprehension of the poem, yet she tried to use content vocabulary (underlined words in quote) to help her explain her opinion:

We read “Descending Bread Loaf Mt. after Dark” in class the other day. I thought this poem was very good. I could picture the events that were taking place by the way you described things. I especially liked the paragraph where you said, “The falling sun dawdled a bit behind yellow clouds, like old ivory, before sinking behind Adirondack peaks stenciled on the blue-white sky.” I liked this sentence because I like the adjectives you put in it. It made the poem come alive. (Josie’s transcript, Oct. 16, 1999, lines 379-384).

In her next posting to Chris, Josie sent an original draft of a poem and clearly stated that it was a rough draft which she hoped he enjoyed. She did not ask for help on this particular poem, though Chris provided a critique in his next posting to Josie:

I did enjoy your poem “Autumn.” It is nostalgic and kind of sweetly sad, as all nostalgia is. I have been told I am nostalgic. It might be a mental affliction! The first line opens the poem with the idea of warmth and sun, but the second line quickly turns that seemingly upbeat emotion into a sad one: “who knows, this could be the last one for awhile.” I begin to worry about tomorrow. Then comes the nostalgia: the sun is all that remains of

long fun in the summer, except for the memory. Then comes the foreboding forshadowing [*sic*] again: tree leaves darkening and barely holding on to the dying...I think you are after something complex in this poem: feelings of nostalgia for times that are no more, and recognizing that not only are those fun times over, but something dark and foreboding is in store. Very good. Keep working on this. There's more to say.

(Josie's transcript, Oct. 27, 1999, lines 500-508).

Chris's critique did three things. He praised Josie for the nostalgic tone of her poem and then made a connection with her by saying he also has those feelings. Then he explicated the changes in tone he actually saw in her poem, explaining how nostalgia fit the poem. Finally he encouraged her to continue working on the poem.

In her next posting to Chris, Josie sent another draft of the poem "Autumn" with visible changes that she said she made because of Chris's suggestions.

Draft 1

Autumn

The beautiful and warm day is here again,  
Who know this could be that last one for a while.

The warm sun shinning [*sic*] on me brings back old memories from the fun, long summer days.

Looking around I see the tree leaves darkening, and barely holding onto the dying, soft branches.

As I know once again Autumn is here. (Josie's transcript, Oct. 24, 1999, lines 467-484)

Draft 2

Autumn

The beautiful and warm day is here again;

The days are narrowing down till the cold bite of winter comes.

The heating sun shining on me brings back old memories of the fun, long summer days.

Looking around I see the tree leaves darkening, and barely holding onto the dying, soft branches

I once again know autumn is here. (Josie's transcript, Nov. 14, 1999, lines 621-629)

The most significant revision Josie made was to the second line which offered a chilly contrast to the warmth of the first line of the poem. Her underlined changes above may be at the encouragement of Chris, but there was no one specific change as a result of a specific comment he made.

One of the last poems Josie sent Chris during the first semester was a poem that shadowed Whitman's "I Hear America Singing." Her topic was instead the county fair. When she sent an early draft to Chris, his critique called into question why her lines were written more as paragraphs and questioned whether this was really a poem. He wanted her to consider the difference between poetry and prose. He said his own poems were sometimes "prosey" and that "sometimes it's only the linebreaks [*sic*] that suggests a poem" (Josie's transcript, Dec. 13, 1999, line 877). The next time Josie's poem appeared in the transcript was when she sent it to her exchange partner two days later. This time, her line breaks were clearly noticeable, and she had four distinct stanzas rather than four prose paragraphs. In her next message to Chris on Dec. 16<sup>th</sup>, she revealed that she and her teacher had worked on the format of her poem "so that it's more like a poem instead of an essay" (Josie's transcript, Dec. 16, 1999, lines 940-941). She also continued a conversation Chris initiated in his previous post to her when he asked her questions about how "outsiders" viewed a county fair and how "insiders" viewed the fair: "The outsiders

are clueless of what really goes on because they have no idea what some people do just so that they can win. Some people spray paint their animals, while others get to know the judge well enough so that their last name is known well enough” (lines 943-946). Chris’s questions required Josie to connect to another perspective of her topic, which she did by describing behind the scenes actions of those who attend a county fair.

Josie paired with a different AHS student at the beginning of the second semester, this time with a male student. The first few postings to and from the new partners contained introductions and more personal talk than poetry talk; however, there is a noticeable difference in the introductions from first and second semester partners. In the first semester, most of the first few postings contained more personal information, like what sports a person played or information about the writer’s family. Comments about poetry were limited to what they thought of poetry or how much they wrote it. In Josie’s first semester introduction, she had one sentence that mentioned both her attitude toward poetry (she liked it depending on her mood) and her experience (little) with it. In her second semester introduction, approximately two-thirds of her posting focused on poetry. Her first paragraph described her appearance and school activities. The rest of the posting, three paragraphs and two poems, focus on what she thought about her new partners’ last posted poem as well as what she thought about Ogden Nash’s poetry, which they recently studied in class: “I like his [Nash’s] poems a lot. They’re very simple, which makes them very good” (Josie’s transcript, Jan. 30, 2000, lines 1407-1408). Her willingness to share her original poetry as well as her opinion on Nash’s poetry revealed a change in her attitude about and experience with the genre over the course of the first semester.

In addition to a change in attitude toward poetry, I also looked for an increase in Josie's use of content vocabulary when talking with her partner or with Chris. Below is an excerpt from a posting at the end of the first quarter of the exchange, followed by a posting from the early part of the second semester of the exchange when Chris asked students to create and use a literary taxonomy. Content vocabulary, or vocabulary specific to the study of English/Language Arts, is underlined in each.

#### Early Post

I liked your Haiku! I love big trees and there aren't any very big trees here. I am with you about having too many syllables. I can write some poetry but haikus hate me! (Josie's transcript, Oct. 10, 1999, lines 299-300)

This posting was similar to others Josie wrote in their use of content vocabulary. Her postings from the first semester typically contained content vocabulary but usually only one or two words, other than a variation of the word poetry, and most related to the poetic form her class had recently studied.

#### Post Using Literary Taxonomy

Our class filled out some taxonomies for our old poetry pals, so here's what I wrote about your poems to [Chris] I noticed you wrote a lot of good things in your poems. You had good use of personification, metaphors, similes, and symbolism. You didn't really have any sound effects, but that's all right. Two poems you wrote in first person, and one was in second person. None of the poems were [sic] in second person. I also noticed that your poems were in varied forms, meaning stanzas. In one of



your poems you had long lines, and in the other two you had short lines. The poems you wrote didn't rhyme. Maybe one or two lines did, but not the whole poem. Some of the different themes you used were moonlight and a rose. And one was about when you were younger and how things were more fun. Some characteristics I noticed are that all of your poems flow together, and none of the lines sounded choppy. You are a very good poet, and you express yourself very well. I also learned how to read better and help other people with their poetry, since everyone's poetry is different. (Josie's transcript, Feb. 19, 2000, lines 1537-1548).

This posting noticeably used more content vocabulary, most words used correctly, and the vocabulary mirrored that used in the literary taxonomy handout Louise created at Chris's suggestion. The literary taxonomy was a tool for peer assessment which encouraged students to put together their knowledge of poetry to identify characteristics of their partners' poetry.

I did not find a noticeable increase in the use of content vocabulary in her later postings at the end of the exchange. Instead, I noticed that her comments about her own poetry revealed what she thought about revising her poetry prior to any input from her exchange partner or from Chris. In a March 6, 2000, posting to Chris, she wrote about a poem draft: "I think I'm going to change a couple of lines, like the part where I repeat myself again, but I don't know. I think I'll just mess with it and see what works" (Josie's transcript, lines 1865-1866). The next posting she sent to Chris also contained comments about her revision process: "Thanks for responding to our letters and talking about our poems. I did see what you were saying when you said I should try to end the poem

differently. I've been thinking of some different ways in how I could end it but haven't come up with the right one yet" (April 14, 2000, lines 2068-2070).

