THE MULTIPLE WRITING GENRES OF ONLINE LEARNING: STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE OF WRITING IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM SPACE

by

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ABSTRACT

LYNN ANN WILSON. The multiple writing genres of online learning: students' experience of writing in the online classroom space. (Under the direction of DR. RONALD LUNSFORD)

Based upon theories of computer mediated communication of Herring and Lemke and the work of genre scholars such as Askehave, Santini, and Devitt, this qualitative study explored how computer mediated communication shapes writing genres in an online classroom. Genre embodies the context and users' purpose for any textual communication. Through a case study of a graduate level online class, the study investigated students' experiences of the genres realized by their writing in the online classroom. The primary goal of the research study was to understand students' experiences of enacting the multiple writing genres in an online class. The research questions were: 1) What are the rhetorical situations for students' writing in an online classroom? 2) How do students acquire knowledge of the conventions of the multiple genres of online classroom writing? 3) What are students' experiences of enacting the multiple writing genres in an online classroom? Semi-structured transcribed interviews, field notes of online classroom observations, artifacts gathered from the online class, and questionnaire results were collected as data and interpreted by applying an inductive analysis. The online classroom is a multi-generic space where students are called upon to enact various writing genres, depending on the rhetorical situation of the learning activity, in order to perform the social practices of online education. Genre is a useful lens for exploring students' online writing practices because genres offer a means of accessing the ways language forms the experience of information and ideas. Since online classes immerse students in an environment of written text, online student writing

illustrates evolving web genres in action. This changeable notion of genre suggests that opportunities exist within the online space for students to direct their own genre performances in ways that make sense for their computer mediated learning environment. The study revealed students' awareness of their own rhetorical choices through the enactment of particular writing genres online and how their writing was shaped by computer mediated communication. The online classroom has the potential to be an optimal space for students to engage in genre (re)formation shaped by the CMC medium of online learning. The results and analysis of the research may influence institutions to take a more informed approach to improving instructional practices online in general and writing practices online in particular.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Two technological developments of the late 20th century – the arrival of personal computers into homes and workplaces combined with the extensive growth of the Internet – have substantially changed and dramatically increased distance learning. Higher education has been fundamentally transformed by information technologies (Taylor, 2001). Online education utilizes computer mediated communication (CMC) to enable the production and exchange of electronic texts between students and instructors via the Internet. Generally, computer mediated communication involves electronic communication using networked computer connections between individuals and groups separated by distance (Luppicini, 2007). Scholars such as Herring (1999, 2002, 2004) have acknowledged online learning as a site for computer mediated communication. The capabilities of computer mediated communication in an educational setting have significantly expanded distance education. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2011) reported that the percentage of students taking at least one online course has tripled in less than a decade, from 9.6% in 2002 to 29.9% in fall 2009. Online education is not just a marketing tool of proprietary institutions; online courses and entire programs are being offered at traditional institutions as well. The *Chronicle of Higher Education Online Learning Report* for 2011 showed that 82% of community colleges and 79% of research universities offered online classes.

Once called "correspondence courses," distance learning has evolved into online learning for the 21st century. The distance learning courses I took in the mid-1990s, as a working, adult student, made it possible to earn a college degree from a university branch campus, where traditional course offerings were limited. I enrolled in correspondence courses at a state university located several hundred miles away to fulfill degree requirements. I received a packet in the mail with a syllabus and assignments, and I mailed my writing assignments to my instructor, who mailed back handwritten comments and grades on a paper form a few weeks later. These courses utilized envelopes and stamps, not the computer technology that supports 21st century distance learners. While the correspondence courses were literally delivered by mail on paper, online classes are virtually delivered by Internet connections on computer screens. Yet, the similarity between these correspondence courses and online courses is their essential reliance on written text. Instructors and students rely on written text to engage in a distance learning environment.

Online learners are primarily situated as writers and readers to a much greater degree than learners in on-ground classes. This is because in the online classroom students primarily use written language to represent themselves to their classmates and instructor. Online learning is still a relatively new phenomenon, and researchers are just beginning to examine connections between online learning and writing (Lea, 2004, 2007; Lea & Goodfellow, 2009; Lea & Street, 2006; Lapadat, 2002, 2004). Key forms of student engagement in an online class have been identified by Moore (1989) as learner-instructor interaction, learner-learner interaction, and learner-content interaction. Students' writing encompasses each of these components of online student engagement –

students write to the instructor and to each other, and students write to complete assignments. The nature of an asynchronous online class is that students are typically not communicating in a face-to-face setting with the instructor or with each other. Even when the synchronous delivery of online education via computer mediated communication involves visual and audio media, the experience of learning online is informed primarily by written text, often in the form of slide presentations and "chat" boxes.

Online classes immerse students in an environment of written text; consequently, textual literacy is foremost. Students must invoke textual literacy practices to contribute to an online class to any degree (Lapadat, 2002). This textual literacy immersion exposes students to a broad range of writing genres. For Lemke (1998), "a literacy is always a literacy in some genre, and it must be defined with respect to […] the material technologies involved, and the social contexts of production, circulation, and use of the particular genre" (para. 5). A *genre* is a social action with a communicative purpose. Since genre embodies the context and purpose for any communication, students must enact various writing genres in order to perform the social practices of online education.

Problem Statement

Research interests in literacy, genre, and computer mediated communication converge in the online learning environment. A rhetorical genre study of print texts and student writing has been undertaken by Swales (1990), Devitt (2004), Bawarshi (2000), and Soliday (2011), among others. Drawing on Miller's (1984) identification of genre as "social action," Swales (1990) explained that genres function "not only as a mechanism for reaching communicative goals but also of clarifying what those goals might be" (p. 44). Genres guide readers' expectations of a text and writers' formulation of a text. The

evolution of the Internet has drawn scholars to recognize how CMC has given rise to a variety of web genres – reproduced/replicated, adapted, novel, and emerging (Santini, 2006a, 2007; Herring et al., 2005; Askehave & Nielsen, 2006; Crowston & Williams, 2000). The post-traditional genre theory that considers genre in terms of social purpose and communicative action (not just form) and the notion that genres are constructed by the users has provided a foundation for these theories of web genres.

Online students, in particular, rely on generic conventions of previously known genres and genres associated with the online environment in order to participate in their textual world of online learning. Consequently, the online learning environment calls students to invoke a range of genres for their writing. However, the intersection of CMC, genre, and online education has not been sufficiently researched, particularly in connection with writing genres online. According to Spinuzzi, Hart-Davidson, and Zachry (2006), "One of the key insights in computers and writing scholarship is that technology really does change the way we write, think, and act" (p. 43). But how? In what ways? For me, the research just generates more questions about what happens when students are faced with writing for their online classes.

As an online instructor, most of what I knew about students' interactivity with the online course was based solely on what was visible on the computer screen. Students logged in to the classroom to engage in a series of actions within the online space. The students' typed text and corresponding time stamps showed what they did and when, and as an instructor, I could evaluate the quality of students' written discussion responses and other writing assignments. Yet, students' experiences relative to each of these rhetorical situations warranted deeper study. Herring (1996) suggested that "by virtue of being

carried out exclusively via language, text-based CMC makes transparent as never before the role of language in the presentation of self, and in the genesis and organization of social practices" (para. 3). This research study sought to understand the nature of writing in an online class through an analysis of the students' experiences of online writing genres in the classroom space.

