WRITING ON THE WEB:
ONLINE TECHNOLOGY AND THE WRITERS' WORKSHOP
IN THE JUNIOR SECONDARY CLASSROOM

BY

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Abstract

Schools are places where students are required to perform writing acts and submit written products. A writers' workshop (WW) is one method used in schools to encourage students to write. Most would include the peer conference, the time for a student to talk about her/his writing, face-to-face, in various stages, one to one or in small groups of three to four peers. Graves (1983, 1985, 1991, 1995, 1996), Calkins (1986), and Atwell (1987) gave encouraging descriptions of their WW classrooms. Others have illuminated some of the challenges (DiPardo and Freedman, 1998; Lensmire, 1992, 1994; Morse, 1994; Rouse, 1988; Zemelman and Daniels, 1988). In particular, implementation of the peer conference has been problematic. Issues of teacher control are forefront and reinforced by the need to maintain a safe and productive classroom environment. Unlike the traditional teacher-talk dominated classroom, the peer conference creates less closely supervised opportunities for students to speak. In this restructured learning environment, the immediate peer culture becomes an important concern. The teacher cannot be sure that the classroom is a safe place for every student to share her/his work with peers (Lensmire, 1992).

Despite these realities, constructivist theory stresses the importance of context and encourages active participation of students through talk and writing (Schaafsma, 1996; Doolittle, 1999; Schallert, Dodson, Benton, Reed, Amador, Lissi, Coward & Fleeman, 1999). Online technology opens a new range of alternatives, and several features seem applicable to the problem of safety in the peer conference. Tornow (1997) and Bonk, Malikowski, Angeli, and Supplee (1998) described the use of the online conference in a university setting. These authors defended the benefits of learning in a social context. Bonk et. al. (1998) saw web-based conferencing as “an electronic apprenticeship,” an application of Vygotsky’s negotiation of meaning within students’ zone of proximal development.

Three of Bakhtin’s (1981) key perceptions are embodied in the WW: Through writing, the individual is able to develop a dialogic awareness of his/her own place in the community (Brandist, 1997; Lensmire, 1994). Student stories are utterances in context, socio-linguistic narratives with an intertextual nature (Schallert et. al., 1999). However, with the reduction of autocratic control, the peer conference, like Bakhtin’s carnival, has the potential to open the darker
underbelly of the adolescent nature, and further serves as a caution to maintain a safe classroom environment.

As researcher, I had a dual role as the teacher of the classroom under study. My goals were: (1) to create an online learning environment for the peer conference; (2) to peruse the peer responses to monitor class climate; (3) to assess the value of the peer conference; (4) to obtain students' evaluations of the online conference experience; and (5) to assess the value of the peer conference as indicated by revisions made between the draft and final copy of one piece of narrative writing.

In collaboration with the project leader at the university computer center, we adapted a WebCT site to meet our purposes. WebCT is a multi-dimensional communication tool developed at the University of British Columbia. A course construction template within this technology accommodated all of the functions necessary to establish the online peer conference.

The main findings of this study were: (1) WebCT provided an appropriate online learning environment for the peer conference. In both the survey and class meeting data students confirmed that the online conference was a valuable way to construct meaning. One student commented, the assignment “gave us a thought process, not just a writing one.” (2) Although one student received negative response to his story, for the vast majority of peer responses, safe environment was not a concern. However, the quality of peer responses was raised as an issue. (3) On the survey, of 22 participants, 17 students somewhat or strongly agreed that they would recommend the online conference for other students. At the last class meeting, of 18 participants present, 16 voted yes, they would like to do this project again. (4) On the survey, 18 somewhat or strongly agreed that they liked anonymous response. During class meeting discussion, students favored the use of a code name and suggested possible improvements: numbers versus names, assigned names, number only, no name and no number. Anonymous response allowed response to the writing and not to the writer, or the writer’s place in the social hierarchy. (5) The concern for improved quality of peer response was reinforced as I found evidence of insufficient revision made between the draft and final copies of these narratives.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Writing is a product. Writing is a process.
Writing is solitary. Writing is communal.
Writing is art. Writing is diligence.

Not opposite ends of a continuum, writing is all of the above. Writing is one way human beings experience and express their existence. Writing is communication.

Schools are places where students are required to perform writing acts and submit written products. The dimensions, complexity and relevance of the act of writing deserves and has received much attention in the literature of education. In the past six decades, writing has been recognized as both product and process, both solitary and communal. In practice and in the current literature, the communal process of writing has been emphasized as interactive learning. As a teacher of writing, I find that balance among alternatives is a more comfortable position. First, I try to respect the writer’s need for solitude and self-determination of process. Then I try to create opportunities for interaction with both myself and peers to feed the process and encourage dialogue with a goal of improving the final product.

A writers’ workshop model is one method that has been developed to teach writing in schools. A generic definition of the writers’ workshop (WW) would be a classroom where students write and talk about their writing and the process of writing with peers and teacher. The purpose of the talk is to help students revise and edit their own work, to make meaning for themselves and to share that meaning with others. The WW builds on the traditional writing process of draft, revise, proofread and publish. A successful WW would include recurrent interactions that encourage discussion. The peer conference is the time given to a student to talk to others face-to-face about his/her writing; they may meet one to one or in small groups of three to four. In a peer conference,
students discuss writing in various stages. Students may brainstorm ideas for a story, develop story elements, or proofread before final publication. Graves (1983, 1985, 1991, 1995), Calkins (1986), and Atwell (1987) give vivid and encouraging, positive descriptions of their WW classrooms. They describe classrooms that emphasized the importance of daily writing, student choice, and publication of student writing. Other examinations have illuminated some of the challenges faced by teachers in WW classrooms (DiPardo & Freedman, 1998; Lensmire, 1992, 1994; Brunjes, 1993; Morse, 1994; Rouse, 1988; Zemelman & Daniels, 1988). In particular, implementation of the peer conference has been described as problematic. Issues of teacher control and classroom management are forefront, and reinforced by the need to maintain a safe and productive classroom environment. The peer conference calls for a restructuring of the traditional scenario of teacher-dominated classroom talk, and allows students the freedom to speak in less supervised circumstances. When students are involved in peer conference, this freedom is put into action. The teacher cannot be sure what will be said in a peer conference or that every student and every student’s work will be treated with respect. The teacher cannot be sure that the environment will remain safe for all students. Compounding this risk, neither research nor experience has demonstrated that an improved product will result from the peer conference.

Despite these realities, I believe that the importance of talk to writing as a vehicle to “make meaning” outweighs the challenges. The WW provides a structure that allows students to experience opportunities to write, to talk and to make meaning. This is important above and beyond a focus on the product of writing. Every year, every semester, as a teacher, I am provided with a another chance to create a WW environment. Each time I try, I hope that it will be a positive experience that will allow students to make meaning for themselves and with others. The recursive nature of the secondary school schedule allows for experimentation and refinement from year to year, semester to semester. Each successive class adds a new piece of information and offers a new perspective.

The addition of online technology to the WW, also known as computer-mediated communication (CMC), may be useful in reducing some of the particular difficulties that accompany the peer conference. Online technology allows the teacher to monitor a written record to what students “say” in peer conference. Online technology also provides a convenient method to
store and recall the draft(s) and final copy of the written work. To improve my ability to maintain
and monitor a safe environment, the online alternative to the face-to-face peer conference offers an
archival record of what is said. While verbal communications are spontaneous and cannot be
retrieved, asynchronous, text-based discourse can be edited before it is released.

For the student, online technology may offer the safety of anonymity. As a writer,
anonymity allows the student to wear a mask, to hide his/her identity behind a "code name." For
the insecure adolescent, a code name may allow the student to explore characters and situations that
could be potentially embarrassing if publicly proclaimed. The anonymous response encourages an
honest response. The peer responder is less constrained by bounds of loyalty or prejudice.
Anonymity offers both the writer and the reader an expanded freedom of expression.

I do not suggest that the online conference should be a replacement for the face-to-face peer
conference. Rather, I see online technology as an addition to my existing practices in the WW
classroom. The specific advantage of online technology is the archival record of the student
dialogue as well as the before and after drafts. My goal is to supplement current practices without
subtracting what already works; my purpose is to improve the peer conference by adding online
technology.

The following chapters will discuss the key elements of the WW and review the literature
that describes the WW as an opportunity for students to socially construct meaning. I will briefly
outline the rapid growth of online technology and how I selected the specific technology used in
this study. This qualitative study extends and modifies the use of the online conference as described
by Tornow (1997), and Bonk, Malikowski, Angeli, and Supplee (1998), although both of these were
studies conducted with university students. These researchers valued the capacity of the online
environment to produce an archival record and physical evidence of time on task and task
completion. Tornow, in particular, discussed the value of the anonymous response, as anonymity
allows a response to the writing, not the writer. Both studies reported positive student attitudes
towards the use of online technology.

My study was situated in a junior secondary school, and employed online technology. In
this study, I examined the content of peer response and the use of peer response in the revision of a
piece of writing. I used WebCT as the online vehicle to provide a written record of the peer
responses and to allow for anonymity to further protect both the author and respondent. The addition of online technology to the peer conference generated physical evidence that students did use the time provided to talk about writing, and, furthermore, I was able to monitor this record to ensure that the students’ comments were respectful and appropriate. I will discuss the peer comments, the comparison of story drafts before and after the online conference, and what evidence in the final copy indicated about peer influence. Using comments gathered in a survey and two class discussions, I also will discuss participants’ opinions about the use of online technology to peer conference and possible benefits to their writing.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

A word is a microcosm of human consciousness

Practice preceded theory both in personal and professional experience. First, I wrote; then, I wrote with students. Only later did I discover that education theory supported beliefs I had developed from these experiences. As a writer, dialogue with an audience both encourages and inspires me. As a teacher, I have observed that students benefit when they get to actively participate in their own learning. When students talk -- to each other, with the teacher, or in group discussion, a classroom can come to life. I have concluded that talk influences learning, and talk about writing tasks benefits writers. My problem has been how to create an opportunity for students to talk about writing. A Writers’ Workshop (WW) is a way of structuring classroom instruction in the writing process. A WW encourages students to choose their own topics and encourages teachers to use the peer conference to support student writing (Gere, 1987; Lensmire, 1992, 1994; Strech, 1995; Brunjes, 1993). In the peer conference, students are asked to review and/or edit the work of fellow students; they detect, diagnose, and solve writing problems (van der Geest & Remmers, 1994). However, in the “hormonal environment” of the junior secondary classroom, experience with the peer conference has proved that implementation is problematic.

The search for an answer to the problem of the peer conference led me to investigate the possibilities that technology might offer. Use of the computer in the classroom has introduced an intoxicating array of opportunities. Word processing has long been accepted in the writing classroom. A current direction has been online communication, and in this context, the idea of an online peer conference was developed.

Rationale
Through a review of the pertinent literature, I will place this study within the context of theoretical perspective and practical application. I will discuss social constructivist theory and the
relevance of the work of Vygotsky and Bakhtin. With respect to practical application, I will describe the key elements of the WW; specifically ownership, structure and the peer conference.

The use of online technology exploded in the late 1990s. As a consequence, this summary will be but a small sampling of available literature. Although neither the peer conference nor the online conference are original topics for study, most previous research has been situated in elementary and middle school classrooms, or in the world of the post-secondary education and business. Although a middle school may incorporate grade 8 and sometimes grade 9 students, the junior secondary population that includes the year(s) in preparation for senior secondary are seldom specified.

Experience

Writing has been an integral part of my personal history, documented in diaries and journals. My preference has been to express myself in decades of unpublished poems and narratives. I remember upgrading from pencil to pen, manual to electric and finally self-correcting typewriter. I remember when I thought I would never own a computer; I have owned several since. Personal interest has led me to study of writing and audience response to writing. A correspondence course in education, Special Topics: Writing, offered by Carolyn Manchur (1994) through Simon Fraser University, was my first introduction to the internet, using Eudora to connect to my peers to share writing and practice reader response (Elbow, 1981).

Writing is an essential part of the English curriculum. The Province of British Columbia Ministry of Education has established an Integrated Resource Package (IRP) for each subject and grade level. For English 10, the IRP recommends that students be exposed to a “wide variety of literary and informational communications”. This information is available online at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irla810/elacurr.htm. For English 10, the focus seems to be descriptive writing. In particular, students should be able to “describe how mood and tone affect the drama of a story, play or film.”

I have been a teacher for more than eighteen years, and an English teacher for the last twelve. WW strategies allow me to share my passion about writing with students. My own enthusiasm is often strained by the difficulties I have encountered in attempts to implement a WW environment. The key concern is a classroom management issue. When a teacher gives up the
center stage and total control, students are allowed the freedom to select the venue for their learning experience. Even within the structured guidelines of an orderly classroom, an educational activity is not always a student's first choice. When given time to talk about writing, not all talk was on task. Sadly, not only would some talk not be helpful, sometimes what one student would say to another would be hurtful. The idea to create online conference to increase peer “talk” was one possible solution to the problems of eliciting on-task and appropriate talk.

Theory

Theorists in such divergent schools of thought as behavioral psychology and social construction of knowledge have argued that students need to talk to learn and students need to talk to write. Both schools have focused on the interaction of thought, speech and writing.

Behavioral psychology. The behavioral study of psychology was based on the theories of J. B. Watson (1878-1958) and B. F. Skinner (1904- ) and focused on performance and empirical observation (Bohannon, 1993). Zoellner (1969, January) opened the doors to controversy, and initiated a series of rebuttals documented in College English over the next several months, because he identified writing as a social event. He used a behavioral model to argue for a “talk-write” pedagogy. As an instructor of college level English composition, he observed that students could say what they were unable to write. Using the vocabulary of operant conditioning, stimulus-response-reinforcement, Zoellner argued for the study of external behavior. The heart of the talk-write pedagogy was the principle of successive approximations where “the student is verbally reinforced for increasingly efficacious scribal activity” (p. 225). Viewed as a behavioral action, language could be studied in response to stimulation provided by other speakers. To summarize, Zoellner observed that students could speak what they could not write, and he proposed that student talk can improve student writing.

In the four decades since, writers have revisited Zoellner’s (1969) talk-write pedagogy. Miller and Rinderer (1980) recognized the resemblance between the Zoellner’s talk-write model and a theatre performance. They commented, "The notion of rehearsal suggests preparation over time" (p. 3). The rehearsal analogy recognizes that an audience is implicit. A rehearsal is preparation to perform before an audience. For the writer, a peer response allows the writer to rehearse before the final product is presented. Hatch (1991) argued that teachers and researchers
must study "writing as a signifying act," and suggested Zoellner's process model allows the teacher to deal with observable behavior. Hatch observed that Zoellner's concern for behavior is similar to work in linguistics and literary theory; "the teacher or researcher can only observe language, sign systems, and acts of signification" (p. 9).

Signification was integral to the work of Russian researcher, Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896 - 1917). Vygotsky (1962, 1978) identified language as a sign system that children use to learn culturally appropriate communication. Vygotsky argued that oral language develops thought, and learning is interactive. Vygotsky, among others, gave a theoretical basis for creating classroom situations that will offer a wide range of opportunities for language activity and social interaction (Hoel, 1997). Vygotsky, however, went beyond the reinforcement paradigm and emphasis on external observable behavior asserted by the behaviorists to propose the notion of social construction of meaning.

Social Construct Theory. Social construct theorists stress the importance of social context; the construction and reconstruction of ideas relies on collaboration and shared meaning. This perspective on language and learning recognizes language as a social construct, assumes that discourse is socially constructed within particular communities, and encourages active participation through talk and writing (Schaafsma, 1996). Although Vygotsky worked in the early part of the twentieth century, the writings of this Russian psychologist only came to the attention of North American researchers several decades later in the 1962 and 1978 translations. Vygotsky recognized the importance of social interaction, and suggested the close relationship between talk and writing. He contended that language is reconstructed in a mental process to organize individual thought. The individual moves from the social level to internal level; sign operations are transformed from interpersonal processes into intrapersonal ones (Geekie, 1993). The work of Bakhtin (1981) has influenced the view of writing as a didactic process, and furthers recognition that written language is communication (Mulvaney, 1993; van der Geest & Remmers, 1994; Hoel, 1997; Schallert, Dodson, Benton, Reed, Amador, Lissi, Coward & Fleeman, 1999). These socio-cultural concepts have underscored the need to examine the relationship of student talk to student learning and the importance of talk in the classroom, in learning process.
Social Construction of Meaning

The essential core of constructivism is that learners actively construct their own knowledge and meaning from their experiences (Doolittle, 1999; Schallert et. al., 1999). The key to a WW is the social construction of meaning. The social construction of meaning can be defined as the intellectual product that is the result of collaboration among individuals (Schallert et. al., 1999). Wells (1986) discussed Vygotsky (1962) to argue that the writing conference is a vehicle for the reader to inquire about the author’s intentions and to negotiate meaning. The construction of knowledge occurs through interaction of peers or small groups of students. This interaction is an effective tool for helping students bridge the gap between speaking and writing. As early as 1981, Emig’s research on how writers write pioneered think-aloud strategies and documented case studies with grade 12 students (Dyson & Freedman, 1991). When students are in small groups, they participate; they risk exploring new ideas; they learn from one another (Reid, 1986).

Wells (1986) made specific suggestions for the writing conference: First, assume the writer has something important to say. Then, be sure you have understood the writer’s intended meaning; and question and make suggestions based on the spoken intentions. Finally, in reply, confirm or extend the understood meaning, and reply in terms the writer can understand. Wells recognized that children are active meaning makers and the best way adults can help them to learn is to give them evidence, guidance, and encouragement. Each individual constructs one’s own meaning, and that meaning is built on the interactions each one had and has with others.

A recurrent theme in the literature on language and learning is that learners actively seek meaning. Pinnell (1987) observed, “Children are not doomed to imitate; they make their own meanings. They are more than passive responders; they actively participate and think” (p. 353). Peer response makes language the central feature of thinking and knowing.

Gere (1987) surveyed a long history of writing groups, the earliest organized at Harvard in 1719, and stressed the similarities she discovered. She comments, “Perhaps the most significant commonality among writing groups appears in what they contribute to our understanding of what it means to write. Specifically, writing groups highlight the social dimension of writing” (p. 3). Based on her observations, Gere determined that writing groups often focus on creating meaning through dialogue; and this dialogue encourages writers to “re-vision” and create substantial improvements. Gere put peer response at the center of the writing group because it makes language the central
As mentioned above, Vygotsky studied the social context of language acquisition. A crucial element in Vygotsky's thinking is that development is mediated by tools and signs. Vygotsky (1962) argued that for the young child, language is at first only a tool for social interaction. The child will recognize that language has a structure and language plays role in the social environment. Cultural values are represented in the sign system that has evolved to regulate and maintain order. Ordered systems of linguistic signs mediate the ways in which people behave in particular social settings (Dyson & Freedman, 1991; Hoel, 1997). Vygotsky (1962) argued, "Not only may cognitive or social factors modify language acquisition, but language acquisition will in turn modify the development of cognitive and social skills" (p. 260). This social interaction approach to the development of language recognizes the fusion of nature and nurture in child development.

Zone of proximal development. Vygotsky (1978) argued that human beings were innately social, and he stressed the role of the care giver. He defined the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) as follows:

It is the distance between the actual problem solving level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (p. 86).

Wertsch (1985) identified the ZPD as the area between a student's unassisted performance and a student's performance with outside support. The ZPD is difference between what the child can do acting alone and what he/she can do when acting with the guidance of a more advanced partner. Negotiation of meaning occurs within a student's ZPD. Interaction is the key; talk is the medium for that interaction. Hoel (1997) explained the process that takes place in the ZPD as the conversion from the social to the individual, "or from the intermental to the intramental," to "learn appropriate
cultural knowledge through a dialectic relationship with more experienced members in their society” (p. 6). Thinking in partnership goes beyond what one individual could do alone (Mulvaney, 1993; Schallert et. al., 1999). The construction of knowledge occurs when individuals enhance their personal experience through communication with others.

Appropriation. A second concept, appropriation is the notion that cognition occurs based upon prior knowledge developed in relationship with a social agent or mentor (Vygotsky, 1962). Social interaction is at the core of learning and imitation plays an important part in that process. Vygotsky (1978) was specific: “While imitating their elders in culturally patterned activities, children generate opportunities for intellectual development” (p 129). Imitation as a source of learning is closely related to scaffolding, a concept associated with the 1976 work of Jerome Bruner (Hoel, 1997, p. 6). In the context of education, scaffolding is often used to describe the support a student receives from the teacher or more capable peer.

Wertsch (1979) elaborated that appropriation occurred in four stages. First, an individual will appropriate or take on skills and thoughts valued by another person. Second, the individual will lack understanding of the task but performance is accomplished with the guidance of a mentor. Third, the individual will take over the responsibility for the task but with adult help. Finally, the individual is able to perform the task without adult intervention. In other words, the construction of knowledge occurs when individuals enhance their personal knowledge through the presence of others. In this way, the participating mentor challenges the student and helps the student by scaffolding new knowledge onto prior knowledge.

Wells (1990) connected Vygotsky’s theories:

Learning through apprenticeship is, in fact, a universal phenomenon and is the normal mode through which most critical practices are acquired. ... it is what Vygotsky (1978) had in mind in his well-known exposition of “learning in the zone of proximal development.” In his view, all cultural knowledge, and indeed the higher mental processed themselves, are acquired through social interaction as, in the course of shared participation in a joint activity, the more mature member of the culture, while enacting the total
process, draws the novice into participation and gradually allows him or her to take over more and more of the task, as he or she shows the ability to do so (p. 380).

Evolving from demonstration to hands-on performance, an individual gradually appropriates the relevant behavior to the social situation.

**Bakhtin**

Four main ideas expressed by Bakhtin (1981) are particularly related to the study of student writing: First, the concept of *dialogic* makes language a social, cultural and historical phenomenon. Humans are a social beings in search of meaning. Through dialogue, an individual gains awareness of her/his own place in the community, within the whole (Brandist, 1997). Consciousness emerges through social interaction (Lensmire, 1994). Second, further, *utterances in-context* are language acts in a social setting, and the dialogue exhibits an intertextual nature (Schallert et. al., 1999). Intertextuality is the bridge to the written word, “We are all in dialogue with what we have heard and read, said and written before, we are part of the continuous chain of speech performance” (Hoel, 1997, p. 9). Third, the metaphor of the *carnival* illustrates the individual celebration of freedom from the constraints of conventional lives and reveals another facet of making meaning, with a darker undertone of blasphemy and profanity (Brandist, 1997, p. 11). Words vie for audience in an arena of competing voices. The chaotic atmosphere provides an opportunity for the release of powerful emotions, both positive and negative. Symbols of authority made be held up to mockery, and protection for the weak may be suspended. And fourth, the process where one voice speaks through another voice is defined as *ventriloquation* (Manyak, 1999). I elaborate these ideas below.

**Dialogic.** Language is crucial to learning, as one needs to deal with another ‘I’ who can speak for and about his or herself in a fundamentally different way (Brandist, 1997). Meaning is constructed as an ideological bridge between the dialogue partners (Hoel, 1997), a process of “responsive understanding” (Gay, 1998). Dialogue is a characteristic of *heteroglossia*, “mirrors that face each other” (Brandist, 1997). Holquist (1981) offered another connotation for

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1 Bakhtin (1895-1975) is recognized as the center of a school of thought developed in response to the social and cultural upheaval of the Russian Revolution. Members of the group included M. I. Kagan (1889-1937), P. N. Medvedev (1891-1938), L. V. Pumpianskii (1891-1940), I. I. Sollertinskii (1902-1944), V. N. Volosinov (1895-1936), and others.
**heteroglossia:** “Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole -- there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others” (p. 426).

Bakhtin (1981) stressed the dynamics of speech, multiplicity of meanings, and a continuous generative process:

> The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, and intersects with yet a third group; and all this may crucially shape discourse (p. 276).

To negotiate this continuous process, narrative is often used as a mediating device to negotiate a shared sense of meaning (Mulvaney, 1993).

Hoel (1997) suggested that Bakhtin’s use of the term *polyphony*, or the story as composed by multiple voices, was interchangeable with dialogue, as in a polyphony of voices. The different voices may be “juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically” (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 291-292). The polyphony of voices relates to the *concept of intertextuality*, the relation of one utterance to other utterances, and between past and present discourses (Ewald, 1990). The reader is a co-creator of text, and interprets the text to integrate the reader’s experiences and purposes. The reader’s role is crucial, as the reader consummates the discourse act (Ewald, 1990). Writing requires a triangulation of author, subject, and reader in a constant state of flux. An individual writes text in dialogue with many voices, those heard in the present, as a reflection of past experience, and in anticipation of the future. Talk is embedded in social practices. Individuals speak and write from a position situated in and bounded by cultural norms. Authorship, therefore, is a community-based activity, the product of a complex social situation (Freedman, 1994).

Lapadat (1994) presents the argument that meaning does not have to be the same to be shared. She develops a concept of language domains, or multiple levels of context, that affect both verbal and written interactions. She distinguishes levels of context for both verbal/face-to-face (F2F) and written interactions, and the effect of “Out There” and “In Here” on the individual (Eichar, 1996). In a F2F context, “Out There” includes extra-linguistic information, what is explicit and known, such as the physical setting, social setting, and immediate situation, as well as co-text.
that is created and negotiated between parties, what has been understood and what is expected. “In
Here” includes the historical and experiential knowledge of the participants which incorporates
each individual’s prior knowledge, intentions and beliefs, typically implicit knowledge. The writer
retrieves memory and reconstructs events of the experienced and perceived social world. This
reconstruction can be used to serve literary purposes to fabricate a story, to transform experience
into words and sentences, and can be further rewritten and revised. Each word and structural
component will invoke social meanings, as each part is integrated and provides context. The writer
assumes some readers will share certain knowledge with her/him, both cultural and generic.
However, Lapadat cautions that the reader’s interpretation of the writer’s context will be through the
lens of the reader’s own experiences and implicit knowledge. The shared meanings the writer meant
to be implicit may be invalid for particular readers, or the reader may supply unintended meanings
to subtext. The subjectivity of an individual in the construction of meaning is further developed by
Bakhtin.

**Utterances in-context**. Bakhtin (1981) made the connection between the ongoing dialogue
between individuals and social contexts. He emphasized that an utterance cannot exist without
context (Ewald, 1990). Every utterance is a response to a previous utterance and the impetus for
future utterances (Mulvaney, 1993). The primary use of language is not self-expression but
communication within a specific sociological structure. All speech acts serve as currency in
discourse communities (Cooper & Self, 1999). Individuals make choices between competing world
views in the effort to construct her/his own voice, and these choices are shaped by social goals and
“ideological positioning” in peer-governed worlds (Manyak, 1999). Each utterance, each speech
act is a point of dynamism and change. A single voice is heard in a complex choir of other voices
(Ewald, 1990). Writing is a collaborative rather than individual act.

The interaction of the writing world and the social network can be a mercurial event. When
children use writing to respond to and to provoke responses from peers, they seek affiliation, they
seek to captivate audiences. A Bakhtinian concept of voice suggests that the writer struggles to
invest words and phrases with a new significance to express individual meaning. In a political sense,
my words struggle for precedence over another’s words (Lensmire, 1994). This sense of voice
emphasizes an individual’s active participation, and the contrast to participation is silence. Under
oppressive conditions, some may be excluded from participation, and some voices may be forced into silence. Bakhtin (1981) summarized the challenge of this struggle, "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated-overpopulated-with the intentions of others" (p. 294). The imagery of the carnival fits the individual struggle to find the self amid the multitude of voices.

**Carnival.** Bakhtin developed his metaphor of carnival in his doctoral dissertation written in the late 1930s, which he later prepared for publication in the 1960s when he emerged from obscurity (Brandist, 1997). Bakhtin's study of Rabelais acknowledges the symbolism of the Medieval festival as it is used to illustrate the philosophy of the Renaissance, which views the world in the process of becoming. Bakhtin concentrates on the collapse of the strict hierarchies of the Middle Ages and the recasting of official culture in the form of popular culture. The imagery of carnival is raucous and rowdy, a collective ridicule of officialdom. Carnival is the breakdown of the rigid, hierarchal world that may lead to a celebration of bodily excess. This hierarchal world echoes Plato's myth of the cave, a populace held in the confines of an apparent but false unity that seems indisputable and stable (Brandist, 1997). Carnival releases the individual from this false unity. Metaphysically, Bakhtin suggested, although the biological body is negated, the individual body will be transcended, and the body of historical mankind continues (Brandist, 1997, p. 11). The focus is on death and rebirth, the death of individual but endurance of communal, historical life.

**Ventriloquation.** The Bakhtinian construct of ventriloquation captures the active nature of appropriation. Children speak through existing texts. They interweave personal stories with superhero dramas and the local peer culture, thereby constructing a world and a constructing a self (Manyak, 1999). The social use of popular culture to express and explore identity is a primary source of affiliation (Dyson, 1995). In this process, there are always at least two voices. One voice speaks through another voice and you need to ask, "Who is doing the talking?" (Wertsch, 1991). The challenge is that we must use others' voices, and others' words to say what we want to say (Dyson, 1995). Finding your own voice is an appropriation from the myriad of voices and words that surrounds you (Lensmire, 1994).

The Bakhtinian concept of ventriloquation resembles Vygotsky's identification of the mediational function of semiotic systems, as language is the mediational means for individuals to
speak/ or write purposefully and appropriately in diverse contexts (Wertsch, 1991). These situations may empower or constrain the individual, especially when dynamic tensions exist between an appropriate cultural tool and the specific context (Manyak, 1999). Both Vygotsky and Bakhtin accepted that the act of writing entails a struggle for voice in a dynamic social environment.

**Writers’ Workshop**

A successful WW is an attempt to ameliorate this struggle. A successful WW can be defined as the recurrence of productive peer interactions that encourage discussion of student writing and the writing process. Writing is viewed as a process including the cyclical stages of pre-writing, writing, and revision. The teacher provides instruction in strategies that recognize audience and purpose (DiPardo & Freeman, 1988). Group work allows students to talk to students, and shifts the emphasis from product to process. A WW allows students the time to think, to revise, to talk throughout entire creation of a written work, from beginning to completion.