Throughout the exchange, students shared their own original poetry. What the exchange partner chose to write about in response to a student's poem was not predictable. What was predictable was that students submitting poetry to their partners always asked a question or asked for a bit of advice, even if it was "What do you think?" Josie composed a poem in the last quarter of the exchange that she called a *Bout Rimes* poem. She gave her impression of the form, included the poem, and then asked her partner for help: "To tell you the truth, they aren't that hard to write but mine doesn't really make sense...What do you think? What sentences do you think I should change in this poem? Also, if you could, give me an idea for a title. Thanks!" (Josie's transcript, April 12, 2000, lines 1978-1979, 1996-1997). Josie's exchange partner did respond to her questions by pointing out a specific area of the poem that was too confusing for him to understand, and he did suggest a title as she requested. From an adult perspective looking back at the exchange, Josie appreciated the peer feedback within the exchange: "Rarely would we share our poems in front of the entire class, so it was nice having the opportunity to share my work with someone who couldn't criticize my poem to my face. It was easier to get constructive feedback through a letter than from someone face-to-face" (student survey, 2008). She additionally responded that "The exchange allowed me to share my work with an individual that was similar in age, understood the assignments, and was able to provide adequate feedback" (student survey, 2008).

Eight years after the exchange occurred, Josie commented on her change in her level of participation in the exchange. She said she became an online social butterfly

who enjoyed writing to and getting responses from students in another classroom across the country: “Once I got started with the exchange and developed an ‘online relationship’ with my exchange partner, I found that I truly enjoyed getting responses back and did become somewhat of an online social butterfly. The idea of having to participate eventually turned into wanting to participate” (student survey, 2008). She recalled being a “reluctant writer” in high school. When asked about how the electronic exchange affected her writing, she said it “provided my class the opportunity to practice writing on a consistent basis” and “I feel like it significantly affected my writing” (student survey, 2008).

Josie referred to her teacher’s influence on her writing twice in the survey. The electronic exchange was only a small portion of what the students did in class that year. Josie credited Louise with being “the person who helped shape my writing and understanding of poetry the most...[Louise] would make suggestions on our papers and then we had to go back and correct those mistakes. Through practice, I think my writing dramatically improved” (student survey, 2008).

#### *Tatum and Her Online Discourse*

Tatum was the second oldest child in a family of eight with four brothers and one sister. Family was important—she made a point to tell her exchange partner that her grandfather had 39 grandchildren and she had 33 cousins. She lived twelve miles outside of town, and her family owned two feedlots with 32,000 head of cattle in the feedlots and 15,000 head in pasture. Her family was entrepreneurial; they owned two restaurants, a service station, and a motel.

In her introduction to her partner, Tatum remembered reading poetry in seventh and eighth grades, but she admitted she did not choose to read it now. She had some experience writing poetry in eighth grade and said that she liked poetry that rhymed: “I find [it] more interesting than any other poetry” (Tatum’s transcript, Sept. 12, 1999, line 22). When Louise first talked with her class about participating in the exchange, Tatum had a positive outlook: “I was very excited about the exchange, but never dreamt it would turn out the way it did. I thought it was a really neat way to make reading and writing poetry fun and educational” (student survey, 2008).

When reading through Tatum’s interactions with her exchange partners, I saw evidence of social constructivism whether it was sharing with a partner about a new form of poetry the class studied the previous week or encouraging a partner to help with the revision of a poem. In a posting on November 8, 1999, Tatum shared with her Alaska partner a form of poetry her class learned from a visiting writer: “We have an actor from Denver here, and she is helping us write a recipe poem. You just have to write about something and put it into recipes, and that’s your recipe poem” (lines 474-475). Tatum then posted her own recipe poem about feedlots, a topic with which she had much life experience. Afterward, she asked her partner to provide help for her recipe poem and inquired about a place poem on hockey he said he had written but not sent.

At the end of her exchange partner’s next response, he attached his own recipe poem, which focused on hockey. He did not say whether or not she influenced him to write this particular recipe poem. The only other poem in his post was one he wrote on his ancestors, which was a shadow of a poem on the same topic. In her next response, Tatum identified again her affinity for rhyme and responded to her partner’s poems:

I would like you to send me a copy of the poem that you just wrote. I like reading your poetry. It's neat to know that other people my age are writing. We read the poem "Ancestors" too. I don't really know what to think of it. I like it; but then again, I didn't. I guess it's just too serious. I like funny and rhyming poems....

I really liked both of your poems. The ancestor one tells me a lot about you and how proud you are. Your recipe poem tells me a lot about how you play the game with determination and energy. It also explains some things that I don't understand about hockey. I don't know too much about that sport. (Tatum's transcript, Nov. 22, 1999, lines 682-685, 686-688).

Her response to her exchange partner offered no judgments about his writing; instead, she supported his poetry writing efforts and asked him to send more. Her lack of knowledge about his subject matter was secondary. She wanted to be an audience for him.

In December of that first semester, Tatum and her partner posted to each other twice. Their interactions indicated they were ready to talk poetry. In her Dec. 15, 1999 posting, Tatum explicated poem #33 by Ferlinghetti which her class read. She explained to her partner that the poet's use of description appealed to her and then supported her opinion with a descriptive line about elk antlers from the poem. She shared a "singing poem" shadowing the style of Walt Whitman and again implored her partner to send her any poems he had written. When her Alaska partner responded, he did not mention poem #33 but he did include a villanelle he wrote about hockey. Her last posting to her Alaska partner came in January. Tatum explicated the poem of the week for her partner and then responded to his villanelle:

I really enjoy reading your poems. They are all really good. Your poem “The Game” is so good and so real. I feel just like that during our basketball games, always wonderin [*sic*] what the coach would do if he/she were out there. You are really good with poetry. Do you write a lot of poems? You always come up with some good topic too. (Tatum’s transcript, Jan. 17, 2000, lines 914-917).

Again, her response refrained from being judgmental or critical of her partner’s writing. Following the kind words for her partner, she was judgmental about her own writing, saying she was not a poet and that her poems were not good. She ended this posting with an original sestina that she felt did not make sense. She requested that her partner help her by sending his suggestions for improving her poem. Unfortunately, the conversation between these two partners ended there, and Tatum’s partner did not offer any further suggestions. Annie, the AHS teacher, decided to change students’ partners for the second semester.

For the second semester, Tatum gained two exchange partners from AHS. Both wrote an introduction to Tatum and included their own original poetry. In her own introduction (what she wrote to one partner she also sent to the other while customizing only her responses to their individual poems), she asked her partners not to ridicule her poetry and explained that she was not a poet, though she had nothing against reading poetry. She also included some poetry she had written in the style of Ogden Nash and passed along information she learned in class about Nash’s writing to her new partners:

Mrs. [Louise] told us that Odgen [*sic*] Nash makes up words to rhyme in his poem, so I tried making up words. In “Basketball,” “amuzical” means

“amusing.” In “Snakes,” “blither” means “bother.” In “Ants verses Horses,” “fastroyning” means “fast running.” Also, I need help on filling in the blank. I don’t know what to put there. Please send your suggestions. (Tatum’s transcript, Jan. 30, 1999, lines 1367-1370)

Within her first message to these new partners, Tatum passed along “appropriated” acquired knowledge (Cazden, 2001) about a certain poet and his form of writing and explained why she wrote certain words/phrases in her own poetry. She ended her message with a request for suggestions to improve her poem.

After a class exercise of creating and responding to a literary taxonomy on their exchange partners’ poems, Tatum wrote her first exchange partner once more. While much of her comments strictly follow the questions on the taxonomy, toward the end of the message, she focused on a particular characteristic of his poems—they mainly focused on his sport of choice, hockey:

I noticed in your poetry that you don’t use too many metaphors or similes. The other figurative languages that you use are personification and symbolism. You don’t use any sound effects. Two of your poems are in the first person, none are in the third person, and none are in the rarely used second person. Your stanzas are usually similar. The lines are fairly long, and they are generally free verse. You like to write about playing hockey or just the game of hockey. Another characteristic that I notice in your poetry is that you like to write what’s on your mind. You just write down what comes to the top of you [*sic*] head. I also told [Chris] that I really enjoyed reading your poetry because I don’t know too much about

hockey and I like to read about how you feel while you're on the ice. You also describe every detail quite well. (Tatum's transcript, February 19, 2000, lines 1629-1637)

Tatum admitted having little experience with her partner's topic of choice, yet she enjoyed reading her partner's poems. It was not the topic that drew her. It was her partner's love of the topic and his attraction to it which drew her.

Tatum finally reflected positively on her own work after one of her partners praised a poem she sent and pointed out a line that caught his attention. In her reply to his praise, she said that poem was the first she had written that was good (Tatum's transcript, Feb. 28, 2000). She again praised her partner's writing. Her second partner received similar remarks. Tatum also pointed out the rhyme scheme in the second partner's poem. As she pointed out in her introduction, this particular characteristic of poetry appealed to Tatum and she often commented on rhyme in shared poems as well as her partners' poems.