Purpose of the Study

Genre is a useful lens for exploring students' online writing practices because they offer a means of accessing the ways language forms the experience of information and ideas. According to Soliday (2011), genre study examines "what written forms do in situations the writers find socially meaningful" (p. 9). This single case study of an online class examined students' experiences of writing in the multiple genres of the online classroom. Looking at online classroom writing in the context of genres served to focus the inquiry on the social actions and communicative purposes of student writing. Genres embody the situations, culture, and context of writing (Devitt, 2004). The purpose of my study was to develop a deeper understanding of the students' experiences as they engaged with the writing genres that are present within an online class. A case study exploring students' experiences of the web genres enacted in their writing provided insight into how genres function in the online classroom. Hays (2004) explained that "case studies investigate contemporary cases for purposes of illumination and understanding" (p. 218). I wanted to know how students identified the various writing genres they encountered in their online class, what students experienced as they navigated between these rhetorical situations, what students experienced in the process of enacting these genres, and how students in an online class became socialized into these genres. Students recognized and

identified genres they were already familiar with outside of the online environment, and they became socialized in the new genres they encountered.

I identified and explored the multiple genres that exist in the online classroom environment and probed students' awareness of generic expectations particular to academic writing in an online class. Bianco and Carr-Chellman (2000) explained that "qualitative research is conducted in an effort to understand the experiences and attitudes of people in contextually bounded settings" (p. 4). Regarding the online classroom as a multigeneric space illuminated the genres present in online learning. This involved identifying and categorizing students' online writing: discussion posts and other writing assignments that were the focus of the analysis. Deconstructing rhetorical situations for writing considered how alternative audiences for students' writing were constituted by online functions that made students' writing visible to the instructor or other students. Soliday (2011) suggested that "ideally, we would provide our students with access to a situation where they could interact with readers and be exposed to their expectations in some way" (p. 3). As a former Writing Across the Curriculum program director at City University of New York, Soliday was likely referring to writing assignments in on-ground classes. Yet, this scenario describes the writing situations that could potentially occur in online classes as well.

Maxwell (2002) emphasized that interpretive research "seeks to comprehend phenomena not on the basis of the researcher's perspective and categories, but from those of the participants in the situations studied" (p. 48). With respect to genre, Devitt (2004) maintained that "when considering genres within their contexts, the generic classification that matters most must be the classification recognized by the users of those genres" (p.

67). An analysis of online classroom writing genres entailed using terms the students used for the kinds of writing they did in their class. According to Burkholder (2010), "in genre theory, form and context are intimately connected; a user cannot understand a form's meaning without looking at the context" (p. 6). In this study, students' writing in the online classroom was the context for observing genres in action.

Examining the genres in the online classroom was critically significant because genre circumscribes every communicative act. Crowston, Kwasnik, and Rubleske (2010) suggested that "in terms of digital documents, the questions that arise are whether digital genres emerge from what people do on the Web, or whether the technology itself affords ways of doing things that people can then discover and exploit" (p. 72). The online classroom environment provides opportunities for students to encounter multiple genres enacted by multiple authors. Students' writing coexists alongside the writing of teachers, textbook publishers, website designers, and others. Villanueva, Luzón, and Ruiz-Madrid (2008) contended that

> In order to determine the new competencies that learners will need to interpret and use digital genres, it is necessary to keep in mind that genres are continuously evolving, which calls for research both on already-existing genres, their transformation and the hybridization processes they are currently undergoing. (para. 13)

This research examined the purposes for online classroom writing according to students, according to the teacher, and according to the class materials. Written communication took many forms and had different purposes, and therefore, represented various genres. Crowston et al. (2010) proposed that "rather than trying to study the genres themselves,

researchers can instead study human activity through genres, especially those activities that focus on communication" (p. 82). In this case, I was particularly interested in the activity of *writing*. Devitt (2004) commented that "People recognize genres, and people are the ones who define whether a genre exists. It is the intriguing job of genre scholars to figure out what lies behind what everyone already knows" (p. 32). I suggest that the "everyone" in this case is the online student.

Certainly, online classes are not just anchored at proprietary institutions. This mode of delivery is increasingly being implemented at traditional institutions. Colleges and universities will likely be unable to avoid developing online programs (Taylor, 2001). I believe it is necessary to conduct inquiry that seeks to understand how to maximize the medium of CMC in higher education learning environments. Continued research is needed to explore the students' and professors' experiences of the kinds of writing that happen within the space of this relatively new educational phenomenon. The results and analysis of the research may influence institutions to take a more informed approach to improving instructional practices online, in general, and writing practices online, in particular. Perhaps teachers and instructional designers can have better insight into guiding students toward understanding the purposes for their writing, so students can become more active participants in the literacy practices of their online classrooms. Lonsdale and McCurry (2004) asserted that "literacy cannot be understood independently of the context in which it is situated. What it means to be literate is relational to other literacies […] literacy is a social construct whose constitutive features will vary across time and cultural settings" (p. 28). Acknowledging and responding to factors that affect the writing aspect of online learning is vital to implementing

instruction that challenges and motivates students to commit to their own learning and construction of knowledge.

Research Questions

This single case study explored the writing genres that students enacted online by closely examining student writing in the online classroom. According to Soliday (2011), genre study considers what constitutes and defines rhetorical situations, whether writers can successfully traverse between writing situations, and how writers acquire knowledge and expertise in multiple writing situations. My study responds to these research questions:

1. What are the rhetorical situations for student writing in an online classroom?
2. How do students acquire knowledge of the conventions of the multiple genres of online classroom writing?
3. What are students' experiences of enacting the multiple writing genres in an online class?

The online classroom is a multi-generic space where students are called upon to enact various writing genres, depending on the rhetorical situation of the learning activity. Online students are required to demonstrate their ability to negotiate these rhetorical situations. But students do not always know what writing genres to expect or are expected in their online classroom. What happens when online students are engaged in the process of their writing is the thrust of this study. Although it is understood that the online class serving as the research site for this study may not be typical of all online classes, the class provided a context for questioning and a framework for exploring the genres of students' online classroom writing.

Summary

This chapter introduces the research study by acknowledging the increasing presence of online learning in higher education in the 21st century. Typically, students in online classes must use written text to communicate to classmates and the instructor and to complete assignments. Chapter 1 describes the problem giving rise to the study is the need for educators to learn more about students' experience of writing for their online classes. Students must enact various writing genres in order to perform the social practices of online education, since genre embodies the context and purpose for any communication. Therefore, genre theories provide a means to explore the rhetorical situations of students' online writing. A *genre* is defined as a social action with a communicative purpose. Genres guide readers' expectations of a text and writers' formulation of a text. The evolution of the Internet has drawn scholars to recognize how CMC has given rise to a variety of web genres – reproduced/replicated, adapted, novel, and emerging. Chapter 1 explains that the purpose of my single case study of an online classroom was to develop a deeper understanding of students' experiences as they engaged with the writing genres that are present within an online class. The chapter identifies and discusses the research questions that focused the inquiry into students' online writing and their experiences of genre performances.

