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## **Investigating critical talk between preservice English teachers and middle school students in online literature discussions**

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*University of Tennessee*

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Joellen Maples entitled "Investigating critical talk between preservice English teachers and middle school students in online literature discussions." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Amos Hatch, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Susan Groenke

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

To the Graduate Council:

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Amos Hatch, Co-Chair

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Susan Groenke, Co-Chair

---

We have read this dissertation  
and recommend its acceptance:

Barbara Thayer-Bacon

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Trena Paulus

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Accepted for the council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

---

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate  
School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Investigating Critical Talk between Preservice  
English Teachers and Middle School Students in Online Literature  
Discussions

A Dissertation Presented for  
the Doctor of Philosophy Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Joellen Maples  
August 2008

## **DEDICATION**

For

The most important people in my life  
My parents, my husband, my students (past, present, & future)  
And my dogs Dora, Stanley, and Brutus

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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It’s rough, but it’s something. I’m not sure it’s very good. Most likely it’s a piece of crap. The problem is I won’t know until you tell me cause that’s the way it goes. That’s the way it’s always gone. I give it to you, and you tell me. I can’t tell the difference between the ridiculous and the sublime until you tell me. Now be careful with that—you’ve got my life there in your hands... words are all I have left to play with-- so be gentle.

Thanks for always being gentle and making the ridiculous into the sublime as only you could do. To my mother-in-law, Brenda, you always said I could do it and you meant it.

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## ABSTRACT

In this current political climate of No Child Left Behind, pressure to perform affects teachers and the choices they make in their classrooms. As Rothman, Slattery, Vranek, and Resnick (2002) contend, “As test-based accountability becomes more stringent, schools and teachers will match their curriculum to what is on the tests rather than to what the standards say ought to occur” (p. 29). Since high-stakes testing is the only tangible measurement of accountability, teachers have resorted to teaching to the test and employing direct instruction methods. As a result, few opportunities exist for preservice teachers to practice the facilitation of open-ended discussion about literature. Still fewer opportunities exist for teachers to take a critical stance toward literature instruction. Teachers who take such a stance in the discussion of literature highlight diversity and difference; call attention to the nature and role of literacy in our society; and focus on building students' awareness of how systems of meaning and power affect people and the lives they lead (Harste & Carey, 2003).

Housed in a young adult literature course in 2005, the Web Pen Pals project was a telecollaborative partnership between prospective secondary teachers enrolled in the course and local middle school students. Both sets of students met six times over the semester to discuss young adult literature online. The online chat medium created a virtual classroom space that provided 1) access to adolescent students preservice English teachers might not otherwise have had and 2) a safe, low-risk context where preservice teachers could practice taking on a critical literacy stance--a stance that may not feel safe in other contexts (e.g. field experiences).

The purpose of this qualitative collective case study was to explore what critical



talk topics, if any, occurred and what processes encouraged and developed critical talk in the online discussions of literature between beginning English teachers and middle school students. Since I was interested in the characteristics of the preservice English teachers' discussions within the online space, and their perceptions of the experience, three participants comprised the sample for my study. The primary data source for the study consisted of eight chat transcripts (63 pages of data). Secondary data sources consisted of six interview transcripts (two per preservice teacher) and reflection logs kept by the three preservice teachers during the project.

Findings suggested that only one of the three preservice teachers came close to achieving engaged, substantial critical talk; and the types of discourse moves used by the preservice teachers seemed to affect whether or not critical talk occurred. Findings also revealed that it appeared a relationship existed between the *process* of critical talk, as defined by Burbules's (1993) rules of dialogue, and the occurrence of critical talk: when preservice teachers adhered to Burbules's rules, critical talk seemed to occur.

Interpretations based on the findings of this study included the following: 1) developing relationships with students and establishing a social presence may help teachers achieve critical talk; 2) beginning teachers need time and opportunity to explore and develop a critical stance toward literature; and 3) a CMC forum, on its own, does not ensure equitable participation in online discussion.

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# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

As a middle school reading teacher for 11 years, I valued classroom discussions because they challenged my students to think. I loved teaching reading because stories can represent life. Stories can be enjoyed and critiqued; they are a free travel ticket to anywhere in the world; they can offer a new and unique perspective; and they make us feel. Rarely did I use texts from the basal readers I was expected to use. They were often outdated and uninteresting, and they rarely seemed relevant to my students' vibrant lives.

Instead I incorporated adolescent literature into my curriculum, intentionally picking stories that were often controversial so as to pique my students' interest and create opportunities for discussion. Over the years, my students argued for or against the Soc's gang from Hinton's *The Outsider*'s, related to the sibling rivalry between Louise and Catherine in Paterson's *Jacob Have I Loved*, and cried out against conformity while reading Lowry's *The Giver*. They talked—but not only did they talk, they talked passionately and vigorously, defending one point of view while appreciating another.

In my classroom, we challenged each other, defended our points of view, and critiqued the characters and the stories they told. I wanted my kids to be thinkers—not merely accepters of a text's reality—to question texts, to confront them, and at times, to cherish them. I was interested in what my students had to say because they were different from me in terms of life experiences and views. Through talk, they allowed me into their worlds. Talk breathed life into my classroom.

In hindsight, I realize I was living the practice—I just didn't know the theory. In spring of 2005, my doctoral advisor asked me if I wanted to co-teach her young adult

literature course. A main component of the course was the Web Pen Pals project, a telecollaborative partnership between prospective secondary teachers enrolled in the course and local middle school students. Both sets of students met six times over the semester to discuss young adult literature online. The main goals of the course were to encourage beginning teachers to consider the role talk plays in learning and to practice taking a critical literacy stance toward literature. At the time, I didn't realize that what I had been doing in my eighth grade reading classroom could be called "critical literacy." I didn't even realize it had a name. In spring of 2005, I began to build a bridge between theory and practice.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and President Bush (2001) explained that it was intended to "help close the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their peers" (p. 7). The NCLB policymakers focused on improving achievement in reading. As a result, states were required to implement accountability systems aimed at assessing students' performance on standardized tests. These standardized tests measured progress on state reading standards.

Because of NCLB, schools received increased funding for early literacy instruction, and reading programs such as the Reading First Initiative were created in response to the new accountability systems. At the secondary level, scripted reading programs encouraged a return to the direct instruction of reading—a modernist-inspired mode of instruction that some critics argue locates textual authority in texts and teachers only, silences students' voices, and encourages passive reading (Jordan, 2005).



In this current political climate of NCLB, pressure to perform affects teachers and the choices they make in their classrooms. As Rothman, Slattery, Vranek, and Resnick (2002) contend, “As test-based accountability becomes more stringent, schools and teachers will match their curriculum to what is on the tests rather than to what the standards say ought to occur” (p. 29). Since high-stakes testing is the only tangible measurement of accountability, teachers have resorted to teaching to the test and employing direct instruction methods. As a result, few opportunities exist for preservice teachers to practice the facilitation of open-ended discussion about literature.

Still fewer opportunities exist for teachers to take a critical stance toward literature instruction. This lack of opportunity is significant especially for beginning teachers because, as Beck (2005) suggests, an “absence” of models “for bringing critical literacy to the classroom” may cause beginning teachers to adopt less-critical teaching methods (p. 394). If preservice teachers are encouraged to consider adopting critical teaching methods, they must be provided with opportunities to learn about what critical literacy might look like in the classroom (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluy, 2002). O’Loughlin (1995) contends, “We have failed in our responsibility to our students if we unveil possibilities for them, yet deny them opportunities to reinvent their teaching philosophies in action by seeing and doing the kinds of teaching we advocate” (p. 114).

A supplementary aim of the Web Pen Pals project is the provision of a *safe* space in which preservice teachers can practice taking on a critical stance toward young adult literature. Such a space is needed because assuming a critical stance involves inherent risks, especially when teachers can lose their jobs for low test scores or for encouraging conversations about controversial topics (Meyer, 2004). Teachers who take such a stance

in the discussion of literature highlight diversity and difference; call attention to the nature and role of literacy in our society; and focus on building students' awareness of how systems of meaning and power affect people and the lives they lead (Harste & Carey, 2003). The aforementioned goals are not encouraged in this age of NCLB because much of the focus is on standardized test preparation.

### **Purpose of the Study**

My mentor and I designed the young adult literature course to accomplish three main objectives: 1) to provide an opportunity for preservice teachers with little experience with adolescent students to expand their understandings about the role of talk in learning; 2) to provide an opportunity for preservice teachers with little experience using chat technology to consider such technology as a classroom discussion tool; and 3) to encourage the preservice teachers to take a critical stance toward literature through critical literature discussions online.

Critical reading and discussion may reflect on multiple and contradictory perspectives (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2000; Nieto, 1999), analyze how people are positioned and constructed by texts (Marsh, 2000; Shannon, 1995; Vasquez, 2000), pay attention to and seek out voices of those who have been silenced or marginalized (Harste, Breau, Leland, Lewison, Ociepka, & Vasquez, 2000), and examine competing narratives (Farrell, 1998). Effective discussion may be defined as that which sustains dialogue, invites and supports maximum participation from all involved, and leaves the reader with more knowledge, insight, and/or understanding than before the discussion (Carico & Logan, 2001).

In this course, my mentor and I utilized the Web Pen Pals project to encourage

preservice teachers to consider and practice critical literacy discussions. My purpose for studying the three English education preservice teachers selected for this research project was prompted by my interest in learning how to help beginning teachers facilitate discussions and adopt a more critical stance toward literature. In particular, I wanted to learn how to help beginning teachers learn about alternative strategies to the predominate I-R-E (initiate, respond, and evaluate) pattern of discussion (Mehan, 1979) and the reader response paradigm (Rosenblatt, 1978) typical in most English classrooms.

If the English classroom is going to transcend recitation, studies are needed to learn how preservice teachers form their ideas about discussion and to investigate how preservice teachers facilitate discussions. New teachers need opportunities to practice different types of discussion and to develop strategies for moving students toward more authentic types of talk. The Web Pen Pals project provided such an opportunity for preservice teachers to practice a critical literacy stance in an online environment with real adolescent students. This study serves to add to the literature about discussion and to explore how preservice teachers lead discussions online in terms of *topics* and *process*. The findings of this study will add to the research on teaching beginning teachers how to facilitate discussions, especially in online environments.

The young adult literature course provided an opportunity for preservice teachers to practice a critical literacy stance through computer-based technologies. We chose to use computer-mediated communication (CMC), specifically a synchronous (real-time) tool, to facilitate the discussions because of the potential for equitable participation and a change in the traditional role of the teacher. Some studies support the claim that online environments are more democratic (Schallert, Lissi, Reed, Dodson, Benton, & Hopkins,

1996). The online space provides a level playing field between the instructor and the students, generating an equitable participation in which the instructor does not dominate the discussion (Heuer & King 2004). CMC provides equitable learning experiences for students as they all have access to the floor, and the instructor is less likely to dominate (Lapadat, 2002). The teacher's role shifts from imparting knowledge to helping students create meaning in a learning community (Heuer & King 2004). Change in the teacher's role and in the participation levels may affect the way talk occurs and promote critical talk in the online chats.

For this study, the online chat medium created a virtual classroom space that provided 1) access to adolescent students preservice English teachers might not otherwise have and 2) a safe, low-risk context where preservice teachers can practice taking on a critical literacy stance--a stance that may not feel safe in other contexts (e.g. field experiences). Beck (2005) highlights concerns about classroom management, school settings, and a lack of administrative support as reasons why teachers resist implementing critical pedagogies. It is irresponsible to arm prospective teachers with ideas about what critical teaching practices can look like without giving them the opportunity to practice such teaching. The Web Pen Pals project provided preservice teachers with a space for practicing a critical literacy stance with adolescents.

### **Research Question**

Since the purpose of this project is to explore what critical talk topics, if any, occur and what processes encourage and develop critical talk in online discussion of literature between beginning English teachers and middle school students, the following

research question guided my study: *When encouraged to take a critical stance, how do preservice teachers discuss young adult literature online with middle school students?*

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This study was informed by several theories: the theory that talk supports learning, social constructivism, critical literacy theory, and Burbules's rules of dialogue.

#### ***Why Talk?***

Underlying the Web Pen Pals project is the assumption that talk supports learning. Research supports the benefits of talk as discussion affords the opportunity for students to construct knowledge, deepen responses, and increase understanding of literature (Nystrand, 1997; Wortham, 2004; Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003). Talk also promotes thinking strategies (Barnes, 1993) and provides an opportunity for reconstructing existing ideas, which deepens comprehension (Henson, 1993).

Language researchers have pointed to specific benefits of discussion. Nystrand (1997) posits that discussion does increase student achievement, and Daniels (1994) claims that discussion can raise test scores. Fried (1993) found that middle schoolers are empowered through discussion, and as a result, they seek knowledge for themselves. Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiger, and Long (2003) found a positive relationship between students' dialogic practices and students' abilities to engage in higher order thinking. Research encourages the use of discussion in the classroom based on these benefits.

The current literature on discussion suggests the benefits of talk are numerous and the potential of discussion is exponential, but discussion beyond recitation rarely occurs in public schools (Nystrand, 1997; Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003;

Nystrand et. al, 2003; Townsend & Pace, 2005). In English classrooms, talk is typically reduced to text reproduction and the I-R-E pattern of discourse which detracts from students' engagement (Marshall, Smagorinsky & Smith, 1995; Bloome & Kinzer, 1998; Nystrand, 1997). In spite of the growing body of research dedicated to discussion, instructional literature is seldom available to aid teachers in discussion planning and facilitation (Anagnostopoulos & Smith, 2005).

If the English classroom is ever going to transcend recitation, teacher educators need to help preservice teachers develop their ideas about discussion and give them opportunities to practice facilitating discussions. Yet, rarely are preservice teachers prepared to facilitate classroom talk about literature. As McCann, Johannessen, Kahn, and Flanagan (2006) posit, facilitating discussion about literature may seem easy, but it involves skills that require development over time.

### *Social Constructivism*

Social constructivism provides a social learning theory that makes possible connections between dialogue and technology. Dialogue is contingent upon social interaction of others in which students share and co-construct meaning. Online discussions depend on similar social interactions, while technology potentially provides a space for social learning experiences. From a social constructivist perspective, computer-mediated communication (CMC) enhances social interaction between students and the instructor and creates a shift toward social learning (Kearsley, 2000; Sutton, 2001). Not only does CMC increase those bonds, it provides opportunities for more students to participate. Social interaction is important in creating learning experiences for the

students and teachers within CMC. Unlike traditional classrooms in which teachers dominate the discussions, CMC allows all voices to be heard, and less vocal students do not feel as intimidated to participate (Black, 2005).

Social constructivism is a socio-cultural learning theory derived from Vygotsky's (1978) work. Vygotsky believes that intellectual development is promoted through social interactions in social settings. As Richardson (1997) explains, "It is within this social interaction that cultural meanings are shared within the group, and then internalized by the individual" (p. 8). Vygotsky (1978) expresses the importance of social interactions and contexts to the learner, "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)" (p. 57).

A child's development is further increased through what Vygotsky refers to as the zone of proximal development. He defines ZPD as, "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). The zone of proximal development is an important factor in discussion because peers of different levels can help other peers' development through social interaction which creates a greater understanding of a text and allows for the co-construction of meaning.

Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism is relevant to the social learning that occurs online. In online environments, Lapadat (2002) suggests that the theoretical shift is toward social constructivism in which conceptual development happens through social interactional processes such as problem-solving, discussion, and practical experience.

Social constructivists are concerned about learning, development, language, and social interaction (Vadeboncoeur, 1997), and technology provides online spaces in which these areas can develop and be studied.

Dialogue is an activity that represents social constructivism as it involves collaboration, sharing, and co-constructing knowledge. The participants in the Web Pen Pals project are given the opportunity to experience collaborating, sharing, and co-constructing knowledge in the online environment. The online space may affect the levels of collaboration and sharing since it has been found to enhance social interaction. The space might also contribute to a variation in the participation levels of the students that differs from classroom dialogues in which teachers dominate discussions.

### *Critical Literacy*

The choices that teachers make in classrooms reflect that which teachers believe students should become (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1993). I believe that English teachers should encourage students to become critical readers and thinkers who learn to improve society by critically analyzing and addressing social issues and injustices. Shor (1987) explains “A critically literate person does not stay at the empirical level of memorizing data, or at the impressionistic level of opinion, or at the level of dominant myths in society, but goes beneath the surface to understand the origin, structure, and consequences of any body of knowledge, technical structure, or object under study” (p. 24).

Discussing literature from a critical perspective allows students to delve “beneath the surface” and beyond personal opinions as they attempt to understand the “origin and



structure” of the socio-political systems to which we all operate. Such a stance differs from a personal or “aesthetic” stance that is produced by reader response or transactional reading theory in which “the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 25). Critics of reader response argue that its practice promotes overly-simplistic character identification, “passive empathy through the denial of power relations” (Boler, 1999, p. 261), and students’ reliance on “other people’s oppression in the identification and interpretation of their own lives” (Rosenberg, 1978, p. 83).

Alternatively, talking about literature from a critical stance helps students to look beyond an individual’s character and toward the oppressive societal structures that influence individual behavior (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Shor (1987) posits that a critical model of literacy “establishes teaching and learning as forms of research and experimentation...[and] questioning what we know” (p. 24). It is my belief that opportunities for experimentation, questioning, learning to listen critically, and weighing the varied opinions and arguments of fellow students and teachers all lie within the realm of dialogue (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Given the currently accepted model of reader response theory, I feel that teachers are contributing to their students’ inability to analyze different texts and “tend towards passive acceptance of the text and the dominant culture” (Kempe, 2001, p. 41). I also feel that critical literacy theory will help students to more confidently challenge conflict, oppression, and inequality, while demanding that “people will actively contribute to changing and re-making their culture, with the aim of building a better world in which social justice is not merely an empty slogan” (p. 41). Furthermore, critical literacy theory

informs the Web Pen Pals project as it was emphasized in the young adult literature course in which the preservice teachers were enrolled.

My mentor and I chose the young adult novel, *Monster*, for the preservice teachers to practice applying critical literacy theory and developing their critical stance. *Monster*, by Walter Dean Myers, tells the story of Steve Harmon, a sixteen-year old African-American, who is on trial as an accomplice to murder. The plot develops from the question of whether or not he was a lookout for the murderers of a store owner or was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. He lives in the Harlem city projects with his parents and attends a prestigious high school where he studies film. Steve writes about his experiences in jail and at the trial in the form of a screenplay interspersed with journal entries and flashback scenes. He calls his movie, "Monster," based on what the prosecutor calls him during the trial. The reader plays judge and jury deciding on Steve's innocence or guilt.

This young adult novel was chosen to help the preservice teachers achieve critical talk with their middle school pals. Reading and discussing the book also provided the pals a way to consider the stereotypical representations of young African-American males often created through the media (music videos, advertising, and movies) and to re-think traditional notions of masculinity and toughness as presented in the text. Young adult literature can serve as a medium for critical dialogue because it may help teachers to "raise questions" that help students "notice... 'systems of domination' and 'systems of privilege'" (Edelsky, 1999, p. 12). *Monster* was chosen as a text that lends itself easily to the facilitation of critical talk.

One way that teachers can help students develop a critical stance is by posing

critical questions in their discussions about texts. To help the preservice teachers understand and recognize such questions, we introduced Lewison's, Flint's and Van Sluys's (2002) "Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy" (see Table 1.1) in our young adult literature class. Because the young adult literature course was geared toward encouraging and understanding how preservice English teachers facilitate critical talk in online literature discussions, the "Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy" framework was used as a teaching tool.

I chose this framework for two important reasons. First, it synthesized the range of critical literacy definitions that have been established over the last 30 years. Starting with the problematization of the "everyday through new lenses" and ending with social action, the four dimensions are as follows: disrupting the commonplace; interrogating multiple viewpoints; focusing on sociopolitical issues and taking action; and promoting social justice (2002, p. 383). Each dimension has unique characteristics, and Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys contend that these dimensions are interrelated and interdependent. They also admit that newcomers to critical literacy rarely progress beyond "Disrupting the Commonplace." Second, the preservice teachers were introduced to this framework in their course in order to aid them in their online discussions by improving their ability to develop critical questions.

In the young adult literature class, we discussed each dimension as they might apply to *Monster* and brainstormed potential questions to help their pals engage in each dimension before beginning the Web Pen Pals project. Employing Lewison's, Flint's, and Van Sluys's (2002) "Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy," we considered what types of critical *topics* could be discussed about *Monster*. Certain types of discussion topics (race,

**Table 1.1. Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Disrupting the Commonplace	<p>Problematizing all subjects of study (including adolescence, learning), and understanding existing knowledge as a historical product</p> <p>Interrogating texts: “How is this text trying to position me?”</p> <p>Including popular culture and media as a regular part of the curriculum</p> <p>Studying language to analyze how it shapes identity, constructs cultural discourses, and supports or disrupts the status quo</p>
Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints	<p>Reflecting on multiple and contradictory perspectives</p> <p>Asking: “Whose voices are heard and whose are missing?”</p> <p>Paying attention to and seeking out the voices of those who have been silenced or marginalized</p> <p>Making difference visible</p>
Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues	<p>Going beyond the personal and attempting to understand the sociopolitical systems to which we belong</p> <p>Challenging unquestioned legitimacy of unequal power relationships</p> <p>Redefining literacy as a form of cultural citizenship and politics that increases opportunities for subordinate groups to participate in society and as an ongoing act of consciousness and resistance</p>
Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice	<p>Engaging in praxis—reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it</p> <p>Using language to exercise power to enhance everyday life and to question practices of privilege and injustices</p> <p>Analyzing how language is used to maintain domination, how nondominant groups can gain access to dominant forms of language and culture, how diverse forms of language can be used as cultural resources, and how social action can change existing discourses</p>

Lewison, M., Flint, A.S., & Van Sluys, K. (2002). Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices. *Language Arts*, 79(5), 382-392.

gender, class) were also considered because, as Dozier, Johnston, and Reggies (2006) point out, “Critical literacy also requires understanding literacy as a tool for social action and understanding the ways in which that tool works—for example, how language is organized to reproduce race, class, and gender roles...” (p. 19). Table 1.2 shows what types of topics, questions, and activities we matched to the four dimensions in order to help the preservice teachers bridge theory into practice.

### ***Burbules’s Theory of Dialogue***

Another theory that will aid my study is Burbules’s theory of dialogue. Burbules’s three rules of dialogue provide a framework for examining the process critical talk about literature might follow. The first rule of dialogue is participation. Considering Burbules’s (1993) context is school, he posits that if dialogue is to be pedagogical, it requires active participation from all its members. He warns against what Freire (1970/2001) calls “monologue” and Nystrand (1997) calls “monologic” in a dialogue—one person should not be able to monopolize the discussion. Members should “raise topics, pose questions, challenge each other,” and engage in any activity that defines dialogical interaction (p. 81). The participation rule provides a way to determine how many turns the participants take in the dialogue, who is asking the majority of the questions, and what types of questions are being asked.

The second rule that Burbules (1993) developed is the rule of commitment. This rule is two fold in that it requires its members to be open about their positions and open-minded to other’s positions, and it allows the flow of dialogue even in difficult areas. Threats to this rule include manipulation and unwillingness for members to see the

**Table 1.2. Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy as Applied to Discussion of *Monster***

Dimension	Topics/Questions/Activities for <i>Monster</i>
Disrupting the Commonplace	<p>Re-thinking traditional notions of masculinity/toughness (watch Media Education Foundation video, <i>Tough Guise</i>). What are alternative ways to be masculine?</p> <p>Why is this text written in this multi-genre style? How does it affect the reader’s experience of reading the novel? Why might Myers put the reader in this position?</p> <p>Representations of African-American males “gangster” “thug” –seen through music videos, movies, etc. Why aren’t there more positive representations of African-American males in the media? What would positive representations look like?</p> <p>“You’re young, you’re Black, and you’re a male. You’re already guilty in the jury’s eyes.” What does this quote mean?</p>
Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints	<p>What if Steve were White? What if the lawyers and judge were Black? Why does Steve’s mother wonder if they should get a Black lawyer?</p> <p>The multi-genre novel forces the reader into this dimension—what Steve tells us vs. what others say about him through genres—journal, script, flashbacks—multiple perspectives makes reader play judge and jury</p>
Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues	<p>Considering reasons why urban decay—white flight—once thriving urban centers have become economically disadvantaged and look at links between this and masculinity for young African-American males</p> <p>Percentage of young Black males in prison vs. other populations</p> <p>Research shows Black males incarcerated at higher rates than other populations due to “individual personality characteristics” vs. environmental factors</p>
Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice	<p>Students writing local television station about misrepresentation of African-American teen involved in murder</p>

dialogue through to its conclusion. The rule of commitment compliments critical literacy and the idea of considering another's perspective. This rule describes moments of flow in the dialogue in which disagreements occur and the respect that must be present to see the dialogue through to its conclusion. In dialogue that occurs through a critical literacy stance, socio-political systems are examined, and preservice teachers and students must be open-minded about their positions. This respect and open-mindedness is essential to developing a flow and rhythm to the dialogue without shutting people or topics down.

The last rule is one of reciprocity (Burbules, 1993). Engagement must be undertaken with mutual respect and concern. All dialogue must be reflexive and reversible. If one person asks questions, then others should be allowed to ask questions. Burbules does not expect these rules to be mandated. However, he thinks that they serve as guideposts for dialogue. The idea of reciprocity is relevant in critical dialogue. If we want teachers to consider an alternative from the I-R-E pattern of discussion, it is necessary for the students to feel like they can ask questions just as much as the teacher.

Central to this study is the assumption that talk is beneficial and supports learning. All of the aforementioned theories inform my study specifically in terms of the critical talk *topics* attempted by the preservice teachers in the online discussions and the *process* of what that critical talk might look like. Lewison's, Flint's, and Van Sluys's (2002) "Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy" serves as a framework to educate preservice teachers about critical talk and helps them to understand what the types of *topics* might look like in each dimension. In terms of the *process* of critical talk, Burbules's theory of dialogue provides rules for the preservice teachers to follow that might encourage the occurrence of critical talk. This *process* encompasses the social interaction between the preservice teachers and their pals in a

new medium that may have the potential to transform talk.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is designed to add to the literature about preservice teachers' strategies for facilitating critical discussion and the use of computer-based technologies at the secondary level. Beginning teachers need to be exposed to viable alternatives to scripted programs, the I-R-E pattern of discussion (Cazden, 1988), and the reader response paradigm (Rosenblatt, 1978). The Web Pen Pals project offers preservice teachers a safe space to try on a critical stance toward literature with real adolescent students.

As stated earlier, instructional literature is seldom available to aid teachers in the planning and facilitation of discussion. This study serves to add to the instructional literature about discussion so that teacher educators may learn how to successfully prepare preservice teachers to facilitate critical talk. My findings provide important information for teacher educators to consider when helping beginning teachers facilitate critical talk. Preservice teachers need time and opportunity to develop a critical stance. This research points to the importance of developing curriculums around texts to inspire critical literacy, the need to establish relationships with students to make them feel comfortable participating in critical talk, and the necessity of providing preservice teachers with opportunities to use technology for their future classrooms.

### **Organization of the Study**

Following this introductory chapter is a review of the literature relevant to computer-mediated communication (CMC) and discussion. This chapter is followed by a description of the methodology utilized in this study. The next chapter details my



findings organized around three case studies. The final chapter reports the discussion and interpretations of my findings.

## **CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

In chapter one, I established that the purpose of my study was to discover how three preservice English teachers who were encouraged to take a critical stance facilitated discussion online with middle school students. In this chapter, I will present a review of the literature related to computer-mediated communication (CMC) and discussion. I will review each topic in order to gain a deeper understanding. Since computer-mediated communication is a relatively new field and most of the research is limited to the higher education level rather than the secondary level, it is important to grasp the history behind the topic. I have divided the section on CMC into seven major topics: an historical overview of computer-mediated communication, an examination of the myriad of definitions of CMC, a consideration of the rise of social interaction within CMC, a comparison of asynchronous and synchronous CMC, an examination of the use of CMC outside of education, a review of the use of CMC in education, and a discussion about the effects of CMC on teaching and learning. I will then review the literature related to the topic of discussion. The section on discussion has been divided into three major topics: an examination of theorists/philosophers, English Education's movement toward discussion, and the ways of responding and talking about texts.

### **Computer-Mediated Communication**

#### **Introduction**

I am a product of the generation that grew up with the benefit of computer-mediated communication (CMC). In middle school, I tried to be the best behaved in my

class so that I could go to the library with my friend to play *Oregon Trail* on the school's only computer for students—the Commodore 64. From the moment I connected with technology, I was hooked. I wanted a Commodore 64 for my birthday that year, but I was devastated when we had to get the station wagon fixed instead. Later, during my high school years, I finally got my first computer.

In 1994, I joined America Online (AOL) and became acquainted with all the possibilities of CMC. I could send emails, talk in real time to people all over the world, and post messages to bulletin boards. It was a whimsical world that I could escape to after dinner in which I made friends, fell in love, and played online bingo. CMC has been an integral part of my life; so not surprisingly I am drawn to studying online discussions. However, CMC engenders more than a type of freedom for a young girl escaping her world into another. It has its own history.

### **History of CMC**

To understand computer-mediated communication, one must consider the background of its history. Connections for the Internet, a computer network, were formed throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. The U.S. Department of Defense and several research universities through the Defense Advanced Research Program Agency (DARPA) linked computers (Jones, 1995). The result was a network called Arpanet, which allowed each site's computers access to one another for communication and research. Initially, the information was shared from one individual to another through electronic mail. When the need to send information to many users at one time became necessary, mailing lists were created to send the information from one central point to all

those on the mailing lists. From there, bulletin boards were created so that researchers could link to one another based on certain topics.

In the 1970s, other computer networks grew and were able to connect to Arpanet, which evolved into what we now know as the Internet (Jones, 1995). As a result of the National Science Foundation's generous funding, 30 regional computing networks were created. Recipients of these networks included 300 higher education institutions and some secondary schools causing over two million students to have access to computers in 1974 (Molnar, 1997). The growth was impressive considering that in 1963 only 1% of secondary schools used computers for instructional purposes compared to in 1975, 55% of schools had access but only 23% were used for instruction (Molnar, 1997).

By the mid 1980s, the Internet was expanding its technological base. Email was being used through different networks and communities. The expansion coincided with the commercialization of technology, which has only occurred in the last 20 years when computer use switched from not only technical but to personal use (Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2004). Before the mid 1990s, the interest was not on CMC but rather on Human-Computer Interaction. Thurlow, Lengel, and Tomic (2004) define this type of computer technology as "practical concerns such as information processing, data transfer, and hardware design" (p. 15). They argue that CMC originated and became interesting to scholars in the mid-1990s with the boom of emailing, online chatting, and surfing the web.

### **Definitions of CMC**

Many different definitions of computer-mediated communication exist. Santoro (1995) defines it broadly, "At its broadest, CMC can encompass virtually all computer

uses including such diverse applications as statistical analysis programs, remote sensing systems, and financial modeling programs, all fit within the concept of human communication” (p. 11). At its simplest form, Herring (1996) defines CMC as merely, “communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers” (p. 1).

Yet other researchers emphasize the human element as Jones (1995) chooses to define it,

CMC, of course, is not just a tool; it is at once technology, medium, and engine of social relations. It not only structures social relations, it is the space within which the relations occur and the tool that individuals use to enter that space. It is more than the context within which social relations occur (although it is that, too) for it is commented on and imaginatively constructed by symbolic processes initiated and maintained by individuals and groups (p. 16).

Jones’s definition moves beyond CMC being the tool an individual navigates, but points to its being technology and relations combined within a space. CMC can also be the space that relationships occur within, which many have called cyberspace. As Bell (2001) poetically writes of cyberspace,

thinking about what cyberspace ‘is’ and what it ‘means’ involves its own hypertextuality, as we mingle and merge the hardware, software and wetware with memories and forecasts, hopes and fears, excitement and disappointment. Cyberspace is, I think, something to be understood as it is lived-while maps and stats give us one kind of insight into it, they are inadequate to the task of capturing the thoughts and feelings that come from, to take a mundane example,

sending and receiving email. At one level, thinking of cyberspace as a culture emphasizes this point: it is lived culture, made from people, machines and stories in everyday life (p. 2).

Within this definition, social interaction reigns above mere hardware. Computer-mediated communication becomes more than just an exchange of messages between linked computers.

### **The Rise of Social Interaction in CMC**

CMC is in its nature grounded in communication. As Thurlow, Lengal, and Tomic (2004) point out communication is used to “express our identities, to establish and maintain relationships, and eventually to build communities—three of the most important themes in CMC” (p. 18). It is in these interactive spaces of CMC that scholars focus much of their research. These spaces of interaction can take place in many different forms. The forms that most often interest CMC researchers are the following:

- emails, listservs and mailing lists
- newsgroups, bulletin boards, and blogs
- internet relay chat and instant messaging
- metaworlds and visual chat
- personal homepages and webcams (Thurlow, Lengal, & Tomic, 2004, p. 31).