**Practical Application**

A goal of the WW is to transform the process of writing from a teacher-directed exercise into a personal, self-empowering experience (Wells, 1986; Cazden, 1988; Rouse, 1988; Zemelman & Daniels, 1988; Spandel & Stiggins, 1990; Hoel, 1997; Schallert et. al., 1999). To transform the traditional classroom, new behaviors are required of both the teacher and the student. To facilitate the development of these behaviors, the teacher attempts to create situations that allow the appropriation of the skills of writing and sharing writing. The teacher is encouraged to demonstrate a variety of strategies used by different writers (Ede, 1979; Graves, 1985; Calkins, 1986; Phenix, 1990; Hatch, 1991). To bear in mind the affective nature of the writing process and feel the risk as the student might, the teacher is also encouraged to share personal writing experiences with students (Ede, 1979; Graves, 1985; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; Gere, 1990; Phenix, 1990; Hatch, 1991; Walters, 1991; de la Cruz, 1995; Perry, 1998). The teacher first and foremost fills an essential role as model (Zoellner, 1969; Ede, 1979; Miller & Rinderer, 1980; Graves, 1985, 1995; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; Gere, 1987, 1990; Zemelman & Daniels, 1988; Jeske, 1989; Phenix, 1990; Spandel & Stiggins, 1990; Walters, 1991; Brunjes, 1993). To be successful, the particular verbal interactions of a WW must be shaped, accepted, and practiced (Gere, 1987; Brunjes, 1993; Freedman, 1994, No. 68; Hoel, 1997). Specifically, the teacher models appropriate behaviors for the writing conference.
These appropriate behaviors may include: listen carefully to the author's words, question and make suggestions based on the author's intended meaning, and reply in terms the author can understand (Wells, 1986; Morse, 1994). Peer models have been encouraged for over three decades (Zoellner, 1969; Flower & Hayes, 1977; Miller & Rinderer, 1980; Elbow, 1981; Graves, 1985, 1995; Gere, 1987, 1990; Jeske, 1989; Walters, 1991; Morse, 1994). The giving of response to peer writing is a specific skill. The technical aspect of response giving is first thoroughly modeled by the teacher, then gradually, responses of skilled students serve as models for giving response (Dyson & Freedman, 1991; Hoel, 1997). Competent peers may be identified and asked to participate in role play scenarios for the class. Teachers are encouraged to provide opportunity for multiple trials (Zoellner, January, 1969; Graves, 1985; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; Walters, 1991; Brunjes, 1993). The assumption is that, with practice, students will learn from the teacher and from each other.

Product Versus Process

This transformation in classroom practice has been part of an ongoing product versus process debate. Squire (1991) sets this debate in the context of the history of the teaching of the English Language Arts in the last half of the twentieth century. An academic reform initiated by cognitive psychologists led to a public school reform movement in the late 1950s to early 1960s. Squire credits Jerome Bruner (1960) with the introduction of a “spiral curriculum” that sought to develop mature concepts, which are systematically repeated through the four years of English and include a strong writing component. Although there was a short-lived counter-effort of alternative schools, the late 1960s and 1970s emphasized testing and accountability. “In schooling, as in life, one cannot sustain freedom without discipline” (Squire, 1991, p. 7): therefore, the excesses of the “open education” model, with an emphasis on expression versus specific skills, led to its downfall. The popular motto “back to the basics” encouraged an emphasis on product. Gay (1998) has referred to the product orientation as the “colonial period” in the teaching of writing.

Following a 1966 Anglo-American Seminar at Dartmouth College attended by over 60 international professors, the reaction was to implement a recommended curriculum that stressed...
creativity, expressive writing and response to literature (Woods, 1978; Squire, 1991). The Dartmouth Seminar identified the interrelationship of oral and written language, and comprehension (Cazden, 1988). This incentive encouraged recognition of writing as a process. Educators were asked to address the intermediate steps of production rather than concentrating on the final product (Vygotsky, 1962; Zoellner, 1969; Flower & Hayes, 1977). Advocates suggested a focus on how children write, not on what they write, which would allow writing to contribute to individual growth. Mina Shaughnessy and Donald Murray began initial work with teachers, and Donald Graves popularized the writing process in the classroom. The growth of a process emphasis was encouraged in specific programs at several institutions, such as: the University of California, Berkeley, Writing Project Network; the University of Iowa Writers’ Workshop; and the Bread Loaf School of English, Program in Writing, in Vermont. Several sources have recognized the work of the National Writing Project, which originated as the Bay Area Writing Project in 1974, as early leaders in the recognition of writing as process (Gere, 1987; DiPardo & Freeman, 1988).

A process-oriented classroom could be defined by listing the opportunities that are made available to students. For Zemelman & Daniels (1988), these opportunities for students included particular strategies. They recommend that students receive direct instruction in both the process of writing and the mechanics of writing in context, as well as regular and extended practice at writing. This instruction and practice is complemented with both conference with the teacher and participation in collaborative activities. Students are asked to write for real purposes and experience a wide range of strategies. Teachers need to exhibit positive expectations, while maintaining both flexible and cumulative evaluation. They advise that students benefit when exposed to a rich reading experience, both in published texts and in the work of peers and teachers. As well, students benefit if they are exposed to skilled writers. Further, Zemelman and Daniels (1988) concluded that writing is pervasive in the most effective classrooms. In those classrooms, students write every day, for their own purposes, and with choice of topics and audiences. When they address a real audience, students benefit (Elbow, 1981; Atwell, 1987; DiPardo & Freeman, 1988; Phenix, 1990; Walters, 1991; Strech, 1995; Maxson, 1996).

Practitioners report that talk supports and develops learning in the classroom, in particular in writing classes (Dyson, 1991, 1995; Lensmire, 1992, 1994; Spear, 1993; Freedman, 1992, 1994;
Manyak, 1999). Teachers are encouraged to make time for students to talk to students (Zoellner, 1969; Graves, 1983, 1985, 1991; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; DiPardo & Freeman, 1988; Phenix, 1990; Hansen & Graves, 1991; Brunjes, 1993; Butler, 1995; de la Cruz, 1995). Cazden (1988) argued for an increase in the ratio of student to teacher talk in the belief that student talk improves student learning, and cited several large scale observational studies in the United Kingdom and the United States that indicated teachers tend to control classroom discourse. With a stronger note of pessimism, Geekie (1993) stated bluntly, "Teachers dominate classroom interaction" (p. 9). He argued that conversation is a stimulus to language development, but conversation is seldom fully used in the classroom. The development of a WW moves in the direction of encouraging student talk in the classrooms as talk becomes integral to the process of writing.

Writers' Workshop as a Process

Elbow (1981) established some of the essential components of the writing process: freewrite, revise, create voice. A freewrite is done in a short period of time to allow the writer to quickly record thoughts and associations to generate ideas. Correctness or completeness is not a concern. The writer then can use the ideas generated to develop a first draft. In the process of revising, Elbow suggested the writer needs an audience in order to increase control over the writing, to clarify focus, and to improve organization. The writing conference provides an audience, encourages exploration with words, and can assist the writer to attune to audience needs (Elbow, 1981; Reid, 1983; Hoel, 1997). Also, when an author reads to an audience, the writer hears her/his own voice. Freedman (1992) argued that a writer benefits when she/he reads the work out loud. Voice gives writing power (Cooper & Selfe, 1990; Manyak, 1999); voice draws the reader in to experience what the writer is talking about. This concept is summarized in the axiom, "Show don’t tell." Discourse is the catalyst that allows the writer to explore the complementary roles of talk both as speaker and as audience (Cazden, 1988). Elbow (1981) recognized appropriation as applied to discourse about writing: "There is a profound principle of learning here: We can learn to do alone what at first we could do only with others" (p. 190).

The writing process can be applied to any form of writing, however, most of the literature I reviewed tended to discuss the process of narrative writing. Spear (1993) compiled the work of eleven practitioners across elementary, secondary, and post-secondary grade levels to describe
writing groups in action. Three common themes emerged: structure, safe environment, and instruction.

**Structure.** Although teachers are advised that writing groups require carefully considered structure (Graves, 1985; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; Gere, 1990; Brunjes, 1993; Spears, 1993), little in the literature identifies structure definitively. However, certain elements recur, in particular, student ownership and student voice. Among the avenues open to the student voice would be the peer conference or peer response group.

Another element of structure is emphasis on teacher responsibility to provide a safe environment (Graves, 1983, 1985, 1991; Reid, 1983, 1986; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; Gere, 1990; Brunjes, 1993). To ensure a safe environment, the teacher is encouraged to provide instruction to prepare students to work in groups (Miller & Rinderer, 1980; Graves, 1985; DiPardo & Freeman, 1988; Brunjes, 1993; de la Cruz, 1995). In addition, the teacher is encouraged to model, and provide the opportunity for students to develop the skills of the writing process and the dialogue dynamic of the peer conference and response to writing (Hoel, 1997).

A predictable structure is a key ingredient in developing those behaviors related to writing (Graves, 1983, 1985, 1991, 1995, 1996; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987), and the teacher must take the time to develop the structure required to support writing groups (Phenix, 1990; Freedman, 1992). Structure provides predictability and an opportunity for student choice and responsibility. Some sources advise the teacher to work together with the students to carve out rules and routines for the overall classroom. Students can be invited to participate in the design of the structure for their learning. Graves (1995) claimed, “Writing can flourish in rooms with a predictable structure mutually designed by teachers and children” (p. 35). He reiterated that it is essential that students write everyday and write continuously, as it is “through daily writing children develop their rhythms, their rituals of getting work done, and their rituals of consultation” (p. 35). The rules, the routines, the rituals function best when overt and in consensus. Ownership is an intrinsic ingredient in the development of this environment.

**Ownership.** An essential element in teaching writing is to foster ownership (Graves, 1985; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; Freedman, 1994). The individual is important (Zoellner, 1969; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; de la Cruz, 1995). Writing is seen as a voyage of self-discovery with the
emphasis on communication and making meaning (Wolf & Gearhart, 1997). One aspect of student ownership is that the student selects the topics for writing. In doing so, a WW allows a student to create his/her own unique voice (Zoellner, 1969; Elbow, 1981; Walters, 1991; Dyson, 1991, 1995; Freedman, 1992; Lensmire, 1992, 1994). A goal is that students will develop an internal awareness so that they will be able to view their own writing from the viewpoint of a predetermined audience without requiring audience feedback (Elbow, 1981; Gere, 1987).

One element of internal awareness relates to the question of revision. As with most human beings, students find it difficult to accept criticism (Perry, 1998) - real or perceived. Students may ask, what do teachers mean by “improved” or “better” writing (Dyson & Freedman, 1991; Gay, 1998)? Many practitioners will support the observation that students do not want to revise (van der Geest & Remmers, 1994; Gay, 1998). Some say, “They don’t have a clue on what revision is all about” (Wolf & Gearhart, 1997, p. 226). The student retains the right to make changes or not to make changes. Some authors have suggested that the student should record all revisions on his/her own paper in consultation with the teacher, and that the teacher should not write on the student’s paper (Phenix, 1990; Brunjes, 1993). The writer may receive input, but controls output. An optimistic observation contrasts revision done for writing assigned in school with writing done outside of school. Dyson & Freedman (1991) noted that students spend substantial amounts of time writing, planning and revising the story and poetry writing they did for themselves. For the act of writing to be relevant, a writer’s sense of self must be fostered.

Shared power. Schaafsma (1996) shares with his university students his belief that stories may be useful to them and invites them to share their multiple perspectives; he attempts to make implicit power relations more explicit (p. 112). A key difficulty in creating a similar environment in secondary school classrooms is the transition from teacher control of discourse to shared opportunity for discourse in the classroom. Allowing students to talk in the classroom alters the power structure. One goal of teachers is to employ classroom management skills to create a safe, productive learning environment. To this end, one pervasive reality of teacher talk is control statements (Cazden, 1988; Cooper & Selfe, 1990). Students must use the right words and wait to speak at the right time (Cazden, 1988; Schaafsma, 1996). When students are given opportunities to talk, a teacher attempts to ensure that students will continue to maintain a respectful atmosphere.
The transformation from teacher-dominated discourse to a WW opens the issue of shared power (Wells, 1986; Cazden, 1988; Rouse, 1988; Zemelman & Daniels, 1988; Cooper & Selfe, 1990; Spandel & Stiggins, 1990; Brunjes, 1993; Schaafsma, 1996). Many would argue that when children are given responsibility, they can behave responsibly and no longer have to be closely supervised every moment of the day. Wells (1986) states:

> With an agreed agenda, they know what has to be achieved and spend their time productively, using resources appropriately, asking for the teacher’s assistance only when other resources have proved inadequate, and moving to a new task when the present one is completed (p. 121).

However, the cost of shared power is uncertainty and the loss of autocratic control. Control increases certainty, and uncertainty is uncomfortable. Rouse (1988) describes the difficulty of adjusting to a student centered-focus:

> a teacher must constantly improvise in order to manage the developing situation -- and then afterwards one realizes how much better this might have been done (p. 28).

It is a challenge to find a positive orientation to cope with the inevitable conflict that will arise. A teacher must be convinced of the benefits of student focus in order to tolerate the tensions, and must seize opportunities to redefine failure as feedback.

Shared power may be discussed in the literature, but again, is seldom defined effectively. DiPardo and Freeman (1988) are explicit: “The real issue is how to devise ways in which teachers and students might productively share power, but on this point the literature has largely remained silent” (p. 127). Further, they offer disturbing insight:

> Tensions abound between what groups are purported to offer and how practitioners frame them; too often, what is termed 'peer interaction' amounts to little more than teacher-initiated, teacher-controlled episodes in which students follow explicit directives and take turns role-playing their instructor (p. 144).

They noted that the tendency has been to undermine the potential of peer response groups by “channeling peer dynamics toward teacher-mandated guidelines, thereby subtracting from the
process the crucial element of student empowerment and denying group members authority to become decision-making writers and readers” (p. 144). DiPardo and Freeman criticize the restrictive devices that teachers use to increase student talk. Others might argue that such devices are necessary to provide the structure that allows a process of transition from teacher-dominated discourse to student talk in the classroom (Hoel, 1997). Teacher-created guidelines can be a beginning step, and part of the process that creates opportunities for students to talk in the classroom, and the opportunity to restructure authority.

In a comparative study of eight classrooms, grades 6 through 9, four in the United States (USA) and four in the United Kingdom (UK), Freedman (1994) found striking differences across the classrooms. In all classrooms, the students were from multiple cultural groups, but most were working class. The first major difference was the focus. A child-centered concern for students’ development was typical in the UK, whereas in the USA, a curriculum focus was more common. She observed that even when teachers agreed on the underlying theory of learning, everyday practice showed widely varying interpretations. British teachers seemed to emphasize knowing their students and they set up classrooms to facilitate a negotiated curriculum and shared responsibility. In practice, the negotiated curriculum required the teacher to motivate each student and track each student’s progress. Community building was valued over individualization as context is a large force in the motivation of individual students. British teachers agreed that students need to be taught to assume responsibility, and that the process requires time to happen gradually. For example, students were expected to choose a writing activity that was motivating to them. Typically, the British teachers had worked with the same students for a period of two or more years. The particular British schools in this study were structured to support these teachers in creating close classroom communities.

In contrast, the approach selected by each of the four USA teachers was less consistent and exhibited a substantial variety of daily practices. Two of the American teachers tended to create whole-class activities, whereas two were attempting to move towards a negotiated model. However, when the individual rather than the group was the focus in these classrooms, there was less of a sense of the role of community. Only at a point late in the year did some American students begin to assume increased responsibility.

Implementing these recommendations requires serious restructuring. Au and Carroll (1997)
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discussed the findings of the Kamehameha, Hawaii, project (KEEP), one example of restructuring in a USA school. KEEP teachers worked with researchers to discover the discourse patterns that hindered student achievement, and then worked to modify their behaviors. Teachers tried to develop a moment-to-moment responsiveness, and attempted to focus first on the child's experience with ideas. They were willing to abandon the strictures of their own precedents to value the culture of the children.

A typical solution has been to involve students without giving over complete control. Various methods have been devised to invite increased student participation, but limit student autonomy. Age level, maturity, and previous experience are mitigating factors with regard to student autonomy. Gere (1990) cautioned:

Successful writing groups, whether for responding or evaluation, do not emerge spontaneously in classrooms. They require preparation, and it is this preparation that constitutes 'real' teaching (p. 125).

Individual teachers create a variety of tools to accomplish the goal of students talking to other students in a safe environment. In the junior secondary classroom, the need for tools is especially strong; in some classes armor would be a better description. The writing process approach has great power, but the teacher has to facilitate the shift of control to the student. When students are given instruction about how to work in groups, small group work gives students an opportunity to learn important social skills (Sharan, 1980; Slavin, 1980, 1981; Miller & Rinderer, 1980; Graves, 1985; Kagan, 1985; Reid, 1986; Johnson & Johnson, 1987; DiPardo & Freeman, 1988; Brunjes, 1993; de la Cruz, 1995). To make these groups work, a classroom climate must be created in which students are free to explore ideas. Reid (1986) advised to plan ahead; with careful structuring, the need for direct teacher control is greatly minimized. Spandel and Stiggins (1990) make two prime recommendations: First, keep the structure flexible. Second, give students the means, the skills, and the opportunity to assess their own writing.

Safe environment. Even in the most positive of situations, the teacher must be prepared to cope with the limitations of working with adolescents in a public institution. Students do not necessarily adhere to the same standards of acceptable or appropriate behavior as the teacher, acting "in loco parentis," must consider. Once again, the definition of "appropriate" is absent in the
Schaafsma (1996) raises some pertinent questions: What kinds of stories are acceptable? Which stories are excessive? How does that decision take place? Do students have the right not to hear a story? Without clear answers to these questions, both the students and the teacher lack direction.

Cazden (1988) recognized the need to clarify official and unofficial, legal and illegal speech acts in the total classroom community: “The dilemma for the teacher is not what her academic objectives should be, as it is in the case of student writing, but what rules about talking should be enforced to advance those objectives most effectively” (p. 152). DiPardo and Freeman (1988) noted there had been little information about “the cognitive and social capacities needed to interact supportively in classroom settings” (p. 131). Secondary students take risks when writing at a time of physical and social transition.

Zemelman and Daniels (1988) observed that the basic reason the process paradigm fails in the secondary classroom is that students are not taught to work cooperatively. A teacher cannot assume that students know how to give respectful, appropriate, constructive criticism. Direct instruction in social skills or communication skills is advised in co-operative learning strategies, that is, those strategies based on students talking to other students (Sharan, 1980; Slavin, 1980, 1981; Kagan, 1985; Johnson & Johnson, 1987). However, direct instruction in social skills is not mentioned in detail by practitioners in the WW literature.

Writing, and talk about writing, can play an important part in identity formation. Calkins (1986) recognized that “it is during adolescence that we have a special need to understand our lives, to find a plot line in the complexity of events, to see coordinates of continuity in the midst of discontinuity” (p. 105). Adolescence is a period when students “try on selves,” and the combination of adolescents and writing may be volatile. Although she emphasized the need for a safe, supporting environment, Calkins cautioned that the social hierarchy in the middle school can affect peer response. Social skills training can help students to overcome these challenges. She suggests that students respond less to the writing than to “the writer’s place in the classroom social scene” (p. 109). Structure is required to combat the social stigmas of adolescence. Despite a natural inclination of educators to retreat from the volatile combination of adolescents and writing, adolescents have a special need to understand their own lives, and writing can play a crucial part in the task of identity formation. Language helps individuals make meaning, and making meaning
shapes who we believe we are.

Community-building activities may be introduced early in the program and continue throughout the year to create a positive classroom environment. Gere (1987) advised: “Establishing trust, developing collaborative skills or discovering those developed outside the classroom, and learning to critique writing constitute the preparation necessary for classroom writing groups” (p. 103). Successful writing groups occur when the teacher helps students learn how to function in groups.

Writing is risky. After one year in a public school third grade classroom, Lensmire (1992, 1994) discovered that the utopian picture painted by WW advocates could be shadowed by teasing, risk, and conflict. Looking specifically at multiple peer audiences, he observed that children sought and avoided specific peers. Inclusions and exclusions developed defined by gender and social class. Children from the nearby trailer park were particularly marked as less desirable partners. Although no child reported negative experiences in peer conferences, most anticipated negative consequences if they had to conference with specific peers. Students had the choice of conferencing with the teacher or with peers. Some students, especially unpopular children, avoided peer conference. Lensmire (1992) admitted that his efforts were not enough to make the classroom a safe place for every student to share her/his work with peers. He concluded that peers are an important influence on student experience in the WW, but that influence is not all positive. He recommended that “we must pay more attention to the immediate peer culture” (p. 7), and further that “we had better pay attention to the communities we create in classrooms” (p. 8).

Based on speech act theory, Warren and McCoskey (1993) stated that “language serves as a medium for the speaker’s intentions” (p. 199). Further, they argued, “Speech adjustments made to acknowledge the listener’s status relative to the speaker are almost as basic to verbal interaction as the exchange of information” (p. 209). Students must survive in “peer governed worlds” (Dyson & Freedman, 1997). Beyond the rudiments of classroom management, in the WW a student must not feel threatened to reveal the “self.” The junior secondary school is dangerous ground. Students are aware that school or class rules exist to endorse positive behavior and discourage negative behaviors. But in the peer reality, negative is funny, and negative is cool. Individuals take pride in expression of put-downs and cutting wit. To overcome these undeniable social realities, instruction in specific skills is advantageous.
Instruction

An important component of the WW is the teacher’s role: The teacher shares her/his own writing and writing process and serves as mentor and facilitator for students in their writing. In this way, she/he models appropriate responses for peer response groups, which are a key concern as discussed above (Elbow, 1981; Graves, 1985, 1995; Cazden, 1988; Gere, 1987, 1990; Wells, 1990).

Whole-class critique sessions, in which the teacher is able to highlight useful comments and model constructive suggestions, may be useful (Gere, 1987; Hoel, 1997). The teacher serves as a model, or a scaffold, to assist students to develop listening and problem solving skills. In a WW, students benefit if instruction addresses two discrete functions -- the skills of the writing process and the skills of the social environment. For both writing and social skills, a mini-lesson is recommended for introducing and developing guidelines, criteria, and specific skills (Graves, 1991, 1996; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; Gere, 1990; de la Cruz, 1995; Strech, 1995). For the writing process, a number of possible mini-lessons have been suggested: classroom procedures (folders, portfolios, collection routines, reference materials), conferences (audience, principles, role-model, paraphrase, evaluation), skills (conventions, spelling, editing, revision, proofreading), style, publication rubric and rules (Atwell, 1987). The list can be extended: choosing a topic, leads, organization, argument, poetry, story telling, character development, dialogue, issues of plausibility, and specific grammar skills, such as the use of verbs, adverbs, nouns, adjectives, sentence combining, use of capitals, possessives (Graves, 1991). Graves (1996) recommended focusing on one convention daily in a ten-minute mini-lesson.

Addressing the writing process specifically, Elbow (1981), Graves (1983), and Calkins (1986) outlined questions to guide student talk to students. Elbow (1981) developed two catalogues of criterion- and reader-based questions. Calkins (1986) specified sets of questions for content, design, and evaluation. Brunjes (1993) recommended role-play activities. In addition, teachers have developed their own checklists, revision, and editing sheets to guide student writing conferences. Although students are given the opportunity to talk, teachers establish safeguards to reinforce the mandate of respect and encourage student attention to the task at hand.

The particular verbal interactions of a WW must be shaped, accepted, and practiced. Gere (1987) advised that the voices students hear in writing groups contribute directly to what they
internalize and later use in writing. Gere argued for a semi-autonomous arrangement to allow the teacher to structure a program to increase students' responsibilities over time. As Gere reasoned, this is likely the most practical solution for the junior secondary classroom. Gere noted that the crucial ingredient in the success of writing groups is the commitment of the teacher. An essential part of this commitment is the preparation of students to assume the role of effective participation in writing groups. The teacher must monitor the effectiveness of each group: “The specific zone of proximal development for a given group can be identified only by a teacher who works closely with students much as a coach does, watching, encouraging, and suggesting” (p. 109). A coach needs a game plan. For the WW, an essential element in the game plan is a safe environment. Students need to appropriate the specific oral and physical language that builds a safe environment.

Writing opens an individual to risks; it is difficult to express meaning on paper. It can be even more difficult to open that meaning to scrutiny of a public eye, teacher or peer. A familiar and predictable lesson structure is valuable, and routine can be the lubricant that allows an individual to explore new means of expression (Cazden, 1988). Routine offers clear clues to students in shifting contexts and helps students to recognize what talk is appropriate when. The more certainty the situation can provide for the individual the less the chance of negative consequences.

Peer response. The peer response group is designed to encourage talk about writing. Few studies, however, explore what happens in response groups, and the few studies that exist do not adequately describe the particulars, such as: the group membership, the social context, preparation for group work, previous experience with response groups, or the actual responses. Freedman (1992) examined the intended functions of 95 group meetings held in the classrooms of two grade nine writing teachers and the instructional context surrounding the groups. She also analyzed the video and audiotape data for 17 of the groups to describe the discourse patterns of peer response. Her data revealed some interesting percentages. When groups were guided by response sheets, 60% of the peer talk was on the assigned task to complete the sheet (p. 101). Groups not organized with response sheets were excluded from analysis for three reasons: lack of parallel to selected groups, substantial amounts of time spent in off-task talk, and a tendency for the sharing of feelings rather than ideas about the content of writing (p. 79). A common goal of individuals was to maintain friendships. In the groups studied, students avoided giving a negative response or what the writer
might interpret as negative evaluation (Freedman, 1992; Wolf & Gearhart, 1997). When writers self-identified problems, only 4 of 32 responses (12.5%) were in the form of advice or suggestions. Peer responders often ignored the writer’s specific request for help. Although guide sheets improved student on task performance, a lot of talk was purely to get the teacher-given task completed in ways that maintained the peer culture (Freedman, 1992; Wolf & Gearhart, 1997). The avoidance of critical comment and the desire to maintain friendships indicated the need for the teacher to give the writer feedback as part of the instructional program. Even though peer comment may be problematic, Freedman (1992) still encouraged writers to read their own writing aloud to peers in response groups. She argued that an important benefit of reading work aloud is self-response, or the development of the inner dialogue of the writer.

Brunjes (1993) states that she enjoyed what she called “a somewhat notorious reputation” as a “response group guru” in her role as a middle school writing teacher. While a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Utah, she worked as a researcher with a teacher in a large urban public school to assist with the introduction of peer response methods in a sophomore honors English class. Brunjes noted “complications,” and she commented that the students “seemed to wrestle all year with finding a comfort zone in the response sessions. Their experiences seemed to be colored by the ambivalence of adolescent security” (p. 41). These words are no surprise to the practitioner. At the junior secondary level, teachers recognize the “complications” mentioned by Brunjes as reality. Adolescent is a time of insecurity, when social defenses are underdeveloped (Elbow, 1981; Graves, 1985, 1995; Cazden, 1988; Gere, 1987, 1990; Jeske, 1989; Morse, 1994). Junior secondary students are adolescents, and therefore, they suffer the pangs of insecurity, uncertainty, and peer pressure. They are not sure who they are, who they want to be, or how to become that person. They are very concerned, and very concerned to hide that they are concerned, about what other people think of them. In a single class, students will have 30 ways of coping with the pain of adolescence. The students who participated in the Brunjes (1993) study “requested more structure and direct instruction in order that they might perform the task of response more successfully and efficiently in the academic setting” (p. 45). Brunjes noted, “The ability to give useful response to writers is an art learned over time” (p. 47). Students need time to become comfortable when talking to other students, time to develop communication skills, and time to
practice effective responses.

The process-product debate about the teaching of writing has often overlooked an important third dimension -- the audience. Morse (1994) noted that a teacher’s responses to student writing in individual conference resembled the behaviors of the helping professionals, such as counselors, social workers, clergymen, substance abuse workers, physicians, nurses, among others. How one communicates is the vital link. Using a basic model of helping behaviors based on Rogerian principles, Morse acknowledged the microcounselling-based metatheory of communication developed by Allen Ivey and N.B. Gluckstern (1982, 1984). Morse outlined ten behaviors applicable to the writing conference (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic attending behavior</td>
<td>Maintain eye contact, relaxed body language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal encourage</td>
<td>Use silence, and acknowledgement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraphrasing</td>
<td>For example, “I heard you say....”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection of feelings</td>
<td>For example, “I hear you are angry....”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open invitation to talk</td>
<td>Use questions such as what, how, could, would, but avoid why.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarization</td>
<td>Restate or recapitulate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive asset search</td>
<td>Place an emphasis on strengths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confrontation</td>
<td>Identify discrepancies as an aid to clarification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directives</td>
<td>Make objective and non-evaluative statements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-disclosure</td>
<td>Should be used in moderation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These steps could be combined and developed in mini-lessons. One, review basic attending behavior; discuss eye contact and body language. Two, illustrate the use of minimal encouragement; practice the use of silence, acknowledgement, and openers to promote talk. Three, demonstrate use of the paraphrase. Four, reflect your feelings to the writer. These "social capacities" could be introduced via direct instruction, by teacher modeling, and through role play situations. However, when Morse studied teachers who were deemed to be expert and frequently used the writing conference, he did not find these helping behaviors to be present. He concluded, "the more traditional methods of direct, didactic instruction, student passivity, and teacher control seemed to predominate" (p. 14). Expert teachers displayed weak helping skills, yet the WW is based on the belief of peers helping peers. Attention to Morse's helping behaviors would not only be of help to students in response groups but also to teachers who are attempting to model these behaviors. The National Council of Teachers of English concluded that students need to be shown inclusive and expansive ways to respond to peer writing (Gay, 1998).