In Chapter 2, I discuss theories of computer mediated communication and genre that form the theoretical framework for the study. In addition, this chapter examines the relevant and related literature concerning online education and past qualitative research studies of these areas.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I explore the theoretical framework for this study as well as provide a review of the relevant literature. The section of the chapter that deals with the theoretical framework discusses genre as social action and web genre evolutions. The section reviewing the literature discusses student writing genres online, online class discussions, and other kinds of online writing assignments.

Theoretical Framework

Despite the relatively new developments in computer technology and the Internet, a considerable amount of scholarship has been undertaken since the 1990s on online learning, computer mediated communication, and web genres. Theories of genre and of computer mediated communication framed the study. A theoretical framework guides what types of data are collected and situates what kind of analysis is applied to interpret the research topic. Anfara and Mertz (2006) noted how theory "plays a key role in framing and conducting almost every aspect of the study" (p. xxiii). This study is grounded in a constructionist epistemology. According to Crotty (1998), constructionism is "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and the world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). This epistemological stance influences all aspects of my research and my thinking

about the dynamics of the online classroom, made possible through computer mediated communication.

Computer mediated communication is defined as any "digitally-mediated medium" (Herring, 2002). CMC is quintessentially a phenomenon of the Internet (Herring, 2002). The Internet as described by Herring (2002) is "a large, geographically dispersed, interconnected, unstructured medium that shapes human interaction" (p. 111). CMC varies according to the technology and the purpose for using the computer for communication (Herring, 2002). Khine et al. (2003) noted that CMC typically refers to the "transmission and reception of messages via computer networks" (p. 115). However, most computer-mediated communication is more robust than simply relaying messages. Herring (2004a) more broadly defined CMC to "include both interactive, text-based modes *and* human to human communication" via the Internet (p. 27). CMC is also perceived to be relatively anonymous (Chester & Gwynne, 2006).

Characteristics of CMC include asynchronous and synchronous communication capacity, high interactivity, and multi-way communication (Luppicini, 2007). CMC also has been described as a "lean medium" (Herring, 1999; Garrison et al., 2000). Herring (2002) observed that the temporality of synchronous and asynchronous communication influences the use of synchronous modes for social interaction and asynchronous modes for problem solving. Because the text-only quality of CMC may seem less socially present, it is often considered better for delivering factual information rather than building social relationships (Herring, 2002). Still, users have found ways to adapt the text-only aspect of the CMC medium to express personal and social meanings (Herring, 2002). This is partly achieved through the e-grammar of CMC, which visually records

shifts in register (Herring, 2011). Despite the lack of traditional forms of feedback, CMC users have established means of signaling listening and turn-taking within conversation (Herring, 1999).

The value of communicating through computer networks lies in technology's capability for expanding and enhancing communication (Herring, 2004; Khine et al., 2003). Not only are conversations represented as written text displayed on the computer screen and archived for later review, users interact with CMC in specific and beneficial ways. Herring (1999) argued that "even the least persistent asynchronous interface is more persistent than spoken language, which disappears immediately once it is uttered. Persistent conversation aids the user's cognitive processing" (para. 53). In addition, Stein (2006) asserted that paper texts tend to be more slowly read, but screen texts are more quickly scanned, so that "language on the screen carries a much higher perceptual load than in spoken and written language" (para. 5). The manner of encountering text – the medium – impacts how the communication is comprehended and internalized by the reader. The circumstances of experiencing the text – the rhetorical situation – also influence how the communication is understood. Lemke (1998) contended that "the meaning of words and images, read or heard, seen static or changing, are different because of the contexts in which they appear" (para. 2). Since words and images have different meanings in different contexts, a computer interface provides a certain context for users to construct meaning out of written text and visual imagery. Meanwhile, Herring (1999, 2002, 2004) has undertaken a classification of CMC genres that includes websites, webblogs, e-mail, and listservs to examine the concept of computer mediated

communication. Genres give grounding to these socially constructed meanings generated within computer mediated communication.

Genre as Social Action

A genre movement has evolved in recent decades in directions relative to genres in print and computer media. By asserting that genre was social action, not just form, Miller (1984) opened up a new dialogue that considered genre in terms of rhetorical purpose. Swales (1990) emphasized that genre has a "communicative purpose" and a distinct set of features to achieve that purpose. Genre users share an understanding and awareness of both purpose and formal features of certain texts (Beghtol, 2000). The criteria for determining whether a text fits into a certain category, or genre, include audience and purpose (Lee, 2001). Swales (1990) defined genre as a "class of communicative events*"* in which language is central. This definition further broadened the concept of genre. According to Swales (1990),

> The principal criterial feature that turns a collection of communicative events into a genre is some shared set of communicative purposes. Placing the primary determinant of genre-membership on shared purpose rather than on similarities of form [assumes that] genres are communicative vehicles for the achievement of goals. (p. 46)

The structure a genre takes is informed by its purpose. A genre is exemplified by how its purpose is expressed through language.

Writers and readers engage in their various communicative acts through genres. Genre is a social construction that exists to meet the communicative purposes of its users. Social constructionism, according to Crotty (1998), "emphasizes the hold our culture has

on us: it shapes the way in which we see things" (p. 58). A communicative form becomes a genre when it successfully and repeatedly accomplishes the intended activity of its users. Spinuzzi et al. (2006) indicated that an action must be repeated and persistent to produce a genred response. According to Bawarshi (2000), "genre helps shape and enable our social actions by rhetorically constituting the way we recognize the situations in which we function" (p. 340). Genres function as models for action by representing expected behavior in situations. Bawarshi (2000) contended that "genre reproduces the activity by providing individuals with the conventions for enacting it. We perform an activity in terms of how we recognize it – that is, how we identify and come to know it. And we recognize an activity by way of genre" (p. 340). Genres make communication more familiar and comprehensible to receivers (Crowston & Williams, 2000). The primacy of genre in communication is acknowledged by Le (1995), who viewed genre as "the way culture carries out its transactions and communication" (para. 5). Members must be aware of the culture's generic conventions in order to actively participate. Within the context of communication, genres represent ways of being in the world.

The rhetorical strategies that genres encompass are relevant for both producers and receivers of communications. Bawarshi (2000) emphasized the "socio-rhetorical function of genres – the extent to which genres shape and help us recognize our communicative goals, including why these goals exist, what and whose purposes they serve, and how best to achieve them" (p. 339). From a writer's standpoint, a genre serves to guide the entire writing process of planning, drafting, and revising as the writer considers her audience, purpose, and text. Burkholder (2010) asserted that "generic features are chosen for their ability to effectively respond to a recurrent situation and

fulfill the expectations of targeted audiences" (p. 6). The writer chooses a genre to represent and convey her ideas; yet, the writer is not just selecting a template. Generic practices are not imposed from the outside; genres are generated within the social context of their use. Devitt (2004) explained that "because a genre develops from the actions of the people in the group in the context of a perceived situation, the genre will show how most people in the group act or are expected to act" (p. 78). Because cultures change in response to socio-economic forces, political forces, technological forces, and so on, the genres used for communication within a culture also change. Lee (2001) emphasized that "genres are categories established by consensus within a culture and hence subject to change as generic conventions are contested/challenged and revised, perceptibly or imperceptibly, over time" (p. 46). Genres are socially constructed by users to enable communication according to culturally identified purposes.

Genre and register.