CMC forms of technology provide spaces for interaction that are influenced by the goal of the user. Context of CMC also plays a part in deciding what form is appropriate. The type of CMC that is chosen is based on many factors: the sex of the participants, number

of participants, length of relationship between users, purpose of the exchange, desire of the interaction to be synchronous (i.e. real time) or asynchronous (i.e. not real time), the amount of privacy in the exchange, and the user's ease in using technology (Thurlow, Lengal, & Tomic, 2004). These factors are considerations in researching each form.

Early researchers were skeptical of the amount of authentic social interaction that could potentially take place in the different CMC forms. Studies investigated different modes of communication such as CMC and determined that the lack of social cues resulted in less intimate interactions as well as lower social presence than face-to-face interaction (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986; Rutter 1987; Daft & Lengal, 1984). Furthermore, the studies evaluated how CMC created more task-oriented interaction than relational. Also, studies suggested that CMC lacked the richness needed to create understanding between people. These studies occurred before the commercialization boom of the Internet and the personal computer. However, they are important because their findings were consistent with one another, and they influenced the view that CMC was impersonal and unsociable. In fact, these studies inadvertently encouraged a privileging of face-to-face communication over CMC, suggesting that attributes like intimacy and warmth could not occur in CMC.

The prevailing thought was challenged when Walther (1992) proposed the Social Information Processing Model of CMC. Walther is one of the first CMC researchers to question early findings about the lack of intimacy and sociability online, and he critiqued the experimental studies and their application to CMC use (Murray, 1997). Walther (1992) pointed out that CMC could be as effective as face-to-face interactions: "Given sufficient time and message exchanges for interpersonal impression formation and

relational development to accrue, and all things being equal, relational quality in later periods of CMC and FtF communication will be the same” (p. 69). Furthermore, he believed that the relational aspect of CMC was due to people’s need for connection as social beings (Chester & Gwynne, 1998). This thinking is not any different from Thurlow and Brown’s idea of the communication imperative that states:

As human beings we’re born to communicate and are driven to maximize our communication satisfaction and interaction. This means that we invariably circumvent any practical or technological obstacles which might otherwise prevent us from having the kind of relational fulfillment we desire (Thurlow, Lengal, & Tomic, p. 51).

Walther and Burgoon, (1992) built on this idea when they found that CMC became more personal when an increase in time spent communicating online occurred. Walther later built on this research when he developed the term hyperpersonal, which is defined as “a more intimate and socially desirable exchange than face-to-face interactions” (Chester & Gwynne, 1998, para. 9). Walther expounded upon the idea of developing intimacy through CMC. Not only could intimacy be achieved, but it could be improved beyond that which is possible in face-to-face interactions. This conclusion was reached because CMC users can interact with one another “without the interference of environmental reality,” which enables them to create certain impressions and identities (Walther, 1996, p. 33). Walther also felt that the lack of visual cues, physical isolation, and self-presentation allowed for increased group cohesion, positive group impressions, and decreased individual differences. Hyperpersonal interaction takes place when future interactions are expected and no face-to-face relationship exists. Other researchers began



to take Walther's lead and examine the social interaction in CMC. As Herring (2001) points out about research during this time, "In part, the first wave of CMC scholarship was a reaction against misunderstandings about CMC that had gone before" (p. 613). More research was needed to remove the stigma of earlier experimental research that regarded CMC as cold and impersonal. As researchers began to evaluate the social interactions of people amongst the different CMC forms, a larger distinction became apparent. The two main genres which emerged from CMC were synchronous CMC and asynchronous CMC.

### **Synchronous CMC and Asynchronous CMC**

The main differences between synchronous and asynchronous CMC have to do with time and formats. Synchronous communication occurs in what is called "real time," and asynchronous communication does not occur in "real time." In other words, in asynchronous communication participants are not communicating simultaneously. Asynchronous communication is represented in emails, listservs, newsgroups, bulletin boards, and discussion forums (Sternberg, 1998). Conversely, Sternberg describes synchronous communication as occurring real time, represented in formats such as internet relay chats, chatrooms, MUDs (Multi User Domains), MOOs (object oriented MUDs), and in gaming such as online poker. While researchers often study "CMC" or "online" when investigating language, identity, and social interaction in these formats, distinct differences exist between asynchronous and synchronous communication.

The organization of the two types of CMC has differences. Crystal (2001) describes asynchronous communication as a situation in which, "the interactions are

stored in some format, and made available to users upon demand, so that they can catch up with the discussion , or add to it, at any time—even after an appreciable period has passed” (p. 11). In this communication, participants have time to reflect on what they would like to post in an email or bulletin board. This method of communication can be a benefit in other ways as well. As Sternberg (1998) points out, “The heightened sense of immediacy in chat leads to more emotion, more heated exchanges, and more kinds of misbehavior than in asynchronous CMC systems, which have built-in delays that allow tempers to simmer down” (para. 8). Furthermore, language in asynchronous communication is more formal than synchronous discussion and is without the pressure of immediate response that synchronous communication requires. Lapadat (2002) describes the benefit of not feeling the pressure to respond,

The result is that online participants can and do take time to think, to polish what they say, and to edit. Participants in asynchronous conferences produce less in total quantity (e.g., number of words), but their contributions to the discussion tend to be carefully crafted, adapted to the audience, dense with meaning, coherent, and complete (para. 19).

Unlike asynchronous communication, synchronous communication does not afford the participant time for reflection due to the immediacy of the exchanges (Sternberg, 1998). Another result of the sense of urgency linked to synchronous communication is that users have less time for creating self-presentation than they might have in asynchronous communication (Walther, 1992). These factors affect the relations developed and the processing of information between users.

Crystal (2001) describes synchronous communication: “In a synchronous situation, a user enters a chat room and joins an ongoing conversation in real time, sending named contributions which are inserted into a permanently scrolling screen along with contributions from other participants” (p. 11). While asynchronous communication is permanent, synchronous communication can only be accessed by scrolling back the screen to review what was typed. Some programs allow for archiving synchronous chats, but when chatting online through an internet provider such as America Online, the chat is gone when the users log off unless they save it. Due to the immediacy of the medium, synchronous communication has more of a conversational tone with a high incidence of phatic communication (Sternberg, 1998). Even though synchronous communication shares attributes of speaking, constraints of slow typing and the necessity of carrying on multiple conversation threads at once can be problematic to users (Lapadat, 2002). These distinctions need to be considered when looking at studies on CMC as they might affect the findings inadvertently.

### **Main Findings in CMC Use Outside of Education**

Studies in CMC are relatively new, occurring during the last 50 years (Thurlow, Lengal, & Tomic, 2004). Since the first wave of research in the early 1990s challenged earlier assumptions about the impersonal nature of CMC, studies which were conducted after the first wave are more pertinent to my study. Studies in refereed journals, books, chapters in edited books from 1996-2006 found through using the library, electronic sources, and personal sources have been used as the focus of this analysis of literature. After reviewing articles and books on CMC, four broad themes emerged as categories for

the main findings: language, social interaction, discourse patterns in asynchronous and synchronous communication, and issues related to gender. I will briefly discuss these themes and how they relate to CMC outside of education. Then, I will also look at CMC in the educational setting focusing only on synchronous communication since it is an aspect of the Web Pen Pals project. I will examine studies in higher education, and then specifically at studies that deal with preservice teachers, and finally, studies at the secondary education level. Even though I could not include every study in the past decade, I have collected sufficient literature to inform my study. After reviewing the literature, I will discuss the impact CMC has exerted on teaching and learning while delineating the specific needs for future research.

### *Language*

One of the major themes that emerged when reviewing the literature was the use of language within CMC. Language is an aspect of CMC that researchers choose to study even though they may approach it from different angles. Initially researchers looked at the language itself in CMC as an emerging form of a new English. Collot and Belmore (1996) did a study comparing 200,000 words in CMC bulletin boards to traditional written and spoken English. They found that CMC language was immediate and friendlier but more formal than speech. Another researcher Naomi Baron (1998) examined the linguistic profiles of email and discovered the language to be a hybrid form of speech and writing. David Crystal (2001) devoted an entire book, entitled *Language and the Internet*, to the topic. He describes the different ways language is used on the Internet through different CMC formats. He describes language online as netspeak, which

he defines as, “a type of language displaying features that are unique to the Internet... arising out of its character as a medium which is electronic, global, and interactive” (p. 18). He also describes how emoticons evolved from netspeak to compensate for the lack of facial expressions and gestures in CMC. Emoticons are defined as, “combinations of keyboard characters designed to show an emotional expression: they are typed in sequence on a single line, and placed after the final punctuation mark of a sentence” (p. 36). Researchers found that women use emoticons more than men (Lee, 2003; Witmer & Katzman, 1997; Wolf, 2000).

Studies have been done that focus on the phonological simulation of language that was indicative of netspeak. Some researchers such as Werry (1996) believe that netspeak emerged out of the medium as a result of users trying to create a conversational tone, “the conventions that are emerging are a direct reflection of the physical constraints on the medium combined with a desire to create a language that is as ‘speech-like’ as possible” (p. 48). This research implied that users were trying to replicate the conversational tone of face-to-face spoken language online. Werry noticed this practice with the speech patterns in CMC, such as different strands at once, short turns, addressivity, and minimal backchannelling from listeners. The language was much more like speech than writing and was similar to a face-to-face informal conversation among friends.

However, other researchers assumed a sociolinguistic stance of language in CMC and attribute it to the social interplay that occurs online (Cargile & Giles, 1997; Stevenson, 2000). Users may or may not choose to conform to the language which may be markers for social acceptance. The use of language online serves as a way for users to relate or bond to other members.

Another aspect of language in CMC that gets attention from researchers is the use of gendered language patterns. Looking at traditional gender roles and verbal interaction in face-to-face settings, researchers studied whether those same patterns existed online. Herring (2000) found that gendered language patterns in face-to-face interaction and CMC had the same representations when it came to aspects such as interactive engagement, laughter, assertiveness, and amount of talk. Other studies found similar results with women self-disclosing more online and men more confident, often less polite and direct in their language use online (Savicki, 1996; Rodino, 1997; Arnold & Miller, 1999).

### ***Social Interaction***

The way social interaction in CMC is studied is varied. This section shows examples of research of CMC outside of education conducted in some prevalent ways, but it in no way represents all that is in the literature. Due to the anonymity in CMC and the ability to reach people all over the world, online relationships developed. Returning to Walther's (1992) Social Information Processing model and his findings about relational development over time in CMC, researchers investigated relationships and their development online. Many studies focus on relationship development online and how users enact self-presentation in those relationships (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Utz, 2000; Roberts & Parks, 1999). Self-presentation allows users to decide when and how they will present themselves to others. The anonymity of CMC allows users to share their complete selves online, including their negative traits (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002).

Relational development in CMC is influenced by a social shaping perspective.

CMC is both shaped by and shapes social practices (Dutton, 1996). It is a perspective that does not attribute all that occurs in online interactions to technology or to the individual behaviors of the users. This perspective is particularly important when studying online dating in CMC. Researchers examine online dating and how relationships are developed and maintained in this environment (Baker, 2002; Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001; Donn & Sherman, 2002). A main focus of this research is self-presentation since those that use CMC for dating purposes will most likely meet face-to-face. Studies examined whether users falsify their identities online (Stone, 1996; Turkle, 1995), and how online daters try to establish credibility regarding a potential mate's identity claims (Donath, 1999; Kibby 1997). Not only are there many studies about the relationship development between online daters, but there are many that research the development of friendships (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Bonebrake, 2002; Stafford, Kline, & Dimmick, 1999).

Not only are social interactions studied in one-on-one relationships, but online communities are studied as well. Online communities are formed through groups such as mutual interest bulletin board groups or gaming communities. Defining an online community can be problematic. As Liu (1999) states,

While the concept of 'virtual community' is still an issue of much debate, an even more fundamental problem is what exactly constitutes a 'virtual community' and whether the current activities on the Internet can be considered as a 'community' in the sociological sense (para. 1)

which further complicates the idea of a definitive definition of community in an online community. Studies examine the social interaction within these online communities (Smith, 1999; Smith, Farnham, & Drucker, 2000). Also of interest are group processes

and virtual organizations which are communities that consist of a collaboration of people that work together in different industries (Lockett & Holland, 1996; Monge & Fulk, 1999; Ahuja & Carley, 1998). Social interaction in CMC outside of education has been researched from many perspectives.

### *Discourse Patterns in CMC*

Another area in which much research has been done is the examination of discourse patterns in CMC. The focus of this research includes patterns such as participation levels, turn taking, addressivity, and floor taking within CMC. Interest in this type of research often stems from researchers' interest in comparing face-to-face discourse patterns to those found in CMC. For example, in synchronous chat, turn adjacency pairing (one person asks a question and then another person answers) is often disrupted due to the multiple threads and participants (Herring, 1999). This problem is partly related to the technology transmissions that can make a message lag. Werry (1996) found that strategies like addressivity (calling a person directly by his or her name) can help with incoherent turns. Cherny (1999) found that frequent use of a name (addressivity) was like a gaze in a face-to-face exchange, and that other strategies included asking for bids for the floor and roll calls. These studies focus on the incoherence of the multiple discussion threads that occur in synchronous CMC and how users adjust.

Crystal (2001) points out that asynchronous CMC exchanges lack some of the discourse patterns of synchronous CMC because they resemble a mixture of informal letter and essay patterns rather than those of a conversation. Davis and Brewer (1997)



describe asynchronous conferencing in light of its differences, “There is no real turn taking in electronic conference discourse. Instead there is an asynchronous exchange of messages about a particular topic” (p. 28). Asynchronous exchanges can be redundant since users do not know what others have said until they see their message (Crystal, 2001). Differing discourse patterns must be dealt with when using either asynchronous or synchronous discussion. As Crystal (2001) points out about the two mediums,

Chatgroups provide something else—a person-to-person interaction that is predominately social in character. The semantic content and discourse coherence of a chatgroup is likely to be stronger within the asynchronous setting, but even there significant social elements operate. And it would seem that, even in the most contentless and incoherent interactions of the synchronous setting, the social advantages outweigh the semantic disadvantages (p. 168).

Discourse patterns continue to be studied due to their perceived effects on the social interaction of CMC and the effects of technology on communication.

### ***Gender***

Issues of gender and power are prevalent in CMC research. Finding studies regarding gender is not difficult as the topics are diverse and just as significant in number (Bell, 2001). In general, studies about gender examine how women and men interact and use language on the internet. However, other studies highlight aspects of CMC such as online gaming. Studies have found that men outnumber women when it comes to graphic games and visual chat, but women are starting to make up a small majority of online gamers (Fattah, Paul, & Gitteau, 2002; Bodmer, 2001). When it comes to basic CMC

such as email and online chatting, women are more likely than men to participate (Bodmer, 2001). Other aspects of online gaming which have been examined include female characters and violence in games specifically targeted for men (Schumacher & Morahan-Martin, 2001).

Other studies take a feminist stance in CMC, examining the masculinization of cyberspace and the assumptions about the technological competency of women (Arizpe, 1999; Morse, 1997). In the study of women's uses of CMC, language is an area that is often examined. Women's speech in interactional patterns of language is considered more emotionally expressive than men's and as a result, women are more likely to challenge people online (Witmer & Katzman, 1997). This expressiveness is illustrated through the use of emoticons online; women have been found to use emoticons more than men (Lee, 2003; Witmer & Katzman, 1997; Wolf, 2000). Most results of studies in the area of gender in CMC are predictable.

## **CMC Uses in Education**

### ***Higher Education***

The use of CMC in higher education seems to have two major applications. One practical application is concerned with improving distance education and the progression of technology. As Beller and Or (1998) point out, "The growing demand among learners for improved accessibility and convenience, lower costs, and more direct applicability of contents to work settings is beginning to change the higher education environment" (para. 11). Not only does CMC affect distance education, but some institutions use CMC to enhance or supplement their current class instruction (Murphy & Collins, 1997). The second application is the integration of CMC technology into the educational setting to

complement the pedagogical shift in education toward constructivism. CMC affords the opportunity for students and instructors alike to participate through online technologies in collaboration for the social construction of knowledge (Murphy & Collins, 1997; Lapadat, 2002; Kanuka, 2005; Veerman, Andriessen, & Kanselaar, 2000).

When accessing CMC in educational settings, users encounter the problem of lack of common terminology. CMC can mean either asynchronous or synchronous or both. Online discussions can refer to synchronous chats or asynchronous bulletin boards. Synchronous CMC can be called online chats or electronic discussions. Due to an inconsistency in terminology, standardization of terms in research is recommended (Tallent-Runnels, et. al, 2006).

Not only are there a variety of terms when referring to CMC, areas that CMC researchers study in educational settings are varied. Before discussing synchronous CMC specifically, a general overview of CMC in educational settings may be helpful. In terms of the settings studied in online environments, most studies focus on higher education and distance education courses rather than secondary classrooms (Murphy & Collins 1997; Greene 2005). Several studies have focused on describing the interaction patterns that occur in synchronous (Greene 2005; Murphy & Collins 1997; Lenhart et al 2001; Utz 2000) and asynchronous environments (Greene 2005; Heuer & King 2004; Huffaker & Calvert 2005).

Regardless of the technological environment investigated, some key findings and common patterns emerge from this body of research. In general, some studies support the claim that online environments are more democratic (Schallert et al., 1996). The online space provides an arena for participation by all of its members. In the studies that focus

on educational settings, the online space provides a level playing field between the instructor and the students, generating an equitable participation in which the instructor does not dominate the discussion (Heuer & King, 2004).

Other researchers have examined the role of gender in online interactions. Similar to studies that deal with CMC outside of education, Huffaker and Calvert (2005) found in the asynchronous conference they studied that females used emoticons more than males. Furthermore, they also observed females demonstrating a higher degree of classroom community than males, even engaging in conventional politeness through language. Another study verified these findings and examined how females use more encouraging remarks while males' remarks are more critical and assertive (Rovai, 2001).

Some researchers have focused on the importance of social interaction in an online learning environment. Patterns such as the role of the instructor, the establishment of relationships, and the development of identity are all important findings that relate to the social dimensions of the online space (Hu et al. 2004; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Utz, 2000; Heuer & King, 2004).

While considerable research has been conducted on asynchronous CMC, perhaps a gap exists in the research on synchronous CMC interaction. Most research on CMC in educational settings has focused on asynchronous communication (Lapadat, 2002; Wang & Newlin, 2001; Pan & Sullivan, 2005; Marjanovic, 1999). Possible reasons for this differential are the large enrollment of students, instructors thinking students can get all they need through links on the course website, and time spent on preparing and maintaining this type of course exceeds time spent on a traditional course (Wang & Newlin, 2001). Time consuming for the instructor and the student, synchronous

communication requires teachers and students to be online at a designated time to participate. Asynchronous communication can be accessed any time at the student's convenience. The time management factor is considered an advantage for asynchronous discussion over synchronous discussion because it is flexible, and since asynchronous communication is not immediate, students have time to reflect and prepare their answers before posting them (Williams, 2002). Finally, synchronous communication is also known as "chat," which often carries a negative connotation. Aitken and Shedletsky (2002) asserted that chat is less useful for group interaction than asynchronous communication, and that synchronous discussion was less serious and off task than asynchronous discussion. Perhaps these are reasons why synchronous CMC is not studied as much as asynchronous CMC.

### ***Preservice Teachers' Use of CMC***

Not only is CMC integrated into regular education courses in universities and colleges, but it is also a part of teacher education programs. Investigating the research of CMC and preservice teachers is necessary for my focus with the Web Pen Pals project and its examination of the preservice teachers' facilitation of the online literature discussions.

Preservice teachers in colleges of education are inadequately prepared for the use of technology in their future classrooms. The Panel on Educational Technology (1997) reports that preservice teachers are being taught about technology, but that the education is often misleading as,

Preservice requirements, however, can typically be satisfied by completing a course on how to operate a computer, or by taking a 'methods' course in which educational technology is discussed, but never actually used by either the professor or the students (sec. 5.4, para. 2).

As a result, preservice teachers are not taught how to integrate technology as a pedagogical tool, but rather are taught basic computer use and maintenance. Granted, K-12 education lags behind when it comes to integrating technology as Blanton, Moorman, and Trathen (1998) point out, "Most school computers lack adequate hard drives, are not networked locally or to the Internet, and are located in isolated labs rather than classrooms. There is little technical support; fewer than 5% of schools have a full-time computer coordinator" (p. 236). Not much has changed recently, and as new Internet technologies such as synchronized environments require more sophisticated technologies, their integration still progresses slowly in K-12 settings (Dede, Brown L' Bahy, & Whitehouse, 2002).

However, even if the new technologies were integrated, teachers are not prepared to use them or teach kids how to use them effectively (Karchmer, 2001). Arguably, educating preservice teachers to learn to use technology pedagogically does not seem practical if when they get their own classrooms, the technology they need to employ is not available. The main reasons colleges of education fail to teach preservice teachers how to integrate technology are lack of time for professors to restructure their courses, lack of funding for hardware and software, slow curricular reform due to demands on education faculty to research, publish, and meet their other academic responsibilities (Panel of Educational Technology, 1997).

Yet, the studies which include preservice teachers and CMC are the result of university faculty using the CMC as a tool for preservice teachers' reflections, virtual simulations, or experiences via CMC to interact with live students. Whether or not the connection is made to the preservice teachers beyond their own use of technology in that setting to its application in their own classrooms is unknown. Not unlike studies outside of education, research about preservice teachers/interns and CMC focuses predominately on asynchronous communication. Blanton, Moorman, and Trathen (1998) found that most studies in teacher education and CMC describe how CMC projects are implemented, their perceived success, the effects of CMC on individuals or groups, and community discourse within CMC as seen through the dialogue that occurs. They asserted that the research produced is often descriptive and anecdotal lacking a theoretical frame. An abundance of CMC research exists, but very few of the studies have theoretical frames and conclusive guidelines (Tallent-Runnels, 2006).

Examples of descriptive studies of CMC projects in which preservice teachers use asynchronous communication mainly to discuss and share experiences about teaching are prevalent (Hoover, 1994; Powers & Dutt-Doner, 1997). In these studies, prospective teachers employed asynchronous communication in order to post their experiences from the field, discuss feelings of support, and to debate teaching strategies. General studies such as these are placed into analytic categories based on topics the prospective teachers chose to write about and their experience with using the CMC.

Some studies focus on how CMC can affect individuals or groups. This type of research of preservice teachers and CMC studies the opportunity that CMC affords preservice teachers who have little experience with children. CMC gives preservice

teachers a chance to become familiar with teacher roles before they intern. Asynchronous and synchronous communication can be used in different ways to provide various experiences for preservice teachers. Email was used to link preservice teachers with middle school students to discuss reading workshop activities in the classroom and to discuss books they were reading and liked to read (Kolloff & Ogden, 1996). Researchers found that the emails provided preservice teachers with a deeper understanding of pedagogy and also gave them experience with adolescents and their attitudes about reading and activities within the classroom. Carico and Logan (2004) implemented synchronous chats in which preservice teachers were paired with middle school students to discuss adolescent literature. Through the online chats, preservice teachers got an invaluable experience of having discussions with middle school students that they might not have had otherwise. Kirk, Guenther, Loguidice, and Nkemnji (2003) used both asynchronous and synchronous CMC in their project which paired up rural, white, preservice teachers with urban middle school students to be email pals. The preservice teachers also used video-conferencing to observe the urban classroom throughout the semester. Synchronous chat provided a venue for the preservice teachers to meet and discuss their experiences with the urban middle schoolers. Through this project, stereotypes and myths were challenged, and the preservice teachers had the opportunity to observe and interact with students from a very different background from their own. The use of CMC offers experiences that might not normally be feasible for preservice teachers and lets them interact with students in a non-threatening environment before they embark on their internship.

Finally, Wade and Fauske's (2004) study of prospective teachers' discourse



strategies would be an example of research which focuses on community discourse within CMC. In this type of research, the focus is on applying analysis and theory from CMC outside of education. In Wade and Fauske's study, they examined three theoretical frames in analyzing the asynchronous discussions of prospective teachers. The preservice teachers studied cases and issues regarding the inclusion of students who have typically been excluded from the mainstream due to disabilities, language, culture, or gender. Wade and Fauske framed their study around Gee's theory of discourse analysis, theories of gender, language and power, and Burbules's genres of dialogue. Their findings revealed a personalized and supportive CMC environment in which discourse patterns were not gender specific. In fact, both men and women mixed styles of typical "male" and "female" discourse patterns. This study shows that CMC theories can also inform CMC research in educational settings to get a deeper analysis than the descriptive or anecdotal studies.

### ***CMC Use in Middle School English Classrooms***

When reviewing the literature on secondary English classrooms and CMC, it was very sparse. Reasons for that have already been mentioned such as the sophistication of new technologies being slowly implemented into public schools and teachers' lack of knowledge in using these new technologies. I looked for articles about CMC and the teaching of English at the middle school level since the students involved in the Web Pen Pals project are that age level. A few types of studies exist, such as studies that examine the use of CMC in the middle school classroom (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Carico & Logan, 2004); studies that research CMC use outside of school to influence the new

literacies within schools (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Lewis & Fabos, 2005); and then articles that try to promote the use of CMC in the classroom (Owen, 2003). These studies have middle school students as participants, are recent examples of current research, and are found in databases from the National Council Teachers of English and International Reading Association. These studies represent the types of CMC use being implemented in the middle school classroom.

Both asynchronous and synchronous CMC have been used at the middle school level. Carico and Logan (2004) used email, bulletin boards, and online chats to enhance the teaching and learning of literature. Through this implementation of CMC, they found “broadened perspectives, increased knowledge, enhanced communication skills, and more satisfying and effective reading practices” (p. 293). Through the use of synchronous chats, the researchers discovered the middle school students were more enthusiastic and used the archived chats as a tool for examining discussion with their students. Their findings were not unlike findings at the university level in that shyer students participated more; everyone had an equal chance to be heard; and the teacher’s role changed out of the transmission mode. Finally, they felt that using CMC in the classroom had the promise of improving communication and exploring literature through discussions while meeting classroom objectives.

Another study analyzed the implementation of CMC with the use of asynchronous threaded discussion groups to discuss adolescent literature (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006). Benefits from this experience for the middle school students were that, “they were able to create a community through which they had control of the conversation, the meanings they jointly constructed, and the connections they wanted to make to their own lives and

worlds” (p. 649). Grisham and Worsley saw the use of CMC as valuable for students especially at the middle school level for which the accountability movement dictates the curriculum and its pacing. CMC gives students a chance to escape tightly constrained teacher-centered classrooms while still learning. Through their analysis of transcripts, the researchers found that students had deeper responses to one another in the asynchronous discussion threads than in paper journals or face-to-face interaction.

Another area for research of CMC in the middle school studied outside uses of CMC and how those literacy practices affect the classroom. Guzzetti and Gamboa’s (2005) research is a case study of two middle school girls and their use of online journaling outside of school. The researchers believe that CMC activities must be studied outside the context of schools before implications for instruction can be made. Furthermore, they contend that understanding adolescents’ outside literacies provide information about how students develop and practice their communication abilities. If teachers understand this relationship, they can tailor meaningful literacy events in the classroom. The two participants did not believe personal aspects of online journaling had a place in schools. Rather they believed that teachers should be aware of such CMC technologies and be able to direct students to appropriate sites. Although Guzzetti and Gamboa do not recommend using online journals in the classroom, they do recommend that students have the opportunity to write in alternative styles and less traditional forms of expression. Also, literacy practices in CMC provide an opportunity for teachers to reconsider what constitutes writing in the classroom.

Another study examined instant messaging in which five of the seven participants were middle school students (Lewis & Fabos, 2005). Lewis and Fabos acknowledged an

influence to do this study was the lack of research on instant messaging (IMs) and chat rooms that focus on educational or literacy-related topics. Their findings revealed that the social identities and subject positions found in IMs were important factors when considering adolescents and their literacy practices. Like Guzzetti and Gamboa, Lewis and Fabos do not recommend using IMs in the classroom, but rather suggest how to apply the literacy practices to school instruction. Teachers can focus on the different types of writing, and students can discuss the concept of audience, shifting topics, writing style, and voice found in IMs and their applications in writing itself.

Finally, Owen (2003) recommends using blogs in several ways in the classroom because they have great potential as an extension to the traditional classroom. Students could use them as personal journals, bulletin board discussions on literature or writing, and even as an electronic portfolio of written work. CMC provides opportunities for student-centered learning. Articles like Owen's provide rationale for educators to consider implementing CMC into the classroom.

### **CMC Effects on Teaching and Learning**

The effects of CMC on teaching and learning have been researched with inconsistent and contradictory results (Im & Lee, 2004). Studies that support the benefits of CMC on education are as numerous as those that are against it. This dichotomy makes building a case for or against the use of CMC particularly problematic.

When it comes to using either asynchronous or synchronous communication as an educational tool, synchronous discussion seems to show less effectiveness. Researchers have found that synchronous chats are valuable as educational tools to build social bonds

and promote social interaction whereas asynchronous discussion is more useful for task-oriented communication (Im & Lee, 2004; Poole, 2000). One reason for this obvious difference may be that asynchronous communication allows time for reflection and organization of thoughts while synchronous communication is immediate (Lim & Tan, 2001). The time that is used for reflective thinking and talk enhances asynchronous CMC over synchronous chat. As a result, asynchronous CMC fosters higher order thinking, reflection, and social construction of meaning (Collison, et. al 2000).

Benefits for using CMC in the educational setting are many. From a constructivist perspective, CMC enhances social interaction between students and the instructor and creates a shift toward social learning (Kearsley, 2000; Sutton, 2001). Not only does it increase those bonds, but it provides opportunities for more students to participate. Palloff and Pratt (1999) found that creating an online community established connectedness, deeper exchange of ideas, risk-taking, and freedom to negotiate during disagreements to reach common educational goals. This social interaction is important for creating learning experiences in the CMC environments. Unlike traditional classrooms in which teachers dominate the discussions, CMC allows all voices to be heard, and even students who are shy, feel less intimidated to participate online (Black, 2005). However, some argue that it is necessary for instructors in online discussions to be more aggressive in maintaining a focused discussion, providing feedback, and posing differing views to foster thinking and discussion (Lim & Cheah, 2003). In fact, if student participation is low online, it can be related to the low quality of guidance by the instructor, which results in ineffective learning for the students (Tallent-Runnels et. al, 2006).

CMC affects teaching and learning through the technology itself. Students that are

inept at technological skills needed to use technology and participate in the discussions may feel left out. For many students, the pace of the chat is difficult to overcome (Greene, 2005). While the pace hinders communication, the format of the chat rooms affects learning as well. Lapadat (2002) found that the chronological record of discourse can be frustrating to users because of the incoherence in the sequence of the discussion. As a result, speed is advantageous to the user both in typing and reading of the screen. For students, the need for substantial typing skills and the effect of the short wait time for participants to respond to a discussion thread are added difficulties to be considered (Murphy & Collins, 1997).

Anonymity in online learning can affect student behavior, which in turn can affect the overall learning experience. As a result, some students may not be concerned about consequences for their behavior and

can develop communication habits that might be disruptive to an instructional setting and protected by the anonymity of the computer medium, and with few social context cues to indicate 'proper' ways to behave, users are able to express and experiment with aspects of their personality that social inhibition would generally encourage them to suppress (Murphy & Collins, 1997, p.181-182).

Conversely, creating participants' anonymity creates a more democratic learning environment for all involved. In this sense, CMC provides equitable learning experiences for students as they all have access to the floor, and the instructor is less likely to dominate (Lapadat, 2002). A shift in power for teachers and students is created by leveling the playing field. The teacher's role shifts from imparting knowledge to helping students create meaning in a learning community (Heuer & King, 2004).

Cooper and Selfe (1990) push for the use of CMC as a forum to disrupt the teacher-centered hegemony that exists in many classrooms. I particularly wanted to discuss this study because I found it to be very informative for my research, and I was unable to uncover anything recent that reflected its points as well. Cooper and Selfe argued that CMC provides a place for student writing and talk that often does not occur in traditional classrooms due to the dyadic relationship of the omniscient teacher and the passive role of the student. They acknowledge that CMC provides opportunities for dialogue and collaboration, but they also point out that it provides opportunities for students to resist as well. Through the educational institution, grades, and traditional relationship of student-teacher, education oppresses students by imposing certain values and beliefs as well as expected behaviors of students.