At least one study looked at the particular implementation of peer response. Lillios and Iding (1996) looked at the effects of written peer comments, using a peer response guide, and teacher comments on the revision of one piece of student writing in a twelve-day unit. There were three phases to the study. Phase 1 consisted of pre-write and write, which were completed in the first three days. Then in Phase 2, instruction and practice in peer response occurred for three days. Students first practiced with an anonymous student's paper as a model in a whole-class discussion using the peer response worksheet. Each student then worked alone using the peer response worksheet with another anonymous student's paper. Phase 3 occurred in the remaining five days. The papers were collected for teacher commentary, and returned to students for revision. The students were then asked to complete a survey. The survey asked: What comments were most effective from teacher and peers? What changes were made based on comments? What changes were made based on feedback on peer-response exercise?

For Lillios and Iding (1996), the focus of their study was the participant's perceptions. They examined student's receptivity to teacher comments as compared to peer comments as reflected in student revision of work. The authors noted that students valued requests for additional information and mechanical corrections. Overall, teacher observations were considered more useful than those of peers, and students made more changes in response to teacher comment. An
interesting observation was that students rated comments about mechanics more highly when given by peers. The most helpful comments discussed structure and praise. As 89% of authors made changes requested by peers, Lillios and Iding believed that with time and practice students would increasingly trust and value peer judgments. They expressed the hope that students will come to see writing as an ongoing process, where the product can be continually shaped and improved. The authors concluded that teachers ought to spend sufficient time discussing the model paper to practice peer response. However, they do not define “sufficient.” They caution against the student tendency to be generous with compliments and recommend that the teacher should model constructive criticism. Students need to be encouraged to focus on more significant concerns, although they do not identify what these might be. Further, they recommended that teachers should engage students regularly in peer response activities and allow plenty of time for dialogue. Although twelve days were described in the study, the authors do not discuss any additional time spent on peer response in the class that was studied. There is no lack of encouragement, but little in the way of explicit direction.

Preparation. The literature on professional practice is abundant and offers anecdotes and prescriptions for the WW, but relatively little research has been reported on the WW on which approaches are most efficacious. With the variety of interpretations and recommendations, how does the teacher begin to prepare students for group work such as the peer conference? Zemelman and Daniels (1988) recommended intensive preparation. See Table 2 for a brief overview.

Many authors, in addition to Zemelman and Daniels (1988), refer to the need for the teacher to provide extensive modeling to demonstrate the techniques of response (Zoellner, 1969; Ede, 1979; Miller & Rinderer, 1980; Graves, 1985, 1995, 1996; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; Gere, 1987, 1990; Phenix, 1990; Spandel & Stiggins, 1990; Walters, 1991; Hoel, 1997; Perry, 1998). The recommendation to increase responsibilities gradually is echoed throughout the practice literature (Graves, 1983, 1985, 1991; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; Phenix, 1990; Spandel & Stiggins, 1990; Hoel, 1997). Jeske (1989) suggests two guidelines. First, students must “know how to praise what is praiseworthy, so as to enforce positive writing behavior” (p. 10). Second, students need to discriminate between “higher- and lower-order concerns” to best use the time available (p. 11).
Table 2

Ten Steps to Prepare for the Writing Conference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>State the purpose for the activity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Establish time limits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Model response techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Derive appropriate procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Derive appropriate comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Teach students how to paraphrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Teach students how to ask for help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Develop their ability refer to feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Practice collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Energize with humor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from A Community of Writers: Teaching Writing in the Junior and Senior High School, by S. Zemelman and H. Daniels, copyright 1988 by Heinemann.

Students could begin work in pairs and then meet in small groups to collaborate on pre-writing. The use of training papers from an unknown, unnamed writer outside the group is one way to practice revision skills. Students can be guided to practice the use of constructive comments. One suggestion is to use questions rather than comments (Elbow, 1981). When giving feedback, peer response could be restricted to overall meaning or message of the writing in order to simplify the task. Focusing on one or two related sets of concerns at a time may help to increase student morale. Later, peers could begin to give attention to elements like clarity, organization, and voice.

Record keeping and effective assessment also is important. Influenced by the work of Johnson and Johnson (1984), Zemelman and Daniels (1988), for example, recommended the use of a guide sheet to record teacher observations, to ensure concrete and accurate data. The teacher, the
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student and the group benefit if there is regular self-evaluation. Strategic intervention based on this collected record can be used to promote student problem solving. Zemelman and Daniels stated, “The main thing we’ve learned about peer writing groups is that they work beautifully and powerfully if you take enough time and energy to prepare them” (p. 186). The teacher needs to define roles; and the teacher should work with students to derive concrete, appropriate responses.

The teacher is responsible for modeling appropriate language behaviors for the writing response group. As well, the teacher is encouraged to model the writing process. One way to do this is for the teacher to write in front of the students to demonstrate her/his own writing process (Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; Zemelman & Daniels, 1988; Graves, 1985, 1995, 1996). Some go as far as to say that it is imperative that teachers write with their students (Spandel & Stiggins, 1990). Graves (1996) advised that teachers should “fight the fear factor” and write with students (p. 40). He explained that few individuals are comfortable enough with one’s own writing to be able to share the process. If the teacher can model the process of writing and accept feedback to model revision, it will increase teacher sensitivity to the student’s sense of risk. Perhaps, students will see that the teacher values writing and is able to overcome obstacles in the writing process.

What type of feedback could be offered to the writer? Elbow (1981) devised two sets of questions that could be used to generate feedback. A “Catalogue of Reader-Based Questions” discusses feelings, reactions, expectations, and imagery. Elbow suggests 41 questions to elicit affective information in three fundamental areas. One, what was happening to you as you were reading the piece of writing? Two, summarize the writing -- give your understanding of what happened in it. Three, make up some images for the writing and the transaction it creates with you (p. 240). A “Catalogue of Criterion-Based Questions” examined content, organization, effective language, and usage. Elbow suggests 24 questions that asked the reader to consider four broad areas. One, what is the quality of the content: ideas, perceptions, point of view? Two, how well is the writing organized? Three, how effective is the language? Four, are there mistakes or inappropriate choices in usage? (p. 240). Elbow cautioned that the writer might know what she/he means to say, but the writer can query whether her/his words convey that meaning to the reader. Feedback from the audience helps the writer to know what the audience heard.

A recent case study by Hoel (1997) specifically applied of the theories of Vygotsky and Bakhtin to the use of the response group, which he defined as 2-5 peers who comment on each
other’s drafts as a stage in their composition work (p. 10). Hoel examined upper-secondary compositions and the strategies used to solve writing and response problems. Identified as a problem-solving discourse, language was seen as both communication and a tool for thinking. Writing, reading, speaking, and listening are construed as integrated activities. The discourse he observed was a continuous “co-construction of meaning,” and he commented: “A high proportion of the discourse consists of probing dialogue sequences where one student tries out a thought and another student grasps it and takes it further” (p. 11). Hoel noted that the response group requires three main areas of competence: First, individuals must be able to communicate and relate to others in the group. Second, individuals need training in the technical aspects of giving response. Third, response must be situated in relation to the criteria of the texts and language. One particular asset of this study situation was that Hoel taught his 22 students in Norwegian language and literature over a 3-year period, which gave him the opportunity to get to know his students well and to develop a close-knit community. This length of time allowed for the modeling and scaffolding Hoel identified as important instructional strategies in this process. This 3-year period is significant in that the students had time to practice and develop the skills of social interaction, and specifically as those skills relate to writing.

**Anonymity**

Time is seldom sufficient to adequately prepare students for the process of peer response. The most significant problem for peer review is the desire for the individual to protect friendships and social status. Students are “reluctant to be frank and comprehensive” (van der Geest & Remmers, 1994). Individuals do not want to hurt a friend’s feelings (Lensmire, 1992, 1994; Freedman, 1994; Schaffer, 1996). The difficulties of working with adolescents and their particular age-determined mores led me to develop my study to make use of anonymity to overcome some of the socially hierarchical judgments that can cloud peer interactions. New developments in computers and the internet led to an exploration of methods to technologically create anonymity in the peer conference. Technology may offer a method to enhance the creation of a safe environment in the WW. In their study, van der Geest and Remmers (1994) noted that computer mediated communication (CMC) led to a reduction of social context clues and “prejudiced communication patterns.” Schallert et. al. (1999) concur that CMC is able to mask cues of gender, ethnicity, and
status. Despite the availability of anonymity, the possibilities have not been explored.

Lack of research. Anonymity as a factor in the writing conference has received minimal attention in the literature. In fact, Keller (1999) specifically spoke against anonymity in online communication and presented a strong argument in favor of the use of real names over nick names, as “logging in with a real name increases a student’s sense of responsibility for what they say” (online citation). As well, “faculty should find that few problems occur from students misusing their chat privileges.” Tornow (1997) merely stated, “Pseudonyms have been provided for all students” (p. 29). Lensmire (1994) noted a contrast between the confidence exhibited by children who used their own names in their stories, and the risks other children “associated with writing about themselves in personal narratives” (p. 113). Further, he recognized the opposite of voice is silence. and silence is sometimes the result of “oppressive conditions that keep certain people from participating” (p. 13). Although van der Geest and Remmers (1994) and Schallert et. al. (1999) allude to a reduction or a masking of social clues, the concept of anonymity is not expanded. This lack of research into the role of anonymity gives weight to the need for this proposed study. The transition to an information highway paved by internet connections is well underway. The role of anonymity will have a place not only in such familiar places as response groups but also such new innovations as chat groups and web courses.

Technology

Although there may be some academics who continue to resist the new information age, many more are accepting the pre-peak growth of computers in communication technology on an intra- and interpersonal level, at home and world-wide (Strickland, 1997; Arlington, 1999; Beatty, 1999; Hopper Cook, 1999). However, summarizing the implementation of a specific “review supporting computer program” in 1994, van der Geest and Remmer concluded that the implementation problems they encountered were greater than the benefits of use. Although implementation does remain a challenging difficulty for most, Bonk, Malikowski, Angeli, and Supplee (1998) referred to Vygotsky’s (1962) socio-cultural theory to argue that the benefits of learning in a social context has applicability in internet-based conferencing. The energy of current expansion combined with the justification of theory supports examination of technology as it may be used in the classroom, and the writing classroom in particular. As well, there is a need to develop
better strategies for addressing the practical difficulties of implementation.

Two dimensions of online interchange can be distinguished: Synchronous settings allow real-time communication (like a telephone), whereas asynchronous versions receive responses later (like a letter) (van der Geest & Remmers, 1994). This “hybrid form of discourse” integrates casual speech with the permanence of writing.

This section will present a brief overview of the development of the internet and the online conference, a small sampling of current use, and the application of the online conference to this study.

**Brief Timeline**

Tornow (1997) traced the history of computer conferencing systems. The first computer conferencing system was designed by physicist, Murray Turoff, in the 1960s for use by United States of America (USA) government. In the 1970s, the Department of Defense sponsored the development of a wide-area network for use in case of nuclear war. To prevent the possibility that the network could be disabled in a single attack, an integral feature was the lack of a central control base. The network was later dispersed for use among the policy makers in the USA government. The design continued to deliberately exclude a central control, which became “an essential characteristic insuring democratic participation” (Tornow, 1997, p. 16). The first Computers and Writing Conference was held at the University of Minnesota in 1982, and has continued, despite a brief interruption in the 1980s, to meet annually ever since. In 1991, *Written Communication* devoted a Special Issue to “Computers, Language and Writing” to discuss networked computers. In 1992, one issue of *College English* included three reviews related to technology developments. The first online version of the Computers and Writing Conference was held in 1993. The online conference has now become a standard adjunct to annual conferences. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) held their first online conference in 1995. Several journals are now published online. For example Ted Jenning’s *EJournal* began in 1991, and the Alliance for Computers and Writing (ACW) publishes the peer-reviewed webzine called *Kairos: A Journal for Teachers of Writing in Webbed Environments*. *Kairos* is devoted to the study of writing in an electronic environment and was cited as an active model of good e-mail conduct (Beatty, 1999). An early example of the integration of computer networks in the classroom occurred in the education
Writing on the Web 38

for the deaf. Trent Batson, an English professor in Texas, conducted his first networked class for deaf students in the spring of 1985, and the students were able to experience and participate in a new kind of live group discussion.

Saye (1997) employed a grounded theory model\(^3\) to study teachers' comfort with technology use and how the use of technology relates to the larger culture's concept of what is legitimate teaching and learning. He concluded that preexisting beliefs will determine whether and how teachers use technology. Saye cautioned that the disparate findings of previous research may lie in study design. Those studies may have been based in evolutionary sites which differ from “general school populations” (p. 8). Often such studies included only the perspectives of active users, at sites with the benefit of atypical resources, or at pilot sites for technology-infused curriculum projects. He stressed the importance of a base of committed innovators. Saye quotes advocates who claim “that ubiquitous technology may push cultural change. The power possibilities that technology offers will spur incremental adoption of active student inquiry as the dominant schooling paradigm” (p. 21). Saye's prediction does seem to be accurate.

Even those who favor the traditional over the electronic workshop can admit to certain advantages for an online connection. Kempa (1997), a Wyoming poet and essayist, realized how useful an online conference could be for “writers who cannot find the level of criticism they need within an hour's drive from home” (p. 70). He found that physical barriers of connection and technical assistance are compounded by psychological barriers such as remoteness which may affect the building of a sense of community. However, he sees the electronic process as more democratic in encouraging greater participation with fewer social constraints and no interruptions to the speaker. As well, all conversation is documented. Kempa suggested seven guidelines for setting up an electronic workshop (Table 3).

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\(^3\) Saye (1997) emphasized the need to collect, to code, and to analyze data simultaneously and recursively.
Table 3
Seven Steps to Prepare for an Electronic Workshop

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Choose participants carefully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Limit workshop size.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Arrange for good technical assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Schedule training sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Create start-up documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Maintain a strong central presence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Line up alternative means of communication.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Concern for size, training, and guidelines recur among enthusiasts, but the suggestion to remember to have a back-up plan is especially crucial when dealing with new technology.

Online Conference

Online technology offers a systematic, audience-oriented, and process-oriented approach to the study of writing. Tornow (1997) discussed her study of an undergraduate writing class that met on Live Interactive Network Conversations (LINC) at the University of Texas, in her text, Link/Age Composing in the Online Classroom. Using an ethnographic approach with interest in hearing student voices, Tornow immersed herself as a participant-observer to look for patterns in what students were writing online and examined students' attitudes towards composing online. The participants had no previous experience in network conversation and little experience with e-mail. She concluded that “online communication is in many ways a return to print” (p. 6). The “talk” on networks is written talk and a new mode of language. As well, she asserted that writing plays and increasingly key role as online activity expands.
Bonk et al. (1998) linked the electronic environment of the World Wide Web to sociocultural theory and observed that the social interaction allowed mentors and more capable peers to scaffold knowledge. Bonk et al. conducted a series of four studies using Conferencing on the Web (COW) with pre-service teachers during their practicum assignments. Like Tornow, Bonk et al. looked for patterns in the cases and commentary produced by the pre-service teachers, and examined students' attitudes towards use of online technology. With an asynchronous Web-based conferencing tool, students could read and comment on peers' narratives at various times. COW conversations were private (accessed by a site address), and all postings could be time and date stamped along with the username, to provide student accountability and system tracking. Students were provided with a seventy-minute training session before the conferencing began to learn important COW conferencing features (e.g., how to post narratives, how to use the reply button, to add personal profiles, etc.). The training session included an opportunity to electronically read and discuss sample narratives. Bonk et al. noted that "COW was extremely easy to use" (p. 11). Bonk et al. used the electronic recording system to gather data for specific forms of electronic assistance. Bonk et al. identified twelve forms of electronic learning mentoring and assistance: social acknowledgement, questioning, direct instruction, modeling/examples, feedback/praise, cognitive task structuring, cognitive elaborations/explanations, push to explore, fostering reflection/self-awareness, encouraging articulation/dialogue prompting, general advice/scaffolding/suggestions, and management. These forms suggested categories that could be used in replication studies. After use of COW technology, students were asked to respond to a survey to examine student comfort with the use of technology and possible benefits. The study conducted in 1998 was the fourth study in a progressive series of studies that attempted to refine questions and methods examining electronic case-based learning in pre-service teacher education. In 1997, an interview was added for qualitative feedback, and in 1998, the number of mentors was increased and the number of participants was reduced.

Both Tornow (1997) and Bonk et al. (1998) describe the use of the online conference in university settings. Citing the growth of the internet, Tornow stated: "Writing teachers simply cannot afford to ignore the fact that writing is increasingly an activity that occurs online" (p. 2).

4 COW was developed by Eric Klavins of San Francisco State University.
She made the connection to the world of work and the need to prepare students for the careers in their future. Bonk et al. saw the importance of "apprenticing students" with emphasis on "authentic learning settings" (p. 4). Both authors defended the benefits of learning in a social context. Bonk et al. argued that Web-based conferencing is an application of Vygotsky's theories, in particular the principle of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Bonk et al. related "negotiation of meaning within students' ZPDs" to "an electronic cognitive apprenticeship." The online conference allows "experts or more capable peers to assist student learning and problem solving beyond their independent reach" (p. 6). In this apprenticeship, gradually, the novice learner assumes greater responsibility for the task at hand.

**Online Conference Use**

The vast number of current uses of online technology prohibits an extensive review of such offerings. This discussion will be limited to one particular online conference and two specific applications at the University of Northern British Columbia. The Teaching Online in Higher Education Conference (1999, November) provides one small sample of online conference activity. The Conference advertised 85 sessions with 89 presenters, and listed approximately 280 participants. Presenters were predominantly from USA universities (over 82 per cent) but international presenters included six from Canada, four from Australia, three from the United Kingdom, and one representative each from Hong Kong, Spain, and South Africa. Beeler (1998) and Lapadat (2000, May) each provide an overview for their implementation of online technology in a university setting.

Online discussion has been identified as the virtual voice of an online community of learners and learning not bound by geographical limits. Altany (1999) described the online conference as a "cyber-sit-down," and also as "an education in how to express oneself and one's thoughts, how to respond critically, but kindly, to others, how to discern new perspectives and have others respond to one's own." Altany noted that those students who may be hesitant to speak in class tend to more fully join in to the ongoing online discussions. By posting student writing, students wrote not only for the teacher, but for a real audience of peers, and this invited responses from peers. This active, social dynamic gave the course a unique voice developed by the spirit and capabilities of the learners.
Kasper (1999) in particular gave proof of this capacity to cross geographic boundaries. ESL students at five colleges participated in a content-based intercultural exchange, instituted through egroups.com. The four United States colleges were located in Georgia, Florida, with two in New York, and the fifth college was located in Kiev, Russia. After finding compatible partners, students were asked to produce a portfolio of writing to be published on the class website. Kasper cited gains for participants, including improved language skills, increased motivation, enhanced performance, and greater confidence. As well, participants benefited from sharing information and opinions with peers.

Using Web Knowledge Forum, an asynchronous threaded discussion forum, Herod (1999) used an online questionnaire completed by eight graduate students, all female, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Herod investigated the learner’s perception of interpersonal presence and compared CMC to the F2F conference, where interpersonal presence is physical. Despite the lack of physical cues, participants identified three forms of interpersonal presence: personal identifiers (biographical information, pictures, links); socializing efforts (extracurricular contact, personal information, supportiveness); and communication style, both personal (witty, poetic, sarcastic) and collegial (contribution to group work, openness, organization). Although all of these participants placed a high value on collegial relationships, the value of social relationships was more important to some than to others.

Three groups of people help to make an online class a success; the computer technologist(s), the teacher(s), and students (Catchpole, 1999). Most often the teacher acts as a mediator between the annoyances of daily use and the serious concerns that need to be referred to the technologist. Martin (1999) suggested a few basic principles that may be useful in the design of “student-friendly” web-based courses: plan carefully and test run all pages, keep each page simple, keep each page short (see also Tornow, 1997), provide “friendly” navigation tools, and keep pages current.

Several presenters discussed specific web technology. Learning Space (LS), a tool for creating web courses designed by Lotus Notes, was used by Geffen (1999), who discussed the advantages and disadvantages of online courses. Several advantages were cited: Students had privacy; and they could choose to correspond with large or small groups, individually to participants, or to the instructor only. Interaction was encouraged. As well, the material archive
could track student progress, including the quantity and quality of participation. Most of the
disadvantages noted were specific to LS, such as lack of automatic buttons, static graphics, and an
inadequate quiz program. More significantly, Geffen observed, “As with all software packages,
there is a learning curve for participants before they feel comfortable using the program.” This
provides yet another argument for the gradual introduction of new skills.

Equalization and greater levels of participation may be a natural outcome of “de-
centralization” (Butler, 1995; Strickland, 1997; Beeler, 1998; Mabrito, 1999; Schallert et. al, 1999).
The online classroom model moves away from the top-down transfer of information and focuses on
the exchange of information among students and the instructor(s). The online interactive discussion
forum reduces the opportunity for the teacher or a few students to monopolize the exchange and
marginalize others (Beeler, 1998). Students write more, and as all discourse is recorded, it is
permanent and may easily be reviewed. Students who succeed best online are text-oriented,
motivated, and self-directed.

However, online courses may not be for everyone. Others have commented on the
difficulties that can be experienced using online technology (van der Geest & Remmer, 1994;
Rubenstein, 1997). The implementation of a writing process classroom demands a great amount of
time. When online technology is added, the time requirements are substantially increased. Clayton
(1999) commented, “this format requires a greater commitment of time prior to beginning a course
than does the same material in a traditional setting.” Extra time is required to rethink objectives,
anticipate student needs, adapt all necessary components to the new format. In addition to the
traditional course description, syllabus, and assignment schedule, vital components such as mini-
lectures, links and bulletin boards may be necessary. Mini-lectures guide and facilitate the student
in taking control of their own learning, links provide connections to supplementary material and
bulletin boards provide interaction between students.

Online communication may encourage too great a sense of freedom and lead to a lessening
of inhibitions normally present in classroom discourse. A few researchers have noted that some
people behave irresponsibly more often online than they would in F2F conversations (Tornow,
1997). The verb, “to flame” has been added to the online vocabulary. According to The New
Hacker’s Dictionary (1993) to flame is “to post an e-mail message intended to insult and
provoke.” Although some may defend flaming as a form of “emotional honesty,” others hope
respectsful norms will develop -- again -- in time.

To help to manage an orderly and intellectual discussion, Keller (1999) proposed eight guidelines for a purposeful chat room. See Table 4 for her use of the acronym CLASSICS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>use contrasting text for teacher and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>limit chat room size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>archive discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>provide study questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>select students to respond; limit spontaneous distractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>invite guests to stimulate discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>use cut and paste for longer responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>surnames not nicknames</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Of specific interest are her suggestions to use study questions to guide discussion and to invite guests to visit to stimulate discussion. She strongly cautioned that enrollment must be limited. These recommendations are echoed by Lieberman and Stovall (1999), who add the need for definite start/end times and published rules of chat etiquette.

Darabi (1999) questioned the viability of teaching online but concluded that it can enhance the learning opportunities of many students. She observed that “teaching writing online is much
more time consuming," for reasons of course design time and the time needed to respond to student work. While response was more time consuming than in the traditional classroom setting, Darabi found that “my e-mail commentaries seem to be more thoughtful and helpful to students than my notations on student papers.” Further, she strongly advised to limit enrollment in online writing courses if the course is to be taught well. Students in the course also commented on the time commitment required, and several were surprised that the course was not self-paced. Darabi realized the heavy amount of reading may have been difficult for the student with weak reading skills or aural learning styles.

Metamorphosis is the metaphor Beeler (1998) uses to discuss the transition of teaching practices from the traditional F2F model to a World Wide Web context. She developed the basic format for her course over a non-teaching/summer semester and the semester previous to introduction, but allowed for revision during implementation. Two concerns affected this course on contemporary Canadian literature: a need to protect authors’ copyright and the limited number of online articles on Canadian literary topics. Beeler notes that this course was designed to meet the particular composition and distribution of students in the more remote areas of northern British Columbia. She argues that good group interaction and user friendly technology are key ingredients in any web course.

Lapadat (2000, May) examined use of online discussion as a tool to socially negotiate meaning. She observed that the level of discussion online could be superior to F2F interaction in the scaffolding of students’ thinking processes. In addition, computer conversations can be distributed over a wide geographic area. Lapadat articulates the unique potential of online discussion-based courses based on four successful experiences with graduate students. She observed that participants developed jointly constructed practice-relevant themes that evidenced deeper levels of understanding. As well, the extended time frame of asynchronous online discussion allows participants to reflect and to produce clarity and coherence in their responses.

Van der Geest and Remmers (1994) concluded that “computer-mediated group writing might become the dominant professional writing practice, particularly when drafts of a document

5 However, Darabi (1999) commented that design time was reduced with the use of WebCT, an authoring template.
need to be revised” (p. 240). Many references have been made to the growth of the online connection (Harris, 1995; Tornow, 1997; Bonk et al., 1998; Arlington, 1999; Beatty, 1999; Clayton, 1999; Herod, 1999; Hopper Cook, 1999; Kasper, 1999). Although computer conferencing technology is in wide use in universities, colleges, business courses, and among textbook publishers, there has been little activity reported from the secondary school.

Writing is a process that will help students to learn and to think. Writing can be a solitary activity, or writing can be an opportunity for social interaction in an effort to construct meaning with others and for oneself. The theories of Vygotsky and Bakhtin help to explain the intricacies and importance of this interaction. A WW classroom provides opportunities for students to work together and to share the making of meaning. However, in the literature of teaching practice, no definitive framework has been established for the implementation of a WW.

Research Problem

DiPardo and Freeman (1988) illuminated two assumptions that practitioners hold about peer response groups -- students gather for feedback on writing, and groups function to increase collaborative thinking and writing. The authors surveyed the literature and research to 1988, and observed that three key areas require further exploration: How do response groups fit into the larger social context of the writing class; what factors internal to response groups influence peer learning; and how do students give and receive response from peers? The latter question was a focus of this study.

I have found that the social hierarchical system of the adolescent culture has been a basis for difficulty in the use of the peer conference in my classroom. I still believe that face-to-face talk is beneficial, but it presents drawbacks for some students in some situations. To overcome these perceived difficulties, I attempted to use technology to create anonymity for students both as writers and as responders. I see this creation as one more way for students to share ideas to further the process of writing. The use of technology provides the possibility of anonymity so peers have a chance to respond to the writing itself and not the writer or the writer’s place in the class hierarchy.

Purpose

The literature, as yet, has not discussed the application of online conference in the junior secondary classroom. The study to be discussed in Chapter Three was designed to look at one particular aspect of the WW, the peer conference, in the naturalistic setting of one junior secondary
classroom. This study had a two-fold focus -- content and attitudes. With respect to content, I monitored student use of an online conference to discuss a short story each wrote and evaluated the impact of that discussion on a final revision. The second focus was students' attitudes. I used an online survey to collect students' opinions about the online conferencing process.

Research Questions

I formed my research questions in these two broad categories: content and attitude. What did participants say and do with regard to one piece of writing? What did participants think about the process and the product?

Content

1. What was the content of peer response online?
2. What changes did the writer make between the online draft and final copy submitted for evaluation?
3. How did the changes address the suggestions made by peers?

Attitudes

4. How did students feel about the process of online conferencing?
5. How did students feel about the usefulness of online conferencing for guiding their writing revision?
CHAPTER THREE
METHOD

You must write as if your life depended on it

My goal in this study, both as a teacher and as a researcher, was to examine the use of online technology to create a web-based peer conference in a writers’ workshop classroom. I considered three main areas: first, the content of peer responses; second, the value of peer conferencing to the students as indicated by their responses to questions probing attitude; and third, the value of the peer conferencing as indicated by revisions made between the draft and final copy of tenth grade students’ narrative writing.

This assignment continued an investigation of genre as the students were introduced to both the expository and narrative form during the fifteen weeks from September to December, 1999. For approximately seven weeks, students practiced the writing process of pre-write, draft and revise and prepared assignments in each format. For the essay, the students were required to include an introduction, statement of thesis, development of a minimum of five main idea paragraphs in support of that thesis, with a minimum of five details for each main idea, and a summary paragraph.

I selected to focus this study on one particular form of writing, the narrative short story. Three considerations guided this selection: The literature I reviewed focused on the narrative form. I developed my practices based on the guidelines proposed for a narrative assignment. Finally, my own experience has given me a greater sense of comfort and confidence as a writer of narrative. I suggested to the students that the key elements of a narrative composition would include: exposition, character(s), rising action, conflict, climax, and denouement.

This chapter will discuss participants, ethical considerations, procedures, student and technical logistics, and the time-line for this study of the narrative writing process. Five sets of data were collected: first, a first draft of students’ narratives which they posted online; second, peer responses posted online; third, a printout of the final copy of each narrative; fourth, an online attitude survey; and fifth, class meeting notes. All data collected was in the form of words, phrases,
and sentences produced in text by students either online or hand written. My field notes served to mark chronology and elaborate my decision-making processes.

Phases Preliminary to the Study

I developed this study over three phases. In the first phase, October, 1998, I drafted a narrative creative writing assignment which required student participation in an online peer conference. The assignment established the criteria for the narrative and expectations for final publication format. That fall, against the advice of my advisor, I attempted to work with a student to develop home-grown technology for students to use to peer conference online. In the second phase, June, 1999, I refined the classroom assignment and piloted WebCT technology to replace the earlier technology that I had attempted. The third phase was the actual study. For all three phases the setting remained the same. My responsibilities as the teacher remained substantially the same across the time period. Primary differences between the pilot phases and the actual study were the participants and the technology employed. WebCT was piloted by students in the spring of 1999, and implemented in the fall of 1999.

Design of the Website

My initial exploration into online technology was undertaken with the purpose of adding a new element to the experience of the Writers’ Workshop in the junior secondary classroom. The vast variety of possibilities I encountered in the search for an appropriate online vehicle was overwhelming. The availability of technical help narrowed the focus to WebCT.

In the first phase, the sprout of homegrown technology withered on the vine. Belatedly acknowledging the advice of my advisor, I contacted the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). There, in January, 1999, I was introduced to the conferencing tool, WebCT, developed at the University of British Columbia. Working with the Project Leader at CTL, we developed a WebCT site that could accommodate all of the functions necessary to establish the web-based conference for English 10.6 The name I gave the site used the first three initials of the school plus initials for “Writing on the Web” (BBJWOW).