Frustration again appeared in her next posting on April 12, 2000, when she tried to explain her "Bouts-Rimes" poem: "I didn't like writing these poems. Mine is really stupid" (lines 2144-2145). After sharing the poem, she explained how this particular form worked:

You see, we had to write seven sets of rhyming words, then put them in a pile and draw one paper. The paper that you draw has seven pairs of rhyming words and you have to use those to write your poem. This made it hard because some of the words had nothing to do with each other. It is hard to put it all into a poem and make it make sense. (lines 2171-2174)



At first glance, this particular exercise should have engaged Tatum because it involved the use of rhyme. Tatum discovered through the exercise that poetry was more than using words that rhyme. Rhymes are no good if the poetry does not “make sense.”

The discourse that occurred between Tatum and her exchange partners, or rather all students and their exchange partners, occurred within a zone of proximal development. As I mentioned in chapter two, Luis Moll (1990) wrote at length about Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development. Moll identified traditional classroom activities—read, complete a worksheet, take a test—as ones that did not position students within that zone. He pointed out that Vygotsky never specified which social activities created that zone but addressed discourse as an important tool in the zone of proximal development: “Vygotsky (1981) claimed that the intellectual skills children acquire are directly related to *how* they interact with others in specific problem-solving environments...Therefore, the nature of social transaction is central to a zone of proximal development analysis” (p. 11). While the students were collaborating on the writing of and the discussion of poetry in the electronic exchange, they were within a zone of proximal development. Through this online discourse, students began to discuss and have informed opinions about poetry; they also continued writing their own poetry.

Moll (1990) and Cazden (2001) both believed that what students discussed within the online discourse would become part of their actual developmental level. Cazden said, “Children do come to do independently what they could formerly do only with help” (2001, p. 63). This happened with Tatum who realized that rhyme does not a poem make. Tangible evidence of this occurred with Alaska students. In one of her final journaling entries in the PTP-TT transcript (May 22, 2000), Annie said that four of her eleven

students chose for their school-required Student Initiated Project to create a personal poetry collection showcasing all of the poetry they wrote during the school year. She also pointed out that her 45 students (including those not involved in the exchange) wrote almost 1000 pieces of poetry over the course of the school year, with one student writing almost 100 of those. This anecdotal evidence supports the theory that what happened within the social interactions on BreadNet in the electronic exchange helped the students revise their own writing, moved them to become poets who were not dependent on peers, and motivated them to produce their own poetry and to have their own opinions on the genre. What once they could not do without help, through the electronic exchange they appropriated knowledge that enabled them to produce their own poetry independently and provide literary analyses of others' writing.

#### PTP from the Teachers' Perspective

The two people ultimately responsible for the electronic exchange remained in the background of the student PTP folder. At times they would offer praise for a student or explain why their students wrote particular poems to their partners. The longest piece of writing they contributed within the students' folder was the introduction of their school and community at the beginning of the exchange. In order to write about the teachers' perspectives of the exchange, I looked to three resources: both teachers' end-of-the-year reports for BLTN, the journal entries they included in the PTP-TT folder, and the telephone interviews I conducted with them in March 2008. When reading these data sources, I looked for instances where what the teachers wrote or said reflected their roles in the exchange process as well as moments when the exchange surprised them.

*Annie in Alaska*

Annie, a Minnesota native and a relative new-comer to Alaska (she had lived there for five years at the time of the exchange) introduced herself to students in the exchange when she introduced the school and community. She expressed to the students that teaching was important to her, both her hobby and her profession. She shared about her family—her husband was a hog farmer and her three children were elementary age and younger. She shared some of her quirks: “I also love old movies and buttery popcorn” (PTP transcript, Sept. 15, 1999, lines 32-33). She also shared with students her main goal for the exchange, for them to “come to discover a love for (or at least an appreciation of) poetry and what it has to offer all of us” (lines 36-37).

Prior to her summer at BLSE, Annie could not have conceived an electronic exchange: “If anyone would have even mentioned anything like ‘electronic exchange,’ I would have thought, ‘Oh, pen pals’ (interview, March 8, 2008). She attributed her students’ outlook on the exchange to a short posting at the beginning of the exchange from Dixie Goswami to the students. In the posting, Annie thought Goswami set the tone for the exchange:

But Dixie really set the stage for what the conversations would be like because she sent a welcome to the exchange kind of email. We hadn’t asked her to. She did it on her own. And she introduced herself and told the kids a little bit about who she was. That part was very brief. A couple of sentences maybe. And then she included a copy of Mary Oliver’s poem “August,” and then she wrote her own version of “August.” And she invited the students to do the same thing. (interview, Marcy 8, 2008).

Annie felt that Dixie's posting kept the exchange from having the "pen-pal" tone. Her students began structuring their postings in a similar manner to Goswami's. They would chit-chat or briefly talk about something personal and then focus on the common text for that week. Annie felt it was important that she and Louise kept students focused on the literary side of the exchange rather than the personal side of the exchange, especially when students began to grow comfortable with each other and know each other through their conversations online. To encourage a literary focus, she and Louise also refused to allow students to exchange addresses or phone numbers until the end of the school year. Students corresponded only through the online exchange.

Annie incorporated the exchange into her language arts curriculum and used samples of student writing for the exchange as teaching tools. Before teachers posted exchange writing to the online PTP student folder; they read all of the students' letters. As Annie would read, she would identify paragraphs or passages from letters that she would then print out and copy onto overhead transparencies to share with her students. Her goal in classroom discussion with the transparencies was "to make the learning process transparent. I'm big on the metacognitive aspect of teaching and learning...to think about their thoughts is a good thing, and it is part of the learning process. It helps you to become smarter and more insightful, and being a little more introspective is good as a learner" (interview, March 8, 2008).

One of the exchange challenges for Annie was accessing the school computer lab so that students could compose for the exchange. At that time, their school had one computer lab. Only four teachers taught at the school, but accessing the lab when she needed her students to write was not always easy. Absent students also presented a

problem. If students missed school on the day they used the computer lab, it was difficult to get a letter written for the exchange partners in Colorado. Absences were frequent, especially when the weather was 30-50 degrees below zero. Many of her students did not have computers at home. Students with the most absences were from the Native Alaskan village: "Maybe [they] couldn't come to school because without electricity and running water when it is 40 degrees below zero just keeping yourself alive in your house is kind of a full time job" (interview, March 8, 2008).

Frustrations with students arose within the exchange. Annie wrote Louise about a challenging student who was reluctant to participate in the exchange. This particular student experienced academic problems and also dealt with behavioral issues in class. Annie was concerned about how this student's attitude affected his CHS partner. Louise replied to Annie that she, too, felt ownership for Annie's student as a result of the exchange and wanted to help. Louise went to her student and explained to him some of the challenges faced by his Alaska partner. Louise felt her student was responsible enough to handle the situation and would try to draw the reluctant Alaska student into the exchange. Several days later, Annie responded with an update on her troubled student:

I asked what he had been working on and he said he wrote a place-poem...well, he wasn't sure it was a place poem, but I told them to write about something they really knew and loved, so he wrote about riding his bike (his ABSOLUTE favorite thing in the world). He was quite proud, even though he would not allow ANYONE else to read the poem. He said he thought it was the best poem he had ever written. I wanted to share it with you right away, as I see it as a major, major achievement in terms of

the power of our project. (PTP-TT transcript, Oct. 14, 1999, lines 1002-1007).

Annie pointed out in her posting that her student's topic was his "favorite thing in the world." While they often prescribed the format of a poem and insisted their students write their exchange partners on a regular basis, both Annie and Louise were flexible with their students about their writing topics. This allowed their students to have buy-in with the exchange. While the genre and the form were unfamiliar to them, students were often intimately aware of the subjects of their writing.

The exchange was not just a vehicle to engage students in the writing process. Annie also discovered that the exchange led her students to understand new pieces of literature. When they began reading *Romeo and Juliet*, the language was a sticking point. One of the students involved in the writing exchange pointed out that if you read *Romeo and Juliet* like a poem, it was easy to understand. Other students soon were willing to accept that bit of advice. Annie posted a humorous response to that a-ha moment: "I've been trying to find a sure fire way to teach Shakespeare...All it takes is six months' worth of poetry reading to convince them that they CAN decipher words written in verse!" (PTP-TT transcript, Jan. 18, 2000, lines 3119-3121).

