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## Online Composition Classes Call for a Pedagogical Paradigm Shift: Students as Cartographers of Their Own Knowledge Maps

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

**ONLINE COMPOSITION CLASSES CALL FOR A PEDAGOGICAL  
PARADIGM SHIFT: STUDENTS AS CARTOGRAPHERS OF THEIR OWN  
KNOWLEDGE MAPS**

By

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To my father and to my mother, both of whom believed in me before I believed in myself and walked with me through much of this journey. . . and to my husband, Marcus, my daughter, Sarah, and my son, Christopher, who walked with me through the rest of the journey.

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## **ABSTRACT**

My dissertation research focuses on how students create knowledge in a classroom community, more specifically how taking an online course impacts students' learning and ultimately, students' knowledge making. Since the online course presents a closed community, the Blackboard site is the only "learning site" for the students in the course. Since I am researching online Bb communities, the context of the research invites ethnographical methods, both qualitative data or narratives to describe each online community's "health" and quantitative analysis of the student dialogue threads on the forums.

This ethnographic study focuses on the impact of pedagogical styles on the learning processes of online composition students. In the spring semester of 2005, I observed two Blackboard online course sites: one taught as a teacher-centered course and one taught as a student-centered course. I researched the archived course sites looking for evidence of positive communal health in the communication exchanges between student and student, as well as between student and instructor. I also analyzed the discussion board forums for evidence of transformative learning in the student dialogues.

This dissertation study compares the pedagogical strategies of teacher-centered and student-centered online courses, reflects the impact of communal health on the online course community, sheds light on how communal health influences the student's ability to move through the transformative learning process, as well as poses questions for further research.

## CHAPTER 1

### MAPPING MY OWN PROJECT: THE WHY, WHAT AND HOW OF MY DISSERTATION

“Lectures on the Go,” an October 28, 2005 article in The Chronicle of Higher Education debates the use of podcasting lectures. Students can download lectures off the university network system or even the internet and listen to them at their leisure or at their work. Brock Bead showcases the debate among the professors as to whether podcasting hinders or benefits the students. Professor Patrick Thaddeus Jackson of American University “says that podcasting can transform an entire campus into a classroom” (A40).

I don’t think many of us teaching on the postsecondary level two decades ago could have imagined podcasting our lectures for students. Yet it is the newest technological advancement in higher education. Just one decade ago, many college level classrooms boasted computer technology, most of these classrooms networked for easy exchange of information between students and teachers.

Indeed technology has changed the way we teach; distance ed, individual tutoring and online classes all came well before the podcast. And the “podcast” is a technology used in a traditional face-to-face (f2f) classroom. Even though these technological advances pepper many of the f2f and online courses offered at the postsecondary level today, too many who teach these courses are reluctant to change their teaching pedagogy. In the three decades and more that I have been teaching freshmen composition, I have watched the discipline’s pedagogy shift from telling students how they should write, to guiding and then allowing students to find their own writing process.

I began teaching freshmen composition as a teaching assistant in the mid 70’s employing what James Berlin would call Current Traditionalist pedagogical style (Berlin, Cross Talk 237). Pushing this pedagogy to the extreme, I calculated my students’ grades on essays by taking away a certain number of points for each grammatical or mechanical



infraction. All of this was based on a rubric I felt reflected the hierarchical nature of writing errors. There was room for rhetorical considerations, of course, but my students didn't have to make more than a few comma splices and a few more agreement errors and their grades dropped from B's to D's or even F's. Somehow I felt justified in doing this because I was, after all, the instructor, the one who knew how writing should be written, what standard written English was all about. Just a couple of years of this type of traditional teaching and grading and I realized that I was not infallible, and my students were not really taking much out of the classroom—beyond the critical assessments of their instructor: me.

Several years later teaching at Louisiana State University, I found myself using Roger Garrison's conferencing approach in a developmental writing course. LSU adopted Garrison's workshop approach when faced with an influx of developmental writers in the university. The instructor served as an "editor" and conferenced with each student at each step of his or her writing process. Like most of my colleagues at the time, I had already accepted Donald Murray's process pedagogy, espoused in a 1972 essay in *The Leaflet* (Murray 3). "Teaching Writing as a Process Not Product" marked a "turn" in composition pedagogy; Murray's article emphasized the need to observe writing instruction as a process so that the "autopsies" teachers performed on "F" essays—red inking the final product--could become lessons in preventative care—instruction and help with the steps in the writing process. So when I began teaching the developmental classes at LSU using the Garrison approach, the conferencing method struck me as a useful strategy to teach the steps in the writing process. Conversing with students about each of their drafts would not only give them feedback between drafts but would give them the language to think about revising future drafts. Carrying this conferencing technique from the developmental writing classroom into the freshmen composition classroom, I labored with individual student conferences through three working drafts each. I did this for a few years before I realized that I had written most of the essays my students turned in to me. A great deal of my time and effort and very little learning on the student's part frustrated me yet again.

After this, I experimented with Peter Elbow's small group workshop, as Elbow explains his "teacherless class" in *Writing without Teachers* (1973): a small group of

peers workshop their drafts through the writing process. This small group pedagogy gave way to a simpler peer response method. Again drawing from the philosophies and practices of both Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* (1973) and Donald Murray's *A Writer Teaches Writing* (1985), I experimented with peer response in the freshmen writing classes I taught. Over the span of a decade, peer response to student drafts became my pedagogical mantra: playing with how these responses should be done—wavering between outlining what each peer should look for in each draft to allowing students to write their own questions for peers to answer. During this time my teaching practices and classroom strategies continued to evolve, trying new practices I'd read about in *College Composition and Communication* or *College English* journals.

Kenneth Bruffee's article "Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind" impacted my teaching philosophy and thus pedagogical approach more than any other theory at the time. The pedagogy of collaborative learning pulls its strength from students helping other students learn. In this article, Bruffee discusses the difference between collaborative learning as a "process" and as a "pedagogical tool" (Bruffee, Cross Talk 393, 394). Bruffee reveals "the history and the complex ideas that underlie collaborative learning" which can assist the teacher in adapting collaborative learning as a useful pedagogical tool in the classroom ( Cross Talk 394 ). Using collaborative learning as a premise for my pedagogical practices, I continued to implement peer response to student drafts as a key component to student learning. My teaching experiences, as most freshmen composition instructors in the 80's, were limited to the f2f classroom environment.

Entering the doctorate program at Florida State University (FSU) exposed me to new composition research and theory and ultimately new pedagogical practices—primarily because FSU's First Year Writing (FYW) program offered me the chance to teach in the networked computer classrooms. By the late 90's, my teaching became more student-centered as I asked students to not only post their responses to the readings on the Blackboard (Bb) discussion board, but respond to their peers' posts as well. "Community of writers" was the buzz phrase in my composition classroom as I encouraged students to help each other figure out the "**what**" of the writing assignments as well as the "**how**" of each assignment. Not willing to give up too much control, however, I still felt the need to

supply students with writing response questions when it came time to do peer responses to working drafts.

As a doctoral student in Richard Straub's Research Methods course, I found myself reading a great deal of literature on writing response—most of the articles centering around teacher responses to student writing. One of the essays in Straub's The Practice of Response highlighted a course taught by a previous doctoral student, Peggy O'Neil (Straub 147). O'Neil's workshop method for the writing classroom asked the students to create their own questions for their peers as well as their instructor to read and respond to. This seemed to me a more student-centered approach to the teaching of writing and played into the Bruffee collaborative, Elbow teacherless classroom idea. As part of the Research Methods course, I set up a teacher-research activity using O'Neil's methodology: I wanted to see what the impact on students' drafts would be if the student himself or herself asked the questions on each of the working drafts. I kept the control class by supplying one section with writing response questions for the drafts.

Surprising to me, the students who wrote their own questions for peer response workshops garnered more knowledge about their own writing process throughout the semester. From student reflections, I realized that the exercise of having the students come up with their own questions actually helped them to become better writers. They were trying to find out what they needed the reader to read and when—which placed the magnifying glass on the student's individual process, not just the product. And because these student-generated questions were read by other students, the readers came away with a better idea of the questions they might ask about their own drafts. Students were sharing their processes of writing (how to think about each draft) as well as the products of the written drafts. My short semester study added more credence to Bruffee's collaborative approach to learning. Working in the computer classrooms (CAI) for a few more semesters, I realized just how much Bruffee's collaborative approach seemed in step with the espoused social pedagogical practices found in the computer-networked classroom at the time.

Teaching in the computer-networked classroom and using the Bb software here at FSU focused my attention on discussion forums and how students related to one another in these online spaces. Were their responses different than those expressed f2f? Did the

students seem to garner more of their peers' ideas and thought processes by reading them on the forum, rather than just hearing them in the classroom? Were the peer responses more honest when the students wrote them as replies in the Bb discussion forum than they would have been if the students were sitting f2f and responding? And many of these questions gave rise to new questions as I read the composition pedagogies in my Comp Theory class at the time. Two pedagogies in Tate, Rupiper and Schick's 2001 text, A Guide To Composition Pedagogies struck me: Rebecca Moore Howard's chapter on "Collaborative Pedagogy" and Diana George and John Trimbur's chapter on "Cultural Studies and Composition." Coupled with the idea of **how** I could set up my freshmen classes as student-centered, asking for peer responses to drafts, creating forums for students to dialogue about the reading material in the course, the **why** of what I was striving for seemed answered in these two pedagogies. Even in my f2f classrooms I searched for learning activities that engaged the students in discovery. The students' eureka moments, the aha's, the "I didn't know what I really wanted to write until I started writing this," or "my peer's comment made me rethink the purpose and I began again to write," or even just the "I found my thoughts come easier and clearer if I write after my morning walk to the coffee shop" all signaled a growth in the student's knowledge. Reading Rebecca Howard when I did in that Comp Theory course began to answer the questions circling in my head as well as zero in on the **why** of a student-centered classroom.

Collaborative pedagogy traces its philosophical roots to the social constructivist philosophy of Richard Rorty. Knowledge for Rorty and his followers is not something "out there" that can be discovered by the persistent, gifted learner; rather, it is socially justified belief, constructed in the community and acquired in interaction with that community. Andrea Lunsford describes composition's embrace of collaboration as an epistemological shift in the field (Howard 56).

Student dialogue in both the written and spoken word provided the opportunity for student knowledge making. By pushing the student past the "familiar" of his day-to-day life, the dialogue would provide fertile soil for planting new ideas. Asking students to embrace and critique a part of their quotidian environment, cultural studies pedagogy provided the push past the familiar. George and Trimbur's chapter, "Cultural Studies and

Composition,” discusses the many definitions and uses of cultural studies in the comp classroom:

In a sense, the cultural studies approach to the writing classroom addressed the question of what constitutes the content of a composition course with the idea that content is right under our noses, in the culture of everyday life, while shifting the emphasis from the personal experience of the individual to the lived experience of participants in the larger culture. In retaining the second commonplace—close reading—the cultural studies-based writing class distinguished itself from traditional classroom practice by resisting hierarchies that privileged certain kinds of texts (literary) over others (e.g., television sitcoms) and by imagining a wide range of social phenomena—not only the media and advertising but also malls, city streets, classrooms, workplaces, the rituals of everyday life, and so on—as cultural texts that can be read and analyzed. (George and Trimbur 82)

I took the culture-of-the-moment definition to ground my freshmen comp class in unfamiliar debate about very common images and phrases they see and hear in their day-to-day lives.

Indeed, moving from the front of the f2f classroom stance where I tell students what they can write and how they can write their essays, or even conferencing with students so that they might take on my language of the writing process and its revision techniques, to taking up residence in the back of the classroom, so that I may offer students a space to dialogue in their own language, to discuss their own sights, sounds and thoughts, and to ask their own questions about the text they are writing represented a marked difference in my pedagogical stance. I realized their knowledge making comes from my creation of the course that best allows for their dialogue, discussion and critique. My evolving philosophies and subsequent practices of teaching composition happened, though, as a result of more than just the events I write about here. These events are just a few “benchmarks” of how I came to believe in what I teach in the freshmen composition classroom.

Reading for my doctoral courses began a personal pursuit to read as much of the literature in the field of teaching writing in the networked classroom as possible. This pursuit broadened the dimension of my personal goals as a writing instructor and continued to increase my teacher-researcher activity in a computer-assisted classroom. Teaching my first **online** course at FSU in the Spring of 2004, however, pushed my pedagogical knowledge to new frontiers; it created a path which moved in the same direction I was going but moved at warp speed. What better forum to set up a student-centered course and where better to do it than an online freshmen writing course. The Bb site became the “classroom” and the teacher “appears” or “intervenes” as much as she wants once the course gets underway. Yes, I definitely had to rethink my f2f teaching strategies and the online course created the perfect opportunity to test a new pedagogy—one that I had been moving toward for some three decades.

Teaching this online composition course or any course online did indeed call for a paradigm shift in pedagogy. This shift would need to encompass student-centered learning and community building as well as technological literacy. Fittingly, it is at this time that a convergence of student-centered pedagogy in the writing classroom and networked collaboration in the online writing course would logically occur. Parallel lines would and did become intersecting points.

Richard Lanham foretells this convergence, this intersection, in his 1993 text, *The Electronic Word*. Lanham devotes an entire chapter to “The Extraordinary Convergence: Democracy, Technology, Theory, and the University Curriculum” (98 – 119). In 1999 Marilyn Cooper cites this intersection, this “convergence,” this paradigm shift as the coupling of the electronic conversation and “postmodern condition,” a condition which might . . . not necessarily represent progress, but it is certainly real . . . and it requires new strategies if we are to work effectively within the systems that structure many of our everyday experiences.” (142) Thus the praxis of writing instructions is in a state of transition; these transitions lie in the “. . . assumptions about knowledge, language, and the self, a transition in assumptions about power, a transition in assumptions about responsibility, and a transition in assumptions about the teacher’s role in the classroom” (143).

It is this intersection, this convergence, this paradigm shift I set out to investigate for my dissertation research.

Preparing to teach the online courses, I asked several of my colleagues for reference texts on teaching distance education or online courses. One colleague suggested I read Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace: Effective Strategies for the Online Classroom by two social scientists Rena Palloff and Keith Pratt. Palloff and Pratt point to the necessity of viewing the teaching of online courses as very different from the f2f classroom and call for a pedagogical paradigm shift to effectively “teach” in the electronic environment. Palloff and Pratt view this shift as a necessity but also as a positive shift in creating learning communities that move beyond the class community to the social and cultural communities of the twenty first century. Indeed, Palloff and Pratt title the first chapter of their text “The New Paradigm for Learning.” The shift from how teachers teach an online course to how students learn in an online course is emphasized from the beginning of the text. Palloff and Pratt identify the problems of shifting from f2f classroom learning and online learning for faculty as well as for their institutions:

Many faculty members believe that the online classroom is no different from the traditional one—that the approaches that work face to face will work when learners are separated from them and from each other by time and distance. (xiv)

Witnessing first hand the difficulties of online teaching, the lack of telling expressions on student faces, the loss of the whole class participating in discussions to clarify assignments or course topics, I grappled with the pedagogy of the online course.

Ultimately agreeing with Palloff and Pratt—that teaching the **online** course differed drastically from teaching in the f2f classroom—I adopted many of their student-centered strategies for my dissertation research.

Palloff and Pratt profess a more student-centered approach for the online course, one that emphasizes a community of learners and this community in turn creates a more independent learner as well as reflects the technological literacy necessary in this century’s culture. The instructor sets up the course, monitors the course, realizing that its dynamics may demand a change in syllabus, but the instructor serves as a guide or a participant. The students’ participation creates the knowledge learned in the course—not

the instructor's notes or "lectures." The online learning environment demands a pedagogical shift, one that Palloff and Pratt see as a positive one—reflecting many of Cooper's statements of shifting assumptions. Palloff and Pratt believe that as the student navigates the map of the online course, he or she is constantly thinking about the technology involved. This helps the student learner center on the way the learning is happening as much as on the content of the course. This provides an opportunity for the student to reflect not only on the content and his or her knowledge of it, but on the learning itself. How is learning in the online course different from the learning in a traditional f2f classroom? How does the group work differ? How does the instructor's role change? Are these differences beneficial or not for the students' learning experiences? Incorporating these questions into my dissertation study as part of questionnaires, reflections and case study interviews, I wanted to track the students' awareness of their learning processes in this student-centered online writing course.

Just as Brock Bead in his 2005 "Lectures on the Go" reflects on "teacher's roles" and "student learning" with the use of podcasts, "The 'sage on the stage' is dying, if not dead already." "Faculty members are no longer privileged sources of knowledge, so our job should be to get people to think critically and independently about things" (A-41). Podcasts free up time inside the f2f classroom allowing for "interactive personal space between you and your students. . . [allowing for] the decentered classroom," (Bead A-42) where students can "spend their class time in discussion, not rapt attention" (Bead A-41). Even though the discussion here is about taping lectures to be heard outside of the classroom, it echoes Palloff and Pratt's call for student-centered learning in the distance ed course and reflects the culture's as well as the academy's link to technology.

Indeed, I had taught in the CAI classrooms for three or four years and had set up course content for several freshmen writing courses with the Bb software. As a result of this experience, I was familiar with creating a classroom community on Bb, but I was unsure of how the **online** course would play itself out, was unsure where and when my students would have an opportunity to learn. I already made use of the discussion boards on Bb as a place for student dialogue and felt that this would be a good place to start with the online course.



My dissertation research focuses on how students create knowledge in a classroom community, more specifically how taking an online course impacts students' learning and ultimately, students' knowledge making. Since the online course presents a closed community, the Bb site would be the only "learning site" for the students in the course; this online course seemed to be the perfect forum for my investigation.

Initially I set up my research to investigate two online ENC 1102 courses that I was teaching in the fall of 2004: one that would be taught as a teacher-centered course and one that would be more student-centered. I resorted to my early days of teaching as an authority to set up the teacher-centered online site, and I took my cues from Palloff and Pratt to weave collaborative projects as well as online class discussion into my student-centered course. I kept the tone of my online instructor persona purposefully informal and facilitative in the student-centered course, whereas correspondence between instructor and student in the teacher-centered online course remained fairly distant and formal.

In this pilot study, my primary interest focused on observing the students' responses, conversations, and dialogues on the Blackboard discussion boards—both large group and small. The Blackboard content management system delivered both of the online courses that I taught and studied. I employed ethnographic research methods, utilizing thick description to define the online environment and observe the students' discussions on the forums. In the teacher-centered course, I was an objective observer; in the student-centered course, I was an interested participant observer (Bishop 36). I anticipated a difference in the way students communicated ideas to one another and thus a distinction between how and when students created knowledge in the two courses.

My expectations, however, were never met.

Trying to keep my teacher personas consistent with the different courses proved problematic; signing e-mails with kathy ashman or Kathleen Ashman, depending on whether the students were in my student-centered or teacher-centered course, helped to foster the two personas in each of the classes. But, it was difficult to keep the two classes of students separate as many of them e-mailed me without their names attached—much less which section they were in. It was also difficult to remain constant in my pedagogical stance for each class—as a teacher-centered instructor in one and a student-

centered instructor in the other. My desire to keep the variables of the research project to a minimum fell away when I realized I could not maintain consistent pedagogy in either course. Thus, the beauty of a pilot research study was brought into focus.

So, in the spring of 2005 I asked a colleague if she would teach a section of ENC 1102 online as a teacher-centered course. This is all I asked of her. Her syllabus contained as many projects as mine, but her teaching style reflected a traditional teacher-centered course. Now I was able to concentrate on creating and maintaining a consistent pedagogical stance in my student-centered online writing course. I, of course, observed my colleague's online writing course as a non-participant ethnographic researcher and observed my own online course as a participant ethnographic researcher (Bishop 36).

I triangulated the research by giving students questionnaires at the beginning, middle and end of the student-centered online course, compiling case studies of a handful of students from both the teacher-centered and student centered courses, and conducting an informal instructor survey of how instructors use the discussion boards on the Bb site. (See Appendices A-E for student questionnaires and instructor survey.) Students in my student-centered online course filled out a questionnaire concerning online learning and their approach to it at the beginning and at the end of the semester. This preliminary questionnaire served as a benchmark to the student's perception of learning with technology at the beginning of the semester and how this perception may have changed at the end of the semester. The mid semester questionnaire asked students specific questions about the collaborative project they participated in. Students in the student-centered class also produced several reflections for research artifacts as well as all of the discussion board material for research sampling. The discussion board forums and archived teacher announcements provided data from the teacher-centered course that my colleague taught.

I drew some of my research data from archived instructor announcements on each course site: these announcements as well as instructor replies within the forum threads reflected the tone of the online course. However, most of my research data came from the conversations or threads on the discussion boards of the online courses. I analyzed these threads looking for evidence of "double loop" or even "triple loop learning" (students move from merely regurgitating memorized course material to creating knowledge of

their own communities through student dialogue and interaction). The instructor survey gave me an idea of how most teachers of writing utilize the discussion boards on the Blackboard content management system. And the case studies gave me a rounder picture—filled in the personal pockets of information not gleaned in the online discussion boards.

## CHAPTER 2

### **SURVEYING THE PAST AND PLOTTING THE FUTURE OF *ONLINE COMPOSITION INSTRUCTION***

Four decades ago, I can recall my first introduction to a computer in the educational setting. An inner city elementary school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, hosted a talk about computers. Sitting in a fairly large auditorium among my fellow classmates, we gaped at a machine that spanned the width of the stage and rose at least fifteen feet high. This computer used binary numbers to compute its solutions. In awe, I left that auditorium and began to practice using binary numbers—thinking I’d be ahead of the computer game.

Indeed, the computer evolved quickly after that; its decreased size made it desktop accessible and the use of words instead of just numbers gave it a word processing function. Several years passed and falling far behind in the “computer game,” I stayed away from computer courses in the early 70’s as I completed my undergraduate degree in English and Spanish at Purdue.

Yet, the use of computers in the writing classroom and the pedagogy of writing instruction have run parallel to each other since the early 70’s. Just as the teaching of writing used to mean the teaching of organizational, diction and grammar skills, computer use in the writing classroom was relegated to question/response software which drilled individual students on grammar skills. Outside of the classroom, the computer served as a more effective “typewriter.” Still the solitary activity of one student at the computer defined its educational use.

Not until Tim Berners-Lee wove the first world-wide web did the computer stop acting as a solitary tool for the individual and become a communicative forum for a community. As the computer became a networking tool, connecting to the global community or just the academic classroom community, the teaching of writing evolved as well, embracing the collaborative approaches of Vygotsky, Rorty, and Bruffee and practicing their social constructivist methods.

## **A Brief History of the Impact of Computers on Composition Pedagogy**

Indeed, the first computers introduced into the composition classroom in the mid 60's housed programs built on B.F. Skinner learning models; these programs merely drilled and tested students on grammar points. During the mid 70's, many who taught English invested time and research in writing programs to aid students in the writing process. Most of these programs were merely a set of questions to elicit specifics concerning the topic of the essay and strategies involved to write it (Wresch 44). By 1977, with the invention of microcomputers, computers had become more accessible to the writing student and more available for the writing instructor. These computers during the late 70's and early 80's were primarily used as “teacher aids”; in essence these PC's gave the student one-on-one interaction with the teacher, the authority, in the form of “microcomputer-based skill-and-drill exercises, which grew from the print-based workbooks that were a staple of the current-traditional curriculum” (Moran 203).

More computer programs were generated and some allowed the student to get assistance in the invention techniques of writing “MINDWRITER or PREWRITE” (Klem and Moran 94), as well as the editing tasks involved—spell check and grammar check; software was even produced to guide the student through the cognitive writing process. Collins and Gentner describe this model “where computers would guide students through the patterns of the writing process and enhance the students’ cognitive activities” (qtd. in Klem and Moran 94). Patricia Bizzell, articulating a concern of many composition scholars of the time, disputes the ability of the computer to “produce the behavior” of students composing. Bizzell goes on to emphasize the computer’s inability to guide each student in each writing situation by criticizing “attempts to program language-using computers . . . [as] such structures reveal their lack of explanatory power when applied to an actual situation in which discourse conventions come into play” (Bizzell 382, 383).

The technological invention of the split screen available in the late 80's was a boon to student writers according to Janet Eldred. Eldred notes that split screen capabilities could be fortuitous for the composition student as he has access to his notes and summaries at the bottom of the screen, as well as access to the top part of the screen

which houses the research paper he is composing. Yet, Eldred cautions that such split screen technology is costly and difficult to master for the composition student (Eldred 212, 213).

In these first two decades, writing scholars and instructors were trying innovative teaching strategies as well as programs to best utilize the computer technology in the classroom; many of these innovative approaches produced negative as well as positive results. A style-checking program designed to assist students in proofreading presented benefits as well as drawbacks for the writing student. In 1983, K. E. Keifer and C. R. Jones researched the efficacy of such a proofreading program and found that the field of composition scholars and educators “divides neatly into two camps: some see the style-checking program as a teacher’s and writer’s aid, and others see the style-checking program as inaccurate and therefore confusing to the student writer” (as qtd in Klem and Moran 94).