For Burkholder (2010), genre is "about how people use language to accomplish specific tasks" (p. 2). Le (1995) pointed out that "genre has become an obvious target for linguistic investigation as it is socially determined" (para. 4). The emphasis on language calls for a distinction between the terms *genre* and *register*. Lee (2001) suggested that *genre* refers to the "social purposes around language" while *register* implies more "particular contextual or situational parameters" of language use (p. 42). Registers are more specific textual qualities, such as formality/informality. Lee (2001) explained that the difference between genre and register stems not just from how a text is used, but also from how a text is viewed. Therefore, while register is *internal* to the text, genre is *external* to the text. Register relates to language use that varies according to social

context and conventions, whereas genre relates to a member of a category of texts grouped according to socially determined purposes (Lee, 2001).

Genre and text types.

Some scholars make a distinction between genres and text types. According to Santini (2006b), "text types are rhetorical/discourse patterns dictated by the purpose of a text" (para. 8). The purpose, embodied by the chosen genre, calls for particular modes to express that purpose. For Santini (2005), "text types are related to the producer's intention toward the receiver(s)" (para. 3) – what the writer wants the reader to experience. Ultimately, "text types can be derived from the texts themselves, irrespective of the genre" (Santini, 2006a, p. 69). For example, the letter genre may employ narration, description, or argumentation as its text type.

Genre Analysis

Genre analysis takes into account the unique positions that written texts hold in certain situations by the genre users. Devitt's (2004) emphasis on the social function of genres is relevant to this study of the genres students enact in their online classroom. Devitt (2004) proposed six principles for analyzing genre in a particular context. Three of those principles deemed particularly relevant to online learning entail examining: genres' social functions for groups; genres' discourse features; and ideologies reflected, constructed, and reinforced through genres. These principles are applied in my discussion of the findings in the study. This model was selected because of its focus on the social aspects of how genres interact, develop, and function within groups. Devitt's approach is especially significant concerning the *student's experience* of writing genres online, which is the focus of my study.

Genre Formation

Genre choices not only reflect the values of the group, but also of individual writers participating in the group (Dean, 2008). Devitt (2004) maintained that "genres reinforce conformity but they also require choice" (p. 85). The rhetorical nature of genre enables choosing the option of following, resisting, or adapting genre expectations (Dean, 2008). Yet, despite the guidelines and expectations, genres are not static. Devitt (2004) stressed that as social actions, genres can adjust in response to the needs of the rhetorical situation. Actual genre function is always in flux, since genre users – writers and readers – determine what the genre is and how it is used based on the rhetorical situation at hand. Soliday (2011) indicated that genres shape the written responses to circumstances that are socially determined. For Devitt (2004), the writer represents the rhetorical situation invoked by the genre when choosing to write within that genre.

Nowhere is this dynamic property of genre more evident than on the Internet. Internet users are apt to recognize traditional genres replicated on the screen, see genres whose form has been adapted, or see entirely novel genres that do not exist outside of the Web (Santini, 2006b, 2007). The communicability of the Internet is rapidly shaping and reshaping genres, and online education is likely contributing to and being impacted by these generic changes. For example, Friesen (2009) argued that within the context of threaded discussions in an online classroom, the "post" may be considered an emerging web genre with resulting sub-genres dependent on its use within the class. Online student writing illustrates these evolving web genres in action. This changeable notion of genre suggests that opportunities exist within the online space for students to direct their own

genre performances in ways that make sense for their computer mediated learning environment. Lemke (1998) acknowledged that

> Insofar as education is initiation into new communities, and especially into their generic and specialized literacy practices, new information technologies, new communication practices, and new social networks make possible new paradigms for education and learning, and call into question the assumptions on which the older paradigms rest. (para. 18)

Along those lines, Askehave and Nielsen (2005) asserted that the "web medium forms an integral part of web genres" (p. 138). Santini (2007), for her part, emphasized that "interactions between web users and possibilities offered by technology modify existing genres or create new ones, which better satisfy the communication needs brought on by these new conditions" (p. 3). The online classroom is an optimal space for students to engage in genre (re)formation shaped by the CMC medium of online learning.

Web Genre Evolutions

The digital realization of a genre may share features of its print counterpart; however, it is not simply a digital version of an already existing genre because it draws on an entirely new medium. Since many aspects of the Internet medium contribute to both the utilization and appearance of web genres, the notion of medium must be integrated into a genre concept for CMC. Askehave and Nielsen (2005) asserted that "media properties influence both the purpose and form of web-mediated genres, and should therefore be included in the genre identification" (p. 128). Web genres rely on the medium to establish their communicative purpose in ways that print genres do not. Askehave and Nielsen (2005) put forward the concept of " 'media genres' – where the

two seem to be inseparable because the media is not only a distribution channel but also a carrier of meaning, determining aspect of social practice (how a text is used, by whom it is used, and for what purpose" (p. 138). Askehave and Nielsen (2005) also proposed a two dimensional model for web genres that "captures the essence of text and medium simultaneously" (p. 127). This characterization of text refers to the actual written, textual content.

Genres realized on the Internet are undergoing an evolution concurrent with the technologies that support their formation. The influence of the Internet as a communication medium has forced existing genres to adapt and caused new genres to emerge (Crowston & Williams, 2000; Santini, 2006b). Santini (2005) observed that web genres "range from plain electronic versions of paper genres, to genres more tailored to take advantage of the potentials of the Web" (p. 1). For example, embedding links to other electronic documents with the same purpose creates a multi-page document, but when links with different purposes are embedded, the digital medium of the Internet changes how the user interacts with the document. A different form of the document is created, and as such, a different genre (Crowston & Williams, 2000).

The visual organization of web pages facilitates including multiple functions and texts with different communicative purposes (Santini, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). Santini (2007) explained that "the effect of hyperlinking, interactivity and multi-functionality can affect the textuality of web pages, which rely also on the use of images and other graphic elements" (p. 2). Santini (2006a, 2006b) also considered web pages to be innovative documents, more changeable and distinctive than paper documents. Web pages combine and unify seemingly disparate, nonlinear web page elements (Santini, 2006a, 2007). In

fact, web documents are frequently indistinguishable since they often do not look like the standard of a particular genre (Crowston et al., 2010).

Singularly unique web documents may not qualify as a genre, unless the users continue to produce this distinctive form of communication based on its capacity to successfully fulfill the users' needs. According to Herring, Scheidt, Wright and Bonus (2005), "recurrent electronic communication practices can be meaningfully characterized as genres" (p. 143). Crowston and Williams (2000) noted that users may "modify a genre and communicate in a way that invokes only some of the expected aspects of a form. If these changes become repeatedly used, they too may become accepted and used together with or instead of existing genres" (p. 303). Computer mediated communication has maintained its progression in response to expanded Internet use. As Santini (2007) contended,

> If we see the web as a dynamic environment, we could say that there are three forces interacting: what we bring from the past (reproduced genres), what is new or adapted to the new environment (novel genres and adapted genres), what is going to emerge and is not fully formed yet (emerging genres). (p 6)

Clearly, genres on the web are as fluid and unbounded as the Web itself in responding to rhetorical situations as they rapidly unfold.

Not all web genres realized on the Internet are entirely new innovations, however. Crowston and Williams' (2000) study of genres on the Internet found that most web pages reproduced traditional genres. Web mediated genres taken as a whole are new, but their features may be similar to traditional genre features (Askehave & Nielsen, 2005).

