USING INTERNET TECHNOLOGIES IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

A Thesis
by
BRIAN CLARK WILSON

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APPROVED BY:

_____
Dr. Lynn Searfoss
Chairperson, Thesis Committee

_____
Dr. Leslie Cook
Member, Thesis Committee

_____
Dr. Michael Wilson
Member, Thesis Committee

_____
Dr. James Ivory
Chairperson, Department of English

_____
Dr. Edelma Huntley
Dean, Research and Graduate Studies

ABSTRACT

USING INTERNET TECHNOLOGIES IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM
(May 2010)

Brian Clark Wilson, B.A., Appalachian State University

M. A., Appalachian State University

Chairperson: Dr. Lynn Searfoss

This thesis explores ways to use common internet technologies to augment

first and second year college composition courses. While many essays and books have

been published regarding the implications of such technologies on composition

classrooms, most of these publications have focused on creating online and hybrid

courses. However, courses that rely on the internet to provide the primary context in

which we interact with our students can require fundamental shifts in the

philosophies by which we teach composition. Because of this, some of the theoretical

and practical framework of the scholarship that focuses on fully online or hybrid

courses may not suit teachers who simply want to augment existing face-to-face

classrooms with internet technology. Therefore, this thesis will explore ways to

augment face-to-face classrooms that rely heavily on process writing, social

constructivist, and social expressivist philosophies of composition pedagogy. By

attempting to find practical ways to apply these teaching philosophies in an online

environment in ways that directly correlate with classroom practice, I hope to provide

practical information for teachers wishing to explore ways that technology can help

their normal teaching practices.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and father who have always gone above and beyond the call of parental duty, and my wife Amanda who's love and support have gotten me through both undergraduate and grad school.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The recently published draft of the *UNC Tomorrow* initiative calls on educators and

universities to begin integrating "new technology and new forms of knowledge into

what they term (borrowing from Disney) the "Classroom of Tomorrow"" (13). With

the growing trend toward Learner Centered Education (LCE) and the increasing

understanding of social constructivist paradigms in knowledge building, the UNC

system has recognized a need to cultivate this emerging sense of learning

communities in hopes that such models can help produce a workforce that is better

able to compete in our struggling economy. Overall, this trend marks a desire for

greater emphasis on collaboration both between students as well as educators.

However, with that desire, the *UNC Tomorrow* initiative also highlights the ways in

which new internet technologies are providing us with expanded and enhanced

opportunities for collaboration not just within individual universities, but across the

entire university system. In fact, part of the *UNC Tomorrow* initiative calls for the

construction of an educator Wiki to be utilized by educators across the state and at all

levels of education as a way to collaborate on teaching practices and pedagogies.

　　As internet technologies continue to advance, much of the emphasis has

shifted from creating the most elaborate and flashy websites and has instead moved

towards creating various arenas for user participation. This fundamental shift can be

evidenced by the proliferation of social networking tools like Facebook and Myspace.

Therefore, with a recognized increasing emphasis on new, interactive paradigms in

web design in both the academic and business worlds, it will be the purpose of this

project to explore ways that these new technologies can be connected to our existing

composition classrooms.

Within the field of composition studies, the usage of internet technologies in

the teaching of first and second year writing courses has been a somewhat

contentious issue. In his essay "Distant Voices: Teaching and Writing in a Culture of

Technology," Chris Anson points out one of the biggest problems facing the academy

today: how do we go about using new technologies "in effective ways and not, in the

urge for ever-cheaper instruction, substituting them for contexts and methods that we

hold to be essential for learning to write" (800).   While many have read this as a

critique of the push toward fully online and hybrid courses, underneath that is also a

critique of how we approach classroom technologies as well. The internet promises

new contexts in which we can help our students learn and grow as writers; however,

new contexts don't necessarily mean new pedagogies. While the adoption of these

new technologies may mean that we reevaluate and consider the true implications of

some of our existing pedagogies, it does not mean that we have to create new

pedagogies specifically for teaching on the web. In fact, with little specialized

technology understanding, teachers can begin finding creative and innovative ways to

use technologies with their existing pedagogies. In essence, technology can be used to

enhance our existing methods without replacing our long held assumptions about

how a writing classroom should function. When we approach technology as an ancillary tool rather than a replacement for the face to face classroom, we begin to see how this technology, at its very core, reinforces our most cherished values and extends the space and time in which we can practice them.

This project began for me during my first semester of graduate school. Technology has always been an interest of mine and when I began to read scholars like Anson, Warnock, and Selfe who were concerned with the ways we use technology with composition, I began to understand that the problem was far more complex than simply assigning a few online activities for our first year writing students.

Universities in general have been somewhat preoccupied with the role that internet technology plays in our classrooms. With this new and varied form of communication now so widely available, there has been increasing pressure from the community and from university administrators to increase the number of hybrid and on-line courses being offered. These pressures have created some apprehension among teachers who, like me, resist the notion that we can one day replace the face-to-face classroom with virtual learning. What's more, one of the key assumptions made by many administrators when pushing the transition to virtual classes is that these classes are somehow more economically efficient (Anson 799). This is based on the notion that online teaching somehow requires less work per student on the part of the teacher; therefore, online classes should be able to sustain higher student capacities. However, as many scholars in the field of composition studies have pointed out, the assumption that online teaching requires less time and effort on the

part of the teacher is misguided (see Hawisher and Moran and Warnock for discussions on allotting time to online teaching). My own experiences as well as the experiences of many of my colleagues have consistently confirmed that even the simplest online activities require a considerable time investment on the part of the teacher.

Much of the growing trend in using the internet in education has been inspired by the proliferation of Web 2.0 technologies. Put simply, Web 2.0 represents a shift in the way in which we create and perceive the internet. That shift is marked by a change from websites that ask visitors to consume information to websites that ask visitors to contribute to information. Early forms of websites were static and could only be edited by those in charge of constructing and/or maintaining a website. While Bulletin Board and Newsgroup services have been popular for a couple of decades, only in the previous decade or so has that type of user controlled and editable technology become the dominating paradigm in website design. An easily recognizable example of this shift could be the immensely popular online encyclopedia, Wikipedia. However, beyond websites such as Wikipedia that are overtly centered on social constructivism, a simple evaluation of many contemporary news websites will reveal that nearly all of them incorporate some type of forum discussion as a means of allowing users to openly evaluate and discuss articles. Indeed, social interaction has become increasingly prolific on websites to the point that it's fairly uncommon to find a "traditional" website that is geared toward simply displaying information without soliciting feedback from visitors.

This shift in the emphasis of internet technologies towards social constructivist models has led educators to recognize pedagogical values in these newly emerging systems. Composition educators and theorists in particular have begun recognizing the usefulness of some of these technologies for our writing classes. While I, like Anson and many others, don't believe that internet technology should be used to replace the face-to-face composition classroom, I do believe that course management systems that are based on a social constructivist paradigm, such as Moodle, can be heavily used in composition classrooms to reinforce writing as a process, collaboration through that process, and the social nature of the construction of knowledge. Indeed, the transference of some of our most common practices to some web interfaces may be relatively simple. However, as I argue throughout this thesis, such transference must start from an evaluation and understanding of exactly what these practices are and how they serve to help develop student writing. While attempting to adapt them to the new internet context is somewhat necessary, fundamentally changing these practices for the web environment can be frustrating for teachers and lead to outcomes that we may not necessarily value.

Much of this study is inspired by my own experiences as both an undergraduate and graduate student. Throughout my education, I have experienced teachers who have attempted to use web technology with their classrooms in various ways- some successful, some unsuccessful. Even in my early graduate career, I could recognize that what many teachers were struggling with wasn't necessarily the technology itself, but how to make that technology work with their own pedagogical

practices. Indeed, as Anson points out, much of the scholarship involving internet technologies and education revolves around ways to replace classroom experiences with online experiences. In fact, many of the books published on the topic focus primarily on theories and practices geared toward the full transference of writing classrooms to online environments. It's no wonder then that teachers who were attempting to use these technologies to simply augment their writing classes were struggling to reconcile the shift in the way they were approaching the technology. To start from the assumption that the internet technology is our primary context in which we interact with our students requires an almost complete reassessment of our existing pedagogies as well as a reassessment in the way that we interact with our students. With no substantial face-to-face interaction with our students, the teacher is required to take on a somewhat different persona. As Scott Warnock points out in his book *Teaching Online: How and Why*, online interaction requires a teacher to step up their involvement in course activities and discussion in order to help keep the students from getting a sense that they are somehow detached from the course. That of course assumes that there isn't any face-to-face interaction.   With so much scholarship geared toward ways to replace actual class time with virtual activities, it can be difficult to synthesize this information into something useful for the teacher who simply wants to use the internet as a tool to augment the teacher's existing classroom. The lack of face-to-face interaction can force teachers to make fairly substantial changes to their current pedagogies.

It is my goal then with this thesis to attempt to approach technology from a different assumption than some of the contemporary composition scholars who have focused on using technology spaces as a new context with which we replace the face-to-face classroom. Rather than looking at technology as a tool to replace our face-to-face classrooms, I will be approaching it as a tool to augment the face-to-face classroom and attempting to show some ways that these technologies can be used to enforce some of our best practices in composition pedagogy. It is my hope that through this project I have derived some practical advice and warnings regarding the usage of these technologies with the traditional face-to-face classroom. I believe that, when used appropriately, these technologies can help improve the effectiveness of our existing pedagogies. We can provide our students a space in which they can produce more low stakes writing, they can interact dialogically with one another to co-construct knowledge, and the teacher can have an alternative site in which to collect student work and disseminate information to their students.

This thesis will rely on both secondary and classroom research that was conducted with two Expository writing classes in the Fall of 2009. Chapter 1 will be a review of some of the literature concerning contemporary composition pedagogies as well as some of the existing research that has been done on the usage of computers and the internet with composition classrooms. It will begin by giving some background on pedagogical theories that I rely heavily on for my composition classroom. It will then discuss some of the contemporary scholarship on teaching with internet technologies. Although this discussion will focus primarily on

scholarship that has dealt directly with using internet technologies in the composition classroom, there will also be some discussion of scholars who have worked to understand the implications and uses of technology in teaching across the university.

Chapter 2 will outline the design of the classroom study. This design was inspired somewhat by Patricia Boyd's call for more scholarship that included studies of student perception of online experiences as well as teacher perceptions. As Boyd points out, much of the scholarship thus far has focused solely on teacher perception; however, I have made it a point throughout this study to constantly engage students through dialogue as well as a fairly extensive survey in order to gauge their perceptions and feelings regarding the online component of our classroom.

Chapter 3 will present the results of the study. These results will be categorized by the technology being discussed with focus on discussion forums and wikis. Although some of the results of this study were somewhat limited considering the timeline and scope of the study (primarily with regards to wikis), I do feel that they yielded some valuable information with regards to varying ways of approaching online assignments. What's more, I will include some discussion of student perceptions of their progress and interactions with the technology.

Chapter 4 will summarize the results of this study with regards to the perceived effectiveness of our existing pedagogies when augmented with online assignments. Although it would be impossible to produce quantifiable results, this study should nonetheless produce enough data to theorize some appropriate ways to utilize these technologies. It is my goal that the conclusion be somewhat pragmatic in

nature in that I will attempt to give practical advice for any teacher wishing to take the proverbial leap into using the internet with their composition classrooms.

Proposals like the *UNC Tomorrow* initiative represent a growing trend in the way that we understand and disseminate knowledge. With Web 2.0 technologies so widely available, we would be amiss to ignore the potential benefits that these technologies can offer to our classrooms. Further, with the growing demand for college graduates with improved computer and internet literacy, inclusion of these technologies can help widen students' career possibilities after graduation.

Unlike many publications related to teaching composition with online technologies, this project will not start from the assumption that the cyber environment is the primary point of contact in which we interact with our students. Such publications, although popular and helpful, can create confusion for teachers wishing to simply branch out into using new technologies with their face-to-face classrooms. Because these scholars are writing from teaching experiences that involved little to no face-to-face interaction with their students, the ways that they utilized these technologies may be confusing for teachers planning traditionally face-to-face classes. Therefore, it is the purpose of this thesis to work from our contemporary understanding of best practices in the teaching of composition and to use that to formulate theories on ways those pedagogies can be enhanced through networked learning.