During the mid 80's the shift from the “technocentric” (the computer as the focus of the writing class), to researching students’ writing with computers was reflected in a number of research studies: what were the effects of students composing on the computer screen instead of ink on paper? Again, this research produced mixed results: Elizabeth Klem and Charles Moran report that “[r]esearchers observe that the word-processing screen presents the writer with a different and perhaps liberating context in which to write” (90). Klem and Moran cited S. Marcus’ 1984 findings that this “liberating context” lowered the writer’s risk and ultimately impacted students’ attitudes toward their writing: “users no longer feel their words are ‘carved in stone’” (as qtd in Klem and Moran 91). And in 1985, J. V. Catano viewed this “new flexibility as a definite asset of computer-writing [since] composing and writing take place together as the writer shapes the ‘fluid text’” (Klem and Moran 91).

Again, though, too much emphasis on the technology and not enough on the students’ learning might have clouded the judgement of such studies. C. Haas and J.R.Hayes in a 1986 study and Haas again in a 1989 study “found that students working on screen-report less ‘text-sense’” (Klem and Moran 92). “Students can’t see the whole document; they only see the screen and thus feel ‘lost’” (92). Haas’ later study also concluded “that writers using word-processing programs on computers plan less than do

writers working with pen and paper only, and . . . the planning writers do on-screen is ‘sequential planning’ or word-and -sentence-level planning that occurs close to the point of utterance” (qtd. in Klem and Moran 92).

With the advent of networked classrooms in the late 80's, technology finally became a tool for the composition student—not an aid for the teacher. These sophisticated smaller networked PC's enabled the student to interact with his fellow students, borrowing ideas, conversing about texts and thus empowering the student to create new texts.

Elizabeth Klem and Charles Moran wrote that most “who focus on the benefits to be gained from a networked writing classroom generally stress the interactive learning that this arrangement can provide. A networked writing classroom enhances the social, collaborative atmosphere that exists even in classes with stand-alone workstations” (Klem and Moran 95).

In the next decade Lester Faigley echoed these accolades for the computer-networked classroom, dubbing this type of classroom as the “best possible learning environment with technology [ : ] students trained in collaborative learning have higher achievement and self esteem, [and this] technology has made learning more student-centered, encouraged collaboration, and increased student-teacher interaction” ( as qtd. in Hawisher, LeBlanc, Moran and Selfe 137, 138). Faigley also applauded the easy student access of teachers through e-mail for those students who might not be on campus when they need to discuss class activities or for those students who just might feel awkward approaching the instructor one on one (137, 138). R. Rickly and J. Butler joined many other composition scholars and teachers to praise the networked environments for their ability to reflect what Lester Faigley terms “*the social view*, a view that understands writing ‘as a social activity within a specific community’” (Hawisher, LeBlanc, Moran, and Selfe 136).

This tool of technology not only added to the social benefit of the writing classroom but increased the political efficacy of the classroom community as well. According to Elizabeth Klem and Charles Moran, “ a networked computer environment may encourage previously unheard voices to enter discussion and, thus, may be a force for democracy” (90).

At a time when much criticism was aimed at politically correct educational practices, the social and political benefits of technologically enhanced classrooms provided an easy bandwagon to jump onto, but Hawisher and Selfe tempered this storm of optimism: “electronic classrooms . . . do not automatically create ideal learning situations” (“The Rhetoric,” 134). Hawisher and Selfe cited Michael Foucault’s belief that the “‘architecture’ of such electronic spaces is a highly political act in itself. Like the traditional classroom, the architecture of electronic spaces can put some students at a disadvantage, thwarting rather than encouraging learning” (134).

Todd Taylor’s 2000 study agreed that networked classrooms can put some students at a disadvantage, noting the disadvantages of many black students: “ideological forces that lead to oppression do not, in fact, suddenly disappear in online exchanges” (114). In fact, according to Taylor, these differences were “non-negotiable” and should be researched for a better understanding of the black student (118). Taylor’s research cited the following warnings:

- (a) how powerful and informative student body language can be in a networked classroom, (b) that one must avoid universalizing so-called black experience, and (c) that to successfully negotiate difference, we must attend to more complex, fine-grained notions of difference, as Hourigan’s 1994 study suggested. (120)

Even “[b]y the advent of the 1990’s, it had become clear to computers and composition specialists that technology would not automatically increase the opportunities for the democratic participation of less privileged segments of our society” (Hawisher, LeBlanc, Moran and Selfe 257). Hawisher, LeBlanc, Moran and Selfe seemed to be cautioning those who would view the computer and networked classrooms as a panacea for the writing student or for the politically conscious writing instructor.

In 2001, just five years after Charles Moran praised the benefits of the collaborative networked classroom, he wrote an article cautioning those who believed computers would somehow make the work of composing easy: Moran cited Carolyn Dowling’s 1994 conclusions that “some writers report feeling ‘alienated’ from their screen text; that others feel that when they write online they lose all sense of audience other than themselves; and that others find it difficult to come to closure when composing



with text that can so easily be changed” ( 209). Dowling’s 1994 research of on-line classrooms revealed, and Moran echoes her claim, that “writing continues to be perceived as a difficult activity [and that this] suggests the possibility that the benefits of word processing might be counterbalanced . . . by aspects of the computing environment that render the activity, for some individuals, as fraught with problems in this medium as others” (qtd in Moran 209). Moran goes on to explore the question of authority that comes into play in online student discussions: “A number of teachers have reported online discussions that moved rapidly off topic; others have reported that in the online discussion students are more likely to ‘flame’ one another or to use language that is hurtful to others in the discussion” (Moran 212).

By the early 90's hypertexts and hypermedia were introduced to compositionists: “chiefly as new instructional delivery systems or as new sites for composing, [but] exploring the theoretical potential of hypertext was one thing: making it work with real readers and writers in real classrooms taught by real teachers, was another” (Hawisher, LeBlanc, Moran and Selfe 207, 208). Again, Gail Hawisher, Paul LeBlanc and others in the composition field were quick to note that technology can make unique learning experiences possible; technology does not ensure them.

Online writing communities offer easy access to experimenting with both collaborative and multi-genred prose. Some researchers in the field of composition have embarked on their own collaborative pieces. Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede have been collaborating on texts for the last decade and Ede has given a great deal of text in a 2000 edition of a freshman writing handbook to the discussion of collaborative writing. The networked classrooms make this type of writing readily available and simple for the writing student to engage in.

Kathy Yancey and Michael Spooner exemplify what can be done collaboratively and with the use of hypertext in the essay “Petals on a Wet Black Bough: Textuality, Collaboration, and New Essay.” Hypertexts, according to Richard Lanham “are . . . three dimensional. Fugue like, they can carry on an argument at several levels” ( 21). With various links to other sites, hypertext can create “subtexts” of different voices in different genres. As Myka Vielstimmig (a pen name coined by Yancey and Spooner) state, “The text isn’t your mother’s text anymore; the audience is some shifting polyglot

‘out there’; and the author—well, speak to Barthes about the author” (89). Vielstimmig writes that the text of the article in its unusual format “is not an argument against *The Essay* or against ‘print classic’ or conventional logic. It is an argument toward another kind of essay: a text that accommodates narrative and exposition and pattern, all three” (91). By the mid to late 90's, computers in the writing classroom had afforded composition instructors and scholars many opportunities to create new teaching methodology based on collaborative multi vocal, multigenred, hypertextual work, as well as given the student a tool to create new discoveries and unique texts to share in the writing classroom and beyond.

Vielstimmig cites Beth Baldwin’s desire to “teach students to write ‘textual conversations’ instead of the traditional academic essay [and that] the online world has changed the classroom, [and made] the essay . . . a dinosaur” (101) Vielstimmig pushes this new frontier in the networked classroom even farther espousing this new type of writing for the screen as

a new rhetorical act. As Negroponte and Turkle, Lanham and Landow, suggested, the thinking in this rhetoric is associative, expressive, disjunctive, dialogic, often dialectical. It involves multiple kinds of literacy—from that of the page to the screen to the personal. It’s surprisingly collaborative; when authors compose together, new identities can be formed; new readership can be assumed; and new processing, as Fisher and Watkins and Takayoshi demonstrate, is being developed and (only recently) articulated. (qtd in Vielstimmig 105, 106)

Computers in the composition classroom have not only changed the way teachers teach—more student-centered, and the way students learn—more collaboratively; this technology has also changed the way writers compose, create and deliver ideas. Thus, this new technology has changed the way readers interpret these ideas, “invit[ing] multiple readings: aesthetic ones as well as efferent” (Vielstimmig 114). Hypertexts allow for what James Sosnoski terms “exploratory hypertext readings” (Sosnoski 163). Sosnoski believes that “[h]yper-reading is characterized by . . . de-authorizing: a lessening sense of authorship and authorly intention” than linear text provides (Sosnoski

163). Thus, the student makes his own choices as he moves through the text; the reading becomes an exploration—a different type of learning experience.

Over the past three and a half decades, computers have moved from center stage in the writing classroom (how can the computer assist the writing instructor; how does it impact the writing student) to a tool that sits in front of the student. The computer and its networked classroom technology afford the student a variety of options: from gathering outside sources to discovering her ideas, and from composing her texts to publishing her words.

In 1989, Hawisher looked to a new perspective of computers in the composition classroom: “to a view informed by the interaction of technology with the culture in which it exists” (Hawisher, “Research,” 63). Computers are definitely more a part of our culture now in 2006 than they were three or even just one decade ago. And computers in the composition classroom, particularly the computer-networked comp classroom, can allow for an environment where students engage in learning through written dialogues, peer reviews, and hypertext projects. This high tech classroom can also grant the student instant publishing privileges as student postings or e-mails become part of what Janet Eldred calls the “intertext” ( 212) of the course.

Computer networked composition classrooms have also provided the instructor with “instant archiving” of students’ work. Many networked classrooms use software such as Blackboard which gives the instructor instant access to students’ work as well as the ability to store this work for further research.

Three and a half decades of research still point to Hawisher’s view: the computer in the composition classroom needs to interact with its culture—as an innovative working tool for the student and instructor.

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Through the many years of teaching in the composition field, I have allowed the computer to move to the forefront of my teaching strategies—so much so, that now the computer dominates my pedagogical interest in composition.

The self-paced courses offered online, similar to the correspondence courses before the Internet, have now morphed into the classroom community spaces for problem solving and collaborative project creation. Tim Berners-Lee created the worldwide web

so that experts in the field could share their work and their knowledge. Using the virtual space of the online classroom, teachers of writing create spaces for students to discuss ideas, share drafts, and ultimately create knowledge. Creating these spaces calls for new pedagogical practices.

### **Multiple Perspectives: From The Outside As Well as From the Inside of the Postsecondary Classroom**

A **2003** online article, from *The Chronicle of Higher Education: Information Technology*, states that one third of the 3000 chief academic officers and college presidents who responded to a Sloan Consortium questionnaire “said online education would be superior to in-class instruction at their institutions within three years. And 57 percent said Internet-based courses at their colleges were already at least equivalent to lecture-hall counterparts in educational quality” (“Many Administrators Believe . . .,” par. 4). Yet in a **2004** *Chronicle* article quite another story unfolds: “The boom in educational technology has not lived up to its promise of revolutionizing the classroom and making higher education more profitable, two professors conclude in a report scheduled to be released today” (Carnevale, par. 1). Carnevale cites a report written by Robert Zemsky, an education professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and William F. Massy, professor emeritus of education and business administration at Stanford University. In “Thwarted Innovation: What Happened to E-Learning and Why” the two conclude that their study cited too many professors who thought using “power point” was innovative technology and that until a unifying online course structure was in place, online learning could not be productive for the student or economically beneficial for the institution. Yet, decidedly more postsecondary students enrolled in online courses in **2005**, according to a Sloan Consortium research poll: “The online enrollment growth rate is over ten times that projected by the National Center for Education Statistics for the general postsecondary student population” (*Growing By Degrees*, par. 9).

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In a **1999** text entitled Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace, two social science professors, Rena Pallof and Keith Pratt, point to the necessity of viewing the

teaching of online courses as very different from the f2f (face-to-face) classroom and call for a pedagogical paradigm shift to effectively “teach” in the electronic environment. Palloff and Pratt view this shift as a necessity but also as a positive shift in creating learning communities that move beyond the class community to the social and cultural communities of the twenty first century. Indeed, Palloff and Pratt title the first chapter of their text “The New Paradigm for Learning.” The shift from how teachers teach an online course to how students learn in an online course is emphasized from the beginning of the text. Palloff and Pratt identify the problems of shifting from f2f classroom learning to online learning for faculty as well as for their institutions:

Many faculty members believe that the online classroom is no different from the traditional one—that the approaches that work face to face will work when learners are separated from them and from each other by time and distance. However, when the only connection we have to our students is thought words on a screen, we must pay attention to many issues that we take for granted in the face-to face classroom. (xiv)

Palloff and Pratt explore these “issues” in their text:

What happens when instructors and their students never meet face to face, but are connected only through text on a screen? How does that change the transmission of knowledge, the nature of the learning process and the relationship among the people who are interacting online? (4)

The authors feel that a student-centered pedagogical approach that emphasizes a community of learners creates a more independent learner as well as reflects the technological literacy necessary in this century’s culture. The instructor sets up the course, monitors the course, realizing that its dynamics may demand a change in syllabus, but the instructor serves as a guide or a participant. The students’ participation creates the knowledge learned in the course—not the instructor’s notes or “lectures.” Palloff and Pratt believe that as the student navigates the map of the online course, he or she is constantly thinking about the technology involved. This helps the student learner center on the way the learning is happening as much as on the content of the course. This provides an opportunity for the student to reflect not only on the content and his or her knowledge of it, but on the learning itself. How is learning in the online course different

from the learning in a traditional f2f classroom? How does the group work differ? How does the instructor's role change? Are these differences beneficial or not for the students' learning experiences? This reflection leads to "transformative learning" according to Palloff and Pratt: "transformative learning" takes place when the student moves beyond the "single loop" learning (memorizing the content of the class) to the "double loop" learning, reflecting on how this new information is different from what the student knew before, to the "third loop" in learning—adapting this new knowledge in the student's life and community:

We have previously referred to this element of online learning as a *double loop* in the learning process, based on a term coined by Chris Argyris (1992). This loop provides a means of self-reflection that fuels further inquiry. However, transformative learning is actually a complex series of interactions that is multidimensional. It is what Robert Hargrove (1998) calls *triple loop learning*, which he describes as "learning [that] involves altering the particular perspective, underlying beliefs, and assumptions (or old rules) that shape *who we are* as a human being—what we identify with." (qtd on 130)

Daryl Evans and Terry Nations edit a **2000** text entitled Changing University Teaching. Offering a definition of the title in the text's introduction, they explain that "Changing University Teaching can be understood as a collection of reflections by university people about their own engagements with change" (2). Randy Garrison and Terry Anderson discuss the impetus for some of these changes in their chapter entitled "Transforming and enhancing university teaching: stronger and weaker technological influences." They point out how the response of rising student populations in the university is to facilitate larger lecture courses and how technology makes these larger lecture courses more viable--not only by improving the presentation of digital material during the lecture, but also by creating the means for the student to hear lectures more than just once in the lecture hall. This is the "weaker" influence of technology.

Garrison and Anderson argue that "[w]hile the rhetoric of universities is to support critical discourse and produce critical thinkers, . . . too often the emphasis is on disseminating, assimilating and reproducing information [leaving] the development of

critical thinkers as largely fortuitous” (25) The two Canadian authors pinpoint “learning outcomes” as essential in determining technology-driven pedagogical practices at the university level: whether the outcomes are “surface/reproducing . . . unreflexive, rote learning strategy” or “deep/meaningful . . . comprehending the significance of the content and its relationship to existing knowledge frameworks” (26). Thus effective teaching allows for “critical reflection and discourse, . . . and [thus] collaborative teaching strategies to externalize meaning” (26). All of these learning outcomes emanate from a “facilitative approach to teaching” (26).

Arguing for the “stronger technological influence,” using technology to facilitate discussion and collaborative student projects, Garrison and Anderson outline pedagogical approaches that contribute to “meaningful learning outcomes” (27). Setting up discussion groups where students may “translate current theory to relevant practice” (29) is one such pedagogical approach.

Garrison and Anderson point to both the reluctance of university instructors to learn new technology and its relevant pedagogical strategies for their disciplines, and to the inability of the administration to view collaborative research in theory and practice which may contribute to the instructor’s repertoire of teaching methods as barriers to “the stronger technological influence.” Both authors certainly agree that “new and emerging communications technology will influence society and students to demand more from their professors and change approaches to university teaching—for the better”(33).

A University of Wisconsin professor, Chere Campbell-Gibson, reflects on her first online teaching experience, how it has changed her as a teacher and ultimately, how it has changed her students as learners. She catalogs several student comments and reflections of the online learning experience as well as her own misgivings in the article “The ultimate disorienting dilemma: the online learning community.” She carefully outlines Jack Mezirow’s “theory of perspective transformation” early in the article and uses her students’ comments to reflect on the stages of this “transformation” that each student moves through during her online course. Mezirow’s theory suggests that the learning experience takes place when a student must “make a new or revised interpretation of experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation and action” (Mezirow 148). The first step of Mezirow’s ten-step process is “a disorienting

dilemma.” Her students are faced with this “disorienting dilemma” as they negotiate the unique learning style of an online course.

Negotiating a new teaching style, Campbell-Gibson reflects on her changing teaching strategies as she abides by the social-constructionist student-centered learning theory. She keeps herself out of the student discussions of new material, does not validate or negate student ideas on the discussion board and tries to allow her students to initiate and follow through with discussion questions. Her teaching experience in this online course has been as disorienting as the experiences of her students—but much has been learned by both teacher and student.

A scholar in the field of composition, Patricia Web Peterson outlines what she defines as the three debates in distance ed in a **2001** *Computers and Composition* article, “The Debate about Online Learning: Key Issues for Writing Teachers.” Peterson cites “teacher’s roles,” “educational goals,” and “student learning” as the three “key issues” in this debate. Peterson urges composition instructors to address these issues in their online composition classrooms because

[u]nlike typical lecture classes, first-year composition is typically (or so we hope) a small, interactive group of students working together to investigate and write about current, key issues. When these kinds of courses are moved online, what is lost and what is gained? These questions are yet to be discussed fully by scholars within Composition Studies. (360)

Peterson discusses the first of these debates—the changing teacher’s role in the online composition classroom. On one side of the debate sources cite that many times comp instructors find themselves “unbundling” a course someone else (usually an online course designer or corporate sponsor) has created. This presents problems for the instructors and the students who find themselves teaching from a rote set of precepts and testing to a set of outcome skills respectively . . . “[since] corporate interests, rather than faculty members, determine the curriculum” (362). The other side of the debate houses those who create and teach their own online course but do so using the same pedagogical practices as they would for the f2f course. Peterson cites that instead of debating the issue, or critiquing the practices of both, now is the perfect opportunity for those who



believe that student-centered pedagogical approaches can assist the online writing student to make their voices heard. Peterson goes on to explain why embracing a student-centered online classroom benefits the student and the instructor: “. . . for over a decade now, computers and composition specialists have been claiming that one of the benefits of using computers in the writing classroom is that the teacher is de-centered, thus inviting students to become co-constructors of knowledge in the classroom” (364).

The second issue of debate Peterson brings up in her article is “educational goals.” Citing that many believe online courses to be merely money-making strategies which ultimately strip the social and cultural education of the student, Peterson highlights the composition instructor’s opportunity to once again interject the pedagogical approaches of social constructivist classrooms and thus create better learning spaces for the online student: “The problem for composition teachers, then, is promoting diversity in higher education without selling out to a corporate model or allowing state budgets to guide pedagogical choices” (367).

Zeroing in on Peterson’s last “key issue” in these three debates, “[h]ow student learning [is] changed, bettered, or damaged, by distance learning courses” (365), she evokes several questions other scholars have asked when considering online course pedagogy: Who is the instructor in the distance ed course and how does she interact with her students? What are the educational goals, or what does she want her students to take out of the classroom? Peterson discusses several colleagues’ views, citing new pedagogical approaches which de-center the instructor and encourage collaboration in the distance ed course.

In a **2002** article, “The Development of Social Climate in Virtual Learning Discussion Groups,” published in the *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, a study of five models of online learning groups were studied to observe “pedagogical rationale” of CMC’s (Computer Mediated Classrooms). The research studies were set up to (1) shed light on whether or not a “social climate” develops in online learning groups, (2) which models of online learning create which types of “social atmosphere” and (3) the “virtual teacher’s” role in these online learning groups (Oren, Mioduser and Nachmias, par. 1).

The results indicated that the social climate of learning groups did become an integral part of the learning process over a period of time: that students did relax and begin to discuss personal aspects of their lives as they worked collaboratively on projects; and that a social atmosphere more conducive to learning developed in direct proportion to the instructor's **decreased** presence in the online forum or virtual classroom: "It is evident that while the development of a social climate is quite a natural need of the students in online discussions, it may either grow or vanish as a function of the moderation and intervention approach of the virtual teacher" (Oren, Mioduser and Nachmias, par. 46).

Craig Stroupe working as a course designer for a large Bay area school set up a design for an educational linguistics course. Working with the instructor, Stroupe set the course up to revolve around student discussion online. Even though Stroupe and the instructor saw the discussion board as a place for students "to apply ideas, share experiences and build learning communities" (256), the students remarked that they felt these discussions were "busywork." "We had aspired to . . . make distance presence, to create a living community of learners, thinkers and writers that was mediated—and perhaps made even more reflective—by the remote connectivity of the Web" (256) stated Stroupe in his **2003** *Computers and Composition* article entitled "Making Distance Presence: The Compositional Voice in Online Learning."

Realizing that the prompts for the online discussion might not have generated the desired student dialogue, the instructor placed the students in small groups to increase student discussion while Stroupe and she pondered the "prompt" problem. Stroupe contributes the problem to students indoctrinated in conventional f2f teaching methods. The students wanted to bask in the knowledge of the professor, write for the expert, receive validation from the knowledgeable one, but the instructor wanted to create a learning community online. Stroupe offers the solution of a "third voice in the online classroom": instead of just the "the instructional voice," "authoritative or closed" (259) and "the conversational voice," "more than one person speaking or writing" (259), the online course should utilize the "third voice" in the classroom—"the compositional voice, which is less commonly used in online pedagogy" (258). Stroupe defines "the compositional voice [as] characterized by its openness to dialogism—its rejection of

authoritative closedness or monoglossia [and its embrace] of creating a structure that internally enables languages of different social contexts to speak to and reveal one another” (259). These three voices—“instructional,” “conversational” and “the compositional” are then distinguished by the degree of “what Mikhail Bahktin would call ‘dialogism’”(259).

Stroupe points out that distance education courses, online courses, favor “the instructional voice,” give lipservice to the “conversational” and more than often do not engage the students’ “compositional voice.” This phenomenon perplexes Stroupe:

online courses represent the potential realization and institutionalization of the kind of writing-intensive learning long-promoted by writing-across-the-curriculum and writing-in-the-disciplines initiatives, which have often been headquartered, if problematically so, in English departments. Indeed, in an online writing course, writing represents the primary means by which individuals can make themselves present to one another. (261)

Stroupe discusses why online course designers or even online instructors might have difficulty coming to this since the online course in postsecondary institutions is viewed as both “an engineered learning system and a linguistic social text—a conflict reflecting larger tensions in the culture of higher education that promoted online teaching simultaneously as a modular, scalable electronic product and a communitarian site of experiential engagement among teacher and students ” (262). This online writing, the ability to read another’s writing, think about it, write about it, perhaps even come back to reflect on the peer’s as well as the student’s response and then edit, presents another voice in the classroom—not “the instructional voice” of the expert, not “the conversational voice” of the question, response, possibly validation of response voice, but “the compositional voice”: “the compositional voice [so coined by Stroupe] . . . to highlight a discursive possibility . . .students can realize themselves through textual performance” (266).

Stroupe believes that online assignments should take on “genres” of their own, should take advantage of the way online “screens” are read, and should favor the students’ familiar routine of scanning and searching the visual as well as the textual “readings” on the web: “mediated presence achieved aesthetically and compositionally”

with the “private and instructional genre assignment” (269). Stroupe calls these “digital compositions,” “a bricolage” (269).