WebCT technology includes more possible uses than explored in this research. WebCT has

6 BBJWOW was designed by Lynda Williams in collaboration with Elizabeth Woods. David Juniper assisted with refinement of the site and nurture of the technologically challenged.
built in options for the designer as well as those open to students. For the designer, the entry page could contain a banner, a heading, customized course icons, a footer counter, and a designer tool bar. A tutorial is built in to WebCT plus additional documentation is available. WebCT is set up for four types of users: the designer, who maintains control; the administrator, who may be the designer; grader(s); and students. Designer tools include progress tracking, student management, timed quizzes, access control and course back-up. Course content includes: a home page to link course components; a welcome page that can offer a brief course synopsis and instructor comment; single pages which link to a browser window of course information; paths of content to sequence related pages and that allow rearrangement of topics; tool pages to group common elements; and additional tools for glossary and search. WebCT offers instructor consistency of interface, complete control, cross platform via browser, multi-media capability, and a tool set.

The opening screen of the site we designed contains a banner, the heading BBJWOW, a footer counter, and four icons: Student Writing, Bulletin Board (BB), Peer Response Guidelines, and Survey. Students can access the Student Writing icon to read past and current stories. Peer Response Guidelines and the Survey will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. The BB icon allowed communication between students and was available for teacher use, although I chose not to participate in this online interaction. The BB kept track of which responses had been read and notified the student what was unread. The BB could be searched for a particular response. The student self evaluation feature was used to post the online survey. The survey included multiple-choice and open-ended short answer questions.

WebCT offers several tools valuable to the instructor. Progress tracking pages indicate date and time of each access by each student, time spent on the system, and percentage of stories selected. The BB records the number of responses and follow-up postings, if any. Comprehensive statistics were available for survey response analysis and can be downloaded for use with Excel.

A number of other tools were available with WebCT but not used in BBJWOW. For example, electronic mail, which allows one-to-one message transfer, was not activated. The Chat Room for intra- or inter-course communication was not accessed; nor was the

WebCT will allow chat rooms to be exclusive to the specific course, but can also allow communication among students enrolled in any course on the system server.
Whiteboard Tool, which allows real-time communication using a graphical paint interface. Other tools allow students to add images to their work and to include student-prepared web pages. Search features are available, including a searchable and linkable glossary and connection to external references. Timed quizzes can be delivered online on a predetermined day, and marks and comments can be returned to the students online.

BBJWOW was developed from mid-February through to May, 1999. I was taught how to upload (save) the 41 narratives to WebCT, and how to create paths, directories and links. I made decisions as to where I wanted them placed, but drew on the help of CTL staff for most manipulations of data in the site. The first challenge was to create a WebCT path for the “sample stories” that I had selected for display under the Student Writing icon. These sample stories were used to introduce WebCT technology and to model online peer response in the actual study.

Sample stories

Students enrolled in English 10, 1998-1999, two sections in semesters one and two sections in semester two, assisted in the first two phases of development of the study. In the fall semester, 41 students’ short stories were saved to disk for future use. Of these, I selected twelve for use in the final study. The selection of the 12 was based on three criteria: The story contained a protagonist, conflict, and resolution; the story was successfully completed in HTML; and I judged that the story would appeal to the target audience, adolescent males and females. In the second phase, thirteen students piloted the WebCT technology, and posted a narrative and peer responses online. These thirteen and the original twelve students were asked to complete the Letter of Informed Consent, 1998-1999, in the month of June, 1999 (Appendix A). Only stories written by the seventeen students who returned the Letter of Consent, signed by both student and parent, were considered for use as sample stories in the actual study. Of that seventeen, only fifteen stories were utilized, as one was incomplete and another was not saved in HTML. These stories became the basis for the sample stories used to introduce participants to the web-based conference in the actual study conducted in the fall of 1999.

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Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) was developed in the 1990s and is used to create web pages. Known for its ease of use, it is often added by a text editor or word processor.
Method

Participants

Participants included 22 of 24 students, nine boys and fifteen girls, enrolled in English 10, first semester, 1999-2000. I was the only teacher of English 10 at the school. The junior secondary school of approximately 320 students, grades 8, 9 and 10, is located in the interior of British Columbia on the rural edge of a small urban center. The socio-economic status of the catchment area could be generalized as lower to middle class, with a predominance of employment in the forestry and pulp mill industries. The range of incomes is broad, from one-parent families on social assistance to two-parent income families who appeared to live in relative financial comfort.

Ethical Considerations. Approval for this study was obtained from the school principal, April 1; from the School District Director of Student Services, April 15; and from the UNBC Ethics Review Committee on May 19, 1999 (Appendix B). Students were given the Letter of Consent (Appendix C) on October 13, 1999, and both student and parent signature was requested. Fourteen students had returned signed Letters by October 15, seven more were received by November 4, and the last Letter was returned November 9, 1999. The two students who chose not to participate online completed an equivalent assignment in class, and their work was not used in this research study. Data used in analysis was derived only from the nine boys and thirteen girls who returned the Letter of Consent and participated in the web-based conference. Participants were informed that any information obtained in connection with this study that could be identified with an individual participant would remain confidential and would be disclosed only with the permission of the participant. Two students consented to the publication of their names as the author of the story published online on BBJWOW. Both student and parent completed the letter of Consent 2000-2001 (Appendix G). These two students agreed to the use of their names on the closed website, open only to students this particular school. Further, any wider dissemination of the site would require further permission from the student for the use of this/her real name or for the publication of his/her story.

The decision as to whether or not to participate did not prejudice the student's relations with the teacher or the school. If a student decided to participate, the student was free to withdraw consent and discontinue the web-based peer conferencing at any time. No participant has chosen to withdraw.
The study presented a minimal level of intrusion as this assignment is a part of the established English curriculum, and students were allowed to "opt out" of the online portion of the project. No time outside of class was required. However, students were free to work on the writing and revision of their stories as they chose. Risk factors were no greater than normal school activity.

Procedure

Class time was devoted to this project from October 12, to November 30, 1999, a period of 36 days, approximately seven weeks. However, student projects were accepted until December 17, 1999. During this time period, students also were working on other class assignments not relevant to this research. Students were introduced to both the short story and the web-based conference before they were asked to participate in this study. The preparation of students for the narrative composition assignment was undertaken from the first week of classes. On the first full day of school, I gave the students a Course Overview and introduced the option of their participation in this research project. The first unit emphasized expository writing and students had the opportunity to read a wide variety of essays, some of which were narrative essays, and they wrote an in-class essay. In the subsequent unit, the students were required to submit an extended argumentative essay in the form of a research paper.

The second unit introduced narrative composition. I asked students to read a minimum of thirty short stories, recorded on a "Reading Log." Then each student selected fifteen of those stories for which to write paragraph responses and selected two stories for which they created a visual representation (Narrative Response Journal Assignment, Appendix D). One textbook9 was issued to all students, and additional texts listed on the assignment sheet were available to students in the classroom, but students were not limited to these texts nor required to use those recommended. Students were given time in the library to find additional resources to better match their personal interests, and students were encouraged to use material from any appropriate source. With input from students, five stories were selected to read out loud together in class, followed by class discussion. Additionally, students were given an opportunity to read the work of previous students that had been archived in WebCT.

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**Introduction to WebCT.** I used a LCD projector linked to an iMAC computer to demonstrate how to access the web site and how to log-in. The four icons previously described appear on the Welcome Page. The Student Writing icon led to three choices: Sample Stories, Presentations, and Publications. Of the fifteen stories I collected as samples, I selected two as examples of best quality, and I included these two under the “Publication” heading (Appendix E and F). I requested and received permission from the two students to use their real names as author when posted as a BBJWOW Publication. Real names are published only with stories written by students who complete the Letter of Consent for Publication form (Appendix G), and both student and parent signatures are requested. The other thirteen stories were included under the “Sample Stories” heading (see Figure 1).\(^\text{10}\) For these thirteen stories, only the pseudonym is given. On the Table of Contents, five are identified as “Fantasy/Science Fiction,” four are “Murder/Mystery,” and four are considered “True Life”.

\(^{10}\) Van der Geest (1994) provided the example for the use of the screen image (p. 243).
Figure 1. Table of Contents of Sample Stories

1. Fantasy / Sci Fi
   1.1. Abducted
   1.2. Deprived
   1.3. Ghostbusters
   1.4. The New Kid
   1.5. Revelation

2. Mystery / Mystery
   2.1. A Love
   2.2. Human for Hire
   2.3. Manhunters
   2.4. Revenge

3. True Life
   3.1. Damian
   3.2. Hunter
   3.3. The Penalty Shot
   3.4. The Wake Up Call

I showed students how to access the Table of Contents to select a story to read and how then to respond to a story through a link to the BB. The students read the titles and called out suggestions for discussion. I read out loud two of the selected stories. In whole class discussion, the students made oral comments about the stories; I synthesized these comments and posted a response under “Bulletins” on the website. An example of the screen used to compose a message is shown in Figure 2, and includes a sample of a student response in the student’s own words.

Figure 2. Sample of Screen to Compose Message

Compose Message
Start new thread on topic: BuckFever

Post  Preview  Cancel  Don't Wrap  Attach...

Forum: Notes

Message No. 156: posted by Chicken Little (little)
on Mon, Nov. 22, 1999, 14:47
Subject: Marbles

good details but it didn't make any sense to me at the end
Peer Response Guidelines. After this initial session, I gave students a hand-out of the Peer Response Guidelines (Appendix H). Icon access to this list also was available online. These Guidelines were developed based on the work of Elbow (1981) and Bonk et al. (1998). At the same time, I gave students a sheet delineating step-by-step instructions to the website (“Instructions: WebCT,” Appendix I). As soon as a student returned the Letter of Consent, the individual student or a small group of students was given a repeat of the demonstration on how to log-in to the website. Students practiced peer response individually or with partners. In practice sessions, students used a “dummy log-in” to preserve anonymity. I recorded which students practiced on which day and the number of each response.

Narrative Composition Assignment. For more than a decade, students in all three grades at this particular junior secondary school have been asked to write a narrative composition as a requirement of the English curriculum. Students have the opportunity to write as many short stories as they wish; however, each student is required to submit one for evaluation. In October, English 10 students were given a narrative composition assignment which formed the basis for this study (“Narrative: Creative Writing,” Appendix J).

In accord with the philosophy of the Writers’ Workshop, students were asked to demonstrate the writing process; a pre-write, rough draft, and revised draft were required. A pre-write could take any form such as a brainstorm list, web, plot diagram, character sketch, even an illustration or a cartoon. Students had free choice of topic; there were no length requirements. In previous years, I have asked students to share their draft with at least three peers in face-to-face conference. In this study, my aim was to develop a process for and to examine the effect of web-based peer conference on the students’ writing process, and revision of the final product. The web-based conference was explored to allow a student to respond to the writing and not to the writer, or to the writer’s place in the social hierarchy. To preserve anonymity, each student selected a code name she/he shared with me; only the participant and I were to know the student’s code name (Tornow, 1997). However, several students did reveal their code name to their friends. Some code names were lyrical, such as “Fire Fly” or “Purple Peacock.” Others bordered on questionable

However, students who wished to enter the School District No. 57 Writing Contest were advised of a maximum length of 2500 words for that purpose.
humor, such as “Bud Puffer” and “Dime Bag.” Participants posted their short story to the designated web site, using the code name. Stories appeared online as shown in Figure 3. I selected this story, “Buck Fever,” for further discussion in the Results chapter.

Students posted their stories to the “Presentations” file. Once the stories were available online, participants were invited to read as many stories as they wished. Stories were arranged in alphabetical order by story title as shown in Figure 4.
Figure 3. An example of a student story posted to WebCT.
Figure 4. Table of Contents of Presentations
A student could select a story by clicking on the title. The header above each story offered an icon link to the WebCT BB. By clicking on the BB icon, the student could respond to that story. Peer responses were posted to the BB and assigned a chronological number according to date and time posted. Students were required to respond to at least five narratives of their choice, using their own code name. The author could check the BB at any time to see what responses were posted to her/his story. To ensure that each story received a minimum of three responses, I tracked the number of peer responses by student and to which story. Beginning November 21, at the beginning of each class, I read the titles of stories that had not yet received sufficient response. Students were very cooperative, and all stories received at least three responses. A sample from the list of peer responses is shown in Figure 5.

**Revision.** I gave each participant a printout of the peer responses; and following this, they were given the opportunity to review, revise and proofread their work. I also gave each participant a printout of the draft posted to WebCT (online draft), and I asked her/him to use a highlighter to note where she/he had made changes to the story. All students were required to submit a printout of their final narrative to the teacher for evaluation. They were required to attach hard copies of the pre-write, early draft, all revised drafts, and the printout of peer responses they were given. As the teacher, I evaluated each story for both "preparation" and "quality." The criteria for "preparation" were listed on the assignment handout, Narrative: Creative Writing (Appendix J). On that assignment sheet, I detailed the specific requirements and the point value assigned for each item for a total of one hundred points. Then, I asked students to make suggestions to improve the criteria I would use to evaluate the "quality" of their short stories. I displayed a form I have used in the past on an overhead screen (Appendix K). I discussed these elements with the class and asked the students if they wanted to suggest any changes to the criteria. No suggestions were offered.

The time required to complete this project using online technology was a limitation of this approach. By the time all students had submitted their stories for evaluation, this narrative unit had extended far beyond the length of time I had given in any previous year. At this point, time became a major consideration. Students were not required to make further revisions, and none of the stories were posted as "Publications" for peer review. Several students entered their stories in the school writing contest, but none were selected to compete at the district level.
Figure 5. A sample list of peer responses
Survey. All participants were asked to complete a short survey after the narrative writing. The purpose of the survey was to determine their familiarity and comfort with both peer conferencing and the use of computer technology to conference. The survey form was made available to students online, using WebCT (Appendix L); however, the completed responses were only seen by myself and the CTL Project Leader. Students accessed the survey by selecting the icon on the welcome page.

Multi-task requirements. For the month of October, students completed the Narrative Response Journal (Appendix D) and drafted a short story. Beginning mid-October, students typed their stories on iMAC computers and used the “save as” feature to convert the story to HTML to upload to WebCT. In school, students were able to access WebCT outside of class time anytime the school library was open. Access was also possible using Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Explorer from any computer with an online connection, as the web address was cited on “WebCT: Instructions” (Appendix I). As the number of computers at the school was limited, students had several tasks they could pursue in the library at any one time. Those tasks pertained to assignments other than the one examined in this research as well as to the narrative assignment. From November 15 until December 17, students were working concurrently on a research paper as well as several small grammar assignments. The sequence of activities is outlined on “Calendar of Assignments” as shown in Figure 6.
### Calendar of Assignments

#### September

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<td>Read N</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Read N</td>
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<td>25</td>
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#### December

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Expos = The expository unit began September 7 and ended September 22. On September 22, students wrote and in-class expository essay.

Read Nar = From September 22 through to October 29, students read short stories and wrote responses in paragraph form addressing theme.

Write = On October 2, students began to draft their own short story. Some students worked on a first draft until November 4.

WebCT = On October 13, students were introduced to WebCT in whole-class discussion, using an LCD projector and screen.

Intro = From October 14 until October 21, students used sample stories to practice writing peer responses and to become familiar with WebCT.

Practice = Stories were uploaded to WebCT from November 3 to November 16

Response = Students wrote peer responses from November 10 until November 26.

Revision = Students worked on revision from November 25 through 30.

Nar Due = Students were required to submit the short story on December 8.

Survey = From December 1 through 10, students wrote answers to the online survey.

ResPp = The research unit began on November 15 and concluded in January of 2000.
Through November, students had access to six computers to type their own story and to peer respond. By mid-November, all of the 22 stories were uploaded. The week of November 15, students were given time to respond online. By Monday, November 22, each student had received a printed compilation of peer responses to his/her story. The first student completed and submitted the narrative assignment on November 25. My schedule called for all short story work to be completed by November 30. However, I continued to accept late assignments until the last story was received, December 17.

**Class meeting.** To close the narrative unit, a class meeting was held to solicit additional student input about the process. The class meeting format I use has been developed over fifteen years of practice based on the principles of Rudolf Dreikurs, who adapted the work of Alfred Adler. A guided response may take a variety of forms. Guided response typically includes: good things, problems, suggested improvements, responsibilities, and future plans. For this study, students were given a “Reflective Response” form (Appendix M) to record their thoughts under three headings: Good Things, Problems, Possible Improvements. I asked each student to record their thoughts on these forms on December 15, 1999, the day before I returned their stories to them with the marks I assigned to their work. I collected the forms, and then, the next day, after returning their papers with accompanying evaluation and comments, I returned the same form to them. I asked them to complete the same questions on the back. First, each student recorded his or her own thoughts, then students formed self-selected small groups to share their ideas. Finally, an open discussion was held to allow students to voice any additional thoughts they had about the unit. I recorded the comments students made during the discussion and collected all the forms. I chose a two day process because I wanted to hear what students thought about the unit without reference to grades. I wondered if students might make different comments after they had been assigned a mark for the project.

**Teacher Responsibilities.** From the first contact between students and teacher, it was my responsibility as the teacher to organize the class, establish rules and routines, and clarify expectations. I created time in the daily schedule for practice of the writing process and rehearsal of the peer response to writing, in both whole class and peer sessions (Elbow, 1981; Graves, 1983, 1985, 1995; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1984, 1987; Gere, 1987, 1990; Cazden, 1988; Jeske, 1989; Morse, 1994). As recommended in the literature, I wrote with my students and shared personal...
writing (Graves, 1985, 1995; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; Gere, 1987; Zemelman & Daniels, 1988; Phenix, 1990; Spandel & Stiggins, 1990).

Prior to students accessing WebCT, I entered the students’ real and code names. I set up the library computers to bookmark the site and prepare for student access. As soon as a student completed the HTML draft of his/her story, I uploaded the story to WebCT. The stories appeared under the “Presentations” icon. On an ongoing basis, I printed out two copies of the responses for each story using the WebCT function that allows the administrator to compile peer responses in any order. Figure 7 illustrates a sample of compiled responses for “Buck Fever,” and Figure 8 illustrates a sample of compiled responses for “Braggart.” I gave one copy to the writer of the story. I kept one copy and checked the responses to ensure that students’ comments were appropriate and respectful. I also kept a record of the number of responses per student and per story.
Figure 7. Sample responses for “Buck Fever”
Figure 8. Sample responses for “Braggart”

Message No. 73: posted by Proud Canadian (canadian) on Fri, Nov. 12, 1999, 10:21
Subject: Braggart

Excellent plot, excellent ending. What can I say. Good job all around.

Message No. 77: posted by Agent SSS (sss) on Fri, Nov. 12, 1999, 11:13
Subject: Braggart

It was very depressing. Isn’t there a better way to resolve the conflict. Is just bragging enough to kill someone over. If he hated Bill so much why were they friends.

Message No. 80: posted by Dime Bag (bag) on Mon, Nov. 15, 1999, 13:06
Subject: Braggart

I didn’t really like this story. It could have been written by a little kid. The events happened too fast. I didn’t get a clear pitch of the characters.
Data Analysis

My main purpose was to study the relationship between peer responses to a piece of student writing and the writer’s revision of that writing after reading those comments. Secondly, I asked students to comment on the effectiveness of WebCT to gather feedback that could assist the student in the revision of writing. I maintained a Research Journal of annotated field notes. This journal recorded my initiation to and implementation of WebCT. As well, I used the Journal to document analysis in progress and as an attempt to identify and make explicit both insights and limitations as they emerged.

In this study, I examined the comments peers made in response to student stories and the revision authors made to their stories, and I looked for evidence that indicated that the revisions may have been influenced by peer responses. After students completed the writing and revision process, I asked them to complete a survey and to participate in a class meeting. I examined both the survey responses and the class meeting comments to determine what students felt about the process of the web-based peer conference and the usefulness of the peer responses they received.

Data Collected

I collected six sources of data. First, I printed out a copy of the online draft which I used as a baseline for comparison to the final draft. Second, I compiled and printed responses for each story, with copies for the author and myself. Third, I asked each participant to take a copy of the online draft and, with a highlighter, indicate where she/he made revisions to the story. Fourth, every student was required to submit a final copy of the story for evaluation (Appendix J and K). Fifth, I asked students to complete an online survey to give their opinions on the usefulness of peer response and computer assisted peer response (Appendix L). Sixth, I held a class meeting to close the unit. Data from this meeting consisted of my summarizing notes recorded during the meeting and the written Reflective Response forms (Appendix M) completed by individual students.

Analysis Procedure

Each of the six sources of data dictated their own type of analysis. First, I recorded my “teacher” notations of possible revisions on a printed copy of the online draft. Second, I analyzed the peer responses to determine patterns in the content. Third, to check for proofreading, I
compared the copy of the online draft highlighted by the student, the teacher annotated copy, and the final copy submitted by the student for evaluation. Fourth, to check for revision, I compared the words and sentences in the online draft to the final copy. Fifth, I analyzed the survey to determine frequency of numerical data and patterns in the content of the short answers. Sixth, I analyzed the Reflective Response forms (Appendix M) completed during the class meetings to determine frequency and patterns in the content of participants’ comments. This step-by-step process is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teacher notations</td>
<td>Proofreading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Peer responses</td>
<td>Patterns of words, phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Student notations</td>
<td>Highlighted words, phrases, sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Final copy</td>
<td>Words, phrases, sentences compared to teacher notations and student notations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Frequency of numerical data, patterns of words, phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reflective Response</td>
<td>Patterns of words, phrases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Notations

First, I read the 22 stories. On the printed copy of the online draft, I recorded notations of possible revisions. I did not share these teacher notations with students until after the study was completed.12 I wanted to examine student revision based on peer comments, not teacher comments.

12 In January, I asked if any student would like to see the teacher notations I made. At that time, students had the opportunity to prepare their stories for the school district writing contest. I gave a copy of my notations to the one student who asked.
The notations I made tended to be for proofreading: commas, end punctuation, paragraphs, spelling. This first step helped me to determine students’ needs for future mini-lessons, particularly in grammar and presentation of a final product.

Peer Responses

Second, I wanted to examine what comments peers made in response to student stories (Question #1). I used a printout of the peer responses compiled for each story to look for frequency and patterns of comments. Many of the peer responses were several sentences long, whereas others were mere phrases. To obtain a meaningful text size unit, I segmented each peer response into idea units or “comments,” that is single words or phrases that expressed one idea. To give an example, these are the sentences contained in peer response #94:

I thought your story was very creative, filled with lots of interesting words. I was a little unclear of who the prince was and where he came from. Was he only in her dream?

This was broken down into four comments, as follows:

- 94a I thought your story was very creative,
- 94b filled with lots of interesting words.
- 94c I was a little unclear of who the prince was and where he came from.
- 94d Was he only in her dream?

The 119 peer responses were divided into 442 comments. After I read and numbered each comment, I began the process of analysis. Once again, after all the comments had been coded and recorded on a spreadsheet, I calculated totals by student and by category. I will discuss the frequencies and patterns that emerged in the Results chapter.

Comparison Teacher Notation, Student Notation and Final Drafts

After completing the coding, I made a comparison between my notation copy, the student’s notation copy and the final copy of each story to examine what revisions authors made to their stories (Question #2). I created an analysis chart, Narrative Notations (Appendix M) to help me to examine student revision. On each chart, first, I summarized the proofreading notations I had made. Initially, I began to tally information about the mechanics of writing. Second, I looked at peer responses to summarize the revisions suggested by peers. As I read the peer comments, I noticed
additional information I wanted to tally. I added several categories on each Narrative Notations chart (Appendix N) in my own handwriting. The categories were audience and elements of plot: the beginning, rising action, climax, ending, and theme. I also examined peer responses for comments on dialogue and description.

Third, I used the student's highlighted draft to assist me in determining what revision the student had made in the final copy. Fourth, I compared the highlighted draft to the final copy and counted the number of words, phrases and/or sentences that were changed. Fifth, I compared the peer comments to the changes made in the final copy to see what evidence indicated that author revisions may have been influenced by peer responses (Question #3). This five step process was repeated three times to check for inconsistencies. I will examine the frequencies and patterns that emerged in the Results chapter.

Survey

I used both the survey and the class meeting to determine students' perceptions about this narrative project. Specifically, I asked how students felt about the process of peer conference online (Questions #4), and how useful they felt the peer responses were in guiding the revision of their stories (Question #5).

I examined student responses to the 30-question survey. After students had written their own narrative, conferenced with peers, and produced a final copy, I asked all participants to complete the survey. The survey form was available to students online, using WebCT (Appendix L). The completed survey responses were available only to the teacher and the CTL Project Leader. The students' responses to the survey were anonymous. The only record archived by WebCT was that a student had taken the survey, and no date or number was assigned to the particular student.

I collected two types of data: Five questions asked background data as to gender and computer experience. Ten Likert-type questions asked students to indicate their attitudes towards the peer and web-based conference. Fifteen questions required a typed, short answer response. Each question generated its own categories of response. Some categories were common to more than one question. I gave survey responses a three-part code: First, I indicated that this was a survey response with the initials SR. Then, I gave the number of the question for the response. Last, I gave the chronological number of the student's response. An example would be, "It was a fun experience. Thanx" SR30.18. I will examine the frequencies and patterns of responses in the
Results chapter. I attempted to reproduce the student’s words as accurately as possible, including frequent spelling and grammatical errors, which were noted as in the above example.

Class Meeting

The words and phrases from the individual responses recorded on the Reflective Response forms (Appendix M) were compiled and coded. The Reflective Response included three guiding questions: List the “good things,” the “problems,” and “possible improvements” to the online writing project. Five categories emerged from the data: peer response, anonymity, computer use, statements positive or negative, and evaluation.

I gave Reflective Response comments a four part code: First, I put the Reflective Response forms in alphabetical order. This was done as a force of habit procedure. I indicated that this was a class meeting comment with a capitalized letter of the alphabet. Second, I gave the date of the class meeting, either 16 or 17. Third, I assigned numbers to the three guiding questions: Good things were number one, problems number 2, and improvements number 3. Last, I gave a small case alphabetical letter to each of the student’s comments. An example would be, “It was a first for me” Q17.1a. I will examine the frequencies and patterns of responses in the Results chapter. Again, I attempted to reproduce the student’s words as accurately as possible, including frequent spelling and grammatical errors, which were noted as in the above example.

I will discuss the results of this inquiry and examine the frequencies and patterns of responses in the Results chapter, next.
It may be that the most difficult thing writing teachers do is implement peer response groups (Brunjes, 1993, p. 20).

My purpose in this study was to examine the usefulness of the online peer conference as indicated by two measures -- student revision to one piece of narrative writing, and a survey and classroom discussions of students' attitudes. Five questions guided this endeavor. With regard to content: First, I examined the content of peer response online. Second, I examined the changes the writer made between the online and final copy submitted for evaluation. Third, I examined how these changes addressed the suggestions made by peers. The analysis of content was a qualitative process of pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). With regard to attitude, I made an inventory of student responses to both a survey and as expressed in two class meetings. Fourth, I examined students’ comments about the process of online conferencing; and fifth, I examined students’ comments about the usefulness of online conferencing for guiding their writing revision. The analysis of attitude was both a qualitative and quantitative process. This chapter will examine the data collected in the attempt to address these questions.

With regard to content, the documents collected were the online draft, the peer responses to each story, a copy of the online draft with teacher notations, another with student notations, and final evaluated copy. With regard to attitude, student opinion was collected in the form of an online Survey (Appendix L) and a written Reflective Response (Appendix M) recorded on two separate days, along with my field notes. Due to the importance of anonymity in the concern for a safe environment, anonymous response will be discussed as a subtopic of attitude.

According to WebCT student tracking, during this project, the first student accessed the system on October 15, 1999, and the last student to begin entered on November 24. Three students last accessed by November 16, and all students finished peer response by
November 30. The highest number of “hits” (access) was 101, with a low of 22, and an average per student of 44.5 hits. Hits included access both to read and to respond to stories.

Content

Content of Peer Response

Each of the 22 participants was required to read the work of their peers, select five stories, and post a response to each of those selected five. Thirteen students completed the required five responses, two students posted three, and one student posted only two responses. Six students posted more responses than required. This response pattern indicated unanticipated differences not examined in this study, but evoked an interest for future consideration.

One hundred nineteen responses were posted. Each of the responses was divided into words or phrases that expressed a single idea, identified as a comment. Of 442 comments, the average number of comments per peer response was 3.7. The average number of responses per story was 5.4. The average number of comments per participant and per story was twenty. Two stories received a high total of thirty comments: #18 “Summer Love” received seven responses, five of which were longer than the norm. #20 “The Teacher”, a long story, received five responses, one of which contained ten comments. The least number of peer comments received by any story was eight and ten: #5 “Burmuda”, the longest and most rambling of the presentations, received only three responses for a total of 8 comments, and then only because I kept reminding students that each story had to be read by a minimum of three people. In the end, two students responded on the last Friday, one of whom was the author, who commented, “note to slf: write shorter stories!!!” The last response was taken the following Monday. One of the first stories available online, #21 “I Told You So,” received only four responses, all three comments or less. The story was short, and all four responses contained comments asking for more description.