Many paper genres are merely transplanted to the web and replicated in an electronic form (Santini, 2005, 2006b). However, Lemke (1998) pointed out:

> What looks like the same text or multimedia genre on paper or screen is not functionally the same, follows different meaning conventions, and requires different skills for its successful use, when it functions in different social networks for different purposes, as part of different human activities. (para. 5)

The potential for adapted genres to become novel genres derives from the fact that web genres serve new communicative purposes (Crowston & Williams, 2000). To be considered a new genre, the function and purpose must be different. The key is not how the form looks, but how it is used and why.

Novel genres show little or no resemblance to paper genres (Santini, 2006b). More significantly, novel genres have communicative purposes unique to the Internet (Santini, 2007). For a novel genre to emerge depends on social acceptance by users (Santini, 2007). Santini (2005) notes that some novel genres "have become fully acknowledged and genre labels have been invented for them only in recent years, for instance, home pages, FAQs, newsletters, emails, weblogs" (para. 1). When factors such as the Internet medium and how a genre is enacted come together, there is potential for a novel or adapted genre to arise.

Santini (2007) described the Web as a "complex scenario where the mixture of several genres in a web page is a fast operation […] the constant introduction of web technologies brings about the transitional phase of emerging genres, where genre conventions are unclear" (p. 8). Web pages are usually more multifaceted and diverse than traditional paper documents or even electronic documents, since they exhibit several

communicative purposes simultaneously (Santini, 2006a, 2006b). Web documents may also reflect multiple genres (Crowston et al., 2010). When two or more genres overlap, but do not meld together to become an entirely new genre, a multi-genre classification is used (Santini, 2007).

As computer mediated communication is still in a stage of development, web genres are characterized by fluidity and hybridity (Santini & Sharoff, 2009). Textual attributes of genre hybridism and individualization remain persistent, and genre practices are not fully established (Santini, 2007). A study by Herring et al. (2005), that attempted to investigate blogs as an example of an emergent or reproduced web genre, found that blogs were actually a hybrid of offline and online genres made possible by technology. Genre hybridism refers to a web page with more than one genre, regardless of how these genres relate to each other (Rehm et al., 2007). Herring et al. (2005) also observed that "the flexible, hybrid nature of the blog format means that it can express a wide range of genres, in accordance with the needs and interests of its users" (p. 162). Santini (2007) explained that "*individualization* refers to the impact of authorial experimentation and/or creativity. Authors of web pages are virtually free to invent or propose any genre variation. It is so much so that many web pages cannot be classified into any genres" (p. 7). In summary, according to Santini (2007), "genres are named communication artifacts characterized by conventions, raising expectations, showing hybridism or individualization, and undergoing evolution" (p. 8). These evolving web genres are visible in online education.

Crotty (1998) explained that from the constructionist viewpoint, "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (p. 43).

This view is especially relevant to web genres. Web users create meaning for their selves through the process of "text consumption" – by the way users encounter the text (Askehave & Nielsen, 2005). Askehave and Nielsen (2005) observed that web users "choose their own path and create their own text, becoming a kind of web author" (p. 126). This model considers the points of view of both text producer and text receiver (Askehave & Nielsen, 2005). The receiver (reader) tangibly co-constructs meaning with the producer (writer).

The user may choose to simultaneously or consecutively read, listen to, or watch the content. Villanueva et al. (2008) asserted that "an informative text provides information at different degrees of specialization depending on the hypertextual links activated by the user and on the decisions regarding the possible reading paths to follow" (para. 12). These alternatives promote a non-sequential "reading" process. Since readers choose where to begin and end their engagement with the text, the element of hypertext embedded in web genres conveys a sense of non-linearity uncommon in print texts (Villanueva et al., 2008). The user actively makes decisions as she shifts between reading and navigating. Thus, the digital text is constituted as an interactive, socially constructed entity as the user engages in modal shifts from reading mode to navigating mode (Villanueva et al., 2008). In reading mode, the user experiences the web document as a printed text; in navigating mode, the web document is experienced more dynamically through the Internet medium. These observations only explain how students might experience a text that has already been produced in the online class, not how student create their own texts.

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this section is to provide a review of previous scholarship in relation to my research study. The literature in the field of online education is relatively recent; most research of the online learning environment has been undertaken over the past decade.

Although many scholars have recognized the educational potential of computer mediated communication, researchers are just beginning to explore its various dimensions, such as encouraging interaction and collaboration (Khine, et al., 2003), establishing community (Garrison et al., 2000), and implementing assessment (Vonderwell, Liang & Alderman, 2007). Sutton (2000) identified the educational benefits of CMC in terms of opportunities for varied forms of learner interaction and persistence, while Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) emphasized the possibilities for online learners to develop critical thinking. Other beneficial characteristics are the flexibility for accommodating various learning styles and the capacity for group interchange (Sutton, 2000; Harasim, 1996). Garrison et al. (2000) have investigated social, cognitive, and teacher presence in an online class. As Porter (2007) stated in the foreword to *Digital Writing Research: Technologies, Methodologies, and Ethical Issues*: "Digital technologies are radically changing (have changed) writing – and our research needs to understand the dramatic scope of this change and to address this change" (p. xiii). Scholarly inquiries of online learning suggest a new paradigm for education research.

Since genres are social constructions, even similarly configured documents will likely be viewed and identified differently depending on the users (Crowston et al., 2010). Burkholder (2010) explained that reinforcing students' awareness of context in relation to genre will support their selection of appropriate genres in response to the

rhetorical situations they experience in their online writing. According to Burkholder (2010), "by comparing choices and constraints each genre offers, students can begin to understand why some genres are better responses to certain situations than others" (p. 8). Burkholder's emphasis on students' genre awareness is reflective of the academic literacies model discussed by Lea. However, Burkholder is arguing from the point of view of library sciences and information literacy, not from the position of an online educator or researcher.

Some mention of genre has been made in a general way in online education literature; however, few scholars have directly addressed the notion of genres within the online classroom. This limited exploration of the genres present in students' online writing, particularly in relation to a CMC context, represents a gap in the scholarly literature of online learning. The significance of students' genre awareness was underscored by Le (1995), who affirmed that "genre competence is an essential part of communicative competence" (para. 6). Le (1995) further urged course designers to be responsive to the societal importance of students' appropriate genre use in various social contexts and interactions.

The evolution of web genres was implied by Jones and Lea (2008), who asserted that "texts produced in association with digital technologies are hybrid, fluid and multimodal and offer innovative spaces for the integration of a range of texts in different modes" (p. 208). Jones and Lea (2008) maintained that their research applied a "textual, rather than technological, lens to digital practices and considered how meanings are produced, negotiated and contested" (p. 208). Jones and Lea (2008) granted that the writing genres, in which students engage in an online class, may be shaped by the

medium of computer mediated communication; however, this was not the focus of their study.

A study by Friesen (2009) found similarities between the epistolary genre and online discussion posts. Friesen emphasized that student posts made the same kinds of assumptions as letters about context and the relationship between sender and receiver, in other words, writer and reader. Friesen (2009) observed that students viewed posts as both a bridge and a barrier, as a distance-breaker and a distance-maker. Posts showed students' perceptions of the discontinuation and continuation of writing that happens with letters. Additionally, students represented the temporal nature of letter writing through descriptions of conditions concurrent with the reading or writing of the message. Students' posts also reflected assumptions and shared understandings between writer and reader, demonstrated by fragmentation and missing words.