Stroupe defends the need to view these online student compositions as remediation of pen and paper essays—not as a writing task that may be assimilated into what is already done—but as a dynamic work that continues to change. This work comes about because of the online environment, not in spite of it. This work may only happen if pedagogical methods keep pace with distance education:

In the distance-education pedagogy I propose, an online class is a collaborative composition, not just instructional delivery plus conversation. . . . the online classroom is not a seamless virtual world created by the professor, but a gallery of student work and criticism that is always provisional, experimental, and under (de/re)construction. Ultimately, this experiment celebrates not presence but absence, not technoromantic connection but mediated distance—consciously, aesthetically, and yet never completely overcome. (273)

Kristie Fleckenstein’s **2005** theoretical article, “Faceless students, virtual places: Emergence and communal accountability in online classrooms,” discusses the theory that the online classroom takes on a separate entity and its own “communal” space and “health.” She draws on Gregory Bateson’s complex systems theory: “that information evolves from a convoluted process of differences flowing back and forth among themselves” (153). Fleckenstein goes on “to describe this process as transactive. . . in which discrete elements, like billiard balls, affect each other without altering individual identity—and transact—in which elements gain their individual identities through their relationship with each other” (153). According to Fleckenstein, the course created in virtual space demands its own semiotics, physical existence and interpretant student participation; all of these aspects work together transactively to build the course community. This emergent place, which is more than the sum of its parts—an “emergent phenomenon”—is “drawn from work in complex systems,” and “offers a powerful framework for addressing the troubling phenomenon of fragmentation in virtual environments” (153). Fragmentation, as Fleckenstein defines it, takes place when students ostracize other students in the course community; this creates distraction from

the learning environment because of its divisive power and ultimately breaks down the health of the community. “Communal health” and thus an effective learning environment in an online course are contingent upon a strong community according to Fleckenstein’s article.

Fleckenstein goes on to identify the three “constituent elements” of this emerging phenomenon and discusses how each of these plays a role in a strong online course community: these elements are “language,” (157) “physical realities” (160) and “place as interpretant action” (164). Not only does the language of the course syllabus, policies and writing assignments play a part in the community of online courses, but the software—Blackboard, Web CT, Drupal—used for the course site does as well. To explain this software impact on an online course, Fleckenstein offers something as simple as the “white pointer hand” that we see with the Adobe software as having ideological and political overtones which shade the language of the course. And, of course, the interpretant’s language use creates the tone of the course, and, in turn, reflects the course’s “communal health.” Fleckenstein points out examples from an online education course that show how interpretants’ language can act inclusionary or exclusionary, depending on the situation in the course (159).

“Physical realities of virtual place,” the second of the three elements Fleckenstein discusses, encompasses not only the technological site where the student enters his/her virtual classroom and the ensuing online course boundaries and sections, but also the physical space where the student locates himself while engaging in the online course. All of the activities surrounding the student (“interpretant”), whether they be outside of the student’s control—friends, roommates, family members walking into or out of the room—or within the student’s control—playing video games on split screen, or instant messaging, e-mailing friends—all of these physical factors contribute to the emergent place phenomenon and influence the relationships and activities of the interpretants in the community (160-164).

As Fleckenstein defines the third element of the “emerging place,” she begins to define what she means by “emergent place”: “A place is neither an imprint of our discursive regimes nor an impervious container that shapes our identities without being shaped in return. Rather, place is the product and the producer of a dynamic fusion of

sign system, physical reality, and interpretant” (164). The interpretants act and react to form a certain “place” which is somewhat defined by the interpretants, but they are just as defined by the place they have created. So the activity with a course, whether it be software, instructor or student initiated, contributes to the emergent phenomenon of the online community, contributes to the communal health, and thus to the efficacy of the learning community. Fleckenstein offers the specific example of the students who usurped the white board space on the Blackboard site to doodle with their group while a class chat ensued: “As interpretants, they disrupted and remolded the design of the online classroom according to their desires. In the process of doing so, they redefined their identities as something other than ‘students learning to read and write about literature’” (166).

For the rest of the article, Fleckenstein offers some helpful suggestions to create and preserve the communal health of the online course community. Many of these stem from what she refers to as “communal accountability” (166): (1) allow the students (interpretants) to communicate with each other in a variety of spaces—discussion board, small group, chat groups, “privileging frequent and repeated feedback”—not just between student and teacher, but student and student (167); (2) “marking,” a phenomenon which entails students putting names and faces to other virtual students (167); (3) the individual interpretant’s commitment to “accodomate the needs of the whole [community]”—this could be as simple as making sure that the internet connection functions properly all of the time and that the user is familiar with the course site software. And finally, (4) Fleckenstein suggests the instructor and students write a “social contract” (170) at the beginning of the course, outlining “the responsibilities each participant has to the community as a whole and to the individuals comprising that community” (170). She ends her article by asking the reader several questions which reflect the doubts she still possesses about online community building; however, she believes that “an understanding of online classrooms as emergent places can anchor our pedagogical decisions and help us shape a classroom that nurtures communal health” (172).

As composition pedagogy has evolved from treating the individual student’s errors to creating small group workshops, so has the computer use in the writing classroom broadened its reach from the individual grammar exercises to finally provide

virtual spaces for student discussion and learning. We in the composition field continue to research pedagogical strategies to create the virtual spaces most effective for students to not only learn, but to make their own knowledge through interaction with their peers.

## CHAPTER 3

### SELECTING THE INSTRUMENTS TO BEST PLOT THE RESEARCH OF MY STUDY

#### Brief History of Relevant Research Instruments

The path of composition's theoretical research and subsequent methodologies over the last half-century does not plot a straight line. Instead it plucks parcels from regions of thought and ideology from all points of the map, bending with new political winds and ensuing social climates. For over forty-five years, the composition field has struggled to define itself through research, perhaps publicizing its first foray into the theoretical field with Janet Emig's The Composing Processes of 12th Graders, followed by Mina Shaughnessy's Errors and Expectations—both teacher-researchers focusing in on the microscopic view of the individual student's writing process.

In 1987, Stephen North points to the plethora of theories and methods which abound in composition studies and sees this phenomenon as flawed. North sets out to write his book, The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field, simply because he has experienced the same sense of confusion and frustration many of his colleagues have when he has tried to organize, whether it's historically, pedagogically or theoretically, the many and varied studies in the field of composition since the early 1960's. He divides the book into six sections, the first four of which give an overview of the field: the historical context of the field, the practitioners who participate in "practice as inquiry," the scholars who write about the field of composition, and the researchers who practice various research methodologies. North tries to categorize the research methodologies, the types of knowledge that are being created in the field in sections two through four. Section five is devoted to the discussion of what he believes to be the hybridization of methodologies which North sees as flawed research. North believes more consistency is needed within the field of composition theory; James Berlin specifies this inconsistency in his 1987 text, Rhetoric and Reality. Berlin identifies the divide between the expressivist in the composition field who seeks to



understand the individual writer and encourages the student to explore ideas in a personal journal, and the social constructionist in the field who encourages students in his class to explore ideas “by engaging in public discourse to affect the social and political context of their behavior” (185).

In a 1994 text, Taking Stock: The Writing Process Movement in the 90’s, Wendy Bishop builds on North’s definition of the “lore” of the composition classroom and his discussion of varied research methodologies to point to ethnography as a type of research which considers the plethora of classroom practices and teaching methods. This ethnographic research then would place the “lore,” the personal anecdote of the classroom, at the forefront—all of it grounded in close observation of the classroom environment. In Bishop’s article, “The Perils, Pleasures, and Process of Ethnographic Writing Research,” she argues for a more “naturalistic research method”:

Since North published his influential book, many in composition have argued that naturalistic research methods, particularly ethnography and teacher-research (ethnographic researchers study other teachers’ classes while teacher-researchers study their own classes), may be a primary method for understanding the complex literacy cultures that occur in schools and communities. Many in composition claim that context-based study illuminates previously neglected areas (for example, classroom context) and produces holistic understandings of complex processes (composing, becoming a writer or a writing teacher, undertaking or resisting university literacy). (262)

Bishop grapples with the many nuances of the definition of ethnography in her text, Ethnographic Writing Research. She cites the need to “sort through definitions offered by other researchers: all shaded by their originating discipline (such as sociology, anthropology, education, cognitive psychology)” (17). Most ethnographic research, though, shares certain methodologies:

Ethnographies generate hypotheses, focus on context, are written up using thick description, require participant observation, and use multiple measures for data collection, that is triangulation . . . More recently, definitions explore case-study reporting and the dual roles of

ethnographers in composition, who are often teachers and researchers or teacher-researchers. (18)

Five years after Bishop's text, many who research and teach in the field of composition believe that the plentiful theories and methodologies do not divide the scholars in the field. In fact, they view these varied approaches to understanding the student writer in the classroom as a natural evolution of theory and pedagogy, reflecting the political and social climate over the years. Gary Olson points out that the necessity of applying multiple research methods for differing classrooms logically parallels the need to listen to multiple voices from cultural regions to posit knowledge making on any subject:

This sensitivity to multiple standpoints, multiple social and cultural positionings, would afford a 'stronger' objectivity in that the very inclusiveness of alternative positions would enrich rather than impoverish the perspectives on and information about a subject being examined. (10)

Olson's essay, "Toward a Post-Process Composition: Abandoning the Rhetoric of Assertion," echoes Thomas Kent's introduction in the same 1999 anthology, Beyond the Writing Process Paradigm: Post Process Theory. Kent coins a term more aptly descriptive for evolving theories of composition research when he suggests we talk about "theorizing," not theories. The gerund reflects composition's more protean research and methods' field of study. So North's critical stance on the many varied theories and methods in the field of composition in 1987 becomes the discipline's strength in 1999.

Cindy Johanek showcases the composition researcher's ability to choose quantitative or qualitative methodology according to the purpose and the audience of the research study in a text length version of how research methodology should be "context-based." Composing Research: A Contextualist Paradigm for Rhetoric and Composition points out that the tools of research employed should be dictated by what needs to be researched for whom and for what purpose. Johanek goes on to state that a researcher then might logically employ both quantitative and qualitative methods for one research project:

Numbers as well as narratives naturally occur in most contexts. A

Contextualist Theory of Epistemic Justification is a useful template on which to base a new inclusive paradigm, helping us to decide on research methods for a particular project based not on politics or personal preferences, but on the contexts in which our research questions arise. (111)

Up until this chapter, I've presented my dissertation in broad strokes, encompassing many years of theory and methodology, much like aerial photographs snapped at high elevations. Zooming in now, I must plot a specific piece of land—observe specific online course communities—and describe the tools and methodologies employed for my research.

### **Topographical Map of the Research Study: Outlining the Process**

My dissertation research focuses on how students create knowledge in a classroom community, more specifically how taking an online course impacts students' learning and ultimately, students' knowledge making. Since the online course presents a closed community, the Bb site is the only "learning site" for the students in the course. Since I am researching online Bb communities, the context of the research invites ethnographical strategies, both qualitative data or narratives to describe each online community's "health" (Fleckenstein) and quantitative analysis for the student dialogue threads on the forums (MacNealy).

#### **Pilot Study: Fall 2004**

Initially I set up my research to investigate two online ENC 1102 courses that I was teaching in the fall of 2004: one that would be taught as a teacher-centered course and one that would be more student-centered. In a section titled "Dialogue as Inquiry," Rena Palloff and Keith Pratt cite the "new skills" needed for the student-centered, "facilitative" instructor:

It is important for the instructor to be able to facilitate this dialogue without dominating it [which is what a teacher-centered instructor might do], so as to allow for the 'volley of views' to occur. This can be done in several ways. First, instructors as well as participants must learn and

develop the art of asking expansive questions. Next, the responsibility for the facilitation of discussion can be shared among the participants. And last, students should be encouraged—even required—to provide constructive feedback to one another throughout the course. The sharing of this responsibility among the participants is one way instructors learn to stretch their facilitative skills. Rather than being at the forefront of the discussion, [where a teacher-centered online course instructor might be] the instructor is an equal player, acting only as a gentle guide. This is a new skill for many instructors. Therefore, as we develop our abilities in this area, we grow as instructors, just as our students grow as learners.

(119)

In essence as an instructor of the teacher-centered course, I used strategies and methods in opposition of those collaborative strategies purported here by Palloff and Pratt. As an instructor of the student-centered online course, I took my cues from Palloff and Pratt to weave collaborative projects as well as online class discussion into my student-centered course. I kept the tone of my online instructor persona purposefully informal in the student-centered course to facilitate the sense of a community of equal participants, whereas correspondence between instructor and student in the teacher-centered online course remained fairly distant and formal.

In this pilot study, my primary interest focused on observing the students' responses, conversations and dialogues on the Blackboard discussion boards—both large group and small. The Blackboard content management system delivered both of the online courses that I taught and studied. I employed ethnographic research methods, utilizing thick description to define the online environment and observe the students' discussions on the forums. In the teacher-centered course, I was an objective observer; in the student-centered course, I was an interested participant observer (Bishop, Ethnographic Writing Research 36). The distinction between these roles lies primarily in the instructor's ability to manipulate the course culture, affording the instructor more authority over the students and their course community in the teacher-centered course. I anticipated a difference in the way students communicated ideas to one another and thus

their attitude toward the class community. This distinction, I believed, would impact how and when students created knowledge in each course.

My expectations, however, were never met.

Trying to keep my teacher personas consistent with the different courses proved problematic; signing e-mails with kathy ashman or Kathleen Ashman, depending on whether the students were in my student-centered or teacher-centered course helped to foster the two personas in each of the classes. But, it was difficult to keep the two classes of students separate as many of them e-mailed me without their names attached much less which section they were in. It was also difficult to remain constant in my pedagogical stance for each class—as a student-centered instructor in one and a teacher-centered instructor in the other. My desire to keep the variables of the research project to a minimum fell away when I realized I could not maintain consistent pedagogy in either course. Thus, the beauty of a pilot research study was brought into focus.

### **Research Study: Spring 2005**

So, in the spring of 2005, I asked a colleague if she would teach a section of ENC 1102 online as a teacher-centered course. This is all I asked of her. Her syllabus contained as many projects as mine, but her teaching style reflected a traditional teacher-centered course. Now I was able to concentrate on creating and maintaining a consistent pedagogical stance in my student-centered online writing course. I, of course, observed my colleague's online writing course as a non-participant ethnographic researcher and observed my own online course as an interested participant ethnographic researcher (Bishop, Ethnographic Writing Research 36).

I triangulated the research by “us[ing] multiple measures for data collection” (Bishop, Ethnographic Writing Research 18), giving students questionnaires at the beginning, middle and end of the student-centered online course (see Appendices A,B, & C), compiling case studies of a handful of students from both the teacher-centered and student centered courses (Appendix D), and conducting an informal instructor survey of how instructors use the discussion boards on the Bb site (Appendix E). Students then filled out a questionnaire concerning online learning and their approach to it at the beginning and at the end of the semester. This preliminary questionnaire (Appendix A) served as a benchmark to the student's perception of learning with technology at the

beginning of the semester and how this perception may have changed at the end of the semester (Appendix C). The mid-semester questionnaire (Appendix B) asked students specific questions about the collaborative project they participated in. The students produced several reflections for research artifacts as well as all of the discussion board material for research sampling.

Most of my research data, though, came from the conversations or threads on the discussion boards of the online courses. I analyzed these threads looking for evidence of “single,” “double” and even “triple loop learning” (Palloff and Pratt) in the students’ discussions on the Bb forums as well as confirming these learning activities in student reflections. The instructor survey (Appendix E) gave me an idea of how most teachers of writing utilize the discussion boards on the Blackboard content management system. And the case studies (Appendix D) gave me a rounder picture—filled in the personal pockets of information not gleaned in the online discussion boards.

### **Research Questions**

To fully examine the data compiled from my research, I addressed these questions:

Does teacher-centered or student-centered pedagogy affect “communal health?”

Does one pedagogical style benefit the health of the online course community more than the other?

How does the student-centered pedagogy affect this third loop of learning, if it does at all?

Similarly, how does the teacher-centered pedagogy affect this third loop of student learning in the online community if at all?

Does positive communal health contribute to students engaging in Palloff and Pratt’s third loop of learning? And if so, how?

Do most comp instructors who use Bb course sites teach from teacher-centered pedagogy or student-centered?

## Tools and Methodologies

### Analyzing Community Health

To assess the communal health of each online community—student-centered or teacher-centered, I randomly scanned virtual spaces of student dialogue for each course site looking for use of “exclusionary” or “inclusionary” (Fleckenstein) language by either the students or the instructor. In “Faceless students, virtual places. . .,” Kristi Fleckenstein gives examples of exclusionary language for what she calls the “least functional group” in the class: Each member of the group comes into the online chat site moments apart. One member (Dawn) comes in, announces her arrival and realizes no one else is there, so leaves. In the meantime Rene and Kiley have come in to the site and begin discussing. Dawn comes back and states, “I’m here!!!!!!” and “Rene responds, ‘sure u are u really leaving and coming back bc you’re a spy/I know the truth,’ . . . using language which can be interpreted as marginalizing” (159). Fleckenstein also offers an example of language that “work[s] to incorporate” members of the community. In another group that met in an online chat room quite often during the course, one member begins discussion by complimenting another on her reading response. This leads to what Fleckenstein calls the participants “cautiously craft[ing] a common ground that they can both comfortably inhabit despite their differences” (160). The participants in this group also share personal information about themselves, with one member even encouraging the others to come to the restaurant where he works as a chef (Fleckenstein 160).

### Analyzing Discourse for Evidence of Palloff and Pratt’s Third Loop Learning

Rena Palloff and Keith Pratt in their text, Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace, cite Jack Mezirow’s definition of *transformative learning* as the basis of their “process of transformative learning in the online classroom”:

Jack Mezirow (1990, 1991) coined the term *transformative learning* to refer to learning that is based on reflection and on the interpretation of the experiences, ideas, and assumptions gained through prior learning. This type of learning is rooted in the meaning-making process that is central to

constructivism, which we have already established as a major feature of the online classroom. The goal of transformative learning is to understand why we see the world the way we do and to shake off the constraints of the limiting perspectives we have carried with us into the learning experience. Patricia Cranton (1994) adds that in order for the questioning of personal assumptions and self-reflection to occur, the environment must provide the support and the ability to dialogue and critically reflect on the material presented and on the self. (129)

In order for students to experience *transformative learning*, they must have the opportunity to both reflect on past knowledge while learning new knowledge of the course. Dialogue among students during this reflective stage serves as a catalyst for this transformative learning: the students continually add new knowledge to their prior learning experience, critiquing this new information through peer questioning and summary.

So to design a learning community conducive to this *transformative learning*, Palloff and Pratt believe that the instructor must act more as a collaborator/facilitator in the community, engage a student-centered pedagogy: must ask “expansive” or open-ended questions or prompts; must set up a variety of forums or virtual spaces for student discussion, conversation and critical peer feedback; and must incorporate group projects. Just as important, though, is the need for a “*disorienting dilemma*”; “Mezirow (1990) states that perspectives are transformed when learners encounter what he terms *disorienting dilemmas*—dilemmas that cause the learner to critically assess distortions in the areas of the nature and use of knowledge . . .” (as qtd in Palloff and Pratt 130). And Palloff and Pratt believe that “by simply getting involved in an online class, a learner immediately encounters a disorienting dilemma” (131).

Palloff and Pratt propose that as the student navigates the map of the online course, he or she is constantly thinking about the technology involved. This helps the student learner center on the way the learning is happening as much as on the content of the course. This provides an opportunity for the student to reflect not only on the content and his or her knowledge of it, but on the learning itself. How is learning in the online course different from the learning in a traditional f2f classroom? How does the group



work differ? How does the instructor's role change? Are these differences beneficial or not for the students' learning experiences? This reflection leads to "transformative learning" according to Palloff and Pratt: "transformative learning" takes place when the student moves beyond the "single loop" learning (memorizing the content of the class) to the "double loop" learning, reflecting on how this new information is different from what the student knew before, to the "third loop" in learning—adapting this new knowledge in the student's life and community:

[The second] loop provides a means of self-reflection that fuels further inquiry. However, transformative learning is actually a complex series of interactions that is multidimensional. It is what Robert Hargrove (1998) calls *triple loop learning*, which he describes as 'learning [that] involves altering the particular perspective, underlying beliefs, and assumptions (or old rules) that shape *who we are* as a human being—what we identify with.' (qtd on 130)

Terry Evans and Daryl Nation in their 2000 text Changing University Teaching call this "*triple loop learning*," "deep learning" as opposed to "surface learning" (38). Evans and Nation also propose the facilitative approach to teaching online courses:

In contrast to presentational teaching, facilitative teaching encourages students to take a deep approach to learning and the development of higher order abilities such as critical thinking and learning how to learn. A facilitative approach to teaching and learning is a collaborative approach and requires sustained two-way communication. A collaborative approach facilitates critical discourse and deep, meaningful learning outcomes . . . A facilitative approach to teaching is very different from a presentational approach. It is the difference between sharing meaning and sharing information. (26)

My study, then, focuses on if and how students move through this three loop learning process in the online writing communities—one facilitative and student-centered and one that is teacher-centered.

**Method of Discourse Analysis for Evidence of Third Loop Learning.** Using Mary Sue MacNealy's empirical method of discourse analysis, I tabulated those threaded

student discussions which housed evidence of third loop learning. Mary Sue MacNealy gives various definitions for “discourse analysis in her text, Strategies for Empirical Research in Writing. These definitions depend on the purposes of the researcher and his or her field of study. “Writing researchers . . . are usually not so much interested in language itself as they are interested in what they can learn about something else through studying the language used in particular situations” (126). MacNealy gives examples of researchers who look at texts of writing to see if particular teaching strategies are effective, or those researchers who might study “discourses of certain communities, both modern and historical, to learn more about writing practices in those particular communities” (127).

I analyzed student dialogue threads in online writing courses to study the learning process of these students. MacNealy suggests that after the researcher has chosen the “appropriate segment for analysis” (129) that she then “define a construct of interest” (132). Forum prompts and subsequent threads on the Bb discussion board forums are visual cues of discourse segments. These “boundary markers” (MacNealy 131), then clearly depict the beginning and end of a student communication. More specific boundary markers—inside these visual forum cues—presented themselves when I developed and defined “the construct of interest” (MacNealy):

we could define construct as teaching students to write cursively instead of printing their letters, or we could define the construct of teaching writing as teaching students to use certain writing tools (e.g., a word processor) which could help them revise. . . . we need to define the construct we want to investigate as precisely or narrowly as possible. (78)

My “construct of interest” may be defined as student learning activities or processes: delineating and observing the steps of the learning process within student dialogues, student reflections and student artifacts. This descriptive analysis scans student dialogues for three categories related to the construct: (1) repeating learned information from course texts or student texts, (2) reflecting on the learned texts or tasks, and (3) pushing the learned texts or tasks into examples found in the larger community—beyond the online course community. These three categories reflect the first, second and third loop of learning discussed in Palloff and Pratt’s text.

## **Content Analysis of Questionnaires**

Wendy Bishop discusses the use of questionnaires in ethnographic research in her text, Ethnographic Writing Research: this qualitative instrument is used “for broad comparative purposes or to ‘set the scene.’” The researcher “will be analyzing them for recurring themes or focusing on a particular response category and creating a chart, showing a range of answers” (110). I used the “[o]pen-[e]nded [q]uestions” Mary Sue MacNealy describes in Strategies for Empirical Research in Writing for my questionnaire format to “set the scene,” providing background information on my student participants in each online course. I also looked for “correlation of variables” on the questionnaires, a type of analysis that according to MacNealy produces “quantifiable data” (171). The first and last questionnaires (Appendix A & C) provide background information, offering student profiles of writing habits and technological expertise—before and after the online writing course. The questionnaires also give insight into what the students expect in an online course and how they are managing the course. More importantly, the questionnaires serve as a type of student reflection: the students are asked to reflect on the use of technology, on the process of writing with technology. This reflection provides an opportunity for the student to think about his or her steps in the learning process. It also indicates to the instructor whether the online course is a “disorienting dilemma” (Palloff and Pratt) for the student.

The questionnaire administered after the collaborative project (Appendix B) asks the student to directly reflect on the collaborative project he or she has just completed. How was the collaborative work benefited or hindered by virtual space?

Information from these questionnaires reports the progress the students feel they have made in this online writing course, reports the connection between their writing process and the technology they used, report any correlative variables found between certain student technological abilities and attitudes toward the writing community as well as verifies the discourse analysis of the student dialogue.

## **Content Analysis of Case Studies**

The case study responses provide a more in-depth analysis of the students’ attitude toward the instructors and students in each of the writing communities. (Appendix D). These end-of-the-semester interviews highlight students’ appreciation and

or apprehension of the teaching strategies employed in each of the online writing communities. These interviews also allow for more detailed narratives concerning the course from individual students.

### **Charting Comp Instructors' Uses of Bb Forums**

This instructor survey (Appendix E) highlighted the use of various discussion board forums on the Bb site. The survey also asked instructors how they used each of the forums. This provided data on the teaching methods employed on the Bb site.