Initial categories, I tried to use the “Peer Response Guidelines” (Appendix H) in my first attempt to make sense of the data. However, these original categories seemed to overlap without any clear distinction. I generated fifteen categories in my second attempt to code the comments: (1) Character was maintained. (2) Mechanics were maintained and sub-divided into (3) paragraphing and (4) spelling. (5) Plot was maintained and sub-divided into several literary conventions: (6) exposition, (7) rising action, (8) climax, (9) end, (10) theme, and (11) length. Positive feedback and social acknowledgment were both recognized as (12) affirmation. (13) Word choice replaced voice
and audience. The categories (14) description and (15) other were added. As I read and re-read the peer responses, these fifteen categories emerged from the data. To illustrate: Peer response #94 to story #8 “Enchanted Utopia” was coded as follows:

94a I thought your story was very creative, = affirmation
94b filled with lots of interesting words. = word choice
94c I was a little unclear of who the prince was
and where he came from. = character
94d Was he only in her dream = plot

I chose these fifteen categories as representative of fundamentals in the junior secondary English curriculum; in particular, literary conventions for the narrative composition and mechanical correctness. Positive feedback to the author seemed to be the most frequent type of comment and demanded a category. I deleted several categories as superfluous: direct instruction, questioning, and suggestions for improvement. Comments for these deleted categories seemed to fit better in the categories of the literary conventions. Table 6 gives examples. Please note, throughout this study, the words, spelling, and punctuation are replicated from the student’s own and have not been corrected, and the addition of the symbol [sic] has been omitted.¹³

¹³ Two of the examiners of this study remarked at the lack of spelling accuracy demonstrated by these students, and both wondered why the sudents spelled so poorly.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Comment Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>141b Develop your characters more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>67c You used punctuation well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraphing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>133c You should have broke the paragraphs up more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>107d use the spell chec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>94d Was he only in her dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposition</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>149c (There is a lot of dialog) which is a bit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>confusing at the beginning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rising Action</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>116b lots of foreshadowing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climax</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>152b Then pearl has an accident and rosie gets her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>guy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ending</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>68f I knew something bad would happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>140a seem's like there isn't much of a point to this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>121b It's amazing how you could make it good and so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>short.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>116a good story!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word choice</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>134d and re worded so it wuld have had more of an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>126d add more detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>69a I didn't like your story at all,....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>442</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once all the comments had been coded and recorded on a spreadsheet, I calculated totals by student and by category. When I derived a percentage by category, only affirmations (118 comments, 27%) and plot (104 comments, 23%) had received adequate numbers of comments to be useful. Subsidiary categories of plot indicated that the climax or ending received approximately 14% of the total number of comments, and theme received approximately 5%. Character, a subdivision of description, received approximately 5% of the total. In decreasing order, exposition or rising action, length, and spelling each received approximately 3% of the total. Climax, paragraphing, and “other” each received less than 2%. Consequently, I decided to reduce the number of categories.

Revised categories. In my third attempt, the 442 comments were condensed into four categories: Affirmations, Description, Plot, and Mechanics. The Affirmation category was retained. The “other” category contained five negative comments directed to one story, which I included in the affirmation category, as a lack of affirmation, for a total of 123 comments. For Plot, I included all comments previously classified as plot and added exposition (7), rising action (8), climax (10), ending (52), theme (24), and length (15), for a total of 220 comments. In the Description category, I included all comments previously classified as description (31) and added character (22) and word choice (9), for a total of 62 comments. In the Mechanics category, I included all comments previously classified as mechanics (15) and added paragraphing (4) and spelling (18), for a total of 37 comments. Only one comment deviated from this compilation, I originally classified 134d (see Tables 6 and 7) as “word choice” due to the mention of “reworded,” but upon reflection, I redefined it as a “plot” comment calling for “more of an impact.” Using the same comments as in Table 6, Table 7 illustrates how I reassigned the codes.
### Table 7

Examples of peer responses distributed among four categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Comment Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>69a I didn’t like your story at all,...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>116a good story!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>126d add more detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>141b Develop your characters more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>68f I knew something bad would happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>94d Was he only in her dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>116b lots of foreshadowing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>121b It’s amazing how you could make it good and so short.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>134d and reworded so it would have had more of an impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>140a seem’s like there isn’t much of a point to this story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>149c (There is a lot of dialog) which is a bit confusing at the beginning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>152b Then Pearl has an accident and Rosie gets her guy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>67c You used punctuation well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>107d use the spell check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>133c You should have broke the paragraphs up more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>442</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using these four categories, in order of frequency, the greatest number of comments were attributed to Plot (50%), followed by Affirmations (28%), Description (14%), and Mechanics (8%).

First, I read and proofread all 22 of the stories. Of the 22, I selected five for closer observation. I selected four of these five specific stories due to the number of responses each had received from peers. One story was selected as it was the only story to receive negative feedback. Each of the four had received the greatest number of comments according to category. For example, two stories received the greatest number of affirmative comments: #8 “Enchanted Utopia” (Appendix O.1) received fifteen affirmations, and #4 “Buck Fever” (Appendix P) received ten affirmations. In comparison, most stories received only five positive statements, and every story received at least one. Two stories each received the greatest number of comments about plot: Both #12 “Marbles” (Appendix Q.1) and #20 “The Teacher” (Appendix R) each received seventeen comments. In comparison, most stories received approximately five comments about plot, and one story received no comments about plot. The number of student comments was the basis for the selection of these four. “The Braggart” story #3 (Appendix S) was an oddity, as it received five negative comments from three different students. These were the only negative comments posted. Of these five, “Enchanted Utopia” (Appendix O.2) and “Marbles” (Appendix Q.2) will be discussed as examples of revision. “Buck Fever,” “Braggart,” and “The Teacher” will be discussed as examples of no revision.

When I asked myself why “Enchanted Utopia” and “Buck Fever” had received this high number of affirmations, I had to acknowledge that my participation in the context clouds my perception. Although listed on the story by her code name, Fuzzy Kiwi, the author of “Enchanted Utopia” did not choose to be anonymous. To me, she appeared to be a well-liked student, and that popularity combined with the romance of her story may account for the number of affirmations she received. Students knew she was the author, they liked her, and they liked her story. If this syllogism is true, then it may also be true that if students do not like you, they are likely not to like your story. My perception of the class culture was that the author of “Buck Fever” was not a student who was well-liked in the class. However, students liked his story. I believe that the students did not know who Bud Puffer was. In class, I heard students ask out loud, “Who is the author?” Bud Puffer chose to remain anonymous. I believe students may have liked “Buck Fever” because of its length and subject matter. The story was little more than one page long, and I have noticed that
students like short stories that are short. As well, with accidental death as an ironic finale, the subject bordered on black humor, another device favored by adolescents. This is one example where anonymity worked in the author’s favor.

Both “Marbles” and “Teacher” received a high number of comments about plot. I believe both students remained anonymous to their peers, because students would ask who the author was. Lil Smurf, the author of “Teacher,” was the last to complete her first draft and the last to receive peer response. Although she had opportunity, she never chose to make any revision. On the other hand, Spiffy Spock, the author of “Marbles” attempted to answer the concerns expressed in peer response. She did make minimal changes. However, she did not resolve the problem with the plot in that revision. The comments she received from her peers did not help her solve her problem. She did not ask me, and I did not know what to tell her to help her to solve her problem. Only after the story was submitted to the school writing contest did I hear a response from one of the judges who offered insight to the unresolved problem with “Marbles.” He remarked that the story read like a Twilight Zone episode, but it did not make that essential connection between the story hook and the resolution. The reader is left seeking the connection between the crushed marbles and the death of the grandmother. “Marbles” is a case of art requiring diligence and a wider audience for reader response.

Revisions

Changes between online draft and final copy

Of 22 students, 18 made some effort to revise the final draft of the story. Four students made no revisions at all. Those four handed in a printed copy of the online draft for final evaluation (refer to Appendix P, R, and S). When the HTML version posted on WebCT was printed, it did not show paragraphs. This difficulty was a result of my lack of familiarity with the website and the time constraints that limited my ability to troubleshoot for a solution. However, all the students who revised their work demonstrated the use of paragraphs in the final draft. Seven students changed only mechanics in the form of minor revisions to spelling, punctuation or capitalization. One-half of the students made meaning-based revisions. Eleven students added sentences, four added description, and seven developed plot. The authors of both “Enchanted Utopia” (Appendix O.2) and “Marbles” (Appendix Q.2) made changes to the plot and ending of their stories. Fuzzy Kiwi
developed the character of her antagonist with dialogue and separated both lovers in the final punishment. Spiffy Spock tried to clarify the relationship of the ghost-child and the crushed marbles to the death of the grandmother, but all of the judges in the school writing contest felt the ending still lacked clarity.

When I compared my teacher notations (Appendix N) for proofreading to the student’s final copy, the correction of mechanical errors was minimal. The teacher baseline recorded a numerical range of mechanical errors from a low of ten to a high of more than 70 for the longest story, #3 “Burmuda.” In the final draft, for all 22 participants, most of these mechanical errors remained. Comma errors were especially prevalent. In Reflective Response, students listed several problems: “revisions (indenting)” J16.2a, “organization of the story” J16.2b, “only in making changes to story was a bit confusing” J16.2a, “editing, fixing” G17.2a, “The people didn’t tell me about punctuation” K17.2a, “...indenting, spelling, quotations” J17.2a.b.c.

My perception is that revision was minimal. Further, students did not know how to give useful comments to the author. These two concerns, the poor quality of the final work and inefficacy of peer comments, will be discussed further in Chapter 5. Acknowledging those limitations, I examined what revisions may have been suggested by peer response.

Author Use of Peer Responses

Relationship Between Revisions and Peer Suggestions

To examine the relationship between what peers suggested and what authors revised, I made several preliminary decisions. I interpreted affirmations to mean revision was not suggested. I addressed changes in three categories: Description, Plot, and Mechanics. Four students added descriptive sentences to their stories. Of these, three had each received at least three peer comments with regard to description, and one had received no comments about description. Seven students added sentences to develop plot, and all of these seven had received peer comments about plot. Seven students proofread their work to improve mechanics, and of these, three had received suggestions from peers. In reference to teacher-noted errors in mechanics, only two of the 22 evaluated stories demonstrated an adequate level of error correction, with “adequate” defined as five or fewer errors in mechanics. For each of the eleven stories that were revised, Table 8 outlines the number of peer comments by category each story received, and revision is indicated by the number of sentences that the author added for description or plot and the number of mechanical
changes made. As mentioned previously, teacher notations primarily recorded proofreading errors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>21</th>
<th>22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peer comments</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>revision</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plot</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peer comments</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>revision</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peer comments</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>revision</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher notations</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>40+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four authors received peer comments and made changes: The author of story #7 added description. The authors of stories #6 and #19 added sentences to develop plot. Stories #7 and #18 showed evidence of proofreading corrections. The authors of stories #8, #21 and #22 made revisions despite an insufficient number of suggestions. On the other hand, the authors of stories #8 and #18 received requests for additional description, but no revisions were made. Seven authors received suggestions about plot, but minimal revisions were made (stories #7, #10, #11, #12, #13, #18, and #22).

Nine participants received suggestions but did not change words or add sentences. However, in addition to the changes previously described for “Enchanted Utopia” and “Marbles,”
other authors did add sentences to develop their stories: #6 “Egg Seller” added eleven sentences, #19 “The Sweater” added sixteen sentences, and #21 “I Told You So” added 20 sentences, and #13 “Mystery Magic” and #18 “Summer Love” each added two sentences. Four authors added description: #7 “Emptiness,” #10 “Grace,” #11 “Heaven and Back,” and #22 “Unforgiven.”

I interpret these data to indicate that the participants did very little revision to their piece of writing. The students tended not to use the suggestions made by peers in their revision. Three explanations occur to me. First, student demonstration of the ability to proofread was insufficient because students were unaware of publication conventions. Second, student comments were insufficient to encourage revision. And, third, some students just did not care enough about their stories to revise.

What I teach is not what students learn. This is a sad but true axiom. Although my records assure me that these students had been exposed to publication fundamentals such as the need to paragraph dialogue and correct spelling, they did not demonstrate these fundamentals in this piece of writing. What I perceive as student need for teacher involvement in the revision process will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

The students themselves expressed dissatisfaction with peer comments. On the survey, seven students said they made changes to mechanics, four changed descriptions, and two reported changes to character. Such comments included, “I used more description on my character...and described how he got injured” SR20.9 and “I changed what happened to a character in my story. Instead of falling of a pyramid she gets a pimple” SR20.13. Eight students replied that they had not made any changes to the narrative based on peer response. Comments included: “Nothing that anybody in the class said made me change the story” SR20.4, “I didn’t make any changes to my story because there were no response that helped me” SR20.15, and “I made no revisions due to peer responses” SR20.18.

Several students made revisions despite insufficient comments. #8 “Enchanted Utopia” received only three suggestions about plot, but added ten sentences. #21 “I Told You So” received only six responses concerning plot, but added twenty sentences, and no comments about mechanics but made fifteen changes. #22 “Unforgiven” received three comments about description, and added eight sentences. The students who made changes, with or without peer input, were students who seemed to care about what they had written. Those who made no changes might agree with the
following statement: “I would have had to almost re-write the whole story” SR20.11.

Attitudes

With regard to attitude, I used the survey (Appendix L) and two informal class meetings (Appendix L). Students responded to the 30-question online survey in three sections. Of the fifteen multiple choice questions, the first five requested information as to gender, experience with the internet and chat options, as well as from what location and for how long participants used WebCT. In the second section, students were asked to use a Likert-type scale and rate ten statements from a low of one, low or strongly disagree, to three, no opinion, to a high of five, high or strongly agree. The last fifteen questions requested participants to respond in short answer format. The last two sections examined student opinions about the design and effectiveness of the narrative project, previous experience with teacher or peer response, anonymity, the use of WebCT, and perception of self as a writer.

Five categories emerged from the class meeting data: Peer Response, Anonymity, Computer Use, Teacher Evaluation of stories, and Project Evaluation of the narrative project by the students. Both the survey and class meeting data were used to determine student attitudes about the process, the usefulness of the peer response, and the value of anonymous response.

Student attitudes about the process of online conferencing

When asked to express their opinions about the process employed in this narrative project, 75 of 140 comments submitted on the Reflective Response forms used in the class meetings were “Good Things.” The survey specifically addressed the process of the online conference with both Likert-type and short answer questions. On the survey, seventeen students somewhat or strongly agreed that they would recommend online conferencing for other students, one opposed, and four had no opinion. On the survey, the final question asked for “Other” additional comments the students wished to share. Of thirteen comments, eleven were affirmations and two concerned anonymity. Affirmations included: “IT WAS CCCCCOOOOOOOOOOOOOLLLLLL” SR30.2, “I thought this was a great experience for me. I enjoyed learning about the WebCT program” SR30.3, “I though was a neat experience and it taught me something new” SR30.13, and “I enjoyed doing this because it was the first time I had done this” SR30.15.
The initial WebCT results indicated that 24 individuals had recorded answers to the survey administered to the 22 participants. However, one student entered twice, as she believed the first entry had been deleted. As well, my CTL advisor entered once to test the survey. The data has been adjusted to correct for this, as these answers were omitted.

**Likert-type questions.** The first five questions asked background information. Seventeen students used computers at school, and five had home computers. This was not a group of technophiles. Of 22 participants, thirteen had fewer than ten hours experience with the World Wide Web (WWW) prior to this project, nine students had more than 50 hours experience. Twenty had less than ten hours experience with a chatline or electronic conferencing system, and two had more than ten hours. Twenty students spent less than four hours on WebCT, and two spent more than five hours.

With the ten questions that followed, I attempted to discern student attitudes. Seventeen students somewhat or strongly agreed that the conferencing activity encouraged sharing ideas, but three opposed, and two had no opinion. Ten students somewhat or strongly agreed that the conferencing activity gave ideas regarding character, but three opposed, and nine had no opinion. Ten students somewhat or strongly agreed that the conferencing activity gave ideas regarding plot, but six opposed, and six had no opinion. A lukewarm endorsement, perhaps; however, in the context of limited adolescent enthusiasm for academic endeavor, the positive outweighs the negative.

Nineteen participants liked anonymous response, while only thirteen reported anonymity as an author was important. Fourteen students would use WebCT for online conference in the future, and eleven made affirmative comments when asked to give additional input. Table 9 outlines descriptive statistics.
Table 9

Descriptive Statistics: Likert-type Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. WWW experience (hrs)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Elec. conference experience (hrs)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. WebCT use (hrs)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Location</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Opinion self as writer</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Opinion WebCT</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Ideas</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Anon author</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Anon. response</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Read online</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Read print</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Character</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Plot</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Recommend online</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Questions 5 to 15 were ranked on a scale from a high/strongly agree of 5 to a low/strongly disagree of 1.

These numerical data were supplemented with the opinions students shared in the section of the survey designed for open-ended response.
Short answer questions. WebCT complied the responses students had given to the fifteen short answer questions, which included an invitation to make additional comments, and these responses were printed. Overall, I felt the comments tended to be positive and the improvements they suggested were creative and constructive. For me, the negative sentiments students expressed were more than offset by statements of encouragement.

Students had 462 opportunities to respond to short answer questions, this possible total included 143 responses of no comment or blank entry and 329 comments. The total of affirmative comments was 205, and 124 were negative. The breakdown of the original fifteen short answer questions into sub-questions expanded the number of response opportunities. Two questions asked students what previous experience they had had with writing conference(s), with teachers (question 22) or with students (question 23). Both of those questions also asked: Did you make changes to your writing? Question 24 asked students if they liked their previous experience with the student-to-student writing conference, and why. Question 25 addressed this specific study: “You have just participated in an online writing conference, what did you like about that experience?”

Student answers grouped into three categories: All but one participant commented on using WebCT; seventeen students liked WebCT, and four did not. Less than half of the participants mentioned the narrative assignment or the use of computers (as distinguished from mention of WebCT specifically). Seven students commented that they liked the narrative assignment, four said they did not. Three students liked using computers for this project, two did not. These results are summarized in Table 10.
Table 10
Summary of Survey Responses: Online Conference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Affirmative</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Comments useful</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Comments not useful</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Comments hurtful</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Read peers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Revision</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Identify as writer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous experience writing conference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. with teacher</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made revisions</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. with student</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made revisions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. like student conference</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>why</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Like online conference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WebCT</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assignment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use computers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Like anon author</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Like anon response</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Use again</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Improvements</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Other comments</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only five students could somewhat agree that they saw themselves as writers. In short answer response, positive comments were: “i like to write but i do not see myself as a writer” SR21.5, “I’ll wait and find out” SR21.12, “I see myself kind of like a writer but it isn’t something I want to pursue” SR21.13, and “i wrote the story didn’t i?” SR21.23. Negative response was more typical; such as “Hell no!” SR21.7 and “NO, NOT EVEN CLOSE” SR21.9.

Eleven students felt that they improved their own stories after reading narratives written by peers; such comments included, “I realized I needed to make the story more clear” SR19.8, “I learned to make a good story you have to describe characters and events” SR19.9, and “I learned what people liked, just from reading their story” SR19.15. Four found the comparison beneficial and commented, “what level a grade ten student should be at” SR19.5, “I found out my story was not the worst” SR19.7, “i made me feel comfortable with my own writing” SR19.10, and “I learned other ways other people write stories” SR19.11. There was a slight preference for the reading of stories in print copy, but nine students expressed a preference to read stories online, see Table 11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Affirmative</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prefer print format</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer online format</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Reflective Response on both days, one student specifically addressed format, “I would have liked printing out the stories to read them” C16.3a.

**Writer’s conference.** Two questions were designed ascertain previous experience with the writer’s conference. Twelve students had experienced teacher-to-student writing conference; comments included: “i did it in elementary school” SR22.1, “in grade 5. my
teacher called me to his desk and told me I did a good job and told me what he expected in my stories” SR22.5, “Teachers have told me to shorten my stories” SR22.6, “In elementary school whenever we wrote a story we got a friend to read and then the teacher would talk to us about it and ask about the characters and setting etc” SR22.13. Thirteen said they had made revision based on teacher input. Only eight recalled experience with peer conferences and only three believed they made changes based on peer input; “I didn’t make changes to my writing because we didn’t do stuff like this” SR23.4. Two students recalled liking the experience; “I liked how the other student was helpful but told you what needed improvement” SR24.6 and “I liked the advice I got, but I didn’t like that some people think some stories are stupid” SR24.7.

Unfortunately, as the WebCT survey provided for anonymous responses by the participants, this data cannot be used to compare to responses by participant, story, or according to gender. This study does not consider whether girls or boys prefer peer response or online technology. However, the students who did not like technology did voice their opinions: “I don’t spend my spare time on computers, so I don’t go online to do stuff like this” SR25.4, “I’m not into all this technical stuff. Computers aren’t my thing” SR28.4, “...it was a lot of hassle for me” SR28.20, and “I don’t like computers” SR28.21.

Student attitudes about the usefulness of the online conference

Most students commented that they received some useful peer response and gave examples; such as, “Who was the mom talking to? Why was she crying?” SR16.8, “Need to let the reader know that Amie was more scared of the defendant” SR16.12, and “This was a pretty good story but the end was finished too fast like it was rushed” SR16.16. Four students reported that they received no useful comments; “Unfortunately none of the comments I received helped me in my story. They were mostly of the ‘good job,’ area” SR16.18.

Comments students labeled as least useful included: “They would give me a big fat A+. It didn’t really tell the specifics of what I could have changed” SR17.4, “One comment were someone told me they knew the character in my story” SR17.10, “That my story was unrealistic” SR17.13 and “Good story I was interested the whole time” SR17.18. Only three students reported hurtful comments: “...it was too long and they got bored...” SR18.3, “...the only sorta negative
comment I got was about the prince not being explained enough” SR18.4, and “No, all the response I received used destructive criticism” SR18.13. I interpreted the last comment to mean that the participant refuted the receipt of constructive criticism and confirmed the receipt of negative comment(s).

Class Meetings. I transcribed student comments and grouped for similarities. Data was collected over two days. I transcribed a total of 170 comments from the Reflective Response forms (Appendix L), which included 21 occurrences of “no comment,” for a total of 149 comments. On the first day, before they received my evaluation, students wrote almost twice as many comments compared to day two. Over half of the comments were positive. Five main categories emerged: Peer Response, Anonymity, Computers Use, Evaluation, and the Narrative Project. The results are summarized in Table 12.

Table 12
Summary: Reflective Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Good Things</th>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Improvements</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer response</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymity</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use computers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative project</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Peer Responses. Aside from concerns about the use of computers which will be discussed separately, my interpretation of these numbers is that students liked the process of peer response. However, some students lamented the meager information contained in peers’ comments. Asked what improvements could be made to the narrative project in the future, students replied in Reflective Response: “better response guidelines, stricter content,
have to have at least one helpful bit of advice.” L16.3a.b.c, “Some people did not thoroughly read my story or give effort in their response” N16.2a, and “More suggestions on the stories should be made.” W16.3a. The online survey asked students what improvements could be made to the online conference; one student responded, “Stricter response guidelines. I believe that one objective, helpful comment should be mandatory” SR29.18. Possible solutions to the problem of poor comments will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

In Reflective Response, one of the students recognized the “possibility of honesty that could be hurtful” V16.2a. For Amigo Four, the author of “The Braggart, this was the case. On both days in Reflective Response, he commented “I received more negative than positive responses” Q16.2b, and “I got many negative comments” Q17.2a. The comments were:

69a I didn’t like your story at all, ...
80a I didn’t really like this story
80b It could have been written by a little kid.
139a ok, is there a point to this story?
139c (why would someone kill another person because of bragging) that is crazy[.]

Although negative, none of these comments seemed to me to threaten the safe environment coda. As well, there were positive comments:

69c Your punctuation was good
73a Excellent plot
73b excellent ending
73c What can I say. Good job all around.
87a Interesting story.

As stated in comment 139c, peers asked the author, was bragging enough reason for the protagonist to kill the antagonist? The author wrote his story quite quickly and it was one of the earliest to be posted to the website. Like, Lil Smurf, Amigo Four chose not to revise his story. I do not know if the negative response contributed to the author’s lack of motivation to revise.

Students were concerned about the use of computers. They suggested that an insufficient number of computers created access problems. One student recommended, “Make certain people should have certain days on the computer so that everyone can make
sure they get a turn. And only once everyones had one or two turns then if people still aren’t done they can have more time” X16.3a. Some students objected the amount of time that was given so that all participants could complete each stage of the project. In my field notes from the December 17 class meeting, I have recorded that students felt the unit went on too long. One student recommended that I “cram (the project) into two weeks.” As the researcher, I was driven to collect as much data as possible, so as teacher, I extended deadlines continuously to ensure full participation. For the malingering student, these extensions were a benefit; comments included, “I had enough time” D16.1a and “I liked how you extended the time when we needed it” W16.1a. For those participants who held to the scheduled due dates, my flexibility was frustrating for them because the result was delays in returning feedback.

Computer Use. The implementation of WebCT was much maligned due to situational constraints, and some students had difficulty using both iMac and IBM computers. Generally, students had difficulty preparing the story to upload and, later, in the revising of the online draft. As the students were not familiar with WebCT, and I uploaded each story. However, students were asked to select the HTML option in the “save as” feature of the word processor when ready to post online. Most students needed my assistance to complete this task. Later, when the student wanted to revise the story, most students needed my assistance to copy the story online and then paste it back into a word processing program. The time frame did not offer enough opportunity for students to practice and develop these skills to complete these tasks without teacher assistance.

In the first week, some students tried to post responses, but reported the response did not appear, so they had to re-enter comments. On November 19, several students had trouble with the “compose” screen, and they were not able to type in their comments. I first tried to reload, then refresh, and finally I instructed the students to quit and re-enter the website. Students commented they needed “more instructions for WebCT” J16.3a; and I needed to “make it clearer on how to get into everything” R16.3a. Problems reported included: “it was done with Macs” A16.2a, “the computers too slow” B16.2a, “couldn’t get into my story half the time, couldn’t make changes, wouldn’t let me peer responses” E16.2a.b.c, and “Getting confused with the HTML thing couldn’t figure what was wrong”
X16.2a. However, sixteen students on the survey found WebCT easy to use and work “never got lost because it was on the computer” F16.1b. As well, “I think it was a fun experience. The fact that people could access my story in a flash was fascinating. The internet made this project enjoyable” SR25.18.

Evaluation. On the second day, after the participants received their marks for the short story project, the Reflective Responses contained comments about evaluation: Positive comments included: “the teacher liking my story” and “being encouraged to enter the Writing Contest” J17.1b.c. Problems included: “marks went down very drastically” F17.2a, “It really dropped my mark. I am not good at writing stories” M17.2a.b, and “I got a bad mark” W17.2b (the student received 76%). One student suggested, “Stories are very hard to write so marks should be easier to get good marks when it comes to the story” A17.2a (the student received 82%). Commenting on the same story, another student wrote, “I thought that the marking system was not very flexible to some stories. It worked well with mine however I felt it was not very well suited for ‘Emptyness’. The Story had a very good theme and overall impact, however the marking system did not show this” N17.3a.

Narrative Project. Students liked the project despite the fact that the process still needs refinement. One student commented, “By reading short stories before writing our own I was able to get an idea about writing” N16.1a. Good things included: “it was different, it was kinda fun” E16.1a, “I really liked this assignment and I normally hate writing stories” V16.1a, “quite organized system” C17.1b, and “The program rocked” E17.1b. Six students liked that they had choices, one of which was to chose whether or not to go on WebCT. Students did make suggestions for improvement: “Make it easier to access” SR29.7, “have papers on the wall that tell people how to use it” SR29.12, “To be more indepth with the instructions so students know exactly what they are doing when and where they have to go” SR29.13.

Although there were difficulties, some students had positive comments: “I knew how to do it” K16.1a, “I felt well organized” R16.1a, “figured out my problems” X16.1a, and “you were there to help” W17.1b. When asked if they would like to use online conferencing again, thirteen comments were positive, five had no opinion, and negative comments concerned computer and writing difficulties. Several comments mentioned that
the project was “fun.” Two students commented, “It helped me see in my story what I had overlooked after reading it over and over again” SR28.8 and “yes it could help me with my typing skills and its interesting to see what people say without recognizing there writting ” SR 28.19.

Anonymity

Students liked the idea of anonymity, but they did not feel that they were anonymous for this project. The students were aware that anonymity was an important aspect of this study. At least three times, I asked students to keep their “code name” private. I am reminded of the old cliche, you can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink. As mentioned previously, many students did keep their code name a secret, however, some did not.

Several students recognized the benefits of anonymity and commented on honest opinions, and some liked the freedom from retribution. On the survey, nineteen students somewhat or strongly agreed that they liked using a code name to present their story anonymously, eighteen had a similar opinion in favor of anonymous response.

Survey question 24 asked students to compare the online conference to any experience they had ever had with a face-to-face (F2F) conference. The importance of peer relations was paramount: “you could not be truthful” SR24.1, “The responses were less personal, when you don’t know who said it so your feelings don’t get hurt” SR24.8, “You get to hear opinions, but you don’t always get straight answers” SR24.10, “They only catch little things. Depending on if they were your friend or not or if they liked you” SR24.11. In addition to concerns for friendship, student recognized a possible threat to a safe environment: “I liked that you could get an opinion from your peers but sometimes the comments could get rude” SR24.13, “i didn’t like the response idea. most of my responses were negative but some were positive but no responses helped me” SR24.15. The fifteenth student to respond to the survey not only had negative comments, but did not feel the comments received were useful.

Survey questions 25, 26 and 27 asked for student opinions about online peer response. Again, anonymity was seen as an escape from peer retribution: “How you can make comments with out worrying about the author getting made at you” SR25.6, “I liked
that you could be anonymous and no one’s feeling would get hurt if you criticized their story” SR25.13, “yes because i wouldn’t want a fight to start because i said something bad about their story. i don’t feel pressured” SR26.5, “It was important so you don’t get harrassed about a response” SR27.7, “they wouldn’t go get made at you, or write a bad comment back to you, for no reason” SR27.11.

Anonymity was connected to giving and receiving honest opinions: “I liked the chance to hear what people actually thought of my story” SR25.24, “you could be truthful” SR27.1, “Yes, because if your friend did a really bad jod on a story or something and you give them ideas about how to improve they might think you are bashing it. Same goes for someone you don’t really like, they might think your saying these things because you don’t like them” SR27.4, “If the person knows who you are and they hate you they will give you a bad response. They respond to people other than their friends” SR27.9, “you felt like you could say what you thought, not just say, ‘yeah...that was really,„um,good.’ If it was boring you were like, ‘kinda boring...’” SR27.14, “It is important to be anon in my responces so I won’t limit not hold back what I say about a story” SR27.22. One student assessed the abilities of his/her peers, “I don’t like my peers reading my stuff because they are stereotypically judgemental. I believe with the anonymity I received honest and true opinions and comments” SR26.18.