Friesen (2009) affirmed that students' familiarity with the letter writing genre supported their engagement with online posts. Friesen (2009) also contended that more narrative than critical inquiry (as desired by the instructor) was seen in the postings because narrative is more comfortable for students. This observation recalls Santini's (2006a) reference to text types. Friesen (2009) argued that "in the recurrent situation of an ongoing class discussion […] it is cultural, conventional, and generic elements that play a role in orienting students' individual and collective communicative acts and expectations" (p. 183). This argument implies that conditions *outside* the online class have a significant influence over genres of students' posts. Familiarity with certain generic expectations may be a factor. Friesen's analysis raises the question as to what

extent the conditions within the online class determine the genres students actually use for their writing.

Friesen (2009) acknowledged that the students in the online class were not interviewed to ascertain their own perception of the genres being enacted in their online writing. The analysis by Friesen suggested that students' online posts were not necessarily circumscribed by computer mediated communication. However, the possibility exists that the posts were a representation of the reproduced, replicated genres described by Santini.

Of course, even in on ground classes, students' degree of knowledge and understanding of genre expectations influences their levels of academic writing. An "academic literacies model" was advocated by Lea and Street (2006) to support students' acclimation to literacy practices in academic contexts. The academic literacies model guides students toward awareness of the notion of "genre switching," whether in the process of developing a written piece or when moving from one writing situation to another (Lea & Street, 2006). According to Lea and Street (2006), "one of the underlying assumptions of an academic literacies model is that educators need to be concerned with literacies more generally across academic contexts and not only the assessed texts produced by students" (p. 234). Although the study by Lea and Street was situated in an on ground classroom, certainly, in the context of an online class, students produce written texts in a variety of genres for various purposes, making the academic literacies model relevant to online learning as well.

In a case study of an on-ground composition class that examined what a writing assignment is designed to do and what a student actually does, Nelson (1995) explored

the pedagogical issue of how teachers can construct writing assignments that encourage students to construct meaning through their writing. The focus of the research study was to "illustrate how students respond to certain features of assignments and classroom environments in which they set about interpreting and completing their work, focusing in particular on how students negotiate unfamiliar, often innovative writing tasks" (Nelson, 1995, p. 413). In a traditional composition classroom, students often write reflective journals and participate in discussions. It is not the activity that can be unique to an online class, but the written format in which students are expected to respond to the activity. More than other types of assignments, Nelson (1995) stated that "writing assignments pose particular problems because students must interpret them and formulate approaches of their own, a task that can prove troublesome" (p. 417). Since essentially every assignment in an online class is presented and responded to in writing, this can be seen as an advantage or disadvantage to students, depending on their writing experience.

Some online delivery platforms use an audio function to present synchronous lectures and facilitate discussions, but written text is still the primary method for interaction between instructor and students. According to Kindred (2002), "the use of the computer encourages active involvement by all participants and offers a certain amount of control over the structure of the discussion" (para. 9). Asynchronous online discussions allow students more time to formulate responses to their teacher and classmates than they would have in a face-to-face class – time to read the question and other students' answers, to think about their own answers, to write their responses, and to reconsider what they have written. Lapadat (2002) asserted that "the potential for conceptual growth is facilitated by the learning-focused textual environment of

asynchronous conferencing, not only because of immersion in reading meaningful texts, but because conference participants express themselves in writing" (para. 17). Online classroom writing and connections between informal discussions, formal writing, and the importance of developing academic literacies has been explored by Lea (2004, 2007), Lea and Goodfellow (2009), Lea and Street (2006) and Lapadat (2002, 2004).

In a case study that analyzed online course design, Lea (2004) considered all of the written texts that make up the online classroom in their entirety. Lea (2004) argued that all "reading and writing – literacies – are cultural social practices, and vary depending upon the particular context" (p. 740). The study emphasized the importance of designing courses that incorporate opportunities for students to develop their academic literacies.

A case study by Lea (2007) of students' online discussions indicated that students demonstrated a range of genres in their writing online. Lea (2007) argued that the written texts students produce in online learning environments, in the form of discussion posts, had not been sufficiently affirmed as academic writing. Lea (2007) explained that "in foregrounding specific textual features, we are able to examine the nature of this writing in the academy and the contribution it can make to understanding literacies in online learning" (p. 96). The students' messages were analyzed in relation to evidences of intertextuality, metadiscourse, and multimodality. Students used available technologies to add hyperlinks and document attachments to their postings. Personal anecdotes were used often, reflecting a practice demonstrated in the course content. Lea (2007) concluded that "student messages were institutionally significant spaces for the negotiation of issues of meaning making" (p. 97).

Lea (2007) observed the language students use in online discussions to negotiate meaning in their learning and to position themselves as meaning-makers, just as they might in their other academic writing. According to Lea (2007), researchers had considered the ways online student writing becomes a venue for the social practice of co-constructing meaning, but had not recognized the complexities of the language used in the process. Lea (2007) stated that her research purpose was to "examine the nature of writing in online interaction and communication and what this can tell us about the process of knowledge construction in this context" (p. 84). Lea (2007) also recognized how the rhetorical choices students make in their written online discussions situated them in particular places in the act of meaning making. Lea (2007) determined that "course design privileges the written texts created during online communication, and the nature of these texts – continually visible throughout the life of the course – leads to their being regarded as authoritative by both students and tutors" (p. 84). Within the online space, teacher's writing is juxtaposed with students' writing. While the study identified students' efforts to demonstrate authority over the making of meaning in discussions, Lea (2007) did not speak to the assertion of the teacher's authority online, where both the students' words and the teacher's words usually appear together as text on the screen.

The question of whether discussions are "written talk" has been raised in a study by Lapadat (2002) that compared face-to-face classroom discussion with online asynchronous discussion. Lapadat (2002) considered that the technological dynamics of online discussions "endow participants' textual contributions with an interactivity and continuity that have the 'feel' of conversation" (para. 10). A student example of a segment of the transcribed classroom discussion used more colloquial language, fillers,

and generalized statements, yet a reproduced online discussion of the same student on the same topic clearly demonstrated a more thorough, detailed explanation. Lapadat (2002) attributed these substantive differences to the ability to reflect, revise, and edit. There is a sense of permanence inherent in online discussions that allows participants to refer to and re-read the written discussion of other students (Lapadat, 2002). Students are able to incorporate the words and phrases of their classmates or instructor into their own written statements in ways that do not require the formality of citation. Lapadat (2002) proposed that "expressing oneself via a written medium holds the promise of writing one's way into understanding" (para. 26). Writing taken in this context becomes a means of fostering critical thinking. Lapadat (2002) further acknowledged that audience in online writing becomes "an audience of peers, who are predisposed to read what one writes and also to respond, [which] creates a joint focus on academic topics of mutual interest, and thus a crucible for the social construction of meaning" (para. 31).