## CHAPTER 4

### **PLOTTING OUT THE NARRATIVE PARCELS OF DATA FOR MY DISSERTATION MAP: THE QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES OF MY ETHNOGRAPHICAL STUDY**

Wendy Bishop attempts to define ethnographic research in her text, Ethnographic Writing Research: she points to the many and varied ethnographies in several disciplines that keep her from zeroing in on an exact definition. She does write, however, that most “[e]thnographies generate hypotheses, focus on context, are written up using thick description, require participant observation, and use multiple measures for data collection, that is triangulation” (18). This “participant observation,” up until the last five years, described a f2f encounter of some type: living with the aborigines in Australia, working on a fishing ship in Alaska, or observing the emergency management strategies of Hurricane Katrina. Each of these experiences requires the participant observer to work and live within the culture or event. A teacher, by the very nature of her profession, is always a participant observer as she constantly observes her students in the courses she teaches. She may make assumptions about specific students from the way they dress, their speech dialect, just as the students are “sizing up” the instructor from the first day of class. Since the online instructor comes to know the students personally and academically only by text on the screen, this observation then must take on a different form for the online classroom instructor. Both students and instructors must wait for that text or visual on the screen to make any impression, and the course software always mediates this communication. The online ethnographer, then, must observe all of the events on the course site—whether it is the first student who posts the first response on a discussion board forum and how the instructor reacts to that student, or the instructor’s last announcement posted on the front page of the site.

So to observe an online course, new tools, new nuances of observations are put in to play—many of these chosen after the research begins simply because the ethnographer does not know what she’ll observe until the course is underway. The participant observer

might have certain goals or events in mind to research, but the quotidian events of course community may present more research data. In this manner, the ethnographer reacts to information, judging the best research instrument to use to record this data. Since these ways of observing and reporting are dictated, in part, by the course itself, I have usurped a term coined by Thomas Kent as “theorizing,” coupled it with a term coined by Craig Stroupe, “the compositional voice,” and placed both next to Kristi Fleckenstein’s “communal health,” to clarify the how and what of my research; I have conflated three useful terms to identify my reporting styles as well as the observation instruments of my dissertation research.

If the online course community, consisting of the individuals in the course and the online site of the course software, in this case the Blackboard site, encompasses the ethnographic setting, I, then as the teacher researcher, have a specific ecosystem to observe. To observe this ecosystem, I gathered data from several domains, finally putting the pieces together to evaluate the whole. This research and its data are context-based which allows for “theorizing” results of the different pedagogies of the online writing course community. Ethnography seems a logical fit for the online course—as Fleckenstein describes the “emergent place” or community of an online course reflecting its “communal health” through the exclusionary or inclusionary practices of its “interpretants.” Creating a social climate conducive to students’ exchange of ideas employing Stroupe’s “compositional voice” would allow me to “theorize” how my students come to make knowledge and whether the student-centered community I create helps or hinders this process more than the teacher-centered community my colleague set up. Again, it is important to remember that these results are “context-based” (Johanek) and thus reflect two online courses offered at one university in one semester. Essentially the outcomes of this data analysis are not theories, but one researcher theorizing from the many narratives involved in ethnographical research.

Palloff and Pratt discuss the need for qualitative, thick descriptions to report research outcomes as opposed to quantifiable results of research in their text, Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace, when they focus on how students learn as well as what students learn in on online classroom:

Learning in the distance education environment cannot be passive. If

students do not enter into the online classroom—do not post a contribution to the discussion—the instructor has no way of knowing they have been there. So students are not only responsible for logging on but they must contribute to the learning process by posting their thoughts and ideas to the online discussion. . . . In the process, a web of learning is created . . . through which a process of knowledge acquisition is collaboratively created. (6)

Identifying this distinction between rote memorization and collaborative learning as the difference between step 2 and step 3 of the transformative learning process, Palloff and Pratt go on to discuss the “outcomes of this process”:

[these] should not be measured by the number of facts memorized and the amount of subject matter regurgitated but by the depth of knowledge and the number of skills gained. Evidence of critical thinking and of knowledge acquired is the desired learning outcomes. (6)

These outcomes may be analyzed and reported best through “thick description” or narratives (Bishop, [Ethnographic Writing Research 153](#)).

### **Sketching Boundary Markers for Each Online Community: Questionnaire Results**

Brief surveys or questionnaires provide the ethnographic researcher with a “cultural overview” (Bishop, [Ethnographic Research 81](#)). Indeed I used this first questionnaire as a general sketch of the students in each of the online courses I studied. I did, however, also ask my student-centered course students to take a mid-term and an end-of-term questionnaire as a reflective activity. Palloff and Pratt view these questionnaires as necessary reflections on the learning process. Because this reflection activity was part of the student-centered pedagogy, I did not ask the students in the teacher-centered course to take the mid-term and end-of-term questionnaires. Most of the questions on this first questionnaire (Appendix A) asked the students about their writing competency as well as their technological expertise. Some of the questions also asked about previous high school English class projects. I didn’t expect to find much diversity in the writing competency level of the students within each course or between

each course. Florida State's first year composition students are a fairly homogenous group: most have come through the high school English curriculum in Florida, have worked on literary essays and have done some group project work. Indeed the general sketch of each course painted a similar portrait with just a few discrepancies in numbers. In the teacher-centered course, ten out of the seventeen total students composed at the computer; fifteen out of the total eighteen students in the student-centered course composed at the computer. These findings seemed in keeping with students who wish to take an online course. Two students in the teacher-centered course had taken ENC 1101 online while in high school; only one in the student-centered course had. This did surprise me, but I believe that the number of students who have taken ENC 1101 or any other course online before they enter college will continue to increase. Five out of the teacher-centered course had taken AP English classes compared to three out of the student-centered course.

Probably the most interesting data I received from this first questionnaire had to do with group projects in high school or college English courses. I asked students if they had participated with group projects and if they enjoyed their participation in them. One quarter of the students in the teacher-centered course had participated in group projects and one quarter of those students had enjoyed it; the other eighth complained about the "slackers" who were in their group. One third of the students in the student-centered course had participated in group projects and only one third of those students enjoyed them. However, several students in the student-centered course expressed a desire to work with group projects; these students were not necessarily those who had already participated in them. So the results indicated that most students from both sections did not enjoy the experience they had working with group projects. Many of them offered similar complaints: group members didn't "pull their weight," or "I was usually left to do the bulk of the work." It puzzled me that all of the students who did all of the work in these group projects ended up in the same online courses. If this, in fact, were the case, then group projects in these online courses shouldn't prove to be problematic.

This quantitative data merely provided an "overview of the culture" (Bishop). At the most, I can assume that the students in each course hold similar competency levels for both writing and technological skills. This data carved out a rough boundary of each of



the courses, but to discuss the learning processes for the students within each course, the ethnographic researcher must travel away from the boundary markers into the interior of the course.

### **First Research Parcel To Plot: Distinguishing the Uses of Exclusionary and Inclusionary Language in Each of the Online Courses**

The beauty of ethnographically studying an online course is that it is archived and may be referred to as often as needed. Daily exchanges, as well as course policy and assignments are stored on the course site. Any public communication may be observed and quantified. To observe the “communal health” of the two online courses, I scanned the instructor’s use of language by reading the archived announcements from the course site as well as reading the posted comments of the instructor on both the large discussion board and the group forums. (See Appendices F & G for examples of discussion board forums and the dialogue threads within them.) I also, and perhaps more painstakingly, observed the students’ use of language on both discussion board forums, looking for the relationship between the tone of the instructor’s online communications and the tone of the students’ online language among their peers. Specifically, I gave at least two examples of announcements from each online course to demonstrate the instructor’s use of language and I also quantified the number of times the instructor used exclusionary or inclusionary language in her announcements. Then I moved to the discussion board forums to observe and report by example and quantifiable results the instructor’s use of language.

Next I showcased two or three examples of student use of language in student dialogue threads, trying to draw a relationship between the tone the instructor set for the course and the tone of the students’ dialogues.

#### **Language Use in the Teacher-Centered Course**

C. L. agreed to teach the teacher-centered online writing course. Her online writing course involved as many projects as mine, used the same text as mine, but her projects differed, as did the manner in which she conducted her communications with students. To identify my colleague’s use of language on her course site—specifically

“exclusionary and inclusionary” (Fleckenstein)—I first scanned the archived announcements that she placed on the front page of the Bb classroom site. Her use of authoritative tone and language occurred only four times out of the 19 announcements posted during the semester. These four served as reprimands to her students:

I am astounded that at this point in the semester I should have to say this, but for your URL and response assignment, you MUST reply critically. If it's awesome work, WHY? If not, WHY NOT? By this point you should know better than to say ‘Hey, that's great!’ and leave it at that. I like that you like each others' work, but if you aren't being critical, you're wasting your peers' time--and your own.

Oddly enough, none of these four reprimands were prefaced with “Hello students” or any greeting and two did not have her usual closing “C. L..” Also note the use of capitals in the announcement—a practice that has come to reflect a loud voice or yelling in digital text. I believe that Fleckenstein would define this language as “exclusionary” or “marginalizing.”

The other 15 announcements seemed informative, energized and even humorous at times:

*Take a deep breath!* Hold it. Let it out. Count to ten. If you're still stressed out, bang your head against a wall until things seem to ‘calm down.’

Seriously, folks, we're heading into midterms and that means stress. But a little time management (i.e., don't be like me and put everything off until the last minute) a little fun time (ie, go to a movie, go to Wild Adventures, or just go nuts and dance naked in your living room), and a little food (yes, caffeine feels like a food group, but you need fuel and vitamins and other food-like thingies--yes, that's a technical term--that keep you going).

So keep yourself calm and happy and working hard and you'll be fine.

C. L..

All of these 15 opened with some sort of salutation and closed with her name. Certainly, C. L.’s identifying with the students’ stress of midterms, and joking about Wild Adventures or living room antics would be considered “inclusionary” by Fleckenstein’s definition. So quantifying the inclusionary vs. exclusionary language employed by C.

L.'s announcements, I would have to say that she uses predominately inclusionary language—at least on the front page of the course. I guess I could compare this to first impressions of a teacher in front of a classroom, or how a teacher might greet her class each class session. Yet, I would expect a teacher-centered course to reflect more authoritative “greetings” or “announcements” and even to use a full name instead of just a first name.

The instructor, as much as the students—if not more so—sets the “tone” of the course community. Referring back to Palloff and Pratt’s description of the collaborative instructor, a student-centered instructor would “facilitate” student dialogue, not “dominate” it. A student-centered instructor, then, employing a more informal tone, would try to instill a sense of collaboration, of students and instructor working together—certainly a more egalitarian pedagogical approach; whereas the instructor of a teacher-centered course would be more directive. Employing an authoritative tone, C. L. often directed her students on the large discussion board forums; C. L. would jump into these student discussion board threads to reprimand students for incorrect postings or redirect the discussion if it seemed to be getting off-topic. This type of intervention in the community dialogue seems appropriate for an instructor teaching a teacher-centered course. This type of intervention, magnified by the fact that the online environment is only text, impacts the way the students view the community work. Yet, I found that several of these interjections by C. L. could be considered too critical, too exclusionary—oftentimes isolating the student from the community. The following was taken from one of the first discussion board threads on C. L.’s online course, an activity that took place in just the second week of the course. A student posted a thread responding to a question C. L. had posted on the forum: “What does it mean to ‘project identity’”? The student responded:

Project in the Psychology sense is to show the external self or image to someone in order to avoid anxiety or to convey an impression of to an audience or one self. (www.dictionary.com) Identity is a single human existing as a distinct entity. (www.dictionary.com) In other words, a person is conveying a message about the individual or society’s mentality about a person.

This was the second student to post on this forum. C. L. replied to the student's post, asking her to follow the assigned task. "But what about what YOU think and why? I can go look this up online too. I want you to think about it and share your thoughts." Here C. L. used the capital letters to emphasize her point that the student did not do what was assigned. To add insult to this reprimand, C. L. stated that she could have looked this up online as well. To me, this language and tone humiliates the student, isolates the student from a discussion board where students need to feel comfortable expressing their views. The student posted again, explaining her first post:

I like to know the definition or the facts before conveying what i think. I chose those because i felt they dealt with cindy sherman and the last sentence is what i think it is coming from that conclusion of answers.

And C. L. responded, "ok, nd now that you got the definitions, what do you think? (that is the assignment)." C. L. seemed to back off a bit here from her initial intensity. But I believe the damage had already been done. Interestingly, Jones, the student in this last dialogue thread with C. L., did not resubmit her thoughts on projecting identity. She was vocal on this discussion board further on, but she was responding to others, not revising and reposting her original response. Out of 74 posts on this first discussion board forum, C. L. posted 14 replies—only one of which praised a student for her post.

During the first week the students in C. L.'s class engaged in a number of beginning-of-the-semester tasks: reading the syllabus, signing a course contract, filling out the questionnaire for my research and a consent form for me to do the research. She set these various tasks up on large discussion board forums, so all of the course community could read what other peers—as well as—C. L. posted. Within these forums, C. L. often redirected students who had mistakenly placed the wrong task in the forum or not completed the task as assigned. All of this seemed perfectly appropriate since these tasks needed to be carried out correctly for the research as well as for her online course, but the tone and the language used seemed inappropriately severe at times: "In the future, if you cannot get ahoh of Word, save your files as .rtf files or I will not accept them." This was reprimanding a student on one of the first tasks of the semester—the first questionnaire. "Theodore, The assignment was to save the file as your last name and the

word survey. Please resave the file with the proper name, and please read assignments carefully.” This was also in response to the first questionnaire.

mikey This file should be named Towers Consent. Please re-do. You were supposed to save this as your name and the word survey. Please read assignments carefully and do this one over. Name your message with the file name. You must put something in the message box, (it can be anything, "hi" for all I care) and attach the file. Click submit.

C. L.’s flippant tone when she wrote “it can be anything, ‘hi’ for all I care,” seemed to show a complete disregard for her students’ comfort level in the course. Remember, in an online course, the words on the screen are all the student has to go by; he can’t meet the instructor after class to talk and perhaps clarify miscommunications. And here C. L. used the screaming capitals one more time and threatened the student as well. “Theodore, Besides being EXTREMELY late, this does not follow the assignment. You were asked to save the document as your last name and the word policy. Please do it over, by Tuesday, or you will be dropped. C. L.”

To be fair to C. L., she did, on occasion, use inclusionary language when she posted a reply to the large discussion board. Here she replied to a student who had posted a file attachment to a forum and placed an emoticon in the message slot: “Ok, I have to tell you! You made me laugh. I wasn't expecting a funny face when I opened the message. Thanks! I needed that this afternoon. –C. L.” It certainly isn’t unusual for instructors to act both compassionate and directive in a f2f classroom, but those emotions seem less severe if the student sees the physical nuances of the instructor who is having a bad day. The online student only reads the text on the screen, so a demanding, caustic tone seems even harsher.

In C. L.’s online community, some students did mimic her oftentimes caustic, critical tone. By the third week of class, at least one student was projecting this sarcastic and judgmental tone: The first student had posted on the forum for this third assignment; the first peer to reply made sure that the student felt sufficiently stupid, “um hun, your suppose to pick two sources that will help with your paper. Do you know if those sources will help you with your paper?” Fleckenstein would no doubt consider this language “um hun” as “exclusionary,” and I would consider this a disrespectful reply.

The students, sensing the hostility shown to their peers, either mimicked the critically harsh response to their peers' work as the student in the previous example, or became more considerate and helpful—to lessen the negative tone. C. L. set up group forums for students to workshop their projects. Students were given “workshop checklists,” a list of areas to critique for each of the projects. While C. L. would often reprimand the students to stick to the checklist, the students, perhaps to lessen this hostility, would work quite congenially with each other. Each student would submit a draft as a file attachment and the two other peers in the group would comment on the draft using the comment feature of Word and then attach the critiqued draft to the reply post. Cathy is the first to post her draft and she addressed the members of her group in the message slot of the post:

Okay, LOL This is a pitiful draft! It's really bad. I really just tried to get out all my thoughts and some of them are still floating around in my head. I plan on organizing this allot more. Here is the link to the website, the graphics are in place, but I have not yet filled the content in. Please I am open for suggestions. Also, I am going to include side pages that contain the journals that we have been doing in class because I feel like those have good information. Also, a Works cited page is coming soon....

Notice the use of the informal LOL (laugh out loud) in capital letters. Here Cathy was self-effacing, “This is a pitiful draft!” but she showed them that she was aware of what needed to be done and asked for suggestions: “Please I am open for suggestions.” Here Cathy is definitely reaching out to her peers, “cautiously craft[ing] [that] common ground” that Fleckenstein refers to when she defines the use of inclusionary language (160). It is important to note that Cathy didn't need to write anything in the message slot of this post. The workshop checklist had been supplied by C. L.; the student was not asked to discuss the draft with her peers at all. Not only had Cathy addressed her peers, but she also had tried to introduce herself in a very modest way, asking for their help with the project. She was modeling a collaborative stance here, yet she was working in a rather non-collaborative community. One of the members of her group posted his critique of her draft and apologized for getting it back to her so late: “heres your comments. Im sorry that i didnt do this earlier but i hope this is still some benefit too you. Evan” The

next member of the group posted: “Hope I could help. Gail” Again, each of the members had posted a response to Cathy’s draft as file attachments; each had completed the assigned task. But they wished to establish more of a relationship with their group members, to show respect to each other, and so they addressed one another in the message slot of the group discussion board. And here Cathy acknowledged her receipt of the critiques and also thanked her group members. Note the number of exclamation points Cathy used in this post: “Thanks so much for your comments!!!! They really helped!!!! You gave me some great ideas!” Again, the assigned tasks had been completed; there was no need to communicate at all with the group members, yet these members wished to do more than the instructor’s assigned tasks; they wanted to “cautiously craft [that] common ground,” to move closer to a community of writers.

### **Language Use in the Student-Centered Course**

The student-centered course I set up utilized the announcement page in much the same manner as C. L.’s teacher-centered. I often gave explanations of assignments or reminded students of work that was due as well as reviewed material they might need for the writing task at hand that week:

Students, please make sure that your mla format is correct on this third project. These are a few details you should keep in mind: Do remember that whatever is on the far left side of the works cited page for the entry is what should be in the parenthetical note. Also remember that if you are citing an online source, you need to include a paragraph number for where the information can be found. (\_National Website People\_, par. 11). Note, if you are placing a website title in the parenthetical note, it needs to be underlined—just like it is underlined on the works cited page. If you are parenthetically noting an offline source—a printed source, a book etc.—then the parenthetical note will house the surname of the author (or whatever is on the far left side of the works cited entry) and the page number. There is no comma for this one and no abbreviation for page. Just (Jones 13). Do remember to double space the works cited page. Everything is double-spaced: between Words Cited and the first entry, between each line of the entry and between entries themselves. If

you are unsure about any of this, check out the *Scott Foresman handbook*.

Happy editing, ;-) kathy ashman. (Bb announcement, Apr. 8, 2005)

Using the emoticon and the closing remark of “happy editing” provided an informal tone and used inclusionary language that students felt comfortable with. Out of the thirty announcements on the Bb site, only five did not contain a salutation and more than half ended with an emoticon. And I always signed my announcements as well as my e-mails “kathy ashman.”

My students filled out a consent form as well as a questionnaire in the first couple of weeks of the course. I set up the retrieval of these documents much the same way as C. L. did; the students posted the consent form and the questionnaire on the large discussion board with these instructions:

Open a thread on this forum and just list your name and then attach the ‘signed’ consent form. Again, thank you for participating in this study. kathy ashman” ; “Post a quick message with your name and then attach the questionnaire as a file attachment. thanks students, kathy ashman

I made sure to thank the students for doing this work and always signed my name in lower case letters, choosing to use “kathy” as opposed to the more formal “Kathleen.” I did not reprimand the students on the discussion board thread if, in fact, they did not follow instructions. I e-mailed them privately and asked them to resubmit. I wanted to keep the online community a collaborative and comfortable environment; thus, the students would continue to discuss freely and informally.

On the first discussion board forum of my online course, there were 63 posts altogether, only six of those were mine in response to student posts or discussion threads: “I’m curious; what are some examples of these vibes, of these body gestures? Can the same gesture be interpreted differently by different sexes, cultures?” Here I merely engaged the student to ask for more specific examples. In this next post, I quoted a part of the student’s original post and then posed more questions or gave examples:

“For example, many people tell lies to others. Unless someone understands body language and other forms of nonverbal communication, he/she cannot truly know the truth.” When I read this, I couldn't help but think about detectives interviewing suspects. Is there a course on how to



tell if the guy is telling the truth-- reading body language of the average criminal, perhaps?

These types of interjections or replies to students asked them to elaborate, even gave them more to elaborate on when discussing the topics. Four of the seven I posted for this forum reflected this questioning to broaden or narrow the topic; the other three were just to praise a good student post or an entire discussion thread: “This is a great thread on this discussion board, students. I’m thoroughly enjoying it.” I wanted students to discuss the assigned topic, wanted them to have the freedom to take the topic in a different direction or to offer an honest opinion about the topic or the course or the instructor. I was, after all an equal participant, a collaborator in this student-centered course. I was learning at the same time they were. One student, upset with Atwan’s text, voiced her opinion on this discussion board forum—the first of the semester’s assigned discussion board tasks:

As an introduction to this class I do not think that this made a good impression. It makes this class seem very dull and boring considering that it is an English class and we are reading about the media. There were parts that were good and informative towards what I think this class is about, and maybe I am completely off course as to what this class is really about. But I do not think that reading how to make an advertisement has anything to do with a research English class. Communication is very important in society and has always been. It is the way we express our selves. Humans have learned to communicate with a gorilla using sign language that shows how much we are dependant upon communication whether it is verbal such as a news broadcast or non-verbal such as signing to a gorilla. Technology has advanced our ways of communication in many ways. 30 years ago we did not have computers and internet and instant messaging and email. People had to use other means to send and receive information. This article pointed out all of the means that our society today uses to communicate. There are some that are very seldom talked about such as paintings and other art forms and monuments. This article was extremely boring. It was also uninformative to me. I have taken marketing classes in high school and in those classes I was taught how to analyze media in

most all forms. It was hard to read because it was very bland. I found it to be like reading an encyclopedia. There was no flair to it either. I do see how it could be useful to some people with all of the information that it did provide to me. I just do not see how it pertains to an analytical/research English class. We are writing essays and doing research not analyzing today's media. If that is what I wanted to do then I would have taken a media class or a journalism class.

I replied on the discussion board forum to Cheryl's post:

Boy Cheryl, I certainly applaud your honest review of Atwan's text. I would hate to see what you would say about the last required text we used in ENC 1102. If, as you say, you have taken several marketing classes, then you could be a big help to this writing community. We all share our strengths in this writing community and you obviously have a great deal of knowledge about analysis. Whether or not you believe this is what should be taught in an ENC 1102 class is also very interesting to me. I have taught this course a variety of ways using a variety of textbooks and I like Atwan's text and I like teaching a course that is more rhetorical than literary. I welcome all honest reviews of the text and of the course activities. thanks for the honest feedback, kathy ashman

Here, on the first discussion board forum, I made a point to applaud a student for her honesty, hopefully signaling to the rest of the community that honesty and critical perspectives were welcomed. This attitude or collaborative approach, then, would carry over to the students' attitudes and dialogues.

As a student-centered instructor, I set up a collaborative project and used the group forums to house the project workshops. Each group discussed the project on the discussion board of the forum. I encouraged the students to discuss all aspects of the project on these forums, even though they had access to group e-mail. I wanted to observe their dialogues and I couldn't do that if they e-mailed one another. The following was a discussion board "thread" taken from one of the group forums. Holly, Rachel and Elizabeth brainstormed possible topics for their collaborative project. Rachel started the thread:

So I'm pretty sure this is the discussion board for the "Revisioning History" group project. It's nice to meet (?) you guys :). I had a couple of ideas for the historical event we could do out project on. The one I like best is 9/11. We could each take a different perspective on the event when writing about it... a couple of other events I thought of were Pearl Harbor, women's suffrage movement (im not sure if its supposed to be one specific event or if it could be over a period of time...) anyway let me know what you think!

Rachel threw out a couple of topic ideas, but not until after she greeted her fellow group members, drawing attention to the word “meet” with a question mark. She conveyed her confusion about the topic and asked what her group members thought. Rachel presented herself as a collaborative member of the group, not dictating topics, but asking for clarification and more ideas. Elizabeth replied to Rachel’s post, acknowledging her own confusion, but offering more topic ideas.