However, some students did not feel anonymous response was needed: “no because i’m honest with my responds and they’re never harsh” SR27.3, “Didn’t matter Don’t care what other people think” SR27.6, “no not really because i tried t keep my answers as unrude as possible” SR27.19. I wondered if these same students were ones who expressed confidence in themselves as writers.

Survey question 25 specifically asked if students felt anonymity as a writer was important: “It was important so people can’t bug a person about their story” SR25.7, “The person responds according to your story not to you” SR25.9, “Yes i liked it alot more. You have no idea what the person is like in life, so they could write alot different then they act” SR25.11, “Yes because i new my story needed changes and i new my friends wouldn’t have said anything if they new it was mine” SR26.20. I was most pleased to hear one student comment, “people responded to your story and not to you” SR26.12.
However, again, a few did not feel the need to be an anonymous author: “no because i’m not ashamed with my writing” SR26.3, “No, I don’t mind people knowing what I write, I have not done anything too bad to not want anyone to read it” SR26.4, “It didn’t matter to me because people knew what my passcode was anyway just from reading to topic of my story” SR26.15.

Despite the few dissenters, many students suggested improvements to the security of anonymity: “To improve this I would make sure it is easier to protect my anonymity” SR29.22. Specific suggestions were offered: “I didn’t like the fact that most people knew who you were anyways. More anonymity would be more helpful. Maybe use numbers instead of names to identify” SR25.8. The same student expressed the same sentiment twice: “Use numbers instead of names” SR29.8. Another suggestions was to “have computers in a little room so that class mates cannot see what you are writing” SR29.15.

The results of my analysis of the data collected were summarized in this chapter. The data collected included an online draft of one short story, peer responses to that draft, my proofreading notations, the student’s revision notations, and a final copy produced for evaluation. The usefulness of the online conference was assessed through two measures: student revision to that one short story and student attitudes as indicated in responses to a survey and in classroom discussion. There were five stages to the analysis: First, the content of peer responses were considered in categories derived from the comments. The greatest number of comments were about plot and affirmations, with a lesser number of comments about description and mechanics. Second, I noted very little revision to the original draft of the story, although some students did add sentences. The stories showed a dismal lack of awareness of publication proofreading standards. Third, the changes suggested by peers were insufficient to be of much help to the author. This inadequacy proved to be a weakness of this narrative project. For the most part, students did not know how to give meaningful comments to the author. Fourth, although more than half of the students had positive things to say about this narrative project, the process still had several flaws. The students had a large number of tasks to accomplish, some required the use of new skills, in a minimal length of time with minimal assistance. Last, although students did see the online
conference as useful, they themselves recognized that they needed more practice to develop their skills both in the writing process and in the use of online technology.

The relevance of anonymity to peer response, the tensions between a Writers' Workshop model and anonymous response, my inadequacy as a teacher model, the inadequacy of student revision, and possible directions for future online conference projects will be considered in the next chapter. As well, attention will be given to the positive impact of peer response.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Where language and naming are power,
silence is oppression, violence

On the typical day, in the typical classroom anywhere in North America, any length of time, sixty minutes or ninety minutes, can feel like an eternity when you face a group of thirty-some sophomoric students. Repeat that process four or six times a day and survival can become your only obsession. The goal is to make it through the week, from Monday to Friday, and then to recuperate for two days. No mention will be made here of the other, real life of home and family, nor of academic pursuits. Monday morning, you grab your thermos mug of coffee and box of marked papers before you head out the door to begin again.

Set against this reality, it is not hard to see why initiatives of innovation and enterprise are often few and sporadic in the modern public school system. Many days, for me, the job feels more like mob control than meaning making.

Celebrations of writers’ workshop success stories (Graves, 1983, 1985, 1991, 1995; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987) have had more prominence than reports that have illuminated some of the difficult inherent challenges (DiPardo & Freedman, 1998; Brunjes, 1993; Lensmire, 1992, 1994; Morse, 1994; Rouse, 1988; Zemelman & Daniels, 1988). Few published reports warn of the enormity of the commitment required to undertake either the WW or the implementation of technology (see also Beeler, 1998). The huge amounts of time required to accomplish these tasks deplete both energy and ego. Optimistic beginnings can quickly revert to the old routine if not a fade into fiasco. After participation in a summer institute, one secondary English teacher, known as a successful writing teacher, tried five times to implement response groups, and in her estimation each had been a “miserable failure” (Brunjes, 1993).

That said, many of the elements of this study “worked” in my classroom, both in the creation of a WW and in the implementation of WebCT. Students wrote, students
shared writing, and students were encouraged to continue to write. I give full recognition to the obstacles that lie ahead in future efforts to implement an online peer conference, but I will repeat this project -- in a yet a new guise. In the structure of future implementations of the WW, I will continue to encourage student ownership of the process, but I now know that I will give more emphasis to the quality required of both student response comments and in the final product. For me, online peer response had enough merit that I will continue to attempt to overcome the hurdles. I believe that the effort to implement anonymity served as a means to insure a safer classroom environment, especially for certain individuals. Student responses gave evidence that a few students did socially construct meaning. As a perspective on language and learning, social construct theorists assume that the construction and reconstruction of ideas relies on collaboration and shared meaning, and they stress the importance of social context (Schaafsma, 1996). Within the particular community of this study, students were encouraged to actively participate and experience opportunities to write, to talk and to make meaning. For me, this study highlighted the tensions I face as a writing teacher. In addition to the question of focus between the process or the product of writing, I now question the salience I have given to writing as an exercise in the making of meaning.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the underlying tensions, challenges and rewards of WW and technological implementation. I will discuss three issues relevant to this study, and for each I will offer an assessment with respect to my personal practice. First, I will examine the WW as a process for the social construction of meaning. I will connect the low quality of peer response with a lack of adequate teacher modeling and insufficient emphasis on personal meaning. Second, I will consider the effect this may have had on student revision of the final product. Third, I will discuss the triple threat of initiatives I undertook in this study. The first initiative was the implementation of a WW, the second was the implementation of the online conference. The third initiative was the attempt to introduce anonymity. Then, I will suggest implications for wider instructional practice and briefly consider directions for future research. As well, I compare this study to those described in the research literature to determine limitations and describe my contributions. With respect to limitations, I will discuss data collected, the role of the researcher, sample, data analysis, and auditing techniques. Only in reflection did an unexpected tension become
obvious—specifically, the incompatibility that exists between the Graves-Calkins-Atwell model of the WW and the use of anonymous response in the closed setting of one particular classroom.

Social Construction of Meaning

My exposure to theory came after more than ten years as a classroom teacher. The theories of Vygotsky and Bakhtin appealed to me. Those theories matched what I observed in student performance and fit with my approach to instruction. As Hoel (1997) observed, “The instrumental consequence of ZPD, internalization and scaffolding is a transfer of control and responsibility from adult to child, from teacher to student” (p. 7). The goal may be achieved in increments, adjusting to the scaffolding needs of the students and depending on each student’s ZPD. But the demand to accommodate the scaffolding needs and ZPD for thirty-some students is phenomenal, and again remember that this is multiplied by four or six groups of 30-some students daily. That speculative ideal where the student assumes responsibility and takes control for his/her own learning does occur in specific individuals, but on a group level, it has never yet happened in a class that I have taught. However, my efforts to implement the WW in my classes has brought me closer to such a possibility.

Both on the survey and in the class meetings, students voiced a confirmation that they recognized the online conference as a way to construct meaning. Proud Canadian believed the online conference “gave us a thought process, not just a writing one” L16.1b. On the survey, one student commented, “I liked the way I could get an outsider’s view of how it made sense of them” SR30.8. Another student reported that peer comments “helped me see in my my story what I had overlooked after reading it over and over again” SR28.8. The online conference helped both authors to realize the meaning they attempted to share was not the meaning their readers received. Gere (1990) stated that the immediacy of writing groups fosters audience awareness. The author is confronted with her/his audience and learns that the meaning intended is not the meaning received by some members of the audience (Lapadat, 1994). In this way, the online conference did provide the type of writing conference feedback Gere described. These student authors recognized the synergy of communication with her/his audience.
Quality of Peer Responses

For some students peer response worked, but not for all students. Brunjes (1993) noted that many students have difficulty giving specific response on “how to make the writing better” (p. 30). This may not be a difficulty for adolescents alone. Lapadat (2000, October) commented, “I have observed that adults, for example in writing classes, workshops, or writing groups, have the same difficulty with giving good response.” Elbow (1981), Graves (1985), Calkins (1986), and Gere (1990) stressed the importance of good questions. My students needed more help in learning how to ask good questions. Students in this study said that they felt that they did not receive adequate peer response. They reported that most comments were not very useful or explicit or appropriate to their stories. Although many comments were frivolous and expedient, some peers did make constructive comments about content, and, in particular, about plot and character. Although some students did make statements that peer responses contributed to making meaning, others did not voice such positive sentiments. I have to take responsibility for compounding this difficulty with insufficient teacher modeling and student practice. In my discussion of Future Research, Mothus (2000) will be suggested as a model for a possible solution to this concern. These insights have led me to reassess my instructional responsibilities as teacher and to address the need to clarify my expectations about student responsibilities. These challenges will affect my future decisions, and have implications for wider practice and research.

Personal Assessment

Respect for a writer’s need for solitude and self-determination of process, student ownership, will always be important to me. In future incarnations, I will consider several improvements. Gere (1990) made three suggestions: one, evaluate both the drafts and the final product; two, with the students, develop criteria for evaluation; and three, be sure students feel that their assessment matters. To ensure that assessment matters, I gave students credit for both peer editing and peer evaluation. Although all students produced a first draft, I allowed students more than three weeks to accomplish that task. I believe now that amount of time was too long; and the first draft could be completed in one week. For most students, the final product they submitted
demonstrated insufficient awareness of quality expectations. In future implementations, I hope to increase student awareness of the need for mechanical and grammatical accuracy. As well, I will attempt to ensure that students take more responsibility to provide constructive comments to their peers. First, as stated, I believe that students needed more exposure to peer response with both demonstration and practice. Second, I believe that students would benefit if they were involved in the development of the procedures that will be used to evaluate the comments themselves.

**Response guidelines.** The “editing sheets” that DiPardo and Freeman (1988) disparaged may be a survival tactic in a crucial battle against time. Although such sheets do channel response, the sheets may allow students to internalize an evaluative template, thus giving them the tools to better assist peers through their responses. Brunjes (1993) stresses the importance of the time spent in teacher modeling, ongoing training, and support for response groups. As in the Brunjes study, some participants wanted more structure. A student commented in the online survey: We needed “[s]tricter response guidelines. I believe that one objective, helpful comment should be mandatory” SR29.18. A student commented on the Reflective Response form: We needed “better response guidelines, stricter content, have to have a least one helpful bit of advice.” L16.3a.b.c. Despite the time constraints, I now realize it is essential that I devote more time to the appropriation of the skills needed to comment effectively on a piece of writing.

I will use stories and comments archived in this project with my next class to discuss which comments they perceive as useful. I will use these stories during whole-class critique to model comments that could help guide the author to develop such elements as rising action, character, and climax. I could add more “open-ended” elements to the sheets so that the comments are not entirely directive. As some students in this study may have been cavalier in their peer response because there was no measure of utility or consequence for silliness, in the next incarnation, I plan to evaluate student comments and to continue to require a specific number of comments. With the students, I will develop the criteria for an evaluation scheme to assess comments. Then, I will not only compile peer responses by story but by contributor as well. I will establish a deadline for peer response, and I will evaluate the comments according to the derived criteria. With instructions presented more clearly, guidelines established through consensus, and more practice, I will see if more students are able to appropriate the critical stance that will allow them to offer helpful suggestions to peers.
Wider connections. To move beyond my own classroom, I am involved in my school district’s “zone” English team meetings, each zone determined by the central secondary school. We have begun to discuss the implementation of the Advanced Placement “vertical team” concept. A vertical team would allow involved teachers to agree to a skills implementation and skills practice schedule and allow each successive grade to build on previous work. For us, the vertical team would include the elementary and junior secondary schools in our secondary school zone and the two post-secondary institutions in the city. Initial meetings took place between the junior and senior secondary schools during the 1999-2000 school year, and one meeting included representatives from both post-secondary institutions.

As well, I am involved in my school district’s Writing Committee. I have offered to present an introduction to WebCT and BBJWOW to district teachers on a day designated for professional in-service. The Project Leader at the CTL has offered to assist with such a presentation. I encourage the creation of a WebCT platform for each of the district secondary schools. The WebCT platform could provide an avenue for students to submit their writing at the school level, at the district level, and perhaps to a district anthology. I would also like students to have easier access to more public audiences; such as Reflections on Water, an online literary/art magazine at UNBC, available at the website address: http://ctl.unbc.ca/row/. Not only would a WebCT connection between schools provide more opportunity to reach a greater audience, but such a connection also would create more opportunity for input from a greater variety of persons, and more possibility for anonymity, which will be discussed further.

The low level of competency demonstrated in the final products submitted for evaluation may be a result of this underlying lack of commitment to this assignment as a way to share personal meaning. Daily, I need to remind myself that the important issue is that the students are given an opportunity to read, to write, and to talk about writing to make meaning for themselves and with others. I can provide opportunity; I can make time in the lesson plan; I can encourage. Those are the elements I can control. With each incarnation, with each semester, I can only hope to do those things better.
Revision

Awareness of a student’s zone of proximal development is critical in encouraging participation in the writing process. The student who sees herself/himself as a writer may have a greater investment in this project than the student who holds a negative opinion. Two students recorded such comments on their Reflective Response; “it is very hard to write a story” A16.2b and “I don’t enjoy writing” F16.2a. Whereas a student who is a writer is interested in the outcome of the writing process, the non-writer needs to be encouraged even to try. In this project, every student produced a story, even the most resistant. As it stands now, the problem of the future is not to merely ask the student to produce the story draft, but to encourage them to create a finished product that demonstrates grade level skills as determined by provincial standards.

In this study, the guidelines I first shared with students and later used to assess the final narrative that students submitted to me did not give students adequate information to elicit a quality product (see Appendix K). In this province, and in this school district, the Ministry of Education provides guidelines in the document: BC Performance Standards: Writing (revised February, 2000). In the future, I will use the “Quick Scale” from this guide that is provided for narrative writing. I will use the Quick Scales to increase student awareness of quality expectations and, later, to assess the stories submitted to me as final product. Five aspects are considered: “snapshot” which is a subjective measure of overall effectiveness; “meaning” which includes ideas and information as well as use of detail; “style” which includes clarity, variety, and impact of language as well as use of literary techniques; “form” which includes opening, development, ending, character, dialogue, and setting; and “conventions” which includes spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and grammar. These aspects are judged according to four standards: “not yet within expectations,” “meets expectations (minimum level),” “fully meets expectations,” and “exceeds expectations.” I am encouraged by the extended descriptions that are given for each aspect and for each standard (p. 214). Most of the final products that were submitted to me in December, 1999, were at minimal level of expectation as defined by this scale, and several were not yet within expectations. This level of performance is a concern that relates
to the lack of proofreading demonstrated in the final copy of the short story as discussed below.

**Proofreading.**

Revision demands flexibility and the motivation to complete the task. Both Wolf and Gearhart (1997) and Freedman (1992) mentioned student preoccupation with expediency and a desire to “get the job done.” In the hectic world of the typical adolescent, this is an understandable compunction. Perhaps my assessment is too negative, but I feel that most students in this study were more interested in “getting it done” than in doing a good job.

This project has caused me to re-evaluate the “product versus process” debate. Perhaps the current concern for the process of writing has reduced emphasis on quality of the final product. In the specific student work I examined in this study, most of the stories submitted were not prepared for publication, nor did they “fully meet expectations” as defined by the BC governmental standard. Students submitted work in serious need of final proofreading. Most students did not seem to recognize their errors and evidenced minimal responsibility for the correction of errors. There seemed to be an unspoken acceptance that the final proofread was the job of the teacher. This is not the first such occurrence. In more than fifteen years of similar examinations of student work, I have seen a trend toward inadequate presentation of the final product. As the students under observation were in grade 10 English, this is a cause for concern.

Minimal presentation stands at one end of the continuum, and at the other is the presentation required for scholarship awards in grade 12. One grade 12 teacher of Advanced Placement English commented that scholarship papers may be dismissed from consideration if not proofread assiduously. For most of the students whose work I have examined, there is a critical gap between what is and what should be.

In any one year, no one teacher can teach all the skills required to be successful in preparing a work for final publication. However, by the tenth year of schooling, an English teacher could hope for some consistent level of development. Further, I have discovered that I cannot assume an awareness of basic conventions, such as paragraphing for topic and dialogue, or the use of commas in dialogue or in a series. What I find more troubling is the
lack of demonstration of these skills even after I have explicitly taught the use of these skills in relation to assigned reading and in specific review sessions on the mechanics of writing. I find sustenance in the fact that some students do produce more competent work.

**Personal assessment**

This project has made me consider a need for more direct instruction and practice in proofreading standards, especially spelling, sentence structure, and comma use. I now question my decision to withhold my proofreading comments from the students for this project. I have learned that they did not recognize most of those problems on their own. Although peers may assist in achieving mechanical and grammatical accuracy, I believe I will have to accept responsibility for proofreading before final publication. Such stop-gap efforts will ameliorate the problem for now, but this does not reduce the need for students to acquire proofreading skills for themselves. Therefore, in the next incarnation of this narrative project, I will try to incorporate more opportunities for students to practice proofreading. I will use the anonymous stories from previous classes to introduce proofreading techniques. Then, after students have received online peer response, I will suggest they meet F2F to proofread. I will use this activity to reinforce instruction in the standards of proofreading.

To continue on a positive track, the emphasis on process, and in particular the writing process as developed in a WW atmosphere, does seem to have a favorable impact on student interest and enjoyment in producing a piece of writing.

**The Triumvirate of Initiatives**

In this study, I not only wanted to perfect the peer writing conference, but I wanted to do so with the implementation of new technology. Not only did I want to use the online conference, but I wanted to make it anonymous. In retrospect, I realize, in one unit, with one class, I attempted three initiatives at the same time. Despite the development of complications between two of my aims, the groundwork of this study suggests positive directions both for instructional practice and further research. This section will discuss student attitudes about the narrative project, the difficulties of online implementation and the lessons learned in attempting anonymity.
Student Attitudes About the Narrative Project

Students liked this narrative project. They liked that they had a great number of choices. They could select the topic, the length, and whether to conference online or F2F. As well, they made the daily decision of how do spend their time during that class period. Students could write, read stories online, peer respond, or work on another English assignment (see Calendar of Assignments, Figure 6, p. 64). At the last class meeting, one student asked if I will repeat this assignment. I asked the class, should I do it again? Of the eighteen participants in attendance that day, sixteen voted yes, and only two voted no.

Not surprisingly, these two had had problems with computers. They wrote side-by-side at neighboring computers, and they knew each other’s code name. The students had successfully used F2F conference to draft their stories, and each had her story written fairly early. They were both able to use a computer for word processing. However, each had difficulty when entering her code name to gain access to the website. After a panic evoked, frantic phone call to the CTL project leader for assistance, she easily solved the difficulty. The WebCT pages had presented all the necessary instructions and steps, but these two students had not followed all the directions. Each thought she had entered her code name as an access code, but neither one had done that step. Due to the delays they had with log-in, they were less enthusiastic about online responding. Despite their online frustrations, they both had positive comments about the narrative project. One said, a good thing was “Reading other peoples storys anonymously” G16.1a, and the other enthused: “the program ROCKERED!!!” E.17.2b.

In Reflective Response, students reported 72 “Good Things” of a total of 149 comments. They liked getting input on their stories and found peer response helpful. As “good things” they mentioned, “the other people giving you their honest opinions so I could better understand what wasn’t working in the story” J16.1a, and “Peer responses helped a little to fix my story” X16.1c.

Challenges of the Online Conference

In this study, use of the computer and WebCT offered a challenge for some students. Their comments indicated that some of them needed more instruction in computer
use: “The computers were too confusing for me (too much fiddling around)” C16.2a, “couldn’t get into my story easy ” G16.2a, and “confusing getting into the proper web site” R16.2a. As van der Geest and Remmers (1994) observed, using computers requires extra time. They also sympathized with the “teething troubles” incurred when introducing a prototype. They suggested use of a minimal, task-oriented manual, and the availability of a technician’s assistance in the computer lab. To address the first suggestion, I am planning to review and revise the WebCT Instructions (Appendix I), and then post them in large, plain print near all computer stations.

However, as to their second suggestion, for the most part, I was usually the only person available able to offer technical assistance. As this was in addition to the routine demands on a teacher, I was not able to guide each student to a comfortable familiarity with WebCT. Many students were not ready to work alone in the preparation of the draft to upload, nor to download for the completion of the final copy. A possible solution to this “snag” may be to solicit several students to assist me in the classroom with these functions. I would select students with three criteria in mind, in descending order of importance: first, students who are willing to work with peers; second, students who demonstrate strong computer skills, and third, those who have shown motivation and enthusiasm for writing. I would first train them in the use of WebCT before I introduce the program to the class as a whole. These peer mentors could then work with other students within their zone of proximal readiness to help them to appropriate the skills of WebCT use. In future semesters, I hope to spend less time on technology and more time on the writing process. Peer mentors may be a means to that end.

Anonymity

For the student, online technology may offer the safety of anonymity. As a writer, anonymity allows the student to wear a mask, to hide his/her identity behind a secret name. For the insecure adolescent, that secret name may allow the student to explore characters and situations that could be potentially embarrassing if publicly proclaimed. The anonymous response encourages an honest response. The peer responder is less constrained by bounds of loyalty or prejudice. Anonymity offers both the writer and the reader an expanded freedom of expression.
I will consider three questions in this discussion of anonymity: First, was anonymity achieved in this project? Second, did anonymity afford benefits to some students in this adolescent environment? And, third, is it possible to resolve the innate tension that exists between the use of anonymity and the processes of the WW in the context of a small group such as was the case in this study? This third question will be discussed as an implication for instructional practice.

Anonymity in situ? The small sample, combined with proximity, prevented the achievement of anonymity through the introduction of online technology as used in this study. The intimate conditions of this context resulted in many of the participants’ identities becoming known to some of the others. However, of 22 participants, eighteen agreed or strongly agreed that they liked anonymous response. Positive comments included: “Responding and receiving anonymously I was able to get and give honest feedback” N16.1b, and “I liked the way we used code names so that we responded [and] people didn’t get offended” U16.1a. A show of hands at the final class meeting indicated that students favored the use of a code name.

Many knew each others’ code names, but comments imply that does not mean that they told each other: “everyone figured out nicknames” F16.2b, “people could find out who you were” L16.2a, and “people kept bothering us to find out our code name” P16.2a. Fifteen participants raised their hands to record that they knew five or more code names; and eight knew ten or more. In the class meeting on December 17, students said they could guess an author by the content of the story or the story style, and students would give themselves away in peer response. Some students were annoyed with the breach of anonymity. One student was critical of “People who tell each other their names or even worse are people who go around trying to find out who other people are” T17.2a. In Reflective Response on December 16, students suggested possible improvements. We discussed numbers versus names. One student suggested that I assign names. Another suggested they post stories with no name and no number; or response could be made by number only. I will also check with the CTL project leader about other options the technology offers. WebCT may provide a log-in procedure that would allow the teacher alone to identify the writers and responders so that the students do not have to use code names at all.
A success story. All students were not anonymous, but some did achieve anonymity. “Buck Fever” is an anonymity success story. The author, Bud Puffer, tells much about himself in his choice of code name. An outsider, he has a list of citations for harassment in his school record. Peers do not tend to associate with him, nor have they indicated respect for his opinions or his work. However, they liked his story, “Buck Fever.” Students commented, “I like these kinds of stories with a sort of foreshadowing” 89a,b, “good story!” 116a, and “Very well written” 150a. Bud Puffer was ecstatic. I always will remember his smile when he read these comments. Had the peer responders been aware of the true identity of this author, I do not believe the comments would have been so consistently favorable. Anonymity increased the safety, and friendliness of this writing environment for this student.

Both observation and the data indicated that students liked this online peer conference. When I watched students work with online technology, I saw excitement and enthusiasm. Their comments both on the survey and in Reflective Response reinforced this visual message. I found that a WW strategy did allow students to take ownership of their work and develop their own voice. However, the work students submitted demonstrated a weakness in the revision of the final product. Although anonymity was not achieved for all students, for some the safety of the code name brought unexpected positive response.

Implications

My experience in this study leads me to one major piece of advice for fellow practitioners: Feel free to try new initiatives, and feel free to have those days where you feel as if you have failed. Although your initiative may not achieve all of the goals you intend, quite likely you will achieve at least a degree of success. Three implications for wider practice will be discussed: the difficulty of socially creating meaning in a WW, the problem of inadequate revision, and the challenges of anonymity, especially in a small setting.

Social Construction of Meaning

The most irritating implication of this study is to confirm, yet again, that time is the major impediment in developing any kind of writing conference. For this study, the peer response was at the the heart of making meaning. Brunjes (1993) advised that the ability to give useful response is an art learned over time (p. 47). She suggests that it takes months of
preparation to create a supportive environment. Students need to experience ongoing demonstrations that model response group protocols and strategies. Freedman (1994) and Hoel (1997) illustrate the benefits of time to acquire and develop the skills of peer response. Freedman noted that British teachers usually keep the same students for two or more years. She suggested that student interaction in classroom occurs along a continuum of involvement, from highly involved to relatively uninvolved. She concluded British students “wrote with commitment and involvement and took significant strides as writers” when British teachers were able to base their practice on a negotiated curriculum that shared responsibility (p. 4). Freedman stated that the British teachers in her study “agreed that their students had to be taught to assume responsibility and that this process happened gradually across years of time” (p. 4). The teachers determined the context that best served to motivate students to learn to write by practicing a variety of types of writing. Teachers were expected to help unmotivated students to find an alternate activity that is motivating. Freedman cautioned that the British philosophy includes the teacher as a responsible co-partner and the students are not free to make any choices they want (p. 12).

Set in Norway, Hoel’s (1997) study was situated in a upper secondary-school class in language and literature with the same 22 students for a period of three years. Hoel identified three areas of competence for students to function were given very strict rules to shape the response discourse and to act as a scaffold for the communication and social atmosphere of the group (p. 11). “How to comment on a draft” was the technical aspect of giving response. Only after response giving was thoroughly modeled by the teacher, did students gradually take over using “so-called response sheets” which specified criteria. As these response groups allowed maximum freedom, the teacher must “supply standards, structures and rules which will gradually be internalized” (p. 11). Hoel concluded that peers are not competent to scaffold without intensive preparation. The oppressive lack of time is the recurrent obstacle between what is done and what could be done.

Revision

The vertical team concept gives hope for an answer to the problem of insufficient time to teach the skills of revision, as well as implement a WW and new technology. The vertical team
could be a forum for discussion and a vehicle for consensus in the answer to the question: What is most important? At present, my school can be seen as a microcosm of the zone and school district as a whole, and I believe we have much in common with Freedman’s (1994) observation that there are wide contrasts between classrooms. In most classrooms, students are expected to engage in teacher-assigned activities, and only a few teachers practice a community-of-learners approach. Some teachers in my school, zone, and school district do exhibit commitment to a process approach. However, writing instruction in grade 8 and 9 at my particular school does not emphasize a process approach. The importance of revision is not explicitly taught, nor stressed, nor rewarded in the form of grades. When student work is published in the school paper or yearbook, I do the final preparation, and I am responsible for the final proofreading and editing. An unpleasant consequence of my concern for the final product of the newspaper and yearbook is that I enable the students to continue to avoid assuming this responsibility themselves.

**Anonymity**

The key tension in the development of this particular WW environment and the addition of the online conference occurred in attempt to create anonymity for this study. As discussed in the review of relevant literature, the WW process presumes that students will have an opportunity to talk to peers throughout the entire process of writing, from the pre-write to drafting and to the final product. For this study, students were asked to sacrifice F2F dialogue to maintain anonymity. Students only received peer input only once, in the form of online comments. Students were not given an opportunity to share brainstorm ideas, to discuss during the draft stage or to read their work aloud to partners to hear the words. They were not given a chance to talk what they could not write (Zoellner, 1969).

If the students in my small classes from my small school could share their stories with students at other schools, anonymity would be more achievable. The implication here is that if my students can benefit from an anonymous writing experience, other students also might benefit. However, the means to greater cross-school exchange will remain undeveloped until support networks are in place for teachers who are willing to use technology. These concerns and the additional possibilities for future revision of this narrative project will be addressed in the next section as a limitation of this study.
Limitations of Study

This study’s scope and the robustness of its design are limited. Although this design was an attempt at replication, as discussed below, the differences were substantial.

Methodological Limitations

The design and implementation of this study was much influenced by the work of Bonk, Malikowski, Angeli & Supplee (1998), and I measured my product in comparison to that standard. Five areas of comparison emerged: data collection, the role of the researcher, sampling, auditing techniques, and data analysis.

Data collection. Bonk et al. (1998) reported on four types of data: summary data from Conferencing on the Web (COW)\(^{13}\); 75 randomly selected cases, written and electronically recorded; an attitude survey of “most” students as an end conferencing activity of approximately ten minutes; and an interview, offered as a student option. Eight students were selected, and three months later participated in a 40-60 minute interview.

I was able to replicate the use of an interactive online technology, WebCT, which is similar to COW. I modeled some of my survey questions from those cited in the 1998 study. I did not replicate case studies or an interview. Although, I had hoped to conduct follow-up interviews at the end of the project, by the end of December, only one month remained in the semester, and I felt saturated with data. Therefore, I decided not to attempt interviews in this study. In retrospect, I now realize that the data I collected does not explain why students made certain choices, nor give sufficient insight into some comments that they made. In the future, follow-up interviews might offer better clarification as to why some students feel they are writers, and others do not, and as well, why some students choose to revise, and others do not.