I did not know what to expect from Annie's journal writings in the PTP-TT folder. The discourse she, Louise, and Chris Benson created in that folder often did not involve any comments specific to the poetry exchange. Many times they were just classroom snapshots, providing the other adult exchange participants a glimpse of the workings of their individual classrooms. While an in-depth analysis of their discourse was not part of my research plan, looking at their postings did help flesh out their online

personas and provided a glimpse into their personal and professional lives. Annie often talked about road blocks she encountered as a teacher involving limitations her students encountered because they were small, rural, or lacked funding for curricular changes she felt were needed. Through her online conversations with Louise, I could tell that Annie valued Louise's input and often asked her to share her pedagogical experiences. In addition to struggles, she wrote about her students in a writing voice that placed me in her classroom:

[English class] doesn't always have to be an "activity" with a specified objective and measurable outcomes. The things that came up in class today might not have otherwise: B. looked up the word "epistolary" because it was used in a subtitle for a poem (and he shared the definition with the class); G. wanted to know about Dante & Milton & all four 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys read Sandburg's poem & we talked about the images we have of "personal hells" and what Sandburg meant in his poem....Watching them engaged in all of this offered one of those moments in teaching when I felt completely separate from the students...like a distant observer looking down on an idyllic scene. Granted, it wasn't all picture-perfect: W. wrote another poem about "scoring with a chick" and N. illustrated a mock advertisement touting "Beer: Helping Ugly People Get Laid for a Hundred Years." During all of this reading and writing, R. stopped in to check out...forever: she's a 17-year-old 10<sup>th</sup> grader who will become a mother in about two months....She is an avid reader and was an awesome participant in our PTP exchange discussions (even though she has always

been a struggling student overall. For the first time EVER she was experiencing success in an English class.). In a perfect world, they would *all* be totally engrossed in the content; they would all be great students; they would all live happy, average lives (ahh...only in Lake Wobegon :). In the two classes combined today, however, 11 of the 14 were right there, on the edge, reading and thinking and being the students an English teacher dreams of. Our world isn't perfect, but it is pretty amazing sometimes. Like today. (PTP-TT transcript, March 2, 2000, lines 5522-5527, 5535-5540, 5542-5548)

Earlier in the year, Annie's students supported Louise after the news that her mother was diagnosed with cancer. Annie and her students faced their own loss that year when a student in their school (not in their language arts class) committed suicide on New Year's Day. What began as an exercise to encourage students to write and enjoy poetry turned into a solace and a way for students to express their grief. Annie wrote about that devastating day:

Today we began the day with an assembly for our junior high/high school students at which the announcement was made. We followed with the students in grades 9-12 meeting as a small group (only about 30 kids) for a time of sharing and grieving. And there was such grief. Lots of "whys" and "what ifs." The rest of the day was spent quietly with many students visiting with parents and the counselor in the library; others went to class and attempted normalcy. The number of students who chose to write their way through the day was incredible. Many, many students wrote; poetry



was the genre of choice for most. (PTP-TT transcript, Jan. 3, 2000, lines 3009-3015)

She shared in that posting a poem written by one of her students that day, a student who at the beginning of the year had never written any poetry except for class assignments. The poem he wrote that day was a memorial to a friend, and it was a way for him to begin to grieve for the loss of that friend. And it was not assigned.

At the end of the year, Annie thought about why PTP was the only exchange that year that really worked. She conducted four exchanges that year with her students, and PTP was the only one she considered successful:

In my evaluation of what has made PTP different, I truly think that the communication has made a huge difference (between teachers), but I also think the length of the commitment (looking at it as a “commitment” of at LEAST nine-weeks, then a semester, and then a full year). The duration of our exchange is really what I think has made the big, big difference. The kids have had the opportunity to get to know each other and build friendships...relationships with people they’ve never set eyes on. (PTP-TT transcript, April 4, 2000, lines 7051-7055).

### *Louise in Colorado*

Louise, a minister’s wife and mother of three, was a veteran teacher the summer she attended Bread Loaf School of English. Louise was quite a bit older than Annie; even her children were older than Annie. She had little experience with any technology and admitted to using the computer to write recommendation letters for students or type worksheets but little else. In fact, she began using computers only a year prior to

attending BLSE. The PTP exchange was the first electronic exchange she planned or executed.

Louise saw herself as a learner along with her students. When she and Annie first conceived the exchange, they chose poetry because it was a genre they were uncomfortable teaching: “My focus became more learning with the students rather than me being the expert teaching the students, and so I think that Pass the Poetry just really lent itself to that new philosophy I had formed for myself” (interview, March 9, 2008).

Some technology challenges existed for Louise the first year of the exchange. Her students were required to write their exchange letters outside of class and turn them in on a disk where she could download their writing to a folder she set up on the school network. For students who did not have computers at home, Louise checked out AlphaSmarts, word processing devices, to them so that they could work on their letters at home. Between Louise and the business teacher, they had 40 AlphaSmarts in their school, enough for all of her students to check out one if necessary. The first and second year of the exchange, she had one computer in her classroom, and often only one printer worked in the whole school. When the exchange moved to its third and fourth year in 2003-2005, their school had a computer lab that she then utilized with her students. Her biggest technology challenge the first year was posting all of her student letters for the Alaska classroom in a timely manner. This issue arose in her first “Journal Talk” in the Pass the Poetry-Teacher Talk folder (PTP-TT) in September 1999; here she asked Annie for input on how she was handling the posting for the Alaska students. At first Louise spent up to two hours each week downloading and posting letters, but once she had her

technology specialist help her set up a network folder, the process became more streamlined and less time-intensive on her part.

Louise's challenges with technology paid dividends in an unexpected way. After one month into the exchange, when she was ready to start faxing student letters to Alaska rather than type them and post them via BreadNet, she realized that her students were learning how the writing process worked through their classroom collaborations. On one particular day, several students had questions about their writing and asked for help with editing their work. Louise journaled:

These mini-grammar lessons would be lost if they were writing manually because they would be reluctant to go back and make changes. Word processors really do encourage editing and rewriting! I'm writing this paragraph to document that the students are learning more than just poetry. The writing process is taking place! And it is effective because they have authentic audiences! They are concerned about what they are writing and they want to write well. (PTP-TT transcript, Oct. 10, 1999, lines 719-724)

While Louise gave credit to word processors for her students' new-found desire to edit, they also provided a medium the students used to collaborate with their peers. Students took time to ask questions of each other in class prior to sending their writing online, and they expected feedback from their online peer audience as well.

Louise discovered the exchange was an opportunity for individualized writing instruction for her students and made the exchange a part of their writing curriculum:

When these kids wrote the letters, they were expected to write with voice, and complete sentences, and check punctuation and spelling and all of

that. And I made it like an individual grammar exercise. I can't remember if I did that the first two years or if I started doing it halfway through the exchange or not. But it dawned on me, hey, I can use this to teach these kids something about paragraphing and all of that. And so then when I posted the letters, I would go through and make the corrections. Some teachers I guess would be almost horrified, but I was of the philosophy that if you read something that is written correctly, then there is a certain learning that takes place because of that. If the writing is full of mistakes, or incomplete sentences and things like that, that it would hinder comprehension...if I corrected a period or put a period in, in the margin of the students' copy, I would put a P, and then that became an individualized grammar assignment or punctuation assignment, or if there was a dangling modifier or something I would put down DM in the margin of that line, and they had to find it and correct it. (interview, March 9, 2008)

Louise considered her students' audience and would only send corrected postings to Alaska. In a later "Journal Talk" posting within the student PTP-TT folder, she proudly commented that several students were turning in relatively error-free letters: "Not only are most of the students writing poetry, but they are also writing prose in the form of letters. I virtually did no editing with them (except for D.'s and J.'s work) on the last set of letters to Chris. Either they helped each other (and that's okay too), or they aren't repeating mistakes (that's even better)" (PTP-TT transcript, Oct. 24, 1999, lines 1514-1516).

During her journaling, Louise would often reflect on her students' progress. She noticed that they were writing longer letters to exchange partners and were adding more details. She also looked for new ways to integrate the exchange into her language arts curriculum:

I was concerned about not getting to short stories, but they are reading *The Red Badge of Courage*. This is the first year that the social studies teacher and I are teaching the novel together, and that's a good thing. (I have to keep reminding myself that more is not necessarily better.) And they are reading a lot. They are reading all the letters from Alaska and from Chris. Then too, they are doing vocabulary study of Greek roots and affixes; and they've done some sentence-expanding exercises. I'll have to push them to use that skill in their letter writing. (PTP-TT transcript, Oct. 18, 1999, lines 1486-1491)

Near the end of the first semester of the exchange, Louise received some bad news about her 87-year-old mother, who was diagnosed with a fast-growing cancer. After writing about it to Annie, Annie shared the information with her students. Even though they had been writing to Louise's students and not Louise herself, Annie's students had developed a relationship with her as well. Some asked to write letters to Louise that week, sharing in her sadness, and of those who wrote, several empathized and explained that they understood what it felt like to lose a loved one to cancer.