Wow! I was so confused when I saw the word group. Yeah, nice to meet you as well. Pearl Harbor is a great event or anything else protaining to WW2 would work. If we wanted to do events in our life time some examples are:

Columbine

The Fall of the Berlin Wall

Fall of the USSR

Those are just some ideas let me know what you guys think

Rachel replied to Elizabeth and helped to make the final decision on the topic: “great ideas. apparently the events have to have happened at least a decade ago. so far i think Pearl Harbor would be the most interesting. what do you both think?” Here Rachel was asking for both of her group members to help make the decision—trying to pull the third member of the group, Holly, into the dialogue since she had not posted yet. Elizabeth replied to Rachel, verifying the topic and pulling Holly into the dialogue by asking a question: “Sounds good to me. Want to start working on Pearl Harbor?” Rachel replies quickly: “Sure. What are you going to write your viewpoint about? I am going to write mine about the soldier's families throughout and after Pearl Harbor, if the teacher

approves. I will post my 500 words on this board by Feb. 9. good luck :)” Here Rachel signaled that she would begin writing her part of the project and signed off with a “good luck” and a happy face emoticon. Holly finally posted on the group forum, offering an apology and a reason for not posting sooner:

Hey you guys. I'm so sorry I haven't posted anything yet. I had a tonsilectomy/adnoidectomy on Monday and they kept me in the hospital over night. Since then I've been resting. But enough excuses, I like the idea of writing about Pearl Harbor. I am not quite sure what to write about exactly. I'm thinking maybe about writing about either the media's perspective or about the chaos that ensued after the bombing. I'm still not sure. If you guys have any suggestions, I'd greatly appreciate them.

Rachel, who began this thread on the discussion board promptly replied to Holly and expressed her concern over Holly’s operation, told her that she was on the right track for perspective ideas, let Holly and Elizabeth know she had the go ahead for her perspective and offered her instant messenger url if Holly and Elizabeth wanted to contact her quickly.

I'm so sorry to hear about your operations :( I hope you're feeling better! I like your ideas, they sound good. By the way, the teacher approved my topic of writing about the soldier's families... yay! Talk to you soon. if anyone wants my s/n just in case (i'm always online...) it's xobellaaimox.

All three of these group members used inclusionary language with one another and Rachel even offered her instant messenger url in case they needed to contact her quickly. These three group members moved toward “a common ground that they can . . . comfortably inhabit despite their differences” (Fleckenstein160). And these actions, these verbal communications echoed my facilitative tone as a student-centered instructor, increased the “communal health” of their group, and ultimately impacted the writing course community.

The examples given in this section focus on single threads of the discussion boards, both the large and the group forums, but they are indicative of the community’s health, as they reflect much of the tone of the text found on each of the online sites.

## **Second Research Parcel: Analyzing Discourse for Evidence of Palloff and Pratt's Third Loop Learning**

Recognizing the threads on the discussion board forums as visual “boundary markers” (MacNealy 131), I looked for evidence of the three steps in Palloff and Pratt’s learning process. Following MacNealy’s discourse analysis research strategy, I outlined a “construct of interest” (MacNealy 132): (**Step 1**) repeating learned information from course texts; (**Step 2**) reflecting on information from course texts and reflecting on or responding to peers’ questions as well as posing questions for peers; and (**Step 3**) creating examples found outside of the course community gleaned from information in the texts and student dialogue. These three categories reflect the first, second and third loop of learning discussed in Palloff and Pratt’s text. The first step merely reiterates information in the course texts. The second step focuses on the student’s reflection of the course material, the student writer offering his or her opinion on the material and perhaps asking peer readers questions. The peer reader reflects upon the peer writer’s post, offers an opinion, answers questions posed, and possibly asks more questions of the previous or following peer readers. This second step highlights the differing opinions of the students dialoguing in the course and provides the impetus for students to move to step three. Step three demonstrates the student’s ability to incorporate peers’ ideas and opinions and to formulate new or extended examples of the points being discussed—specifically these examples move from discussion of course material to discussion of the student’s personal community and then to discussions within the community at large.

To analyze student dialogues for transformative learning, I scanned three of the large discussion board forums from each online course looking for evidence of transformative learning (**Step 3**). I have included three examples of dialogue threads from at least two different large discussion board forums to highlight examples of transformative learning in each of the online courses. Then I have quantified the times transformative learning has occurred on the three discussion board forums chosen from each online course. During the course of the semester, many discussion board forums

were set up, many more than just three. I chose to quantify data from only three large discussion board forums because I could only find three on the teacher-centered course that asked open-ended questions. These types of prompts offered students the opportunity to make their own knowledge, to move to step three in the learning process.

### **Data Gleaned from the Teacher-Centered Online Writing Course**

“Project Identity,” one of the first projects C. L.’s students worked on, asked the students to read about the photographer, Cindy Sherman, in the Convergences text, the primary reader for the ENC 1102 courses. Then the students were asked to define the act of “projecting identity” and prompted to discuss what identities they project. The assignment ultimately ended in the students creating a webpage which incorporated the student’s own identity in visual as well as word text, and also included hyperlinks to other larger communities which share the same identity.

**Ellie’s dialogue thread.** Ellie was one of the last students to post a new dialogue thread on the discussion board forum. (Each student begins a thread and then replies to other students’ threads.) Ellie picked up a topic discussed on a previous thread that discussed how a dancer was able to project an identity for a role in a production. This reiterating another peer’s opinion and then reflecting on it was evidence of **Step 2** of the learning process. Ellie then ended the post, moving from **Step 2** to **3** by reflecting on the benefits of the dancer’s empathetically identifying with the role the dancer played in the production, yet not incurring any personal criticism as the critic was judging the role the dancer portrayed.

I believe to project one's identity is to reveal your features of your personality through your actions and words. One can hide certain aspects of their identity, covering them up by other traits that they make more evident. As a dancer much like Sherman I am accustomed to using my art to project my identity or the identity of another. **[Step 2]** You must embody yourself into the role and make it truly believable that you are that person or thing, this is one of the hardest things for many. Using different identities is often a release for many and allows them to display different parts of their personality without someone actually judging them, rather they judge the character. **[Step 3]**

Ellie showed the relationship between her personal experiences and the viewer's evaluation of her performances. Although, she didn't offer her peer reader a specific example, she demonstrated in general terms, her move from **Step 2** to **3** in the transformative learning process.

Jaimi replied to Ellie's post with a compliment and a question: "This is a good perspective. [Notice the use of the inclusionary statement here which also served as a quick reference to Ellie's post.] When dancing would you say your projecting your identity or your character's identity?" This reply would certainly fall under the **Step 2** category, but it gave Ellie another opportunity to clarify her move from **Step 2** to **Step 3** with a specific example.

When dancing you get a chance to project the identity of the character you are playing, but sometimes the character has some characteristics you possess and don't usually express. [**Step 2**] For example, if you have a little bit of a rebellion side and you get a chance to play the Black Swan in "Swan Lake" you can let that show though. [**Step 3**]

Ellie took the opportunity and supplied her reader with a specific example from her personal experience, alluding to the larger community's knowledge of "Swan Lake." Jaimi replied with a quick, "Awesome, good to think about." C. L. entered into the discussion board now, replying to Ellie's dialogue thread and asked Ellie, "What if you don't have a little bit of a rebellion side? Is it possible that we all carry the same set of traits, in different mixes of amounts and can, in fact show any side? If so, what is identity?" Another student, George, decided to post an answer to C. L.'s questions:

I agree with C. L. to some extent. I think we all have the same 'set of traits' in us, in varying amounts. [Here George reiterates what C. L. has stated in her post. **Step 2**] And it is up to the person as to how they want to mix those amounts. The person is in complete control of their identity and therefore is responsible for allotting the right traits as they pertain to the identity they are trying to project. Or something like that. Did I lose anyone? [Here Michael is trying to move from **Step 2** to **3** by pushing the idea out into the larger community. He starts with the individual but moves to recognition of an audience by the end of the post.]

**Cathy's dialogue thread.** Further on into the semester, week eight, C. L. asked the students to analyze an online ad and post this analysis to the large discussion board forum. Cathy was one of the first students to start a dialogue thread, to post her analysis. Cathy began her post by discussing the ads many of her peers had found to analyze, delighting in their choices and adding interesting comments about the ads when she could. She finished her post by analyzing her own ad:

One of the key things I noticed when examining many of the ads was that they offered a free trial. Most ads will have some kind of “buy into this” gimmick that makes a consumer feel like they have nothing to lose. Ads tell allot about what Americans will buy. The market attempts to make products look easy, cheap, and fast. For example, Rachel's ad about Blockbuster appeals to the consumer who wants quick convenience. It promotes Blockbuster's online store in which consumers can order movies at the comfort of their own home. Today people have so much on their schedules, convenience is a huge advantage and it allows a product to stand out from the other competitors which offers the same thing, except a person has to go pick up the video. Technology is another huge issue, especially for web surfers. The bigger, the better, and the more advanced is what people want. Evan's ad for a lap top computer promotes this new wave of technology. No longer are computer nerds bound by wires. That promise allows people to have a more mobile and once again convenient computer. Many ads appeal to a person's sense of style or class, like Tajanna's Louis Vuitton Ad. The photography is sleek and classy. The product itself does the trick. When I looked at George's ad for the purchase of a new domain name, I almost gave into it myself! The price is amazingly cheap. [Cathy has identified at least four of her peers' ads and brought them into her post; this reflects a very collaborative attitude toward her peers. **Step 2**] I am thinking that there has to be a string attached. That is another tactic for advertisers. Put what is good about the product big and bold; put the whole truth in fine print. It actually makes me laugh somewhat. I saw an ad recently in a magazine for a particular



drug. Most people only see the picture and the headline of those drug ads, but almost all of them have full information on the back in tiny print that people don't usually take the time to read. I read it. Grant it, drugs are serious things and typically any drug can have fatal side effects. In any case, the fine print listed "death" as one of the possible side effects! Just something to think about...[**Step 3**]

Cathy pulled examples from her peers' work, recognizing the various rhetorical strategies used in advertisements before she clinched her post with the dynamic discovery of "death" as one of the possible side effects." Theodore replied first to Cathy's post, agreeing with one of her points and elaborating on it with an example drawn from the community.

I agree with you about the convenience of things. I think that's what sells most if it's not insanely expensive. [Theodore picks up Cathy's point about convenience here. **Step 2**] Who didn't want DSL when it came out? I remember the commercial with the kid having his science project due and he had to look up something before he had to leave for school. The screen came up so quickly it made viewers think about their dial-up taking five minutes to sign on and load anything. Then there was that sad one with the two dads helping their kids with research projects. One was done and they all sat down as a family for dinner or something and the other dad with the dial-up was up all night working on the project with his daughter. To me, it just created a sad scene and even though I already had DSL I would've switched if I didn't have it. No one has time for anything anymore; convenience seems to be the key in marketing. Even if you're shopping, if there's not a huge price difference between stores, I'd buy a product at a store a few dollars more to save myself from driving across town; especially in Miami traffic.[Here Theodore is drawing from personal experience to verify her two examples taken from the larger community. **Step 3**] The drug ads are definitely a favorite. [Again, Theodore picks up another topic already broached in Cathy's post. **Step 2**] In tenth grade I had to do a public service announcement for my film class

and my friend and I made a spoof on the drug ads. I like to time them when they start listing the side effects. My mom always says “Yeah, I want some of that!” The advertisers spend 2 minutes talking about being free from one health problem, but give you a list of 20 others it will cause and then you have to go buy drugs for THOSE health problems and it just seems like it would be an endless cycle. [Theodore begins with a personal experience and pushes it into the larger community. **Step 3**]

Jennifer replied to Cathy’s thread agreeing with past posts and contributing yet another example:

Of course it’s about convenience! [Joining in the dialogue here, Jennifer picks up a topic both Cathy and Theodore have discussed. **Step 2**] Hence why gas station add convenience stores, and they charge more then if you went to the grocery store. My economic's teacher talked about someone making 1 million dollars revenue from the convenience store. Not to shabby! Wal-Mart is the ideal convenience, one stop for everything, including gas which is why its one of the top companies in America. That's just the way of the world, how quickly can one get . . . time is money. And that people would rather spend their time on something else [Jennifer moves the discussion into transformative learning again by giving one more example from the larger community. **Step 3**]

George was the last to respond to Cathy’s thread and he began his post with a salutation, “Cathy,” demonstrating that his comments were meant for Cathy more than the other peers who had posted. George did this because he wanted to compliment Cathy for “tak[ing] the time to look over every ad and critique it.” He admitted that he was almost taken in by Yahoo’s domain sale (**Step 2**), and then drew on another topic, another ad strategy. Here he offered an explanation and then pushed the discussion out to the whole of society, to the “United States public”:

Cathy, First off, I think you have taken the time to look over every ad and critique. Just mentioning this, because I want you to know that your effort does not go unnoticed by your classmates. By the way, I almost gave into the price for that domain name as well [**Step 2**]. But isn't that Yahoo.com's

goal? To reel us in like we're sailfish? [George's question here marks a turning point in the dialogue; here he is setting up the dialogue for explanations of ideas—possibly examples to strengthen the explanation.] There are so many different types of advertising like this: bait and switch, false advertising, free trial etc., and you did a nice job of trying to find different examples of each.[**Step 2**] I think it is fair to say that as a whole, the United States public are rather naive (that's EVIAN spelled backwards; you know the water, just a little joke) and as long as the American public stays the American public, sketchy advertising is here to stay. Mike [Mike builds on the previous dialogue to introduce another aspect of the discussion—not just the advertiser's strategies but also the American public's naiveté. **Step 3**] Notice also that Mike signs his reply even though his name is in the reply slot already visible by his peers.]

George not only contributed to the community's knowledge making but also to the community's health when he personally addressed his reply to Cathy and signed his post as well.

One of the last projects C. L. assigned dealt with communities: defining each, identifying which communities students belonged to and how language changed within each community. C. L.'s prompt asked very specific questions that had multiple answers—open-ended questions:

What is a community? How many communities do you belong to? How do you relate to others in your community? How does your use of language change as you move through these communities? How do these communities set up expectations for their “members”? What expectations are there of “non-members”?

**George's dialogue thread.** George posted after half of the class had posted, so many of his statements seemed redundant (**Step 2**) and most seemed too general. He did, however, introduce a new topic in his dialogue thread—how communities create comfort for their members (**Step 3**) giving examples of these communities as “home,” “neighborhood” and “hang out place.”

A community, in my opinion, is any place that feels like home. In other words, it's a safe place; where you can be yourself. **[Step 3]** A community is a place where people of the same interests gather and communicate. A person can be a part of multiple communities at the same time. For example, the neighborhood in which you live can be considered a community, yet at the same time your school or hang out place is another community. I belong to two, my neighborhood community and my educational community. The two are quite different. **[Step 2]** I am a different person in my home community, and by that I mean more reserved and quiet. However, while I'm up here in school, I find that I am more outgoing and energetic. [moving to **Step 3**]

It is crucial for people living among the same community to be able to get along with one another and communicate. It is not as hard as it might seem, for example I choose to surround myself with people I find it easy to communicate with. Different communities offer different types of languages and dialects. It is not uncommon for people to have to change and adapt their use of language according to certain communities. For example, in areas where education is not so prevalent, it is common to hear slang phrases and incorrect usage of words. **[Step 2]**

A community is a place where membership should not be required. No one should have to take a test to be a part of something. I would never want to be a part of community that sets up expectations for their members. That goes against the very principle of what a community is. In terms of 'non members,' I hope that every community chooses not to segregate themselves from people who do not necessarily belong to your community. Communities should be embraced for what they offer to each individual person. [George is defining community quite differently than most of his peers have already defined it. He is moving toward **Step 3** here, but has not provided specific examples to clarify his statements.]

George, after reading several of his peers' dialogue threads, had formulated his own definition of community; George chose to focus on the connotation of the word. To him

community was synonymous with “comfort,” “belonging,” “safety.” It was this emotional aspect of the term that prompted him to state that he hoped no one would have to “take a test” to be a member of a community and no one should ever feel excluded from a community and thus there were no “nonmembers.” He contradicted himself in this post because he didn’t distinguish between the connotative and denotative meaning of the word “community.”

Ellie was the first to reply to George’s post pointing out his contradictory statements (**Step 2**) and giving an example to support her observation (**Step 3**). Again she questioned George’s definition of a comfortable and safe community when she cited “jail” as a community. Here she offered an example, but to soften the chide, she included humor, ending her reply with an emoticon:

I agree with the statement you made about communities being able to communicate with each other, [**Step 2**] but this sort of contradicts with the following statement that you shouldn't have to take a "test" to be part of a community, meaning everyone should have the right to be part of any community. If someone who could not pass the SAT and they were ammited to college they would have difficulties communicating with others at the university and what about job applications? [**Step 3**]  
Also, what about all communities feeling like home. Wouldn't jail be considered a community? I know I wouldn't feel at home if I was in jail. (Although I think Martha Stuart tried to make her cell feel like home :), but that is an exception ). [**Step 3**]

Theodore’s reply tried to clarify some of George’s statements with examples. He pushed the **Step 2** in George’s post to **Step 3**—not very convincingly though.

I like your idea about how you should not have to take a test to be in a community [**Step 2**] but i think in some ways the reason why there are communities is becasue certain people are the same and so have unintentionally passed a requirement to be in the community which likes cars for example. [**Step 3**] However like you say in some certain communities you need to pass a requirement [**Step 2**] such as a fraternity. [**Step 3**]

Here Theodore was responding to Ellie’s questions as much as he was responding to George’s original post. Oftentimes peers push the knowledge construction, the transformative learning forward by asking questions of their peers, a very natural learning process and significantly more important if peers, not instructors, present questions for response or present evidence of confusion in another peer’s post. Ellie, by asking questions and using humor to reply to her own questions, kept the exchange of student dialogue comfortable. Theodore, also, seemed to use inclusionary language as he told George “that he likes his idea.” Both of these peer replies were collaborative in nature, yet supply necessary questions for clarification to build knowledge.

Jaimi, however, didn’t worry about inclusionary language; she just offered her opinion that was in direct opposition of George’s post, giving examples from her personal experience to support her statements. Here Jaimi recognized George’s ideas enough to criticize (**Step 2**) and then moved toward **Step 3**—but didn’t quite make it because she didn’t push past her personal experience.

I don't exactly agree with your definition of a community being a place where you feel safe or at home. [**Step 2**] Each of my classes is a community but I dont feel at home in them. I am loud and obnoxious at home but in class I am usually quiet and reserved. Also, many people hate their jobs but are forced to stay a member of the community because of the money. These people probably dont feel at home or safe when they are at work. [moving toward **Step 3** with this general example]

C. L. was the last to reply on this dialogue thread, a practice she repeated for most of the student dialogue threads on the discussion board. She asked George what other communities he belonged to. “You belong to far more than two communities. Try thinking of at least three more.” Her question came as a reprimand for something George was not asked to do. She did not specify how many communities the student must name in her questions, yet she publicly asked George to list more. Her formal rebuke, coming at the end of a very congenial student exchange, seemed more harsh and exclusionary than needed. Yes, these types of interjections occur in a teacher-centered course, and yes, she could have asked him to clarify his statements with details, but instead she belittled him for not listing the several communities he belonged to.

To quantify the number of **Step 3**'s on the discussion board forums, I analyzed three large discussion board forums for each online course. I zeroed in on forums that asked open-ended questions, so that student exchange might move to transformative learning, as those forums which merely asked the student to regurgitate information from the text or to list url's as possible sources would not create student dialogue. So for each of the three forums from each course, I counted the number of student dialogue threads; I did not use single posts as these did not reflect exchange of ideas between students. I also did not use those threads composed of the student and the instructor, as again, student exchange was not the sole communication occurring. Then I examined each student dialogue within the forum looking for evidence of **Step 3**'s. The three forums represented student work at the beginning, middle and end of the semester.

From C. L.'s teacher-centered online course, I chose the following forums: "Project Identity," from the second week; "Ads Analyzed," from the eighth week; and "Community" from the eleventh week for analysis. Out of ten student dialogue threads from the "Project Identity" forum, there were five **Step 3**'s. Out of ten student dialogue threads from "Ads Analyzed," there were twelve **Step 3**'s. And out of twelve student dialogue threads from the "Community" forum, there were seventeen **Step 3**'s.

### **Data Gleaned from the Student-Centered Online Writing Course**

One of the first tasks for my online students asked the students to read Atwan's "Introduction" and then discuss the idea of nonverbal communication. This was the first foray into the large discussion board use for my students in this course. Some of the dialogues, tentatively written, soon turned into confident opinions aired openly. Most of these dialogue threads merely reiterated what Atwan had written in the "Introduction" or what the prompt asked, but some morphed into students attempting to create their own knowledge. I purposely chose a prompt—an open-ended question—which would make them think and write about their own experiences with nonverbal communication since Atwan doesn't discuss these media in his "Introduction" of the course text.

Atwan's text discusses a variety of media, how to "read" the different mediums found in everyday life. Atwan lists questions the student might ask him or herself to "read" the medium more analytically. Some of these questions we ask ourselves automatically when we come upon a billboard

or even when we read an essay in class. Some of the questions, though, ask us to probe deeper than we might normally think about a medium. These questions set up criteria for analysis, for evaluation of the medium. How might we analyze nonverbal and nontextual communication, like body language, for instance? Is there a list of questions that we might use for criteria in the analysis of body language? Would this skill (analyzing body language) be of use to us in the everyday world? Where, when, how, why? Post a 300 word response to any or all of the questions above or even create new questions for other students. Post due date 1/7/05. Begin the conversation with your post. Continue the conversation by responding to your peers' posts. Remember respond to three peers' posts in at least 150 word responses. Responses due by 1/9/05.

**Elizabeth's dialogue thread.** Elizabeth posted her thread as one of the last posts; it was obvious from the content that she read many of her peers' posts first since she summarized some of the ideas that had been discussed (**Step 1**). She paid quick lip service to the material from Atwan's text and then offered an observation about the digital space she and her peers occupied at that moment and how this space would be more enticing to the peer if a photo were included (**Step 2**). She attributed the preference of visual graphics over text to society's poor attention span (**Step 3**):

I think it is rather ironic how this book uses examples such as the internet and mass media productions such as Television and advertisements as examples of how we start to believe things exist and aren't just what they appear to be. [**Step 1**] The ironic part is that we too by posting on here are doing something along the same lines. By posting it is as if someone is talking to us not that we are just reading someone's work. The book brings up very good points when it comes to what it read by others and what isn't. [**Step 2**] If I was to TYPE IN ALL CAPS, such as I all did I'm sure it would be a safe assumption to say everyone that clicks on this will read that and see what is typed in bold because whatever attracts the eye is what people tend to read. This is what makes pictures such a productive method of communication. So the old saying a picture is worth a thousand



words is certainly true. While most of you wouldn't take the time to read this if not required for the class wouldn't do so but if I included a photo I'm sure the time one spends on this page would increase significantly. The era, in which people spend time giving long speeches, have passed. A great example of this is the latest commercials from truth.com. While decades ago before the age of commercials people who have to give speeches on the dangers of smoking. While some would listen most wouldn't. People attention spans aren't typically more than 15 minutes, so now with the availability of television people like truth.com are able to get the message about the dangers of smoking out to millions of people and able to grab their attention. With the recent popularity of these commercials it just goes to show that pictures really do grab others attention over the old way of just speaking. [Here Elizabeth moves from a personal example of students responding to her ALL CAPS and perhaps a photo to an example from TV and then relates an opinion on the community at large. **Step 3**]

Elizabeth began her post discussing a topic from the "Introduction" of how media may convince us to believe "things exist" and are more than what they appear; hence "by posting [on this discussion board] it was as if someone was talking to us not that we were just reading someone's work." In fact there was a dialogue but this dialogue on this blackboard forum was unlike anything she had experienced before. She moved to the next topic and brought up the book's ideas again stating that she agreed with Atwan (**Step 2**). As soon as Elizabeth began to discuss her own use of ALL CAPS, she moved into **Step 3**, finishing the learning activity by offering the reader a particular example of how and why tv ads cater to society's short attention span.

Samantha, the first peer to reply to Elizabeth's post echoed Elizabeth's notion that "a picture is worth a thousand words and thus exhibited **Step 2** in the learning process. When Samantha confessed that she "never took a second thought about why" she used ALL CAPS in her instant messages or e-mails, she moved into **Step 3**.

I agree with you about the picture thing. [**Step 2**] I didn't ever think about how much a picture can add to text, or how much it draws someone's

attention to what is on the page. I also never really thought about writing in all caps or bold. I use it all the time when I am e-mailing or instant messaging, but I never took a second thought about why or that it was a form of nonverbal communication. I've realized that communication and some of the hidden, non-verbal messages are things that I need to pay more attention to. [**Step 3**]

To be honest, Samantha did not move into step 3 in this post, but she was poised at the line between recognizing that an event occurs to finding examples of it in her broader community.

The next student who replied to Elizabeth's post offered a different perspective on Elizabeth's ideas by asking questions. This was an important marker of the learning activity process as it asked the student to move beyond what he or she already knew to consider new information (**Step 3**).