CMC offers a new space for students to think divergently, disagree, and resist the institution with their own language. This space is necessary as Cooper and Selfe (1990) explain, “Teachers cannot divest themselves of those vestiges of authority that strike them as unproductive by ignoring the institutional arrangements that unequally empower teachers and students” (p. 851). Resistance should not have a negative connotation. Within cyberspace, institutional law does not follow. Students can challenge traditional student-teacher roles and produce alternative ones. In this sense, Cooper and Selfe argue that students are empowered and active learners because, through their resistance, they are creating their own learning experience rather than passively accepting the teacher’s predetermined curriculum. Cooper and Selfe point out that through the use of CMC, “such conferences are capable of making student-teacher and student-student exchanges more egalitarian, reducing the dominance of the teacher and the role of accommodation

behavior in discussion and increasing the importance of the students' discourse" (p. 851-852). Through egalitarian exchanges, the spirit of competition resides within ideas rather than personalities. Although turn-taking within CMC has been problematic to some, Cooper and Selfe see this as a benefit to education because students have more freedom within discussions and can pick up any topic they wish rather than following a certain topic strand.

According to Cooper and Selfe, successful CMC relies on three factors: "the synergistic effect of written conversation, dialogue, and exchange; the shift in power and control from a teacher-centered forum to a student-centered one; and the liberating influence of the electronic medium within which the conferences occur" (p. 857-858). Furthermore, they found that through CMC, students can develop their own ways of talking about classroom concepts. Cooper and Selfe's article presents an interesting frame through which to evaluate the benefits of CMC for students through the resistance of institutionalized power. Their article also suggests that CMC provides a different space through which students may escape the institution of schooling, its discourse, and the traditional student-teacher roles.

A review of the literature shows certain gaps that can be addressed through future research in CMC. Articles written on the topic are numerous, but very few actually have a rigorous methodology and theoretical frame. Most studies reflect descriptions of experiences and make many unwarranted claims. Future research needs to include a strong theoretical frame and transcend the mere description of CMC. Studies need to evaluate the learning acquired through the use of CMC.

In the field of teacher education, studies need to look further than just at



preservice teachers' experiences with using technology. Research should focus on preservice teachers using technology in a pedagogical manner. By providing preservice teachers opportunities to engage in CMC with secondary students, not only do they gain the experience of working with students, but they can also study the pedagogy they use to teach those students. One way to approach this research would be to have preservice teachers implement theoretical practices into CMC with students and then study the archived copies to reflect on those practices.

Future research needs to be done on synchronous CMC as asynchronous communication has been studied far more. Research should be conducted to see how synchronous discussion can be developed into more than just an arena for social interaction. Particular focus on how secondary students navigate these new technologies is needed. The most important research goes back to the basic techniques of imparting and acquiring knowledge using the latest technologies.

## **Discussion**

### **Introduction**

Discussion has been a pedagogical tool used in the English classroom for decades. Researchers have analyzed and critiqued discussion to evaluate the elements needed for its effective use. Furthermore, consideration has been given to the different forms of discussions in the classroom such as whole class, small group, literature circles, and book talks. An examination of discussion as a teaching strategy is important for a complete understanding of the technique.

## **Theorists/Philosophers**

As early as the time of Socrates, discussion was the skillful use of language and patterns of questioning to discover truth. Socrates helped his students give birth to their own ideas and thoughts through what he called maieutics, and this process occurred through the method of dialogue or conversation (Holden, 2002). He would ask a series of questions of his students in order to stimulate higher level thinking for problem solving. Socrates challenged his students to arrive at answers to questions through the process of rephrasing their question and reflecting upon it (Moeller & Moeller, 2002).

This process of questioning is known as the Socratic method, which focuses on the discussion of ideas based on a common text (Holden, 2002). However, disagreement exists as to what really constitutes the Socratic method. For teachers, the method can range from anything to rapid-fire questions, an interview, or even a cross-examination (Moeller & Moeller, 2002). Teachers who integrate the method as a rapid-fire questioning approach, however, lose the benefits of the dialogue that should occur. The Socratic method and its various permutations are routinely used by English educators to stimulate discussion in their classrooms.

John Dewey is a more recent influence on the use of discussion as a teaching strategy. Dewey believed that school is primarily a social institution and that social activities should be the focus of school subjects (Holden, 2002). Rather than using direct interaction between teacher and students to stimulate discovery as in the Socratic method, Dewey felt that knowledge should be co-constructed through the interaction between students. As Hirtle (1996) points out, the construction of knowledge for Dewey involved

using language as a tool for learning by collaborating with other students through their own thoughts and feelings.

Building upon Dewey's ideas of social interaction and language, Vygotsky (1978) believed that intellectual development was promoted through social interactions in social settings. Vygotsky writes about the importance of social interactions and contexts to the learner, "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)" (p. 57). Furthermore, this development and interaction was increased through Vygotsky's idea of the Zone of Proximal Development. As Gilles and Pierce (2003) point out, the ZPD is important when analyzing talk in the classroom because learning can be mediated for a child through a more capable peer or adult. Dixon-Krauss (1996) believed Vygotsky rejected traditional behaviorists' views because they were based on individual passive responses to the surroundings whereas Vygotsky believed that people knew themselves based on their interactions with others. Interactions with others became an important aspect of the learning process. Views such as Vygotsky's and Dewey's led to an appeal for using discussion as a tool in the classroom.

Finally, an historical look at discussion must include the influence of Paulo Freire. When Dewey (1916/1944) made the challenge,

To oscillate between drill exercises that strive to attain efficiency in outward doing without the use of intelligence, and an accumulation of knowledge that is supposed to be an ultimate end in itself, means that education accepts the present social conditions as final (p.137),

he was referring to the banking method that Freire would eventually write about. In the banking method, knowledge is a gift from those who think they are knowledgeable (teachers) to the ignorant (students) “in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving” (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 72). The students are passive and in the role of receivers rather than active participants in the learning process. However, through this process of projecting ignorance, education is negated as a process of inquiry. As Freire states, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72). Freire believed strongly that the more students adapt to the banking method the more they become passive to learning and easier to dominate.

To counter the banking method, Freire (1970/1993) suggests problem-posing education in which dialogue is used to blur or eliminate the roles of “teacher of the students” and “students of the teacher.” In this dialogic process, teacher and student become jointly responsible and critical co-investigators. In Freire’s model, teacher authority is not valid because authority must be on the side of freedom rather than domination. In this conception of freedom, authentic reflection generates authentic thinking that takes place through communication.

Freire calls for a democratic dialogue, which is egalitarian in nature. Most interpret this type of dialogue as simply students taking turns and participating without the restrictions imposed by the banking method. However, Freire’s (1970/1993) dialogue differs in that it also has an essence known as *the word*. Reflection and action are the two dimensions of which *the word* create. Praxis is born out of the process of reflection and

action in which action serves to combat oppression and alienation. Freire does not rely on reason or logic alone to accomplish the freedom which calls students to action, and he does not deny emotion in his democratic dialogue. In fact, love is the foundation of dialogue; faith is a requirement of dialogue; and trust is established through dialogue. As Freire (1970/1993) points out, “Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people...Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself” (p. 89). The relational aspect of dialogue, for Freire, is that dialogue cannot exist without humility, faith, or hope. Along with its relational traits, Freire’s dialogue engages its participants in critical thinking. A teacher who encourages this type of dialogue in education is different from the teacher who implements the banking method because “For the anti-dialogical banking educator, the question of content simply concerns the program about which he will discourse to his students; and he answers his own question, by organizing his own program” (p. 93). Freire’s views about dialogue and the negative effects of the banking method would have a profound effect on the art of discussion in the language arts curriculum.

Burbules is another theorist whose work has influenced the ideas about discussion in English Education. Burbules (1993) chooses to use the word dialogue to describe the symbiotic, communicative relationship that involves both emotional and cognitive interaction between equals. In his model, successful dialogue involves mutual feelings of affection, trust, respect, concern, hope, and appreciation between participants. Influenced by Bakhtin, Freire, Gadamer, Habermas, Vygotsky, and Wittgenstein, Burbules’s main influence for his ideas on dialogue stem from Dewey’s concept of democracy as a free exchange of ideas and Freire’s concept of dialogue. Furthermore, the basis of Burbules’s

view of dialogue includes three aspects of Freire's theory: the relational character of dialogue, a constructivist view of knowledge, and a nonauthoritarian conception of teaching.

He considers all of his influences while defining dialogue as a pedagogical communicative relation. He sees dialogue as pedagogical because it accomplishes more than imparting knowledge as Plato had thought. Burbules (1993) thinks dialogue should involve discovery, exchanges between others in which learning occurs, and an opportunity to learn self-expression within a democratic society. To him, dialogue is communicative and relational because it includes language, reason, morality, a social organization, and a relation that catches its participants up in a spirit of exchange.

Burbules (1993) argues that dialogue is more than just a form of question and response because actual social relations are formed through the dialogue. Through the relationships formed, dialogue becomes a process in which there is mutual respect, trust, and concern. Denying feelings in dialogue and discussion is encouraged by Western thought because to be objective one must express views rationally. However, emotions are tied up in the values and beliefs expressed in dialogue.

Dialogue is not just a discussion between two people who talk at one another, but it is an art that combines both a cognitive interest in knowledge with affective qualities that maintain personal involvement in dialogue. Burbules (1993) redefines dialogic relations as "a relation between and among persons, when they are drawn into a particular dynamic of speaking with and listening to one another." (p. 22).

When considering this type of dialogic relationship, the traditional dyad of teacher/student can no longer exist. As Freire and Dewey have mentioned, when

education becomes interactive, the roles of teacher/student do not become so easily defined. Many argue that the power ideologies cannot be broken down within these roles by the very notion that teachers ultimately have power of students institutionally and through subject matter expertise. However, Burbules (1993) believes that through the dialogic relation, attitudes of trust and respect can acknowledge subject matter expertise without reifying the teacher back into an authoritarian role of power.

Burbules (1993) is fair in his assumptions about dialogue and shares Ellsworth's critique of the "repressive fictions of classroom dialogue" (p. 23). Ellsworth (1989) suggests quite emphatically that dialogue in its conventional sense cannot break down the power relations among class, race, gender, and student/teacher relations. Dangers that Burbules draws from Ellsworth are the risks of excessive reliance on the teacher for knowledge, false confidence of safety within the classroom through equal participation, assuming goodwill will solve all arguments, and that everyone's cultural positions affect the ability to empathize. Another danger is the notion of democratic tolerance within dialogue which is problematic because "the stupid opinion is treated with the same respect as the intelligent one, the misinformed may talk as long as the informed, and propaganda rides along with falsehood" (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999/2005, p. 257).

Burbules (1993) does consider dialogue in contexts of differences, dialogue within equality and community, and dialogue and authority. He addresses the ideas that dialogue does not require identity among its members, and it does not assume that all members will speak the same or hold the same values. He does, however, assume that dialogue will be coupled with respect and understanding that can overlook any problematic differences. Dialogue does not even assume that its members are equal.

However, through the dialogic relations that are formed, roles can be exchanged in which one can learn and teach at the same time.

When it comes to the role of authority, Burbules (1993) has taken into account feminists' critiques of institutional authority. The power a teacher has because he/she is a "teacher" cannot be denied. However, Burbules reasserts the notion of fluid roles between teacher and students. Listening to one another gives authority to members, and the respect of authority is created from the knowledge that can be given. Through the elements of emotion and relational dialogue, the roles of teacher and student no longer connote the traditional unequal power differentials.

Even though many theorists and philosophers have given English teachers theoretical ways to apply and consider the value of discussions in their classrooms, changes in the curriculum were not implemented to include discussion into the classroom until the 1970s (Gilles & Pierce, 2003). Around this time, talk began to be considered an important component in learning. Movements within the language arts curriculum have influenced the use of discussion and dialogue in pedagogical practices.

### **English Education's Movement Toward Discussion**

When the National Council Teachers of English (NCTE) began in 1911, a standard agenda for the teaching of English did not exist. In fact, much of the curriculum in secondary classes was inherited from colleges which influenced the incorporation of courses such as Literature, Penmanship, Elocution, Grammar, Reading, Orthography, Rhetoric, and Composition (Hook, 1997). In the 1890s, Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard, headed the Committee of Ten. This group determined that there were two main



objectives for teaching English at the secondary level:

- 1) To enable the pupil to understand the expressed thoughts of others and to give expression to thoughts of his own; and
- 2) To cultivate a taste for reading, to give the pupil some acquaintance with good literature, and to furnish him with the means of extending that acquaintance (Hook, 1997, p. 13).

However, historically these statements were problematic for English educators. Based on the two objectives for teaching English, communication and literature were joined as unlikely companions with the result that literature was given a privileged position in secondary English classes (Nelms, 2000). Considering all the different elements within the curriculum, educators chose the elements that they valued and shortchanged others since specific academic objectives had not been delineated.

As Applebee (1994) points out, “The English language arts have a long-standing predisposition to come unglued—to separate into the myriad individual studies from which they were assembled” (p. 49). The “ungluing” that Applebee speaks of has been apparent throughout the history of English education. Examples of this fragmentation include speech teachers segregating themselves in 1915 from the English curriculum and reading teachers breaking away from English educators in 1947 to create the International Reading Association (Nelms, 2000). Since the Committee’s decision to divide the English curriculum into two different arenas, communication has always received short shrift. As Nelms (2000) mentions, “Literature has usually emerged the master at least with older, college-bound students; communication skills the handmaiden—with all the inequity those gender-laden terms imply” (p. 51). Not until the 1970s did the uneven

divisions of classroom time for teaching communication become an issue to be addressed.

During the mid-seventies, a dynamic shift in the language arts curriculum occurred. Prior to the 1970s, reading was separated from language arts. Eventually there would be a push to integrate the two disciplines. Reading teachers focused on the actual skills needed in the act of reading whereas English teachers focused on the analysis of literature. In the reading curriculum, the information-processing theory dominated how reading was researched and taught. Major studies of that era focused on information-processing elements of reading such as the individual skills involved in reading like comprehension (Alvermann, Smith, & Readence, 1985), memory (Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert, & Goetz, 1977), and interpretations and recall of texts (Bransford & Franks, 1972). Studies focused on the relationship between text-based factors and comprehension factors within the individual reader *only*. Focusing on the individual skills in reading did not provide time to consider student response to the literature being read. Students' responses to literature affect the way they participate in discussion about literature.

### **Ways of Responding and Talking About Texts**

Readers can employ three models of reading in order to shape their responses to a text and their discussions about that text. As teachers, we affect our students' responses to literature by utilizing these different reading models and influencing how readers interact or fail to interact with a text. These choices affect the levels of meaning making that can occur. These models affect students' internal responses and talk about the text.

### *Transmission and Translation Models*

Originally, the transmission model was popular with reading theorists as it encouraged students to read and extract meaning from the author's intention, placing them in a passive role with no opportunity for meaning making (Schraw & Bruning, 1996). Eventually, reading theorists moved from the transmission model in favor of the translation model (or New Criticism). In this model, meaning is inherent to the text, and readers interpret the message solely from the text when considering their experiences, the text's historical or cultural context, or the author's intended meaning (1996). For example, the transmission and translation models create a classroom environment in which teachers must rely on known answer and close-ended questions about plot and skill development. Examples of such questions teachers might ask include the following: *What is the plot of the story?; What is the theme of the story?; and What are the characters' intentions?*

These two models could lead to an I-R-E pattern of discourse (Mehan, 1979; Cazden, 1988) in a discussion. This concept of talk Barnes (1993) calls presentational talk, a type of communication that dominates many whole class discussions. His description of presentational talk in the classroom follows:

Such presentational talk does not allow students enough opportunity to make the new thinking their own, since it encourages them to be less concerned about sorting out their ideas than about earning praise by giving an officially approved answer to a question. Students know that 'right' answers are expected, and that teachers do not want to linger on one student's hesitations...Indeed, the common kind of questioning that teachers use to check that students are following their line

of thought calls in its very nature for presentational replies, confident and brief (p. 30).

During this time, researchers such as Mehan (1979) examined this type of “presentational talk” that dominated classrooms. His study examined the social organization of interaction in Courtney Cazden’s elementary classroom over a school year. This descriptive study showed the natural structure of classroom lessons and the interactional activities between teacher and students participating in a classroom community. This study was unique for its time because the focus was a detailed examination of one class rather than several classes in different schools.

Mehan (1979) found that the structure of classroom lessons adhered to an initiation-reply-evaluation (I-R-E) pattern. The teacher initiates a question; the student responds to that question; and then the teacher evaluates the student’s response. Mehan refers to an analysis of the traditional classroom in which there are seven categories for teacher talk and only two categories for students. The seven categories for teachers are 1) accepts feelings; 2) praises or encourages; 3) accepts or uses ideas of students; 4) asks questions; 5) lectures; 6) gives directions; and 7) criticizes or justifies authority, but the only two categories for student talk were response and initiation (p. 10). Mehan used these aspects of talk to further explain the various functions of the teacher initiation.

The I-R-E pattern serves not only to structure the classroom lesson, but also to frame the interactional control the teacher possesses in the classroom. Students must follow the implicit classroom order of discourse to participate in the classroom community. This type of normative order is understood as a product of the institution of school. As Mehan (1979) points out,

Students must orient their behavior to the procedures for gaining access to the floor in order to appropriately engage in classroom interaction from the point of view of the teacher. If students deviate from this normative system, sanctions are imposed by the teacher, and sometimes by other students (p. 124).

As Mehan's (1979) study shows, the I-R-E pattern of discourse is significantly different from everyday conversation. A major difference is sequential organization. Conversation is made up of a two-part sequence (i.e. greeting to greeting, question and answer) whereas the classroom pattern is a three-part sequence of initiation-reply-evaluation. Even though conversation may include a three-part sequence, the evaluation sequence is not used to pass judgment or determine if a response is right or wrong as it is in the classroom. Another difference between the two types of talk is turn-taking. In the classroom, the turn-taking is invited or required by the teacher, who is in total control of the discourse. However, conversation occurs with a natural ebb and flow between participants. By controlling the turn-taking, the teacher not only controls the focus of the lesson but also the interaction within the classroom.

These two differences pointed out in Mehan's (1979) study change the dynamics of a discussion for children, who learn quickly the implicit rules of classroom discourse. Instead of building upon children's natural inclination to discuss, the teacher trains the child to fit the norms of the classroom. Mehan describes this change,

The child is expected to modify his or her speech patterns and social patterns to conform to the standards of the classroom. This means, in many cases, that children must leave ideas, ways of speaking, and ways of acting learned at home and with peers behind when they enter the classroom (p. 197).

As a result, the child learns an artificial form of talk in which rules are prescribed by the teacher and discussion is very formulaic. Furthermore, this discourse pattern encourages the banking method instruction described by Freire. This pattern of classroom discourse has been studied and replicated for decades with similar findings.

One such example is a two year study conducted by Martin Nystrand (1997) and discussed by him in *Opening Dialogue: Understanding the Dynamics of Language and Learning in the English Classroom*. He describes the difference between recitation and discussion, pointing out that both are called “discussion” by teachers. The study investigated the instructional organization on student learning through recitation and discussion. The two year (1987-1989) study focused on 58 eighth-grade and 54 ninth-grade language arts and English classes in 16 middle and junior high schools and nine high schools in eight Midwestern urban, suburban, and rural communities. Each class was observed four times, twice in the fall and twice in the spring. More than 200 lessons were observed and studied in each of the two years.

Nystrand (1997) studied instructional discourse in two distinct ways. His observers timed instructional activities to measure the time allocated for each activity. The activities observed were question-answer, discussion, small group work, and seat work. Furthermore, teacher and student questions were coded for dialogic dimensions. Nystrand considered dialogic dimensions to be the following: “1) authenticity (whether or not questions had ‘prespecified’ answers); 2) uptake (incorporation of previous answers into subsequent questions); and 3) level of evaluation (extent to which the teacher allowed a student response to modify the topic of discourse)” (p. 32).

His findings confirmed that the nature of classroom discourse was mainly

monologic. For Nystrand, monologic discourse followed Mehan's (1979) I-R-E pattern. He found that in this type of discourse the teacher controls the discussion and the students recite brief answers usually one word to the teacher's questions. In fact, his study showed that discussion lasted on average less than 50 seconds per class in eighth grade and 15 seconds per class in ninth grade. The results were not entirely surprising to Nystrand as he had pointed out that recitation had been the dominant discourse in American public schools for over a century. Yet he found that when dialogic discussion did occur, it evinced a strong positive effect on student achievement. Effective discussions engage students, value student contributions, and encourage collaborative co-construction of knowledge (1997). Two important findings resulting from his study were the realizations that small group work was mainly collaborative seatwork (which had a negative effect on student learning), and instruction was predominantly monologic in lower track classes than higher level. Even though the educational historical contexts have changed over time from behaviorism and individualism to constructivism and community, the change has not affected the way classroom discussion engages students.

Nystrand's (1997) work was influenced by the philosopher and literary theorist Bakhtin, who believed language and thought were shaped by dialogue, calling this perspective dialogism. Central to Nystrand's monologic and dialogic discourse is Bakhtin's (1981) authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. Monologic discourse is dominated by authoritative discourse. Bakhtin (1981) explains that authoritative discourse "demands our unconditional allegiance" and allows "no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variance on it" (p. 343). Authoritative discourse, then, is the official discourse of

instruction in which authority is given to the teachers and is the discourse most practiced in schools. As Haworth (1999) points out,

The status of formal classroom instruction as the ‘privileged genre’ is as likely to be confirmed by pupils as teachers (there is comfort in ritual). It therefore seems predictable that the conventions of whole class instruction will percolate through the words of children in less formal settings, as they unconsciously accede to the ‘authoritative’ discourse of the classroom (p. 101).

Conversely, internally persuasive discourse occurs within the individual and affords the individual an opportunity to internalize the voices of other members within a discussion. Unlike authoritative discourse, Bakhtin (1981) suggests internally persuasive discourse, “awakens new and independent words...It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions” (p. 345). This type of discourse leads to a dialogic form of discussion in which interaction is “multi-voiced, versatile and playful” (Haworth, 1999, p. 101). When dialogue is monologic, internally persuasive discourse does not occur within an individual because the individual is incapable of co-creating a speech genre between himself and the teacher in which the genre becomes, “half-ours and half-someone else’s” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345).

Nystrand’s (1997) study influenced English education in many ways. First, it offered teachers an opportunity to consider how to organize classroom talk to promote learning, and it brought to light the problem of classroom talk being monopolized by teachers using the I-R-E pattern of discourse. His research confirmed what others had written about (Mehan, 1979; Cazden, 1988; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Marshall,



Smagorinsky, & Smith, 1995), and further studies would continue to find the monologic discourse still dominating the classroom (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Nystrand et. al, 2003; Townsend & Pace, 2005). However, the I-R-E pattern or presentational talk fit the transmission and translation models that were encouraged during the information-processing era. Yet, this pattern still continues in whole group discussions today.

### ***Transactional Model***

After the information-processing era, the reading community transitioned into an era of socio-cultural learning in which Rosenblatt's (1978) reader response theory emerged and was described by reading theorists of the time as a transactional model. This theoretical move from the transmission and translation models was motivated by reading theorists who believed that meaning existed as an interaction between the reader and text rather than simply a product of the text. Schraw and Bruning (1996) explain that this model encourages readers to interact with a text based on their "prior knowledge of the topic domain, previous reading experiences, and situational objectives" (p. 293). The transactional model allows teachers to ask opinion questions in order to discern which characters and experiences from a text that the students most closely relate. Some possible questions that teachers might ask in this model are the following: *Who is your favorite character?; What character can you relate to the most and why?; and What did you like most about the book?*

Louise Rosenblatt (1978/1994) spearheaded the resistance against information-processing models of reading by examining reader stances or responses to a text. In

Rosenblatt's transactional model (reader response), a reader could move from an efferent to aesthetic stance while interacting with the text. She describes efferent reading as, "the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out...his [the reader] attention is directed outward so to speak, toward concepts to be retained, ideas to be tested, actions to be performed after the reading" (p. 23). However, when approached through an aesthetic stance, "the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (pp. 24-25). In the educational context of information-processing, Rosenblatt's stances illustrated a novel way to approach a text through a less analytic and more personal perspective. Her new way of examining readers and their interactions with texts influenced the ways materials and procedures were used to teach reading. Including this new view of reading in the language arts arena was a conceptual part of the shift toward an increasingly integrated curriculum (Alexander & Fox, 2004).

While changes occurred in the reading curriculum, modifications were simultaneously made in the language arts curriculum. In the information-processing era, language arts consisted of reading, writing, listening, and speaking but gradually shifted to a model of reading, writing, and talking across the curriculum with the socio-cultural era (Gilles & Pierce, 2003).

### ***Constructivism and the Transactional Model***

Cognitive psychology and its notion of an individualistic approach to schooling in the information-processing era was replaced by constructivism in the socio-cultural era. Literacy researchers were influenced by the works of Vygotsky (1986) and Heath (1983).

Behavioral types of research were replaced by more holistic qualitative approaches to literacy in natural settings such as classrooms, homes, and workplaces (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding 1988). Along with the resistance to behaviorism, questions arose concerning the traditional mode of scientific inquiry as well. As a result, a shift occurred from focusing on individual learning to emphasizing group learning. The transactional model (reader response) encouraged this movement and is responsible for the types of group interactions that began to occur in classrooms. As Carey-Webb (2001) explains,

Rather than lecture, recitation, or the discovery of some predetermined meaning, reader response teachers favor small- and large-group discussions, literature circles, creative writing, and dramatic and artistic activities that help students engage actively with what they read and express their individual responses and understandings (p. 7).

However, even with this new emphasis on group work and community, the English classroom still did not consider the possibilities of talk beyond having children interact with one another in the reading and writing workshops that prevailed during this time (Gilles & Pierce, 2003). In these workshops, writing and literature were still privileged above talk itself. In fact, the English Coalition of 1987 was formed and was active for about two years at national conventions. Their theme was “Democracy through Language,” but the two publications of the Coalition never had a substantial audience. The overall call of the English Coalition was to empower teachers and students through language use in the classroom. The goals for students were to empower them in the following ways:

- as lifelong learners whose command of language is exemplary and who gain pleasure and fulfillment from reading, writing, speaking, and listening;
- as active inquirers, experimenters, and problem solvers who are able to use the arts of language as means of gaining insight into and reflecting on their own and others' lives;
- as productive citizens who use language to take charge of their own lives and to communicate effectively with others;
- as theorizers about their own language and learning, able to read, write, and reflect on texts from multiple perspectives (“The English Conference Coalition, “Aims sec.).

The emphasis in this movement was the focus on language and communication in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. No evidence of any influence of this movement to any specific achievement in secondary English or to the standards exists (Nelms, 2000). The movement essentially failed and was ignored, and communication and language remained the “handmaiden.”

Although the belief of the English Coalition on the need for talk in the classroom had not been popular, the success of reading and writing workshops did place some emphasis on the role of talk in learning. By the nineties, English educators began to consider ways to use talk in the classroom. With the introduction of Nancie Atwell’s book, *In the Middle*, English teachers at the middle school level engaged in class reports,

group sharing, and dialogue journals (Nelms, 2000). In 1991, NCTE released a position statement entitled, “NCTE’s Position on the Teaching of English: Assumptions and Practices,” which stated three assumptions regarding language in the English curriculum:

- 1) Language is a vital medium for creating individual and social identities;
- 2) Students' language is valued and used as a means of learning, change, and growth within the classroom; and
- 3) The power of language and the rules that it follows are discovered, not invoked (para. 18-20).

Even though one section of the position paper was devoted to the importance of teaching oral language, NCTE was vague about how to incorporate language in the classroom. The lack of in-depth development of the language section suggests that talk, even for the NCTE, was not valued as much as literature. However, with the influence of the new reading and writing workshops on teacher beliefs, talk began to be used in classroom practice.

Around this time, the National Oracy Project (1988-1993) in England evolved, and the British government set up a national curriculum that included the spoken language. Unheard of at the time was the notion of identifying oracy as a means and condition of learning in all subjects (Barnes, 1993). Teachers had to find ways to encourage talk within their daily lessons. The results of the project showed that students were able to move beyond basic facts, develop better problem-solving skills, improve learning strategies, and gain a better understanding of the language and of knowledge itself. (1993). The development of these skills is in contrast to the effects of the use of the

I-R-E pattern, in which students focus on getting the right answer and do not have opportunities to explore, extend, or elaborate their responses.

Possibly influenced by the National Oracy Project, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in 1993 created a position statement called, “Learning Through Language: A Call For Action in All Disciplines,” which was supported by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. The opening statement posits to teachers that language-intensive classrooms in which language fosters learning is different from the teacher-centered traditional models, but research shows that students experience improved learning with retention through language-intensive classrooms (“Learning Through Language,” para. 1). Even though much of the work students do revolves around writing as communication, the NCTE position statement calls for teacher or student led small group discussions, and the students set their own questions for further learning and also determine collaboratively topics of learning (par. 4-9). Teachers are encouraged to re-assess their classrooms. As part of this re-assessment, they are also encouraged to work together with their students and share some of their control in learning decisions (para. 13). This NCTE position is not entirely surprising since this paper was written during the socio-cultural era when learning together was the dominant trend. Finally, teachers were also encouraged to reflect on how language was being used in their classes in terms of who was asking the questions and who was talking (para. 11).

In the socio-cultural era, English teachers shifted the focus to include talk within their classrooms, such as small group discussions and literature circles. Research began to focus on different types of discussions since the English curriculum had shifted from only

covering content to having students explore the curriculum through talk (Gilles & Pierce, 2003).

### *Small Group Discussions*

With the advent of the reading and writing workshops, teachers found usefulness in small group activities that involved talk. Within small groups, students can assume four unique intellectual roles: spontaneous helper, assigned tutor, peer critic, and collaborator on assigned tasks (Cazden, 1988). The main purpose for small group tasks was for students to recognize themselves as sources of knowledge to share with others besides adults. In these groups, students experience reading, writing, and talking with one another.

Critics of small group discussions surfaced. After all, these small groups were assigned tasks, but the groups could not be completely monitored or controlled by the teacher to ensure learning objectives occurred. Lewis (1997) studied fifth and sixth graders' peer discussions in small groups and raised the point that there is no single way to ensure successful peer discussions. She found too many contextual influences to discern whether participation was enhanced both academically and socially. As Nystrand (1997) pointed out, small group discussions were potentially helpful when teachers clearly defined goals and tasks to their students, and teacher encouragement was provided to generate conclusions, solve open-ended problems, and address authentic questions. The ultimate finding of his study revealed, however, that most small group discussions in classrooms were merely collaborative seatwork. Maybe it was because of the findings by Nystrand and Lewis, but talk in small groups almost had a negative connotation. As

Gilles and Pierce (2003) wrote:

Public perception still holds that small group work is not as rigorous as teacher-dominated, whole-class instruction. Many continue to believe that a teacher's primary role is to address the entire class. Therefore, when an entire classroom of students is engaged in small group work, some principals, parents, and even fellow teachers continue to believe that the teacher is not *teaching* (p. 71).

This identity crisis of the teacher as leader, participator, or facilitator causes problems for development of classroom practice in group talk. Researchers such as Barnes (1993) would argue the teacher and his/her role is not really the point of small group discussions. As he points out, "A small group of peers is less threatening than the full class, and the absence of the teacher temporarily releases them from the search for right answers that so often distorts their learning strategies" (p. 30). Small groups provide the opportunity and format for everyone in the group to talk. A whole group discussion is considered formal and traditional by the students, but a small group allows for the feel of an authentic conversation. Students can respond to one another, build on each other's ideas, or create alternative discussion perspectives. These characteristics are not routinely observed in a whole group discussion.

### ***Literature Circles/Book Talks***

In English education, another small group was created that had a different purpose than tutoring, peer critiquing, or collaborating on tasks. Harvey Daniels (1994) first introduced the idea of the literature circle as part of a reading-writing workshop approach to be utilized by some struggling schools in Chicago. Although literature circles are



called many different names such as book talks, literature discussions, or book clubs, Daniels (1994) intended for literature circles to have very specific tenets:

- Students choose their own reading materials and form groups based on book choice, with different groups reading different books;
- Groups meet regularly to discuss their readings;
- Students create notes, questions, or drawings to guide their discussions;
- Group discussions should be open and natural, an activity in which personal digressions, fun, imagination, curiosity, and even disagreements are welcome;
- Initially, while learning to interact in literature circles, students assume designated roles with specified tasks;
- The teacher serves as a facilitator only, not as a participant;
- Evaluation is by teacher observation and student self-evaluation;
- When students are finished reading and discussing a book, they form new groups around new reading choices (p. 18).

Daniels delineated these specific requirements for an effective literature circle, but teachers modified the tenets to fit their individual style and planning. While talk was an important component of the literature circles, it was not the main focus. Literature circles provide students with an opportunity to become readers and take ownership of their reading. Daniels (1994) explains that teachers have, “traditionally allowed kids little choice or ownership of their reading, instead marching them through an endless lock-step series of teacher-collected and teacher-controlled readings” (p. 11). Literature circles were created to break that cycle of control. Students actually get to select a book that they want to read and discuss it with peers to construct their own meaning of the text.