At the mid-point of the year, Louise and Annie had to decide whether or not to continue the exchange. In a journal posting, Louise wrote about positive outcomes of the exchange at that point: students were writing longer letters; the quality of student-

composed poetry had improved; student analysis of poetry rivaled that of some Advanced Placement students; students were willing to share ideas; the exchange made the students feel special. From her perspective, the exchange was a success and should continue.

While reviewing the PTP-TT folder, I also kept my eye open for instances where Annie and Louise consciously placed their students in student-centered learning opportunities related to the exchange. One such opportunity occurred that winter for Louise. Remember that her school is a small, rural school with just over 100 students. She and several other teachers collaborated to plan a KICK day (Kids in Charge of Knowledge) at their school. Students applied to lead workshops 45-90 minutes long, and students signed up to take workshops that appealed to them. Vivian, Tatum, and Josie all volunteered to lead poetry-writing sessions for 23 high school and three middle school students that day. Workshop participants said they learned how to write poetry, workshop poems, use sensory details, write a nature poem, be creative, imagine, explore ideas, and think and put down thoughts. All of the workshop participants felt their instructors were prepared and were willing to recommend the workshop to other friends. Feedback forms from the student participants reflected what the participants had learned in the workshop, but those comments also reflected what Louise's three students had learned from the exchange.

In an interview, I asked Louise how the electronic exchange affected the writing of her students, and her answer supported what Cazden (2001) theorized about classroom discourse. Louise said using Breadnet (the technology) for the exchange did not improve student writing in and of itself:

I'm thinking that in my students' mind it was just an expedient way to communicate back and forth rather than through snail mail...I think the big difference...was because they had an authentic audience. It wasn't just some fictitious audience out there or the English teacher, but they were actually writing to an authentic audience, and that made all the difference. They learned from each other. They would, you know, because they would see how some of [Annie's] students would write, and then didn't want to be seen as stupid...or if somebody is not a good writer, it seems they would pick up on that and they would urge each other...So I think they encouraged each other just to write more if nothing else.

(interview, March 9, 2008)

The outcomes of the exchange depended on the social discourse that occurred within it. The curriculum created in the discourse of the Pass the Poetry exchange itself was a scaffold, a "coherent set of 'contexts and activities' carefully sequenced over days or weeks to build students' competencies toward a valued goal" (Cazden, 2001, p. 69). While the goal for both teachers in their original exchange plan was simply to encourage their students to have a greater appreciation for poetry, they and their students both experienced an unexpected side effect. At the end of the exchange, the students reconceptualized poetry through the encouragement of their teachers as well as their peers. One of the most important tangible successes of the exchange to Louise she mentioned in her end-of-the-year report in 2000 and in her interview in 2008: All of her students were real, published writers that year. Students published their own chapbook, and several students published poetry in the newspaper, books, and online venues.

### PTP from the Outside Correspondent/Poet's Perspective

As I mentioned earlier in this study, another participant began the exchange with no knowledge of any of the students participating that year. Chris Benson was a staff member of the BLTN and met both Louise and Annie at the BLSE in Vermont. He became a member of the teacher network in 1994, one year after it began. At the time of the exchange, his role as Publication Coordinator was to mentor teachers in the network to publish their work on what they were doing online with their students. He said in a personal interview on March 26, 2008, that he had participated in a few other exchanges where he wrote to participants: "I had never gone to Bread Loaf thinking I would come home with three or four projects. I'd just, when I was asked, I participated."

Chris was first introduced to the concept of networked writing in the 1980's when it was in its infancy in education. BreadNet was in existence as far back as 1983, but there were very few networks with this type of work happening then. In graduate school, he participated in an online forum course where they would write about what they were studying: "That really opened up my eyes to what writing was all about. I thought it was extremely motivating to have others to write to, though I cringe now when I look, when I think back on the things I wrote. They were so sophomoric, yet I thought I was discovering things that no one knew about. I was pretty naïve" (interview, March 26, 2008). After graduate school, Chris went to work as a teacher of writing at Clemson University where he instituted a similar online writing requirement for his college students.

Several years later he became affiliated with Bread Loaf and became a part of the online BLTN community. By that time, he had been participating in online writing



communities for about seven years. Chris became the outside correspondent/poet for the PTP exchange at the suggestion of Dixie Goswami: “Dixie knew I wrote a lot of poems, and she always praised me for how I responded to teachers and students online. She always said my responses were substantive...She said they were helpful because they moved the conversations along” (personal interview, March 26, 2008).

Both Annie and Louise talked of Chris’s influence with their students. Annie praised Chris’s role in the exchange:

Especially in that first year, he, his influence in that first year was, I don’t even know what the word is, it was huge. Because what he did, he elevated the hmmm, not the purpose, he elevated the tenor of the exchange I guess...He was the adult they could go to who wasn’t the teacher yet. He could give them these really insightful comments and very sincere responses that he wasn’t being paid to do; that wasn’t his job to critique their work, and yet he would do it” (interview, March 8, 2008).

Annie would become frustrated at times with her students because of the interaction they had with Chris. She would make suggestions or ask questions about student writing and the students would not respond to her, yet when Chris asked the same questions, they would revise their writing. When she asked a student about it, he said Chris was asking as a friend and not a teacher. Louise felt that Chris was

really good at prodding them to think at a little higher level or think at a little deeper level, especially in the writing of the poetry, and I think that made such a difference in pushing those kids to write quality poetry.  
(interview, March 9, 2008)

During the second semester of the exchange, Louise asked Chris to specifically address a certain point about writing poetry the next time he wrote to her students. She recognized his influence and was not above using it to help her students improve as writers. That influence led the students to give Chris a nickname used periodically, often affectionately and in jest, throughout the exchange: Poet Master. This naming also indicated a relationship connection the students forged with their outside correspondent/poet.

I asked Chris in our interview how he thought his responses moved the conversation along. His response echoed how Louise and Annie viewed his role in the exchange:

I think for one thing, I wasn't their evaluator in any formal way. I wasn't associated with their grades in any way. I kind of presented myself as an interested adult, so I had some authority over the subject. Obviously, I'm an English teacher and write poetry myself, so that gives me an authority to write about their writing in a way that carries some weight. They looked up to me for that. Naturally. And yet I wasn't the person beating them over the head or trying to drill them with this stuff. And I often would ask more questions than give advice. I tried not to, um, suggest they should do specific things with their poems. Instead, I tried to praise them and ask questions rather than say, "Why don't you scratch this line, add more to this line?" I did some of that, but I tried to resist that urge. (March 26, 2008).

When I dove into the exchange transcript to see how accurately Chris and the teachers recalled his role in the exchange, I noticed two important points about his

writing to the students. First, he spoke the language of a poet both in the content vocabulary he used and the exposition and analysis he used. Second, his responses to the students were *always* individualized to the student and his/her work. For comparison, I looked at responses he made to several students within the same round of postings. On December 16, 1999, Louise posted student poems that shadowed Walt Whitman's "I Hear America Singing." The following excerpts are examples of responses Chris made to each of the four students discussed in this chapter. I have also underlined the "poet talk" (content vocabulary) he used in his postings:

Excerpt 1

Josie: Very good revision. I like the way you've focused primarily on sounds. There is so much vivid detail that comes out through that focus. I also notice that your stanzas became more formal, adhering to a nearly regular length, and line lengths are about the same length, although I don't know if you were using a formula of number of syllables or stresses. It's beginning to look like a poem and that process, it seems, helps ideas unfold. Would you consider making the last two lines above so they are actually the first two lines of the poem? Here's why I suggest it. It's an experiment in revision that places you, the writer, in the context of the poem in concrete way. This moves the poem away from abstract and general writing to more subjective writing because, once you are in the poem, you can affect the poem any way you want. It's just an experiment, though, and you don't have to do it" (Jackie's transcript, Dec. 30, 1999, lines 988-996).

His approach was non-confrontational. He made a revision suggestion and explained why it was appropriate. Then he gave the student the opportunity to decide for herself whether or not she wanted to make the change.