I like how you mentioned the part about a picture being worth a million words. I posted a similar thought about how much we take pictures for face value, however they can be easily doctored. [**Step 2**] So my point is that yes you are right that they are worth a million words, but which words are they? Are they truth, lies, or both? [**Step 3**]

Although Holly did not give an example of how a photo may lie just as well as text may, she implied a connection and thus broadened the reader's scope of knowledge.

Maura, the last responder to Elizabeth's post combined two of the original post's topics and offered examples in the larger community of each—thus moving the reader past **Step 2** twice in the span of a short reply:

I think it's interesting that you made the analyzation that if we were to use CAPS or bolded language that we have more of a tendency to use it. [**Step 2**] Since the internet is such a key factor in everyday life we have somewhat made a language of our own for it (ie: CAPS meaning screaming/anger) [**Step 3**] I also think it's cool how you mentioned that humans attention spans are decreased and the time for long speeches is long gone. [**Step 2**] I feel that you've hinted at the fact that today's world is so much more informal than it ever has been. Between giving up long

speeches and coming up with new language ‘guidelines’ online it shows that we are constantly changing. [**Step 3**]

This aggregation of knowledge in student dialogue threads, I believe, to be very common. One student discusses a topic idea; another student may summarize and offer an example—sometimes from the individual experience of the student and sometimes from the larger community. These steps of the learning process, I also believe, are apparent in some of the first observations made by a young child; these steps occur naturally and we, as facilitators of collaborative learning, need to create a learning environment most conducive for this student dialogue and exchange of ideas.

Toward the middle of the semester I began a unit on history and part of that unit in Atwan’s text covered movies based on historical events. The large discussion board forum prompt I posted for my students was both expansive (covered a broad range of possible movies to discuss) as well as open-ended (there was no right answer to the question):

Atwan asks ‘[t]o what extent is the history we see, hear, know, or read objective and reliable? And to what extent is it biased and fabricated?’ (244). Do you think that moviemakers should continue to make movies that ‘supposedly’ depict historical events. Is one director’s idea of the events surrounding the *Titanic* necessarily incorrect if the director focuses just on a love story? Are these personal stories just fodder for the capitalistic grist mill or are they just as viable and ‘real’ as what history books depict? Should we consider more personal stories in our ‘school book histories’? Why or why not?

The question posed elicited an interesting discussion from the students, simply because there were so many differing opinions. These differing opinions, freely shared in a relaxed and comfortable forum environment allowed for student knowledge making to occur. Indeed, on the very first post on the forum, students are already moving through **Steps 1 and 2** and positing a great deal of examples for **Step 3**. Sharon was the first to post on this forum.

#### **Sharon’s dialogue thread.**

I definitely think that Mark Carnes and others like him are way off base

for criticizing the movie makers for their lack of accuracy or non factual additions. **[Step 1 and 2]** Movie makers are not trying to make a documentary; they are trying to create a Blockbuster hit. They are going to base the movie around what the popular audience wants to see and that is big stars and love scenes. I also think it is unfair to criticize directors like James Cameron for his work on Titanic when it was historically correct except for the main characters. This in my opinion is good in a way. It is respectful to those who died, because it is not just about one person that was actually on the ship, it is just a fictional relationship with fictional characters. I think it would have been much worse if he had tried to make the movie about an actual person's account of what happened. **[Step 2]** That would leave him NO artistic creativity. Then he wouldn't really be directing it the person whose story it is would have. **[Step 3]** I also totally agree with whoever said that these movies aren't supposed to be totally accurate, they are what makes people want more information about the topic. This is totally true in my opinion. I am one of those people that see a movie about a certain topic and then want to find out more! **[Step 2]** For example the movie DICK starring Kristen Dunst (from movies like Little Women, Bring it On, and Spiderman,) and Michelle Williams (Jen on Dawson's Creek,) both girls are teen stars. The movie is about Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandal, I am not sure how accurate the movie actually was but it made me want to learn more about the Watergate scandal and what happened in real life. **[very close to Step 3 here]**

As I said, Sharon was the first student to post on this forum and as I have pointed out in the text of the post, Sharon moved quickly into reflecting on the course material, offering her own opinion, and ending it with examples pulled from her own experiences, almost pushing these examples into society's sphere. Current movie fare is for the most part common knowledge and thus her examples, while originating from her own personal experience ring true with the community at large. Five of Sharon's peers replied to Sharon's original post; the first two replies merely echoed Sharon's ideas and opinions

and so would be considered **Step 2**'s. Yet even these summaries of Sharon's original approach contributed to the dialogue thread as each student offered an elaboration of the original text for the students who follow to read. Elizabeth was the third person to reply to Sharon's post and although she echoed Sharon's opinion for most of her reply (**Step 2**), she did move beyond that to **Step 3** when she encapsulated the kernel of Sharon's post and opened a new door for the dialogue.

Wow you actually liked Dick? Crazy maybe I was just at a weird point in my life were I didn't understand it. [Notice that Elizabeth disagrees with Sharon here but contributes this differing opinion to her own ignorance. **Step 2**] I do agree with you that these kinds of movies make me more interested in the topic. While I knew some facts about Titanic before the movie such as the ship sunk but the movie made me want to know much more about it. The point that movie producers are there to make blockbuster films not documentaries is excellent. If we wanted to watch a documentary then we would. Since we don't we go to the movies. [**Step 2**] They don't spend millions sometimes billions of dollars on making a movie to get it to flop in the theater. They make them to please the audience and in the case of Titanic a love story sold the movie. [**Step 3**]

Holly, the fourth peer to respond to Sharon's post began by disagreeing with Sharon. In her first four sentences, she reiterated Sharon's points (**Step 2**), but in her last three sentences she offered a reason, an example of why she disagreed—pushing the point back to the interview in the text which was a reflection of society today.

As much as I tried, I do have to disagree with your opinion. I do think that keeping fiction and facts separate are the key to making a historical movie. Yes the director is allowed several liberties to create a story to run alongside of the historical event, some movies make it more about the side story than the event. I noticed this to be the case in Titanic and in Pearl Harbor. [**Step 2**] Because they were more about the side story, they did not influence me to learn more about the event, because in my head I wasn't seeing the event of the ship sinking or the bombing of Pearl Harbor; I was seeing just another fictional movie. So I do not think that Carnes

was wrong in probing Stone about the inaccuracies of the movie. [Step 3]

David, the last peer to reply to Sharon's post reiterated some of what each of the peers had written (Step 2), but added his own hypothetical example of how these points of discussion related to the larger society (Step 3).

I really liked your comments here, especially the one at the end. If people see something that sparks an interest, whether it be a movie, T.V. show, magazine article, what ever, they will probably want to learn more about it. [Step 2] To me, this adds to the value of a historical movie, even if it isn't one-hundred percent true. Some fifteen year old kid may see Russell Crowe being a bad-ass in Gladiator, and he may want to learn a little more about gladiators in general. I think if used properly, movies are a huge way to influence kids and adults alike, to learn about things they may really enjoy, but just never have taken the time to go and read about. People love movies, and movies are good for people, especially when it sparks an interest. [Step 3]

All of the students posting on this thread moved quickly past step 1 into step 2, simply because Sharon's first post began with the critiquing of the reading assignment. She didn't summarize Carnes essay; she jumped right in with her own opinion of it.

Maura pulled from the assigned readings in the text as well as her peers' dialogues on this discussion board to compose her post. She reiterated most of what she had read from both sources and then broadened the topic to include what appeared to be her reason why people might rely on only the movie version of an historical event. Most of her post was walking through Step 2, leaving the last three sentences for Step 3:

After reading the two articles I realized that thought movies do impact a viewers perception of history it isn't a director's responsibility to portray history accurately. If a movie go-er wants to know more about a specific historical even they should not rely on a Hollywood blockbuster. Instead they should go to the library and check out an educational film, since they do exist and watch that instead. We do not automatically assume that there are robots that do human work or that aliens have taken over people's minds and are living within our society because we see that in a movie.

Why should directors keep exactly with history without adding some spice? I believe that people should educate themselves on a topic before they jump to a conclusion. [Step 2] Unfortunately, much of today's society is too lazy to do so therefore relying on movies such as Titanic or JFK for the "truth." Overall, I feel that these movies provide information but not necessarily the truth. It may give someone the incentive to discover new information about the event and educate themselves.[Step 3]

The first student to reply never moved past **Step 2**; she merely summarized all of the points Maura had made in her post. This summary could have benefited the student dialogue more if Kelly, the first responder, would have at the very minimum, offered a specific example from her own experience or from the larger community:

I liked your response because parts of it were very similar to how I feel about movies as well. When someone goes to the movie theatre, they go because they want to be entertained by a blockbuster hit, as you said, few are gullible enough to think what they're watching is the truth. I agree when you stated that it is not the director's responsibility to portray history accurately, they just take what they want and embellish on it in order to do their job, which is to make good movies. Watching movies is more a form of entertainment than a form of education, and you're right, if people want to be educated there are plenty of libraries around so they can do so. I also stated in my response, like you did, that some films, while not being completely factual, can give others incentive to learn the facts about the movie. [Step 2]

The next student built on Maura's post by setting up a relationship between the laziness of society and how sex sells (**Step 2**). The only way our lazy society would acquiesce to watching a two hour movie was if there were some sex in it—or in this case, a love story. Elizabeth finished her response by criticizing the critics, a definite move from classroom dialogue to the larger community fare (**Step 3**).

Excellent point. Society is lazy. The point I think people need to realize is as cliché as it sounds sex sells. [Step 2] So in order to pass across the point of an event or someone's life the producers sometimes need to add a

little sex or at least a love story in it to sell the flick. The movies are there to get the big theme out about the event not to be fine detailed on the events. Critics who seem to complain need to get this through their head.

### [Step 3]

Notice Elizabeth's use of inclusionary language at the beginning of this post: "Excellent point." Elizabeth identified with Maura's opinion and championed her cause by criticizing those who would oppose them.

To gather evidence of students making knowledge, of students moving to step 3's on the discussion board forum, I chose three forums to analyze: "Nontextual Communication," (second week forum), "Historical Movies," a forum students posted and replied on during the fifth week of the course, and "Blurring Media Lines," a forum for student exchange assigned in the tenth week of the course. Out of the ten dialogue threads on the "Nontextual Communication" forum, I found fourteen **Step 3**'s. There were thirty-three **Step 3**'s out of fifteen dialogue threads on the "Historical Movies" forum and twenty-seven **Step 3**'s out of twelve dialogue threads on the "Blurring Media Lines" forum.

### **Third Research Parcel: Instructor Survey Results**

The student learning process occurs when students dialogue topics that are open-ended. Sometimes called dialogic bids, open questions, or discussion prompts, these topics allow for multiple perspectives and exchange of opinions. As Palloff and Pratt and many scholars who have researched technology and teaching believe the

use of communications technologies, especially in distance and open education, is most useful in engendering social interactions in learning. Experience has shown that the usage of communication technologies, which mirror real life social interactions, are most preferred and indeed most successful. (Jegade )

Indeed, the Bb forums, large and small do serve as public and private forums for student interaction. Often, though, instructors who use Bb forums do not take advantage of this benefit. Results from a small survey of first year writing instructors who use Bb



software revealed that less than 30% of time spent on the forums was utilized for student dialogue. Instead, instructors polled used the Bb forums more for reading responses. At least 50% of discussion board forums were allocated to individual students responding to various course readings. Journaling, another individual student activity, comprised thirty percent of the discussion board forum use, leaving a mere ten percent of discussion board use for peer review of working drafts. And finally, the one “engendering social interaction,” (Jegade) the one opportunity for students to dialogue and make knowledge—to move to the transformative stage of learning—comprised only fifteen percent of the Bb use for students in first year writing courses.

### **Creating the Dissertation Map: Results of the Research Parcels**

Even though I still have case studies to present, I believe that “communal health” does impact student dialogue. This in turn has an affect on the student’s desire and ability to move to Palloff and Pratt’s third loop of learning. The tone of communication, the emergent community and interpretant’s language within the community (Fleckenstein) plays a role in the student comfort level which in turn invites a more congenial attitude toward the course work. Transformative learning increased as the semester progressed in each of the courses. This increase of transformative learning unfolds, I believe, because of an increase in emergent community: the students, comfortable with the course environment and its software gather to share ideas. This comfort level may be due to the collaborative pedagogical approach employed in the student-centered course or the need to ban together against the exclusionary, almost caustic, tone of the instructor in the teacher-centered course.

Quantifying the number of Step 3’s found in the three forums analyzed for each course, I found the student-centered course revealed more transformative learning than the teacher-centered:

Teacher centered	Student Centered
10 dialogue threads—5 Step 3’s	10 dialogue threads—14 Step 3’s
10 dialogue threads—12 Step 3’s	15 dialogue threads—33 Step 3’s
12 dialogue threads—17 Step 3’s	12 dialogue threads—27 Step 3’s

If this quantitative data has proven anything, it has proven that an online course community can and will function like any other social community, coming together for the good of all who inhabit it. I do not, believe, however, that any online course taught by a hostile instructor would cause a community to band together. I am theorizing, here, about one such community—not promoting a theory about all such communities. If it weren't for Cathy, a student in C. L.'s course, an inclusionary community might not have emerged.

Teaching online shares similarities with teaching f2f: context-based pedagogical strategies reflect the natural dynamics of students learning. This fluid event requires a directive as well as a reactive approach. The online instructor attempts to set up a course site that is conducive to collaboration and transformative learning, but the instructor must be responsive to evidence of exclusionary language or any element that threatens the “communal health.” Even if both of these pedagogical strategies are employed, learning is still context-based and ethnography still reveals the odd happenstance of students dialoguing in spite of an exclusionary hostile presence. Both online communities show evidence of transformative learning through student-dialogue; however, the student-centered community reflects more transformative learning. This result could very well have been because of the many open-ended discussion prompts given in this course. These open ended prompts are part of Palloff and Pratt's suggestive syllabus for the collaborative learning. The group project, however, was another pedagogical strategy purported by Palloff and Pratt. The group project in my online course backfired; many of the students came to distrust their fellow community members because of the negative experiences they had with their group members. Again, following set guidelines to set up the “perfect” instructional online community falls short—simply because part of creating learning environments for students is a reactive, context-based ongoing activity.

Not all of the results of the qualitative and quantitative data focus on the ambiguity, though. “Communal health” (Fleckenstein) serves to facilitate student dialogue; creating a healthy virtual community is a preliminary benchmark for transformative student learning in the online classroom. And this communal health emerges because of the collaborative instructor or in spite of the hostile instructor—if the students work together.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **MARKING BOUNDARIES WITHIN NARRATIVE PARCELS: CARVING OUT THE CASE STUDIES**

Mary Sue MacNealy defines case study as “a carefully designed project to systematically collect information about an event, situation, or small group of persons or objects for the purpose of exploring, describing, and/or explaining aspects not previously known or considered” (197). Research tools used for case studies consist of “the interview” and “archival information” (202). Since my ethnographic study observed online student participants, I conducted online interviews and perused the archived online course sites on Blackboard for discussions and written artifacts.

I chose three of the five case study students selected from each online course at the beginning of the semester to observe and write about for my dissertation. For each of the case studies in C. L.’s course, the first questionnaire (Appendix A), the end interview (Appendix D), and all of the archived material on the Bb site served as material for the three case study narratives. For the three case studies chosen from my student-centered course, I gathered data from three questionnaires—Appendices A, B, and C—as well as data from the end interview (Appendix D) and archival material of the course site. Since student reflection of course work and activities was an integral part of the student-centered pedagogy, the second and third questionnaires were not given to the teacher-centered group of students.

#### **Teacher-Centered Course Case Studies**

##### **Cathy**

Cathy, a very conscientious and agreeable online student, the type of student who would always be smiling and prepared in a f2f course, posted her work first on almost every discussion board. If she wasn’t the first to post, she was the second to post and that was on thirteen journal forums as well as fifteen large discussion board forums. Cathy’s posts reflected intellectual introspection and placed the bar quite high for the rest of her online classmates. An online instructor’s dream student, Cathy modeled proficient

student work as well as the perfect collaborative attitude—always ready to offer helpful suggestions to her peers and never missed thanking her peers for their input on her own work.

Cathy, an “undecided major” wrote that she was thinking about nursing as well as elementary education for a major. She took A.P. English both her junior and senior years in high school, giving her quite a bit of experience in research papers, essays and literary analysis. She had never participated in a group project, but enjoyed peer review of her writing. She writes that she is comfortable composing at the computer and feels there is always room for improvement in her writing. As a community member of C. L.’s class, she participated in and worked hard at all of the activities assigned. After reading her many posts online, I would have to say that she was the most “vocal” as well as “humble” student in C. L.’s class, two qualities which only benefited the rest of the writing community.

The interview with Cathy at the end of the semester reflected a more muted enthusiasm in Cathy than shown at the beginning of the course. When asked if she felt the teacher/student relationship helped or hindered her learning process in this course, she sidestepped answering the interview question, choosing instead to focus on how available to her students C. L. had been:

The best part about the teacher was that she was more than willing to meet with and/or help the students in anyway she could. She really did try to interact. The positive with an online class is that it is all done on a forum, so there is a full record of everything that was done through out the semester. I think that it was important that she interact with the students because the communication was limited because it was restricted to text. She tried to make up for this as much as possible.

Cathy seemed to dance around the question, almost coming to the defense of C. L., almost as if she sensed that most of the students did not feel their learning process was enhanced by the teacher/student relationship. Yet, she readily answered the next question that asked about the student/student relationship in the course and whether it helped or hindered her learning process.

The relationship with the students was amazing. We were really able to connect and interact. No one was able to make any judgments on anyone by appearance, so it forced us to reach out and interact. We had to learn about each other strictly from the text and work. It is actually amazing how much I got to know these people. I think it went much more in depth than any other class. The peer review was great. Everyone has their own ideas to bring to the table and we all benefited from that diversity.

Again, in response to the third question—would the relationship between student and student or teacher and student been a more positive one in a f2f course—Cathy brought up the “tone of communication” as a vital catalyst in opening student to student dialogue as well as teacher to student dialogue in an online course. After Cathy confessed that she was not prepared for the amount of work asked of her in this online course, she moved on to a reason why the workload might have seemed greater than if she had taken a f2f:

I think that the main problem with an online class is that it complicates communication. Because everything is through text, often it is easy to misunderstand the tone of communication. [Here Cathy is ‘speaking for more than just herself; it is clear that she has become emotionally as well as academically vested in this online writing community.] Many of my peers e-mailed me asking for help because they felt like they had no hope for revision. Many of the students wanted to get out of the class. I did not mind it that much, but it was difficult for me. I think any student taking this class should be prepared. To me, college level English writing classes should be subjective. I think that writing is a very personal thing and each student has a personal style (that should be developed at this point). I think that instead of being excessively critical, the teacher should offer suggestions and grade on a basis of effort and improvement. [Clearly Cathy senses the injustice she felt her peers endured but softens this critique as she generalizes the term of instructor instead of naming C. L..] This was the hardest class I have ever taken. I think often what was happening was that because the class is not face to face, it was easy to

have miscommunication. Sometime it felt like the teacher was being harder than she meant to be. [She offers another rationalization for what she sees as C. L.'s lack of instructor to student communication.] Writing is a very personal thing and sometimes if a teacher gives a response to a student that tears up their writing, it can be internalized personally which causes more emotion and frustration. That can interfere with the learning process and people then want to give up. Often, the assignments were not clear. Language and communication is not merely words on a page. It is amazing how much body language and tone conveys a message. I think the limit of an online class is that communication is limited and not 3-D. Basically, a student should be prepared and able to work independently and identify assignments sufficiently.

At the end of this response, Cathy once again drew critical judgment away from her instructor and placed the fault on the “miscommunication of tone” in an online course. Obviously Cathy understands how the learning process works as well as when it is working. She seemed to bear the brunt of many of the students’ complaints; they would e-mail her for revision ideas and not e-mail their instructor. If Cathy had not been one of the first students to post on each discussion board, had not demonstrated that she could handle the work and had not also demonstrated that she wanted peer feedback and was pleased when she received it, the students would not have seen her as someone they could turn to for advice. Ironically, Cathy modeled the “perfect” collaborative student in a very teacher-centered, if not teacher-hostile, online community.

Perhaps it was just because of this teacher hostility that the students connected to one another so well. When asked for an activity in the online course which proved beneficial, Cathy replied that “the peer response [was] by far the most helpful.” She goes on to explain why:

In the same way that an online course makes it more difficult, it also adds to the learning experience. [Here Palloff and Pratt would identify the ‘disorienting dilemma’ needed for students to reflect on their learning process; Cathy seems to be doing just that in this passage.] When you are not meeting in person, all of the work is based on your papers and

performance. No one can see any of the people in the class. That forces people to learn people's personalities and abilities instead of relying on an appearance. I think that that is something that is a good lesson for anyone. It forces people to interact with people and get to know people. The peer response and groups made the community tight. Ironically, I have gotten the closest with this class than any other class I have taken. [Her statement here proves at least part of Palloff and Pratt's theory; Cathy isn't, however, working in a student-centered pedagogical course—or is she? Have the students created their own community in direct opposition to the hostile presence of their instructor? This is indeed an interesting phenomenon.] I think that most of us came in with an open mind and we have benefited from that. I met many friends in this class. I think that is interesting.

To say the very least, this phenomenon “is interesting.” I would say that only an ethnographic study would reveal such a phenomenon, and it would be difficult to replicate such a study. If Cathy were not part of the community, if there was not a student who was as collaborative and intelligent ready to give more time of herself for her fellow students, this collaborative community could not have evolved. And if the instructor were not as hostile to students and if the students were not ready to turn to other students for help, this would not have occurred. Perhaps this was why in many of the discussion board forums, students addressed Cathy in an opening salutation when they replied to her post. They wanted to give her credit for helping them understand what needed to be done and how to do it. Perhaps they also wanted their instructor to know that they didn't feel the same towards her. Again, the context of this ethnographic study presents an intriguing phenomenon of online learning.

Cathy's last response on the final interview didn't really discuss the least beneficial activity in the course; it discussed the most beneficial which seems in keeping with her optimistic personality:

The class was stressful, but I think that I did learn a lot from it. What I learned however, was not really in the field of improving my writing. Frankly, I think that my writing has been constant for a while now. What

this class improved was my ability to expand my ideas. [Here Cathy might just as well have said improve my ability to think on screen. Much like Stroupe's compositional voice, Cathy has begun to experiment with thinking through her keystrokes. (Asimov)] For some reason, the information in this class really clicked with me. I am not sure if this is because it pertained to my other areas of study. I am a double major in Philosophy and Psychology. [Cathy has changed her 'undecided major' of Elementary Education since the beginning of the semester.] The topics we were asked to write about were very convertible to philosophical topics, and the interactions in a forum that is different really showed me people's personality. I really got a sense of the other students. [What she doesn't say here is that she got a sense of the other students' thinking processes and learning processes as well. She remarks on the affect the harsh tone of the instructor had on the student learning process earlier in this interview.] The worst thing about the class is that it required a lot of work and often was very frustrating. I thought the teacher may have been a little hard at times. I am not saying students should be spoon fed, but I think she could be a little lighter. The only negative was that communication was limited.

Here Cathy brings up, yet again, the "communication" problem, that it was limited; however, there are many researchers in the online pedagogical field who would disagree. Many would say that students have more access to the instructor since the student may send an e-mail 24/7.

Honestly, Cathy provided more information, more intellectual reflection than any of the other students participating in this study, so to compare other student interviews to hers seems a bit unfair. Theodore, another student in C. L.'s teacher-centered classroom, also granted an interview at the end of the semester. His case study is almost in direct opposition to Cathy's and his responses parallel this opposition as well.



## Theodore

Theodore spent the last two years in England and confessed that he had not taken an English course in those two years because in England “you can choose your subjects for the last two years.” He is a business major and has composed at the computer since he got his laptop two years ago. He took the online English course for the same reason he enjoys using the computer to write—because “it’s faster and easier.” He had never been asked to work collaboratively on projects with his classmates but feels that “2 heads are better than one,” so he seemed open to this activity. C. L. asked her students to write a short introduction on one of the forums of the discussion board. Theodore seemed optimistic and happy to be part of the online group in his introduction when he told his peers that he was from England and now on the FSU swim team. He stated that the team was a “lot of work but fun!” In the first week of the semester, C. L. asked students to sign the consent form for my study; Theodore was one of the first to post. C. L. publicly reprimanded him when he posted incorrectly: “Please do this again--properly--and please read assignments carefully.” C. L. also asked for a questionnaire to be completed and posted to the large discussion board. Again, Theodore was the first to post and again C. L. publicly reprimanded him, telling him what to do to fix the error and to “please read assignments carefully.” Theodore, though, was not the first to post on the next assigned activity for the large discussion board. He posted after half of the class had posted, but he was still publicly reprimanded: “Besides being EXTREMELY late, this does not follow the assignment. You were asked to save the document as your last name and the word policy. Please do it over, by Tuesday, or you will be dropped.” Her instructions seemed quite caustic here, and my guess was that Theodore may be posting a bit late because he had been at a swim meet. I could be wrong, but he had already announced that he was on the swim team, he had shown that he wanted to accomplish the work in the class by posting first on the first three posting activities, so her tone here seemed almost personally driven.