The role of talk in literature circles is very beneficial even as a secondary focus. Through talk, students are able to share interpretations about texts and broaden their ideas about the text through others' thoughts and ideas. As Crafton (1991) explains, "It's tough not to assume a different perspective, achieve a deeper understanding, extend or refine an idea if there are opportunities to talk before, during, and after a literacy event" (p. 12). When students are trying on different perspectives and extending their ideas, they come closer to achieving what Barnes (1993) describes as exploratory talk in contrast to the presentational talk that teachers have students use. When talk is understood as an "exploratory" tool--interrelated with reading, writing, and listening-- students and teachers can explore ideas, to "try out new ways of thinking...reshape an idea in mid-sentence, respond immediately to the hints and doubts of others, and collaborate in shaping meanings they could not hope to reach alone" (Barnes & Todd, 1995, p. 15). Barnes and Todd explain that such collaborative talk is necessary in the "reconstruction of existing ideas in the light of the new experiences, new ideas, new ways of thinking and understanding" (p. 24). Talk, then, is not a final product, but rather an in-process, on-going way of improving understanding. True dialogue begins at the point when students are exploring their ideas with each other in a type of "thinking aloud that constitutes an initial exploration of the matter in hand" (Barnes, 1993, p. 31).

By observing and listening to students' dialogue within literature circles, teachers have an opportunity to tailor their curriculum to their students' interests. In fact, research has shown that literature circles do increase student reading achievement (Daniels, 1994). Other researchers have substantiated the success of literature circles in developing critical readers (Brabham & Villuame, 2000), improving students' attitudes and reading levels

(Davis, Resta, Davis, & Camacho, 2001), and increasing content comprehension through peer talk (Klinger, Vaughn, & Schumann, 1998).

### *Critical Literacy*

Most secondary English teachers use one of the three aforementioned reading models with their students, affecting the way students approach texts in general. Yet, Wineburg (1991) found that high school students rarely question the legitimacy of texts they read due to their lack of critical perspective. As he explains,

Before students can see subtexts, they must first believe they exist. In the absence of such beliefs, students simply overlooked or did not know how to seek out features designed to shape their perceptions or make them view events in a particular way. Students may have processed texts, but they failed to engage them (p. 510).

Students are unable to read texts from a critical perspective using the three reading models mentioned above. A critical literacy model must be adopted by teachers as an alternative to the three main reading models in order to help students read and discuss literature from a critical stance. However, in this age of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), most teachers are reverting back to the translation model, employing direct instruction and basal texts to bring up test scores. Such pressures do not afford teachers the opportunity to teach from a critical perspective.

Critical literacy theory is complicated because it lacks a distinctive instructional methodology (Behrman, 2006). While critical literacy may be described in many ways,

most critical literacy researchers (Comber & Simpson, 2001; Janks, 2001; Muspratt, Luke, & Freebody, 1997; Luke, 2000; Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys, 2002; Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006) agree that the process of reading and the language involved are power-laden. A critical perspective incorporates the reader's experience and the language within a text to create meaning making. A critical reader "...does not stay at the empirical level of memorizing data, or at the impressionistic level of opinion, or at the level of dominant myths in society, but goes beneath the surface to understand the origin, structure, and consequences of any body of knowledge, technical structure, or object under study" (Shor, 1987, p. 24). Furthermore, this movement from empirical levels and impressionistic opinions, upon closer inspection, represents a shift from the personal to the social which results in "an explicit foregrounding in the classroom of controversial, provocative issues regarding racial, class, gender, and political differences" (Beck, 2005). To assume this type of critical stance, students must consider the sociopolitical systems to which they belong.

However, talking about literature from a critical stance is not easy for teachers to do let alone students especially if teachers have limited experience discussing literature from such a stance. For beginning English teachers, assuming a critical stance in discussions about young adult literature involves talking about *topics* not always considered appropriate in classroom discussion (e.g., race, gender, sexuality) and talking in *ways* not always controlled or determined by the teacher (i.e., I-R-E patterns of discussion). For example, two topics one might see in critical talk about literature include (but are not limited to) reflection on the multiple and contradictory perspectives held by the discussants (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2000; Nieto, 1999), and analysis of how

people are positioned and constructed by texts (Marsh, 2000; Shannon, 1995; Vasquez, 2000).

The *process* of critical talk differs from the frequently used I-R-E pattern of discussion as part of the transmission or translation models. In terms of *process*, one might expect to see critical talk about literature follow Burbules' (1993) three rules of dialogue: *the rule of participation, the rule of reciprocity, and the rule of commitment*. As described in detail in chapter one, the first rule of dialogue is one of participation. Dialogue requires active participation from all its members. One person should not be able to monopolize the discussion. Active participation entails each member should "raise topics, pose questions, challenge each other," (p. 81) and engage in any activity that defines dialogical interaction. The second rule that Burbules (1993) developed is the rule of commitment. Members should be open about their ideas and open-minded to other's ideas. The rule of commitment compliments critical literacy as it encourages considering another's perspectives. When disagreements occur in dialogue, respect must be present to see the dialogue through to its conclusion. Finally, the last rule is one of reciprocity (Burbules, 1993). All dialogue must be reflexive and reversible and undertaken in mutual respect and concern. The idea of reciprocity is relevant in critical dialogue. If we want teachers to consider alternatives to the I-R-E pattern of discussion and reader response, opportunities should be provided for them to practice facilitating discussion from a critical stance as well as designing curriculum to promote student response from a critical perspective.

## Summary

This review of the literature provides an historical overview of computer-mediated communication and an examination of discussion. Both subjects are important aspects of the Web Pen Pals project. Research on computer-mediated communication is implemented mostly in higher education. Given the lack of research conducted at the secondary level, this study hopes to add to that research. Furthermore, few studies identify CMC as a tool for preservice teachers within a secondary educational setting. Similarly, the role of discussion in English classrooms has been underused in spite of its known benefits for students. Discussion, in most secondary classrooms, is seen as recitation rather than the authentic dialogue that researchers like Burbules and Nystrand advocate. The Web Pen Pals project may provide an opportunity for critical talk to occur through synchronous chat, justifying that CMC may be a valuable tool for teacher education while arguing that discussion, as a pedagogical tool, can help preservice teachers develop critical literacy methods. My methodology for this study is reported in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

Before conducting any study, researchers should reflect on their perspectives, beliefs, and goals. These considerations influence the methodology that is selected for the design of the study. Some researchers design surveys that obtain their participants' opinions and perspectives on certain topics. Other researchers, based on their beliefs, prefer to observe their participants in their natural setting and interview them to acquire each informant's point of view. Maxwell (1996) asserts that it is important for researchers to consider their purposes for doing a study. He believes that researchers have personal, practical, and research purposes when they propose to do a study. These purposes dictate whether a researcher chooses a quantitative or a qualitative design. In this chapter, I will discuss the purpose of my study and subsequent research question. I will also explain my methodological approach and rationale while describing the case study, my participants, context of the study, data collection strategies, data analysis, and the methodological limitations of my study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In January of 2005, I co-taught a Literature for the Adolescent course for students enrolled in a teacher education program at a southern research I university. As described in chapter one, goals for the course included encouraging beginning English teachers to expand their understandings about literature discussions and to consider using new internet technologies such as online chatting as a classroom discussion tool. The predominant goal, however, included providing an opportunity for beginning English

teachers to take on a critical stance in discussions about young adult literature. As described in chapter one, this stance involves talking about *topics* not always considered appropriate in classroom discussion (e.g., race, gender, sexuality), and talking in *ways* not always controlled or determined by the teacher (i.e., I-R-E patterns of discussion). Thus, understanding the topics under discussion and how the discussion happened (e.g., who controlled the talk) in the online chats is crucial to this study. Topics one might expect to see in critical talk about literature include (but are not limited to) reflection on the multiple and contradictory perspectives held by the discussants (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2000; Nieto, 1999), and analysis of how people are positioned and constructed by texts (Marsh, 2000; Shannon, 1995; Vasquez, 2000). In terms of *process*, one might expect to see critical talk about literature follow Burbules' (1993) three rules of dialogue, as described in chapter one: the *rule of participation*, the *rule of reciprocity*, and the *rule of commitment*.

Since the purpose of this project is to explore what critical talk topics, if any, occur and what processes encourage and develop critical talk in online discussion of literature between beginning teachers and middle school students, the following research question guided my study: *When encouraged to take a critical stance, how do preservice teachers discuss literature online with middle school students?*

### **Methodological Approach and Rationale**

This qualitative collective case study was grounded in the constructivist paradigm. Constructivists' ontological view assumes "a world in which universal, absolute realities are unknowable, and the objects of inquiry are individual perspectives



or constructions of reality” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). As such, multiple realities are constructed within any given experience, and truth is individually constructed. Qualitative research is the appropriate choice to study the preservice teachers’ online discussions and their perceptions of that experience. Patton (1985) explains that qualitative research:

is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting....The analysis strives for depth and understanding (p. 1).

I chose a constructivist qualitative design because the role of the researcher is that of a co-creator of meaning. In this regard, the researcher is involved with the natural setting of the phenomena. As Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggest, the researcher enters the participants’ world and seeks their perspectives and meanings through interaction. By conducting interviews and reading the participants’ online discussions and journals, I saw my role entwined with those of my participants.

### ***The Case Study***

Operating out of a constructivist paradigm, I selected a strategy of inquiry appropriate to my research question. Creswell (2003) suggests that strategies of inquiry provide direction for procedures in a research design. I chose a qualitative collective case

study as the appropriate strategy of inquiry for exploring the perceptions of three preservice teachers in online discussions and for discovering the characteristics of their discussions. Creswell (2003) describes the case study as a process in which

the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (p.15).

Creswell's description of a case study is appropriate to my study because I studied three preservice English teachers' discussions over a semester in a single activity, the Web Pen Pals project. Furthermore, I have collected a variety of data over a two year period.

### ***Selection of the Case***

A case study does not have to focus on a singular case. Multiple individual cases are necessary when studying more than one individual. However, studying several cases within one project can be conceptualized as one collective case (Stake, 1995). I decided to use the collective case study method because I am interested in English education preservice teachers' perceptions of their experience discussing literature online and the dialogue that occurs. Since I looked at three preservice teachers and how they led the literature discussions with the students, they represented the members of the collective case study. The three individual cases made up the one collective case study. Participants were selected as individual cases because they chatted in different rooms, had different middle school pals, and represented different discussion styles. While each preservice teacher represented an individual case, they also acted as a collective case depicting

preservice teachers enrolled in a fifth-year, post-baccalaureate program in English education at a research I university. The individual cases allowed for the opportunity to cross-analyze each of the preservice teachers' experiences to gain a fuller picture. A benefit to using more than one case is a more compelling interpretation because of the variation that can occur across cases (Merriam, 1998). Merriam also suggests that including multiple cases enhances the external validity of the findings. Due to its strengths, the case study method was appropriate to use in my study.

### *Participants*

Since I was interested in the characteristics of the preservice English teachers' discussions within the online space, and their perceptions of the experience, three participants comprised the sample for my study. "Purposeful sampling" was more relevant for this case study than selecting a diversity of participants (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Merriam points out that, "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p.61).

Because I am a former English teacher, and because I intend to prepare beginning English teachers in the future, my interest was specifically in the English education preservice teachers. The Literature for Adolescents course was not a required course but an elective in the English education program. Other, non-English education students could also enroll in the course. Therefore, not all students enrolled in the course were English education students. Three English education students consented to participate in the study. All three participants were Caucasian females in their early 20s and full-time

students. All three had earned Bachelor's degrees in English and were preparing to begin a year-long internship in a local high school. For the purposes of this study, they were given the pseudonyms of Brenda, Sharon, and Abby.

The three preservice teachers served as a typical sample. Merriam defines a typical sample as one that is selected because "it reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest" (p. 62). The three preservice teachers fit the typical sample for several reasons. First, they had no experience in a formal classroom leading discussions. Next, all three participated in the same adolescent literature course with an emphasis on critical literacy. Finally, all three had limited experience in chat rooms prior to the start of the project. Based on a technology survey administered on the first day of class, Brenda and Sharon were fairly comfortable with technology, and Abby self-reported that she was very comfortable.

In preparation for the Web Pen Pals project, Brenda, Sharon, and Abby were each selected to be in a group with three middle school students. These groups stayed the same during the entire project, which lasted fifteen weeks. Brenda's group consisted of herself, two female middle schoolers, and one male student. Sharon's group consisted of herself, one female, and two male middle school students. Abby's group consisted of herself, one female, and two male students (see Table 3.1 for groups).

In the Literature for the Adolescent course, students were given a handout delineating the requirements of the project (see Appendix A). A second handout outlining the additional research opportunities was also distributed at the end of the semester (see Appendix B). All eight of the students in the course were required to complete the online discussions and reflection logs for the course; however, only the work from the

**Table 3.1. Web Pen Pals' Groups**

<i>Preservice Teacher</i>	<i>Middle School Pals</i>
Abby	Chuck Brianna Reggie
Sharon	Alice Nick Roger
Brenda	David Beth Kathy

three preservice English teachers served as the data for this study. After the course was completed and final grades were assigned, I approached the three preservice teachers and asked for their voluntary participation in this study and obtained consent from them. To ensure confidentiality, I assigned pseudonyms for any middle school student with whom they interacted in the chats or mentioned in their interviews.

### **Contexts of the Study**

#### ***Instructional Context***

The context of a case provides an important background to the case study. In my study, the context included the adolescent literature course, the urban middle school, and the online space. First, the study had an instructional context of the Literature for the Adolescent course with an emphasis in teaching critical literacy. As stated earlier, the purpose of the course was 1) to provide an opportunity for preservice teachers with little experience with adolescents to expand their understandings about literature discussions;

2) to provide an opportunity for preservice teachers with little experience using chat technology to consider such technology as a classroom discussion tool; and 3) to enhance the preservice teachers' critical stance toward literature through critical literature discussions that occur online.

In the course, we introduced the preservice teachers to definitions of critical literacy and to the socio-constructivist rationale for talking about literature. We chose two young adult novels for the preservice teachers to discuss first as a class, and then with their middle school pals. Avi's *Nothing But the Truth* and Walter Dean Myers's *Monster* were selected because of their multi-genre, multi-voice formats, which aided in the analysis of multiple perspectives and the role of language in constructing identity and cultural discourses (see Groenke, 2005). As explained in chapter one, we used young adult literature as a medium for critical dialogue because we believe young adult literature may help teachers "raise questions" that help students "notice... 'systems of domination' and 'systems of privilege'" (Edelsky, 1999, p. 12). Also, young adult literature can encourage readers to care (Edelsky, 1999). We believe young adult literature can provide "a context for students to become conscious of their operating world view and to examine critically alternative ways of understanding the world and social relations" (Glasgow, 2001, p. 54).

Talking about literature from a critical stance is not easy for teachers to do, however, especially if they have little experience discussing literature from such a stance. Thus, to help the beginning teachers understand what critical discussion about Avi's and Myers' novels might look like, we introduced Lewison's, Flint's and Van Sluys's (2002) "Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy" in the young adult literature class (see Table 3.2).

The “Four Dimensions” represent a synthesis of critical literacy definitions as they have appeared in the literature over the last 30 years. The dimensional perspective emphasizes critical literacy as a “process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations” (Anderson & Irvine, 1993, p.82). This process is demonstrated in the move across dimensions—from a focus on problematizing the “everyday” (p. 383) (including our own reading processes) in the first dimension, to taking action for social justice in the fourth, and last, dimension. Lewison et al. (2002) explain this last dimension, taking action, is “*the goal of critical literacy,*” but it cannot be attained without “expanded understandings and perspectives gained from the other three dimensions” (p. 384, italics in original).

In the Literature for the Adolescent course, we discussed the dimensions as they might apply to Avi’s and Myers’ novels, brainstormed questions we might ask to help our pals engage each dimension (see Table 3.3), and then used these questions to guide our own discussion of the novels before the college-level students discussed the novels with their pals.

In addition to using the framework with the preservice teachers to prepare them for the online discussions, we also did other activities with them to make sure they understood what critical literacy might look like. The preservice teachers were exposed to the video *Tough Guise* which focused on the traditional ideas of masculinity which are presented and perpetuated through the media. Viewing this video would help them see critical literacy in action, and since the middle school students also viewed this video, it provided another opportunity for critical talk. They also looked at Valentine’s Day advertisements to see which groups of people were marginalized or excluded by not being

**Table 3.2. Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy**

Dimension	Characteristics
Disrupting the Commonplace	<p>Problematizing all subjects of study (including adolescence, learning), and understanding existing knowledge as a historical product</p> <p>Interrogating texts: “How is this text trying to position me?”</p> <p>Including popular culture and media as a regular part of the curriculum</p> <p>Studying language to analyze how it shapes identity, constructs cultural discourses, and supports or disrupts the status quo</p>
Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints	<p>Reflecting on multiple and contradictory perspectives</p> <p>Asking: “Whose voices are heard and whose are missing?”</p> <p>Paying attention to and seeking out the voices of those who have been silenced or marginalized</p> <p>Making difference visible</p>
Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues	<p>Going beyond the personal and attempting to understand the sociopolitical systems to which we belong</p> <p>Challenging unquestioned legitimacy of unequal power relationships</p> <p>Redefining literacy as a form of cultural citizenship and politics that increases opportunities for subordinate groups to participate in society and as an ongoing act of consciousness and resistance</p>
Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice	<p>Engaging in praxis—reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it</p> <p>Using language to exercise power to enhance everyday life and to question practices of privilege and injustices</p> <p>Analyzing how language is used to maintain domination, how nondominant groups can gain access to dominant forms of language and culture, how diverse forms of language can be used as cultural resources, and how social action can change existing discourses</p>

Lewis, M., Flint, A.S., & Van Sluys, K. (2002). Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices. *Language Arts*, 79(5), 382-392.



**Table 3.3. Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy as applied to Discussion of *Monster***

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Topics/Questions/Activities in <i>Monster</i></b>
Disrupting the Commonplace	<p>Re-thinking traditional notions of masculinity/toughness (watch Media Education Foundation video, <i>Tough Guise</i>). What are alternative ways to be masculine?</p> <p>Why is this text written in this multi-genre style? How does it affect the reader’s experience of reading the novel? Why might Myers put the reader in this position?</p> <p>Representations of African-American males “gangster” “thug” –seen through music videos, movies, etc. Why aren’t there more positive representations of African-American males in the media? What would positive representations look like?</p> <p>“You’re young, you’re Black, and you’re a male. You’re already guilty in the jury’s eyes.” What does this quote mean?</p>
Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints	<p>What if Steve were White? What if the lawyers and judge were Black? Why does Steve’s mother wonder if they should get a Black lawyer?</p> <p>The multi-genre novel forces the reader into this dimension—what Steve tells us vs. what others say about him through genres—journal, script, flashbacks—multiple perspectives makes reader play judge and jury</p>
Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues	<p>Considering reasons why urban decay—white flight—once thriving urban centers have become economically disadvantaged and look at links between this and masculinity for young African-American males</p> <p>Percentage of young Black males in prison vs. other populations</p> <p>Research shows Black males incarcerated at higher rates than other populations due to “individual personality characteristics” vs. environmental factors</p>
Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice	<p>Students writing local television station about misrepresentation of African-American teen involved in murder</p>

represented in the ads. By doing these activities, the preservice teachers participated in critical literacy as well as applied the four dimensions framework to *Monster*.

### ***North View Middle School***

The second context related to this study was an urban middle school in the Southeast. We wanted to work with a low socio-economic school where students may not have had the opportunity to participate in a project like this due to access to technology and poor performance academically. The eighth-grade students who participated in this study were enrolled in a seventh-period low-average reading class. According to the county's school policy, a low-average level class is designed for the student who is performing two-to-three levels below grade level. The students' reading ability levels, based on their previous years' performance on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Tests (TCAP), were described as "below proficient." Below proficient is defined as scoring 0-20 out of a 55 score range. As a result of their below proficient achievement, these students were grouped into a low-level reading placement. The majority of the students enrolled in the class was of low socioeconomic status and received free or reduced lunch.

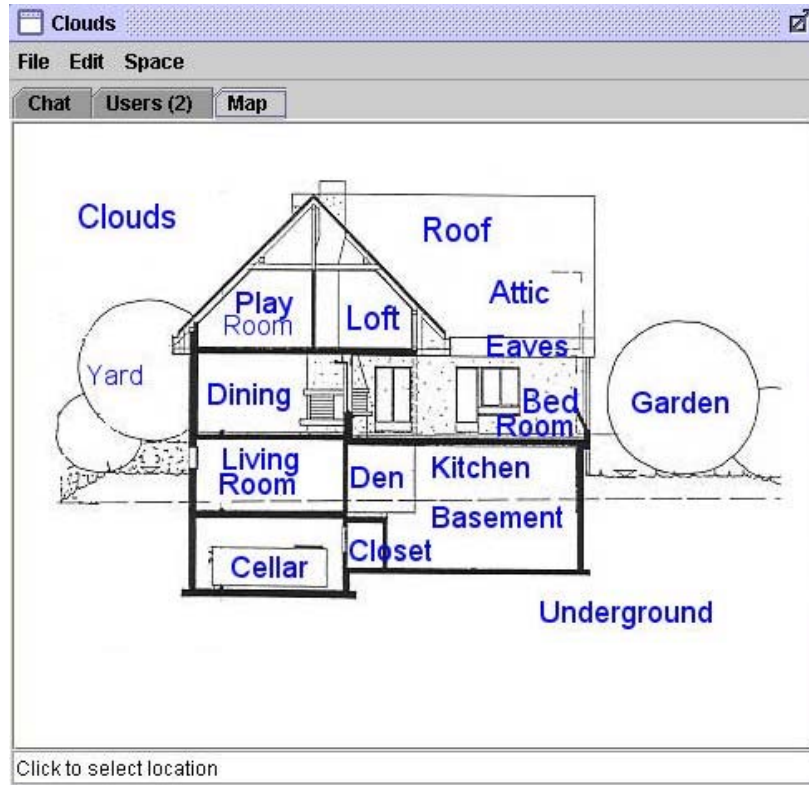
### ***Web Pen Pals Online Space***

The third context of the Web Pen Pals project was the online space itself ([www.webpenpals.org](http://www.webpenpals.org)). The Web Pen Pals project site provided a unique and secure medium for the preservice teachers to practice a critical literacy stance when discussing literature with their middle school pals. Teacher Bridge, a project funded by the National Science Foundation and directed by the Center for Human-Computer Interaction at Virginia Tech, created the online space (<http://teacherbridge.cs.vt.edu/>). Based on the

BRIDGE (Basic Resources for Integrated Distributed Group Environments) collaboration toolkit, it supports web-based synchronous and asynchronous collaborative access to a wide variety of tools for manipulating different kinds of content. As an innovative set of collaborative resources for educators, the system provides easy access and advanced interactive tools for teachers.

The Teacher Bridge online chat space is a forum where computer-mediated communication (CMC) can occur. In its simplest form, Herring (1996) defines CMC as, “communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers” (p.1). Herring’s definition is appropriate for this study because the preservice teachers communicated with their middle school web pals through an online synchronous chat via computers. Crystal (2001) describes online synchronous communication as follows: “In a synchronous situation, a user enters a chat room and joins an ongoing conversation in real time, sending named contributions which are inserted into a permanently scrolling screen along with contributions from other participants” (p.11). Usually synchronous communication can only be accessed by scrolling back the screen to review what was typed. However, the Web Pen Pals forum archived the synchronous chats.

The chat rooms were arranged as different rooms of a house. (see Fig. 3.1) We assigned each preservice teacher a room in which to meet their pals on six different occasions throughout the semester. Brenda was assigned the yard, Sharon the kitchen, and Abby the attic. The Web Pen Pals site was a secure online space requiring participants to provide a user name and password to access the space. By clicking on their assigned room name, they were taken into a synchronous chat space in which they discussed the adolescent literature novels *Nothing But the Truth* by Avi and *Monster* by



**Figure 3.1 Map of House with Assorted Chat Rooms**

Walter Dean Myers. They typed what they wanted to say into a dialog box and then clicked “send.” Their words appeared on the main screen of the synchronous chat space next to their username. The conversation scrolled up the screen as the participants talked.

### **Data Collection Strategies**

For this collective case study, the primary data source consisted of eight chat transcripts (63 pages of data). Secondary data consisted of six interview transcripts (two per preservice teacher) and reflection logs kept by the three preservice teachers during the project. As secondary data sources, the interviews and reflection logs served to triangulate the primary data source. The eight online chats lasted approximately 45 minutes each.

1.	Sharon	4/5 2:39 PM	Hi everyone. Hope you had a good spring break, I know I enjoyed my time off. 16
2.	Sharon	4/5 2:40 PM	Ok, I hope you all like <i>Monster</i> , and I can't wait to hear what you think about it, because you all have such good things to say. 27
3.	Sharon	4/5 2:41 PM	If you have any questions about the book, I want to be able to help answer them. I hope we can talk alot about the book, because there is so much there. 32

**Figure 3.2 Example of Chat Transcript**

Preserved in archived records, the chat transcripts showed each participant’s contributions to the discussion. Each transcript showed the participant’s username, a time and date stamp for each turn, and then the lines they typed. (See Fig. 3.2)

The transcripts provided an opportunity to capture the phenomena as it naturally occurred. For this study, the chats from the book *Monster* were selected as data for each of the three participants. Two of the preservice teachers participated in three chats each. However, the third preservice teacher (Sharon) only participated in two chats because she elected to observe me facilitate one of her discussions. As a result, only eight chats comprised the data of this study. The online chat data were used to answer my research question regarding how preservice teachers discuss literature online with middle school students.

I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each preservice teacher. The first interviews were conducted after the first set of chats was analyzed. By the time of the interviews, enough time had elapsed to give the preservice teachers time to reflect on the project. The first semi-structured interview was conducted face-to-face and lasted approximately one hour. The focus of the first interview was to gain insight into the participants’ perceptions of their experience of the online discussions (see Appendix C

for interview protocol). The interview was an appropriate method to select because it illuminated the multiple realities of a socially constructed experience which had symbolic significance for the participants (Denzin, 2001). It is important from the constructivist paradigm to obtain the unique meanings the participants attribute to their experiences. As Patton (1990) explains:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe....We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective (p. 196).

Specifically, the semi-structured interview was selected because as Merriam (1998) explains, "Less structured formats assume that individual respondents define their world in unique ways" (p.74). In this type of interview, the interviewer creates a list of questions as a guide. One benefit of this type of interview is that the format "allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 1998, p. 74). The first interviews were audio-taped and transcribed with all identifying information changed. Thus, the interview method was an effective way to gain insight about the preservice teachers' perceptions of the experience leading the online discussions.

To further address my research question, I conducted a second interview several months later. The second interview was conducted to gain more information from the three participants about the discourse strategies they used to facilitate the online discussions (see Appendix D for interview protocol). This interview was conducted after the analysis of the eight chats was completed and occurred several months after the preservice teachers participated in the online discussions. When I scheduled the second interview with my participants, two of the preservice teachers (Brenda and Abby) requested to do the interviews through email. Brenda requested the email interview because she no longer lived in the town where the study took place. Abby requested the email interview because she had been away from the chats for some time and felt the email interview would allow her time to reflect and respond thoughtfully about the discussions. The participants could look back at the online chats to familiarize themselves with the context of the chats and were not pressured to respond immediately as they might be in a face-to-face interview. I hoped that having copies of the chats in front of them and the ability to look back over them might produce more thoughtful responses. Hewson, Yule, Laurent, and Vogel (2003) point out the same benefits in their description of the email interview:

Compared with traditional interview methods the email interview may be less spontaneous and flowing, but it allows respondents to answer in their own time, as and when it is convenient for them. This may encourage more detailed and carefully considered answers. Further, respondents may be more accurate in answering factual questions since they are able to go and check information, and this may enhance the validity and quality of data obtained (p. 45).

I also offered this option to my third participant, Sharon, and she accepted. I felt doing all three interviews via email was important for continuity in the interview process.

After I conducted the interviews, I offered each participant a member check. Confidence in the study is increased through the use of member checking, which occurs when “the actor is requested to examine rough drafts of writing where the actions or words of the actor are featured, sometimes when first written up but usually when no further data will be collected from him or her” (Stake, 1995, p. 115). A member check was provided to the three participants when all the data were collected. I gave each participant copies of her interview transcripts instructing each to approve the copies, delete lines of the interviews not to be included as data, and/or clarify points made in the interviews. All of the participants accepted their transcripts without modifications.

In addition to the individual interviews, the other secondary data sources I collected were the participants’ reflection logs written for the Literature for the Adolescent course. Each class member was required to keep a reflection log of the online discussions and their experience. They wrote in their journals after each chat session. For this study, only the journal entries pertaining to the *Monster* chats served as data. The journals were considered unobtrusive data since they were part of the course requirements. Unobtrusive data can be valuable as they can “provide insight into the social phenomenon under investigation without interfering with the enactment of that social phenomenon” (Hatch, 2002, p.116). Furthermore, the journals, as data, offered another format for the participants to share their own realities and how they understood the experience. Finally, since the journals were unobtrusive data, they were nonreactive which is helpful when trying to make comparisons with other types of data for purposes



of triangulation (Hatch, 2002). In my study, the journals served as data supplemental to the online chat transcripts and helped to provide insight about the participants' perceptions of the online experience.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this study was a multi-step process. The eight online chats were analyzed through a modified inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002). Because I was interested in understanding how the preservice teachers facilitated discussion of *Monster* from a critical stance in terms of both *topics* and *process*, I first focused on the conversational turns which were on the topic of “book talk,” that is, *Monster*. I created a topic chart (see for example Table 3.4) in which I coded segments of the chats to delineate book talk topics from non-related topics (e.g., chit-chat).

The next step in the analysis involved using the book talk segments to locate “critical talk” episodes, or episodes where critical talk topics occurred, in the discussion for microanalysis. To identify critical talk episodes, I employed the modified version of Lewison et. al’s (2002) “Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy” framework as applied to *Monster* (see Table 3.3) and Van Sluys’s, Lewison’s, and Flint’s (2006) questions for data analysis (see Table 3.5) as a secondary analytic tool. I used the “Questions for Data Analysis” to look closer at the critical talk episodes using the four dimensions. The questions helped me to re-check my classifications of the critical talk. As I looked at the critical talk excerpts, I applied the questions to make sure they fit one of the dimensions. If the excerpt answered any one of the questions, I included it in the corresponding dimension.

**Table 3.4. Topic Chart**

Line numbers	Topic	Notes
1-15	Greetings	Initiated by A. –greetings Talk about rain—generic
16-26	Handing out books/ procedural	Initiated by A.—asking if pals have books with them and how far they got in their reading in class C. mentions he’s hyper randomly
27-37	What pals have been doing in classroom with Monster	Initiated by A.—wondering how pals read book in class—compliments Ray about his part
38-42	A. gives kids opportunity to ask questions or choose discussion topics	Initiated by A.—wants kids to pick topic of discussion or ask her questions—pals do neither
43-53	Discussion of favorite character	Initiated by A. since pals turned down chance to decide topic –Everyone likes Steve, but pals don’t know why they do and then say b/c he’s nice
54-64	Discussion of Steve’s unstereotypical behavior and where he learned that	A. picks this up and points out that Steve acts like a gentleman—brings up where did he learn that from—pal mentions Steve does not act like a murderer
64-77	Assumptions about marital status of parents in an inner city	Building on Steve’s parents, A. asks if pals are surprised that Steve’s parents are mar- ried—brief mention about single parents in the “hood” —potential CRITICAL topic but A. drops it
78-87	Discussion of characters and how not much going for them	Initiated by A. –talks about how the characters have nothing going for them and a mask of being tough –another potential CRITICAL topic

**Table 3.5. Sluys, Lewison, and Flint Analytic Tool for Critical Talk**

Dimension	Questions for Data Analysis
Disrupting the Commonplace	<p>Do participants question everyday way of seeing?</p> <p>Do participants use language and other sign systems to interrogate “how it is”?</p> <p>Does activity question textual intentions or consumer positioning by exploring underlying messages and/or histories that inform constructed meanings?</p>
Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints	<p>Do participants consider alternative ways of seeing, telling, or constructing a given event or issue?</p> <p>Does activity involve attending to, seeking out, and/or considering silenced or marginalized voices?</p> <p>Does activity involve examining competing narratives or producing counternarratives?</p> <p>Do participants engage in activity that foregrounds difference?</p>
Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues	<p>Does activity move beyond the personal and attempt to understand relationships between personal experience and larger cultural stories or systems?</p> <p>Do participants challenge power relationships and/or study the relationships between language and power?</p> <p>Does activity include or create opportunities for subordinate group(s) participation?</p>
Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice	<p>Does activity involve rewriting, redesigning, or the taking on of new positions?</p> <p>Do participants move from spectator roles to actor roles?</p> <p>Does activity involve ongoing accessing and using language or image to change existing discourses?</p> <p>Are participants crossing borders and creating new borderlands that welcome and build on rich cultural resources?</p>

Van Sluys, K., Lewison, M., & Flint, A.S. (2006). Researching critical literacy: A critical study of analysis of classroom discourse. *Journal of Literacy Research* 38 (2), 197-233.