#### Excerpt 2

Brooks: You have a really good revision here. I'm proud of the way you brought out a focused poem on the football championship game. I really like the idea of the players singing a melody and the student fans singing a harmony. That makes good sense. You have, very nearly, an extended metaphor in this poem. You might consider extending it some more. I'm wondering now if the introduction of the hunting theme isn't a little forced in this poem with this revision? You have such a good idea rolling along with the football song that it seems counterproductive to introduce the hunting theme, unless of course you can find a way to make the two themes work together more clearly. Still, I don't want to criticize too much. You have a really good poem here and I'm just trying to give you ideas on how it works in my mind, and maybe confirm some questions you have about it. I like the theme of beginning and ending in the poem, or the idea of a cycle. (Brooks' transcript, Dec. 30, 1999, lines 1347-1356).

Chris again used the language of the poet when making revision suggestions to Brooks. He identified what he saw happening in Brooks' poem and then suggested a revision idea. He gave a critique instead of criticism (Cazden, 2001). He also praised Brooks' poem.

## Excerpt 3

Tatum: Thanks for the info on the name “Idalia.” It is such a pretty name. I don’t have any concrete idea on how you might add the details above into your poem. I don’t have your poem in front of me at the moment. One thing you might consider is to fabricate details. You could write a poem that tells a story or an anecdote about Ida and Leah. It doesn’t matter if what you write is completely different from the truth. Using historical details and then changing some of the facts is okay. So what I’m saying is that I wouldn’t try to force Ida and Leah into your poem “I Hear Idalia Singing.” Maybe you’d consider writing a new poem about them. (Tatum’s transcript, Dec. 30, 1999, lines 830-836)

Whereas Chris focused on theme for Brooks’ poem and structure for Josie’s poem, he instead focused on content and details when giving feedback to Tatum.

## Excerpt 4

Vivian: I like very much what you’ve done with this poem. It is strong. I agree that the title is much too plain. Think about the meaning of the poem. What is it really about. It’s got to be about something much greater than just music or sound. The whole poem is greater than the sum of its parts, so what is the deeper subject of the whole poem? What about the parents’ song and the coaches’ song? Did you run out of gas on those lines? They seem to need something more to make them clear to my ear. Here’s an idea: is the coaches’ song and the parents’ song a similar song? Does it sound anything like the teachers’ song?

Thinking about those questions might give you a new way to hear what it sounds like. Would you consider deleting the final line? The reason I ask is that the next-to-last line is so much stronger and seems to end the poem much more satisfyingly. Perhaps you'd consider moving the last line to another place in the poem. (Vivan's transcript, Dec. 30, 1999, lines 572-582)

Chris's discourse showed that he wanted Vivian to think more about what she intended for the poem's meaning. He also pointed out weak areas in the poem and provided a suggestion for how she could improve those weaknesses. But again he did it in such a way that the student had to make the final decision about how her poem should look upon revision. The feedback he provided was not for a student grade; instead, he wanted the students to really think about how the decisions they made in revision could improve their poems. He did not talk superciliously to the students; he used the language of the poet expecting them to understand what he was saying. He spoke to them as writers, as poets themselves. The dialogue he had with students placed him as the expert. According to Annie, her students never considered themselves to be equals with Chris: "The anonymous nature of the exchange allowed Chris to see the very best in their writing, even if, you know, Chris didn't know that they may have been poor students in language arts in terms of they did poorly on tests or never had their homework done or had trouble writing a great introductory paragraph" (interview, March 8, 2008). It is no wonder that the students began to call him the "Poet Master" during the exchange.

When I looked at the responses that students gave their peer exchange partners and the responses they gave to Chris, I saw a difference in the content. There were more

“personal chats” about extra-curricular activities, personal likes/dislikes, references to friends and family in student-to-student discourse whereas with Chris, students focused on the poetry in their responses, omitting most of the personal details they would share with their peers. I asked Chris if he noticed a change in the writing students sent to him and the writing students sent to peers:

I’m going strictly on memory here. I think the student interactions were a little more shallow. You know how they go. “How are you doing? What’s up?” They have that chatty stuff at the beginning of their note and then they get down to the nitty-gritty of the poem they are supposed to be responding to or whatever the note was they were responding to. And um, you know, they are just not able yet, at that young age, to ask provocative questions, which I would do. I think that’s maybe what mystified them a little bit, made them a little curious about me, was the fact that I would ask provocative questions, questions they would not normally expect to hear.”  
(personal interview, March 26, 2008, lines 187-194)

Toward the end of the interview, I asked Chris why he put so much effort into writing to the students in the exchange. Each time they posted a poem to Chris, he would sit down and write an individualized response for each student, more than twenty at a time:

Often I felt that that time I put into it, it was fun, and I thought am I really putting too much time into this? Because I had a lot of other things to do, and I was probably taking too much time away from other things to do this, yet I found it so interesting intellectually that I loved it...I didn’t have

to grade these kids. They weren't students in my eyes. These were budding writers. (personal interview, March 26, 2008, lines 419-422, 449-450)

The individualized treatment the students received from Chris as well as his willingness to treat them as writers moved the discourse far beyond that of a typical school room. Toward the end of the school year, Chris wrote to Louise, "I think we are all working in some place beyond the institution of schooling. It's very exciting for me as a writer and editor to be talking professionally to [students] about substantive issues in writing and revising. It's just great" (PTP-TT transcript, March 7, 2000, lines 5659-5661).

I realized after reading through all four of the individualized student transcripts used in my research that there was one piece of advice about writing poetry that Chris did repeat to two students; the poem should "add up to something greater than the sum of the parts" (Tatum's transcript, Oct. 27, 1999, lines 451-452; Vivian's transcript, Dec. 30, 1999, lines 574-575). That same advice can be applied to the concept of the electronic exchange. It is not just a tool to improve writing, to explore unfamiliar literary genres, to encourage higher order thinking, to collaborate with peers, to empathize with colleagues, to share loss, to engage students, to exchange cultural understanding, to exceed teacher expectations, to motivate the previously unmotivated. It adds up to something greater than the sum of the parts.

### Implications

When I began my study, its focus was student writing—how it was affected by the exchange process, how students made connections to the literature they read for the exchange, how student writing was affected by comments of their exchange partners, and



how the exchange affected the syntactic complexity of student writing. I found that the writing itself did not need to be the only focus; instead, I needed to widen my focus to include the historical and ecological aspects of the exchange to better understand how the *whole* of the exchange affected the writing component of the exchange.

As I began evaluating the transcript for the exchange, I quickly found that the richly complex, interactive, online dialogue between the adults was fascinating, with implications for networked professional development. My research questions did not consider the adult interactions during the exchange, yet the transcript of the Pass the Poetry-Teacher Talk folder was rich with information about the teachers' knowledge-building processes as well. The role of the exchange in the professional lives of teachers within the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, particularly the electronic network environment, has potential for research questions focusing on teachers as collaborative knowledge-makers through socially networked, professional "niche" communities.

Both Annie and Louise indicated in their interviews that poetry was an intimidating genre for them to teach because they were not comfortable with it themselves. The change they went through becoming teacher-experts deserves to be studied. Within the PTP-TT folder, Louise and Annie's discussion evolved from planning the exchange and discussing poetry in their classrooms to discussing professional issues and frustrations with their jobs and administrative decisions. They also provided support to each other through their personal exchanges. Annie struggled with students who were apathetic toward school; Louise dealt with personal issues with her mother's cancer; Annie celebrated student success with their school poetry night; Louise celebrated success with her students leading school-wide poetry workshops.

These exchanges also contained evidence of classroom teacher action research and detailed responses from students on teacher-initiated student surveys and writings. Much could be made of the professional learning and relationship building that occurred between the teachers in this exchange. Dixie Goswami and others have described teachers' membership in this blended learning environment as developmental, with changes in teachers' theories and practices reflected in the nature of collaborative BreadNet exchanges and in the roles teachers and students play in conversations and inquiries. My study suggests intensive case studies of teachers with different backgrounds, beliefs, and in different settings would provide us with basic understandings about teachers' who are part of this kind of "participatory culture."

Another finding I made during the study which deserves further research is the benefit of electronic archives for teacher researchers. When I began discussing my research proposal with my dissertation chair, I showed him a two-inch notebook with a printout of the transcript of the exchange. But the hard-copy of the exchange was not the easiest artifact to negotiate. I found it much easier to use the online version of the exchange, which was still saved on BreadNet, even though the last postings between these two classrooms occurred on May 22, 2003. Annie and Louise gave me permission the first year of the exchange to be an outside observer of their exchange. Pass the Poetry remained on my BreadNet desktop, and I eventually filed it away in a folder I named "Exchange Archives." When I began researching this exchange, I went back into my file and found everything that was posted during the four years of the exchange. Each year had its own folder, and within each year's folder was the subfolder with their teacher-talk.