Theodore’s answers to the end-of-semester interview questions, brief and to the point, certainly did not reflect the same optimistic zeal that his questionnaire responses from the beginning of the semester nor his introduction to his fellow students did. When asked if the teacher/student relationship in this online course helped or hindered his

learning process, Theodore replied in three sentences: “I do not think my relationship helped me at all. I did not have a very good relationship with my teacher and she did not really help me at all. My one problem was MLA and she never really said what I was doing wrong.” His response, even more brief, when asked if the student/student relationship in this course benefited him, came in two sentences: “I think it [student/student relationship] definitely helped me and without them I would not have done very well. They reviewed my essays and helped me in knowing what to do.” Theodore’s response to the next question, would these student/student or teacher/student relationships have benefited had the course been f2f, only lasted for one sentence: “Feedback would have been better, and knowing what to do would have been better.” It is the end of the semester and students, particularly students who are athletes and have missed a great deal of work, are busy, so his curt answers might be due to time constraints. Yet, could his disgust for his current English instructor be something that carried over to any English instructor, even the one who was conducting the survey?

The last of the three chosen case studies from C. L.’s course is a student who is also a business major and a self-proclaimed, “computer nerd.” Well-practiced in computer and Blackboard use, this new technology did not present a “disorienting dilemma,” yet Gail came away with some of the same conclusions as Cathy.

### **Gail**

Answers to the beginning of the semester questionnaire also revealed that Gail composes at the computer, has been since junior year in high school, appreciates writing with the computer because of the proofreading software and took the online course because it “was more convenient” with her 16 credit hour load. Gail does not enjoy working collaboratively “because I find most of the time I end up doing the bulk of the work,” and that she is “better at the mechanics of a paper than I tend to be with the content. I lack creativity and my vocabulary is pathetic.” Her introduction to her peers stated that she is from Clearwater FL, doesn’t like to wake up early or attend lectures, enjoyed the online business course she took last semester and that is why she is in this online course. She did acquiesce to some scholarly activity when she ended her introduction with “I hope to improve my writing skills and techniques throughout the course of this class.”

Gail, much like one of those f2f students who takes a seat in the least obtrusive place in the classroom, only speaks when spoken to and would rather not participate in small groups, posted toward the middle on each of the forums, sometimes even toward the end of the forum. She seemed like she wanted to keep “off the radar screen,” so she did what she needed to do to get by in the course. The eighth week of the course, she posted to the “Ads Analyzed” forum and got the first public reply from C. L. on this forum:

Gail, I think that your first paragraph is kind of a bunch of blanket statements--which makes them kind of meaningless because they don't get us anywhere. [C. L. chooses to criticize Gail before she gives her an appreciative nod for discussing color and words that get the audience's attention.] BUT, I think you're really getting at something important in the analysis of the actual ads. You're talking about color and words that get attention. I guess I'd like to see how you think that applied to the Constantine ad. Though we can't see the exact one Jennifer saw, I know I've seen them online. So what I'd really like to know is, have you seen it? What about it applies to the concepts of using color and specific words to get attention? You're really getting at what analysis does--you stopped just short of making it whole, though. [C. L. invites Gail to extend her analysis.]

Gail's response seemed guarded—considering C. L. has just given her praise for her points: “C. L., I actually have not seen the Keanu Reeves ad. Or maybe I did and did not pay attention to it, I am not the biggest movie fan. Should I edit it so I carry through about the color scheme to all three (and analyze someone beside Jennifer)? Gail.” C. L. chided Gail again in her next reply: “Well, you should consider not analyzing an ad you haven't seen in a way that requires seeing it--I think it would be easy to find if you do want to analyze it. It doesn't require you to be a movie fan, either. I'm not a drug fan, but I can analyze a drug ad, right?” C. L. seemed to send a mixed message in both of these posts—even her tone changed from scolding to coaching in each of the replies.

Perhaps Gail's apprehension was caused by the “threatening e-mails” she received from C. L.. Gail wrote about these e-mails when she responded to the first question on

the online interview. When asked if the teacher/student relationship helped or hindered her learning process, Gail replied that “the relationship with my teacher hindered my learning process.” Gail goes on to talk about the “[n]umerous threatening e-mails [that] had been sent throughout the course of the semester which was extremely discouraging. It was also harder to understand exactly how she [C. L.] meant things because there was no direct verbal communication.” I believe that Gail was referring to f2f communication in this last statement. And if C. L.’s e-mails were as confusing in tone as her public replies of Gail’s work, there is no doubt as to why Gail felt they were “threatening.”

Gail did sound optimistic about the course activities when she discussed how the student/student relationship hindered or helped her learning process:

I think my relationship with other students was helped in this learning process. We were all able to respond to each others writings without having to worry about being judged since we did not meet face to face. There were no biases whatsoever and instead of just talking to a few people we were able to interact with everyone.

Gail was not the first student in C. L.’s course to sing the praises of the peer review in this online course. Many felt that this review was beneficial simply because people had no preconceived notion about what the writing would be like from the physical appearance of the peer, nor were they as worried about being “brutally honest” in their comments. Gail might have felt that the f2f classroom would have afforded her more of an opportunity to receive “help in explanations for the course because it would have been easier to ask questions.” But, weighing in on the side of peer response as the most beneficial course activity, Gail echoed many of her peers’ preferences for student dialogue.

## **Student-Centered Course Case Studies**

### **Rachel**

An elementary education major, Rachel joined our online course after the first week of the semester, so she had some catching up to do. As she was late coming in to

the course, she posted late to the first few discussion boards. But even after she caught up with the work, she continued to be almost the last to post. I believe this reflected her insecurity in using the Bb forum to express her thoughts. She waited for others to post and read what they had to say before she would chime in. This seemed a bit peculiar for a student who took AP classes both junior and senior years of high school and composed at the computer since she was in elementary school. She spoke about her hesitancy to jump into the Bb forums on her midterm questionnaire:

Since this class is my first online class, it took a little bit of time adjusting to the fact that all of the class information was online. I had to figure things out for myself, and search for the information without help. I have adjusted well, and actually enjoyed the challenge of keeping up with the class.

Acknowledging her newly acquired technological skills in her next answer on the questionnaire, Rachel wrote:

I have learned a lot more about participating in discussion boards and have used this feature in other (social) aspects of my life. I have really enjoyed ‘meeting’ the people online, because it gives you a chance to read people’s writing and opinions without bias. It’s like a teacher grading papers, but covering the names at the top of the page.

As an elementary education major, Rachel seemed well-suited for her profession. She seemed to be ready for any new challenge and looked for ways to translate her activities as a student to those of a teacher: Rachel took charge of her group project and cheered her members on with positive feedback and critical coaching. Rachel made use of inclusionary language in all of her posts and replies and believed the virtual classroom helped to avoid conflict between group members:

I definitely think there would have been more opportunity for conflict in a face-to-face classroom as opposed to an online class. Online, there is really no room for attitudes or defensiveness. If there is a disagreement, the group is forced to ‘verbally’ come to an understanding.

Rachel did mention that “contact[ing] the group members outside of Bb” might have helped the group project even more. Here she seemed to want to “carefully craft common ground” (Fleckenstein) with her group members.

When asked in her final interview if she felt the teacher/student relationship helped or hindered her learning process, Rachel replied that it did both: “It helped in that I wasn’t embarrassed to ask questions, but the fact that I didn’t see the teacher on a regular basis hindered my performance.” Rachel did, in fact, e-mail me often with questions—none of them for her to be embarrassed about. Perhaps Rachel didn’t realize that e-mailing and conferencing with the online instructor takes the place of the f2f contact in a traditional classroom. Yet, she didn’t seem to mind not sharing the same physical space when she peer reviewed their essays. When asked in the final interview if the student/student relationship helped or hindered her learning process, she replied, “I feel as though the student/student relationship was helped because you could let out your concerns and opinions during the peer revision without worrying about seeing the person f2f.”

### **Frances**

Like Rachel, Frances also expressed a need for more teacher-guidance, also lived on campus, also e-mailed me frequently, and was also asked to come see me in a f2f conference if more clarification was necessary. Frances, though, took that extra step to help her in her learning process. She was the only one of my online students who visited me f2f for conferences. She wanted and welcomed help in editing her projects—specifically with mechanical errors.

Frances, a communications major wanting to someday become a broadcaster, came into the class enjoying writing—it “relaxes” her—and thought her writing skills just like her computer literacy skills were above average. After her first project, she quickly realized she needed help and she sought it out. Since this is a student centered course, I would have much preferred her asking her peers for help, but Frances’s weakness demanded the expertise and time that only I had. It didn’t surprise me that Frances wanted to meet f2f to look over her writing: she demonstrated her conscientious work ethic by posting first or second on all of the discussion board forums, by replying to her peers promptly and politely and by taking charge of her group project. What surprised

me was that any student who chose to take an online course would be willing to come in for f2f conferences.

Frances's group project work turned out to be exactly that—a lot of work that she and only one of the other four members would shoulder. I believe that this group project, assigned half way through the semester, put a negative spin on student/student relationships for Frances—as it seemed to have done for many of the students in my class. The group project essentially asked the students to choose an event that happened at least one decade ago and revisit and revise it for a history book lesson. The students were to collaboratively write the introduction to the project that consisted of facts concerning the event as they were written in history books. Then each student took a different perspective on the event and showcased it from a view that might not be in the history book. At the end, the students were to collaboratively write a conclusion that somehow spoke to the new information gleaned and written in this project and how this new information added or detracted from the history book version. The group project, an activity which Palloff and Pratt believed would solidify student/student relationships and is a must in a student-centered course, served to create distrust among at least half of my online students toward their peers.

Even Frances, who wrote in her first questionnaire, “[m]y senior year [English] teacher was completely against group projects, so that wasn’t much fun,” completely changed her mind by the end of the semester when she wrote in her final interview that “I did not have a good experience with the collaborative project so I would have changed a lot.” Here Frances went on to explain how she would change her behavior as a group member, not how the assigned project might be improved. Her comments in her response reflected her disappointment—not only with herself, but also with her peers:

I would have been more forceful and not have been so polite. I felt bad asking for more help, even though I was doing more work than I should have been doing already. Also, I would have made sure we were working ahead, because every student in my group went away and didn’t contact us or work while they were gone.

Frances began the project as a willing collaborator and ended it as a disgusted, disillusioned individual—hardly demonstrating the learning process activity that Palloff

and Pratt envisioned and ironically lamenting the fact that she used inclusionary language with her group members (Fleckenstein). When the two students, who were actually working in the four-member group, came to the point of exasperation, they e-mailed me for help. I scheduled a f2f group conference and only two of the four came. Perhaps this was why, by the end of the semester, that Frances believed her teacher/student relationship benefited her learning process when her student/student relationship did not:

The teacher/student relationship in this online English class helped my learning process a lot. I was challenged, and at one point in this course I was struggling to keep an average grade. I went to the teacher and I was given a reality check, because I needed a lot of help with my writing skills. Ms. Ashman, was more than willing to help with my papers, I learned many things in this class, just from my teacher. I was able to e-mail her whenever I needed to and she was always able to help with an e-mail and I know if I needed more she would have asked me to meet with her if necessary.

In fact when asked on an end of term questionnaire if this online course improved her writing skills, Frances curtly replied, “This course, no. My teacher from this course, yes,” almost separating her instructor from the online course she taught. Ironically, I guess I should feel that the course was a successful student-centered course—if this student did indeed feel like I did not have that much control over it. I guess I didn’t plan, organize and assign projects; I just answered questions and gave grammar tutorials.

Frances, after all of the work she did for the class and the hardships she endured on her group project, still believed this online course benefited her more than a f2f ENC 1102 would have. When asked in her final interview if she would have had a better relationship with her instructor or her peers if this had been a f2f course, she replied:

I can honestly say NO! For some reason I feel that I have formed a better relationship with my teacher than with a f2f class. When taking my first English class my relationship with my teacher was not better than my relationship now and I met with my class 5 times a week. I think I was able to obtain more tips and critiques from my fellow students through the



internet. Maybe I am not seeing them face to face but I feel like I benefited more through this online class than a f2f.

Maybe the “reason” Frances felt that she benefited more from this online course was exactly because she did not see her peers face to face. The tips and critiques she received were directed toward her writing—not toward her physical appearance or because of her physical appearance. Words on the screen don’t wear the latest fashions, don’t often show their age and consequently are more readily and honestly critiqued.

### **Randy**

Randy, a pharmacy major who dives for the FSU team and just started composing at the computer in college, took this online course because of his diving practice and competition schedule and was actually one of Frances’s group members. Randy acknowledged that he “[doesn’t] really feel that [he] is a good writer” when he responded to the first questionnaire. He went on to explain his statement: “My writing doesn’t really flow that good. It usually takes my some time before I can actually figure out what I am going to write and I get stuck a lot.”

Randy posted late to the discussion board forums more than a few times due to his diving competitions and missed out on much of the student dialogue on the group project because he was traveling with the diving team. This, I believe, hindered his learning process a great deal; he wasn’t a strong writer when he entered the course and he wasn’t able to utilize the discussion board forums for help on his writing. Like Frances he set up a f2f conference with me, but all we did during that conference was clarify why he was posting so late and verify his diving team status with a letter from his coach. This was a student, I believe, who should not have been on the diving team or should have had a writing tutor. His writing competency level was not high enough to handle an ENC 1102 course if he had to miss several classes and he certainly was ill-equipped to take it online since he did not have access to the Bb site when he traveled with the swimming team. And in this instance, his travel with the diving team coupled with his writing weaknesses crippled the rest of the group in the group project. When asked if he felt his group project was a success on his final interview, Randy took some responsibility for undermining his group’s success:

I feel that maybe others [other groups] were but not mine. There was probably only about 3 out of the 4 group members actually stayed up with everything through out the whole project. Then everything got all messed up when we had to turn in the final draft and I was out of town at a diving meet for the school and didn't get to help out and then everything just got all confusing on what was going on.

When asked what he learned from this group project, Randy emphatically stated, [n]ot relying on other people. My group was not really keeping up with everything. I am sure that I didn't exactly help do to the fact of me traveling for the school but there were only two people that kept of with everything throughout the whole project.

As one of just four group members, Randy seemed to be pointing a finger at the rest of the group members, yet there was only one group member besides himself who did not keep up with the work. What I found most interesting about Randy's final interview was that the ethnographic researcher was able to interpret Randy's late posts to the group project from an entirely different perspective than his group members. Randy did indeed have a viable excuse—he was participating in a school event—so the reader or the ethnographer places a different set of lens on the group interaction now. This new view of the group highlights the “context-based” research ethnography provided in this instance and justifies the need for teacher-researchers to always theorize—no two online or f2f courses are the same. The individual “interpretants” (Fleckenstein) change the “communal health” (Fleckenstein) of any and all activities daily. Randy displayed more remorse for his inability to help his group when asked how this class will affect his learning in the future:

I think that this class makes people more responsible. Because of the fact that you have to keep up with everything on your own and make sure that you are turning everything in on time. You don't go to class everyday and have a teacher telling you what to do step by step. It is more of a rely on yourself class.

Randy did not, however, take all of the blame for his unsuccessful group project as he suggested that these types of problems might not have occurred if the group activity were a f2f project:

I think that if it were face to face it would have been more sufficient due to the fact that certain members would be forced to put forth some sort of effort towards the project. It would have been more like class work rather than homework and there are those certain people that never do homework.

Randy's reference to "classwork" versus "homework" echoed some earlier questionnaire answers from my online students as well. One student felt that there was more work because everything had to "be written down," since there were no "actual f2f class discussions." Another student mentioned how students would be more responsible toward their group members if they had to see them f2f in the classroom—somehow this physical presence would provide an impetus for the student to do his or her part. I believe this last statement spoke more about seeing the instructor at the front of the room than seeing his/her group members face to face.

Mary Sue Mac Nealy writes in Strategies for Empirical Research in Writing that "[c]ase studies can also be used to help formulate hypotheses and add to the development of theory" (Mac Nealy 199). Indeed placing the microscope on individual students certainly affords the researcher the opportunity to study distinguishing details—small topographical changes in the virtual classroom landscape. Yet these case studies also point to the need to theorize about online or f2f classrooms. Cathy and Frances, from a teacher-centered and a student-centered online course respectively, both took an active role in their own learning process and in the leaning processes of their community members. By the end of the course Cathy defended her instructor's inability to communicate in a respectful tone with her students and praised the peer review work of her fellow community members. Frances, however, praised the relationship with her online instructor and was quite guarded about her feelings toward her peers. An unusual paradox occurred: the student-centered course fostered a closer relationship between the instructor and student, and the teacher-centered course engendered closer relationships

between the students, exactly the opposite of what this ethnographer thought would happen.

Both Theodore and Randy were athletes who competed during the spring semester; both missed postings and submitted late postings because of it. Theodore praised the help he received from the students in his community, but felt his instructor “did not really help me at all,” as he stated in his final interview session. Theodore felt he “would not have done very well” if the community members in his class had not helped him with “peer reviews.” Randy also praised his peers for their help on peer reviews, but felt the group “project hindered it [his learning process].” Both athletes appreciated the critical assessment of their writing by their peers, but only one felt the instructor helped his learning process. Randy wrote in his final interview session that he felt the teacher/student relationship “helped out a lot.” “My teacher was always there to answer my many questioned and was very supportive about me traveling with diving and all. She was there for conference was needed and always responded to my e-mails quickly.” Theodore’s experience in this online course might have been dictated by his teacher-centered instructor or more likely by his hostile instructor; whereas Randy felt he benefited by his student-centered instructor.

Both Frances and Randy felt their relationship with their instructor benefited their learning processes, but the group project poisoned Frances’s trust in her fellow community members. Both Rachel and Frances wanted more instructor feedback but only Frances accepted the f2f conference invitations. All three of these students, Frances, Rachel and Randy, worked in the student-centered online community, yet they each reacted differently to the instructor, and their fellow students.

As an ethnographic instructor, I studied the attitudes and the student behaviors of the students in my online course as well as the students in C. L.’s course. The distinguishing details provided insights into when student dialogue proved most fertile, why transformative learning occurred at that moment and what pedagogical strategies for online courses might help to duplicate these moments in other online courses. Yet these same unique characteristics of each student foil any attempt to generalize or move to Mac Nealy’s “development of theory.” Beyond these three results, the narrative data merely

theorizes, showcases two online course communities taught in the Spring semester at FSU in 2005.

### **The Missing Narratives**

Archiving discussion threads, announcement pages, working drafts, peer responses, final projects and student grades allows the ethnographer to get a full picture of the student as she or he participates in the course and interacts with the instructor. Yet there are missing narratives in this panoramic view—e-mails or the private communication between instructor and student. I, of course, have access to these e-mails for my course, but not for C. L.'s course. The content and tone of e-mails impact a student's comfort level in an online course. I responded to student e-mails quickly and tried to keep my e-mails to students as informal as professionally possible, signing them with "kathy ashman" and perhaps using emoticons on some of them. Gail's comment about C. L.'s "numerous threatening e-mails" was the only reference to this part of her pedagogy that I had. The tone and content of e-mails can build trust between the instructor and the student or undermine the student's confidence. This trust, if created between the instructor and student carries over to the comfort level of the online course and the trust the student may extend toward his or her peers. One student might receive threatening e-mails from her instructor and decide to stop posting or stop discussing on discussion board forums altogether. Another student, however, might receive threatening e-mails and turn toward her peers for guidance and affirmation of acceptance in the community.

Studying individual students in online courses brings a myriad of activities—student/student, teacher/student interactions—into sharper focus for the ethnographer, but this ethnographic photographer also realized that as she focused on one snapshot, on one narrative parcel, the horizon changed, the community changed. By definition ethnographic research is "context-based" (Johanek); in practice, ethnographic research is "phenomenologically based" (Bishop); so on reflection, theorizing results of my ethnographic research is the most I can do and the best I can offer.

## CHAPTER 6

### PINPOINTING PATTERNS IN STUDENT KNOWLEDGE MAPS: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Ethnographic research exposes specific student-to-student and instructor-to-student communications. The online course site archives most of these communications and documents individual student composing processes. Surveying the land formations at ground level in these digital classrooms, I meet conscientious Cathy's and admirable Rachel's, taking note of unique characteristics of each online participant, "listening" to students dialogue with each other and to a certain extent, with their instructors on a day-to-day basis. The tone of these quotidian discussions changes as topics evolve and attitudes react. Capturing these moments, I allow myself to theorize about teacher-centered and student-centered pedagogies, reflecting on Theodore's reaction to C. L.'s numerous reprimands, Gail's guarded response to her instructor after receiving threatening e-mails, and Randy's disappointment as he recalls his unsatisfying group project experience. Details and specific dialogues create engaging narratives; these narratives, however, take on new dimensions if I pull away from surveying the ground formations and move to the aerial photo again.

At this altitude I can compare patterns of communications, contextual narratives, to discover that, even though ethnographic research best captures the small minutia of individual movements and student goals, the archived data from both online course sites reveals topographical similarities. When these many communicative exchanges between student and student or between instructor and student are placed side-by-side, patterns emerge.

In a 2006 *Researching in the Teaching of English* article, Martin Nystrand refers to the analysis of verbal contextual narratives as "event history analysis" (Nystrand 402). In Nystrand's review article, he traces the thirty-year empirical research methods and results of reading comprehension and learning strategies in the K-12 classroom. Although these methods and results reflect research done in f2f classrooms, the qualitative discourse analysis Nystrand discusses—"event history analysis"—is an easy

fit for analyzing archived online discussions. Nystrand believes that “discourse is an event with a history and that [it] is unfolding in time” (404) and it is just this fleeting, context-based quality of discourse that eludes empirical methods of research. Instead Nystrand calls for the study of “dynamic data” through “qualitative discourse analysis, and ethnography” (401). Nystrand’s article points to the relationship between classroom discussion and reading comprehension as he cites the need to analyze communicative exchanges between students and their instructors to look for patterns, and then compares the occurrence of such patterns with increased reading comprehension scores. I am interested here in the type of discourse analysis used, the context-based analysis that documents the steps in the dialogue. These steps run parallel to Palloff and Pratt’s steps in transformative learning and so the research method seems appropriately relevant to my research goals: studying the relationship between online pedagogical strategies and student learning patterns.

Indeed tracing Palloff and Pratt’s transformative learning process pattern through the two online composition courses I studied, I found that students—if given the opportunity to discuss an open-ended topic—will move through these steps of the process. Evidence of the three steps in the transformative learning process abounds in several of each of the online course Bb forums: A total of 34 dialogue threads in the teacher-centered community and 74 dialogue threads in the student-centered community reflect this transformative learning—and these numbers are data results for just three discussion board forums in each course. If this quantifiable data, these similar patterns of learning, has proven anything, it has proven that members of an online course community can and will create knowledge through dialogue and discussion of open-ended topics.

Nystrand’s research gives impetus to the need to assess dialogic patterns noted in specific “epistemic” classroom contexts. He points to the necessity to study the dynamics between students in peer discussion as well as the role the instructor plays in large group discussion. This type of research on verbal exchanges becomes fuller and is made even richer when these exchanges take place in written format—such as those in the online composition classroom. The student participating in the online course discussion is not only dialoguing with her peers, she is practicing the act of putting ideas into written context. Posting on these Bb discussion board forums also affords her the opportunity to

reflect on all of the discussion heretofore. In fact, these written dialogues can only occur in online forums. And this asynchronous discussion design yields space and time for Craig Stroupe's "compositional voice" in written discussion. This online writing, the ability to read another's writing, think about it, write about it, perhaps even come back to reflect on the peer's as well as the student's initial response and then edit, presents another voice in the classroom—not "the instructional voice" of the expert, not "the conversational voice" of the question and response, but "the compositional voice . . . to highlight a discursive possibility [where] students can realize themselves through textual performance" (266). Indeed replicating this "compositional voice" in the f2f classroom would be difficult if not impossible.