CHAPTER 1: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

What We Take For Granted: The Current State of Composition Pedagogy

By and large, contemporary composition pedagogy is still based on the Process

Pedagogy that developed in the 1970s and 1980s. Peter Elbow is the person whose

theory is most associated with process pedagogy today. In discussing process

pedagogy, Elbow distinguishes between two separate skills used when writing:

critical thinking and creativity. Elbow calls for a writing process that emphasizes both

skills separately. Rather than attempting to critically analyze all words as they go

onto the page, Elbow advocates a type of freewriting that temporarily suspends

critical thinking in hopes of simply getting words out on paper (7). As Elbow says in

his book *Writing With Power* "when people think too much during the early stages

about what they want to end up with, that preoccupation with the final product keeps

them from attaining it" (7). Instead, Elbow advocates that the writing process start

with freewriting during which we just write without paying critical attention to

whether or not our writing is "correct" or even makes complete sense. Elbow asserts

that "[f]reewriting makes writing easier by helping you with the root psychological or

existential difficulty in writing: finding words in your head and putting them down on

a blank piece of paper" (14). Freewriting has become a commonly used tool in many

composition classrooms. It is one of the many ways that we go about getting students

to generate writing. Elbow's idea of process then moves on to a series of revisions during which the writing gradually changes into something more and more mature. However, as we now recognize and accept, this idea of what the writing process should look like is but one of many. Donald Murray presupposed a key problem with teaching process writing when he asked, "What is the process we should teach?" (4). Murray goes on to say that

> [i]t is the process of discovery through language. It is the process of exploration of what we know and what we feel about what we know through language. It is the process of using language to learn about our world, to evaluate what we learn about our world, to communicate what we learn about our world. (4)

Murray himself divided the process into stages much the same as Elbow. Murray is correct in that the processes we are teaching are about helping students evaluate knowledge; however, one critique of both Murray and Elbow is that they attempt to divide the writing process up into definitive stages. Murray describes the stages of the writing process as: "*prewriting, writing,* and *rewriting*" (4). While dividing the writing process into stages may have been helpful for the purpose of theory, in practice it has been discovered that this was overly reductive and that, in fact, writing processes are as plentiful as the students we have to teach. Post-process theories acknowledge this fact with their assertion that writing processes are and should remain individualized.

One of the primary critiques that post-process theorists have made about process pedagogy is that it "has reduced the writing act to a series of codified phases that can be taught" (Breuch 97). In essence, post-process theorists believe that "process pedagogy simply offers us another foundational explanation of writing" (97). Another critique of post-process theorists regarding process pedagogy is that process pedagogy encourages an "internalist conception of communicative interaction" rather than adopting a more social constructionist or "an externalist conception" (Kent 169). The notion that writing does not happen in isolation and is, rather, the result of communicative interaction with others is often reinforced when we adopt collaborative methods in our classrooms. Kenneth Bruffee has written what is considered to be the landmark essay tying the term "collaborative pedagogy" to the teaching of composition. In his essay "Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind," Bruffee writes: "What the term [collaborative learning] meant in practice was a form of indirect teaching in which the teacher sets the problem and organizes students to work it out collaboratively" (Bruffee 637). Perhaps the most widely accepted form of collaborative learning in the composition classroom is peer criticism. Bruffee describes peer criticism by saying, "students learn to describe the organizational structure of a peer's paper, paraphrase it, and comment both on what seems well done and what the author might do to improve the work" (637-638). This has many benefits for the students. First, it helps to tear down the notion that writing is always done for a solitary reader (the teacher). Through peer criticism, student writers have a variety of readers and therefore get varying responses to their writing.

Students will then learn to resist the earlier engrained habit of writing for a teacher and instead learn to write for a more varied audience. This often produces more rich, thought-out writing as Bruffee points out: "Students' work tended to improve when they got help from peers; peers offering help, furthermore, learned from the students they helped and from the activity of helping itself" (638).

Bruffee goes on to discuss the relationship between thought and speech. In essence, according to Bruffee, both thought and speech are social acts since thought represents an internalization of speech. Bruffee writes that "if thought is internalized public and social talk, then writing of all kinds is internalized social talk made public and social again" (641). If we accept that writing is a public and social act, then how can we teach writing in a way that encourages isolationism? This is of course one of the critiques that post-process theorists make of process pedagogy, and they are often quick to point out that traditional pedagogies did the very same thing. They kept students separated at every point in class by positioning the teacher as the ultimate authority of knowledge in a lecture driven classroom. Consequently, collaboration was not possible under this model since student knowledge was not valued. It's no surprise then that when it came to producing writing, the students would attempt in every way to appeal to a single person as their audience: the teacher. However, with collaborative pedagogies, the source of knowledge is displaced from the teacher and placed on the class as a whole, being itself a social, communal setting in which students can practice the open exchange of ideas. Bruffee describes vaguely what this looks like as a classroom practice:

The inference writing teachers should make from this line of reasoning is that

our task must involve engaging students in conversation among themselves at

as many points in both the writing and the reading process as possible, and

that we should contrive to ensure that students' conversation about what they

read and write is similar in as many ways as possible to the way we would like

them eventually to read and write. (Bruffee 642)

As I will discuss later, this notion that we should encourage students' discussion to

mimic in as many ways as possible the "way we would like them eventually to read

and write" is a key place where internet technologies can support our current

pedagogies.

James Berlin has taken many of the ideas from collaborative pedagogy a step

further by tying them into his notion of democracy in the classroom and social-

epistemic rhetoric. Like Bruffee, Berlin believes in de-centering the classroom and

placing emphasis for knowledge construction on the students themselves through

conversation. Berlin sees the classroom as a place where cultural and ideological

contact can be made between students of different backgrounds during which

students can learn to negotiate through the ongoing discourses necessary to sustain a

democratic system. As Berlin says in his book *Rhetoric, Poetics, and Cultures:*

Refiguring College English Studies, "In teaching people to write and read, we are thus

teaching them a way of experiencing the world. This realization requires that the

writing classroom be dialogic" (110). Many of our current practices are based on the

notion that while writing processes are individualized, we should emphasize writing

as a social act. As Sherrie Gradin discusses in her book *Romancing Rhetorics*, such a classroom can function under a social expressivist model so long as we don't let "the focus on individual vision and voice isolate our students from the social aspects of writing and selfhood" (121). Gradin does an excellent job of negotiating what was once considered by some to be a gap between expressivist and social constructivist philosophies of teaching.

Social expressivism incorporates the philosophies of expressivism in that it acknowledges the individualism of our students as well as the individual processes by which they construct knowledge and ultimately turn that knowledge into writing; however, as Gradin points out, social expressivism also acknowledges that these student subjectivities are derived from and ultimately expanded by the social interactions they have in their day to day lives as well as the classroom. This understanding then helps to bridge the gap between the students as individual writers and the collaborative processes we have them engage in within our classrooms. Social expressivism then encourages the ideas and practices derived from collaborative pedagogies because, as Gradin points out, "[g]roup work provides a built-in forum for differing perspectives to be heard, tried out, revised, and sometimes rejected" (123).

Out of these pedagogical theories has emerged a type of classroom that encourages the development of individual writing processes while simultaneously encouraging collaboration and social contact between students. No longer do most of us teach a process of writing; instead, we design our classrooms so as to allow

students to explore their own writing processes individually and communally. Students are encouraged to freewrite as a way to explore their thoughts and we still move them through a series of drafts. However, rather than dictating how the students should go about producing those drafts, we instead ask the students themselves to become more conscious of their own efforts in hopes that this metacognition will allow them to realize and take more control over their own processes. What's more, in many contemporary classrooms, students share their writing with each other. Often this idea is foreign and somewhat uncomfortable for the students. In my experience, they are often trained to write for a teacher and often they do not recognize their fellow students as possessing the knowledge and skill necessary to effectively evaluate their work. Bruffee's solution to this predicament is to acknowledge that "no student is wholly ignorant and inexperienced" (644). He writes that by "pooling the resources that a group of peers brings with them to the task [we] may make accessible the normal discourse of the new community they together hope to enter" (644). Construction of the knowledge necessary to write in a particular discourse then becomes a communal activity rather than each student attempting to learn it individually. In essence, it is a process of exploration in which the students work together to construct meaning out of their own experiences in the writing classroom.

Composition Scholars Tackle the Internet

The technology mandate of the *UNC Tomorrow Initiative* mirrors some of the concerns

composition teachers and scholars have been dealing with over the last two decades.

The rapid incursion of the internet into the everyday lives of most of America has led

scholars and educators to recognize the many potential benefits these technologies

have to offer. With the advent of the new Web 2.0 paradigm in internet design, there

have emerged several new technologies as well as new spins on old technologies that

have greatly democratized the internet. What's more, the last few years especially

have seen a fairly rapid expansion of internet access across the socio-economic

spectrum. Many public facilities and institutions now offer free access to anyone and

it's becoming increasingly difficult (if not impossible) to find people for whom the

internet doesn't play at least some small part in their everyday lives. With this

increase in available access has come a gradual increase in the number of scholars

staking out their careers in studying the uses and effects of the internet on the

teaching of college composition. This section will explore the work of some of those

scholars. Considering the rapid pace at which technology changes, this section will

focus primarily on scholarly publications that have come out within the last few years.

Indeed, there are many publications from the 1980s and 1990s that relate to this

topic; however, many of those publications dealt with technologies or technology

issues that have all but vanished from the internet landscape today.

Lester Faigley in his essay "Beyond Imagination: The Internet and Global Digital Literacy" discusses how collaboration is reinforced by the use of electronic communications technology. Faigley writes, "introducing technology has made learning more student-centered, encouraged collaboration, and increased student-teacher interaction" (138). Patricia Boyd agrees with this notion by identifying this type of collaborative classroom as Learner Centered Education (LCE): "LCE positions students as co-constructors of knowledge by situating them as active, disciplined participants in their education rather than passive receivers of pre-constructed "truths" (224). Boyd has done an extensive study of the effects of online and hybrid composition courses to learner centered education. Although her study did center on online and hybrid courses, the results can help to determine student responses to certain types of internet technology in general:

> The courses described in my survey used the discussion board feature extensively, suggesting that the instructors valued the kinds of interaction that online environments make possible. Some of the students' responses to the open-ended questions emphasized that the discussion boards fit well with the goals of a writing class because they were required to write their ideas rather than speak them as they would in a f2f course. (239)

Here Boyd is pointing specifically to perhaps one of the most useful internet technologies currently available: discussion boards. It's no coincidence that this technology is bundled with nearly every Course Management System (CMS). Discussion boards, now more commonly called forums, are not a new technology.

They have been around in one form or another for more than two decades. However, with the introduction of forums to course management systems such as Moodle, forums have become a much easier resource for teachers to utilize.

One of the key goals of a process writing based classroom is to get students writing not just in a formal context but also to practice freewriting and journaling much the way that Peter Elbow discusses. Forums can be a fantastic tool for this. Tom Creed agrees with Patricia Boyd on this being a key advantage of forum based discussion when he points out that forums are "primarily visual and textual rather than oral" (158). Forums offer us the opportunity to expand on or move discussions that happen in the classroom to an online setting and then have them played out in written form rather than orally. This gets our students writing more while simultaneously reinforcing the learner centered nature of our classrooms. Scott Warnock in his new book *Teaching Writing Online: How and Why* points out that forum technology increases the "sheer amount of writing exchanged among students and the teacher…few onsite courses offer the chance for this amount of writing" (xi). Further, because of forums, students can engage in discussions of topics related to class while not necessarily having to be in the classroom setting. Since often other classroom obligations cut into the time which we could give our students to freewrite, being able to extend that time electronically is an incredibly valuable resource (Creed).

Forums in the Moodle platform also have the added advantage of being capable of handling file uploads. During discussions, students can attach a variety of different

file types to forum posts. Often this can be used simply as a way to enhance conversations by allowing students to provide specific examples of writing or other media that may help to illustrate what is being discussed. Universities in general have, over the last decade, emphasized educational goals that emphasize student understanding of various forms of media in constructing hypertexts. Part of the *UNC Tomorrow* initiative emphasizes preparing students to compete in our increasingly technology driven world. One thing that must be considered are the ways in which we as composition teachers can expose our students to new ways of producing texts that may include multimedia elements.

Kathleen Yancey has written extensively on the changing landscape of composition studies to include new multimedia forms of composition. In her article "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key" Yancey writes, "Literacy today is in the midst of a tectonic change. Even inside of school, never before have writing and composing generated such diversity in definition" (298). In his book *The Two Virtuals*, Alexander Reid discusses the evolution of symbol systems by tying that evolution directly to the evolution of technology. Reid argues that "this shift can be characterized as moving from a limited, internalized form of consciousness to a consciousness that functions liminally between internal and external cognitive processes and intelligent networks" (23). This, as Reid points out, falls in line with modern post-process theory in that it recognizes our developing understanding of the social and cultural embedidness of knowledge construction. Reid goes on to discuss the changing landscape of modern composition to include various forms of media.

Because of the rapid development of computer and internet technology, the

composition of texts for mass market audiences (in the business, mass media, and

sometimes even academic worlds) has grown to encompass more than just the

written word and often emphasizes the inclusion of performative multimedia and

hyper media. Jeff Rice traces this development and calls on English departments to

reevaluate their definition of the word "writing." Rice writes that "[t]he time has

come to rethink the metaphor of writing because its image is too structured around

fixity. . .[w]e must invent a new metaphor because, on its own, "writing" feels too

limited in an age of total information delivery and connectivity" (129). Andrea

Lunsford in her article "Writing, Technologies, and the Fifth Canon" mirrors Rice's call

for a new metaphor for writing when she gives us this new definition of writing:

> Writing: A technology for creating conceptual frameworks and creating,
> sustaining, and performing lines of thought within those frameworks,
> drawing from and expanding on existing conventions and genres,
> utilizing signs and symbols, incorporating materials drawn from
> multiple sources, and taking advantage of the resources of a full range of
> media. (171)

This definition is reflective of an overall shift in the way that we produce and consume

information. The internet allows for a much wider variety of media in the creation of

documents. Unlike printed text, web documents can include any number of

multimedia elements along with the written word in order to help the writer better

capture the attention of their audience as well as examples to better help make their meaning understood.