While I did not have access to their original emails that occurred between Louise and Annie when they were planning the exchange, Annie was able to find them in her personal archives on BreadNet and forwarded them to me to use in my research. She and Louise also forwarded to me the reports they wrote at the end of the first exchange year which they had posted to BreadNet as part of their fellowship requirements.

With a few clicks of my mouse, I was able to obtain hundreds of pages of information on the exchange which were dated and organized in the order they were originally posted by the teachers involved in the exchange. With an electronic archive, nothing is “lost” and can theoretically be saved and organized in perpetuity. Twenty years from now, if the network is still in existence, I could return to the original postings of any of my electronic exchanges.

Online learning communities exist in schools today. Comparisons can be made between this study and what teachers currently do using software like WebCT or Blackboard, and less formal, teacher-created online learning communities. Are students as motivated in these online environments as the students in Annie and Louise’s classes were? How long do students need to be involved in an online exchange within these learning communities for relationships to develop? Is it enough for students to communicate online, or do they need any face-to-face interactions to develop community? Do cohorts, or students who are involved in multiple learning experiences together, communicate more effectively in an online learning environment than students who have no prior affiliation or connection? Can more than one classroom interact effectively through these other online environments, and can the instructors plan effectively and meaningfully without a common learning and planning component?

Finally, when the Pass the Poetry Electronic Exchange was conducted, Web 2.0 technologies and social networking sites were not in existence. Students didn't know about MySpace, Facebook, blogs, or wikis. In actuality, the exchange used Old Media in contrast to the New Media applications in use today. I would like to see if the relationship building that occurred within this exchange can be replicated within other 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies, specifically those of blogs and wikis. Can electronic exchanges be duplicated in a similar fashion on these two forms of New Media? Both of these technologies are collaborative in nature and lend themselves well to the constructivist classroom. Perhaps they, too, offer opportunities for students to appropriate knowledge of certain subjects and concepts through a collaborative technological environment.

Earlier this year, the Pew Internet and American Life Project along with the College Board and the National Commission on Writing released a report that focused on teen writing and technology (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, & Macgill, 2008). One of the questions they sought to answer involved the role of technologies, including Web 2.0 technologies, in a student's writing process. My study offers some context to their quantitative and qualitative findings in this report. They found that Internet use was high among all teens at 94%, with the lowest use (86%) for teens from families with an annual household income of less than \$30,000 (2008, p. 4). I am not surprised that teens are connecting. While the reasons teens access the Internet are varied, as indicated by the report, the fact that almost all teens do use the Internet indicates that technologies accessed via the Internet that encourage student writing should be studied. According to the report, there is a "strong association between writing and technology platforms that

help teens share their thoughts with the world such as blogs and social networking sites” (p. 34). Teens who write on social networking sites write for personal reasons several times a week while “Nearly one-quarter of teen bloggers (23%) write outside of school just about every day” (p. 34-35). Students who frequently access Web 2.0 technologies on their own time write more. The study did not indicate if the writing is improved, but it did indicate that teens who are using those particular technologies “are among the strongest teen proponents of the importance of writing,” and that “65% of teen bloggers feel that writing is ‘essential’ to later success in life” (p. 35).

What does this mean for the future of electronic exchanges? Exchanges are still conducted on BreadNet in a similar manner to what happened in PTP almost ten years ago. Can teachers using this Old Media branch into the world of New Media and apply what has been learned through this older technology and writing to positively affect the student writing process?

Relationships weighed heavily in the success of the Pass the Poetry exchange. Social networking technologies are built around relationships as well. Taking what was learned through this study about the ecology of the exchange, which is a basic form of social networking, and applying it to newer Web 2.0 (and eventually 3.0) technologies can move us toward a more thoughtful use of social networking in the secondary classroom. The Pew report also found that relationships were an integral part of teens and social networking:

Most teens are driven to particular platforms, communities or technologies by the underlying personal relationships that exist in that space and the content these relationships generate. In fact, teens who experience a lack

of social connection or acceptance when doing social writing often choose to limit their activity. (p. 63).

The relationships that teens develop online that draw them to these communities of social discourse lead to opportunities for constructivist learning. Cazden (2001) reminded us that Vygotsky's "internalization" and Bakhtin's (and Leont'ev's) "appropriation" applied to the mental work behind the discourse in participatory technologies (p. 77). She emphasized, "What can be internalized, or appropriated, from other people still requires significant mental work on the part of the learner," which is "constructivism" (p. 77).

The discourse that occurs through the use of participatory technologies provides an opportunity for teens to develop their own "internally persuasive discourse" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345). Teens are on the threshold of moving from the "authoritative discourse" of parents and school to their own "internally persuasive discourse"; the opportunity to have conversations with other teens and adults online offers a new discourse community:

In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts." (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345-346)

Teens want to make the world their own. Through the discourse that occurs in the online interaction between peers and adults via Old Media such as an electronic exchange or

New Media such as blogs, wikis, and social networking sites, teens use writing to appropriate their own meaning about our world. This ecological component, online discourse, is important to understanding the influence of New Media on teen writing and how educators can appropriate it and use it to our advantage to improve writing instruction today.

Although I drew on established research methodologies, data collection and analyses were influenced by new technologies and data availability. Being able to conduct interviews and ask questions online (on BreadNet) in fact, changed the way I was able to gather information. Access to archival sources, including unedited transcripts of students', teachers', and guests' online writing was in sharp contrast to traditional ways of gathering data. In a traditional case study, researchers would have physically traveled to their field of study, spent several weeks or even months taking field notes of student interactions and taping conversations for transcription, interviewed participants face-to-face, and perhaps analyzed the individual pieces of writing at the time they were written by the students involved in the exchange study. I was able to conduct my research asynchronously, as much as nine years after the initial electronic conversations occurred. My field was an electronic environment which I did not have to inhabit synchronously to investigate, gather, and analyze data to answer my research questions about this case. At this point, the methodologies of studying digital teaching and learning environments, which are rapidly changing, have implications for individual researchers and the field.

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## APPENDIX A

## TEACHER-PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What is the size (student population) of the school where you conducted the electronic exchange? Would you classify it as rural, urban, suburban? What was the range of socio-economic levels of students who participated in the electronic exchange? What were some of the ethnic backgrounds of the students who participated in the exchange?
2. What prior training did you have in electronic exchanges? How many electronic exchanges had you organized and carried out prior to this particular exchange?
3. How did you develop the idea for this electronic exchange?
4. Why did you choose poetry as the focus for the electronic exchange?
5. Prior to the exchange, what competency for poetry did you have as a learner? As a teacher?
6. Did your students have access to technology/computers outside of school? What access to technology did you and your students have at your school? Did your students have any prior training in the use of computers? Explain.
7. Prior to the exchange, what educational experiences did your students already have with poetry?
8. What overall goal(s) for student learning did you have in mind when you planned this electronic exchange?
9. How did the exchange meet, fall short of, or go beyond that/those goal(s)?
10. How did you assess the writing students completed for the exchange? Did you grade student writing that was completed for the exchange?

11. What obstacles/challenges did you face prior to or during the exchange in regards to technology?
12. What obstacles/challenges did you face prior to and during the exchange in regards to student participation?
13. Can you explain the initial response of your students when you shared your ideas about the electronic exchange with them?
14. Was student reaction based on the genre you would be studying during the exchange or on the technological aspect of the exchange?
15. Can you explain how you planned the exchange as part of the English curriculum in your classroom? Did you pre-plan a sequence of reading and writing activities in which students would be engaged during the exchange? Did you consciously build in extra support for students writing for the first time in the poetry genre?
16. How did adults outside of your classroom become involved online in the exchange?
17. How did your students initially respond to the outside adult participants in the exchange?
18. Did all of your students participate from the beginning to the end of the exchange? If not, why did they not participate?
19. Do you think the electronic exchange affected the writing of your students?
20. If you could choose a student who made the biggest gains in writing during this exchange, whom would you choose? What evidence would you use to support your opinion?

21. If you could choose a student who did not make any “gains” as a writer during this exchange, whom would it be? Why do you think this student did not make any “gains”? What evidence would you use to support this opinion?
22. Is there anything I did not ask about that you would like to share with me about this particular electronic exchange and/or those involved in the exchange?