Role of researcher. As researchers, Bonk et al. (1998) seemed to take the role of observer, distant from data collection -- a stance that offers broader perspective. This stance excludes intimacy with context. I was not able to replicate this broad perspective as I was immersed in this particular context. I chose in-situ research as a context in which I have the power to effect change, however minor and impermanent. As this was not a replication, I

\(^{13}\) COW provided empirical data number people who accessed, active contributors, number and average length of messages, number and length of responses, average length of case threads.
question my perception as being too involved. I often was tempted to substitute hunches based on my perception of the context as explanation for some of the patterns revealed in the data. It was only when I slipped the bounds of the practitioner that I could begin to raise my eyes to the horizon to see the implications for broader practice and research.

The dual role of practitioner and researcher was yet another strain for me. Baumann (1996) conducted research while teaching middle school students. He commented, “the roles and duties associated with teaching conflicted with plans I had for gathering, analyzing, and reflecting on research data” (p. 31). In my study, some data collection did compromise my role as a teacher. The time line allowed for the completion of the first draft and submission of the final work is an example of the needs of the researcher taking precedence. Like Baumann, I adhere to a philosophical principle that my primary purpose was to teach my students, so, as he says, “when push came to shove, research tasks had to defer to teaching responsibilities” (p. 31). In other words, though I could make extensions to the timeline for the narrative project, it could not go on forever. Even while students were completing the short story assignment, other assignments were already underway. As well, planning for instruction had to supersede research work -- data analysis and reflection often were reserved for weekends and longer holiday periods. The conflict I experienced was in the form of time and task tensions. Baumann argued that time is not a privilege bestowed on public school teachers. As such, the conflicts between teaching and research may only be resolved when research fits into the process of daily teaching so that theory may inform practice and practice inform theory.

**Sampling.** Bonk et al. (1998) obtained a relatively large sample size of 157 participants who produced 319 case studies, with 620 peer replies and 298 mentor replies. This sample size was not replicated. I used a small sample of 22 participants. Sampling method was replicated. Both studies employed convenience and criterion sampling and included all enrolled students. Participants in the Bonk et al. study were pre-service teachers, and my study involved grade 10 students. The criterion for participation in my study was enrollment in grade 10 English. Convenience sampling gave the advantages of access to and cooperation of participants, but limited the generalization of findings to other
settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which was not a goal of this qualitative study.

**Data analysis.** Bonk et al. (1998) employed predetermined categories pretested in previous studies and admitted this was a limit to the discovery of the unknown. “Twelve forms of electronic learning mentoring and assistance” (p. 39) were coded for discourse type, case components, questions type, learning assistance, and mentoring. Content analysis included social acknowledgements, unsupported claims/opinions, justified comments, questions and dialogue prompts, and scaffolding. The transcription technique was to use COW to record new notes and “how to” navigate notes (Malikowski, 1997).

This study records only my perceptions. The transcriptions I made of survey responses or class meeting Reflective Responses were not returned to students for a check of authenticity. This study represents my singular interpretations of students’ responses in both surveys and class meetings. In contrast, Bonk et al. (1998) had the multiple perspectives of several researchers. My only check for the trustworthiness of data analysis was a time lapse of three months between initial coding of data and second review. Few corrections resulted, and usually my only debate was most appropriate category.

**Auditing techniques.** Like Bonk et al. (1998), I attempted to increase dependability and maintained a “log” of daily class activities and of the transcript analyses. However, I cannot replicate confirmability. Bonk et al. had two evaluators analyze the documents collected, who noted common themes. The case analysis had an inter-rater reliability of 80.3%.

Bonk et al. worked in collaboration over a series of studies. As a teacher working as a researcher, this study is a product of one perspective. This isolation affected the role of the researched, the analysis of data, and the auditing techniques. The small size of the sample was a result of the context selected. With these limitations in mind, this study did offer contributions both for instructional practice and further research.

**Contributions of Study**

Students liked this project. I tend to repeat what students have enjoyed with my next group of students. Over several years of implementation, the WW has become the backbone of my writing program. I believe that this study reinforces continued use of the online conference in my writing program.

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14 The study contained no description of how COW aids to “navigate notes.”
program and constitutes one small step into the technological future of education. An unexpected finding of this study was for me to recognize the need to forefront joint construction of meaning as my primary motivation in organizing instruction.

**Social Construction of Meaning**

This study recognized the importance of talk in the classroom. The maxim "show don’t tell" was used to encourage students to use words that paint a picture for the reader. What the reader sees may not be what the author intended. For example, recently a student shared his understanding of the setting in the classic short story “Barney,” written by Will Stanton (1987). The author describes an isolated island. However, because the student understood that a rat is a main character, this student believed the setting was an urban apartment building. Sometimes even a professional writer cannot overcome the implicit knowledge a reader brings to the text. As Lapadat (1994) cautions, the reader’s interpretation of the writer’s context will be through the lens of the reader’s own experiences and implicit knowledge, and the reader may supply unintended meanings to subtext.

Bakhtin (1981) emphasized that an utterance cannot exist without context (Ewald, 1990). This subjectivity in the construction of meaning allows an individual to make choices between competing world views in the effort to construct her/his own voice. These choices are shaped by social goals and “ideological positioning” in peer-governed worlds (Manyak, 1999). The primary use of language is not self-expression but communication within a specific sociological structure.

Dyson and Freedman (1991) noted that expert writers revised on the “discourse level” and made changes in meaning. Unlike the students in my care, these experts tend to have a larger repertory of revision strategies at their command. Considering the work of student writers, Dyson and Freedman commented that students revised on the word level and made some changes in form. They noted students solve problems by rewriting without analysis of the problem (p. 760). This certainly was the case in this study. “Marbles” is a telling example. Although the author heard the student comments about the problematic ending, she did not possess a strategy to solve the problem, adding words was not enough. Only after the fact was I able to discern a possible route to a solution for this student. This further reinforces my desire to expand the sources for critique available to the students. Students such as Spiffy Spock, the author of “Marbles,” might benefit if
we opened the website beyond the confines of one class, and one school. She needed more guidance than my students or I was able to provide.

Online Education

Technophobes are the Luddites of the twentieth century. The children entering school in the twenty-first century and their teachers will be increasingly technophile. Saye (1997) discusses phases of technology implementation in the secondary school. He devised a useful heuristic, a continuum to distinguish polar extremes in attitude, from the “Accidental Tourist (AT),”15 who prefers to avoid the unfamiliar, to the “Voyageur (VG),” who thrives on risk and freedom. He observed the major goals of technology use for students were utilitarian (p. 15). He concluded, “Comfort may be the largest factor in determining if and how teachers and students use educational technologies and respond to innovation” (p. 21). The key here is the time period. The students and teachers in Sayes’ study are of yesterday. Today, young students and “younger” teachers are far more comfortable with technology. From the portable the Game Boy to the video arcade, the youth of tomorrow are becoming more prepared for a technological future. And the pace of change is accelerating.

Over the three phases, research into and practice with new technology far over shadowed the writing aspect of this inquiry. From the first foray into technology to the implementation of WebCT, the addition of new technology for use by students in the writing program has been the most difficult of tasks. The first years of implementation are argument against computer use (van der Geest & Remmers, 1994). As a teacher attempting to implement technology in the classroom, I have found that the daily problems and unpredictability do wear me down. Belief in the ultimate value of the experience and sheer enthusiasm for the future of writing on the web keep me going. Despite days when the district computer system or the school computer system breaks down, or students experience log-in problems, or I become frustrated because of my steep technological learning curve, there have been rewards.

One reward has been superior support from the CTL, and in particular, the project leader. As Professor Bonk advised, technical assistance has been critical (personal correspondence,

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15 Saye (1997) strikes an apt analogy between the main character of Anne Tyler’s 1985 novel of the same title and the teacher on the verge of evading new technology.
January 14, 1999). Convenience, accessibility and available technical assistance determined that WebCT would be the vehicle used for the online conference. Without that technical assistance, I would not have accomplished the implementation of the online conference.

The "teething troubles" of a prototype will ease, and the "what's next" will bring in a whole new set of afflictions, but the way of the future is, and will be, students working on computers, and more and more using online technology. This trend has been documented in recent studies and these researchers all comment on the development and rapid growth of online technology (Harris, 1995; Tornow, 1997; Beeler, 1998; Bonk et al, 1998; Arlington, 1999; Beatty, 1999; Clayton, 1999; Herod, 1999; Hopper Cook, 1999; and Kasper, 1999; Lapadat, 2000, May). However, as previously noted, almost all of this research occurs in a post-secondary setting.

Future Research

Although social construction of meaning is much discussed in the literature, little information is packaged to be accessible for immediate use in the classroom. Mothus (2000) is discussed here as an exception to that norm. I suggest that the problems of revision need cross-grade attention. As done in the Bonk et al. (1998) study, the addition of the case study and interview could offer an opportunity to further validate data about student attitudes towards the WW and the online conference. Almost as an aside, I am also curious as to whether students will come to prefer to read information online in the future.

Social Construction of Meaning

Writing a story at the teacher's command does limit the spontaneity of student expression and diminishes the connection between writing and personal meaning. The main problem with this study was that the lessons were not constructivist in presentation, students were not guided to seek a joint construction of meaning. Students were not introduced to this narrative project as an exercise in making and sharing meaning. They did not see that their words, sentences, and thoughts are written to share meaning with the reader. Little in the research literature offers viable solutions to this problem. However, Mothus (2000), a practicing high school teacher and doctoral candidate at the University of Calgary, suggests a holistic-constructivist approach that a teacher could actually use in a classroom. In her example, lower-ability junior secondary students are guided through the stages of writing a book for younger children to appropriate the skills they need to create their own
In future semesters, the approach proposed by Mothus (2000) could be developed to increase the potential that students might jointly construct meaning in the WW. I would devote one day to whole class review of one archived story, as previously mentioned. I would introduce the lesson with a reminder that our goal in writing and in reading these short stories is to share meaning. Prior to reading the stories, I will pose the following questions. How do the words and sentences in the story help us to make sense of the writer’s meaning? What is missing that might help us see through the writer’s eyes? First, I will give each student a copy of the selected story to read individually. Then students will be asked to volunteer to read the story aloud. To develop a guide sheet for this activity, I will use an overhead that summarizes some of Elbow’s (1981) reader response questions. With the students, we will select and record questions that we will use on the archived story. Working with self-selected partners, students will use the questions to review the story. Then, as a whole class, we will assess which questions were useful and consider changes. Another archived story could be used to repeat the process. A follow-up activity could be to use the same questions for peer stories. The goal of shared meaning must be made apparent, continually reinforced, and, hopefully, accepted by the students.

As a teacher I need direction to change my instructional practices to forefront social construction of meaning. My students need direction, over an extended period of time, to improve their skills to be able to present their own personal meaning according to accepted standards.

Revision

If the member schools of a vertical team were to meet to discuss best practices, they could not look to the research literature to offer clear guidelines for a skills-and-sequence, introduction-and-development model of the practices that would allow students to experience a successful writing program and increased consistency across the grades. Research studies and practitioner reports tend to cluster at the middle school and post-secondary levels. Researchers could provide direction as to which skills, what sequence and what possible methods best meet the needs of which students,

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16 If the computer lab is available, I would use WebCT to read the stories online. However, as I cannot assume I will have 30 computers available, I conjecture this lesson as based in the classroom.
particularly during adolescence. Although homogeneous implementation will always remain unattainable, school, zone, or district meetings could offer a forum for decision-making as to which skills, what sequence and what possible methods language arts teachers will emphasize. The schools in my district have begun to work with the writing reference sets supplied by the Ministry of Education, previously mentioned. Criterion-referenced standards do supply a picture of the goal; however, the directions to achieve that goal remain insufficient.

Case Study and Interview

I was not able to cross check the opinions given in the survey to the identity of a particular student. I wondered if students who expressed an interest in writing -- saw themselves as a writer -- would have different ideas about revision and the usefulness of the online conference. What motivates students who like to write? Will an appeal to self-expression and making meaning motivate the recalcitrant writer to try to write?

When and why did some students lose a view of themselves as writers, and more important, as tellers of stories? Why did those students become silent? Bahktin (1981) identifies a power struggle that determines which voices are heard. Have some students been silenced? A study of an ethnographic design would better address these questions.

Online versus print

Students reported a slight preference for a printed copy to read stories as opposed to reading online. With reference to the copyright restrictions that govern the placing of entire texts of contemporary works on the web, Beeler (1998) states, “I believe that students often feel more comfortable leafing through a book than reading a text on the web” (p. 163). Further, she observes that printed texts are more practical for lengthy reading sessions. Beeler does not foresee the disappearance of the book even though other scholars may predict that eventuality.

Although it saddens me, I anticipate that students will show an increased preference for reading online in the not too distant future. Today students are accustomed to the printed page; however, SuperStation and the e-book may dominate our future. Home-flyer mailers offer pink Barbie and blue Hot Wheels computers for toddlers. I wonder, will a fondness for the printed page become an anachronism? Textbook companies also are
investigating the online avenue. Academic journals and university courses are going online. As of October, 1999, Allyn & Bacon, John Wiley & Sons, McGraw-Hill, Prentice Hall, and Wadsworth had courses offered via WebCT. In the WebCT Content showcase, over 422 products were listed by discipline, title, author and publisher. Ultimately, this trend will make a difference, especially for the students of tomorrow.

I believe there will always be those individuals who love books and the print media. Gene Roddenbury’s Star Trek series, futuristic science fiction popular both on television and in movies, portrays both James Kirk and Captain Picard as fervent lovers of books. Nevertheless, the technophile expertise of today’s children will likely appropriate to online reading habits for mainstream communication.

Conclusion

The Writers’ Workshop classroom is based upon the belief that writing promotes learning and talk encourages writing. Bonk et al. (1998) concluded that “asynchronous environments proved valuable tools for authentic case creation and discussion for relatively short 2-3 week time periods” (p. 24). Technology such as COW and WebCT collects, stores, compiles and computes data. In the context of the junior secondary classroom, the archival data also allowed me to determine if the peer conference has had an impact on student revision of writing. As well, the written record allowed me to check on the safety of the environment.

The WW did serve as a vehicle to allow the students to share meaning. However, there is little in the literature to guide the practitioner on how to accomplish joint construction of meaning in the writing classroom. This study once more confirms the time that is needed to allow students to appropriate the behaviours of peer response. The stories submitted for final evaluation by the students in this study were at a minimal level of expectations as defined by the BC Performance Standards: Writing (revised February 2000). Responsibility for improvements was addressed from a personal, practice, and research perspective. The difficulties of implementation were complicated by the three-fold

Full listing is available at: http://support.webct.com
initiative I undertook in this study. However, students enjoyed the WW, WebCT did provide online technology, and some students were anonymous. The tension between a fully realized WW and anonymous response could be reduced with the availability of a larger online audience beyond the confines of one school.

This narrative writing project provided a template that will be modified and used again. With each successive semester, I will continue to encourage students to see writing as a personal, self-empowering experience. In The Right to Write, Julia Cameron (1998) states, “Writing claims our world” (p. xvi). Students must persevere in a swarming peer culture, bombarded by demands from too many sources. Our sense of self relies on social intercourse (Ewald, 1990). Survival depends on the meanings we take from that interchange and the meanings we make for ourselves.

On several occasions, I told the students that their participation in this study was important to me. That did not make the activity important to them. As my advisor noted, “the difficulty of achieving anonymity and the supporting technology (took precedence) over writing process issues” (personal correspondence, August 24, 2000).

The use of WebCT provided a viable means for students to peer conference. However, the introduction of technology requires support. Although the local school board recently has voted to spend more money on technology, and a part of those monies are for technical support, I do not expect to see very much assistance in the lab as recommended by van der Geest and Remmers (1994). Although I will continue appeal to and appreciate support from the school librarian, school technical coordinator and the project leader at the CTL, I expect I will be the main “Johnny on the spot troubleshooter.” As discussed earlier, peer mentors may provide an untapped source of support. These cautions will not encourage many teachers to rush into technological implementation. Until the needs for support are more adequately met, most teachers will avoid technology initiatives.

In the future, I will begin the narrative writing unit with a discussion of meaning in writing, in movies, in their lives. I plan to emphasize theme and meaning in the stories we will read together in class. When students present their outline for their short story, I will question them to clarify the meaning they seek to share. In several lessons, we will discuss reader response and develop a guide sheet for use with short stories. With a new emphasis
on the individual and self-expression, I will use WebCT again. I hope to use student mentors who will be trained to assist with technology. As ever, I realize I still have much left to learn as a writer, a teacher of writing, and as a researcher.

There is never enough time to do everything well, and some days I fear there is not enough time to do very much of anything well. Graves (1985), Calkins (1986), Atwell (1987), and Stretch (1995) all admonish that the WW requires adequate block of time, preferably a large portion of the instructional day. Calkins (1986) cautioned that the teacher will “need the luxury of time.” As I do not expect to work with any group of students over any length of time, I can not aspire to the standards achieved in the studies of Freedman (1994) or Hoel (1997), I do the best I can in the time I have, and hope the vertical team concept will eventually contribute to student experience and comfort.

I continue to struggle with the choice between peer support throughout the writing process versus the desire to use anonymity to aid in the creation of a safer environment. Quite likely, I will allow my students to choose whatever method they prefer. They will have the option to write in community, or they can chose to remain anonymous and post online with a code name. I will try to continue to experiment with the use of code names for students who wish to be anonymous. And, as highlighted earlier, I see the need to devote several class periods to reader response. However, these shortfalls do not reduce the powerful potential of the use of the peer conference in the writing classroom.
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Writing and Literacy. ERIC Clearinghouse ED 396 314


Graves, D. (1996, Jan./Feb.). If you write, they will too. Instructor, 40-41.


Kempa, R. (1997, March/April). The electronic workshop: While it will never replace the traditional workshop, the electronic workshop will be especially useful for writers who cannot find the level of criticism they need within an hour’s drive from home. *Poets & Writers Magazine, 25* (2), 70-73.


Writing on the Web


WebCT: What does WebCT look like? (accessed October 22, 1999)
http://www.webct.com/look_like.html


An Investigation of Online Technology and the Writers’ Workshop in the Junior Secondary Classroom

I would like to request your participation in a study of narrative composition using computer technology to peer conference online. You are invited to participate in this study because you were a student in my grade 10 English class at Blackburn Junior Secondary School, in the fall or spring semester of 1998-1999.

I am a student of graduate studies in Education at the University of Northern British Columbia. My supervising professor is Dr. Judith Lapadat. I plan to collect the data in this study as the basis for my masters thesis: Online Technology and the Writers’ Workshop in the Junior Secondary Classroom. I plan to investigate students’ use of online technology to respond to peers’ narrative compositions (peer conferencing), and to survey students’ attitudes about writing and peer conferencing online. I hope to learn more about how peer comments affect a writer’s revision of his or her work as well as student attitudes toward writing and revising writing. This information will contribute to research in education, and may be beneficial to future teachers and students.

During the time that you were a student in my class, you wrote a narrative composition. If you decide to participate, you will allow me to post your work as a sample story to the designated web site, anonymously, using your selected “code name”. If you decide to participate, you may choose to respond to sample stories posted to the designated web site, anonymously, using your “code name.” Students who will take English 10 in the fall semester of 1999-2000 will be given the opportunity to read your narrative and your comments, and may choose to comment on your sample story using their own “code name.” You will be given an opportunity to read those comments, revise your work, and post the final, edited narrative as a published work, should you wish to do so. All participants will be invited to complete a short survey after the narrative writing, to determine familiarity and comfort with both peer conferencing and use of computer technology to confer. Possible risk factors are no greater than normal school activity. Students who choose not to participate online will not have their work used in this research study.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Your decision as to whether or not to participate will not prejudice your relations with the teacher or Blackburn Junior Secondary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw consent and your work will be removed from the data base.

If you have any additional questions, please contact me, Elizabeth Woods, at Blackburn Junior Secondary, (250) 963-7474. You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Judith Lapadat, at (250) 360-6667, if you have questions or concerns.

You may keep a copy of this form.

I have decided to participate in a study of narrative composition using computer technology to peer conference online. I agree to post my narrative online, and to allow peers to read and comment on my narrative. My signature indicates that I have read the information above and have decided to participate. I realize that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time after signing this form should I decide to do so.

______________________________  ______________________________
Student’s signature  Date

______________________________  ______________________________
Parent/ Guardian’s signature  Date

______________________________  ______________________________
Researcher’s signature  Date
May 26, 1999

Ms. Elizabeth Woods
9405 Alpine Drive
Prince George, BC

Proposal: 19990510.53

Dear Ms. Woods:

The UNBC Ethics Committee met on May 19, 1999 to review your proposal entitled, "Online Technology and the Writers Workshop in the Jr. Sec. Classroom".

The Committee has approved your proposal and you are free to proceed with your research.

Sincerely,

Alex Michalos
Chair, UNBC Ethics Review Committee
Appendix C
Letter of Informed Consent, 1999-2000
An Investigation of Online Technology and the Writers’ Workshop in the Junior Secondary Classroom

I would like to request your participation in a study of narrative composition using computer technology to peer conference online. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a student in my grade 10 English class at Blackburn Junior Secondary School.

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All students will be asked to write a narrative composition. If you decide to participate, you will post your story to the designated web site, anonymously, using a “code name.” Peers will then be given the opportunity to read and comment on your narrative, using their own “code name.” You will be given an opportunity to revise your work, and post the final, edited narrative as a published work. All participants will be invited to complete a short survey after the narrative writing, to determine familiarity and comfort with both peer conferencing and use of computer technology to conferencing. Several students will be asked to participate in a post-revision interview. The interview will be audio-taped for future analysis of student responses. Except for the interview, no other time outside of class will be required. However, students are free to work on the writing and revision of their stories as they choose. Possible risk factors are no greater than normal school activity. Students who choose not to participate online will complete the same assignments in class; and their work will not be used in this research study.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Your decision as to whether or not to participate will not prejudice your relations with the teacher or Blackburn Junior Secondary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw consent and discontinue the online peer conferencing at any time.

If you have any additional questions, please contact me, Elizabeth Woods, at Blackburn Junior Secondary, (250) 963-7474. You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Judith Lapadat, at (250) 960-6667, if you have questions or concerns.

You may keep a copy of this form.

I have decided to participate in a study of narrative composition using computer technology to peer conference online. I agree to post my narrative online, and to allow peers to read and comment on my narrative. My signature indicates that I have read the information above and have decided to participate. I realize that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time after signing this form should I decide to do so.

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Student’s signature  Date

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Parent/ Guardian’s signature  Date

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Researcher’s signature  Date
ASSIGNMENT:  

**NARRATIVE RESPONSE JOURNAL**

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**READING LOG:**
You are required to read a minimum of 40 short stories. Some we will read together in class, some you will select to read by yourself.

Include Reading Log in final Response Journal.

**Theme Paragraphs:**
You are required to write a response to one story every day of class for this unit. Your response should address the THEME of the short story.

Every fourth day, you will be asked to meet with peers to share your three responses.

Every fifth day, you are required to submit one BEST WORK. Select the best of the three responses you have prepared, revise, edit, and submit for marking.

**BEST WORK**

**DUE DATES:**

**REQUIRED for all Theme Paragraphs:**

**Presentation (05):** computer, typed, or neatly handwritten in pen

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| Quote (03): | Copy a quote from the story that represents the theme. Cite page number. |

| Paragraph (10): | Write a well-constructed paragraph (6-10 sentences) to discuss the theme. Include a clear topic sentence that states the theme. Support your topic sentence with a minimum of three details from the story. End your paragraph with a powerful clincher sentence. Complete sentences, correct grammar, mechanics, and spelling required. **DEDUCTION:** one point for every spelling or mechanical error! |
REQUIRED for RESPONSE JOURNAL:

Title page: title of Response Journal + name, date, class, teacher, block
Table of Contents: list: author and story title
Presentation: duotang cover
include this assignment sheet
include two (2) demonstration response entries
include (3) plot outlines
include (4) examples of BEST WORK
Visual Representation: two (2) illustrations (relevant/creative)
identify story title, author and source
Bibliography: list all sources consulted
minimum three (3) sources required
Self-Evaluation: Record your score on this sheet before presentation to teacher.

RESPONSE JOURNAL DUE DATE: __________

EVALUATION:

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Appendix E

THE ANIMAL
By: Chris Receveur

Tromping through the darkness, he savagely searches for food. There is no vegetation for miles, but he must survive. All the rest of his kind are dead. Dead of starvation.

His heavy footsteps echo through the emptiness. He continues through his damp surroundings. He finds no food.

Wait. There is something moving ahead. No. It's not one of his kind. He is not wanted among them, just a burden.

He often feels of giving up. But he can't, he must survive.

Now the sun is coming up. The water will soon be scarce. The sun's rays burn on his bare back, but he continues on in hopes of finding food.

His once strong and muscular body is now withered down to bones, and his rough skin is itching and burning. He knows he only has one last chance, he must find food.

He continues on to his hunting grounds. He usually has much luck there. The prey used to be plentiful, but since he started hunting there, it has been scarce. All morning he walks through the deep valleys until he reaches his spot.

He sits, and waits. He sees his prey. No, that's not the one he wants. He waits some more.

There. This one looks good. He has his attack all planned out. His prey is nearing, closer, closer, closer. Then, he makes his attack.

"Excuse me, sir, could you spare some change?"
Appendix F

In The Public Eye
by Davina Van Roode

My feet pounded harder and faster against the rough forest floor beneath me as the wind rushed through my hair. I loved that feeling, the way the air felt against my skin as it picked my hair slightly up off my shoulders. It was almost as though I were flying. Often, I wished that feeling would go on forever, as if it were nothing, but I knew my legs could not go on for that long. I could feel the muscles getting even more sore. I needed another rest; it had been about twenty minutes since I last stopped.

I figured I didn't have much time before he realized I was gone, and called the police to come find me. I kept running, faster now, terrified at the thought of ever going back to that dump he called a "home".

He thought I was at Jessica's, believing that I would be home by 5:00 to cook him dinner. I glanced at my watch. It was 4:30.

"Half an hour before he calls Jessica to see why I'm not at the house yet," I thought, "then he'll realize what I've done."

I recalled the last time it happened, hopefully it would be the last of many times. He had come home earlier than I expected, and he had smelled so terrible I could have sworn it was raining whiskey outside. I was doing dishes, something Mom would have been doing, had she not died.

I remembered thinking, "The bartender must have kicked him out again, it's a wonder he got elected."

I knew, as soon as I had smelled him, I was in trouble. I tried to leave the room without getting caught, but it was too late. He had seen me. I prayed to God silently as I turned to face him.

"Why aren't the dishes done, and why aren't you asleep!" he yelled, his words slightly slurred. My prayer to God was interrupted.

"Well I..." I started

"You were laz'lin' around watching t.v., weren't you!" I didn't answer.

"Weren't you!" he repeated as if I hadn't heard. Before I got a chance to answer, he shouted, "You slut! Answer me!"

"No, I..."

"When I want something done, you do it, understand!" he started walking towards me.

"Please, don't yell," I whispered, almost in tears. He was right in front of me now.

"Don't yell!" he cried. "It's my god damn house! I'll do what I want!"

He slapped me, hard and across the face. I could feel the hot salty drops of water rolling down my cheeks. His face was inches away from mine. The heavy stench of whiskey on his breath was sickening.

"I own this damn house," he repeated a third time, only louder. "I own everything in this f'ing house, and you, too, my girl."

He walked back over to me and started hitting me. My stomach hurt from his punches. I tried to fight back with the little energy I had, but he only hit me harder.
Tears were dripping off my chin and my arms became too sore to lift. The last thing I remembered was a sharp pain from the back of my head.

I woke up the next morning staring at white linoleum and shattered dishes. I had a searing pain throughout my head. I went to the bathroom and looked in the mirror. I had bruises on my right cheek where he had slapped me, and bruises on my arms and legs. I had no cuts that time; I was lucky.

I took some Tylenol for my headache, and I grabbed a pen and paper. I passed by the living room, where he was passed out on the couch. He was sure to be sleeping for a few more hours yet. I silently went into my room and sat down on my bed. I wrote:

Dear Dad, I've gone over to Jessica's. Don't expect me home until five o'clock. -Samantha

I guessed that he wouldn't call to check on me, at least, he never had before. I looked at my watch again. "He should be calling Jessica now," I thought. I slowed down to a walk for a while to catch my breath. Once I could breathe again, I started to run. I could hear the cars on the highway; I could tell that I wasn't that far away. I would hitchhike from there. Damn my father for wanting to live in the country.

I heard barking coming from behind me, I broke out of the woods and onto the highway. There was a police car waiting for me, and several officers as well. I tripped and fell hard on the pavement. It felt as though my breath were taken away from me. My face, arms and legs stung as though skinned of flesh.

They helped me up and then sat me in the vehicle. They acted as though I was unable to walk myself. I tried to struggle to get away, but it was too painful.

"Don't take me back there, please," I managed to mutter to them. "Sorry," one of them replied, "but we have to. Your daddy misses you and wants you back home."

"No," I thought, "You don't understand..."

When I woke up, I was in my father's bed. The police officers had left already. I assume that he had answered all their questions.

"How are you?" he asked as though I believed he really cared.

"Go to hell."

He leaned over me and kissed my forehead. "Get off of me." I cried. He started kissing me even more.

"Daddy loves you, don't run away anymore."

He ran his hands through my hair. He started to undress me, unbuttoning my shirt.

"Get off of me! I hate you!"

"No you don't. You love me too," his voice was calm.

He started to unbutton my jeans. I reached over to the bed stand and pulled out the hand gun he had hidden there. I pointed it at him.

"Get off of me!"

"You won't shoot me," he said kissing my cheek.

I fired the gun. He fell to the floor. He lay there gasping in his own pool of blood.

I reached for the phone to call 9-1-1. They didn't make it in time.
Appendix G

Letter of Informed Consent, 2000 - 2001
To Use Real Name
An Investigation of Online Technology and the Writers’ Workshop in the Junior Secondary Classroom

You participated in a study of narrative composition using computer technology to peer conference online in the spring of 2000. At this time, you are invited to present your story as a publication on the website BBJWOW. Your signature to this letter gives your consent to have your real name used in this online publication.