With this increasing desire to begin incorporating, at least minimally, new forms of media into the composition classroom has come investigations into technologies that can help facilitate such composition practices. Wikis have become increasingly popular due to their emphasis on interface simplicity, their positive effects on notions of collaboration, and their emphasis on incorporating new forms of media into texts. Rebecca Lundin in her essay "Teaching with Wikis: Toward a Networked Pedagogy" discusses some of the ways in which wikis can be used to accomplish some of the new goals for collaboration and integration of new media in composition classrooms. Lundin points out that some of the key advantages of wikis is that "they require little specialized knowledge and no specialized software to manipulate multimedia elements" (436). What's more, as Lundin points out, a wiki's "complete lack of structure can highlight that the inclusion of multimedia elements is a rhetorical choice" (436). In essence, wikis allow us to provide our students with a space in which they can produce texts that include both written word as well as a variety of multimedia elements. This type of multimodal composition can help students learn to adapt their composition strategies for an increasingly digitized culture which more and more is coming to rely on incorporation of various performative forms of media to convey meaning (Lunsford 170-171).

Besides applications for teaching the incorporation of multimedia in composition, wikis have also been discussed as tools to help reinforce social

constructivist notions of composition and knowledge building. Jeff Rice points out that traditionally, "English studies [has] maintain[ed] a fixed point of view through a singular notion of writing as static, fixed, and individually composed" (129). However, composition scholars over the last decade or so have begun to recognize the need to emphasize the increasingly networked nature of writing and knowledge construction. As Rebecca Lundin writes,

> Networks can socialize the writing process, readily providing real audiences for student writing and emphasizing the situatedness of each piece of rhetoric among a constellation of others. By viewing writing as a networked activity, students focus on the connectivity and complexity of rhetorical situations rather than understanding writing as the decontextualized product of a single, isolated worker. (432)

This notion of writing as a networked activity is, in many ways, an expansion on earlier theories of collaborative learning. Writing within a network allows the process of collaboration to happen outside of temporal and spatial boundaries. Indeed, many of us do include collaborative writing projects in our classes; however, because of the differences in geographic location (for non-traditional students) as well as differences in schedules, students often find it difficult and outright frustrating to complete collaborative projects. While processes such as research and documentation may be done individually and on separate schedules, an attempt to do the actual writing collaboratively would require that the students meet in a particular place at a specified time and attempt to simultaneously generate meaning out of their work. Of

course, more often than not, this would lead one student to do the actual writing or, alternately, each student to write a particular section of a piece and then mesh everything together into a collage. I've often wondered whether such activities are truly collaborative considering the minimal amount of contact time students achieve through the actual writing process. Wikis, however, can offer an alternative to this by opening the writing process itself up more. The very nature of wikis encourages collaboration on authorship as wikis allow multiple users equal editing rights over a document. Lundin writes that "[d]ue to their user-editable nature, wikis carry with them notions of authorship that confound composition's tendency to insist on, and assume, a single author" (438).

At a recent conference for the Carolinas Writing Program Administrators organization, the central theme was the usage of technology with composition classrooms. During the conference, Dr. Jessie Moore of Elon University presented on potential uses for wikis in collaborative student projects. One of those uses involved having students write their own individual papers on wikis and then encouraging (sometimes requiring) other students to consistently track and comment on each other's writing throughout the writing process. As Bruffee points out, "Writing may seem to be displaced in time and space from the rest of a writer's community of readers and other writers, but in every instance writing is an act, however much displaced, of conversational exchange" (642). Wikis, when used as a primary writing space with a group of peers, can help to tear down some of that sense of displacement. Rather than being bound by typical patterns of drafting where students complete

drafts and bring them to classes at the appointed times, the student's entire process can be opened to their peers. The writing process itself then becomes even more of a social act since much more of the writer's process becomes open for group participation. Wikis then can help to remove some of the isolation inherent in individualized writing processes by allowing students to collaborate at every point in that process. Rather than simply working together to revise drafts, as Dr. Moore pointed out, students can actually become active with one another at the level of actual draft creation thereby removing the temporal restrictions that typically codify group participation in the writing process to simple phases of draft and revision.

Voices of Caution

Besides highlighting the advantages online tools have to offer composition classrooms, many early researchers also emphasized the problem of technology availability as it could be traced through social, economic, and racial differences. Cynthia Selfe points out in her book *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention*, one significant problem that we have faced over the last couple of decades is the distribution of computers amongst people of different races and socio-economic statuses (420). In previous decades, technology availability in public schools and in homes was somewhat limited and, not surprisingly, students from upper income, predominately white homes were at a significant advantage over students from lower income and rural areas. Because of this, as Selfe argues, teachers need to make special consideration for the backgrounds of their students.   Because technology has become so widespread now, we often

forget that our students come from backgrounds that offered them varying degrees of experience with technology. Although most campuses now provide students with a plethora of options for using technology at school, these options can seem daunting or even meaningless to students who come to us with limited technology literacy. Therefore, if we are going to implement these technologies in our classrooms, we too must be aware of this issue and plan ways to help students adjust. As Susan Kirtley notes, "we have a responsibility to find out where students in the classes we teach are in terms of computer literacy, and, at least, guide them to resources that will help them gain the computer skills they need" (Kirtley 224). Many campuses now offer significant computer support programs that can help students acclimate to different types of technology. What's more, often computer labs themselves are staffed with knowledgeable people who can help students navigate the web of technology that we ask them to interact with. We as writing instructors need to be aware of these options so that, in the event that we are unable to help the students ourselves, we can at least point them in a direction where they can get help.

Another caution that is raised by Chris Anson deals with the degree to which we use technology with our composition classrooms. Anson has identified a tendency from administrators to push more and more for writing instruction to be offered completely online. Anson identifies this tendency as stemming from the desire to "creat[e] economic efficiencies and generat[e] increased revenues" (799). This stems from a belief from some that online courses streamline the teaching process as well as do away with the necessity to spend time in class thereby allowing teachers to teach

more students per class which in turn saves the university money. However, as

Hawisher and Moran point out, responding to students online does not save time;

rather, it requires far more of a time commitment from the teacher than a traditional

face-to-face classroom. This was an overarching theme at the CWPA conference with

multiple professors arguing that online courses should in fact have lower caps rather

than higher since, as Daniel Anderson pointed out during the introduction to the

conference, teachers need to consciously place themselves in their online courses by

attempting to respond to student forum posts and other activities as much as possible

so as to reiterate their own presence in the class. Because of these issues, the notion

that these technologies can create economic efficiencies is inaccurate.

In addition to the issue of creating economic efficiencies, although internet

technologies can work well to create dialogic interactions between students, they are

not capable of replacing the dynamics of a face-to-face classroom. Chris Anson, notes

this concern by saying:

> Although many studies and testimonials affirm the ways that Internet chat
>
> lines, listservs, email, and other "virtual spaces" can actually increase the social
>
> nature of communication, there is no doubt that the physical isolation of each
>
> individual from the others creates an entirely different order of interaction.
>
> (806)

Indeed, I agree with Anson here and I do believe that this is one key area in which our

research is lacking. The fact of the matter is, no internet technology can fully replicate

the social interaction of a face-to-face experience. Online interactions often happen

asynchronously with students perhaps engaging with a course website hours or even days apart from each other. Because of this, the fluidity of actual face-to-face encounters is not reproduced. Patricia Boyd points out that "[s]ome researchers have argued that students' learning is actually hindered by online instruction because students do not have the necessary f2f contact with their instructors nor do they have the dialogic exchange that is crucial for learning in a f2f classroom" (225). There is much to be said for the body language that we intuit during face-to-face encounters. Emotions are also difficult to express or discern during conversations on message boards. However, these drawbacks also point back to one of the key advantages of internet technologies for the writing classroom: discussions happen dialogically.

Rarely are we afforded the opportunity to write for an audience who is immediately present. Indeed, the type of writing that we train our students for involves engaging in discourses that continue over long periods of time. We have learned to adapt our own writing in order to accommodate these gaps in distance and time, and this is a skill that we expect our students to learn as well. Therefore, we need to get past the notion that internet technologies are intended to replicate face-to-face encounters and instead acknowledge that their value lies in their ability to somewhat replicate written discourses as well as reinforce the notions of social constructivism and collaboration. In what is considered by many scholars to be one of the foundational essays written in the field of computers with composition classrooms, Chris Anson writes that we should learn to "integrate [technology] into the existing curriculum in principled ways that do not erode the foundations on which

the teacher-experimenters already base [our] instructional principles" (806). It will

be the purpose of this study to put this idea into practice. Many scholars have written

about teaching writing online, but few have written specifically about pedagogical

applications of internet technologies for the traditional face-to-face classroom.

CHAPTER 2: SETUP AND RATIONALE

"Teaching writing online offers you new ways to apply theoretical and pedagogical concepts about writing. It can provide you with different ways of disseminating, sharing, reviewing, and responding to student texts." Scott Warnock

For the purposes of this study, I have followed a couple of guiding inquiries in order to gauge the usefulness of these technologies in composition classrooms. The first area of inquiry will involve the ability of the technology to function under the paradigms of some contemporary composition pedagogies as well as my own teaching philosophy. In doing so, I will speculate on how well such technologies reinforce ideas of social expressivism, process writing, and social constructivism. In investigating this, I will also need to consider whether or not the learning curve for these technologies actually served as a barrier to student learning.

A second area of inquiry will center on student perception of the usefulness of these technologies.   In my own previous experience with classrooms which have attempted to utilize forums, student perception of the usage of these technologies played heavily into overall student outcomes. Therefore, in order to utilize these technologies to their full potential, we must continually gauge whether or not the students perceive the way that we utilize these technologies as useful or not.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, much of the research into using internet technologies with composition classes has focused on ways to replace face-to-face experiences with online experiences. These researchers, as Anson and others have pointed out, are responding to the ever increasing pressure on universities to expand their online course offerings thereby making universities more accessible to non-traditional students. Scott Warnock's book, *Teaching Writing Online - How and Why* is one of the most recent books published in this field. It offers readers very practical advice and activities for setting up online or hybrid courses; however, one of the key differences between Warnock's book and others that have been published in this field is that Warnock approaches teaching online as a transference of existing practices rather than attempting to create, as many books do, a type of online pedagogy that often varies wildly from our existing practices. Although Warnock is writing for teachers preparing for hybrid or online courses, he still works from the premise that "teaching online, like teaching onsite, is about recognizing your teaching talent zones or areas and finding ways to translate those talents to the teaching environment in which you are working" (xiv). Teaching writing with online tools then, according to Warnock, doesn't necessitate new teaching methodologies; we should instead try to transfer what we already do into the online spaces.

Because Warnock takes this approach to teaching composition with internet technologies and because I was relatively new to teaching, I adopted much of Warnock's advice and approach to teaching online when setting up this project. Although he does advise us to work from what we know when it comes to using these

tools, my own inexperience caused me to rely too heavily on his specific practices. Therefore, much of my own reflection and analysis of the results of this project will be attempts to determine the effectiveness of some of Warnock's suggested techniques and to discuss how those practices conflicted with my own teaching philosophies. In doing this, I hope that my readers can find common threads in both Warnock's and my own teaching techniques that will perhaps aid them in discovering ways they can utilize these technologies in their own classrooms.

I intend this study to help teachers learn to become more aware of what they do best in the classroom and how to augment those practices with online activities. Teachers are as unique as the students we teach, and although we often rely on similar theories and pedagogies to go about teaching composition, our teaching styles and personas will vary. Because of this, the way we go about using these technologies, as I argue, needs to be informed by a clear understanding of our existing pedagogies and how we go about using those in our normal classrooms.

Since the timeline for this project is concentrated primarily on a single semester (although I do draw on some experiences from other semesters), the project was somewhat limited in the actual number of technologies that could be used. To try and cram as many technologies as possible into a single semester would, in my opinion, interfere with actual teaching practices. Further, because I am so new to teaching, I was perhaps not as comfortable with tinkering with the workings of my classroom as more experienced teachers. In setting this project up, therefore, I

decided against using technology for technology's sake and instead focused on those technologies that I felt would easily align with my own adopted pedagogies.

I should also note that for this study, I purposefully limited the technologies I used with these classes to those bundled with my university's Course Management System (CMS). Our university recently adopted the Moodle CMS which integrates various common internet technologies that allow teachers to relay information to students as well as technologies that allow students to interact with one another and the teacher. In fact, the creators of Moodle claim to have designed this platform on a social constructionist paradigm ("About Moodle"). As Kevin DePew and Heather Lettner-Rust point out in their article "Mediating Power: Distance Learning Interfaces, Classroom Epistemology, and the Gaze," many previous CMS platforms, designed of course by software engineers and not teachers, have seemingly been set up for what Paulo Freire termed as the "banking model" of education (72). Many of these technologies allowed teachers to design their individual sites with technologies geared toward one way communication between the teacher and the students while interaction between the students themselves was minimal. What's more, by restricting the students' ability to work within this design to customize their own experience or, in fact, do little more than post simple text on a message board, the space resists social expressivist notions of the ways students can interact with a course. In other words, the space is purposefully set up to reinforce the authority of the teacher even to the point of restricting the way the students view the site. Individuality and creativity aren't necessarily being encouraged.