To analyze the *processes* of the talk, or how the talk happened, I analyzed participation levels of the preservice teachers and the middle school students, and analyzed the discourse moves the preservice teachers used to facilitate the talk. In my analysis of participation, I counted the conversational turns for each preservice teacher and her three middle school pals. A conversational turn was counted each time a participant entered text. After each participant's turns were counted, I counted the words per turn and then calculated the average number of words per turn. By analyzing the participation levels of the entire chats, I was able to get a general idea of how the preservice teachers were participating overall.

I then examined the types of discourse moves the preservice teachers used in the conversational turns. To do so, I modified Spradley's (1979) description of domain analysis to analyze all of the preservice teachers' and middle school students' turns within each critical talk episode. Spradley points out that an efficient way of identifying domains is to make use of the semantic relationship. To develop semantic relationships, "one must reduce what people actually say to a basic structure of two terms and a relationship" (p.109).

I took each of the chats and separated the individual participants' turns into Microsoft Word documents. I then selected a single semantic relationship and coded each turn in the dialogue. For this analysis, I implemented Spradley's (1979) strict inclusion semantic relationship and then his means-end semantic relationship. I coded each participants' turns within each critical talk episode line by line under the semantic domains of "X is a kind of Y" (strict inclusion) and "X is a way to do Y" (means-end).

Next, I identified salient domains and looked for domains supported by the data. Then I developed subcategories within the domains to show what was happening within

the data. I continually refined these categories. To establish units of data, I coded segments of the chats for the type of talk each segment exhibited in an effort to uncover patterns within the data (see Appendix E for coding scheme).

The final analytic step was a detailed analysis of specific threads and how the preservice teachers discourse moves impacted the critical talk episodes. This phase of the analysis involved examining the preservice teachers' discourse moves in the context of the discussions. This type of multi-step analysis of the chat transcripts answered my research question regarding how the preservice teachers discussed the literature online with the middle school students.

After I completed my analyses, I conducted a peer audit which created additional credibility of my study. A peer auditor examines the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations to ensure that they are supported by the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My mentor was familiar with the project from all levels and agreed to serve as a peer auditor for my study. Although her familiarity with the project may be problematic, she is more objective than me since she has not analyzed my data as closely. The peer audit serves to ensure that the researcher has maintained integrity while analyzing the data by staying true to the participants' voices and making sure there was adequate data supporting the findings.

### **Methodological Limitations**

The methodological limitations of my study involve its small sample size, the efficacy of case study research, the use of individual interviews in place of group interviews, the use of email interviews, and my bias as a researcher.

Having a small sample of three participants might raise concerns about the quality

of this study. However, by choosing the case study as my methodological approach, my sample could be legitimately as low as one. Yin (2003) points out that sampling logic should not be used in a case study, and as such, sample size is irrelevant. Stake (1995) contends “Case study research is not sampling research. We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case” (p. 4). In my study, I used purposeful sampling in order to understand a particular type of participant (the preservice English teacher). Stake believes it is important to maximize what we can learn by carefully choosing cases.

The efficacy of case study research is often challenged because of its poor basis for generalization and the concern for verification of findings. In regards to generalization, Stake (1995) explains, “The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization” (p.8). He also posits that the degree to which a generalization is represented within a case study is of particular importance. Stake notes that certain patterns repeat, and even though major generalizations may not be drawn, modification of generalizations may occur.

Another concern related to using the case study approach is how to verify the findings. Data source triangulation increases internal validity in a case study and is a way to verify the findings (Stake, 1995). In my study, chat transcripts, interviews, and journals all served as data to facilitate triangulation. With multiple sources of data, I was able to see the preservice teachers' interactions and perceptions in the online chats, the interviews, and in their journals. This is important in order to build confidence in the quality of the study as, “we can look to see if the phenomenon or case remains the same at other times, in other spaces, or as persons interact differently” (Stake, 1995, p.112). It

is important to see if what I observe in the online chats has the same meaning in a different situation such as an interview or journal entry.

Long term observation and data collection increase the validity of the findings (Merriam, 1998). I was present at every online discussion and every class meeting during the fifteen week project. The class met once a week for fifteen weeks with six online chats occurring during the semester. Furthermore, the reliability of a study is improved through the triangulation of multiple methods of collection and an audit trail of how data were collected, how categories were identified, and how certain decisions were made regarding the study (Merriam, 1998).

Another methodological issue is the decision to conduct an individual interview versus a group interview. The decision to do individual interviews represented the constructivist paradigm approach as I believe it was important to ascertain the unique meanings that the participants made about their experiences. I chose the individual interview over the group interview so that I could have more time with individual participants and could focus on their unique behaviors within the online discussions.

A limitation to using email interviews is that the researcher loses the free flow of conversation that a face-to-face interview can offer. Since an email interview occurs over the computer, the researcher also misses any body language cues or tone of voice that might affect the meaning of the interview. This type of tacit information is then lost in an email interview. Hewson, Yule, Laurent, and Vogel (2003) point out that there is less researcher control in this format compared to traditional interview methods. I did not feel the email interview was a limitation because looking back at their former discussions required more time for reflection than a face-to-face interview would have afforded.

Furthermore, the participants and I would send and resend the document back and forth until we were both satisfied we understood everything. With one of the participants being out of town, the email interview was helpful to both of us. Foster (1995) mentions that the email interview is not affected by geography, no additional transcription is needed, and the email data are exactly what the interviewee wrote. To me, the benefits outweighed the weaknesses.

Finally, my bias as a researcher may be considered a limitation. I have my own preconceived notions about what a good discussion is as well as an understanding of the different theories of discussion. My ideas are affected by the kinds of discussions that I have had in my own classrooms. As a teacher becoming a researcher, I struggled to prevent my own biases from interfering with my interpretations of the data. I had to curtail my desire to apply these ideas to the data when I analyzed it and not let my ideas influence what I saw emerge from the data.

There were several ways that I worked to minimize the effects of my bias on my analysis. I regulated my biases as a researcher through the member check, peer audit, and the admission of my biases. I verified the interviews through a member check. Also, during the interviews, the participants were questioned about terminology to obtain emic, or insider's, descriptors and accurate definitions rather than etic, or researcher's descriptors. I had to continually rely on my participants and their voices as well as my peer auditor to prevent my personal interpretations from creeping into the study.

My peer auditor would look over my analysis and remind me not to use educational terminology in my coding and warned me to resist applying theories early on in the analysis process. I would go back and rework my analysis to manage how my bias



influenced how I coded the data. For instance, I might code a pattern in the data as an initiate-respond-evaluate (I-R-E) pattern without considering anything else. My peer auditor would recognize when I did this and point it out to me. I would go back and generate as many codes as I could to avoid this problem.

Furthermore, I have admitted my biases as a researcher which shows the reader that I am up front about them and how they might affect my interpretation of the data. In this kind of qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument for gathering and interpreting data. Since I am an instrument in the research, my interpretation is filtered through my worldview and assumptions. Merriam (1998) points out, “The researcher thus brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which interacts with other people’s constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied” (p. 22-23). I am acknowledging that this research is not objective, but it is influenced by the multiple interpretations of reality, the participants’ and mine. These are some of the methodological limitations of my study. However, I have confidence in the research design because I have established appropriate evaluative criteria as well as a strong rationale for my methodological choices.

### **Summary**

The goal of this qualitative collective case study was to discover how preservice English teachers discussed literature online with their middle school web pals. Furthermore, I wanted to understand the preservice teachers’ perceptions about the experience of leading these discussions. The primary data used to achieve this understanding were the online chat transcripts as well as the secondary data of interviews

and reflection logs. The online chat transcripts were analyzed through a multi-step process. Findings are reported in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

### Introduction

The analysis reported here explores the ways in which three preservice English teachers discussed the young adult novel, *Monster*, online with their middle school pals. The findings presented in this section are organized around my research question: *When encouraged to take a critical stance, how do preservice teachers discuss young adult literature online with middle school students?* In this chapter, each of the three cases will be presented followed by a discussion section. Each individual case description is comprised of 1) the preservice teachers' total number of critical talk episodes; 2) the preservice English teachers' and middle school students' participation levels during the chats and predominant discourse strategies used by the preservice teachers during the critical talk episodes; and 3) an illustrative excerpt that represents the predominant discourse moves used by the preservice teacher and their effects on the chats.

Findings suggested that only one of the three preservice teachers came close to achieving engaged, substantial critical talk; and the types of discourse moves used by the preservice teachers seemed to affect whether or not critical talk occurred. Findings also revealed that it appeared a relationship existed between the *process* of critical talk, as defined by Burbules's (1993) rules of dialogue, and the occurrence of critical talk: when preservice teachers adhered to Burbules's rules, critical talk seemed to occur.

#### Case #1: Brenda, "I Wanted Their Opinions"

The analysis reported here explores the ways in which a preservice teacher, Brenda, discussed the young adult novel, *Monster*, online with her middle school pals, Karen,

David, and Beth. *Monster*, by Walter Dean Myers, tells the story of Steve Harmon, a sixteen-year old African-American, who is on trial as an accomplice for felonious murder. The plot develops from the question of whether he really was a lookout or merely in the wrong place at the wrong time when a convenience store owner is shot and killed. He lives in the Harlem city projects with his parents and attends a prestigious high school where he studies film. Steve writes about his experience in jail and on trial in the form of a screenplay interspersed with journal entries and flashback scenes. He calls his movie, “Monster,” based on what the prosecutor calls him during the trial. The reader plays judge and jury and decides whether or not Steve committed the crime.

Brenda participated in three chats with her pals. Findings revealed that of the three preservice teachers, Brenda came closest to achieving engaged, substantial critical talk with her pals.

***Critical Talk Episodes***

As Table 4.1 shows, five critical talk episodes occurred in Brenda’s chat sessions: three occurred in chat one; one occurred in chat two; and one occurred in chat three.

**Table 4.1. Brenda’s Number of Critical Talk Episodes**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Chat #1</b>	<b>Chat #2</b>	<b>Chat #3</b>
Disrupting the Commonplace	1	0	1
Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints	1	1	0
Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues	1	0	0
Taking Action & Promoting Social Justice	0	0	0

In the first chat, Brenda and her pals collaboratively initiated critical talk topics that matched three of the four critical literacy dimensions, “Disrupting the Commonplace,” “Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints,” and “Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues.” According to Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002), discussants within the first dimension question the “everyday” ways of seeing and problematize all subjects of study. Common examples of critical talk in this dimension give consideration to how the text positions the readers and the influences of popular culture and media while exploring the underlying messages that inform constructed meanings. “Disrupting the Commonplace” is also achieved by studying how language shapes identity, constructs cultural discourses, and supports or disrupts the status quo. Fitting this dimension, the topic centered on Steve’s race and how his race affected the jurors’ perceptions of his innocence or guilt.

Another topic raised in the first chat fit the second dimension of critical literacy, “Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints.” This dimension of critical literacy includes considering different ways of seeing, telling, or constructing an issue. Discussants also reflect on multiple viewpoints and contradictory perspectives of an issue. In this dimension, readers seek out silenced or marginalized voices, and make differences visible to one another. Exemplifying this dimension, the topic centered on how the story in *Monster* would have been different if the main character were White.

During this critical talk episode, I also saw that Brenda and her pals reached the third dimension of critical literacy, “Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues,” which entails going beyond personal responses to texts to consideration of the sociopolitical systems to which we belong. Perhaps to encourage her pals to consider the larger sociopolitical systems involved with race/ethnicity and the juvenile justice system, Brenda described an

article we had read in the young adult literature course to her pals about incarceration rates of Black juvenile offenders as opposed to White juvenile offenders. She offered this information to complement a topic one of her pals initiated.

In chat two, Brenda and one of her pals again collaboratively raised a critical talk topic matching the second dimension, “Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints.” Brenda asked her pals to consider how the jurors perceived the convicted criminals who testified against Steve. Her pal, Beth, wondered how the jurors would perceive Steve if he were White, and would he be more “believable” on the stand as a White man.

In chat three, Brenda raised a critical talk topic that matched the “Disrupting the Commonplace” dimension by asking if her pals thought traditional notions of masculinity (e.g., “men are supposed to be brave;” “men are jocks;” “men never cry”) were stereotypes or realities they experienced at school.

Lewison’s, Flint’s, and Van Sluys’s (2002) dimensional perspective of critical literacy emphasizes critical literacy as a “process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations” (Anderson & Irvine, 1993, p.82). This process is not necessarily linear or best demonstrated in a developmental move across dimensions. Rather, developing critical literacy is an interrelated process. Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) explain the last dimension--taking action--is “*the* goal of critical literacy,” but they suggest it cannot be attained without “expanded understandings and perspectives gained from the other three dimensions” (p. 384, italics in original).

Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) also posit that newcomers to critical literacy rarely get beyond the second dimension to the fourth dimension of “taking action.”

Brenda *did* get beyond the second dimension, and, especially in the first chat, seemed to cycle through the first three dimensions, building on and expanding the talk to include perspectives that might have eventually (given more chat sessions over a longer period of time) encouraged the group to consider locally relevant ways to take action.

### ***Participation Levels and Discourse Strategies***

Participation is essential when considering critical talk and how the preservice teachers facilitated talk with their pals. When considering the participation levels, it is important to note who is taking the most turns and what the participants are doing in those turns. For example, whether or not the turns are predominately questions or responses can make a difference in the balance or equality of the talk. Understanding participation is important because as Burbules (1993) suggests, each member should “get to raise topics, pose questions, challenge another member, and engage in any other activity that defines dialogical interaction” (p. 80). The *process* of critical talk values shared participation in talk as evidenced by who initiates topics, asks questions, and practices reciprocity.

To first understand how Brenda and her pals participated in the three *Monster* chats, I counted the conversational turns taken by Brenda and her three pals, and then counted the number of words per turn per participant. I then calculated an average number of words per turn. I did this for all three chats (see Table 4.2).

Brenda took the highest percentage of turns in each chat (41.9%, 44.8%, and 37.5% respectively), which implied she was doing most of the talking in the chats. However, it is not enough to count the number of turns taken to fully understand the

**Table 4.2. Conversational Turns and Words per Turn**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>4/5/05 # of Turns</b>	<b>Avg Words Per Turn</b>	<b>4/12/05 # of Turns</b>	<b>Avg Words Per Turn</b>	<b>4/26/05 # of Turns</b>	<b>Avg Words Per Turn</b>
Brenda preservice teacher	113	8.8	162	5.5	120	6.2
Kathy pal	74	6.1	75	5.2	76	4.5
David pal	48	4.2	90	2.7	72	2.6
Beth pal	35	6.3	35	5.3	52	3.3
Total	270		362		320	

nature of the participation. Therefore, I looked next at Brenda’s individual turns within the critical talk episodes.

Findings show Brenda predominantly *shared her personal opinions*, and used the *uptake* strategy (as a response and a question). In addition, Brenda predominantly used two questioning strategies: *soliciting authentic student opinions*, and *challenging* her pals to defend a line of argument (see Table 4.3). Nystrand (1997) defines *uptake* as a process where “the teacher validates particular students’ ideas by incorporating their responses into subsequent questions” (p. 6). Brenda’s use of *uptake* seemed to help position students’ questions—which initiated critical talk topics—as the focus of discussion and seemed to encourage the collaborative development of critical talk. This collaboration seemed to be maintained through Brenda’s willingness to *share her personal opinions* about the text and the issues students raised, as well as the kinds of questions Brenda posed.



**Table 4.3. Brenda's Main Discourse Strategies in the Critical Talk Episodes**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Number of Times Stated</b>	<b>Purpose of Statement</b>	<b>Example</b>
Share Opinion	To share one's personal belief or attitude about a topic	14	--to express a view	<i>all though he was involved and the neighborhood is mainly black i think his color plays a part</i>
Uptake	To inquire into something a student contributes to the discussion  To share comments or information to extend student's contribution	11	--build on student's comment  --let student guide topic for discussion	<i>we read an article that said white were arrested just as much and more sometimes then black</i>
Request Clarification	To restate or correct to clear up confusion	10	--to repeat for understanding	<i>Yes u david u were the last list</i>
Praise	To appreciate or recognize a person or idea	6	--to encourage students' participation --to build confidence in pals	<i>awesome david that means you r more open minded then some other people</i>
Give Directive	To instruct or guide	5	--to guide students --to facilitate the discussion	<i>Answer that yourself kathy</i>
Agree	To support another's position or belief	5	--to evaluate a response -to connect to another person	<i>I agree david</i>
Acknowledge	To provide affirmation or confirmation of a comment	4	--to recognize someone's comment --to validate a comment	<i>and that is why we need to recognize this and effect the world</i>
Provide Example	To give an idea to represent or clarify a concept	3	--to extend an idea --to clarify an idea	<i>...men r tough or strong... These are stereotypes</i>

**Table 4.3, continued**

<b>Type of Question</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Number of Times Asked</b>	<b>Purpose of Question</b>	<b>Example</b>
Request for Opinion	Request reader's general attitude toward the written text, author, etc.	12	--get students' views --build on pals' ideas --consider different perspective --initiate talk	<i>But black r more likely to be convicted and have aharser punishment why do you think that is?</i>
Uptake	Inquire into something a student contributes to the discussion  Share comments or information to extend student's contribution	6	--build on student's comment  --let student guide topic for discussion	<i>we read an article that said white were arrested just as much and more sometimes then black</i>
Challenge	Elicit a defense or line of argument	7	--contest pals' views --play devil's advocate --pose opposite or alternative view	<i>How can u not mean to be racist?</i>
Request for Elaboration	Elicit more information about a student response to teacher-posed question	5	--encourage and extend response --have pals justify answers --provide clarification --have pals defend choices --for understanding	<i>What is true david?</i>
Investigate	Request for students to look deeper into a certain topic; probe	2	--discover alternative views --encourage elaboration --consider text to world at large --encourage predictions -review plot	<i>What would have happened if everything in the story was the same but Steve was white?</i>

In the excerpt which follows, I present an example from Brenda’s first chat illustrating her use of *uptake* of her pal, Beth’s, question, which ultimately seemed to create the opportunity for a collaborative critical discussion to emerge. This excerpt also illustrates Brenda’s use of two questioning strategies: asking questions soliciting students’ authentic *opinions* and *challenge* questions. These types of questions seemed to provide the middle school students with an opportunity to express their views beyond a more simplistic yes/no response. Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) might call such questions “open-ended” questions (no prior answer known), and suggest such questions can encourage student-centered dialogue and collaboration among discussants. Wang (2005) suggests that *challenge* questions can create a “climate of equal participation for multiple perspectives” (p. 306). Brenda’s use of *challenge* questions seemed to encourage her pals to defend their positions with multiple perspectives by developing argument threads within their discussions (Walker, 2005).

*Illustrative Excerpt from Brenda’s First Chat:*

<i>Line #</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Time Stamp</i>	<i>Turn</i>	<i>Question/response Type</i>
101.	Beth	4/5 2:59 PM	do you think the color of steve has anything to do with it ?	Student initiation
102.	David	4/5 2:59 PM	not at all	
103.	Kathy	4/5 2:59 PM	i do	
105.	Brenda	4/5 2:59 PM	everyone please explain why they think what they think about the color question	Uptake
106.	Brenda	4/5 3:00 PM	i think it does have something to do w/ things	Share opinion
107.	Beth	4/5 3:00 PM	if he was white would he have a different outcome ?	Student initiation
108.	Brenda	4/5 3:00 PM	all though he was involved and the neighborhood is mainly black i think his color plays a part	Share opinion

- well she is talking bout how  
when we think of like bad people  
we usually think of a black  
person and so when the jury sees  
that he is black wont they convict  
him easier?
109. Kathy 4/5 3:01 PM *Student uptake-extend*
- all because someone is black  
doesn't make them any different  
than me or any other person in  
the world!
111. David 4/5 3:01 PM
112. Brenda 4/5 3:01 PM *Give directive*
- answer that yourself kathy  
but does most of the world think  
of it that way ?
114. Brenda 4/5 3:01 PM *Challenge*
- yep cause sometimes in society  
people are iffy about color
115. Beth 4/5 3:01 PM
116. David 4/5 3:01 PM *no, but they should*
- we read an article that said white  
were arrested just as much and  
more sometimes then black,
118. Brenda 4/5 3:02 PM *Uptake (extend)*
- like i am mixed and alot of ppl  
are against that  
but black r more likely to be  
convicted and have a harsher  
punishment
119. Beth 4/5 3:02 PM
120. Brenda 4/5 3:02 PM *Uptake continued*
- why do u think that is  
but from movies we have a  
certain outlook
121. Brenda 4/5 3:02 PM *Request for*
123. Beth 4/5 3:02 PM *Opinion*
- i think it is b/c they have a bad  
reputation
124. Kathy 4/5 3:02 PM
- but people don't stop to realize  
things about them
127. David 4/5 3:03 PM
- its like they were talking bout  
[another local high school] it has a  
bad reputation even though the  
school isnt bad i think the black ppl  
have a bad reputation but some of  
them arent bad
131. Kathy 4/5 3:04 PM
- blacks are more of my friends  
than most white people
132. David 4/5 3:04 PM
- awesome david that means you r  
more open minded then some  
other people
133. Brenda 4/5 3:04 PM *Individual*  
*Praise*

134.	David	4/5 3:04 PM	True	
				<i>Individual Praise</i>
135.	Brenda	4/5 3:04 PM	we need guys like u in the world to help stop the craziness some ppl think that the "white" ppl are against blacks and thats	
136.	Beth	4/5 3:04 PM	not tru i dont have nothing against	
137.	Kathy	4/5 3:05 PM	blacks that is just my thoughts	<i>Targeted Request for Elaboration</i>
138.	Brenda	4/5 3:05 PM	what is true David ?	
139.	Beth	4/5 3:05 PM	if so i wouldnt b here ppl are afraid of things they cant	
142.	Beth	4/5 3:06 PM	explain or understand	
144.	Brenda	4/5 3:06 PM	great job Beth ppl judge ppl by what color they r even if they dont try 2 they still	<i>Individual Praise</i>
155.	Kathy	4/5 3:08 PM	do it	
156.	Kathy	4/5 3:08 PM	its hard not to	<i>Acknowledge</i>
157.	Brenda	4/5 3:08 PM	and that is why we need to recognize this and effect the world what do u think?	<i>Request for Opinion</i>
158.	Beth	4/5 3:08 PM	ppl go by what statistics say Can you explain to me why you chose the line from the book you	
160.	Brenda	4/5 3:09 PM	did?	<i>Initiates new topic</i>

*Note: Missing line numbers indicate chat turns that were not a part of this analysis.*

In Brenda’s discussions, her pals often initiated topics for discussion and frequently asked questions of the group. It is a question posed by Beth—“do you think the color of Steve has anything to do with it?”--that prompts the discussion which occurs in the above excerpt—a question which inspired the emergence of critical talk through examining race as an issue within the text.

David and Kathy disagreed with one another as David replied, “not at all” (line 102) and Kathy responded, “I do” (line 103). Brenda followed up Beth’s question with an *uptake*, “everyone please explain why they think what they think about the color question” (line 105). This discourse move positioned Beth’s question as the focus of discussion. Typical to Brenda’s discussion style, Brenda seemed to act as a co-participant with her pals, and often *shared her opinion* to the students’ questions, as she does to Beth’s question, “I think it does have something to do w/things” (line 106).

In line 107, “if he was white would he have a different outcome?” Beth extended her initial question, which seemed to problematize the issue of race and provided another perspective for her pals to consider. In line 108, Brenda shared her opinion: “all though he was involved and the neighborhood is mainly black i think his color plays a part.” Kathy interpreted and seemed to clarify Beth’s question, “well she is talking bout how when we think of like bad people we usually think of a black person and so when the jury sees that he is black wont they convict him easier” (line 109).

David seemed energized by her comment, explaining, “all because someone is black doesn’t make them any different than me or any other person in the world!” (line 111). Brenda countered him with a *challenge* question, which seemed to elevate the topic of race beyond the text and onto a larger scale, “but does most of the world think that way?” (line 114). This question seemed to resonate with Beth because she said, “yep” explaining why most of the people in the world might not think like David and said, “cause sometimes in society ppl are iffy about color” (line 115). David answered Brenda’s challenge, explaining, “no, but they should” (116).

After this episode, Brenda presented information from an article she had read in

her Literature for the Adolescent course concerning race and arrests of juvenile male offenders to perhaps further or deepen the topic. She shared with her pals, “we read an article that said white were arrested just as much and more sometimes than black but black r more likely to be convicted and have a harsher punishment” (lines 118 & 120). By sharing this information, Brenda did several things to encourage the continuation of the talk. First, she collaboratively developed a critical talk topic with Beth and Kathy by *uptaking* their questions and adding information to help further extend the discussion. She also presented information that might have countered some of her pals’ assumptions, which may have encouraged talk (“whites were arrested just as much and more sometimes than black”). Then she presented information that answered Kathy’s question (line 109) “when the jury sees that he is black wont they convict him easier?” by sharing information from the article that “black r more likely to be convicted and have a harsher punishment.”

Perhaps to generate more discussion about the information she shared, Brenda then asked an *opinion* question, “why do u think that is” (line 121). I believe critical talk is achieved in this instance. The topic moved from the book to the larger scale of society, and the pals began thinking about race. Brenda stimulated thought by sharing information that challenged her pals. During this process, personal connections were made and new possibilities generated. Beth made a personal disclosure about her struggles with race to exemplify society’s issues with race and shared, “like I am mixed and a lot of ppl are against that” (line 119).

After her personal disclosure, Beth attempted to provide Brenda with a possible justification for why blacks get convicted more often and have harsher sentences than

whites and said, “but from movies we have a certain outlook” (line 123). This is an example in which a pal seemed to connect the media’s influence to how people look at African-Americans. This seemed to show she understood a connection existed between the representation of a group by the media and the discriminatory actions carried out against particular groups. Kathy contributed her own perspective to the question and said, “I think it is b/c they have a bad reputation” (line 124). David responded, “but people don’t stop to realize things about them” (line 127). All of the middle schoolers seem to be very engaged in the discussion.

In line 131, Kathy elaborated on her earlier response (line 124) to Brenda’s *opinion* question about why black male offenders may be convicted at higher rates than white male offenders: “its like they were talking about [a local high school] it had a bad reputation even though the school isn’t bad I think the black ppl have a bad reputation but some of them aren’t bad.” Kathy brought up a local high school in the area and made a personal connection to show that misconceptions can create negative connotations about people. Brenda’s pals seemed to achieve critical talk by making real world connections and attempting to delve beneath the surface of the facts to generate possible explanations for why race might play a role in how the character of Steve is treated and judged in *Monster*.

Throughout the discussion, David seemed to take the topic personally and seemed to feel the need to present himself as an ally to African-Americans: “blacks are more of my friends than most white people” (line 132). Brenda followed up his comment by praising his character and said, “awesome david that means you r more open minded then some other people we need guys like u in the world to help stop the craziness” (lines 133



& 135) to which David responded, “True” (line 134). Throughout her chats, Brenda often praised her pals about their views.

Beth brought up another perspective and added, “some ppl think that the ‘white’ ppl are against blacks and that’s not tru if so I wouldn’t b here” (lines 136 & 139), a reference to her bi-racial identity. Kathy remarked to the group, “I don’t have nothing against blacks that is just my thoughts.”

In line 142, Beth continued to generate possible reasons for racism and said, “ppl are afraid of things they cant explain or understand.” Brenda praised her for her comments and added, “great job beth” (line 144). Kathy pointed out that, “ppl judge ppl by what color they r even if they don’t try 2 they still do it its hard not to” (lines 155 & 156). Brenda ended this topic by advocating “[effecting] the world” (line157). Unfortunately, however, the topic is dropped before the students and Brenda could consider what such “effect” might look like. Instead, Brenda posed a question which initiated a new and unrelated topic, “Can you explain to me why you chose the line from the book you did?” (line 160).

### **Summary**

When attempting critical talk, Brenda characterized her topics within the “Disrupting the Commonplace,” “Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints,” and “Focusing on the Sociopolitical Issues” dimensions. Brenda and her pals collaboratively discussed the topic of race as it pertained to *Monster*.

Brenda led the online discussions as a participant, judiciously using a variety of questions. Accordingly, she came the closest of the preservice teachers to achieving

critical talk. Even though she took more turns than her pals, she appeared to act as a co-participant in the discussion. Her main discourse moves included *sharing her personal opinions*, *uptaking* student questions, *soliciting her pals' opinions*, and *challenging* her pals.

She took a non-traditional approach to the facilitation of her online discussions that did not favor the I-R-E pattern (Mehan, 1979; Cazden 1988). Because Brenda allowed the topics of discussion to be determined by the group and allowed her pals to initiate topics about issues such as race and ethnicity through their own questions, she was able to come closest to achieving critical talk. The next section will discuss Abby's facilitation of her online discussions.

### **Case #2: Abby, "I Was Looking for Them to Explain Themselves"**

This single-case analysis explores the ways that one preservice English teacher, Abby, attempted to facilitate critical talk with her middle school pals, Brianna, Chuck, and Reggie. Findings from the analysis of Abby's chats revealed that while the potential for critical talk existed, Abby's use of *close-ended initiation* questions and *requests for elaboration* seemed to impede Abby's ability to promote and develop critical talk.

#### ***Critical Talk Episodes***

As Table 4.4 shows, only three critical talk episodes occurred in Abby's chats. None occurred in the first chat; two occurred in the second; and one occurred in the third chat.

In the first chat, talk predominantly centered on plot points. In the second chat, Abby attempted to raise a critical talk topic that matched the first dimension, "Disrupting

**Table 4.4. Abby’s Number of Critical Talk Episodes**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Chat #1</b>	<b>Chat #2</b>	<b>Chat #3</b>
Disrupting the Commonplace	0	1	0
Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints	0	1	1
Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues	0	0	0
Taking Action & Promoting Social Justice	0	0	0

the Commonplace” and the second dimension, “Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints.” Abby may have attempted to problematize the “everyday” idea of masculinity and “toughness” with her pals by encouraging discussion of some of the characters in the story who were “acting tough.” Abby asked her pals for reasons why the characters may have felt the need to act tough, and she related the idea of toughness to her male pals, encouraging them to reflect on times when they might have felt similar impulses to act tough in front of their friends.

Abby also contrasted the gang members with Steve’s father perhaps to represent opposing ideas about masculinity. Abby contrasted the young male characters with Steve’s father who did not appear macho and even cried about his son being on trial for murder. Abby asked her pals if it was okay to cry in front of their friends. In this sense, Abby seemed to be attempting to problematize the notion of male toughness.

In the second chat, Abby also raised a topic that fit the second dimension of critical literacy, “Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints,” by asking students to consider what or who defines a crime and when is it OK, if ever, to commit a crime (e.g., “Is it a crime

for a poor mother to steal food to feed her baby?’’). In the third chat, Abby raised one critical talk topic that matched the second dimension, “Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints,” asking her pals to consider the relationship between gender and peer pressure (e.g., “Do boys have more pressure to be ‘tough’ than girls?’”).

***Participation Levels and Discourse Strategies***

Table 4.5 shows that Abby had high levels of participation and took the most turns (36.9%; 34.4%; 41% respectively) across the three chats, and typed the most words per turn of the group.

Abby’s average number of words per turn compared to those of her pals suggested that she was doing more talking than her pals. Such a low average number of words per turn by her pals suggested that Abby’s pals were not highly engaged.

When I looked at Abby’s individual turns, I found that, unlike in Brenda’s case, the majority of Abby’s turns were questions. I therefore calculated the number of Abby’s

**Table 4.5. Conversational Turns and Words per Turn**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>4/5/05 # of Turns</b>	<b>Avg Words Per Turn</b>	<b>4/12/05 # of Turns</b>	<b>Avg Words Per Turn</b>	<b>4/26/05 # of Turns</b>	<b>Avg Words Per Turn</b>
Abby Preservice teacher	72	9.2	77	9.1	68	9.1
Reggie pal	28	2.1	22	4	-	-
Chuck pal	42	1.9	58	2.5	41	2.1
Brianna pal	53	5.1	67	4	57	4.4
Total	195		224		166	

questions as a percentage of her total turns taken in the chat. In her first chat, 34 out of 72 turns were questions (47.2%). Analysis of her second chat revealed that 44 out of 77 turns were questions (57.1%). Finally, her third chat showed an increase in the number of questions she asked as 47 out of 68 turns were questions (69%). Such high percentages of questioning suggested that students' participation in the chats might have been limited to responding to these questions.