"Compositional voice" emerges out of what Palloff and Pratt would call "electronic pedagogy." Arguing for a "paradigm shift" in electronic pedagogy, Palloff and Pratt cite the need to view online teaching strategies in a new light—not to try to adapt f2f strategies to fit the online course:

Electronic pedagogy is not about fancy software packages or simple course conversion. It is about developing the skills involved with community building among a group of learners so as to maximize the benefits and potential that this medium holds in the educational arena. (Palloff and Pratt 18)

My study reflected this paradigm shift in pedagogy by engaging students in asynchronous dialogues and then looking for patterns of learning within the discussions. I adopted many of the strategies espoused by Palloff and Pratt for the student-centered collaborative online class during the course of this semester long research study. Their pedagogy centers around collaborative student projects as well as student reflections of their work on such projects. Students practiced moving through the steps of the learning process, building their own critical sense of analysis as they created a collaborative community of learners. All of this work took place on the course site discussion boards and all of it fed the textual information of the course. The knowledge, then, that the students brought to the site, produced for the projects, reflected upon, and then posted on the discussion boards was student generated. These activities afforded the students the opportunity to make their own knowledge as well as reflect upon the process they used to



make it. This knowledge making, however, this third loop of learning, only occurred if the community worked together—if the members shared a collaborative attitude. This collaborative attitude was in direct proportion to the positive tone of the course community created by the student-centered instructor. Or so Palloff and Pratt believed. To a degree, my research confirmed this, but more importantly, my research demonstrated the desire of the individual students to form a community that worked together—either because of the instructor’s collaborative guidance or in spite of the instructor’s hostile tone. In fact, the most significant of my research questions turned out to be “Does positive communal health contribute to students engaging in Palloff and Pratt’s third loop of learning?”

In most f2f classrooms, the instructor’s attitude toward the course material and toward her students impacts student learning as much as the types of activities and student projects assigned. The f2f instructor is physically present during all large and small group discussions and thus impacts the tone, the community attitude, of the classroom. The online course instructor is only present to the students through the mediating course software; thus the tone or community attitude is created through the course announcements, discussion board replies, public e-mails and possibly private e-mails. Since the instructor does not hold a visible physical presence, it is possible for students to ignore the instructor and her/his attitude. Indeed, none of the participants of the online course are physically present, so the communication exchanges between instructor and student and between student peers create the tone in this digital space. Kristie Fleckenstein refers to this digital community as an “emergent community” and discusses how the inclusionary or exclusionary language of its “interpretants” impact “communal health.” Most instructors would agree that a non-threatening comfortable environment contributes to student learning. The collaborative pedagogical strategies Palloff and Pratt suggest in their text best serve this positive communal health Fleckenstein espouses for online learning spaces.

The archived course site gave me an opportunity to reflect upon each student’s use of inclusionary or exclusionary language, yielding specific instances of language use in different communication exchanges. But once I distanced myself from the specific dialogues to “listen” to the overall tone of the course—the prevailing attitude of the

“emergent community”—my study revealed that positive communal health presided over much of both of the digital courses: students used inclusionary language with one another and most participated in group projects willingly. The student-centered online course did indeed produce transformative learning, as evidenced in the analysis of many student dialogues. Yet, ironically, the teacher-centered online course also produced transformative student learning. I believe these results point to the students’ abilities to create positive communal health in spite of the instructor’s tone. This could well be because in an online course community, every participant contributes to positive communal health: the students as much as, if not more than the instructor, contribute to inclusionary language and collaborative practices. Since posting written or visual communications is the only means of communication, the tone of the communication “speaks” much louder in an online course. And since students create most of the intertext (Eldred) of the course site, their “conversational voice” and “compositional voice” (Stroupe) dominate the archived digital classroom. These research results confirm the need to de-center the instructor’s role in the online course and to provide student-centered collaborative activities, both of which contribute to positive communal health.

In fact the ability to achieve this positive communal health in a collaborative environment may be heightened in the online classroom. Students in a digital class may remain anonymous physically, but in an online composition course, most of their written work is public. The students become what they write, not what they wear, nor how they speak. The emphasis on writing lays bare their weaknesses and their strengths in this medium. They quickly, and perhaps more easily, join the community of other writers striving to accomplish the tasks for the course. This binds them, perhaps in a way that f2f students are not bound to their classmates. The students realize that their reactions to peers’ work serve as a blueprint for the reactions or feedback they receive in turn, and all of the exchanges are black words on a white screen. The text and the attitude of the written exchanges create the students’ personalities. And this opportunity for communication on the cerebral level certainly promotes student learning; the fact that 90% of the participation is written and most of this writing requires cognitive ability maximizes the potential for student learning—if all of this transpires in a positive “emergent community.” Couple the many student dialogues with the student reflections

assigned in the course and the online student not only comes away from the course with new knowledge, but also with how that knowledge was acquired and thus the ability to duplicate the process.

The students learn collaboratively, from dialogues, from peer responses, from reading what other peers have written in response to peers work. The “intertext” (Eldred) of the course site—all that is posted on the site—becomes part of the community and binds the members even more. Still, it is important to remember that this ethnographical study observed just two online courses in one semester. The specific dynamics of the courses could not be replicated, simply because the mix of students in the course would not be the same.

Yet the results of the study allow this researcher the ability to theorize, and eventually to change pedagogical practices once again in the composition classroom. Much of what I have done for this dissertation study has been a new experience for me as a teacher-researcher: Using discourse analysis to trace learning patterns, focusing in on archived instructor announcements and replies to students to study the tone or communal health of the course, and then writing up the ethnographic data for publication was uncharted territory for me. But informally researching my composition classrooms reflect a practice I have been participating in for the last three decades. My pedagogical stance has changed as many times—if not more—than the number of two and four year institutions I have worked at in the span of those decades. All of these changes have taken place after the many conversations with colleagues in my field. Just as students “make knowledge” through their dialogues with peers, I engage in dialogues with journal articles and with fellow writing teachers in an effort to understand my own teaching theories, adopting and adapting new practices from my reading and discussions with other scholars and practitioners in the field.

Indeed, as my dissertation research reflects, new research methods and subsequent assessment tools will need to evolve to maintain efficacy in the digital course community. We as composition instructors need to take a proactive stance in online pedagogy. As Sue Peterson wrote in a 2001 *Computers and Composition* article, composition instructors should embrace the opportunity to research theoretical and pedagogical strategies for the online writing classroom:

If we respond to technology with either uncritical enthusiasm or fear, we are missing the point. More than ever, we need to adopt a critical perspective of technologies influencing and shaping the learning environments we are creating. Because writing is a part of this new technological world, it makes perfect sense for writing teachers to be at the heart of the debate about if, how, and when to use distance-learning technologies in higher education. (Peterson 369)

As if answering Peterson's call, Jane Blakelok and Tracy Jones conducted a survey of online composition courses in 2004, and the results were published in a 2006 *Computers and Composition* article. Blakelok and Jones cite "[r]esponsibility for learning shifting more to the student as one of the pedagogical impacts of online writing courses" (Blakelok and Jones, par. 5). After this year-long survey and writing up the results of it, Blakelok and Jones cite that more research needs to be conducted:

To determine the quality of online courses, further research on assessment is necessary, along with the development of appropriate and effective assessment tools, designed specifically for composition and other writing intensive courses. (Blakelok and Jones, par. 7)

I believe my dissertation research has given even more validity to Peterson's call for proactive research in the field of online writing instruction for the freshmen composition course as well as for any online learning community. If the online course community allows for written student dialogues that result in transformative learning, then effective pedagogical strategies for the online writing course might well reverberate in other postsecondary online classrooms: How does the online instructor impact the online course community? How does the course software impact the students in the course, impact the community of learners? What steps can be taken to create and maintain communal health in an online community? Where, when and what should students discuss online? How does each of these factors impact student learning? What can be taught and what should be learned in an online environment?

My dissertation map brings student knowledge making in the freshmen composition classroom into sharper focus: This ethnographical study allowed me to zero in on individual students as members of the community and to observe student dialogues

among peers; the notes from surveying the two courses, archived on the course site, provided pedagogical insights into the patterns of student learning, allowing me to witness students as cartographers of their own knowledge maps. But the study's blueprints might well be utilized to survey other online postsecondary classrooms.

**APPENDIX A**  
**FIRST STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Ashman

Enc 1102 section 60m 61

First Student Questionnaire

This is the first of three short questionnaires that students will take in this Enc 1102 course. Please give honest responses to the following questions: do remember, there are no right or wrong answers and thank you in advance.

1. What is your major field of study? If undecided, which academic fields are you interested in?
2. What type of English assignments were you assigned in high school? List two or three that you did in your junior or senior year.
3. Do you “write” your English assignments at the computer? If you handwrite your first drafts, when do you switch to the computer keyboard and why do you switch then? Or if you do “write” or compose your papers at the computer, how long have you been doing this?
4. What would you say the biggest advantage of using the computer to write your papers would be?
5. Why did you take a online course instead of a traditional face to face class?
6. Did you work on any collaborative (small group) writing projects in high school? If so, what were they?
7. Do you enjoy working with your peers on projects? Why or why not?
8. How do you feel about your writing skills? Clarify your answer with specifics.
9. How do you feel about your computer skills? Clarify your answer with specifics.
10. Do you think that you will be using a computer in your professional career? If so, what tasks will you be doing at the computer?

**APPENDIX B**  
**MIDTERM STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Ashman

Spring 2005

Midterm Online Student Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions honestly. Do explain your answers with specific details whenever possible.

Note: some of these questions were taken from Palloff and Pratt's *Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace*.

How were you as a learner before you came into this course?

How have you changed?

How do you anticipate this will affect your learning in the future?

Have you learned anything new about technology that you are working with?

Did participation in this group project increase your resources as a researcher in this class and in other classes? Give examples please.

Did you feel that the small group project was a success?

What did you take away from this collaborative project that you might not have experienced doing an individual project?

Were there any conflicts between group members?

How were these resolved?

Did the online technology (group pages) benefit or hinder this collaborative project?

Give specific examples to demonstrate your answer.

Do you believe that there might have been a conflict between group members if this project were conducted in a face-to-face classroom?

What was the hardest part of this project? What was the most enjoyable?

Thank you again for participating in this study.

Kathy Ashman

**APPENDIX C**  
**END OF SEMESTER STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Ashman

Enc 1102

End of Semester Student Questionnaire

This is the first of three short questionnaires that students will take in this Enc 1102 course. Please give honest responses to the following questions: do remember, there are no right or wrong answers and thank you in advance.

1. What is your major field of study? Have you changed your major since the beginning of the semester?
2. Which online Enc 1102 assignment did you enjoy the most and why?
3. Which online Enc 1102 assignment did you enjoy the least and why?
4. What would you say the biggest advantage of using the computer to write your papers would be?
5. Why did you take a online course instead of a traditional face to face class?
6. Did you work on any collaborative (small group) writing projects in high school? If so, what were they?
7. Do you enjoy working with your peers on projects? Why or why not?
8. How do you feel about your writing skills? Clarify your answer with specifics.
9. How do you feel about your computer skills? Clarify your answer with specifics.
10. Do you think that you will be using a computer in your professional career? If so, what tasks will you be doing at the computer?



**APPENDIX D**  
**END OF TERM CASE STUDY QUESTIONS**

Ashman

Enc 1102

End of term Case Study Questions

These are the basic topic questions; they do not encompass all that may be discussed.

Depending on the student's responses, there may be follow up questions.

Did you feel the teacher/student relationship in this online course helped or hindered your learning process? Give specific examples please.

Did you feel the student/student relationship in this online course helped or hindered your learning process? Give specific examples please.

Do you feel that you might have had a better relationship with your teacher or with your fellow students if this would have been a f2f course? Which activities—those involving your peers or those which just involved the teacher—would you have benefited more from if this had been a f2f course?

Give an example of one learning activity that proved to be the most beneficial.

Give an example of one learning activity that proved to be the least beneficial.

Thanks again for participating in this research study.

Kathy ashman

## APPENDIX E

### INSTRUCTOR SURVEY

Fall 2005

Instructor Survey

Rank the following uses of the Bb Large Discussion Board according to how you use it in your freshmen composition classroom. For example, if the Discussion Board is used more for journal entries and some for reading responses, then place a number one in the journal entry slot and a number two in the reading responses slot. Do not place a number by those types of forums you do not use.

\_\_ Posting drafts

\_\_ Students Responding to drafts

\_\_ Journal Entries (personal topics—not taken from the assigned reading)

\_\_ Reading Responses

\_\_ Quiz

\_\_ Student Discussion asking students to respond to “closed questions,” those questions which have a “correct” answer and then asking students to respond to other student responses.

\_\_ Student Discussion asking students to respond to “open questions,” those questions which are open, or have no right answer and then asking students to respond to other student responses.

\_\_ Student Inquiry Forum--students ask questions of other students regarding assignments, topics, or other school related activities.

Give quick examples of the types of student discussion questions (open and/or closed) that are asked.

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Rank the following uses of the Bb Group pages Discussion Board according to how you use it in your freshmen composition classroom. For example, if the Group pages discussion Board is used more for journal entries and some for reading responses, then place a number one in the journal entry slot and a number two in the reading responses slot. Do not place a number by those types of forums you do not use.

\_\_Posting drafts

\_\_Students Responding to drafts

\_\_Journal Entries (personal topics—not taken from the assigned reading)

\_\_Reading Responses

\_\_Quiz

\_\_Student Discussion asking students to respond to “closed questions,” those questions which have a “correct” answer and then asking students to respond to other student responses.

\_\_Student Discussion asking students to respond to “open questions,” those questions which are open, or have no right answer and then asking students to respond to other student responses.

\_\_Student Inquiry Forum--students ask questions of other students regarding assignments, topics, or other school related activities.

Give quick examples of the types of student discussion questions (open and/or closed) that are asked

**APPENDIX F**  
**BB DISCUSSION BOARD POSTING LIST**

<a href="#"><u>Re: possenti</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Possenti, Lauren</u></a>	Tue Jan 25 2005 23:31
<a href="#"><u>Re: possenti</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Donnellan, Kelly</u></a>	Wed Jan 26 2005 14:54
<a href="#"><u>Re: possenti</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Callahan, Maura</u></a>	Wed Jan 26 2005 16:07
<a href="#"><u>Re: possenti</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Haskins, Elizabethberly</u></a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 01:28
<a href="#"><u>Re: possenti</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Green, Holly</u></a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 16:25
<a href="#"><u>Re: possenti</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Woodard, David</u></a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 22:45
<a href="#"><u>Historical Events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Haskins, Elizabethberly</u></a>	Wed Jan 26 2005 12:45
<a href="#"><u>Re: Historical Events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Donnellan, Kelly</u></a>	Wed Jan 26 2005 15:09
<a href="#"><u>Re: Historical Events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Callahan, Maura</u></a>	Wed Jan 26 2005 16:01
<a href="#"><u>Re: Historical Events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Ohrman, Cheryl</u></a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 18:22
<a href="#"><u>Re: Historical Events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Tilbrook, Alex</u></a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 14:42
<a href="#"><u>Re: Historical Events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Woodard, David</u></a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 22:49
<a href="#"><u>Movies of Historical Events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Callahan, Maura</u></a>	Wed Jan 26 2005 14:03
<a href="#"><u>Re: Movies of Historical Events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Donnellan, Kelly</u></a>	Wed Jan 26 2005 15:27
<a href="#"><u>Re: Movies of Historical Events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Haskins, Elizabethberly</u></a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 01:32
<a href="#"><u>Re: Movies of Historical Events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Haskins, Elizabethberly</u></a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 01:32
<a href="#"><u>Re: Movies of Historical Events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Green, Holly</u></a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 16:29
<a href="#"><u>Re: Movies of Historical Events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Lapi, Rachel</u></a>	Fri Jan 28 2005 13:30
<a href="#"><u>Movies of historial events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Donnellan, Kelly</u></a>	Wed Jan 26 2005 14:32
<a href="#"><u>Re: Movies of historial events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Callahan, Maura</u></a>	Wed Jan 26 2005 16:12
<a href="#"><u>Re: Movies of historial events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Haskins, Elizabethberly</u></a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 01:38
<a href="#"><u>Re: Movies of historial events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Green, Holly</u></a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 16:39
<a href="#"><u>Re: Movies of historial events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Baker, Samantha</u></a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 23:02
<a href="#"><u>Re: Movies of historial events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Wright, Kara</u></a>	Sun Jan 30 2005 22:41
<a href="#"><u>green historical events</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Green, Holly</u></a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 16:17

<a href="#">Re: green historical events</a>	<a href="#">Ohrman, Cheryl</a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 17:34
<a href="#">Re: green historical events</a>	<a href="#">Lapi, Rachel</a>	Fri Jan 28 2005 14:39
<a href="#">Re: green historical events</a>	<a href="#">Dupuis, Matthew</a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 20:00
<a href="#">history</a>	<a href="#">Ohrman, Cheryl</a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 17:13
<a href="#">Re: history</a>	<a href="#">Cole, William</a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 20:42
<a href="#">Re: history</a>	<a href="#">Minnis, Gracie</a>	Mon Jan 31 2005 00:08
<a href="#">Woodard Historical Movies</a>	<a href="#">Woodard, David</a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 17:42
<a href="#">Re: Woodard Historical Movies</a>	<a href="#">Tilbrook, Alex</a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 14:26
<a href="#">Baker Movies of Historical Events</a>	<a href="#">Baker, Samantha</a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 19:04
<a href="#">Re: Baker Movies of Historical E...</a>	<a href="#">Dupuis, Matthew</a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 19:50
<a href="#">Historical Events Tilbrook</a>	<a href="#">Tilbrook, Alex</a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 20:04
<a href="#">Re: Hlistorical Events Tilbrook</a>	<a href="#">Baker, Samantha</a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 23:30
<a href="#">Re: Hlistorical Events Tilbrook</a>	<a href="#">Minnis, Gracie</a>	Mon Jan 31 2005 00:15
<a href="#">Murphy Historical Events</a>	<a href="#">Murphy, Stephen</a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 20:59
<a href="#">Re: Murphy Historical Events</a>	<a href="#">Ohrman, Cheryl</a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 21:13
<a href="#">Re: Murphy Historical Events</a>	<a href="#">Tilbrook, Alex</a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 14:33
<a href="#">Re: Murphy Historical Events</a>	<a href="#">Woodard, David</a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 22:41
<a href="#">Historical Events "Wright"</a>	<a href="#">Wright, Kara</a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 21:56
<a href="#">Re: Historical Events "Wright"</a>	<a href="#">Murphy, Stephen</a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 19:57
<a href="#">Re: Historical Events "Wright"</a>	<a href="#">Cole, William</a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 20:14
<a href="#">Re: Historical Events "Wright"</a>	<a href="#">Minnis, Gracie</a>	Mon Jan 31 2005 00:02
<a href="#">Cole Movies</a>	<a href="#">Cole, William</a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 22:00
<a href="#">Re: Cole Movies</a>	<a href="#">Murphy, Stephen</a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 20:52
<a href="#">Re: Cole Movies</a>	<a href="#">Baker, Samantha</a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 23:36
<a href="#">Re: Cole Movies</a>	<a href="#">Wright, Kara</a>	Sun Jan 30 2005 22:49
<a href="#">Movies of Historical Events</a>	<a href="#">Dupuis, Matthew</a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 22:27
<a href="#">Re: Movies of Historical Events</a>	<a href="#">Cole, William</a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 22:17
<a href="#">movies of historical events</a>	<a href="#">Minnis, Gracie</a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 23:09

<u>Re: movies of historical events</u>	<u>Lapi, Rachel</u>	Fri Jan 28 2005 14:48
<u>Re: movies of historical events</u>	<u>Dupuis, Matthew</u>	Sat Jan 29 2005 20:13
<u>Re: movies of historical events</u>	<u>Wright, Kara</u>	Sun Jan 30 2005 22:54
<u>Everyone loves a great love story, ...</u>	<u>Lapi, Rachel</u>	Thu Jan 27 2005 23:37
<u>Re: everyone loves a great love ...</u>	<u>Murphy, Stephen</u>	Sat Jan 29 2005 21:03
<b><u>submitted on group but not here</u></b>	<b><u>Tilbrook, Alex</u></b>	<b>Thu Feb 10 2005</b>
<b><u>oops</u></b>		<b>19:35</b>

## APPENDIX G

### BB DISCUSSION BOARD THREAD

**Forum:** Movies of Historical Events

Times Read: 14

**Date:** Thu Jan 27 2005 21:56

**Author:** Wright, Kara <[kow04@fsu.edu](mailto:kow04@fsu.edu)>

**Subject:** Historical Events "Wright"

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I can't tell you how many times I have watched a movie in class or even at home, where I have had to listen to someone, either a teacher or a critic talk about how inaccurate a movie is. I don't think that is wrong for someone to be upset that something is not accurate, but when we are talking about a movie I think that is where things change a little bit. Like Atwan said in the intro; the history channel is one of the most successful channels in the country. Now when I look at this static's, I think if you want to learn more about the actual history, then a book or the history channel would be great. Now with ages ranging from 10-65 can you really make a movie completely based accurately on the actual event? It might sound rude of me saying that, but that is why movies are entertainment. Now I have to be honest, there have been times that I was flipping through the channels, and I stopped to watch something on the history channel, not because I am a huge history buff, but because I probably saw something or heard something on this topic. For me, if I saw a movie on a historical event, I would be more interested in really learning about the actual event. Now I completely don't agree with pointing the finger at James Cameron for his movie "Titanic." This movie was a huge hit, and in my opinion a great "entertainment" movie. Yes, many people criticize Cameron and others for making this tragic historical event, a tragic love story. Again, you can't expect complete history in the movie; you need to add extra tidbits to spruce up the movie. People might say, well teenagers would want a love story instead of just the plain history, but obviously it was a "blockbuster" hit with everyone not just teenagers.

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#### Thread Detail

<a href="#">Historical Events "Wright"</a>	<a href="#">Wright, Kara</a>	Thu Jan 27 2005 21:56
<a href="#">Re: Historical Events "Wright"</a>	<a href="#">Murphy, Stephen</a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 19:57
<a href="#">Re: Historical Events "Wright"</a>	<a href="#">Cole, William</a>	Sat Jan 29 2005 20:14
<a href="#">Re: Historical Events "Wright"</a>	<a href="#">Minnis, Gracie</a>	Mon Jan 31 2005 00:02

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## APPENDIX H

### HUMAN SUBJECTS RESOURCE APPROVAL LETTER



Office of the Vice President For Research  
Human Subjects Committee  
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2763  
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392

#### APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 8/26/2004

To:  
**Kathleen Ashman**  
3392 Micanopy Trail  
Tallahassee, FL 32312

Dept.: ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

From: John Tomkowiak, Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Tomkowiak M.D.".

Re: **Use of Human Subjects in Research**  
**Making Knowledge in Online Writing Classes**

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Exempt per 45 CFR § 46.101(b) 2 and has been approved by an accelerated review process.

**The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.**

If the project has not been completed by **8/25/2005** you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. Also, the principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Deborah Coxwell-Teague  
HSC No. 2004.581



**APPENDIX I**  
**HUMAN SUBJECT STUDENT CONSENT FORM**

Ashman

Enc 1102-60 or 61

This semester I will be conducting a “teacher research” project in the freshmen composition courses that I’m teaching. This project will be an integral part of my doctoral dissertation. I would like you to participate in this teacher research project.

According to university policy, I must ask my students for their consent before I research their activities in this class. The document that follows is this consent form.

Thanks in advance for participating,

K. Ashman

Once you have “signed” the consent form, please e-mail it back to me as a reply. Place your surname and the word “consent” in the subject slot: for example, “Ashman consent.”

Kathleen Ashman

[Kla8768@garnet.acns.fsu.edu](mailto:Kla8768@garnet.acns.fsu.edu)

850-644-3313

Online Informed Consent Form

For Enc 1102, section 60 and 61 (Fall2004)

I Elizabeth Haskins will participate in this study, knowing that my name will not be used if essays or discussions that I have generated are used in the dissertation. Note, all discussions from the Discussion Board and all assignments will be recorded in the dissertation as just “students in my Enc 1102 section 60 or 61 course.”

Students who are under the age of 18 may not participate in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary and there will be no penalty for nonparticipation.

If there are questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at my e-mail address or phone number above. Or you may contact my major professor, Prof. Deborah Coxwell-Teague at 850-644-0438. Or you may contact the HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE, Mail Code 2763, or

2035 E. Paul Dirac Drive, Box 15  
100 Sliger Bldg., Innovation Park  
Tallahassee, FL 32310

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Student \*Signature and Date Elizabeth Haskins January 6, 2005

\*Note, “signature” here means that you have typed your name in.

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

After graduating from Purdue University with my bachelor's and master's degrees, I began my thirty-year odyssey of teaching freshman composition. Teaching at both two year and four year, private and public institutions, I embraced a myriad of pedagogical practices for the freshmen composition classroom. My teaching has evolved into a very different praxis from what it was when I started the journey. I now find myself at Florida State University researching the teaching of online composition classrooms, moving from teacher-centered to student-centered pedagogy, and utilizing a collaborative social-constructionist perspective. And all that I discover about teaching in the digital world continues to enhance my f2f teaching endeavors as well.