While some of these lecture centered CMS platforms may include simple course forums, even then they often fail to embrace more than a minimal notion of social constructivism. The forums themselves often allow for little more than simple text editing. Where Moodle stands apart is in the breadth of creativity it can allow for students. The interface, although initially designed by the teacher, is customizable for each individual student. Although they cannot change the arrangement of the elements on a course website, they can customize the color and appearance of their sites. What's more, Moodle allows them to personalize their own profile by including a picture of themselves and a space to describe themselves and their interests. The students are allowed to create, within the restrictions of the technology, a space that at least minimally expresses themselves and their interests. The overall design of the space and the representation of each student is not dictated by the teacher or the designer of the technology. A space such as this may do more to invite the student learner in and to encourage them to express themselves as individuals.

Because the students will be interacting only with technology bundled with our university's CMS, there will be some attempt made to evaluate the usefulness of the technology based on student perception and interaction. When considering uses for these technologies in our composition classrooms, we must also consider the degree of difficulty that learning each technology poses for our students. In general, my philosophy for picking technologies centers on setting the technology learning curve as low as possible. Therefore, in order to adequately speculate on the usefulness of

these technologies for my students, I must consider whether or not adapting to and learning the technology functioned as a barrier for my students.

Forums

When considering the social constructivist aspect of the technologies bundled in Moodle, we can begin by considering the functionality of the forum module. Moodle's forum module goes far beyond simple text editing. It allows students to post pictures, links, even embed video and audio. For the more tech savvy students, there is also the option to directly edit the HTML code for forums posts. In essence, the forum module allows students multiple ways to express their ideas in a type of social environment. Because of this, it is my belief that forums can offer much to classrooms that focus on social constructivist and social expressivist philosophies.

This study focused on two expository writing classes which I taught in the fall of 2009. Both classes were designed to heavily utilize forums as a means of extending class discussions as well as practice lower stakes writing. My expository writing classes normally have a cultural studies focus. In essence this means that I ask students to read essays written from varying perspectives on cultural issues. The students then practice rhetorically analyzing these texts as a means to help them become more cognizant of good writing practices and techniques as well as the basics of rhetorical strategy. This approach to teaching writing calls for extensive class discussions that are often somewhat stymied by the time limits normally imposed on a class. In this case, these classes met three days a week for fifty minutes each day. In

order to try and alleviate some of this time constraint, I decided to try moving some of our normal discussion onto the course forums.

The plan was to discuss our readings some in class, but to continue and broaden those discussions on weekly course forums. This exercise was somewhat inspired by an exercise in Warnock's book; however, it was also inspired by my own experiences as a student in undergraduate literature courses. As I mentioned before, I have been a student in many classes that utilized course forums as a way to augment class discussions. However, my own experience had often been that the course forums felt more like disconnected assignments that really didn't relate much to our face-to-face discussions. Therefore, my own past experiences encouraged me to investigate various techniques for using course forums in a composition classroom that relies heavily on discussion. Further, as Warnock points out, the advantage of having discussions via course forums is that students can simultaneously discuss class topics while practicing writing. Not only are they engaging in an in-depth discussion about the rhetorical strategies of the various articles and essays assigned for the class, but they are discussing them while developing their own rhetorical and stylistic abilities.

Warnock suggests in his book that teachers wishing to use forums as a medium for facilitating class discussions need to be very specific in their expectations and requirements for students. While many of our students may be accustomed to communicating via digital technology, many students, especially first year writing students, may find the idea of having class discussions online somewhat daunting.

Therefore, Warnock suggests that we create very detailed assignments for our forum discussions. Not only did I accept this idea as the best way to approach the forum activity, but much of the forum assignment that I passed out on the first day of class is actually adapted from a sample assignment that Warnock printed in his book.

When designing this assignment, I was aiming for a few different potential student outcomes. First, I wanted the students to have a place to actively engage in analysis of the various assigned discussion topics. While I didn't ask for extensive essays, I did ask them for fairly lengthy initial responses. Each week a new forum would be created and a discussion topic related to the class readings would be posted at the top of the forum. Students were asked to first post a "Primary" response to the topic. This response was based on their own understanding and analysis of the topic. I had hoped that this, much like reading response journals, would give them an opportunity to reflect on their own reactions to the readings prior to opening the topics up for class discussions. Primary posts were required to be more than two paragraphs in length with a minimum of 200 words. The requirement that the students write multiple paragraphs was intended to encourage some movement in thought. In essence, I hoped that this would discourage simple, repetitive responses and would instead help students work toward more depth in their analysis of the topics.

The students were also required to do a "Response" post every week. The response post was intended to help develop the forums into actual discussions rather than simple responses to the topic. I asked students to read over the posts that their

classmates had written and to respond to them by adding to, questioning, or

disagreeing with their analysis of the topic. There was no requirement that these

posts be multiple paragraphs and they were only required to be about half as long as

the primary posts. I also encouraged the students to do as many other short posts as

they wanted. Based on Warnock's experiences, I hoped that this assignment structure

would lead to extensive discussions on our forums. This was to be practice in

discourse building that would hopefully help students develop rhetorical strategies

that they could then employ in their longer writing assignments.

Wikis

Another technology that I planned to employ in this study has become

increasingly popular over the last few years. Wiki's have become (in)famous in

universities primarily because of the rising popularity of Wikipedia. An

overwhelming majority of my students are aware of the easy access to knowledge that

Wikipedia provides; however, what they all too often are not aware of is that the

knowledge on Wikipedia represents a collaboration of often large numbers of people.

Wikis offer a great example of social constructivist knowledge building. The basic rule

behind a wiki is that it must provide equal access for anyone to create or edit

documents. Wikipedia provides such access and then relies on users to monitor and

verify information. In my own experience, students are often only vaguely aware of

that aspect of Wikipedia. They simply know it as an online encyclopedia.

The Wiki module in Moodle allows students an open space to collaborate and

build on a single document together. By simply logging in to Moodle and visiting a

group's wiki, individual members can edit the wiki document simultaneously thereby co-constructing a text remotely. This of course makes collaboration on various projects far easier. Rather than needing to occupy the same physical space simultaneously in order to construct or edit a text, the students can edit the same space individually at their own computers. As I discussed in the previous chapter, collaborative projects have become more common in first and second year writing courses. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I designed a relatively simple collaborative project that I hoped could be accomplished using group wikis in Moodle. This project asked students to work together to scour the various forums that had been constructed during the first half of the semester and to excerpt pieces of writing that they considered to be exemplary in some way. Then, I asked the students to construct wikis in which they discussed the various aspects of what they considered good writing using the forum excerpts as examples.

The purpose of this project was to add another analysis exercise that involved reflection on writing actually constructed in our class. In a process writing classroom, we rely heavily on metacognitive exercises as a way to help students become more aware of their own writing processes. While analyzing the writing of professionals from various fields can be helpful for developing student's supply of rhetorical and stylistic strategies, analyzing their own writing and the writing of their peers helps them to become more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses.

Data Analysis

This project will rely on three types of data. First will be my own analysis of student outcomes based on the work they did with the aforementioned technologies. With forums, I will be looking for development in the student's ability to construct arguments that effectively address the rhetorical situation of our classroom. Since part of the purpose of utilizing such an assignment is to help students learn to interact with others within a discourse community, in this case being represented by our class, I will be specifically looking to see that students respond in ways that acknowledge the ideas of their fellow classmates and perhaps elicit some type of response from them. Understanding of discourse construction is key in first and second year writing courses. Students often come to us with a very narrow notion of audience and spend much of their time just attempting to intuit what it is that we, the teachers, want.

In analyzing forum responses, I will also be looking to see whether or not the students show some amount of depth in their response to and analysis of the assigned topics. This is normally gauged based on how well the student can draw insight into the connectedness of meanings within a cultural context beyond just the surface meaning of the text. In other words, simply interpreting the surface meaning of a text is only the first step. Students deepen their analysis when they start intuiting the various aspects of the writer's rhetorical situation that informed that meaning. Since part of the purpose behind assigning readings related to cultural topics is to have students learn to deepen their analysis of the things that they consume, we often use response journal assignments and class discussions as a way for students to practice

analyzing ideas and arguments. Learning to be more active consumers of texts can help students to become more skilled rhetoricians. By having students practice this on course forums, the idea is to give them a space to not only formulate analysis of the assigned texts, but also a place to analyze new texts produced by their classmates.

Student perception of the effectiveness of using online tools will also be considered for this study. Patricia Boyd in her article "Analyzing Students' Perceptions of Their Learning in Online and Hybrid First-Year Composition Courses" points to a lack of scholarship in which student perceptions of their learning experience are discussed. Therefore, this project includes an anonymous survey that asked students to reflect on their experiences using the technology in this course. Samples of this survey can be found in Appendix B. Further, I will also use discussions with students in which they elaborated on their experiences with these technologies as a way to further evaluate the effectiveness of the methods used.

Lastly, I will rely on my own reflections and teaching journal from the semester as a means of gauging my own perception of student progress as the semester progressed. The semester required a tremendous amount of reflection and adaptation based on student responses to the assignments.   By engaging in consistent reflection and soliciting information from the students, I was able to adapt assignments based on their responses. Further, by trying different approaches, I was able to gain valuable insight regarding ways to go about teaching with these technologies.   Specifically I was able to better understand how the level of specificity with which I outlined the assignments and how much time I had to put into

interacting with students online affected student outcomes. My observations of this process are key to evaluating the overall effectiveness of the work the students did with these technologies.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS OF STUDY

Many things took me by surprise during this study. There were several twists and

turns that I had not anticipated. Having read Warnock's book immediately prior to

the beginning of the semester and, undoubtedly, absorbed some of his enthusiasm, I

had high expectations for my classes. In the end, many of those expectations were

met; however, this process required a substantial amount of reflection on my own

teaching practices in order to adapt to the needs of my students. While some of the

attempts to utilize these technologies in various ways were met with less than

exciting results, I feel that all aspects of this study still yielded valuable data regarding

effective ways of using technology in composition classrooms. The primary focus,

therefore, of this chapter will be on analyzing the overall results of the various

applications of these technologies and seeing whether or not those applications

yielded any observable benefit in the students' ability to analyze and write.

Discussion Forums

Based on my own research and ruminations regarding possible applications of

the technologies in Moodle to the composition classroom, I started the semester off

fairly optimistic. I read Scott Warnock's *Teaching Writing Online: How and Why?* just

before the semester started, and his ideas and experiences gave me confidence and

hope. Warnock had primarily used online tools to teach hybrid or fully online

courses.   Although his book still carried, at times, a somewhat cautionary tone, he still had many successes that he shared with his reader much in the manner of a motivational speaker.

As I have said before, one of Warnock's key points was that teaching online didn't need to be all that different from the way we taught face-to-face. It wasn't, he argued, so much creating a new online pedagogy; it was about finding new and creative ways to use our existing pedagogies in an online environment. This means that we don't necessarily need to completely re-write the book on composition pedagogy. This, as Anson and others have pointed out, is one of the predominant fears of many composition teachers who are somewhat skeptical about integrating new technologies into their classrooms. However, Warnock emphasizes in his book that we should learn to simply transfer our typical pedagogies and teaching strategies into the online environment. This means that teachers who may be somewhat apprehensive about using online tools can be a little more at ease knowing that they will simply be doing what they have always done - they are just doing it in a new environment.

One of Warnock's other key assertions was that when designing online assignments, teachers should create highly structured, very specific assignments in order to alleviate some of the typical stress that students feel from trying to intuit a teacher's expectations. In theory, if you tell students exactly what you want, then they carry less apprehension when writing. However, because I was new to teaching, I

failed to notice that his advocacy of highly specific expectations may have actually conflicted with my own teaching philosophy.

The latter point wound up being somewhat of a discovery process for me. At first, the idea of a highly structured forum assignment sounded like a good idea. I replicated much of Warnock's example for weekly forum discussion and handed it out the first day of class. The assignment called for each student to write a minimum of two forum posts every week. The first post, their "primary" post, was to be a response to some sort of prompt generated by the teacher. The second post would be a response to one of their classmate's primary post. After that, they could write as many more posts as they wanted. What I hoped would happen, and what Warnock said always happened in his class, was that these two posts would function to prime the pump for a more organic type of conversation on the message boards. I also followed Warnock in requiring posts to be semiformal. As a class, we came to an understanding of what semiformal meant by having some discussions about the difference between the language that they use online with their friends (via chat programs and/or text messaging) and the language that they would use in an email to a professor. In essence, we agreed that the posts didn't need to be formal essays, nor should they be completely informal in the style of friendly correspondence. We agreed on a happy median in which emphasis was not put on grammar, but that appropriate language and adequate detail/description were necessary in order to better flesh out their arguments for their peers.