Online researchers have viewed threaded discussions as a space for collaboration through writing. Chester and Gwynne (1998) examined the potential for collaboration derived from the written interaction inherent in online discussions. To investigate collaboration in online discussions, Chester and Gwynne (1998) employed a questionnaire method that was analyzed qualitatively. A study by Lin (2007) identified three critical areas of online learning that students should experience in their online learning: independent inquiry, collaborative inquiry, and formative inquiry toward expert knowledge. Independent inquiry happens through the student's own desire to engage with ideas independently, without interruption; collaborative inquiry occurs when there is an interplay and exchange of ideas between students; and formative inquiry results when

students apply their developing expertise gained through independent inquiry by interacting with others through collaborative inquiry (Lin, 2007).

Reflection is another purpose for students' writing in online discussions. Garrison (2003) emphasized the importance of students' reflective inquiry made possible by written communication in discussions. Swan (2005) also discussed the notion of reflection resulting from writing for online discussions.

Just as what writing students do in threaded discussions is unique to the online learning environment, other kinds of student writing are ubiquitous to any learning environment. One of the primary ways students are expected to demonstrate their content knowledge is through writing assignments. Researchers have addressed some formative aspects of student writing that pertain specifically to writing for the online classroom. Speck (2001), in addressing issues of assessment of students' writing in response to formal assignments in online classes, suggested the need for an "alternative paradigm" for assessment of online writing assignments, and Bauer and Anderson (2000) encouraged implementing rubrics to address issues of assessment of students' writing in response to formal assignments in online classes.

A study by McVey (2008), investigating technology-enhanced instructor feedback on students' writing assignments, indicated students used the feedback to improve their writing assignments. McVey (2008) relied on survey results from an open ended survey that was analyzed quantitatively to examine feedback on writing assignments. Anderson et al. (2001) investigated the role of student-to-instructor feedback in the online classroom, in which posts of student questions and student comments, when submitting

assignments, were evaluated. The study determined that students appeared to feel more comfortable giving feedback in writing to the instructor in an online setting.

In an online class, students are typically assigned other writing projects as well as discussion participation. As Lapadat (2002) commented, "there are some interesting consequences for the kinds of thinking, writing, and discursive interaction that take place in these types of courses" (para 10). MacDonald and Thompson's (2005) case study of an online class looked at threaded discussions and writing assignments to assess the quality of content, delivery, interactions, and learning outcomes, while a study by Ke and Carr-Chellman (2006) found solitary learners preferred individual writing assignments over the collaborative nature of class discussions.

Strategies for constructivist learning can be implemented through student writing in discussions and assignments. Writing assignments as well as discussions in their online classes can provide opportunities for students to make meaning out of their learning (Lea; 2004; Lea & Goodfellow, 2009; Lin, 2007). Toscano (2009) asserted that online learning "promotes writing as a way of thinking because such an activity allows students to analyze maps of their knowledge and, more importantly, their individual ways of knowing" (p. 73). These viewpoints suggest that the CMC medium positions writing and student writers in a way that encourages and active participation in learning.

Goodfellow and Lea (2005) contended that discussion assignments are generally viewed as benefiting students' cognitive development and discursive abilities, but "not as written rhetorical practices in their own right" (263). Comparing course assignments in two graduate level online classes, Goodfellow and Lea (2005) noted that challenges "arise from a contrast between the dialogic form of writing generated in the exchange of

messages online and the more monologic requirements of the formal essay genre which tend to characterize the assignments" (p. 264). Whether teachers making course assignments and students responding to assignments are aware of the contrasts inherent in the rhetorical choices relative to the writing genres enacted in discussions and formal writing needs further study. Goodfellow and Lea (2005) argued that "despite the tendency in the research literature to regard online discussions as an elaborated form of speech, students' difficulties with it more often arise from its status as *writing*" (p. 262). A close examination of the writing students do online can open up students' rhetorical choices and deepen the understanding of the genres of writing online and online writing. According to Goodfellow and Lea (2005), students "need support in developing their awareness of the different rhetorical demands of writing in these contexts" (p. 262). Students may not know what writing genres to expect or are expected in their online classroom.

Summary

The research study is grounded in a theoretical framework that guides the collection and analysis of data. Theories of computer mediated communication and web genres frame the study relative to the Internet environment of the online classroom. Genre theories further guide the study relative to the inquiry of types of writing enacted by online students. The relevant literature pertains to online class discussions and other online writing assignments.

Chapter 3 reviews the methodology that was utilized for the study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe the research design for this study as well as provide an overview of the research site, study participants, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques.

A qualitative case study is an effective research design for exploring the online classroom. Bianco and Carr-Chellman (2000) posed a critical question a researcher of online learning should consider when doing case study research – "Is the electronic space the actual classroom?" (p. 5). I view the online learning platform, maintained in the electronic space and mediated by the Internet, as the "online classroom," where activities intended for learning occur. As defined by Glesne (2006), a case is a "bounded integrated system" (p. 13). Because it is comprised of a specific group of participants engaging in particular ways for a designated purpose over a specified length of time, the online classroom environment represents a bounded, integrated system. In this context, a single case study can be conducted of the classroom as a whole.

When studying online classrooms, qualitative education researchers generally follow similar research protocols as for on ground classrooms, yet adaptations of methods and analyses are necessary to fully capture the unique qualities of the CMC learning experience (McKee & DeVoss, 2007). Bianco and Carr-Chellman (2000) recognized that there are logistical and ethical implications of conducting inquiry at a "distance" – such as an online class – when using certain ethnographic strategies of qualitative research that

have historically relied on close contact with participants. Lea and Goodfellow (2009) also expressed methodological concerns with online classroom research, such as how to conduct observation, what counts as data, and how to preserve the integrity of data if removing participant identifiers. The key to the trustworthiness of the study is for the researcher to acknowledge and account for methodological decisions in the research design and the entire process of gathering, analyzing, and reporting on the data (Porter, 2007; DePew, 2007).

Because the online classroom is text-based and located on the Internet, retrieving artifacts mostly entailed basic computer functions like downloading files, taking screen shots, and copying/pasting text into word processing documents. Some online researchers have also recognized the importance of extending their inquiries beyond the textual data to conduct interviews and surveys of student participants (MacDonald & Thompson, 2005; Locke & Daly, 2006; Jones & Lea, 2008). Interviews and open-ended surveys and questionnaires provided a means of gathering data in the words the participants used to describe their experiences of a phenomenon.

Research Design

The research design for this qualitative inquiry was a single case study of an online classroom. This case study identified and described the genres of students' online classroom writing. For education research related to student writing, Nelson (1995) suggested that case studies offer "a view of students as insiders, actively invoking their knowledge of how classrooms work and engaging in a variety of interpretations which influence how they define and approach their writing assignments" (p. 422). The writings of students enrolled in a graduate level course, delivered online, were interpreted through

a qualitative analysis of data systematically collected using an online questionnaire, teacher and student interviews, class observations, and retrieval of artifacts located within the learning management system (LMS) for the course. Maxwell (2002) explained that "while the relevant consensus about the categories used in description rests in the research community, the relevant consensus for the terms used in interpretation rests to a substantial extent in the community studied" (p. 49). The ethnographic techniques used for this study were relevant in order to understand the genres of writing in online education. Building a thick description was achieved through analyzing and interpreting the data collected. A timeline for the study is attached as Appendix A.