I am a student of graduate studies in Education at the University of Northern British Columbia. My supervising professor is Dr. Judith Lapadat. The BBJWOW website was developed for the study that is the basis for my masters thesis: Online Technology and the Writers’ Workshop in the Junior Secondary Classroom. I investigated students’ use of online technology to respond to peers’ narrative compositions (peer conferencing), and to surveyed students’ attitudes about writing and peer conferencing online. My goal was to learn more about how peer comments affect a writer’s revision of his or her work as well as student attitudes toward writing and revising writing. This information will contribute to research in education, and may be beneficial to future teachers and students.

According to prior agreement, your story was posted to the designated web site, anonymously, using a “code name.” Peers have had the opportunity to read and comment on your narrative, using their own “code name.”

All information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential. As agreed by your prior Letter of Consent 1999-2000, your name will be disclosed only with your permission. This letter of Consent 2000-2001, asks you to agree to the use of your name as the author of the story published online on BBJWOW. This remains a closed website, open only to students of Blackburn Junior Secondary School. Any wider dissemination of the site will require further permission from you for the use of your real name or for the publication of your story.

Your decision as to whether or not to participate will not prejudice your relations with the teacher or Blackburn Junior Secondary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw consent and discontinue the online publication at any time.

If you have any additional questions, please contact me, Elizabeth Woods, at Blackburn Junior Secondary, (250) 963-7474. You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Judith Lapadat, at (250) 960-6667, if you have questions or concerns. You may keep a copy of this form.

I have decided to participate in a study of narrative composition using computer technology to peer conference online. I agree to post my narrative online, and to allow peers to read and comment on my narrative. My signature indicates that I have read the information above and have decided to participate. I realize that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time after signing this form should I decide to do so.

_________________________________  _______________________________________
Student’s signature                        Date

_________________________________  _______________________________________
Parent/ Guardian’s signature              Date

_________________________________  _______________________________________
Researcher’s signature                   Date
Appendix H

Peer Response Guidelines

1. Social Acknowledgement:
   “Your story was about aliens,” “I like mysteries....”

2. Positive Feedback:
   “Wow, what a story,” “That shows real insight....”

3. Direct instruction:
   “When the character _____ would be a good place to show not tell.”
   “Consider the advice to foreshadow a tragic event.”

4. Questioning:
   “Why was the character in the alley,” “Who called her?”

5. Content: “What was your main idea for this story?”
   “I see a collection of thoughts, but what were you trying to say?”
   “Could you describe _____ a little more.”

6. Organization:
   “In the beginning, you could develop....”
   “In the middle, I wanted to know........”
   “The ending happened quite quickly; I needed a sense of closure.”

7. Language:
   “Who is your audience?”
   “I could hear the voice of your main character.”
   “The old man in your story talked like a teenager.”

8. Mechanics: “Be sure to check your spelling; it distracts the reader.”
   “Remember to use quotation marks for dialogue.”
   “Run-on sentences/ sentence fragments confuse the reader.”

9. Prompting: “I need to know why the character was angry”,
   “What else might the character have done here?”

10. Suggestions for improvement:
    “If I were in her shoes, I might.....”
    “Please clarify what you mean by....”
APPENDIX I

INSTRUCTIONS: WebCT

Instruction are based on the use of the iMac computers at Blackburn Junior Secondary. Details may vary for other computers.

1. **Prepare the narrative**
   1. **Code name**
      You are assigned a two word “code name.” The second word of the code name will be used as your <log-in name>.

2. **Type draft**
   a. Have prepared draft of your story.
   b. Type the story into AppleWorks.
   c. After the title of the story, use your code name as author.
   d. Make all revisions and proofread.
   e. When you are prepared to save the draft, under the “save as” feature on the file menu, select “HTML.”

3. Your teacher will upload the story to WebCT to “Presentations” and print a copy of the presentation draft.

II. **Using WebCT**
1. Open netscape navigator.
2. Use Book mark to go to “WebCT Course Listings.”
   If you are using a computer away from school, the web address is:

   http://

3. Select “English 10 BBJWOW”
4. Your <log-in name> is the second word of your code name in lower case letters.
5. Your “password” is your student number.
   You are invited to change your password if you wish.
   If you decide to change your password, please notify your teacher.
6. The "Welcome" screen lists four options:
   Student Work
   Peer Response Guidelines
   Survey
   Change your password.

...Please turn the page....
7. Practice Peer Response  
   a. reference: online "Peer Response Guidelines" or printed handout  
   b. select icon: "Student Work"  
   c. select icon: "Sample Stories"  
   d. Ready any story you wish.  
   e. select icon: "Bulletins" at the top of the page  
   f. You are now in the forum.  
   g. Write your response to the sample story.  
   h. select icon: "Post" to enter your response  

8. Presentations  
   a. at this stage, you must work individually -- no partners  
   b. select icon: "Presentations"  
   c. Ready any story you wish.  
   d. You are required to respond to five stories.  
   e. select icon: "Bulletins" at the top of the page  
   f. You are now in the forum.  
   g. Write your response to the sample story.  
   h. select icon: "Post" to enter your response  

9. Revision  
   a. Read the response peers have given to your story.  
   b. Decide if you wish to make any changes to the story.  
   c. Proofread.  
   d. Save all the changes.  
   e. Print the final publication copy of your story.  
   f. Using the "presentation draft", highlight where you have made changes  
   g. Turn in all required work to teacher.  

10. Survey  
    a. select icon: Survey  
    b. Respond to objective questions as indicated.  
    c. Please give some thought to, and carefully answer, the short answer questions.  

If you wish to work in a group to practice peer response:  
   a. Use <test> for log-in.  
   b. Use <help> for password.  
   c. Note the number of the response you posted.  
   d. Inform your teacher of that number to receive credit.
You are invited to participate in a study of narrative composition using computer technology to peer conferencing online. I plan to collect the data in this study as the basis for my masters thesis: *An Investigation of Online Technology and the Writers' Workshop in the Junior Secondary Classroom*. Students who choose not to participate online will complete the same assignments in class; and their work will not be used in this research study.

All students are assigned to write a narrative composition. If you decide to participate, you will post your story to the designated web site, anonymously, using your selected "code name". Peers will then be given the opportunity to read and comment on your narrative, using their own "code name". You will be given an opportunity to revise your work, and post the final, edited narrative as a published work. All participants will be invited to complete a short survey after the narrative writing, to determine familiarity and comfort with both peer conferencing and use of computer technology to conference.

**OPTIONAL:** Several students may be asked to participate in a post-revision interview. The interview will be audio-taped for future analysis of student responses. Except for the interview, no other time outside of class will be required. Students are free to work on the writing and revision of their stories as they choose.

Please refer to the attached assignment schedule. Note the target dates established for successful completion of the project. Please record the date(s) you work on each of the required stages. This "Assignment Sheet" will be collected at the end of the unit.

**REQUIRED for Narrative Creative Writing:**

| Evaluation: quality of content | = 100 points |
| Evaluation: preparation | = 100 points |
| On Time | / 05 points |
| Assignment Sheet returned | / 05 |
| Prewrite | / 10 |
| Organization | / 10 |
| Draft | / 10 |
| Draft - revision | / 20 |
| - proofread | |
| Typed final copy | / 10 |
| Peer Response (3 x 10 points) | / 30 |
| Preparation TOTAL | /100 points |

E. Woods - 10/11/99
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## APPENDIX K

### EVALUATION: NARRATIVE

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<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Effective climax</th>
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### EVALUATION: NARRATIVE

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Survey Questions

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A. Please select the most appropriate answer:

1. Gender
   a. **male**   b. **female**

2. WWW
   How much experience did you have using the World Wide Web before this project?
   a. **no experience**   b. **less than 10 hours**   c. **10-50 hours**   d. **more than 50 hours**

3. Elec Conference
   How much experience did you have using a Bulletin Board System, Chatline, or other electronic conferencing systems before this project?
   a. **no experience**   b. **less than 10 hours**   c. **10-50 hours**   d. **more than 50 hours**

4. Time
   How much time did you spend on WebCT during this project?
   a. **30 - 60 min.**   b. **1-2 hours**   c. **3-4 hours**   d. **5-6 hours**   e. **7+ hours**

5. Location
   Please indicate locations from which you accessed WebCT: You may select more than one.
   a. **library**   b. **Star Lab**   c. **classroom**   d. **home**   e. **other**

B. Please give your opinion to the statements below, using the scale:

1. **(Low/ Strongly Disagree)**
2. **(Somewhat Disagree)**
3. **(no opinion)**
4. **(Somewhat Agree)**
5. **(High/ Strongly Agree)**

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statements that follow, items 6 to 15. Number 5 indicates you do agree with the statement. Number 1 indicates that you do not agree. Please select the number from 5 to 1 that best describes your opinion.

6. **OC Writer** i see myself as a writer.
7. **OC WebCT** The conferencing tool WebCT was easy to use.
8. **Ideas** This conferencing activity encouraged sharing ideas.
9. **Anon author** I like using my code name to publish anonymously.
10. **Anon response** I like using my code name to respond to stories anonymously.
11. **Read online** I prefer to read stories online.
12. **Read print** I prefer to read a story on the printed page.
13. **Character** This conferencing activity gave me ideas regarding character.
14. **Plot** This conferencing activity gave me ideas regarding plot.
15. **Recommend** I would recommend online conferencing for other students.
C. Open Ended Questions

16. Most useful Please give examples of some specific comments from peers that were most useful.

17. Least useful Please give examples of some specific comments from peers that were least useful.

18. Examples=Hurt Did you receive any comments which hurt your feelings? Please give example(s).

19. Read peers What did you gain from reading narratives written by peers, if anything?

20. Revision What revisions did you make to your narrative based on peer response(s)? Please give example(s).

21. P writer Do you see yourself as a writer? If "yes", in what way do you see yourself as a writer?

22. Conf teacher What experience have you had with student/teacher writing conference(s)? Did you make changes to your writing?

23. Conf student What experience have you had with student/student writing conference(s)? Did you make changes to your writing?

24. Conf person If you have ever participated in a student/student writing conference, what did you like about that experience?

25. Conf online You have just participated in online writing conference. What did you like about this experience?

26. Anon author Was it important to you to be anonymous as an author? Why? Why not?

27. Anon response Was it important to you to be anonymous when you wrote a response to a story? Why? Why not?

28. Future Would you like to use online conferencing about writing in the future? Why? Why not?

29. Improvements What could be done to make improvements to the online conference or to help to prepare students to use it?

30. Other Additional comments?
REFLECTIVE RESPONSE

For each of the following categories, list at least three things (in complete sentences) that you feel are important to you.

I  Good things:

II  Problems:

III  Improvements needed:
### ANALYSIS:

**Narrative Notations**  
January 9, 2000

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Where the winding path led across the chine, bushes of blackberry and huckleberry gathered into two tangled lanes until it was one curling mass of green waves. Dull rays of the evening sun shone through the pink and silver haze of soft clouds. The insects chanted a hypnotizing chorus in the long July heat, near the gurgling rivulets of the cold blue bayou. Under the gnarled old oak tree sat a beautiful princess, with hair that fell in honey ringlets like a golden waterfall down her back. She had emerald green eyes that shone like jewels that seemed to look inside your very heart and pierce your soul like daggers. To get away from the palace, Meredith would come to this spot as often as she could. Sometimes to feed the animals. Sometimes to throw rocks in the bubbling creek, and dream what I’d be like to grow wings and fly far away from the royal confusions of every day life that has become her very existence. Or to listen to the world and all it had to say about the complications and unsettling entities which is our own manifested domain. Sometimes she’d fall asleep under the enchanted old oak tree, and only there, no where else she would dream about him. Never the face only a voice, resonant and melodious.

One night during dinner there were three light raps on the front door. “Who would be so rude as to interrupt my dinner.” She opened the door and peered out into the dusky silence of the eventide. “Who’s there?” The princess called weakly. No answer. Just as she was about to close the door, a shape appeared suddenly out of the twilight. An old pitiful looking woman stepped into the light. “Please help me, I’ve no food and no place to stay, I’ve been traveling for days.” The old woman’s hair was matted with burrs and twigs. Her clothes were tattered and torn from her obviously long journey. “I will stay for only one night, and will be off in the morning. I can repay you.” begged the old witch. “With what could you give me?, I am a wealthy princess, and you are an old beggar lady. What could you have that I don’t. I have everything I need. So away with you wretched old witch.” And she shut the door “Beggars!” Meredith mumbled with disgust. On the other side of the door she could hear the old witch grumbling and cursing. Meredith returned to her meal without any more disruptions.

Days later Meredith wondered down to her discreet Utopia. She was staring at the clear blue sky when a beautiful butterfly fluttered around her then landed on her arm. Touched by its beauty Meredith brushed her lips over the delicate gossamer wings. Suddenly a gust of wind came out of nowhere spiraling around Meredith and she closed her eyes against the tiny grains of sand. Seconds later the wind was gone and the princess could hear the voice of the man in her dreams, “you have released my soul from the bounds of a curse, you are my angel. I have seen your face in my dreams.” “And I have heard your voice in mine.” Suddenly the old beggar witch appeared. Ah ha! You thought you could just turn your back on me, and not suffer a consequence you poor unfortunate soul.” The witch screamed. her voice filled with hatred and rage. “Because you are rude, and vain you shall live for the rest of eternity never being able to be with your true love, and you will live forever with only half a soul. And turning to Meredith’s love, spat out “And you shall perish in the fiery pits of hell.” The witch raised her arms, clouds swarmed quickly around the clear sky. Thunder roared and lightening crashed as she summoned evil from the four corners of the earth. Meredith called to her,” Now you shall suffer for the rest of eternity. “Nooooooool. “Screamed Meredith. She jumped in the arms of the man and their lips met for a brief moment. Suddenly lightening struck the old enchanted oak tree. It was split down the middle and half fell on the witch, it killed her, but it was too late the spell had already been cast. There was another gust of wind and sand. The princess was turned into a fish to live in the bubbling brook near the charred old oak tree and the prince remained a man. And it was so, the couple could never be, For Meredith, and the man of her dreams.
Appendix O-2

The Enchanted Utopia
By: Fuzzy Kiwi

Where the winding path led across the chine, bushes of blackberry and huckleberry gathered into two tangled lanes until it was one curling mass of green waves. Dull rays of the evening sun shone through the pink and silver haze of soft clouds. The insects chanted a hypnotizing chorus in the long July heat, near the gurgling rivulets of the cold blue bayou. Under the gnarled old oak tree sat a beautiful princess, with hair that fell in honey ringlets like a golden waterfall down her back. She had emerald green eyes that shone like jewels that seemed to look inside your very heart and pierce your soul like daggers. To get away from the palace, Meredith would come to this spot as often as she could. Sometimes to feed the animals. Sometimes to throw rocks in the bubbling creek, and dream what I’d be like to grow wings and fly far away from the royal confusions of every day life that has become her very existence. Or to listen to the world and all it had to say about the complications and unsettling entities which is our own manifested domain. Sometimes she’d fall asleep under the enchanted old oak tree, and only there, no where else she would dream about him. Never the face only a voice, resonant and melodious. One night during dinner there were three light raps on the front door. “Who would be so rude as to interrupt my dinner.” She opened the door and peered out into the dusky silence of the eventide. “Who’s there?” The princess called weakly. No answer. Just as she was about to close the door, a shape appeared suddenly out of the twilight. An old pitiful looking woman stepped into the light. “Please help me, I’ve no food and no place to stay, I’ve been traveling for days.” The old woman’s hair was matted with burrs and twigs. Her clothes were tattered and torn from her obviously long journey. “I will stay for only one night, and will be off in the morning. I can repay you.” begged the old witch. “With what could you give me?, I am a wealthy princess, and you are an old beggar lady. What could you have that I don’t. I have everything I need. So away with you wretched old witch.” And she shut the door. “Beggars!” Meredith mumbled with disgust. On the other side of the door she could hear the old witch grumbling and cursing. Meredith returned to her meal without any more disruptions. Days later Meredith wondered down to her discreet Utopia. She was staring at the clear blue sky when a beautiful butterfly fluttered around her then landed on her arm. Touched by it’s beauty Meredith brushed her lips over the delicate gossamer wings. Suddenly a gust of wind came out of nowhere spiraling around Meredith and she closed her eyes against the tiny grains of sand. Seconds later the wind was gone and the princess could hear the voice of the man in her dreams, “you have released my soul from the bounds of a curse, you are my angel. I have seen your face in my dreams.”

“And I have heard your voice in mine.” Suddenly the old beggar witch appeared. “Ah ha! You thought you could just turn your back on me, and not suffer a consequence you poor unfortunate soul.” The witch screamed. her voice filled with hatred and rage.

“But because you are rude, and vain you shall live for the rest of eternity never being able to be with your true love, and you will live a pitiful lonely life with only half a soul.” Meredith heard her love’s voice and the love in it cloaked her in it’s warmth and comfort. “Hag, is there nothing which will break the curse?” The hag looked at him closely, half her face obscured by her matted hair, one eye glowing, her wicked face creased in thought. Then finally answered, “To know his voice but not his touch, is your punishment for loving yourself too much.” To him: “Fair of face is not love true, but a maiden with grace we’ll be true to you. If love be yours then you must wait for the beauty of youth to first abate. When youth’s bloom fades and wisdoms glow en if your hearts be true it will be known.”

She raised her arms, clouds swarmed quickly around the clear sky. Thunder roared and lightening crashed as she summoned evil from the four corners of the earth. Thunder snapped angrily as if pissed off at the gods above. The witch turned to the Meredith called to her,” Now you shall suffer for the rest of eternity.

“Noooooo!” Screamed Meredith. She jumped in the arms of the man and their lips met for a brief moment. Suddenly lightening struck the old enchanted oak tree. It was split down the middle and half fell on the witch, it killed her, but it was too late the spell had already been cast. There was a another gust of wind and sand. The princess was sent to one side of the world, and the prince to the other.

If it is meant to be,

Then true love shall set them free.
Buck Fever

By: Bud Puffer

"Hey Chad, I see a deer!" exclaimed John.
"Where?"
"Right there, shoot!"
"It's gone," sobbed Chad.
"Well if you didn't have buck fever, maybe you could shoot something."
"Hey John What's buck fever?"
"Well Chad it's when a guy---- or woman gets so excited when hunting they can't control themselves. Sometimes they have it so bad they hallucinate and shoot at something that's not there. Sometimes they shoot at something that is there but not the right animal."
"So you mean people shoot at like dogs instead of deer or moose because they imagine their dogs-----."
"No Chad, I mean they shoot at everything they think is an animal, including humans."
"Their a deer Chad shoot it this time."
"That ones gone too," putted Chad.
"Don't worry that one went down the hill. I'll go around it and scare it back up the hill then you shoot it or you don't get to shoot one today."

John walked down the hill around the deer and started back up. It took John a will to come back but Chad had a good foil to get this deer.

Chad just about fell asleep in the truck when he saw a massive set of antlers cross the top of the hill then the giant head and body came with the antlers. Chad dropped his ammunition on the truck floor. Chad picked it up his ammunition and inserted 1 bullet into the chamber. He aimed his 300 Winchester mag at the giant deer.

Boooooooooom. It dropped like a rock to the ground.
"I got it, I got it. Jeezolhhnnn Jeeexxkkkkhhhhhhhhhhnnnn. Oh well I'm going to see my prize buck."

As Chad walked towards his door he noticed his door was wearing blue jeans and a orange hat just like John.

The End
Hush now. It's only be for a few hours. you know how lonely your grandma is now that Papa is gone. My mother said as she dragged me by my arm up the driveway.

And don't forget your please and thankyous now, you hear? But mom...

I'll be back at dinner for you, alright. She yanked at my clothes and wiped my face, then hurried back to the car. I stood on the porch and watched her drive out of sight. Then the front door opened a crack and my grandmother poked her nose through.

You're late. Nevermind, shut the door behind you, she ordered in her deep hoarse voice. She sputtered and hacked all the way back to the sofa then muttered at me to go play upstairs as not to bother her. She lit another cigarette and continued to bask in the glow of her television, lost in a myriad of game shows and westerns. For a moment I stood beside her, spying the room for something amusing to take upstairs.

Here!

Grandma shoved her faded yellow knit blanket in my arms and dipped her other hand into a bowl of old cheesies. It stunk horribly of smoke, but I dragged it upstairs nonetheless. The wooden floorboards creaked with my every step. The only door which wasn't locked was at the end of the long dim hallway. The room was bare, except for a couple of old and battered wooden chairs which sat in facing the window. The window had been left open, so its tattered curtains were floating and flapping with the breeze. I then draped the blanket over the chairs, creating a perfect tent. I crawled beneath and began to chat with Vana White over a cup of tea. She agreed that my Grandmother shouldn't be so cranky.

I was sitting on the floor cross-legged, when something rolled beneath the blanket and stopped at my foot; A clear glass marble. Surely Grandma wouldn't own any marbles. I stuffed it in my pocket and poked my head out of the tent.

A small frail hand quickly pulled itself back into the hallway.

Grandma?

No reply. I crept up to the doorway and saw her at the top of the stairs. A girl, a little older than I was, stooped over dozens of the same marbles, her back to me. Her dress was dirty and torn. A red velvet sash was tied behind her back.

Hey! I whispered loudly at her, Where did you come from?

She slowly turned her face toward me, and grimaced but said nothing. Although the lighting was bad, it seemed that her eyes had no colour. Just white everywhere. I choked back a shriek of horror. She stood up, still watching me and lifted her foot as though to crush the marbles with her shoe. Just then, the window in the empty room slammed shut. I glanced at the window and back again. But she had vanished. No marbles or anything. I fled down the stairs to my grandmother.

Did you see the girl? I panted.

What girl? My grandma barked impatiently.

The girl upstairs with the...

Nonsense! Now keep quiet. You made me miss the question now! She waved her hand at me and said, Go on back upstairs.
But I dared not move. I sat frozen, in the livingroom chair, my eyes glued to the top of the banister, for the time until my mother came. Knowing my mother would only react in the same way, I snuck off to bed early to figure out who that girl was. Not a lot was coming to mind. I pulled the marble from my pocket and placed it carefully on my dresser and eventually fell asleep. I began to dream that I could see my grandmother at the top of the staircase. But as she turned to me, her eyes had the same emptiness, and menacing smile.

The phone rang, startling me awake. My alarm said 11:49 pm. I heard my mother answer. I pressed my ear against the wall to listen.

"Yes, this is her... Excuse me?... But how..."

I wasn't quite sure what to think of the tone in my mother's voice.

"But how could she have swallowed broken glass for Christ's sake?!" My mother half shouting, half sobbed into the reciever.

I snatched the marble off of the dresser and threw it as far and as hard as I could out the window.
"Hush now. It'll only be for a few hours. You know how lonely your grandma is now that Papa is gone," my mother said as she dragged me by my arm up the driveway.

"And don't forget your please and thank you's now, you hear?"

"But mom..."

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But I dared not move. I sat frozen, in the livingroom chair, my eyes glued to the top of the banister, for the time until my mother came.

As we drove home I knew my mother would only react in the same way, so I didn't bother trying. I snuck off to bed early to think about who girl. I pulled the marble from my pocket and placed it carefully on my dresser and eventually fell asleep.

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I snatched the marble off of the dresser and threw it as far and as hard as I could out the window.
The Teacher
By: Little Smurf

I sat in class wondering what would have happened if I had stayed. It would probably have turned out better than it did. It all started when the first day of school had come. I was so excited, I was going into a brand new school. I have been hearing rumors about the teachers for months. That made me really nervous, but I was going to have to face it and find out for myself. I always thought those rumors were just to scare me. My first three classes went great, they say every year that the classes have so much fun. I checked my list to see what my last class was. There I saw it, his name Mr. Dimsadle. Out of all the rumors I heard, this one really scared me. I walked into class and sat in the very back corner.

"Good morning ladies and gentlemen. My name is Mr. Dimsadle, I will be your teacher for ever and ever ha ha ha!"

"Crystal, earth to Crystal you going to stay the night?"

"Oh, Oh hi Jenny I must have been day dreaming."

"Is it true about Mr. Dimsadle that he's really mean?"

"No, not at all."

"There must be something going on, I heard that he's really mean on the first day," I said.

As soon as I got home my Mom, Dad and even my older sister asked how my first day of school was.

"I got Mr. Dimsadle for Math," I said.

My whole family dropped what they were doing.

"Is something wrong?" I asked.

No, No not at all," they said.

I have got to find out what is wrong with this teacher. I also told my friends who I got and they wouldn't stop acting weird. I ate supper at home, but nobody talked during dinner.

"My French teacher is pregnant," I said, but no one even looked up they just kept eating.

The first class I had this morning was with Mr. Dimsadle and thinking that made me dread getting out of bed. He started class like usual, with notes, all I could think about was that he was after me. Over and over it went in my mind "Forever, forever ha ha ha! The bell rang, I jumped and screamed.

"I am so sorry, I had a really bad dream last night."

Everyone just laughed at me. I felt so embarrassed. All lunch hour the kids in my class asked me how I was feeling. I ended up going home, but there wasn't anyone there. I read the note on the table.
“Honey we had to go out for a while. We will be back at supper time. Love you

Yahoo! I have the whole house to myself, alright. This has never happened before. My parents never leave me home alone.

I was having so much fun until some sick pervert started calling. I was really scared. The phone just kept ringing and ringing and when I picked it up he would say “Guess what I am going to do to you tommorow. It is not going to be very pleasant. It will probably make you scream again. Ha, Ha get it.” I was so shooken up after that I tried to call the [police but every time I picked up the phone that voice would be on it. I went to my room and curled up on my bed. The phone stoped ringing for about 5 minutes, then started ringing again. It must have been someone playing a really sick joke on me. No one would have known about me screaming unless the rumors were true. Nah, they couldn’t be, I thought. The phone calls stoped when my family came home about half an hour later.

The next day I was so glad it was friday. The news I heard that morning just lit up my day. Classes were going to be just 20 minutes long because of a special presentation this afternoon. I was so happy I felt like I could fly.

There was a new girl in French class today. She looked alott like my cousin. When I walked by her desk, to get to my seat, I realized it was her. We both started talking at once and I found out she is in my Math class as well as my French class. She’s just as nervous as I was the frist time I went to that class.

“Don’t worry we only have 20 minutes today,” I said and that made her feel better.

The presentation was actually really good. I wish I was still there. The weekend was finally here. We both went out for a walk by an old mine. We found allot of neat sites.

It was getting dark, so we decided to go home. We ran back to the tunnel opening, but there were rocks blocking the opening.

“I can’t believe how this happened!” I yelled.

We sat there trying to think of another way out of the cave. It became pitch black in the cave. We saw a shadow and we hudded closer together. The shadow was coming closer and closer. There it stood bigger then me and my cousin put together. He reached out with his hands towards us and suddenly a cold hand touched us. He was finally so close I could swear it was HIM! It was Mr. Dimsadle.

“Help us. Help please, oh please, help us,” we both cried.

“Shh! Please be quiet.” he said.

“What are you doing here?” We asked. “Don’t you ever go home after work? I always thought you went home to mark bad grades on peoples work just for the fun of it.”

“Ha, Ha no,” he said as he laughed. “No that is just a rumor.”

As we sat there, we found out that Mr. Dimsadle isn’t such a bad guy after all. We told jokes and old rumors. Mr. Dimsadle kept making freaky remarks like “I’m going to get you and you friend too! Ha, Ha. I can fly, wanna see?. I have one more thing to tell you hee, hee, hee!” As he got closer to us his laugh go treally scary.
He leaned down “Do you want to hear something really funny?
We both shook our heads no.
“ I’m not Mr. Dimsadle.”
“But you look exactly like him” we both said at the same time.
“I have a twin brother.”

We started backing away to try to get out of the cave. But he grabbed me and wouldn’t let go.
“Um, there’s someone else in here with us!” cried my cousin.

“John you know your not allowed out of your room.” said this familiar voice.

It was him the real one this time.

“I don’t have to listen to you,” raved the evil twin as he grabbed a piece of broken glass, while he was grabbing the glass I squirmed and freed myself from his grip.

“I take it that you haven’t taken your medication today,” said Mr. Dimsadle looking at the piece of glass.

“I sure have, look how much better I am.”

The two guys were circling closer and closer to each other. I yelled to stop the fight, but they didn’t even take their eyes off each other.

“You two can take off now this is in between me and John,” said Mr. Dimsadle.

“No, I can’t!” I yelled

“Yes you can, just walk away, there is another exit just beyond that corner,” said Mr. Dimsadle, sounding just a little angry.

We both started running in the direction of the exit when I heard Mr. Dimsadle yell in pain. I ran back to see him lying on the floor. What kept running through my mind was “Is he dead?” I reach his side and bent down to get a better look.

“Come on get up,” I told him.

But it wasn’t him. Where was Mr. Dimsadle? To this day we don’t what happened to Mr. Dimsadle.

THE END
There was god then there was me. That was the line of Joe Mason’s friend, or so called friend, Bill. Joe was a normal old Joe, lived in an average sized house and had a good job. He was a plump, husky 35 year old. Joe didn’t like Bill at all. Bill was a skinny all around annoying person with a low class job. That afternoon guess who phones, Bill.

“Hey Joe come see my new sled.”

“Yeah, okay I’ll be right over.” Joe knew that Bill didn’t take care of anything. His sled would be held together by duct-tape by the end of winter. Bill heard someone at the door.

“Come in.” shouted Bill. ”Hey Joe lets go snowmobiling!”

“I don’t think so, Bill.”

BANG,BANG,BANG! As the piercing sound of bullets, ripped through the silence of the small house. Bill drops slowly to the ground holding his chest, as he landed in his own blood. Joe could see Bill try to breath, but all that he did was cough up his own blood. BANG. One more shot to the head to finish him off.

As Joe walks around the house with a Jerry-can of gasoline he wonders what possessed him to do that. He thinks of the 25 years of friendship go down the drain because of bills bragging.

Joe walks up to Bill’s mutilated caracas and lights his zippo, holds it in his left hand, then turns the gun on himself.