When conceptualizing the forum work prior to the beginning of the semester, I had imagined this work as a type of freewriting that was grounded in a social context. As Rebecca Lundin and others have mentioned, writing that's done online and especially via forums or wiki networks can help to "socialize the writing process, readily providing real audiences for student writing and emphasizing the situatedness of each piece of rhetoric among a constellation of others" (432).   The idea was to give them a space to practice writing that didn't necessarily rely on the same sense of formality as normal essays, but that did require the students to maintain and awareness of their audiences. Of course, one of the key critiques of process pedagogy by post-process theorists is the idea that process writing emphasizes a writing process that leaves the writer isolated and removed from the social group formed in a normal writing classroom. While the idea that the process writing, with its reliance on peer workshopping, calls for an isolationist sense of writing is arguable, by having the students rely heavily on forums as a medium for writing practice, we are reinforcing the overall social nature of writing.

Forums then can also become a place to begin and continue discussions that have always been somewhat limited by the institutionally imposed time constraints. Fifty minutes three days a week is often not an adequate amount of time to allow students to really work through analysis of texts and ideas as a class, especially when you factor other teaching activities that need to happen face to face. By having them carry on with discussions on the course forums, I hoped to alleviate the time

constraint problem and give them a space to practice their writing with topics that we were already working with as a class.

While this sounds ideal, what I did not consider when setting all of this up was how it would impact the overall notion of process writing for the students. In the back of my mind, I had always thought of the forum discussion as being a form of freewriting or writing to learn. Because my classroom relies heavily on social-expressivism as a way to help students develop their own writing styles, I had anticipated the forums as being a space in which students could practice freewriting in a semi-public context. They could tentatively work through arguments much the same way they would in class discussion, but the forum would offer the added advantages of having such work being written and all but eliminating normal time constraints. However, I did not take into account the way in which the very structure of the assignment itself would actually conflict with the notions of social expressivism and networked writing and instead turn the forum into yet another essay assignment. What I found was that the discussion forum did not turn into the sort of discourse that I had hoped would evolve from the primary and secondary post requirements. In fact, early on, there was no discourse at all.

After about three weeks, I began to realize that the forums were not evolving the way I had hoped. Every week, the students would respond to the prompt with a stripped down essay that just barely met the requirements of the assignment. For example, this post was a primary response to a reading assignment we did during the third week of class:

The average family on TV is one that is generally referred to "perfect". They all have a mom, dad, and two kids one boy and one girl. The dad always has a good 9 to 5 job the mom is a perfect house wife and the two kids go to school and get into minor trouble that they usually learn a moral from. This is what the narrator wants so that he can feel normal and be accepted by the "white" people. He idolizes them because they almost always seem happy with their life and with each other. This is what happens to almost every little kid growing up we have all been exposed to these cool families and we want to be like them, but over time we realize that this is not what is best for us. TV exposes us to family ideas that are great and a lot of people have then but no one has them all the time. My point is this, if our family was what we see as perfect all the time it would quickly get boring and on everyone's nerves. Its that sibling rivalry or those random times that your parents that come out to play with you as a kid that makes your childhood special. Lets face it the best memories you have as a kid are not the strict or stiff family dinners, it's when you end up laughing until your stomach hurts because of something your brother or sister did. The narrator is going to compare his family to ones he sees on TV or to his friends families because that's what kids do but one day he will look back and he will be thankful that his family was unique.

The student has done an adequate job of summarizing the text and formulating somewhat of an analysis of it. He is even begins to work in a minimal amount of evaluation when he discusses the reasons why the narrator bothers to compare his family to television families. One thing this essay does not do, however, is make any noticeable attempt to build on such knowledge with the student's fellow classmates. What's strikingly absent from this essay is any attempt to reach out into the overall discourse that should be under construction amongst their fellow classmates.

As Paula Maurino writes "[a]ppropriate communication in learning systems would be those in which students communicate extensively with instructors and with each other" (48). Maurino's research focuses on whether asynchronous threading technology is capable of moving students through the proximal zone of learning. Although much of Maurino's research deals with students in a business course, it still has implications for courses across the curriculum. The student response excerpted above is, at its very core, nothing but a simplified version of the standard five paragraph essay that students learn to write with in high school. The student states the problem they have with the topic of the reading, they discuss the problem in brief detail, and they attempt to write a conclusion that sums up their thoughts. In essence, they have fallen back on the genre they have been trained to meet the bare minimum requirements of the assignment. This type of response functions well to meet the necessary expectations of an essay which will be read and graded solely by a teacher. In fact, save the grammar and spelling errors, I can imagine this sort of response earning the student a decent grade on a written test. However, this response does not

meet the second part of Maurino's criteria for appropriate online communication: the student is not attempting communication with her/his fellow classmates.

By limiting my participation on the forums to a few guiding questions or statements, I had hoped that the students would move away from writing solely for me, the teacher. However, as I pointed out above, this particular example seems to have been written primarily for the teacher. The response is carefully crafted to meet the requirements of the assignment while making no real attempt at sparking discussion amongst classmates. This was most likely due to the fact that the author perceived the forum discussion as nothing more than one more writing assignment for the class. As one student wrote in her journal later in the semester, "[d]uring the first few weeks of this class the online forums weren't as effective as I thought they would be. The main problem was that many people were just focusing on the word count for their posts and were content with just having a primary post and one secondary post" (See Appendix C).   The author of the previous forum sample, being accustomed through years of schooling to writing only for their teacher, addressed the extensive prompt and the assignment given and wrote what they thought I wanted to hear. In the course of doing so, the author abandoned any attempts at experimenting with their own writing or attempting to construct a post that could easily accommodate responses from their fellow classmates.

Often, when having discussions in class, I try to avoid getting locked into a pattern of having students respond only to me. Instead, I encourage them to discuss topics with the class as a whole. Simply asking questions and asking for direct

responses doesn't constitute a discussion. I typically try to avoid doing that as much as possible in class; however, when constructing the assignment for our forum posts, I failed to realize that the assignment was doing just that.

In a face-to-face classroom setting, I can employee multiple techniques in order to see to it that the discussion gets passed around the classroom. For example, simply shifting eye contact from student to student helps to make all students feel involved in the discussion even though only one student may be talking at any given moment. With forum discussions, there are some similar techniques that can help draw students out.   As Warnock suggests, interjections by the teacher to ask questions related to the student responses on the forum can often help liven up an otherwise stagnant forum as well as giving the students a model of appropriate forum interaction. Especially early in the semester, students can feel uncertain of how to respond to one another on course forums. A little guidance from the teacher can help alleviate some of that uncertainty.

Of course, regardless of the techniques used to engage the students in forum writing, the students still must be willing to do more than simply the bare minimum of work to achieve a desired grade. Early on in the semester, I, more often than not, did not find that to be the case.   After students did their initial post in response to the prompt, they would simply respond to one other person's post with the bare minimum word count. Even if I interjected at that point, the discussion thread would die. They would not respond to me because it was not required in the assignment.

While the fact that the response does not attempt to participate in a networked discourse is concerning, the overall stagnant nature of the student forum writing had become apparent. In a classroom centered on process based social expressivism, we strive to see students innovating with their writing. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Donald Murray describes writing process as a process of discovery through language. That discovery can be extended beyond just the discovery of ideas through language, but also the discovery of the student's style and individualized writing process. This is of course where much of the value lies in low stakes, free writing exercises. By giving the students a space to write that is at least somewhat exempt from the normal constraints of typical college paper prompts (or that is at least perceived by the students to be), they can begin the process of experimenting with voice and style.

Of course, such experimentation is typically done in isolation. In my classroom anyway, a typical freewriting exercise consists of asking students to write for five to ten minutes in a journal no one else will read. Further, we often teach freewriting as a method students can employ on their own to help them discover ways into a particular paper topic. While these are certainly helpful especially for students who may be facing down normal apprehensions regarding their own writing, I suspected when contemplating this study that forums could function as an effective transition between isolated freewriting and full scale academic writing. In essence, I envisioned the forums as being a place for lowered stakes, semi-formal writing that required the students to evaluate issues and practice constructing arguments with one another. The forums then could allow the students to experiment with words and argument

construction the same as isolated freewriting, but within a social context. The student

then would not need to rely solely on their own evaluations of ideas, but they would

have an audience immediately available to work and learn with. What's more,

working in a networked environment gives the student a better sense of the way

writing functions in a broader discourse. In other words, I envisioned the forums as a

tool that could help further socialize the invention stages of writing processes.

Part of what I saw early on, and what I think the above excerpted example

illustrates, was the minimalistic nature of the student responses on the forums.

During the fifth week of class, I recorded in my teaching journal that "discussions are

happening. . .[but] the students are simply doing exactly what's assigned and little

more. . .This isn't their writing" (See Appendix A).   While this tended not to lead to

actual student discussions, it also led to student writing that was anything but

innovating. By and large the students did tend to explore ideas, at least on a surface

level, but they did not seem to really experiment with their own writing and

argumentation processes. Instead, they stuck with the same forms of writing they

were familiar with from their early education.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized that the forum assignment so

far had not really met my pedagogical expectations. If I really wanted my students to

start taking chances with their writing, to really learn their own processes and style of

argumentation, I needed to really reflect on the already established theories from

which I normally worked and figure out what aspects of those theories were being

stifled by the current forum assignment. In essence, I made a mistake when designing

the class. I didn't follow Warnock's primary advice to work from what I know; instead, I tried to mimic Warnock's own technique which in hindsight I realize was based on some pedagogical expectations and values that were very different than my own. Warnock works from a highly structured set of expectations with highly structured assignments that leave little room for innovation and creativity. My classes, on the other hand, tend to put more emphasis on writing as a process of discovery in which students are expected to stretch their legs as writers and develop their own processes and style. Further, the emphasis on social constructivism in my class translates into more open and free flowing discussions about our various topics. Such discussions could potentially translate well into the online environment provided I work from the same allowance for open and free flowing discussion that I do in the classroom.

After reflecting on this, I went to work on redesigning the online component of the class to more accurately reflect my normal methods and expectations. After reading over my forum assignment carefully, I realized that such a heavily structured assignment did not allow for the exploration of thought and writing process that many of my free writing and class discussion assignments were designed around. Instead, what we had was an assignment that asked for a relatively specific outcome and somewhat dictated how I expected the students to get there.   Since these students were by and large accustomed to simply working toward a grade, they simply took the original assignment and dissected it to figure out exactly what I wanted them to do in order to earn a passing grade. In essence, they were spending their effort on

attempting to anticipate what I wanted rather than exploring their own processes. They were writing for me and practically ignoring their classmates except to do the single response post that was required. Even with those response posts, however, it was evident that they were only minimally considering their classmates as a potential audience.

Once I began exploring the ways in which my initial assignment conflicted with my own classroom theories, I began to understand how to manipulate the forum discussion portion of the class in order to more accurately approximate my typical teaching methods. I did discuss some of my concerns with the students as well and they openly admitted that so far the forum discussions had been nothing more than another assignment to do every week. They did not feel as though the forums were a free space for written discussion. Further, they expressed to me that they felt the highly specific stipulations of the assignment made them feel somewhat boxed in when it came to the things they wrote.

Ultimately, the solution I came up with was to gut my actual forum assignment and make the expectations and requirements more open and less specific. This decision came about and was implemented during the fifth week of class. The primary requirement from then on was that they actually post to the forum every week. There was no minimum word count and there was no minimum number of posts required. I also drastically changed my grading rubric. Rather than attempting to grade each individual post the students made, I simply told them that at the end of the semester, I would look back on the whole of their contribution to the message

board discussions and holistically grade their participation. This method of grading was far more in line with the way I normally grade class participation. I've yet to meet a teacher who counts every word their students utter in class as a way to assign a participation grade. Granted I do keep track of how often students speak in class; however, when it comes to assigning a grade, I tend to look at the "big picture" related to their in-class participation rather than trying to calculate a grade based on each instance of class participation. So, the new expectations for forum discussion and the new grading method, I felt, fell more in line with my normal pedagogy than our original assignment.

   The first noticeable outcome of this shift was that my own work load was drastically decreased. Warnock and others have warned that teaching courses either in hybrid or fully online format is far more time consuming than conventional face-to-face classrooms. This was immediately obvious to me during our first weeks of classes. I felt an incessant need to continually monitor the forums in an attempt to liven up otherwise stagnant discussion coupled with the need to continually read and grade everything the students posted. Because my original grading rubric called for specific numbers of posts with specific word counts, I felt obligated to meticulously read everything posted on the message boards. I would estimate that during the first few weeks of the semester I was spending around 10 hours a week just reading, commenting on, and grading forum discussions. For two classes that were not designed to be fully online courses, that was far too much time for a teacher to have to spend only on one online element.

Student participation on the forums also changed quite noticeably in some positive and some negative ways. For the first few weeks after the shift, student posts tended to be short responses and/or reactions to the readings. The style of the posts changed for many students as well. With the post length requirement dropped, I found that students were more likely to explore their initial reactions in short, quick statements that often ended with questions. Much of these new posts seemed more akin to the way students respond in normal classroom conversations and, perhaps, fell more in line with their native composing processes. For example, this is how one student began a thread on our forum during the sixth week of the semester:

> I like how the other conversation is going, but I would like to delve into the power another subculture of media has on us and that is the news media. I am sure this may seem like a boring topic to all of you but the news media is incredibly bias and it has an effect on not only how we perceive the world around us, but how our voting and political decisions are made. There is no unbiased news source in America. Looking at Fox News on the right and the rest on the left, they all slant stories to give favor to a certain ideology. This is a huge problem. The passage by Diana Kendall mentions how the news media has become a money-seeking venture rather than an objective, unbiased interpretation of what is going on in the world. This poses a serious problem and we need to find a way to getting the media to go back to covering stories in a non-biased way. What do you guys think about this issue?