Since the majority of Abby's contributions were questions, I focused my analysis of Abby's discourse moves on the types of questions she asked during the critical talk episodes (see Table 4.6). When coding questions, I identified types of questions based on their impact on the students' responses. Abby participated predominantly as a question-asker, and by asking the majority of questions, she seemed to control the topics and participation levels of the chats, which may have discouraged the development of critical talk.

The predominant question types in Abby's critical talk episodes were *close-ended initiation* questions and *requests for elaboration*. *Close-ended initiation* questions are questions that initiate new topics and request simple, unelaborated yes/no responses. Her reliance upon these questions seems to suggest that Abby was predisposed to employing an I-R-E or I-R-F (*Initiate-Respond-Evaluate/Follow-up*) pattern of discussion in the chats—a pattern where the teacher traditionally controls the topic, pacing, and speaker's turns. When Abby initiated a topic with a *close-ended initiation* question and got unelaborated responses—which was often the case across her three chats—she followed the questions up with a *request for elaboration* to elicit elaborated responses from her pals.

**Table 4.6. Abby's Questioning Strategies in Critical Talk Episodes**

<b>Type of Question</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Number of Times Asked</b>	<b>Purpose of Question</b>	<b>Example</b>
Close-Ended Initiation	Question which poses a new topic  Question which can be responded to in "yes" or "no" form	12	--to elicit and/or control certain pal response/lead --direct pals in discussion --get information --get pals' views --clarification --review plot details/check for understanding	<i>These guys that steve hangs out with...they don't have alot going for them do they?</i>
Request for Elaboration	Elicit more information about a student response to teacher-posed question	9	--show interest in pal --get pals' opinions --instigate critical thinking -get justification/defense of responses	<i>they are putting on some kind of front, a mask, but why?</i>
Hypothesize	Elicit value judgment from student based on teacher created scenario	6	--gauge pals' values --critical thinking --challenge views	<i>like, if someone is starving and needs something to eat and they steal food...is it okay then?</i>
Request for Opinion	Request reader's general attitude toward the written text, author, etc.	4	--initiate new discussion --get all pals' views --inspire critical thinking	<i>I would think that they might put extra emphasis on being tough or cool because this is all they have what do you all think?</i>
Challenge	Elicit a defense or line of argument	3	--contest pals' views --play devil's advocate --pose opposite or alternative view	<i>so everyone has a clean slate when they are born?</i>

**Table 4.6, continued.**

<b>Type of Question</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Number of Times Asked</b>	<b>Purpose of Question</b>	<b>Example</b>
Request for Clarification	Convey confusion/ elicit more information to clear up confusion	3	--comprehend/ understand --restate an idea --help students focus	<i>so, their friends told them that to be cool they had to do something bad?</i>
Uptake	Inquire into something a student contributes to the discussion	1	--show interest in what pal says --build discussion on pals' comments --have pals justify or elaborate answers	<i>good point ray, again. what if these places turned them away?</i>
Request for Known Answer	Answer can be found in text	1	--get a specific answer --get response about the plot of text --check for understanding	<i>what does he do when comes to see steve?</i>

This pattern of asking a *close-ended initiation* question and following it up with a *request for elaboration* seemed to prevent Abby from promoting and developing critical talk, as her frequent use of *close-ended initiation* questions changed the topic of discussion frequently and left little room for dialogue to develop, as seen in the following excerpt:

*Illustrative Excerpt from Abby's Second Chat*

<b>Line #</b>	<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Time Stamp</b>	<b>Turn</b>	<b>Question/Response Type</b>
			<i>These guys that steve hangs out with...they don't have alot going for them do they?</i>	<i>Close-Ended Initiation</i>
78.	Abby	4/12 2:57 PM		
79.	Brianna	4/12 2:57 PM	<i>No</i>	
80.	Reggie	4/12 2:57 PM	<i>No</i>	
81.	Chuck	4/12 2:57 PM	<i>No</i>	
			<i>people like bobo and osvaldo</i>	<i>Example</i>
82.	Abby	4/12 2:57 PM		
83.	Chuck	4/12 2:57 PM	<i>No</i>	
			<i>all they have is this mask of being tough thhey all seem like murderers or drug dealers</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
84.	Abby	4/12 2:58 PM		
85.	Brianna	4/12 2:58 PM		
86.	Chuck	4/12 2:58 PM	<i>Yep</i>	
87.	Brianna	4/12 2:58 PM	<i>Yep</i>	
			<i>these guys that steve hangs out with, why do you think they act so tough?</i>	<i>Request for Elaboration</i>
97.	Abby	4/12 2:59 PM		
98.	Reggie	4/12 2:59 PM	<i>Nope</i>	
99.	Chuck	4/12 3:00 PM	<i>dont know</i>	
			<i>because they were brought up to act like that by the way they were raised</i>	
100.	Brianna	4/12 3:00 PM		
101.	Chuck	4/12 3:00 PM		
			<i>ray, Chuck, do you ever act tough in front of your friends, honestly.</i>	<i>Close-Ended Initiation</i>
102.	Abby	4/12 3:00 PM		
103.	Chuck	4/12 3:00 PM	<i>Yes</i>	



104. Reggie	4/12 3:01 PM	Sometimes	
105. Chuck	4/12 3:01 PM	i take up for myself	
106. Reggie	4/12 3:01 PM	i say what i feel	
			<i>Request For Elaboration Close-Ended Initiation</i>
107. Abby	4/12 3:01 PM	why? is it the way you were raised, as Chuck suggested earlier?	
108. Chuck	4/12 3:01 PM	No i think its so they will look cool in front of their friends	
109. Brianna	4/12 3:02 PM		
110. Chuck	4/12 3:02 PM	i dont know why i just do it yes, i think so to brit...but that is not a bad thing, we all want to look cool.	<i>Agree</i>
111. Abby	4/12 3:02 PM		
112. Abby	4/12 3:02 PM	i know i do	<i>Personal Disclosure</i>
113. Brianna	4/12 3:02 PM	Yep	
114. Chuck	4/12 3:03 PM	Sure so, these tough guys in the book, they are putting on some kind of front, a mask, but why?	<i>Request For Elaboration</i>
115. Abby	4/12 3:03 PM		
116. Chuck	4/12 3:03 PM	i dont know so people will think that they are cool. they dont want to look weak if they do they will get picked on	
117. Brianna	4/12 3:04 PM		
118. Reggie	4/12 3:04 PM		
119. Chuck	4/12 3:05 PM	i guess great answers...reggie, you are correct. so all they have are these masks because they really don't have much else. I would think that they might put extra emphasis on being tough or cool because this is all they have	<i>Evaluate Share Opinion</i>
120. Abby	4/12 3:05 PM		
121. Abby	4/12 3:05 PM	what do you all think?	<i>Request for Opinion</i>
122. Brianna	4/12 3:05 PM	Yeah	
123. Reggie	4/12 3:06 PM	Yep	

124. Brianna	4/12 3:06 PM	that is all that they really have	
125. Chuck	4/12 3:06 PM	i think your right but what about Steve's dad? he doesn't quite fit the mold, does he? the mold of "macho"	Close-Ended Initiation
126. Abby	4/12 3:06 PM	No	
127. Brianna	4/12 3:06 PM	No	
128. Chuck	4/12 3:06 PM	No	Request For Elaboration
129. Abby	4/12 3:06 PM	why not?	
130. Chuck	4/12 3:07 PM	hes nice	
131. Brianna	4/12 3:07 PM	he seems to nice	Evaluate Request For Known Answer
132. Abby	4/12 3:07 PM	yes, he is very nice. what does he do when comes to see steve?	
133. Reggie	4/12 3:07 PM	he was raised in a different neighborhood maybe perhaps ray, maybe he was not raised in harlem,	
134. Abby	4/12 3:08 PM	good point	Evaluate
135. Brianna	4/12 3:08 PM	he sometimes starts to cry	
136. Chuck	4/12 3:08 PM	good point	
137. Abby	4/12 3:08 PM	yes, he cries.	Evaluate
138. Abby	4/12 3:09 PM	chris, ray, is that okay to cry in front of your friends?	Close-Ended Initiation
139. Chuck	4/12 3:09 PM	Yes	
140. Reggie	4/12 3:09 PM	if it is tragic like somebody died	
141. Chuck	4/12 3:09 PM	i guess it is if its a good reason	
142. Abby	4/12 3:10 PM	that is interesting.	Evaluate
143. Brianna	4/12 3:10 PM	wow.i thought that you guys would say no let me ask you this. do you think that a crime can be justified?	Close-Ended Initiation
156. Abby	4/12 3:13 PM		

Abby began this excerpt by asking a *close-ended initiation* question (line 78), in which it seems she tried to solicit a response of *no*. By asking, “they don’t have a lot going for them do they?” she seemed to assert a negative opinion before ending with, “do they?” All three pals accepted her solicitation by responding, “No” (lines 79-81). This type of *close-ended initiation* question left Abby with little on which to build dialogue. Unless the pals elaborated spontaneously, she would have to request elaboration from them to continue the dialogue, which she often did. This seemed to be a recurring pattern in all of Abby’s chats.

In line 82, Abby expounded upon her point by mentioning two characters, Bobo and Osvaldo, in order to reiterate to the pals that the types of guys that Steve hangs out with are disadvantaged. Chuck repeated his minimalist answer, “no” with the implied meaning that these characters did not have a lot going for them (line 83). Reinforcing the fact that Steve’s friends “don’t have a lot going for them,” Abby then asserted that “all they have is this mask of being tough” (line 84). Brianna then added “they all seem like murderers or drug dealers” (line 85), which introduced a stereotype that Abby had the opportunity to address but didn’t. Instead, she continued with her own line of questioning. As a result, the assertions and stereotypes made within the discussion were never challenged or examined.

Perhaps sensing that the students agreed with her opinion that the characters had only the mask of being tough, Abby offered a *request for elaboration*, “why do you think they act so tough?” (line 97). Such a question could have provided momentum to a discussion that had stalled as a result of too many *close-ended initiation* questions and may have inspired critical talk. However, Chuck replied initially with “don’t know” (line

99), while Brianna elaborated by stating that “they were brought up to act like that” (line 100). Then, Chuck repeated Brianna’s comment, explaining “by the way they were raised” (line 101). The implication of Chuck and Brianna’s comments is that they believe the African-American male characters like Osvaldo and Bobo were brought up or raised to be “thugs” or “tough guys.” This line of inquiry has rich potential for critical discussion to develop, as it provides an opportunity for Abby to encourage her pals to more critically examine their beliefs about stereotypes of African-American males. She could have also introduced larger sociopolitical issues such as the relationship between urban decay and high incidents of violence in urban areas, topics which had been discussed in the young adult literature class. Instead, Abby again continued with her own line of questioning, posing another *close-ended initiation* question, “reggie, chuck, do you ever act tough in front of your friends, honestly” (line 102).

Through this *close-ended initiation* question Abby seemed to try to personalize the reading experience and prompted the male pals’ personal disclosure. Chuck answered “yes” and Reggie typed, “sometimes” and then both elaborated (lines 103-106). Abby then asked for them to elaborate further with another *request for elaboration* and *close-ended initiation* question, “why? is it the way you were raised, as chuck suggested earlier?” (line 107). Chuck responded “no,” and eventually elaborated and said, “I don’t know why I just do it” (line 110). Reggie offered no further response on the subject.

Brianna interjected, unsolicited, and stated her belief that Chuck and Reggie acted tough because they wanted to “look cool in front of their friends” (line 109). Abby agreed with her, but then tempered her agreement by saying, “but that is not a bad thing, we all want to look cool. I know I do” (lines 111-112). This might have been an attempt at

connecting with the pals by not siding with one pal over the others.

In line 115, Abby asked her pals why the “tough guys” in the book were putting on a “kind of front, a mask” (line 115). Chuck stated, “I don’t know” (line 116); Brianna suggested the same response that she made about Chuck and Reggie, “So people will think that they are cool” (line 117). Reggie rejoined the discussion after not participating for several lines (lines 107-117) to mention that, “they do not want to look weak if they do they will be picked on” (line 118). Reggie, as the pals often did in this chat, introduced what could have been a critical topic here about the concept of masculinity and why men might feel the need to act tough. This notion of students introducing what could potentially become critical talk topics is not unusual. Simpson (1996) explains that oftentimes critical discussions emerge out of students’ comments or their own questions about a text rather than a teacher’s prescribed questions.

However, rather than using an *uptake* statement or building on Reggie’s statement (line 118), Abby evaluated the answers and told Reggie that he was “correct” (line 120), and then went on with her own line of questioning, reiterating the point that Steve’s friends don’t have a lot going for them. She then added that this might be why they “put extra emphasis on being tough or cool” (line 120). She followed up by asking an open *opinion* question to the group, “what do you all think?” (line 121). Brianna paraphrased Abby’s opinion earlier and said, “that is all they really have” (line 124), and Chuck agreed with Brianna with no elaboration of his own (line 125).

Rather than develop this idea, Abby posed a new *close-ended initiation* question about Steve’s dad. She may have attempted to apply the concept of masculinity to Steve’s dad by asking, ‘but what about Steve’s dad? he doesn’t quite fit the mold, does he? The

mold of ‘macho’” (line 126). Even though this question is a *close-ended initiation* question, it is also a leading question that stated Abby’s negative opinion that “he doesn’t quite fit the mold” followed by the *close-ended* question “does he?” Maybe the added *close-ended initiation* question was designed by Abby to set up the difference between Steve’s dad’s version of masculinity and the young male characters’ persona of toughness. By creating a dichotomy of masculinity, Abby may have attempted to have her pals problematize and evaluate what it means to be “macho,” while recognizing there might be multiple, alternative versions of “being a man.” As before, the pals seemed to acquiesce and gave Abby her desired response of “no” (lines 127-128).

Abby maintained her questioning pattern and followed a *close-ended initiation* question with a *request for elaboration* of “why not?” (line 129). Two pals responded that “he’s nice” (lines 130-131) which showed that Brianna and Chuck thought that “being nice” was in conflict with “being macho.” Yet, Abby did not develop this line of thinking and agreed with them and then asked a *known answer* question from the story about Steve’s dad, “what does he do when he comes to see Steve?” (line 132).

Reggie, who had been absent again from the discussion, predicted that Steve’s dad did not fit the mold of being macho because “he was raised in a different neighborhood maybe” (line 133). Once again, this was a statement that provided Abby the opportunity to examine students’ assumptions about people who live in urban areas. Abby did not press the pals on their assumptions and stereotypes about how people from urban areas are perceived nor did she discuss the systems in place that cause or perpetuate such assumptions (e.g., movies, advertising, music videos, etc)—topics which had been raised in the young adult literature course.

Instead of pursuing any of these options, Abby acknowledged Reggie's point, restated it, and then evaluated it by saying, "good point" (line 134). In line 135, Brianna answered Abby's *known answer* question from line 132 by pointing out that Steve's dad "sometimes starts to cry" when he visited Steve in jail. Abby agreed with Brianna and confirmed her answer in line 137.

Abby seemed to appeal once more to her male pals while pursuing this thread about masculinity and what was acceptable or standard. She asked another *close-ended initiation* question, "chuck, reggie is that ok to cry in front of your friends?" (line 138) which was completely different than asking whether or not they cried in front of their friends. By asking if it was *ok*, she attached a value to what is expected of males and crying. The male pals agreed that it was ok to cry in front of friends but only "if somebody died" (line 140) and "if it's a good reason" (line 141). Abby expressed her thoughts about their comments and said, "that is interesting" (line 142). Indirectly, the boys challenged Brianna's stereotypical view of boys and crying because she said, "wow. i thought you guys would say no" (line 143). Abby failed to build upon Brianna's comment and lost another chance to examine expectations of male masculinity. She dropped the topic and switched to asking her pals, "let me ask you this. do you think that a crime can be justified" (line 156).

### **Summary**

When attempting critical talk, Abby characterized her topics within the "Disrupting the Commonplace" dimension and the "Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints" dimension. Abby attempted the critical talk topic of masculinity from *Monster* and

related it to her pals' lives while attempting to encourage her pals to try to critique the topic in a personal and contextual way.

Unlike Brenda, Abby led the online discussions in a traditional pattern. She took the most turns, predominantly asking questions. Teachers in traditional classrooms tend to ask the majority of questions in classroom discussions (Nystrand, 1997). Her main questioning strategies were *close-ended initiation* questions and *requests for elaboration*. Her overuse of *close-ended* questions did not seem to encourage the development of critical talk. Abby determined the topics of discussion and asked the majority of questions; her pals initiated critical talk topics but only through their responses to Abby's questions as they were not encouraged to pose their own questions. While students' responses sometimes had the potential to develop critical talk, Abby did not often take up their responses and either continued with her own line of questioning or switched topics altogether.

Overall, Abby seemed to make some attempts at critical talk, she could never engage her pals enough to develop the talk. The next section will discuss Sharon's facilitation of her online discussions.

### **Case #3: Sharon, "I'm Supposed to be the Expert"**

This single-case analysis explores how one preservice English teacher, Sharon, attempted to facilitate critical talk with her middle school pals, Alice, Nick, and Roger. Sharon only participated in two *Monster* chats because, at her request, she observed another person lead what would have been her second chat. Findings revealed that, unlike Brenda, Sharon asked many questions during the critical talk episodes, and all of the



questions she posed—especially *close-ended* (*non-initiating*) questions and *uptake* questions—seemed to have a negative effect on the development of critical talk, as they were attempts to redirect student-initiated critical talk rather than promote its development.

### ***Critical Talk Episodes***

As Table 4.7 shows, Sharon had two potential critical talk episodes. I use the term “potential” because neither episode ever developed into critical talk. One occurred in chat one, and one occurred in the third chat.

In the first chat, it is interesting to note that it was not Sharon who initiated the critical talk topic, but Roger, who asked, “Do you think this book will have some discrimination involved?” Sharon’s pals frequently initiated questions, one of which in the first chat seemed to match the dimension of “Disrupting the Commonplace,” as Roger seemed to wonder how the jury (and the reader) would view Steve as a young, Black male on trial for murder.

**Table 4.7. Sharon’s Number of Critical Talk Episodes**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Chat #1</b>	<b>Chat #2</b>	<b>Chat #3</b>
Disrupting the Commonplace	1	-	1
Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints	0	-	0
Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues	0	-	0
Taking Action & Promoting Social Justice	0	-	0

In the third chat, Sharon attempted to raise a critical talk topic that also seemed to match this first dimension, asking her pals if they "...put on a tough show at school." This might have been an attempt to raise the topic of masculinity/toughness we had discussed in the young adult literature course in relation to the book. While these topics were raised, however, they remained undeveloped, perhaps as a result of Sharon's participation levels and discourse moves.

***Participation Levels and Discourse Strategies***

As with Abby's and Brenda's participation, I counted individual conversational turns for Sharon and her three middle school pals. I determined how many words were typed by each participant and then calculated an average number of words per turn. I did this for both of her chats (see Table 4.8).

Unlike Abby and Brenda, Sharon did not always have the highest participation in the discussion. In fact, in her first chat, her pal, Alice, took the most turns in the conversation (31.3%). Sharon only took 26.8% of the turns which was close to Nick

**Table 4.8. Conversational Turns and Words per Turn**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>4/5/05 # of Turns</b>	<b>Avg Words Per Turn</b>	<b>4/12/05 # of Turns</b>	<b>Avg Words Per Turn</b>	<b>4/26/05 # of Turns</b>	<b>Avg Words Per Turn</b>
Sharon Preservice teacher	78	9.7	-	-	68	8.0
Alice pal	91	5.6	-	-	11	4.6
Nick pal	69	2.5	-	-	47	3.9
Roger pal	53	3.9	-	-	53	4.0
Total	291		-	-	179	

(23.75%) and Roger's (18.2%) participation levels. Overall, the first chat's conversational turns seemed well-balanced amongst the members. In her third chat, Sharon took 38.0% of the turns, considerably more than her pals. The amount of words Sharon typed per turn was considerably higher than her pals' words per turn (9.7 average).

When I analyzed Sharon's individual turns. I discovered that, like Abby, the majority of her turns were questions. Because of this, I calculated the number of questions Sharon asked as a percentage of her total turns taken in the chat. In her first chat, 39 of 79 turns were questions (49.4%), and 34 of her 68 turns were questions (50%) in her third chat. On the surface, it appeared that Sharon's chats were balanced among the pals in terms of participation, but half of her turns were questions. Also, since her average number of words per turn was significantly higher than her pals, it suggested she may have controlled more of the discussion since she was typing more words. The average number of words per turn appeared to be more of a factor than just turn-taking itself, as it is important to note what the participant was doing in the turn.

Since half of Sharon's contributions were questions, I focused this part of my analysis specifically on the question types she used during the critical talk episodes (see Table 4.9).

Sharon predominantly asked *close-ended* (*non-initiating*) questions and *uptake* questions which seemed to have a negative effect on the development of critical talk, as they seemed to be attempts to redirect student-initiated critical talk. Usually, a teacher's use of *uptake* questions in discussion is a good sign, but Sharon doesn't seem to use the *uptake* strategy to validate or learn more about the students' ideas, or to focus students' ideas as the topic for discussion.

**Table 4.9. Sharon’s Questioning Strategies in Critical Talk Episodes**

<b>Type of Question</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Number of Times Asked</b>	<b>Purpose of Question</b>	<b>Example</b>
Request for Information Close-Ended ( <i>non-initiating</i> )	Requests which can be responded to in “yes” or “no” form	3	--to elicit and/or control certain pal response/lead --direct pals in discussion --get information --get pals’ views --clarification --review plot details/check for understanding	<i>well, do you think that she is right?</i>
Uptake	Inquire into something a student contributes to the discussion	3	--show interest in what pal says --build discussion on pals’ comments --have pals justify or elaborate answers	<i>Well, that is a good question, do we know what the races of the lawyers or the judge or the jury is?</i>
Request for Clarification	Convey confusion/elicit more information to clear up confusion	1	--comprehend/understand --restate an idea --help students focus	<i>She doubts what, that he will be found innocent, right?</i>

Rather, her use of the questioning strategy seemed to redirect student-initiated topics. When the student-initiated topic was one that matched a critical literacy dimension, as was the case in the first chat, this redirection, changed the nature of the topic. Burbules (1993) explains the danger of redirections as they are, “juxtapositions of association that are tangential, or skewed, to the original direction of [the] discussion...” (p. 92). Her redirection of the chat ultimately shut down an opportunity for the development of critical talk, as shown in the following excerpt:

*Illustrative Excerpt from Sharon’s First Chat*

<i>Line #</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Time Stamp</i>	<i>Turn</i>	<i>Question/Response Type</i>
81.	Roger	4/5 2:54 PM	<i>do you think this book will have some discrimination involved</i>	<i>Student Initiation</i>
82.	Alice	4/5 2:55 PM	<i>yeah it already does</i>	
83.	Alice	4/5 2:55 PM	<i>(if you want my opinon)</i>	
84.	Nick	4/5 2:55 PM	<i>a little</i>	
85.	Roger	4/5 2:55 PM	<i>it does which page</i>	
86.	Sharon	4/5 2:55 PM	<i>Well, that is a good question, do we know what the races of the lawyers or the judge or the jury is?</i>	<i>Uptake Close-Ended (non-initiating)</i>
90.	Nick	4/5 2:55 PM	<i>No</i>	
91.	Alice	4/5 2:56 PM	<i>it said that ms obrien was white and so was ms perocelli and the dude for king</i>	
94.	Sharon	4/5 2:56 PM	<i>Well, there is already an assumption that he is guilty because he is young and black. Alotof people assume that he is guilty</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
95.	Alice	4/5 2:56 PM	<i>mrs obrien has doubts though? why? and what caused them?</i>	<i>Request</i>
98.	Sharon	4/5 2:57 PM	<i>She doubts what, that he will be found innocent, right?</i>	<i>For Clarification</i>
100.	Alice	4/5 2:57 PM	<i>yeah...maybe</i>	

101. Roger 4/5 2:57 PM Right  
Close-Ended  
(non-initiating)
102. Sharon 4/5 2:57 PM well, do you think that she is right?  
Close-Ended  
(non-initiating)
106. Roger 4/5 2:58 PM Yeah  
i dont think that someone with doubts should defend. I defense person shouldn't doubt thats the
108. Alice 4/5 2:58 PM ADA's job  
Close-Ended  
(non-initiating)
110. Sharon 4/5 2:58 PM well, she has a right to her opinion, she just has to put it aside and do her job, right?  
Close-Ended  
(non-initiating)

Roger initiated the critical talk topic about race and asked a *close-ended* question to get everyone's opinion, "do you think this book will have some discrimination involved" (line 81), and the two other pals responded to his question with, "yeah it already does (if you want my opinion)" and "a little" (lines 82-84).

This question required the group to consider the ethnicities of the characters, the storyline, and to consider the court system and all of its components (judge, jury, lawyers, etc.). Because the alleged criminals in the book were African-American and those in the court system were all White, the discussion might have evolved into a topic about race and who held the power in the courtroom. The discussion might also have evolved around the jurors' and the readers' perceptions of Steve.

Sharon recognized Roger's question as good, but in *taking up* Roger's question, asked a question of her own which seemed to change the nature of Roger's query: "well that is a good question, do we know what the races of the lawyers or the judge or the jury is?" (line 86). Alice responded and pointed out, "it said that ms Obrien was white and so

was ms perocelli and the dude for king” (line 91). Alice introduced that all the lawyers in the story were White while the defendants were African-American.

In line 94, Sharon made a statement that could have encouraged critical talk when her group was determining the races of the judge, jury, and lawyers: “Well, there is already an assumption that he is guilty because he is young and black. A lot of people assume that he is guilty.” Alice countered, “Mrs Obrien has doubts though? Why? And what caused them” (line 95).

Alice questioned how Steve’s lawyer could question his innocence and wanted to know what might cause such doubts. Sharon *uptakes* Alice’s question, *requesting clarification* from Alice, asking “She doubts what, that he will be found innocent, right?” (line 98). Alice replies hesitantly, “Yeah...maybe” (line 100), and Sharon asks “well, do you think that she is right?” (line 102). Again, Sharon’s line of questioning seemed to deflate and redirect Alice’s rich question, which had the original potential to raise critical talk.

By line 108, Alice responded to Sharon’s question (line 102) about the defense counsel being right to have doubts about Steve’s innocence and said, “I don’t think someone with doubts should defend. A defense person shouldn’t doubt that’s the ADA’s job” (line 108). Sharon challenged Alice with another *close-ended* question, “well she has a right to her opinion, she just has to put it aside and do her job, right” (line 110). By ending with the term “right” at the end, it seemed that Sharon was trying to lead Alice to answer yes.

The topic ended when the pals got off-task, a problem for Sharon throughout her chats. Much of Sharon’s chats could be characterized as off-topic discussion, as her pals

often talked to each other, joked, and called each other names. This seemed to prompt Sharon to regulate the behavior, spending much time telling her pals to “be nice” (line 122, chat 1) and “lets just try and talk about the book, ok?” (line 129 chat 1). Her discussions were underdeveloped and never evolved into critical talk, I think in part because Sharon did not know how to engage her pals’ high-level ideas or how to ask follow-up questions that could scaffold the talk in ways that challenged the students and engaged them.

### Summary

Sharon seemed to struggle the most out of the three preservice teachers. Her potential for critical talk only resulted in two episodes at the “Disrupting the Commonplace” dimension. Unlike Brenda or Abby, she never transcended the first dimension of critical talk. She may not have reached other dimensions for several reasons. Her lack of control in facilitating the discussions led to *regulating* her pals’ behavior and talk rather than creating critical talk. This was contrary to Abby who resorted to a traditional pattern of classroom discourse (I-R-E pattern) but was able to facilitate the discussion.

Also, Sharon’s questioning strategies were less varied compared to Abby who also did not develop critical talk. Sharon only incorporated three types of questioning strategies with her pals while Abby incorporated nine. Perhaps this lack of variety affected Sharon’s development of the discussion. Too often, Sharon’s use of *uptake* questions resulted in re-directing student-initiated critical talk into non-critical talk. Sharon’s pals often initiated topics of discussion, asked questions, and seemed to have



multiple thread discussions in the online medium. Sharon did not seem to provide much guidance for the discussion. Overall, Sharon's few attempts at critical talk were ineffective for the aforementioned reasons. The discussion and interpretations of the findings are presented in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATIONS

### Introduction

Findings from this study revealed that only one preservice teacher came close to achieving engaged, critical talk, and it seemed that when Burbules's rules were followed, critical talk seemed to occur. So, perhaps a relationship exists between the *process* and the content of the talk. Interpretations based on the findings of this study included the following: 1) developing relationships with students and establishing a social presence may help teachers achieve critical talk; 2) beginning teachers need time and opportunity to explore and develop a critical stance toward literature; and 3) a CMC forum, on its own, does not ensure equitable participation in online discussion. This chapter will discuss how each preservice teacher's adherence to Burbules's rules may have affected the occurrence of critical talk and will be followed by a section of the interpretations based on the findings of this study.

### Discussion

Drawing on Burbules's (1993) rules of dialogue to illustrate the *process* of critical talk within the preservice teachers' critical talk episodes, it appeared there was a relationship between following the rules of dialogue and the occurrence of critical talk. Burbules suggests three rules of dialogue must be adhered to by discussants if dialogue is to be collaborative and pedagogical. First, the *rule of participation* states that if dialogue is to be pedagogical, it requires active participation from all its members. He cautions that we watch for what Freire (1973) calls "monologue" in a dialogue—one person should not be able to monopolize the discussion. According to Burbules, each member "should be

able to raise topics, pose questions, challenge other points of view, or engage in any of the other activities that define the dialogical interaction” (p. 80) to achieve this rule.

The second rule he developed is the *rule of commitment*. This rule states that engagement must “allow the flow of conversation to be persistent and extensive across a range of shared concerns, even difficult or divisive ones” (p. 81). Burbules (1993) suggests that a threat to this rule is “an inability or unwillingness to see the process through to some meaningful conclusion—not necessarily to agreement or consensus, but at least to an understanding and respect for differences” (p. 81).

The final rule of dialogue is the *rule of reciprocity*. This rule is twofold in that it addresses the form of the discussion and the feelings of the participants. Burbules (1993) explains, “Because a dialogical relation needs to be sustained over time in order to be pedagogically beneficial, it inevitably involves an engagement that is more than purely cognitive” (p. 82). In terms of the form of the discussion, this rule implies that all dialogue must be reflexive and reversible amongst its members. If one person asks questions, then another member should be allowed to ask questions—whatever discussants expect of others they must expect of themselves. In terms of the feelings of the participants, reciprocity is achieved through mutual respect and concern.

Burbules (1993) does not expect these rules to be mandated, but does think that rules similar to these are necessary for having a certain type of dialogue with one’s students. Burbules contends these rules are unspoken in a “dynamic, ongoing dialogical encounter” and that “a repeated need to invoke them” (p. 82) within a discussion can signal failure for the talk. It appeared that successful critical talk occurred when the preservice teachers followed Burbules’s rules in facilitating the chats.

As the one preservice teacher who came closest to achieving meaningful critical talk with her pals, Brenda seemed to incorporate two of Burbules's rules of dialogue into her discussions. She followed the *rule of participation* in several ways. Brenda let students initiate topics, many of which resulted in critical talk. When asked why she let her students initiate topics for discussion, she explained, "I wanted to make sure the students had a chance to start the discussion and talk about what they thought was important" (Interview transcript, February 2007). Not only did she allow students to start the discussion, but by using *uptake*, she helped collaboratively develop critical talk from their topics. As described in the illustrative excerpt, Brenda shared information from an article to help develop Beth and Kathy's questions concerning race and conviction. When asked in a follow-up interview why she shared the article with her pals, Brenda verified that it was to get their *opinions* and take up their ideas, as she explained:

I wanted their opinion on the conviction rates and how society treated blacks and whites. Also since the article agrees with what the students are saying I thought this might strike a new discussion on maybe stereotype prevention or even making the students feel more empowered because they were correct on their thoughts about the world's stereotypes (Interview transcript, February 2007).

By using *uptake*, she focused her pals' questions as discussion topics.

The *rule of participation* seems to be important if we are going to attempt to have critical talk with students. By following this rule, Brenda was a member of the group and not the sole questioner who determined the topics of the chats and how the topics would be discussed. This opportunity for students to determine what topics they wanted to talk about was a trait that Brenda valued in discussion. In a follow-up interview, she described

aspects of an ideal discussion for her as “when they [the students] pose more questions than me, when they can switch topics without me having to say ‘ok we talked about this for 30 minutes so now we’ll talk about this’” (Interview transcript, December 2005).