## APPENDIX B

## ONLINE CORRESPONDENT/POET INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. When did you begin writing poetry to publish/share with others?
2. What prior training did you have in electronic exchanges prior to the Pass the Poetry exchange in 1999-2000? In how many electronic exchanges had you participated directly with students in the role of a poet prior to this exchange?
3. How did you become involved as the outside expert in this particular electronic exchange?
4. How would you define your role in the exchange?
5. Did you collaborate with the teachers on what students would read and write about during the exchange?
6. How did you choose your recommendations for texts to use in the exchange?
7. What goal(s) did you establish for yourself and/or the students for this exchange?
8. How did the exchange meet, fall short of, or go beyond that/those goal(s)?
9. How did your interactions with students in the exchange differ from the interactions of student-to-student or teacher-to-student?
10. What obstacles/challenges did you face prior to and during the exchange in regards to student participation?
11. Can you explain the initial response of the students when you shared your ideas/insights about their writing?
12. Did you notice a change in student writing over the course of the exchange? If so, how would you describe the change that occurred? To what would you attribute this change?



13. If you could choose a student who made the biggest gains in writing during this exchange, whom would you choose? What evidence would you use to support your opinion?
14. If you could choose a student who did not make any “gains” as a writer during this exchange, whom would it be? Why do you think this student did not make any “gains”? What evidence would you use to support this opinion?
15. Is there anything I did not ask about that you would like to share with me about this particular electronic exchange and/or those involved in the exchange?

## APPENDIX C

## STUDENT-PARTICIPANT SURVEY PROTOCOL

Instructions: Please answer the following questions which are based on your personal experiences with the Pass the Poetry electronic exchange during the 1999-2000 school year.

1. Please think back to your time as a student in high school or earlier. Please describe the experiences you had with poetry (reading it or writing it) prior to your participation in the Pass the Poetry exchange.
2. Before the Pass the Poetry exchange, what was your experience with technology either at home or school?
3. What was your initial response when your teacher explained how your class would be participating in an electronic exchange?
4. How would you characterize your level of participation during the exchange?

(Check all that may apply.)

I was a poetry-junky who experimented with writing my own poetry outside of the classroom and began to read poetry for my own enjoyment as a result of my participation.

I was a reluctant writer who only participated because my teacher insisted.

I was a technology-buff who was attracted to and participated in the exchange because I could use computers in class.

I was an online social butterfly who enjoyed writing to and getting responses from students in another classroom across the country.

None of the above

5. Please look back at your response to the previous question. Why do you feel that characterization applies to your participation in the exchange?
6. How did the electronic exchange affect your writing?
7. How did the electronic exchange affect your opinion on poetry?
8. Whose responses—the online poet, your exchange partner, or your classroom teacher—helped shape your writing and/or understanding of poetry? Why?
9. Is there anything I did not ask about that you would like to share with me about this particular electronic exchange and/or those involved in the exchange?

## APPENDIX D

## STUDENT CONSENT FORM

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

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**DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, FOUNDATIONS, AND READING**

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**INFORMED CONSENT FOR STUDENT-PARTICIPANTS**

1. Research will be conducted by Julie H. Rucker, a current graduate student at Georgia Southern University, pursuing an Ed.D. in Curriculum Studies with an emphasis in literacy. This research is for her dissertation project.
2. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to examine secondary students' writing in an electronic environment and evaluate the impact of peer collaboration within this electronic environment. The researcher will also determine if students' writing changes over the course of an electronic exchange by measuring change in the amount of writing a student does in a one-year exchange as well as a change in the complexity of writing students produce over that same time period.
3. Procedures to be followed: Student-participants will not interact verbally with the researcher but will be asked to complete a short survey with open-ended questions about the electronic exchange. The student-participants will give their informed consent to allow their writing in the first year of the Pass the Poetry Exchange to be evaluated for the purpose of the study.
4. Discomforts and Risks: Minimal risk is involved in this project. There is the potential for embarrassment and discomfort on the part of the student-subjects because of the personal nature of some of the writing exchanged between student-subjects over the course of the Pass the Poetry exchange. There is also the potential for mental or social discomfort when allowing an unknown person to analyze writing written for a specific audience which does not include the researcher.
5. Benefits:
  - a. The benefits to participants include knowledge that the evaluation of their writing in this project may help teachers understand how to better help future students make connections to texts, collaborate with peers, and improve the complexity and fluency of their writing.

b. The benefits to society include the positive impact writing in an electronic writing communities can have not just within secondary English classrooms but in classrooms at any level and across the curriculum.

6. Duration/Time: The research will be conducted over a three month time frame.
7. Statement of Confidentiality: The names of all research participants will be held in the strictest of confidence. For the purpose of clarity in writing about the exchange, the researcher will create names for project participants that are in no way traceable to the project participants. The researcher will not identify the names or specific locations of the schools involved in the exchange. Only demographics of the schools will be included in the project, and the schools themselves will be identified as “Alaska High School” and “Colorado High School.”
8. Right to Ask Questions: Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above or the researcher’s faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-681-0843.
9. Compensation: Participants will not incur any expenses related to their participation in this research project. There will also be no compensation provided for participation in the research project.
10. Voluntary Participation: Subjects are not required to participate in this research; they may end their participation at any time by telling the researcher; they do not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer. They may also ask to review research directly related to them at any point during the study.
11. Penalty: There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in this study. You may decide at any time that you do not want to participate further and may withdraw from the project without penalty or retribution.
12. You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Title of Project:           Transaction, Interaction, and Response: Evaluating Secondary Students’ Writing in an Electronic Exchange

Principal Investigator: Julie H. Rucker  
P.O. Box 181  
Tifton, GA 31794  
(229) 388-2238  
jrucker8@georgiasouthern.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Michael T. Moore  
Georgia Southern University  
Department of Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading  
P.O. Box 8144  
Statesboro, GA 30460  
(912) 681-0211  
mmoore@georgiasouthern.edu

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature Date \_\_\_\_\_

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

## TEACHER/ONLINE CORRESPONDENT CONSENT FORM

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

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**DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, FOUNDATIONS, AND READING**

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**INFORMED CONSENT FOR TEACHER/POET-PARTICIPANTS**

1. Research will be conducted by Julie H. Rucker, a current graduate student at Georgia Southern University, pursuing an Ed.D. in Curriculum Studies with an emphasis in literacy. This research is for her dissertation project.
2. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to examine secondary students' writing in an electronic environment and evaluate the impact of peer collaboration within this electronic environment. The researcher will also determine if students' writing changes over the course of an exchange by measuring change in the amount of writing a student does in an exchange over a period of one year as well as a change in the complexity of sentences students write over that same time period.
3. Procedures to be followed: Educator-subjects will participate in an interview with the researcher. The researcher will also analyze the exchange writing/interactions between educator-subjects involved in the exchange to represent the complexity of an exchange.
4. Discomforts and Risks: Minimal risk is involved in this project. There is the potential for embarrassment and discomfort on the part of the educator-subjects because of the personal nature of some of the writing exchanged between educator-subjects over the course of the Pass the Poetry exchange. There is also the potential for mental or social discomfort when discussing with the researcher the educator-subject's perceptions in the creation and outcome of the exchange as well as the educator-subjects' opinions of student work created over the course of the exchange.
5. Benefits:
  - a. The benefits to participants include insight into how their students made connections to common texts studied in their classrooms as revealed through their writing, how those connections influenced peer collaboration and meaning-making that occurred through that collaboration, and how their students improved their writing fluency and complexity over the course of the exchange.

- b. The benefits to society include the positive impact writing in an electronic writing communities can have not just within secondary English classrooms but in classrooms at any level and across the curriculum.
6. Duration/Time: The research will be conducted over a three month time frame.
  7. Statement of Confidentiality: The names of all research participants will be held in the strictest of confidence. For the purpose of clarity in writing about the exchange, the researcher will create names for project participants that are in no way traceable to the project participants. The researcher will not identify the name or location of the schools involved in the exchange. Only demographics of the schools will be included in the project, and the schools themselves will be identified as “Alaska High School” and “Colorado High School.”
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  11. Penalty: There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in this study. You may decide at any time that you do not want to participate further and may withdraw from the project without penalty or retribution.
  12. You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Title of Project:           Transaction, Interaction, and Response: Evaluating Secondary Students’ Writing in an Electronic Exchange



Principal Investigator: Julie H. Rucker  
707 E. 42<sup>nd</sup> St. Tifton, GA 31794  
(229) 388-2238  
jrucker8@georgiasouthern.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Michael T. Moore, Professor  
Georgia Southern University  
P.O. Box 8144  
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(912) 681-0211  
mmoore@georgiasouthern.edu

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date