The first thing that I noticed about this post was that it is was explicitly written for this student's classmates and not for me, the teacher. The student first acknowledges the other conversations that are happening in other threads and then moves on to formulate his own argument related to the topic. For this specific student, this post also represented an overall shift in writing style that, to me, indicated some attempt at experimentation. Prior to our changing the forum criteria, this student's writing was an excellent example of the type of overly formal, forced writing that we often see in college freshmen and that is, I suspect, a result of years of training to write for standardized tests. While this post is still somewhat formal, the student has still broken from the typical essay format.

Overall, this post is far closer to what I expect from a low stakes writing environment. The student runs through his thoughts on the topic in short, declarative statements. From those, you can see that he is hashing out his own ideas and arguments while simultaneously attempting to reconcile those within the context of the discourse from which he has been reading. Further, this particular writer's final move is to reach out to the discourse community of this particular class by openly asking them to participate in an ongoing discussion of the ideas he presents in this post. Although his final question ("what do you guys think about this issue?") is somewhat simplistic and vague, he nonetheless preceded it with enough assertions as to generate quite a lengthy discussion thread. Whereas discussions on the forums early in the semester often ended with one or two replies from other students, this thread went well beyond ten responses and carried out over the week.

The previous example was indicative of the early shift that I noted in the overall student performance on the forums. As the weeks went on, the forums became more and more lively. The students also began to react more positively to the forum assignment. A week after we instituted the change to the forum requirements, I solicited feedback from the students to gauge their reactions. One student wrote that "[w]hen it comes to the message boards, I think the recent adjustments have served us well. The dialogue has become much more fluid and there has been much more participation" (See Appendix C).   The increase in participation, in fact, was quite dramatic. The forums transformed from a place where students submitted assignments twice per week to a place where (sometimes) heated debates would go on well beyond the week in which the discussion started. The forums became lively discourses in which students were actually practicing argumentation through writing - often even incorporating research to defend their positions.

While I was generally pleased with the development of the course forums after I changed the assignment, one drawback to this change in methodology that I should mention is that it did nothing to improve the performance of the students who were already consistently lapse in their work. I'm not referring specifically to students who were at a disadvantage with their writing coming into the class; in fact, some of my weakest writers were some of my most prolific participants on the forums (more discussion of this later). I am referring specifically to the students who displayed an early propensity for minimizing or ignoring their own work load. These same students often did not participate in class, turned in assignments late (if at all), and

overall showed a lack of interest in the class. This type of student, while generally in the minority, is nonetheless common in the university setting. I had hoped that as the forums became more lively, even my lowest performing students would feel the desire to participate. After all, myself and many of my students began to see the forums as somewhat of a form of entertainment. Discussions related to the class topics could be carried much further and far more tangents could be explored via the forums than in the face to face classroom. As one student wrote in his/her survey, "I feel that I heard a lot of things that people probably would not have gotten to say in class" (See Appendix B). All in all, the forums were allowing us the time and freedom necessary to allow our minds to work more naturally than can be allowed within the university imposed time constraints of a normal face to face classroom.

Nonetheless, even with my efforts to liven things up in order to attract more student interest, a few students still chose to keep their interactions on the forums minimal. I bring this up because, as many theorists have pointed out, we need to be cautious and consider the types of students who may or may not feel comfortable participating in an online setting. Some students may be hesitant to post to forum discussions because of the public nature of such writing. Indeed, it has become somewhat of a cultural cliché these days to be hyper aware of the public nature of online interactions and to be very careful of how we present ourselves. While all of the technologies that I used in this study were restricted solely to those present in my university's CMS and therefore restricted to use only by students enrolled in a particular class, I must acknowledge that because of the current cultural climate

related to online privacy, I suspected early on that some students may feel apprehensive about posting to our course website. Therefore, it was my first inclination when I noticed certain students not performing well online to take them aside and talk to them about their lack of participation. While none of my underperforming students expressed any apprehension regarding posting online (in fact all of them attributed their lack of participation to poor time management skills[1]), I still must agree with Cynthia Selfe that all teachers who decide to augment normal classes with online interactions be cautious and aware that some students may have legitimate concerns about writing online.

All in all, the results of online forum portion of the study were positive. Once I worked out how to apply my normal teaching style and pedagogies to the online environment, I felt more comfortable with the classes. The majority of the students also seemed to react positively. In the collected surveys, many of them indicated that they found the forum activity to be a valuable part of the class. When asked in the survey whether or not "writing things for the course website was any different than writing or discussing things face-to-face," one student responded that "more people participated and formulated ideas online" (Appendix B). The forums became a place for them to practice writing and argumentation. While most of the writing that resulted from this activity was not what I would consider to be examples of excellent writing, having a place to practice with one another did, in my eyes, result in better formal writing from my students. It is impossible to quantify how much of that

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[1] It is also telling that out of the 26 completed anonymous surveys, no students indicated that they had any apprehension about posting to the online forums.

improvement came from the forums versus normal class activities; it is nonetheless a common practice (as derived from modern theories related to process writing) to allow students some space to free write and practice their own abilities. In that respect, online forums can be utilized as a space to give students more time to practice such writing while still having a wide audience with which to construct a discourse. While in class journals and free writes often serve as valuable tools to use in a freshmen writing class, forums can be used as an extension of that same idea only not bound to the same space and time constraints as the normal class room.

<div align="center">**Wikis**</div>

As I have said before, Wiki technology offers an interesting and potentially fruitful means of co-constructing knowledge for the composition classroom. Since my own pedagogical practices rely heavily on a social constructionist understanding of knowledge building and since discourse construction is, at its very heart, a form of social constructivism, I had high hopes that the wiki platform would provide my classes with a valuable tool.

Wiki technology is a platform that many of our students are intimately familiar with. Most first year writing instructors are given, at one time or another, a student essay in which much of the research has been gleaned from Wikipedia. Students are generally aware of the existence of this paradigm in knowledge construction at least as consumers, but perhaps not contributors. I assumed when originally planning the wiki assignments that the students would not have too much difficulty bridging the gap to contributors. In a world filled with interactive media, many people assume that

recent generations of students are accustomed to sharing their thoughts through various online interfaces.

The first assignment that my students worked on was relatively simple. The idea was to get them to start reading one another's forum posts with a somewhat critical eye for what they considered to be examples of good writing. They were to work in groups to collect these examples and then construct a wiki page in which they displayed the examples and explanations of what made these examples good. I encouraged them to be creative and to consider aesthetic choices related to the designs of their wikis.

The assignment was designed of course to help make them more conscientious of the style and rhetoric of the writing they were doing on the forums. It also served as an avenue for discussions about visual rhetoric. The students were encouraged to display their chosen excerpts in a manner that would do the original authors justice and presumably capture the interest of their potential audience (our class).

Wikis can work quite well for collaborative projects of this nature. Because the students had to work in small groups to design these presentations, the wiki platform allowed them a single space in which they could all post materials and make design choices. As Rebecca Lundin discusses, one of the unique aspects of a wiki that makes it so uniquely suited to collaborative projects such as this is that it allows equal editing rights to all members of a work group. So, when I assigned each group a wiki to use for this project, each member of the group had equal access and equal rights to edit and manage the space. This runs counter to many other Web 2.0 technologies.

Even forums give superior editing rights to moderators (in Moodle the moderator is essentially the teacher). In a wiki, however, the teacher and the students all have the same abilities.

Much of the research regarding wiki usage in the composition classroom touts the simplistic design paradigm that most wikis use. As Lundin points out, earlier wiki platforms required at least a minimal knowledge of some types of web coding in order to edit them. Newer platforms, however, require no specialized knowledge of coding in order to participate in the wiki. That simplicity of course falls in line with one of the primary parameters of this study: to keep the technology learning curve as low as possible.

The students were given the above described wiki assignment during the 6th week of class. I had set up the wiki module on the course home page and practiced some with the interface in case there were any questions. My initial impressions of the interface were that it looked very similar to a simpler version of a word processor. I designed a simple example wiki for the students, showed them the basics of using the interface, and asked them to work with their group members over the course of the next week to design and build their wikis.

It was almost immediately obvious that the students were struggling with the technology by the amount of concerned emails I received over the next couple of days. Many of the questions were concerning the usage of the interface. Most of them had difficulty figuring out how to create and link to multiple pages within the same wiki. I had not considered that option when I first tried out the module. After some research,

I discovered that the wiki module in Moodle relied on a type of coding called Camel

tagging.[2] It was a relatively simple process for me; however, some of the students

needed quite a bit of instruction and reassurance to learn how to do it.   What's more,

because the wiki module in Moodle contained the same array of basic editing options

as a typical word processor, the button/s needed to create and link pages were

somewhat difficult to spot. Ultimately, many groups opted to keep their wikis at a

single page rather than learning the page creation and linking method.

In the end, it did take an extensive amount of class time to explain the purpose

behind wikis and how to work in them. Again I point out that while our students may

be accustomed to gleaning information from wikis such as Wikipedia, they seemed to

struggle somewhat to understand exactly how the wiki could be utilized to collaborate

on constructing a document. What's more, since the interface of the wiki module in

Moodle contained so many editing features, it actually made the entire process of

learning the technology slightly more daunting.   Students weren't being asked to

simply post text; they were being asked to design a presentation for their classmates.

Because of that, they struggled somewhat with learning to utilize the wiki module to

its fullest potential.

The results of this assignment were fairly disappointing. While many of the

students managed to get decent amounts of examples and analysis on their wikis,

many of them failed to design their pages into anything beyond simple lists of text.

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[2] I recently discovered that the process for creating and linking wiki pages in Moodle has been somewhat
simplified. However, even with this simplification, the method of page creation is still not immediately
obvious.

What's more, many of them expressed in the class surveys that because of their frustration with learning the technology, they felt like their own contributions to the wikis was hampered. The resulting wikis were nothing more than talking points for their class presentations. They had not found creative ways to display their examples and emphasize the aspects of the writing that they thought exemplary. What's more, much of the analysis that they did of their various examples was minimal and cursory. While there is no way to directly prove that this was the result of their frustration with the technology, based on their reactions I suspect that the technology may have interfered somewhat with the expected results of the assignment.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study yielded some valuable data. Being new to teaching and classroom

research, I recognize that there are many things I could have done to get more specific

data covering more aspects of student development. For example, I suspect I could

have learned more about using wikis in the classroom had I spent more time working

with the students to help them learn the interface. At the time, I was not comfortable

with devoting the class time necessary to fully train the students for using the Moodle

wiki module. Perhaps even using a different wiki platform would have made the

process of learning the interface a little easier for the students. Nonetheless, the

experiences from this study can teach us some very valuable things about using these

technologies with our classrooms.

The first and perhaps most valuable conclusion that I have drawn from this

experience is that technology works better in the composition classroom when the

technology itself is not the focus. I myself have been a student in classes where the

technology aspect felt very forced and disconnected from the face-to-face aspect of

the class. In some cases, as Anson and others discuss, teachers may try to implement

new technologies in their classroom as a way to adjust to increasing expectations

from administration. However, any implementation of technology into the

composition classroom must be preceded by a careful consideration or our own

pedagogies and techniques can be transferred into the online environment. While

Warnock warns us of this in his book, I failed to completely heed that warning when

designing this study.

Much of the work that I had my students do on the forums early in the

semester was not truly reflective of the type of small, low-stakes writing or discussion

exercises that I would have them do in our face-to-face meetings. In writing the

assignment, I borrowed too heavily from Warnock's activity not considering how

different his teaching philosophy may have been from my own. Warnock's exercise

was designed for a class that met exclusively online. Therefore, without the normal

face-to-face contact, Warnock felt it necessary to design a highly specific assignment.

Warnock discusses this as being one of the key differences between face-to-face and

online teaching. Since online students don't have the same interaction with teachers

or their fellow students, they may feel somewhat awkward about completing

assignments. Therefore, Warnock writes that "successful message board

conversations depend on providing students with clear-cut guidelines" (78).

However, what sorts of guidelines and specifications you include should be developed

based on your own teaching philosophy.

Indeed, as Warnock points out, teaching fully online or hybrid courses can

present many new challenges to an experienced teacher. Without normal face-to-face

contact, teachers are required to reassess the way in which they interact with their

students. Such reassessment also calls for some reevaluation of one's teaching

persona. As Warnock says in the first chapter of his book, "[y]ou may have spent

years honing your f2f classroom persona, and then -- *pow!* -- you are teaching online"
(1). However, for the purposes of this project, I was not teaching fully online and I
did not take into consideration the differences between Warnock's and my own
teaching situation. In essence, by trying to adopt Warnock's approach to teaching
with forums, I was also adopting the considerations for a fully online course that
Warnock had built into the assignment.