It appeared that Sharon might have followed the *rule of participation* as her pals initiated questions, posed questions, and even challenged one another. However, there were differences in the way Sharon and Brenda felt about this type of participation. As Brenda seemed to embrace the idea of more equal participation levels in dialogue as evidenced by her behavior in the critical talk episodes and her comments in her follow-up interviews, Sharon seemed to perceive this type of participation as threatening. As Sharon explained in a follow-up interview, she saw her role in the chats as that of an expert. She explained, “I should be the expert... I’m the one with the degree. They’re just 8<sup>th</sup> graders” (Interview transcript, December 2005). Sharon might have entered the chat project thinking of herself as the “expert,” with the “degree” in English, but she soon found that she did not have the expertise to facilitate the chats, as her pals were more tech-savvy than her. Also, they were asking high-level questions she didn’t seem to know how to field. At times, Sharon’s pals would ignore her and talk around her. When asked about this in the follow-up interview, Sharon explained:

What, what I did see, and this was just my own ego but um, at one point one of the boys asks Alice a question and I was like ‘Hey, what about me?’ so, and...I took it just that I was not doing a good job in the chat room. And he knows Alice and he knows that she’s a smart girl... Uh, it’s perfectly OK he asked her, it’s not, just like I said my own ego was kind of a little um ‘that’s not nice,’ wish you would have asked me...But then another problem is they wanted to talk about

different things and I can't, I can't do that. You know we all need to be on the same page (Interview transcript, December 2005).

As the end of this quote suggests, Sharon did not seem completely comfortable with letting the students talk on their own, and felt the need to direct their talk. By doing so, however, she was not following the *rule of reciprocity*.

Another way that Sharon differed from Brenda about the *rule of participation* was through her use of *uptake*. Like Brenda, Sharon also used *uptake* with her students, but she did so ineffectively, redirecting student- initiated critical talk instead of developing it. As a result, it seemed that Sharon's use of *uptake* did not serve to validate her students' ideas and center them as topics for discussion. Instead her use of *uptake* changed the nature or focus of the topic—topics that sometimes could have led to critical talk. Even though her pals initiated topics, she resisted allowing their topics to develop before she redirected them. The rule of participation was broken at this point.

Abby did not follow the *rule of participation* in her discussions. With her pals, Abby employed the most traditional types of discourse moves in her chats. Her predominant questions types were *closed-ended initiation* questions and *requests for elaboration* which created I-R-E (Mehan, 1979; Cazden, 1988) and I-R-F patterns (Welles, 1999) within her discussions. As a result, she generally controlled the topics, the pacing, and the speakers' turns in her discussions. These patterns persisted for Abby and did not change with her attempts at critical talk. As a result of these discourse patterns, her pals did not have an opportunity to initiate topics or ask questions.

Unlike the I-R-E pattern or the I-R-F pattern in which the teacher determines the topic, Burbules's (1993) *rule of participation* focuses on shared participation, as each

participant may “raise topics, pose questions, or challenge another’s point of view” (p. 80). Brenda managed to do all of these with her pals. “Challenge” may have a negative connotation to teachers, as some may take a challenge to be a direct threat to their authority. However, Brenda did not see the pals’ challenges as a threat but as a form of reciprocity. She explained her perception of being challenged in a follow-up interview, “They did try to challenge me but not in a way that I felt it was a rude challenge. It was a challenge as in you need to defend yourself just as much as we need to defend ourselves” (Interview transcript, December 2005).

This reciprocity in challenging one another was an example of how Brenda honored Burbules’s *rule of reciprocity*. Brenda also followed this rule as evidenced by the give and take between her and her pals when they posed questions to one another and posed different topics for the discussion. She did not ask a lot of questions and participated by sharing her *opinions* with her pals. She also exemplified this rule when she asked her pals questions that *solicited their opinions*.

Not only does this rule involve give and take, but it also contains a relational element created by encouraging engagement in the discussion. Brenda seemed to create engagement with her pals by using statements such as *praise*. The excerpt that described Brenda’s critical talk showed Brenda praising David for his views about African-Americans. Even though it appeared to David that Brenda and the pals might have had different ideas about race, Brenda did not want to make David feel like his opinion was irrelevant nor did she want to shut down his comments in the future. I asked Brenda about this particular incident in a follow-up interview, and she explained why she used individual praise as a discourse move:

Again I wanted the kids to know they could feel comfortable saying whatever it was they thought and they did not need this big support of evidence to say something. If I had just kept going and did not acknowledge David was becoming offended and a little confused maybe about what the other two students and I actually thought about black people, the room might have become threatening. I wanted him to feel safe in his thoughts and expressions. Besides I was happy David was participating, and wanted to keep this up (Interview transcript, February 2007).

Brenda's comments show what might have happened if she had not followed Burbules's *rule of reciprocity*. She felt that if she had kept going in the discussion without praising David for his ideas, the room might have become threatening, and he might have stopped participating in the discussion. If David had felt uncomfortable in the room and that his opinions did not matter, the discussion could have shut down, been one sided, or been monopolized by other pals, which would not have led to critical talk.

The *rule of reciprocity* was one that both Abby and Sharon also struggled with in their chats. As Abby and Sharon mainly asked questions of their pals, they did not share their own ideas with their pals. Unlike Brenda who praised her pals, Abby further created a lack of reciprocity with her pals by evaluating her pals' responses to her questions. By evaluating students' answers, she seemed to place herself at a level higher than her pals, which created distance between the pals and herself. As distance was created, her pals seemed to become less engaged with the discussion, frequently answering, "I don't know." Abby explained in a follow-up interview that her pals' lack of engagement frustrated her:

First, I don't think that the students have really been trained or had much



experience with participating in a discussion. Second, I take some of the onus of the stilted conversation. Although my intention was to draw them in, I grew frustrated at the lack of conversation and the frequent replies of “I don’t know.” This led to a one-sided conversation where I left the responsibility of “jumping in” to the students when I should have attempted harder to relate the subject matter and the line of questioning to a topic that would engage them and interest them. Instead I simply expected a certain standard and was disappointed when the students fell short of my expectations. (Interview transcript, February 2007).

Abby admitted that her discussions became one-sided which suggested that reciprocity did not occur. Thus it seems Abby’s frustration over the students’ perceived lack of experience with discussions and their inability to meet her expectations may have led her to ask close-ended questions, which might have affected her pals’ lack of engagement. Perhaps the students had not had opportunities to participate in much classroom discussion about literature. Nystrand (1997) points out that the amount of time spent on authentic discussion in middle school classrooms is less than 50 seconds a day. The above quote belied Abby’s expectations for discussion and her opinions about student participation in discussion. Yet, when the students fell short of her expectations, she was disappointed.

Sharon, too, created distance between her pals and herself as warranted by the “expert” status that she felt she needed to have. Sharon shed some light about how this “expert” status affected her in a follow-up interview:

Well I knew I was the adult, and I knew that I was kind of in charge but I didn’t

feel in charge. I mean it, I knew that I should have the expertise to talk about this but I was, I was intimidated by them, really. Well, especially Alice...I was just like 'Wow, you're, uh, OK, that's a great response!' now let me try, you know, with all this other stuff going on technology-wise and everything, let me try to top that or bring, or be able to bring something better out of you. But she was, she was doing perfectly without me...(Interview transcript, December 2005).

By Sharon feeling the pressure to "top" what Alice had achieved, she was not following the *rule of reciprocity*.

The only rule Brenda seemed to disregard was the *rule of commitment*, which might explain why critical talk emerged and was initially developed in her discussions but not sustained. For example, in her critical talk excerpt, Brenda had an opportunity to potentially move to the fourth dimension of critical literacy with her pals. Yet, she immediately dropped the subject and changed the topic. By changing topics abruptly, Brenda may have had another agenda in mind and critical talk might not have been the overall goal for her discussions. Brenda offered her reasoning for why she changed topics abruptly in a developing discussion:

If I felt that we talked about a topic too long maybe or if we weren't getting anything else out of it I would interject questions. I did feel a little pressure to get as many questions in as possible. Um, I just felt that way, you know, not, not anybody saying that you had to do that, it's just what I felt. I would write, I would write down 10 questions and if I didn't get all my 10 questions I was like, 'Oh! I'm only on question 5, I've got 5 more to go, kids, we've got to keep going!' (Interview transcript, December 2005).

Brenda's concern about talking too long about a topic and worrying that she needed to move on to get her ten questions in might be the result of a lack of experience leading a discussion, or her expectations for her role as a participant in the discussion. Her comments also suggested that critical talk was not her overall goal, even though when she attempted critical talk, she was successful. Overall, it appeared that there was a relationship between Burbules's rules of dialogue and Brenda's success at the *process* of critical talk. If she had followed the rule of commitment, she may have had even more success.

Abby and Sharon neglected the *rule of commitment* as well. Abby's use of *close-ended initiation* questions resulted in her changing the topic of discussion frequently and left little room for dialogue to develop. It seemed her questions got in the way of letting the talk develop, or perhaps this was a reflection of her inability to just let the talk develop instead of deciding what topics should be discussed and initiating the questions. In her attempts to accommodate the underdeveloped responses, she had to resort to *requests for elaboration*.

These factors might have led Abby to employ an I-R-F pattern (teacher initiates a question, a student responds, and the teacher follows-up the response with another question, comment, or feedback) to facilitate the discussion. The I-R-F pattern or the I-R-E pattern (teacher initiates a question, a student responds, and the teacher evaluates the response) are common questioning strategies teachers use to facilitate discussion (Mehan, 1979; Cazden, 1988; Nystrand, 1997). However, this questioning pattern seemed to impede the development of critical talk. The I-R-F pattern does not afford development of dialogue which is against the rule of commitment. By implementing this strategy, Abby's topics were not sustained and changed frequently.

Sharon was similar to Abby with her discourse moves, which caused her to break the *rule of commitment*. She, too, often relied on *close-ended* questions, which did little to develop the talk beyond yes/no responses. Her dialogue was not sustained because her pals often made off- topic comments that interrupted her discussions. She lacked the ability to keep the focus and the discussion on track. Sharon acknowledged her lack of leadership within the chat rooms in a follow-up interview:

Things were getting off of topic from the book...I also think that I felt very out of control with the little one-liners that kept popping up without a lot of depth. I wasn't prepared for that. It bugged me. I felt out of control and that I was out of the loop...I was aggravated that Nick was not up to speed on the book, and I knew they were trying to catch him up at times. He was clearly bored and had a hard time keeping on track. The mention of names and things that I was unaware of I thought manifested itself because of those reasons—not everyone was on the same page and that they are kids, they were probably just trying to get away with something and have fun...(Interview transcript, February 2007).

Sharon admitted that her experience with this group was problematic. She spent a lot of her energy asking *regulatory* questions that kept her pals on track. This type of monitoring seemed to affect her ability to inspire critical talk. She was also the only preservice teacher that did not progress beyond the first dimension of critical literacy. As Shor (1999) points out,

While distributing authority is a teacher's challenge in a dialogic program, there is also the opposite dilemma, that is, of the teacher not having enough authority. In

some cases, the lack of authority interferes with a teacher's ability to initiate a critical and power-sharing process. On the one hand, there are classrooms where some students' disruptive behavior overwhelms other students and the teacher, making control the issue instead of knowledge-making or power-sharing (par. 32).

In Sharon's chats, her desire to gain control sometimes replaced the book and critical talk as the focus of the chat. Thus, sustained talk would not occur.

To summarize, following Burbules's rules of dialogue seemed to create an occurrence of critical talk. Brenda, the only preservice teacher who achieved critical talk, followed more of his rules than Abby or Brenda. The struggles that Abby and Sharon exhibited may have been a result of their lack of reciprocity, commitment to topic development, and problematic participation. As Burbules posits, "When something has gone wrong in a dialogical encounter, reflection on the implicit rules we have been taking for granted can often shed light on where things went off track and what we can try to do to change that" (p. 84). Burbules's (1993) rules of dialogue provide a lens through which to view the chats and make possible interpretations as to why critical talk was achieved or not. The next section will provide interpretations based on my findings.

## **Interpretations**

### **Developing a Social Presence and Developing Relationships Online**

One reason Brenda seemed to come close to achieving critical talk may have been the rapport she attempted to build with her pals in the online chat sessions. Perhaps Brenda recognized the importance of relations in a computer-mediated communication (CMC) forum for discussion. Often social interaction, coupled with an educational activity, is an essential pairing for having meaningful and worthwhile educational

outcomes (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). While Garrison, Anderson, and Archer promote such a pairing in an educational task, they also acknowledge that social presence in computer- mediated communication forums is not automatic. In other words, exerting such a presence online takes effort and must be a choice that a participant makes.

Initially, researchers questioned whether relationships could be established in online forums. They found that not only could intimacy be achieved, but that its quality could be improved beyond that of face-to-face interactions. Researchers reached this conclusion by observing CMC users interacting with one another “without the interference of environmental reality,” allowing them to create certain impressions and identities (Walther, 1996, p. 33). Walther also notes that a lack of visual cues, physical isolation, and self-presentation encouraged group cohesion, positive group impressions, and decreased individual differences. These factors did not directly apply to the web pen pals because they knew each other from school. However, the pals did not get to meet the preservice teachers until the end of the project. In spite of her anonymity, Brenda was able to create relationships with her pals.

As I coded Brenda’s responses, I found multiple examples in which Brenda established group cohesion, disclosed personal information, praised her students, and showed concern for her pals. All of these characteristics might have helped Brenda establish rapport and increased the incidence of critical talk with her pals. In the following excerpts, I note how Brenda established group cohesion, disclosed personal information to her pals, praised students, and showed concern in her chats.

Brenda used the word “we” to establish group cohesion and to diminish any implied hierarchy between her pals and herself. Brenda included herself in the discussion

and often answered her pals' questions as well as those she posed to them. The following segments show how she frequently posed questions using "we."

***Excerpt #1 from Brenda's Second Chat***

<b><i>Line #</i></b>	<b><i>Speaker</i></b>	<b><i>Time Stamp</i></b>	<b><i>Turn</i></b>	<b><i>Question/Response Type</i></b>
16.	Brenda	4/12 2:47 PM	so what do we think of the bk	Group opinion
17.	Kathy	4/12 2:48 PM	i like it	
31.	Brenda	4/12 2:49 PM	so do we all still think steve is innocent	Close-ended
32.	David	4/12 2:50 PM	Yes	
37.	Brenda	4/12 2:51 PM	what do we think about the petrocelli using men who r	Group opinion
38.	Brenda	4/12 2:51 PM	curnnetly in jail	Group opinion
39.	Brenda	4/12 2:51 PM	as her witnesses to testify against steve and king	Group opinion

Lines 16, 31, and 37 are examples of Brenda's attempts at establishing group cohesion or membership by using the "we" strategy. By doing this, she put herself on equal footing with her pals and became a member of their group. In a follow-up interview, I inquired about her motivation for using the term "we" in her questions:

To let them know I wanted a response from all of us because at other points in this chat and others I would directly ask a student a question, but in these questions it was for everyone, and maybe the choice of the word we would mean that I could also include my thoughts at some point in the discussion. Because the chats were equally all of ours. Each student shined at some point throughout the project and I felt like 'we' were one group and should keep the feeling of connection (Interview transcript, February 2007).

Brenda’s use of “we” seemed to affect potential power struggles. Many argue that power hierarchies cannot be broken between teachers and students, citing that teachers, ultimately, gain power over students institutionally and through subject matter expertise. However, Burbules (1993) argues that through the dialogic relation, students’ attitudes of trust and respect toward the teacher can be openly acknowledged without reifying the teacher into an authoritarian role. Dialogic relations are dynamic in the sense that, within them, one can learn and teach at the same time. Burbules points to Oakeshott’s (1962) sentiments when he writes, “Voices that speak in connection do not compose a hierarchy” (p. 35). The term “we” helped Brenda establish a connection between herself and her pals, which encouraged dialogue through member identification and group cohesion.

Brenda’s personal disclosure may have also helped her establish relationships with her pals, and when coding her chats, I noticed that Brenda repeatedly shared personal information. The following segment is an example of the pals sharing personal connections to the book *Monster*. After the pals’ personal connections were established, Brenda, in light of moving to a new topic, shared her own connections to the text. By sharing her connection with her pals after they had shared theirs, Brenda was enacting Burbules (1993) third rule of dialogue, the rule of reciprocity. Plainly stated, this rule posits, “what we ask of others we must be prepared for them to ask of us; and what we expect of others we must expect of ourselves” (p. 82). Brenda exhibited this rule throughout her chats.

***Excerpt #2 from Brenda’s Second Chat***

<b><i>Line #</i></b>	<b><i>Speaker</i></b>	<b><i>Time Stamp</i></b>	<b><i>Turn</i></b>	<b><i>Question/Response Type</i></b>
196.	Brenda	4/12 3:09 PM	<i>well i grew up in a rough household</i>	<i>Personal Disclosure</i>



202.	Brenda	4/12 3:09 PM	<i>though i didnt deal w/ the race thing mine was the stereotype issue</i>	<i>Personal Disclosure</i>
203.	Brenda	4/12 3:09 PM	<i>white trash</i>	<i>Personal Disclosure</i>
204.	David	4/12 3:09 PM	<i>What</i>	
207.	Brenda	4/12 3:10 PM	<i>that is what my relation to the bk is</i>	<i>Restatement</i>
208.	Brenda	4/12 3:10 PM	<i>i was judeged for being</i>	<i>Personal Disclosure</i>
209.	Beth	4/12 3:10 PM	<i>bk?</i>	
210.	Brenda	4/12 3:10 PM	<i>poor and living in trialer paerk</i>	<i>Personal Disclosure</i>
213.	David	4/12 3:10 PM	<i>that is very crazy</i>	

In lines 196, 202, and 203, Brenda shared a personal connection to the book by disclosing facts about her childhood, “well i grew up in a rough household though i didnt deal w/ the race thing mine was the stereotype issue white trash.” David seemed unclear about her statement and asked, “What” (line 204). She disclosed specifically to him, “i was judged for being poor and living in a trailer park” (line 210) to which he responded, “that is very crazy” (line 213). Her personal disclosure was particularly important because, as her pals were from a low socio-economic middle school, she may have connected with them by discussing a shared situation. She also shared a negative aspect of her life which might have made them feel more comfortable in sharing with her. Brenda was asked in a follow-up interview why she shared personal information with her pals, and she responded, “I wanted the students to know I cared also about them as people and not just as a project I was completing” (Interview transcript, February 2007). The element of care was a recurrent theme in her discussions and her interviews.

Social presence and the relational components that Brenda incorporated into her

chats became very valuable in the discussion process. By presenting herself as vulnerable through personal disclosure, she made herself seem more real to her pals, even though she was a virtual stranger. The cognitive goal, in the case of the web pen pals, was to attempt critical talk which might be affected by the relationships in the group. Such relational bonds might help discussants stick with the discussion while encouraging them to put forth more effort.

Brenda's final example combines her use of praise with genuine concern for David. Earlier in the discussion, the pals shared a personally relevant quote from the book and explained their choices. David chose the quote in which Steve talks about his stay in juvenile and writes, "I hate this place so much because no one likes me around here." When Brenda asked him to elaborate, David said that he felt hated. The following excerpt shows how Brenda dealt with David's comment in a caring way and praised him for what she perceived as his good traits.

***Excerpt #3 from Brenda's First Chat***

<i>Line #</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Time Stamp</i>	<i>Turn</i>	<i>Question/Response Type</i>
197.	David	4/5 3:13 PM	<i>i feel hated</i>	
198.	Kathy	4/5 3:13 PM	<i>sry'</i>	
199.	Beth	4/5 3:13 PM	<i>by whom</i>	
200.	Brenda	4/5 3:13 PM	<i>why would u feel that way</i>	<i>Request for Elaboration</i>
201.	David	4/5 3:14 PM	<i>because i'm as good as every one else</i>	
202.	Brenda	4/5 3:14 PM	<i>truly i dont know what to say right now</i>	<i>Admission</i>
205.	David	4/5 3:14 PM	<i>because i'm not as good as everyone else</i>	
206.	Beth	4/5 3:15 PM	<i>says who</i>	

207. Brenda	4/5 3:15 PM	<i>but u have (as everyone does) nhave something different to offer to the world</i>	<i>Encouragement</i>
208. David	4/5 3:15 PM	<i>Maybe</i>	
209. Brenda	4/5 3:15 PM	<i>look at your attitude towards other races that is awesome</i>	<i>Offers Specific Praise</i>
210. Brenda	4/5 3:15 PM	<i>no m/b</i>	<i>Disagrees</i>
211. Brenda	4/5 3:15 PM	<i>i know you rock w/ your band</i>	<i>Offers Personal Praise</i>
217. Brenda	4/5 3:16 PM	<i>and i bet if u werent friends w/ the pple u r they would miss something in their lives b/c u add it</i>	<i>Offers Personal Praise</i>
221. Brenda	4/5 3:17 PM	<i>well d im really sorry to hear u feel this way b/c u r awesome</i>	<i>Praise Apology</i>
223. Brenda	4/5 3:17 PM	<i>i can tell im a great judge of character</i>	<i>Humor</i>
226. Brenda	4/5 3:17 PM	<i>i cant wait to meet u and the chics of course</i>	<i>Enthusiasm</i>
227. David	4/5 3:17 PM	<i>yea!!</i>	
236. Brenda	4/5 3:18 PM	<i>d added awesome discussion to the format</i>	<i>Individual Praise</i>
237. David	4/5 3:19 PM	<i>what????</i>	
238. Brenda	4/5 3:19 PM	<i>im glad he and all of you can open up</i>	<i>Group Praise</i>

In line 197, David explained his quote choice with personal disclosure, “I feel hated.” Kathy and Beth immediately responded to his statement and said, “sry” (line 198) and “by whom” (line 199). Brenda showed concern by posing a *request for elaboration*, “why would you feel that way” (line 200). David responded, “because I’m as good as everyone else” (line 201). He meant to say that he was not as good as everyone else, but made a typing error and corrected himself in line 205. Brenda responded to David

exposing a possible vulnerability as a preservice teacher who had no experience with real students and was unsure how to handle the situation. She said, “truly I don’t know what to say right now” (line 202). Beth again asked, “says who” (line 206). At this point in the chat, all of the members showed concern for David.

In the subsequent lines, Brenda gave David several reasons he was as good as, if not better than, other people. Worthy of note is the fact she did not thoughtlessly list generic reasons. Instead, she pointed out specific attributes about him that she had learned while getting to know him. Her awareness of such personal knowledge showed the depth of the relationships she had forged with her pals. In line 207, Brenda pointed out to him, “but u have (as everyone does) nhave something different to offer to the world.” He acknowledged her claim hedgingly and said, “maybe” (line 208) to which Brenda replied back, “no m/b” (no maybe) (line 210). She was unwilling to accept “maybe” as an answer and issued more compliments to David, “look at your attitude toward other races that is awesome” (line 209). She used the information he had volunteered during the book talk. Perceptively, Brenda absorbed what her pals said about characters and the issues they discussed. By gathering that data, she may have made informed decisions about what type of people her pals were so that she could affect them in a personal way.

In line 211, she mentioned some of the personal information that she had learned about David and said, “I know you rock w/your band” and followed with “and i bet if u werent friends w/ the pple u r they would miss something in their lives b/c u add it” (line 217). She later consoled him for feeling down about himself. She believed that he was an “awesome person” (line 221) and bragged about herself to add humor and credibility to

her thoughts about David when she said, “I can tell im a great judge of character” (line 223). She pointed out how she could not wait to meet all of the group (line 226) and then praised David again for adding so much to the discussion (line 236). Finally, she complimented the entire group about their ability to open up saying, “im glad he and all of you can open up” (line 238), showing that she valued what they had to say. This type of reinforcement might have affected the pals’ comfort levels with Brenda and emboldened them to increase their disclosure in the chats. All of the preceding excerpts illustrated how Brenda achieved relationship with her pals, which I feel was a strong component to her achieving critical talk.

Engaging in dialogue is an important aspect of developing relationships. Burbules (1993) offers a revised concept of dialogue in which he hopes to develop an approach of dialogue that “challenges hierarchies and traditional conceptions of teacher authority; that is tolerant and supportive of diversity; that does not rely on teleological presumptions of right answers and final truths; that does not rest on isolated individual efforts, but on mutual and reciprocal communicative relations” (p. 7). Burbules’s approach to dialogue encourages and promotes what might be necessary to achieve critical talk. By challenging traditional ideas of teacher authority, participation can be shared between student and teacher in regard to questions and topic choice. Furthermore, diversity is accepted among members and dialogue can transcend the I-R-E pattern of discussion.

Central to his dialogic approach is the existence of mutual and reciprocal communicative relations which may be vital to critical talk. Students must feel that they are sharing their ideas in an environment in which respect and trust are valued. Burbules points out that dialogue is more than question and response, and that authentic social

relations are formed through dialogue. Brenda was the most effective at forming relationships online through dialogue. In a follow-up interview, Brenda attributed her pals' engagement in the discussion to her groups' good rapport. She expressed certain factors that enhanced her relationships with her pals:

I really believe my pals felt very comfortable in the chat room with me. They called me by my first name, and I shared my personal life with them. I did not speak down to them or treat them like I was better because I was in college. I think they knew I genuinely cared about them and wanted to hear what they had to say (Interview transcript, February 2007).

Brenda illustrated Burbules's values by having her pals use her first name, share personal details with others, and not speak down to them. Thus, her actions may have diminished the potential for the development of a hierarchy between teacher and student. She believed that all of these factors put her pals at ease in her discussions with them. She voiced a genuine concern for her pals, which reinforces the research that posits that relationships can develop online (Walther, 1992; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Utz, 2000).

### ***Collaborating with Kids***

Perhaps because Brenda established a positive rapport with her online pals, she was able to create a strong social presence, make her pals feel comfortable, and collaborate with them to develop critical talk. In each of the preservice teachers' chats, the middle school students initiated critical talk opportunities with a question or a comment. Even though the students' additions could have been developed by the

preservice teachers, more often than not this step was left untaken. Brenda came the closest to achieving critical talk because she observed two of Burbules's rules of dialogue that encouraged the collaboration of critical talk: *the rule of participation* and *the rule of reciprocity*. Her middle school pals achieved critical talk when provided with collaborative opportunities. Conversely, Abby controlled the initiation of topics through the use of the I-R-E and I-R-F patterns. While Sharon's pals initiated higher-level questions, she chose to redirect them. However, had she known how to scaffold the discussion from them, such questions could have possibly led to critical talk. Sharon and Abby did not provide opportunities to collaborate with their pals, which may have been a result of their lack of social presence online and their underdeveloped relationships with their pals.

### **Developing a Critical Stance**

Beginning teachers need help developing critical stances. All three of the preservice teachers struggled with their critical stance to one degree or another. Abby demonstrated how an underdeveloped critical stance might affect the ability to create critical talk. For example, Abby's use of *close-ended initiation* questions, especially after stereotypical comments or assumptions were voiced by her pals, might have been a result of her own biases about characters and the environment within the book. Such preconceived notions might have limited her ability to recognize and question the stereotypes students projected on the characters.

This underdeveloped critical stance was similar for Brenda, as she sometimes overlooked her pals' stereotypical comments as well. King (1993) contends that many

teachers comprehend critical literacy theory but are often poor theorists unable to translate that critical stance into their classrooms or their university coursework. Since Abby was a preservice teacher at the time, and perhaps because Abby had had little to no experience in critically-framed literature discussions in her own secondary schooling (Interview, December 2005), it might have been unrealistic to expect her to implement a critical stance successfully.

At several points in the chats, Abby made assumptive comments about the book's characters and the Harlem setting that might have hindered her critique of the text. McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) point out that teachers do not just "become" critical as it is a process that involves "developing theoretical, research, and pedagogical repertoires; changing with time and circumstance; engaging in self-critical practices; and remaining open to possibilities" (p. 55). This process is difficult for veteran teachers and especially so for preservice teachers. I looked for excerpts in which she initiated an assumption or stereotype, and the most salient example came from chat #2.

***Excerpt from Abby's Second Chat***

In the following excerpt, Abby discussed Steve's parents and their marital status.

<b><i>Line #</i></b>	<b><i>Speaker</i></b>	<b><i>Time Stamp</i></b>	<b><i>Turn</i></b>	<b><i>Question/Response Type</i></b>
64.	<i>abby</i>	<i>4/12 2:54 PM</i>	<i>yes, his parents taught him alot. did you all find it surprising that steve's parents were married?</i>	<i>Agreement Close-ended Initiation</i>
65.	<i>chuck</i>	<i>4/12 2:54 PM</i>	<i>No</i>	
66.	<i>brianna</i>	<i>4/12 2:54 PM</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
67.	<i>reggie</i>	<i>4/12 2:54 PM</i>	<i>No</i>	
68.	<i>abby</i>	<i>4/12 2:54 PM</i>	<i>why yes, bri?</i>	<i>Request For Elaboration</i>



69. chuck 4/12 2:55 PM why do you think its surprising  
because alot of people that live  
70. brianna 4/12 2:55 PM in those arent married.  
true. we always hear about Agreement  
71. abby 4/12 2:55 PM single mothers in the "hood". Stereotype

She began the discussion by asking a *close-ended initiation* question to solicit their opinion, “did you all find it surprising that steve’s parents were married?” (line 64). The two male pals replied, “no” (lines 65 & 67), and Brianna said, “yes” (line 66). Abby did not ask the male pals to explain their answers, which might have provided avenues for further discussion. Instead, she asked Brianna a direct *request for elaboration*, “why yes, bri?” (line 68). Chuck asked Brianna, “why do you think its surprising” (line 69). Brianna explained that “a lot of people that live in those aren’t married” (line 70), which was another stereotypical assumption. Abby’s bias resurfaced when she agreed with Brianna’s assumption, “true. we always hear about single mothers in the ‘hood’ “ (line 71). Perhaps because Abby agreed with the students’ assumptions, she never challenged the students’ assumptions, and allowed the topic to be dropped.

Abby missed an opportunity to discuss with her pals the stereotyping of those that live in Harlem as well as the socio-political issues involved. In a follow-up interview, I asked Abby specifically about this excerpt and what she hoped to achieve by asking such a question (line 64) and she responded:

Ummm, open mouth and insert foot. No, I think in my own mind I was surprised that the protagonist had come into these circumstances which were incongruent with his background/home life. Generally, perhaps stereotypically, and definitely statistically, cases such as the protagonists’ come from a one parent (a.k.a. broken) home. So, I found the plot to be unrealistic on that point. On the surface

it looks like a terribly racist or stereotypical question but I think I was getting at the incongruence of the home life of the protagonist and his actions. (Interview transcript, February, 2007).

Abby explained that since Steve had married parents, it was unrealistic for her to believe that he would be on trial for murder. As readers, our intrinsic values affect the way we respond to and interpret a text. Because she may have carried with her certain assumptions and stereotypical beliefs, Abby may have found it difficult to talk critically about the book. In this sense, Abby potentially perpetuated these stereotypes with her pals. A reader's social and textual interpretations may unintentionally reproduce the hegemonies that they initially intended to deconstruct (Gilbert, 1988). Even though Abby understood that the purpose of the adolescent literature course was to provide her with an opportunity to develop critical talk in her discussions, she might have indirectly reproduced the hegemonic views that she intended to disrupt.

Becoming critical is a *process* as McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) contend. As such, beginning teachers need time to develop their critical stance. It's important that teacher educators give preservice teachers the time and opportunity to explore what a critical stance looks like in a discussion. While they need encouragement, preservice teachers need to become self-critical and be able to reflect on the biases that they may bring to teaching. By helping them become more self-aware, we can help them develop their own critical stance.

Developing a critical stance involves working on a personal level as well as a professional level one. As a result, preservice teachers require time and experience in order to develop a curriculum around young adult novels in the hopes of inspiring critical

talk. To develop curriculums around critical literacy, preservice teachers must acquire resources that present the material in such a way as to encourage critical talk. Also, when planning materials, discussions, and activities, beginning teachers should consider a critical perspective during the process. By taking the time to develop curriculum around texts, beginning teachers have an opportunity to explore and develop their critical stance towards literature which they can be translated to their students.

### ***Implementing an Ecology of Talk***

Even though the preservice teachers were encouraged to take a critical stance toward their discussions, many other factors contextually influenced the development of critical talk. Thus, developing an ecology of talk may increase the likelihood that critical talk may occur. Hillocks (2006) describes an ecological approach to literature discussions as, “the conditions of pedagogy and curriculum that are most conducive to the development and maintenance of discussion and inquiry resulting in deep learning over long periods of time” (p. xi). He believes that in order for discussions to be of a high quality they “must be planned in advance, planned in the sense that the curricular conditions are in place to engender discussion” (p. xi). Additionally, specific curricular decisions may also help to develop critical talk, such as making a developmental move into critical talk, creating a critical literacy curriculum, and establishing a classroom climate complete with relationships that are conducive to critical talk.