It is critical that any teacher wishing to augment their classes with these
technologies consider whether or not the way they plan to use the technology is
confluent with their normal mode of teaching before assigning actual work. While
assignment examples designed for fully online or hybrid courses may seem sound, we
must consider whether or not they coincide with the philosophies that we employ in
our face-to-face classes. After all, face-to-face remains the primary context within
which we interact with our students. Therefore, we should continue to work within
those same face-to-face teaching philosophies when we are designing work for our
students to do online. To adopt online or hybrid teaching philosophies and practices
with a face-to-face classroom that only uses the internet as a tool is to split our
classrooms into two, possibly competing contexts. In essence, we are giving our
classes a split personality. In order to utilize these tools effectively, we should instead
carefully consider ways that they can work in tandem with our face-to-face activities.

Another point that I feel is important to consider before teaching with these
technologies is how high you want to set the technology bar for your students.
Considering that I use these technologies as a tool for teaching composition in a face-

to-face context, my first inclination is to set the technology bar as low as possible. We

often think that recent and upcoming generations of students have extensive

technological literacy. After all, constant interaction with the internet from a young

age is one of the defining characteristics of the Millennial generation. However, as

Susan Kirtley has pointed out, we shouldn't take for granted that a student's previous

interactions with the internet will give them automatic understanding of how to use

any technology we present them with. We do have some responsibility to openly

investigate the technological literacy of our students and help them learn to

effectively use the technologies we require in our classes.

As can be evidenced by the wiki assignment included in this project, when

students are frustrated with trying to learn the technology, the overall quality of their

work can suffer. While I don't mean this in any way as an indicator of the difficulty

level of using wikis, in the case of this project, the wiki assignment was not successful

in large part because the students found the wiki interface difficult and frustrating.

Indeed, many of them expressed a lack of understanding of the technology in class.

In this case, I had unintentionally set the technology bar too high for many of my

students.   While taking extra class time to teach the technology may have helped

alleviate some of this, it's up to the individual teacher to decide whether or not

devoting class time to teaching the technology is really worthwhile.

As I've said before, my own philosophy regarding using these technologies with

the composition classroom dictates that teaching writing should always come before

the technology. If the technology is so complex that it interferes with a student's

ability to write, my inclination is to avoid the technology. However, regardless of the

experiences I have had with the wiki module built into Moodle, there is still much

research which indicates that using wikis can have benefits in a composition

classroom driven by social constructivist philosophies. Indeed, wikis do perhaps

epitomize the social constructivist philosophy better than any technology currently

available. They are entirely driven on the notion that through collaboration, a

multitude of voices can come together to create and inspire new knowledge.

In future trials, I plan to implement different wiki platforms to see if perhaps

more simplified interfaces can help students bridge the technology gap and create

better products with wikis. Nonetheless, this experience illustrates an important

point: in order to use technology effectively in our classrooms, we must consider how

steep the technology learning curve is. This requires us to take some time to practice

and learn technologies that we wish to implement and consider the amount of effort it

will take to teach them to our students. Each teacher will need to decide where they

want to set their technology bar; however, regardless of the different places we

choose to set that bar, we certainly need to decide at what point we consider

technology to be a hindrance to our primary purpose: to teach writing.

While this study certainly does not represent an exhaustive effort to explore

ways of using internet technologies in our composition classrooms, it nonetheless

points to some important considerations that should be noted by teachers wishing to

branch out into the digital world. The internet is rife with potential applications for

the composition classroom. Forums can help us expand our classroom discussions

and give our students more opportunities to write. Wikis offer us an exciting means of helping our students learn to collaborate and share knowledge. However, as with teaching our traditional face-to-face classes, specific uses of these technologies should be decided by careful consideration of our own teaching philosophies. As Scott Warnock writes, in order to use these technologies effectively, we must begin with the simple question "Who are *you*?" (xxiii, emphasis in original).

While I perhaps originally intended this project to yield specific applications for using these technologies, in the process of this investigation I realized that, even though we may draw inspiration from the same established pedagogies, we all teach writing a little different from one another. We must allow ourselves the opportunity to "[t]hink about what [we] do well, and then think about how [we] can use various [internet] resources to *translate* those skills" to the online environment (xvii, emphasis in original). Further, we should constantly evaluate the way that we use these technologies to be sure that they are providing us with our expected outcomes. We cannot go about using technology for technology's sake, but internet technologies do promise to broaden the horizons of our existing methods for teaching writing. For the time being, we should continue to explore the ways we can facilitate this.

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APPENDIX A

Teaching Journal Excerpts

Week 4 (9/14-9/18)

PROCESS WRITING - WRITING TO LEARN

After one successful week on the boards, I decided to change things up a bit. They have their first draft of their first paper due next week and I wanted to give them an opportunity to 1) flesh their ideas out on paper and 2) get some feedback and suggestions from their classmates about their topics. As is typical, I did take some time in class to allow them to discuss their topics amongst one another; however, the problem with that has always been that during our class period (especially in my 8 a.m. class), the students aren't really willing to give much in the way of constructive feedback.

By and large, the responses to the forum topic were far more in depth and useful than the responses they gave in class. Most of them did make an honest attempt to briefly describe their arguments rather than just saying "I want to write about this topic....." (the typical face-to-face response). For example, one student wrote:

> I think that Affirmative Action is an indispensable tool for the progressive growth of American society. It takes race, ethnicity, or gender into consideration in an attempt to promote equal opportunity or increase ethnic or other forms of diversity. Most of the groups listed above are often from socio-demographic areas that lack adequate funding. Due to inadequate funding, these individuals generally are behind in contrast to their peers who are from areas that have high rates of graduation, high literacy rates, and lower crime rates. Affirmative Action is needed due to the income gap in this nation. This gap has created unequal distribution of goods and profits which in return causes individuals from inner-cities and poor rural areas not to have access to better education and various resources. From this, these individuals are not able to reach their full potential. Affirmative Action allows these groups to have a chance at a better life. Through research, I hope to find many success stories that support my opinion. (Farley, Week 4)

During our class discussion, when asked what he planned to write his paper about, this student simply responded that he was writing a paper on "Affirmative Action". The responses and feedback he received from the class were minimal because, as with most other students, his description of the project was minimal. Most students will not take the time to really explain something when they are talking about it in class. Even when the teacher attempts to draw them out more, often they simply don't have time to reflect adequately on the topic and come out with a meaningful, explanative response. (ANALYZE THIS MORE)

RESPONSE TO ABOVE POST

> I believe that you have chosen a very good topic for this paper. I also want to raise a question concerning this idea. You stated that there is an unequal distribution of goods and profits, that more is going to areas of higher rates of graduation, high literacy rates and so on. I am wondering what your ideas on how to balance this unequal distribution of resources might be? Will it involve transferring some of the resources given to the higher graduation areas to the poorer rural areas? And if so will that then cause a decrease in productivity and progress for the area with high literacy rates and lower crime rates? I thought that I would share these thoughts and questions with you in order to help you better defend your position.

Week 5

The discussions are happening. That's about all I can say. The students are simply doing exactly what's assigned and little more. I'm not really seeing any of them taking any chances or really pushing their writing ability. This isn't their writing. This is the writing they are doing for me....for the grade. I really want to reformat this so that the discussion boards become a place where the students can not only discuss the topics, but really question each other and experiment with their own writing.

When I think about it, I realize I'm breaking one of Warnoch's assertions. I'm not really taking my own established teaching style and moving it online. When I originally conceptualized this study, I thought that the forums would be a place where students could continue discussions of the in-class topic in writing. I modeled my assignment after Warnoch who claimed he had great success with it. However, I think that by setting up such a strict, structured assignment, I'm actually stifling the students' voices in what should be a low-stakes environment for them to practice their own rhetorical moves. Their responses right now have not reflected my own pedagogical assumptions. They have instead been the products of a highly intrusive assignment that leaves little freedom. I can even tell by the way they title their post (usually with the bland "Primary Post" or "Response Post") that they cannot really feel a sense of ownership over their writing. It isn't theirs and it isn't discourse construction. It's for a grade. I have to find a way out of this.

ONLINE WORKSHOP

We tried our first online workshop. I have read suggestions in scholarly essays that wikis may be a good technology for this; however, when I went to try and set it up, I could not find a suitable system for using the wiki built into Moodle for online workshoping. No matter how I set it up, I always felt like the technology learning curve for the student would be far too high to have any real pedagogical advantage. In the end, I gave up on the idea of using wikis for this for now. After all, I

do agree with Warnoch that we should never implement technology for technology's sake.   Perhaps with a wiki site outside of Moodle this would be practical.

I went with forums instead. They are simple, and the students are already familiar with them. The results were not all that great; however, I don't think I would consider them to be exceptionally worse than early semester face-to-face workshops. Most of the answers were overly brief and lacked any real analysis of the papers they were intended to critique. For example one student simply responded to a paper by saying:

 "You argue your position very well. The only suggestion I would have to make is that in your third paragraph you repeat "There", a few to many times. Try using other transition words, so the paper would flow better, and the paragraph would be less awkard to read." (Laura)

Well, the transition words comment is ok - but without pointing to specific passages or really trying to dig into the rhetoric of the piece, this whole comment is by and large useless. Some of this is my fault. I really need to sit down and explain to them how to make marginal comments via Microsoft Word so they can make more specific references in-text.

Week 6

First off, the online journal submission is working out really well. Allowing the students to submit via the course website has several advantages. First, the students keep up with journals rather than waiting until just before an arbitrary due date to do them. Since I don't have to worry about physically collecting journals in class, I can have journal entries due daily or weekly. I can grade them quickly as well - much more quickly than when trying to flip through 40 composition books. All of the submissions are on one page with a box right beside them to grade them. It takes me about 5 minutes per class per week to grade them. It's organized, fast, and far more convenient than the conventional method.

My solution to the problem with the forum submissions was to drop almost all of the guidelines and grading stipulations. After thinking about it and talking it over with colleagues, I decided that was the only way to really turn this into a free space for low stakes writing. That is, in my opinion, the best use for it. No other medium in use in classrooms today can really allow them to write this much for as broad an audience (their peers). Short in-class writings are great to help them hone their thoughts for in-class discussions, but forums allow the writing itself to be made public and become the actual discourse rather than just a tool to help them flesh things out. That's not to say that writing to learn in a classroom setting is a bad thing. But writing to learn on-line allows them far more time, space, and gives them an audience.

The only guideline they have for the message boards now is that they post. That's it. I told them that each week we would continue to have a new board and that I would like them to have posts done by Friday. So far, I have been pretty amazed at the difference it has made. The forum this week has been far more lively. Granted, I anticipate that as the newness wears off of this new lifting of the rules of forum participation some students will undoubtedly become more lax in their participation. This is evidenced already by the fact that it is my already established best performers who are most active on the forum. Some students will fall by the wayside. That bothers me some. But, I can only do but so much to encourage students to get involved with their education. Every semester, I have a good portion of kids who just never seem to want to really engage with the class. What responsibility do I have to those students when I seem them failing at online participation?

Week 7 (talk about wiki mashup)

I'm still impressed with the way the forums have developed since dropping the two pages of guidelines I established at the beginning of the semester. Several of the students really seem to be more actively questioning their peers responses to the topics as well as their own assumptions and rhetoric. I speculate that this, just as many other theorist have predicted (ie. Elbow?), that this is because the writing itself isn't getting in the way of the thought. This is becoming more of a low stakes writing environment.

"This is a tricky subject. I really think everything depends on the situation. How many children is the single mother trying to raise? What kind of job does she hold down? Is she single as a result of divorce? Does she have family that could help raise her children? Yes, a lot of children raised by a single mother tend to be on the rebellious side, but also a lot of children raised by single mothers are very well behaved. No one can really say that people who are married have better children than people who are not married. I think it is helpful to have a father figure in a child's life but it isn't imperative. I know plenty of people who have gotten along without a father in their lives. It's not easy by any means, but they do it. They aren't out on the street robbing stores just because a single mother is raising them. Actually, I was just with a large group of normal, well-behaved girls last night for a function and about half of them stood up and talked about how they don't have relationships with their biological fathers but their grandfathers have stepped in as their father figures. I do not think this is really a big deal and I don't think that the government should get involved at all. Family life is nothing that government should stick its nose into." (Dana)

What I see here is a student questioning themselves quite extensively. She starts her post off with a series of questions related to the topic....questions that seem to poke at her original assumptions about this idea. She's really thinking about the topic rather than just posting a "position" essay that tries to clearly argue her own original assumption. While that type of essay is, in some ways, what we ultimately want them to write, they can't really write it well until they learn to question their own (and others') thinking. Before lifting the restrictions on the forums, most of what the students posted were either weak imitations of the five paragraph essay format (thesis, body, conclusion) or

weak attempts to just formulate an opinion on the boards. There was no real questioning, thinking aloud on paper. There was no innovation or risk taking.

One of the responses to this post is certainly worth lifting as well:

" In the spirit of playing devil's advocate I will give you a dissenting view on the situation. No child deserves to grow up in a household with a single mother. With 18% of American households consisting of a mother and a child/children, I think we need to find ways to educate our youth that this is a problem. 43% of single mothers have their children out of wedlock and that number is steadily rising. In fact, single mothers cost the American taxpayer $112 billion each year.

Studies prove that it is a serious problem with data showing that children in single parent homes are 5 times more likely to commit suicide, 9 times more likely to drop out of high school and 32 times more likely to run away. These stats are proof of the importance of a two parent family.
I got these statistics from a extreme conservative author named Ann Coulter. I would suggest going to youtube and typing in "Ann Coulter single mothers" to get a really good example of how this argument is playing out in the real world. Single motherhood is a real issue. The stats back it up that it is simply not fair for the child. Yet again, that is a devil's advocate view of things." (Jacob)

This was the first attempt I had seen by any student on either of my forums to really question another student's assertions. Although he is openly positioning himself in the role of devil's advocate, his assertions nonetheless really get to the heart of one part of the argument on this topic and push the original poster to really consider this within the context of the supposed "evidence". Yes I am impressed that he lifted some statistics and evidence from the source, but what impresses me more is that he lifted evidence that directly correlates to the questions the original post was asking. In other words, he is directly addressing a series of arguments and utilizing data from the reading to answer the questions.

We tried something else this week. I posted a Wiki on the course site and had the students collect examples of what they considered to be the "best" writing from the forums. They did this in small groups, each group having its own wiki. The idea was to *hopefully* get them used to wikis so we could use them more extensively later.

Although I think the core assignment was good (having them evaluate each others' writing), the wiki really got in the way. I would say that only about 1/4 of the students really understood the paradigm for this technology and picked up on how to use it. The other 3/4 just got really frustrated. We wound up using class time to work on this more so I could explain things to them better. When all was said and done though, they still barely understood what they were doing on the wiki and why that specific technology was any more advantageous than forums. I have to admit, I am still somewhat questioning that myself. Yes, it has the advantage of allowing students to co-edit a single document; however, in the context of this class, I could not think of a single assignment that I would normally do that would work well on a wiki. I don't normally have them write

collaborative papers in English 1000. Besides all that, the wiki interface on ASULearn is atrocious. It would take me far too long to teach the technology. Google Doc would probably be a better alternative and I may consider using it later.

APPENDIX B

STUDENT SURVEYS

Survey for Project titled *Internet Technologies with the Composition Classroom*

Brian Clark Wilson

April 30, 2009

This survey will be optional and anonymous. The questions are as follows:

1. How comfortable were you with using internet technologies before you entered this class? Please rate your comfort level on a scale of 1-5 (1 being the least comfortable and 5 being the most comfortable) and elaborate below.

1   2   3   (4)   5

Elaborate: I know how to surf and search the web, and use common sense to figure things out if they are not too comple

2. Do you feel that the internet technologies used with this course have enhanced your learning in this course? Why/why not?   Yes, when we used the Forums I feel that I heard a lot of things that people point I would not have gotten to say in class.

3. What specific types of technology (forums, wikis, chats, etc.) do you feel benefited you the most? Check all that apply:

Wikis (✓)

Chats ( )

Forums (✓)

Electronic File Submission (✓)

Email (✓)

Please explain any specifics of how these technologies have enhanced your learning:

I think being the ... paper online and having ... post our comments was really helpful.

4. What specific types of technology (forums, wikis, chats, etc.) do you feel hindered and/or frustrated you the most?

Wikis ( )

Chats ( )

Forums ( )

Electronic File Submission ( )

Email ( )

Please explain any specifics of how these technologies have hindered your learning:

Non hindered.

5. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being least comfortable, 5 being most comfortable) please indicate how comfortable you are with having class discussions online

1   2   3   4   (5)

Elaborate: I find it easier to comment online then to comment in class. It gives me time to get my thoughts in order and I am less self

6. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being least comfortable, 5 being most comfortable) please indicate how   consious. comfortable you are with posting your own writing on the course website

1   2   3   (4)   5

Elaborate:

7. Did you feel that writing things for the course website was any different than writing or discussing things face-to-face? How so?

Yes, more to put thoughts together and more *(illegible handwriting)*
(illegible handwriting)

8. How do you feel about communicating with your teacher electronically versus in-person or via the telephone? Do you feel more/less comfortable? Why?

More, I just get nervous and email helps with that.

9. Did you feel that your teacher was more/less accessible online versus in-person?

About the same.

10. How do you feel about communicating with your fellow students electronically versus in-person?

Easier to stay on topic online

11. Do you feel that it is easier to communicate with your peers electronically versus in-person?

Yes

12. Do you use social networking sites such as Facebook or Myspace?

Yep. FB.

13. How many hours per week, on average, would you say you spend using social networking sites?

at least 14-18

14. How do you feel about communicating with your teacher via social networking sites such as Facebook or Myspace?

I am fine with it.

15. How do you feel about communicating with your peers via social networking sites such as Facebook or Myspace?

Perfectly o.   t.

16. Before this class, how much prior experience have you had with classes that utilized internet technologies with a face-to-face classroom?

None.

Survey for Project titled *Internet Technologies with the Composition Classroom*

Brian Clark Wilson

April 30, 2009

This survey will be optional and anonymous. The questions are as follows:

1. How comfortable were you with using internet technologies before you entered this class? Please rate your comfort level on a scale of 1-5 (1 being the least comfortable and 5 being the most comfortable) and elaborate below.

1   2   3   (4)   5

Elaborate:

2. Do you feel that the internet technologies used with this course have enhanced your learning in this course? Why/why not?

I don't think I learned much about the technologies but I enjoyed using the forum and learned from it

3. What specific types of technology (forums, wikis, chats, etc.) do you feel benefited you the most? Check all that apply:

Wikis ( )

Chats ( )

Forums (✓)

Electronic File Submission (✓)

Email (✓)

Please explain any specifics of how these technologies have enhanced your learning:

4. What specific types of technology (forums, wikis, chats, etc.) do you feel hindered and/or frustrated you the most?

Wikis ( )

Chats ( )

Forums ( )   NONE

Electronic File Submission ( )

Email ( )

Please explain any specifics of how these technologies have hindered your learning:

5. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being least comfortable, 5 being most comfortable) please indicate how comfortable you are with having class discussions online

1   2   3   4   (5)

Elaborate: I enjoyed using the forum, I could gather my thoughts and articulate them well

6. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being least comfortable, 5 being most comfortable) please indicate how comfortable you are with posting your own writing on the course website

1   2   3   4   (5)

Elaborate: I think posting my paper really helped with getting feedback

7. Did you feel that writing things for the course website was any different than writing or discussing things face-to-face? How so?

No, if anything more people participated and formulated ideas online.

8. How do you feel about communicating with your teacher electronically versus in-person or via the telephone? Do you feel more/less comfortable? Why?

Either way is fine but electronically is easier.

9. Did you feel that your teacher was more/less accessible online versus in-person?

more

10. How do you feel about communicating with your fellow students electronically versus in-person?

I like it but its a lot less likely they will respond online.

11. Do you feel that it is easier to communicate with your peers electronically versus in-person?

person

12. Do you use social networking sites such as Facebook or Myspace?

yes

13. How many hours per week, on average, would you say you spend using social networking sites?

4

14. How do you feel about communicating with your teacher via social networking sites such as Facebook or Myspace?

I wouldn't mind it

15. How do you feel about communicating with your peers via social networking sites such as Facebook or Myspace?

im fine with it

16. Before this class, how much prior experience have you had with classes that utilized internet technologies with a face-to-face classroom?

This is the first class where I have had internet technologies with a face-to-face classroom.

APPENDIX C

Student Journals

Within our all consuming days of technology it is no wonder that now it has been integrated into the class room. Last year I took a class that was completely dependent upon by online use. Actually I never even saw what my teacher and classmates look liked. While I feel that it is important for students to have face to face discourse with classmates and teachers it is also a good idea to integrate technology because it may serve as a good prep for the direction our world   is taking. In this class we get a bit of both which creates a good sturdy balance.

I love the idea of online arguments and   the structure that we have set up through Asulearn. There is a distinct difference between arguments in a visual session and online. Online you can say what you feel and stake your opinion without finding little distractions that throw off your attention. There is time for you to think a point through and then type thoughtfully what you want to say. You do not have to immediately respond and sound like an idiot if your thoughts became jumbled. But, my favorite reason of all is that no one can interrupt you. While I think it is important to be exposed to interruptions and how to deal with them I certainly prefer being able to say, or type, what I want without thinking someone might interrupt me at the first breath I take. These discussion forums allow us to put our best foot forward and gives us a chance to think before we act. We get a really important chance to think before we act. In that thinking moment we can really see who we are and we can examine ourselves before we jump the gun and say what exactly we think about a certain topic. No one wants to look like a fool when trying to persuade someone. What better chance could they have than this?   Many people are also intimidated by crowds or of people staring at them while they try and process their thoughts through speaking. That

uncomfortable sequence is lifted through the computer screen, where no one is watching., just you and your keyboard doing the thinking.

Technology and its integration into the classroom I think can be very successful for some people, but I also think it is important to recognize that not everyone can adapt well to that style. By combining our class with both I think everyone has an equal opportunity to get their voice across, which is what this class is somewhat about.

When it comes to the message boards, I think the recent adjustments have served us well. The dialogue has become much more fluid and there has been much more participation. These are things you already know, therefore, I will try to give insight that will help you down the road.

I think that the advancements in technology have led to increases in the use of that technology on campuses across the nation. If Appalachian State can make it a priority to ensure that the use of technology is prevalent, I think we will see the university become a leader in the field. This, in my opinion, is very important.

I have enjoyed the message boards for the most part. The important element to them is to get everyone involved. This has been a big problem. I think that having very controversial topics, cause students to get involved and adds to much more interesting dialogue. Involvement through the use of controversial topics is the first key.

I also think that encouraging more of a dialogue on the message boards is also important. This is the best way to get fluid conversation and the most insightful posts. Making sure we know that this needs to function like a conversation is also a very important element.

I think it is also important to encourage people to argue points they do not believe. Many times I think about posting something just to stir up the fire and play devil's advocate. After a few minutes of thought I decide not to because I am afraid I will offend somebody. I notice that many people argue the points that are politically correct rather than what they really believe or what could be provocative. I would love to see this change. I feel like people in the class look down upon me because I argue points that are not politically correct. This is not because I necessarily believe these points, I simply want to help my peers think outside the box. I think if you encouraged this more that it would be more acceptable and would create for much more interesting dialogue.

The last point was most important to me. I think if we step outside our culture and analyze an issue or topic without the fear of offending someone or being labeled as racist, sexist, or derogatory, we could make better progress and have dialogue that would help us all grow. If you address this issue in class, I would feel more comfortable on making posts that encourage this dialogue.

Like I said before, the last point I made was the biggest issue I have had with the dialogue on the message boards. I think the message boards have been good and look forward to many new and exciting topics to discuss in the future.

<u>Week Seven Journal Entry</u>

During the first few weeks of this class the online forums weren't as effective as I thought they would be. The main problem was that many people were just focusing on the word count for their posts and were content with just have a primary post and one secondary post. By people just focusing on reaching the bare minimum with the forum posts, it affected the forum and weren't as effective as it should have been. Also as a class we weren't really branching out into separate little debates or conversations based on the topic for the week. A change was needed and I'm glad that there was a change because now we have more freedom and flexibility with what we write and how much we write on the forums.

I like the new way in which the online weekly forums are run because now students can come up with the discussion topic for the weekly forum. Also we students can get more friendly debates brewing amongst each other without crossing the line. I really like where this week's forum has gone. It has flowed very well and now students aren't worrying about word counts or how many posts they need to receive credit. This new way of doing forum posts has really increased participation amongst students who don't regularly participate during class, including myself. During this week's forum posts I like how some people are playing devil's advocate and not necessarily agreeing with what everyone has to say. It becomes pretty dull when people just agree with everyone else's posts because then we don't really see everyone's opposing views.

I do agree that doing some activities online has been helpful because it is like an extension of class discussion and people aren't as timid when it comes to online discussions. By doing online activities throughout the week, it keeps students involved with the class and

requires them to participate. I also believe that students are starting to feel more comfortable with their fellow peers in the class by doing these online discussions each week. Even if someone has a dissenting view on a certain topic, everyone has done a good job of not chewing that certain person out. We have engaged in a friendly debate instead of demoralizing that person which helps with students feeling more comfortable with their fellow peers.

Hopefully with this new change in online forum posts will generate some more discussions in the classroom because right now things are dead when we have class. I don't know if it's the time of the class or another reason but the classroom discussions haven't been going as well as they thought they would. Only a few people are really participating in the classroom discussion and the other students, including myself, need to participate more to liven things up. I think another contributing factor as to why classroom discussions have been so dull is because, for some reason, people might be afraid of saying something that will be argued by another student. Students shouldn't be afraid of someone else's opinion because it helps them see both sides of a certain issue. Students need to start having a more a philosophical mind because then that will help ease some of their problems about speaking up in class. Once again I'm glad that the format for online forums has changed and now students will be able to participate more freely and really voice their opinions about the discussion topic for the week.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Brian Wilson was born on June 15, 1979 in Greenville, North Carolina. He attended elementary school at G.R. Whitfield in Grimesland, North Carolina and high school at Surry Central in Dobson, North Carolina. In 1999, he entered Surry Community college and graduated with an Associates of Arts in 2002. He received a Bachelor of Arts in English with a concentration in Creative Writing in 2006 and a Master of Arts in English in 2010.

Brian is an avid reader of science fiction literature and hopes to one day walk on the surface of Mars. If Mars proves unattainable, he plans to be one of the first to sign up for a possible Lunar colony.