It’s important for teachers to employ established reading models into their discussions before attempting critical talk with their students. These models can enhance the opportunity to develop critical literacy in the classroom. For example, using the

translation model ensures that the students understand the material from the text, while incorporating the transactional model (reader response) provides teachers with information about their students' relations to the text. Cai (2008) asserts, "As readers are not ideologically innocent, their response to literature inevitably reveals beliefs, values, assumptions, and attitudes that derive from a certain ideology" (p. 217). By discovering their students' favorite characters from the text and to what background experiences they most readily relate, teachers may gauge their students' values when attempting a critical stance toward literature. Understanding students' ideologies may help teachers plan ways to help their students develop a critical perspective. Once teachers have decided to attempt critical literacy, they must be sure that the students understand the text and how they relate to the text. Thus, a developmental move from the translation and transactional models to critical literacy occurs. For example, the knowledge gained from students' responses can be used to start critical talk. Cai (2008) discusses how reader response can inspire critical talk:

Readers' misconceptions, biases, and prejudices revealed in their aesthetic reading of a multicultural literary work should be seen as subject matter for analysis, interpretation, and criticism. They may appear as barriers to critical reading of multicultural literature, but in fact they can serve as the starting point for critical reading (p. 217).

When teachers start with a critical perspective without discussing students' personal transactions with the text, they are potentially limiting students' abilities to attempt critical talk. Cai (2008) warns teachers about the effects of this error:

However, if we move beyond transactional theory and bypass the essential step of

personal transaction with the text in hopes of developing critical reading ability in the reader, we run the risk of imposing a certain critical point of view on the reader without the reader really understanding and accepting it...Consequently, the critic or the teacher would again become the authority on the criticism of the text as a social construct, very much like they were the authority on the criticism of the text as an object of art during the heydays of New Criticism” (p. 218).

The transactional model can complement critical literacy because teachers can “encourage the most personal response” from their students and help them “understand them in the larger social and cultural realm” (Rogers & Soter, 1997, p. 112).

Another ecological consideration that may encourage critical talk is the development of a curriculum that leads to critical literacy. For example, teacher educators can instruct their preservice teachers to develop units around young adult literature such as *Monster* to use in their future classrooms. Such an activity might entail researching such issues as juvenile incarceration rates assorted by ethnicity and gender, depictions of masculinity as related to African-Americans in the media, and the effects of economic changes in urban areas as they might relate to the context of *Monster*. Planning lessons around the text as well as thinking of critical questions in advance may improve the likelihood and quality of critical talk.

As a final ecological consideration, preservice teachers can generate activities or ideas that encourage the development of relationships with their students and create a climate of comfort. As seen in Brenda’s case, it’s important to establish relationships with the students so they feel comfortable enough to talk about issues like race, gender, and class. Preservice teachers might also develop activities such as creating democratic

discussion rules, perhaps modeling Burbules's (1993) rules of dialogue. Other ways they might encourage positive relationships include the implementation of classroom activities in which students get to know one another and their preservice teacher. Beginning teachers can also plan to attend the extra-curricular activities such as sporting events, chorus concerts, and plays of their future students in order to show interest and concern. These decisions increase the possibility of collaborating with students and creating critical talk. It is not enough for preservice teachers to possess a critical stance and ask critical questions. An ecology of talk must also be in place to fully integrate critical literacy into the classroom.

### **CMC Can't Do It Alone**

Another implication of this study is that teacher educators cannot simply place beginning teachers into new chat mediums and expect new kinds of talk to occur. Beginning teachers need time to become familiar with the characteristics of the medium and how the medium can affect traditional classroom discourse. This lack of preparation is not unusual in teacher education programs and in K-12 classrooms because as Karchmer (2001) explains, teachers are not generally prepared to use new Internet technologies or to teach children how to use them effectively. As teacher educators, if we are going to propose that future teachers integrate technology into the classroom, we must teach them how to use the technology in ways that will be pedagogically beneficial to them and their students. However, this disconnect between teacher preparation and teacher implementation of technology in the classroom results partly from such factors as limited and/or lack of quality access to the Internet. It exists, too, because new Internet

technologies (i.e., synchronized environments) require more sophisticated technologies so their integration in K-12 progresses slowly (Dede, Brown L'Bahy, & Whitehouse, 2002).

English teacher educators should find this fact disconcerting because the Internet is changing the definitions of literacy and communication. Synchronous chat (real-time chat) disregards standard conventions of discourse (i.e., turn-taking, sequence, and time-ordering) and allows for linguistic versatility that exists especially within young people. Not only might the characteristics of the online medium pose problems for beginning teachers who bring with them certain expectations about discussion, but the technical aspects of the medium may be problematic as well. Lapadat (2002) found that the chronological record of discourse can be frustrating to users because of the incoherence in the sequence of the discussion. As a result, speed is needed by the user in typing and reading of the screen. This lack of skill sets was problematic for Sharon as she described in her post project interview:

I'm not a very fast typer, I can hold my own, but you know nothing like some people and um I have to figure that out and oh, I want to try to keep it somewhat grammatically correct and that's not going to work very well so that's frustrating and, um, you know, you could have said something, you know, five minutes ago that oh! I'm just now reading back in the transcripts, oh! I need to respond to that, but you're not even thinking about that anymore (Interview transcript, December 2005).

Even though research of online environments in educational settings is limited, research that is available examines the need for substantial typing skills and also

considers the effects of the short wait time for participants to respond to a discussion thread (Murphy & Collins, 1997). Beginning teachers who are not adept at typing and reading the scrolling screen may have obstacles in keeping up with the chat, which may affect their participation or facilitation of a discussion. Sharon admitted in a follow up interview how she felt during the project, “I felt totally out of control. I wasn’t used to that type of interaction over a computer and was always on edge and stressed” (Interview transcript, February 2007). Teacher educators need to take some of the responsibility for not properly preparing beginning teachers to work with these new technologies. Sharon explained how her lack of experience with technology made the project seem hard and how experience with technology might have changed her view:

I didn’t find it very easy at all...If I had more experience with it, it would probably be, my answer would probably be a lot more different. Um, but just the fact that I can’t get away from this technology thing because I’m not familiar with it. You know, it’d be like sticking a math problem in front of me and saying ‘Here, have at it.’ ‘OK, thanks!’ [Laughs] (Interview transcript, December 2005).

Another result of the fast-paced environment of the online medium is the use of abbreviations in the discussions. Huffaker and Calvert (2005) found that netspeak can be combined with other forms of language such as slang as a form of communication developed in online environments. In online forums, a common language is constructed by its members, and this is in contrast to the regular classroom where the teacher and the texts determine the language to be learned (Dede, 2004).

These characteristics of the medium, unknown to Sharon who self-reported she had the least amount of experience with technology than the other preservice teachers,



may have affected the way she approached the chats and dealt with the side discussions that occurred in all of her chats. In a traditional face-to-face classroom, the side chats would have been perceived as a class disturbance, but in the synchronous online chats, they were an example of a multiple thread discussion.

Several of Sharon’s excerpts represented such off-topic discussion, which Nystrand (1997) refers to as “a subversion of the authoritative, official discourse of the classroom” (p. 13). Sharon tried to regulate her pals’ off-topic discussion as she treated the online discussion as traditional classroom discourse. Throughout Sharon’s chat sessions, the pals’ side chats threatened to derail her discussions. Even “off-topic” discussions online can be balanced with book talk if effectively managed by the teacher. However, the online space is not necessarily conducive to traditional classroom discourse rules. The most salient example of her desire to manage the online space was in the following excerpt from her first chat. In this excerpt, side discussions and Sharon’s responses to those discussions are examined. This excerpt begins with Alice and Sharon talking about the district attorney. Roger and Nick began teasing one another, and Sharon tried to regain control of the discussion:

***Excerpt from Sharon’s First Chat***

<b><i>Line #</i></b>	<b><i>Speaker</i></b>	<b><i>Time Stamp</i></b>	<b><i>Turn</i></b>	<b><i>Question/Response Type</i></b>
105.	Roger	4/5 2:57 PM	alright Nick	
106.	Roger	4/5 2:58 PM	Yeah	
107.	Nick	4/5 2:58 PM	got sidetracked  i dont think that someone with doubts should defend. I defense person shouldn't	
108.	Alice	4/5 2:58 PM	doubt thats the ADA's job	
109.	Nick	4/5 2:58 PM	whats ada	

- Close-ended  
(leading)*
110. Sharon 4/5 2:58 PM *well, she has a right to her opinion, she just has to put it aside and do her job, right?*
111. Alice 4/5 2:58 PM *they are liek for the people*
112. Alice 4/5 2:58 PM *like if someone gets killed*
113. Nick 4/5 2:58 PM *Yes*
114. Nick 4/5 2:58 PM *Oh*
115. Alice 4/5 2:58 PM *i think so*
116. Roger 4/5 2:59 PM *you should know Nick you like to read*
117. Alice 4/5 2:59 PM *but she need to find out the truth and nothing but the truth*
118. Alice 4/5 2:59 PM *HEY!!!!*
119. Nick 4/5 2:59 PM *never read a murder story*
120. Nick 4/5 2:59 PM *hey what*
121. Alice 4/5 2:59 PM *is that why we are reading both of these!?*
- Regulatory*
122. Sharon 4/5 2:59 PM *Lets be nice in here and remember the chat room rules*
123. Nick 4/5 2:59 PM *Huh*
126. Nick 4/5 3:00 PM *yes Roger*
125. Alice 4/5 2:59 PM *what rules? what did we do?*
134. Nick 4/5 3:01 PM *what plan*
124. Roger 4/5 2:59 PM *well you like to watch csi dont youi*
130. Nick 4/5 3:00 PM *they never use the ada*
135. Roger 4/5 3:01 PM *the book*
- Appreciation  
Praise*
137. Sharon 4/5 3:01 PM *Thanks everyone, You have some great things to say!*
127. Alice 4/5 3:00 PM *Sharon what did we say?*

133. Nick 4/5 3:01 PM Okay
136. Nick 4/5 3:01 PM Oh  
Nick i'm trying to get you to
132. Roger 4/5 3:01 PM stick with the plan  
lets just try and talk about Regulatory  
the book, ok? You did not Reassurance
129. Sharon 4/5 3:00 PM do any thing wrong
128. Roger 4/5 3:00 PM i not being bad am I  
I just want to try and keep Wish/Goal  
this going in a positive
131. Sharon 4/5 3:01 PM way!!!:)

In line 105-106, Roger playfully criticized Nick and said, “alright Nick Yeah.” Nick responded, “got sidetracked” (line 107). The discussion resumed until Roger teased Nick again for not knowing that ADA (line 109) meant “assistant district attorney.” After Alice explained it to him (lines 111-112), Roger continued to tease Nick and said, “you should know Nick you like to read” (line 116). Sharon invoked a *regulatory* comment and said, “Lets be nice in here and remember the chat room rules” (line 122).

In line 123, Nick appeared oblivious and said, “huh.” Roger reiterated the previous topic about television shows and chided Nick. He said, “well you like to watch csi dont youi” (line 124). Alice seemed sensitive to Sharon’s *regulatory* comment and asked, “what rules? what did we do?” (line 125) and then immediately asked Sharon, “sharon what did we say?” (line 127). Roger then dropped his focus on a discussion with Nick and asked Sharon, “I not being bad am I” (line 128). Sharon did not answer their questions and instead tried to return their focus to the book, reassuring them, “lets just try and talk about the book, ok? You did not do anything wrong” (line 129).

However, Nick justified his ADA question and said, “they never use the ada”

(line 130). Sharon tried to move on and expressed her goal, “I just want to try and keep this going in a positive way!!!:”(line 131). By adding the smiley face emoticon at the end of the line, she may have attempted to soften her comment to her pals (Crystal, 2001). Roger aided Sharon’s attempts and said to him, “Nick I’m trying to get you to stick with the plan” (line 134). Nick inquired, “what plan” (line 133) and Roger responded, “the book” (line 135). Sharon tried to establish control and get everyone on track with a positive statement, “Thanks everyone, You have some great things to say” (line 137). The preceding excerpt is indicative of the interruptions that hindered Sharon’s chats. Her discussions were underdeveloped and never evolved into critical talk. These interruptions might have inhibited her ability to facilitate the discussion.

Sharon acknowledged her lack of leadership within the chat rooms in a follow-up interview:

Things were getting off of topic from the book...I also think that I felt very out of control with the little one-liners that kept popping up without a lot of depth. I wasn’t prepared for that. It bugged me. I felt out of control and that I was out of the loop...I was aggravated that Nick was not up to speed on the book, and I knew they were trying to catch him up at times. He was clearly bored and had a hard time keeping on track. The mention of names and things that I was unaware of I thought manifested itself because of those reasons—not everyone was on the same page and that they are kids, they were probably just trying to get away with something and have fun...(Interview transcript, February 2007).

In the preceding example, Sharon’s desire to get back on track seemed to replace

the book and critical talk as the focus of the chat. Perhaps Sharon's perception that she should be the "expert" in the chats and her trying to keep up with the technology contributed to this lack of focus.

Well I knew I was the adult, and I knew that I was kind of in charge but I didn't feel in charge. I mean it, I knew that I should have the expertise to talk about this but I was, I was intimidated by them, really. Well, especially Alice...I was just like 'Wow, you're, uh, OK, that's a great response!' now let me try, you know, with all this other stuff going on technology-wise and everything, let me try to top that or bring, or be able to bring something better out of you. But she was, she was doing perfectly without me, [laughs] I think...What, what I did see, and this was just my own ego but um, at one point one of the boys asks Alice a question and I was like 'Hey, what about me?' so, and...I took it just that I was not doing a good job in the chat room. And he knows Alice and he knows that she's a smart girl... Uh, it's perfectly OK he asked her, it's not, just like I said my own ego was kind of a little um 'that's not nice,' wish you would have asked me...But then another problem is they wanted to talk about different things and I can't, I can't do that. You know we all need to be on the same page (Interview transcript, December 2005).

The preceding interview excerpt showed the conflict that Sharon felt about her role, her pals, and the evolution of the chat discussions. Her thinking about these issues possibly influenced her approach to the discussions and their outcomes.

When her pals tried to resist the traditional classroom discourse rules, Sharon felt

the need to try and gain control and not let the characteristics of the online medium play out. Cooper and Selfe (1990) push for the use of this type of forum as a way to disrupt the teacher-centered hegemony that exists in many face-to-face classrooms. They argue that computer-mediated communication (CMC) provides a place for student writing and talk that often does not occur in traditional classrooms due to the dyadic relationship of the omniscient teacher and the passive role of the student. However, since Sharon was not familiar with the online medium, she did not appear to understand this aspect of it. Perhaps if she had more practice with the online medium or was more informed about the medium, she might have accepted the multiple threads of discussion that can occur.

Cooper and Selfe (1990) acknowledge that CMC provides opportunities for dialogue and collaboration, but they also point out that it provides opportunities for students to resist. The educational system of grades and the traditional relationship between students and teachers imposes certain values, beliefs, and expected behaviors onto students. The online experience offers a new space for students to think divergently, disagree, and resist the institution with their own language. Resistance should not have a negative connotation. Yet, it's important to note and consider that Sharon had definite expectations about what the students' behavior should be in a discussion. In a follow-up interview, she described what her ideal discussion would look like:

I would be able to ask, um, leading interesting questions that will draw responses out that um other kids can bounce off of, and I can bounce off of, and the students will do what they're supposed to, and behave, and not be smart alecs. That's in my perfect little world (Interview transcript, December 2005).

Important in her expectations of an ideal discussion is the behavior she described. Students will “do what they’re supposed to....behave....and not be smart alecs.” Her expectation of students’ behavior possibly explains her use of *regulatory* questions and comments to try and control her pals online. Yet, her expectations also explain what she thought her pals should behave like in the chatroom, which may have been unfair due to the nature of the chatroom.

Besides making sure that we prepare beginning teachers to use new technologies and understand their characteristics, it’s important to inform beginning teachers that the online medium alone does not equalize participation as some of the research suggests. Teachers still play a role in creating reciprocity and shared participation. Some studies support the claim that online environments are more democratic (Schallert et al., 1996). By democratic, the research suggests that the online space provides an arena for participation by all of its members. In studies that focus on higher educational settings, the online space provides a level playing field between the instructor and the students, generating an equitable participation where the instructor does not dominate the discussion (Bump, 1990; Heuer & King, 2004; Hiltz, 1986). However, this was not what happened in Sharon and Abby’s chat rooms. Abby was able to implement the I-R-E pattern into her discussions, in which the teacher does control the discussion through turn-taking and determining the topics of discussion. It is important that we stress to beginning teachers that the online medium itself may not disrupt certain student-teacher hegemonies or discourse patterns. Brenda was successful in creating equal participation amongst her pals through adhering to Burbules’s *rule of participation* and *rule of reciprocity*. As a result, she was able to collaboratively achieve critical talk with her pals.

It is important for new teachers to realize that the medium itself does not equalize participation, but the teacher can still affect the type of interaction that occurs between teacher and students. We need to provide teachers opportunities to get comfortable using technology and time to explore their beliefs and expectations for their own roles and their students' roles in discussion.

### **Conclusion**

Interpretations of this study are the following: 1) developing relationships with students and establishing a social presence may help teachers achieve critical talk; 2) beginning teachers need time and opportunity to explore and develop a critical stance toward literature; and 3) a CMC forum, on its own, does not ensure equitable participation in online discussion. As teacher educators, we need to encourage our preservice teachers to develop relationships with their students because students are more capable of critical talk when we collaborate with them. Also, we should provide beginning teachers with the opportunity to explore a critical stance through an ecology of talk. Teachers must use multiple reading models in order to facilitate a developmental move toward critical talk, develop curriculums around texts that can readily inspire critical literacy within their classrooms, and also establish relationships with their students to promote critical talk. Finally, we should give new teachers opportunities to get comfortable with technology and understand its effects on their instructional goals for discussion. It is important to understand that technology may help to facilitate discussion, but the use of an online medium does not guarantee equal discussion participation. In the end, the teacher remains the central factor for the success of discussions, whether face-to-face or online.



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## **APPENDIX**

## Appendix A

### The Web Pen Pals Project

#### Description

Each of you will be participating in a semester-long project involving correspondence about young adult novels with 8<sup>th</sup> grade students from North View Middle School. Because we are trying to “take on” a critical literacy stance in our discussions about literature, which includes critical thinking and critique about texts and societal issues, we will be reading novels that lend themselves to this purpose. We will begin with Avi’s *Nothing But the Truth*, continue to Walter Dean Myer’s *Monster*, and then, if time allows, conclude the Web Pals project with a novel your North View Middle School pal chooses.

You will act primarily as a reading buddy, someone with whom they can interact about their responses to the reading you will do, about their questions, about your reading habits and theirs, and many other things that will arise as you go through the semester. When you interact in the electronic bulletin board, and when we come together for our chats, the learning community will be broadened even further to include all of us and all of them. Even though a major part of the project will include your one-on-one correspondence, keep in mind that all of the other tasks (bulletin board, chats, process logs many class activities) are designed to complement each other and give you a broader view of literacy.

At NVMS, your pals are 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in a 7<sup>th</sup> period reading class at NVMS. There are 26 of them and 12 of us. Their coordinator and our contact is Mrs. Terri Brown, who has taught at NVMS for 7 years. She is certified in secondary education with a concentration in math. This is her first time teaching reading. She has been a team leader for 5 years. She will be reading the novels with the students and directing them to keep process logs and to respond to the novels in their logs using the same format as you. This should give you and your pal something to help you begin talking about the novels. She will also be visiting our class from time to time to learn what we are learning in terms of how to facilitate discussions about novels that focus on social issues, and to share how things are going in her classroom.

#### Guidelines for communicating with your Web Pal

1. Make contact with your Web Pals each week of the project. You will begin the week of 1/24, after you receive an introductory letter from your pal. You’ll use the electronic bulletin board at [webpenpals.org](http://webpenpals.org) to log in to a room you and your pals will share.
2. Once we begin the correspondence, write weekly (with the exception of our

holidays). Though each of your postings will probably contain personal messages, make sure you also include something related to reading. For example, on most weeks you will be able to write about what you are reading and what you think about it. You and your pal will be keeping a reading log, using the “double-entry diary” entry method we’ll discuss in class. Focus on these in your correspondence. By the end of the semester, you should have a minimum of ten postings that you have written to your pals.

3. Keep in mind that though you are acting more as a reading buddy than a teacher, you are writing to 13- and 14-year old students and using the Internet to do so. We will discuss the implications of this in class.
4. Because we are working with minors, it is important that we keep the correspondence a matter of public record. Please understand that all correspondence is recorded and archived at the web site, and Mrs. Maples and I will make copies of all correspondence.
5. Print out copies of the postings you write to your pal and print out the postings you receive. You will need hard copies for classwork and for your portfolio. Do this weekly.
6. Please contact Mrs. Maples (jweis@utk.edu) or me (sgroenke@utk.edu) immediately if you are concerned about any correspondence that occurs during the semester.
7. Process log/journal: Reflect.

#### Purposes for this project

1. The expression of responses to literature has been recommended for promoting personal and cognitive growth.
2. One goal in a methods class is to provide both pre-service and practicing teachers practical, experiential connections with the classroom. Correspondence with students about literature, commonly known as “literary letters” or “dialogue journals,” is a frequently-practiced method that can provide students a medium for expression and can increase their understanding of literature. The method allows teachers to communicate individually with students, to become aware of student needs, and offers an alternative assessment strategy. Many of your pals will be provided role models for response and may receive added incentive to read by corresponding with college students.
3. By promoting the reading of young adult novels through their legitimization as a classroom activity, we hope to provide the students with meaningful experiences with books and encourage lifelong habits of reading.
4. In this experience, you will see the connectedness of reading, writing, “listening,” and thinking.
5. It is our belief that faculty participants will benefit from shared ideas and interaction with one another. Teaching is often a lonely endeavor for the practicing

teacher, and teacher education faculty must stay in touch with the realities of everyday school life. We see this experience as addressing concerns of both groups.

6. Through this project you will have the opportunity to investigate the possibilities for conducting effective literature discussions online.

7. Finally, we hope to use literature as the vehicle to carry on conversations that will stimulate thought and action about issues of being a “justice-oriented citizen,” diversity, adolescent identity, and other social issues.

## Appendix B

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### CONSENT FORM

Participants: Preservice Teachers

Title of Study: Investigating the Web Pals Project: Critical Literature Discussions Online

Principal Investigator: Susan L. Groenke, Ph.D.  
A417 Claxton Complex  
Dept. of Theory and Practice in Teacher Education  
University of Tennessee-Knoxville  
Knoxville, TN 37996-3442

Co-Investigator: Joellen Maples

**Introduction:** This is an invitation to you to participate in this research. In this study Dr. Groenke and Mrs. Maples will research the effectiveness of the Web Pals project, which is a literature study conducted online with Dr. Groenke's Literature for the Adolescent class from University of Tennessee. If you accept, you'll join approximately 25 other middle school students and 20 university students for a five-month study to help us examine the methods we use to direct the project, for example, the way we introduce you to the literature and prepare you for the MOO, or the online discussion about young adult literature. Then you'll examine the discussions themselves, including your e-mails and the transcripts from the online discussions. We want to discover which strategies work best, which problems we need to address for the future, and which new ideas we should try. Through this research, you will help us discover how we can best use the technology we have at our disposal. The study will be conducted at multiple sites—North View Middle School, university campus, and the online environment (teacherbridge.com).

**Procedures:** If you agree to participate in the research you will be asked to do one or more of the following (please initial the blanks below and initial at the bottom right corner of this page):

Participate in a maximum of two individual interviews after final grades have been turned in. One interview will last a maximum of 45 minutes and will focus on your overall impression of the project as well as some specific questions on your opinions of the literature we used, the use of the web as a way to discuss literature and your ideas about incorporating such a project into the regular English classroom. The second interview will focus on analysis of transcripts from online discussions you participated in, specifically, to identify and analyze which discussion topics or questions worked best, which discussions were most satisfying to you, to identify and analyze your own

discussion strategies, and to analyze the strategies you admire of someone else in the

Investigating the Web Pals Project, Groenke/Maples

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group. The interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed.

Allow us to analyze audiotapes and transcripts of the two interviews.

Allow us to make copies of e-mails to pals, of any other public online discussion (MOO transcripts) associated with this project, and of process log entries kept during duration of project.

Allow us to use information obtained in reports (articles, presentations) made concerning the project.

**Risks Associated with Participation:** Because the research focuses on group discussions and because transcripts are available to all of the participants, when other Web Pals read about the study in articles we write or they hear us talk about the project in presentations, they may be able to figure out who said what in the interviews, even if we change your names (which we will do). Please understand confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the small-group focus sessions. However, the research only concerns your evaluation of the project and your analysis of the discussions. It is not of a sensitive or private nature.

What you say about the project during the interviews will not affect your grades in school in any way.

**Benefits Associated with Participation:** There is no monetary reward for your participation, nor is there any guarantee you will directly benefit from this experience with literature discussions online. However, we are designing it so that you will have maximum opportunity to see changes in several areas: 1) in your ease and skill with technology; 2) in your use of reading and discussion strategies, as you talk with your pal, as you gather in whole group chats to learn from your peers, and as you analyze the literature discussions; 3) in your understanding of issues of identity and diversity as you talk about those issues with others in your groups.

**Confidentiality:** We are taking the following steps to protect your confidentiality: 1) After the research is complete, all participant and school names will be changed on the MOO transcripts and in any reports made concerning the project, and 2) your e-mail addresses will at no time be made available through any means throughout the project or during the research component to anyone outside of the two groups of students. At the end of this study, all e-mail accounts will be destroyed. Interviews with you will be audiotaped. However, the tapes will be erased or destroyed after transcription.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty. You are free at any time to withdraw from the project itself or from the research on it. There is no penalty for withdrawing. Participating or not participating in this study will in no way influence your grade in any course.

**Questions:** If you have questions about the research study, or choose to withdraw, you may contact Dr. Groenke (865-974-4242; e-mail [sgroenke@utk.edu](mailto:sgroenke@utk.edu)) or Joellen Maples (865-974-4242; e-mail [jweis@utk.edu](mailto:jweis@utk.edu)). You may also contact the Office of Research, Compliances, at 865-974-3466 if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or your rights as a research subject.



**Consent:**

I have read or have had read to me the description of the research study as outlined above. The investigator or his/her representative has explained the study to me and has answered all of the questions I have at this time. I have been told of the potential risks as well as the possible benefits (if any) of this study.

I freely volunteer to participate in this study. I understand that I do not have to take part in this study and that my refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of rights to which I am entitled. I further understand that I am free to later withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time. I understand that refusing to participate or later withdrawing from the study will not have adverse effects.

I will receive a copy of the consent form.

_____	_____
Consent of Participant	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Witness	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Principal Investigator	Date

## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Protocol #1**

1. How did you discuss literature as a student in middle school and high school?
2. Describe the teacher's role/the student's role in those discussions.
3. What happens in a good discussion?
4. Describe your ideal discussion.
5. How does discussion differ from other forms of talk?
6. What do you hope students learn from discussion?
7. What is easy/difficult about discussion?
8. Describe your online discussion and what a successful online discussion looks like?
9. What is your experience with chat technology?
10. How does face-to-face discussion differ from online discussion?
11. How does participation online look?
12. What were the roles online?
13. What's the difference between discussion and conversation?
14. Is cyberspace a good forum for literature discussions?
15. What was easy/difficult about communicating online?
16. Would you use chat technologies in your own teaching?
17. Does online chatting have an effect on teenagers lives in schools?
18. Do you see any benefits to incorporating online chat into the classroom?
19. How did you determine how you lead the discussions online?
20. What did you learn from the experience?

## **Appendix D**

### **Interview Protocol #2**

#### General Chat Questions

1. What are your overall impressions of the chats you participated in? (Please talk about each chat individually).
2. What were your goals for the discussion?
3. What type of discussion were you hoping to achieve in terms of content, roles, and participation in the chats? Do you feel you achieved this?
4. What areas did you perceive as good discussions/weak discussions?(provide line numbers and chat # for the segments)
5. Why do you think these areas were good and/or weak?
6. How did you decide what types of questions to ask—was there a process?
7. Of the types of questions you asked, which do you think were most effective? Which do you think were least effective?
8. Did the adolescent lit. course influence the way you approached this discussion? If so, how?
9. Do you feel you can establish rapport or relationships in the online forum?
10. How would you describe your relationships with your pals?

#### Reflecting on the Experience

1. Has this experience affected your classroom discussions now?
2. Have you implemented this type of technology into your classroom now? Why or why not? Would you?
3. Did you learn anything that you have implemented into your classroom discussions now?
4. Do you feel like the discussions about Monster differed from Nothing But the Truth? Why or Why not?
5. Do you feel like knowing the kids longer by the time you did the Monster chats affected the quality of discussions from Nothing But the Truth? Why or why not?

## Appendix E

### Coding categories for types of questions

<b>Type of Question</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
Request for Opinion	Request reader's general attitude toward the written text, author, etc.	<i>But black r more likely to be convicted and have aharsher punishment why do you think that is?</i>
Uptake	Inquire into something a student contributes to the discussion  Share comments or information to extend student's contribution	<i>we read an article that said white were arrested just as much and more sometimes then black</i>
Challenge	Elicit a defense or line of argument	<i>How can u not mean to be racist?</i>
Request for Elaboration	Elicit more information about a student response to teacher-posed question	<i>What is true david?</i>
Investigate	Request for students to look deeper into a certain topic; probe	<i>What would have happened if everything in the story was the same but Steve was white?</i>
Close-Ended Initiation	Question which poses a new topic  Question which can be responded to in "yes" or "no" form	<i>These guys that steve hangs out with...they don't have alot going for them do they?</i>
Hypothesize	Elicit value judgment from student based on teacher created scenario	<i>like, if someone is starving and needs something to eat and they steal food...is it okay then?</i>
Request for Clarification	Convey confusion/ elicit more information to clear up confusion	<i>so, their friends told them that to be cool they had to do something bad?</i>
Request for Known Answer	Answer can be found in text	<i>what does he do when comes to see steve?</i>
Request for Information Close-Ended ( <i>non-initiating</i> )	Requests which can be responded to in "yes" or "no" form	<i>well, do you think that she is right?</i>

### Coding categories for types of statements

Statements	Description	Example
Share Opinion	To share one's personal belief or attitude about a topic	<i>all though he was involved and the neighborhood is mainly black i think his color plays a part</i>
Uptake	To inquire into something a student contributes to the discussion  To share comments or information to extend student's contribution	<i>we read an article that said white were arrested just as much and more sometimes then black</i>
Request Clarification	To restate or correct to clear up confusion	<i>Yes u david u were the last list</i>
Praise	To appreciate or recognize a person or idea	<i>awesome david that means you r more open minded then some other people</i>
Give Directive	To instruct or guide	<i>Answer that yourself kathy</i>
Agree	To support another's position or belief	<i>I agree david</i>
Acknowledge	To provide affirmation or confirmation of a comment	<i>and that is why we need to recognize this and effect the world</i>
Provide Example	To give an idea to represent or clarify a concept	<i>...men r tough or strong... These are stereotypes</i>
Explanation	To teach or clarify a point	<i>they are both similar in that they have different ways that it is written, but the subject is completely different</i>
Personal Disclosure	To reveal personal information; share; connect	<i>our class went to the knoxville detention center and took a tour around.</i>
Clarification	To understand or comprehend	<i>oh the jail you mean</i>
Encouragement	To support	<i>always stay postive and better things will come your way</i>
Joke	To gently correct	<i>well wake up mr. d we getting started</i>
Appreciation	To acknowledge and respect	<i>thank katie about Brittney</i>
Challenge	To counter; present another view	<i>well just b/c he didnt pull the trigger does that make him completely innocent from the crime</i>
Compliment	To establish rapport	<i>we need guys like u in the world to help stop the craziness</i>

## VITA

Joellen Maples was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on March 29, 1973. She earned her Ph.D. in English Education from the University of Tennessee in August 2008. She also holds an Educational Specialist degree in English Education, a Masters of Science degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

While in the doctoral program at the University of Tennessee, Joellen was a clinical instructor in English Education. She worked closely with Dr. Susan Groenke implementing the Web Pen Pals project. In addition, she also served as an intern supervisor for English Education interns.

Joellen also taught eighth grade reading for 11 years at South Doyle Middle School. While teaching middle school, she also coached girls' basketball and girls' track. She is currently scheduled to teach at St. John Fisher College in fall 2008.