Research Questions

This single case study explored writing genres enacted online by closely examining student writing in the online classroom. According to Soliday (2011), genre study considers what constitutes and defines rhetorical situations, whether writers can successfully traverse between writing situations, and how writers acquire knowledge and expertise in multiple writing situations. My study was designed to respond to the following research questions:

1. What are the rhetorical situations for student writing in an online classroom?

2. How do students acquire knowledge of the conventions of the multiple genres of online classroom writing?

3. What are students' experiences of enacting the multiple writing genres in an online class?

Swan (2003) identified three areas of focus for analyzing learning effectiveness in online classes – student interactions with course content, with instructors, and with

classmates. The research questions grounding the data to be analyzed are unique to online learning. These questions formed the basis for data collection with respect to how the aspects of the online course relate to writing genres. The data for the study came from questionnaire responses, artifacts from the online course and related Internet sites, interview transcripts, and observation field notes. Drawing from multiple sources for analysis serves to triangulate the data (DePew, 2007). Data were collected from these four sources in order to better understand genres of writing in an online class. The triangulation of the data is represented by Figure 1.

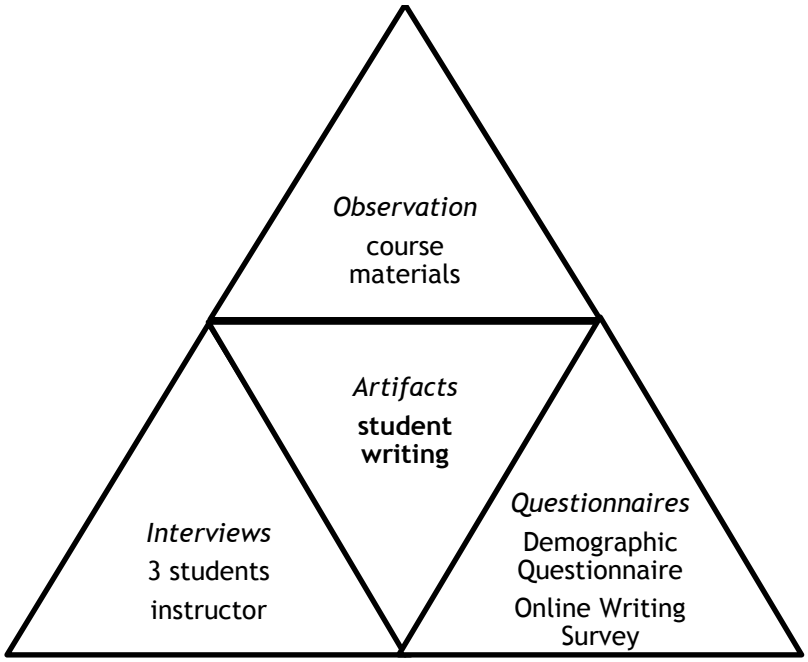


Figure 1: Triangulation of Data Sources

Each of the course areas was closely reviewed in order to gather any supplemental or referenced information that provided a context for understanding the data.

Description of Online Class as a Single Case

The online class was taught at a public university located in an urban area in the southeast. The institution offers graduate and undergraduate degree programs. Graduate students make up approximately 20% of the total student population. There are 59 Master's programs, 18 doctoral programs, and 22 distance education programs. Although the majority of courses at the university are delivered by traditional classroom instruction, students enrolled in the Master of Arts in Teaching or Graduate Certificate programs, offered by the university's College of Education, have the opportunity to take classes either on campus or online. The adult students who typically take these courses range from experienced mid-career or retiring professionals to recent college graduates just beginning their careers. Most are students with a Bachelor's degree in fields other than education, who are seeking both academic preparation and state licensure in order to pursue a teaching career.

A graduate level online class that was a required course in a graduate degree/certificate teaching program at the public university was the focus of this single case study. The course is offered both online and in a traditional classroom setting. Students took the course early in their first or second semester, since it was listed third in the recommended course sequence. The content addressed reading and writing in the classroom which, by its nature, suggested a substantial writing component for students. This class was delivered asynchronously through a commercial learning management system. Students posted written responses to threaded discussions and electronically submitted writing assignments directly to the LMS. Students created wiki pages and documents in *Google Docs*. These Internet tools provided multiple spaces for students' writing within the context of the online class. The course syllabus is attached as

Appendix B. Prior to selecting this course, I contacted a professor in the program to discuss options for doing research in one of these online classes. The professor's description of the courses and typical student enrollment provided the information used to identify this particular course and section. Ultimately, I selected the course and class section based on several factors: delivery method, content, students' range of experiences with online learning and with academic writing, and the instructor's willingness to allow access to the class. Because students take this course early in their program, I anticipated that students would potentially represent a broad range of levels of experience with both online learning and with academic writing. I made contact with one of the instructors teaching the course during the semester when I planned to begin my research, and after a meeting in which I outlined the scope of my research and extent of my involvement in the class, he agreed to give me login access to the class to conduct the study.

Researcher Role

My role as a participant observer was made possible through several Internet technologies. Priessle and Grant (2004) defined participant observation as "a label for research requiring *some extent of social participation* to document or record the course of ongoing events" [emphasis added] (p. 163). I obtained instructor login access from the instructor teaching the class in order to view the entire online course, including participating students' assignment submissions and instructor grade comments not viewable by other students. I was listed as a "Participant" along with the students and instructor on a Participants page within the LMS. My Profile in the LMS showed my role as "Editing Teaching Assistant, Secondary Instructor." I first logged in to the class during Week 8 midway through the semester. At this point, students had already performed

some of their writing for the course and continued to do so while my research was under way. I continued to log in to the class several times a week for the remaining 8 weeks of the 16 week semester, on 30 different days. During the asynchronous delivery mode, my online presence was visible to the class by virtue of a "Recent Activity" and "Online Users" window on the LMS. I did not function as an instructor in the course or post to any of the discussion forums.

I attended three synchronous online class meetings using a platform called *Wimba*. These class meetings were the last three of the seven synchronous sessions held by the instructor over the 16 week semester. My name was displayed on the screen under the "People" column. This gave me an opportunity to interact with students using both an audio and "chat" feature. The purpose for my participation in the first session I attended was to introduce myself and my research study. After I finished my audio presentation to the students outlining the scope of my study, I logged out of the session. For the second session in which I participated, I remained logged in for the entire class meeting, which lasted over one hour. I joined several students in a "breakout room" and interacted with students in a discussion of the course material by using a microphone to activate the audio "Talk" feature. In the third session, I participated by both audio and chat feature, and I was again put into a student breakout room by the instructor.

By linking to public software websites directly from URL links in the LMS forums, I was able to view a variety of students' online writing. I viewed participants' *Google Docs* pages for a student assignment by requesting the participants "Share" their documents with me to obtain access. Although this technically granted me comments privileges, I did not make any comments on the students' documents. I also viewed the

participants' wiki pages for a student assignment, as students were required to post the wiki URL to a "Wiki Midway Progress Report" in Week 6 and to grant access to the instructor to make comments. I did not request permission to make comments, but I was able to see the comments made by the instructor on the wiki content prepared by the students. I viewed timelines students created using either *Dipity*, *Preszi*, or *Voice Thread*. I also viewed students' *Jing* "screencast" presentations of an assignment.

I should note that when I proposed my study, I was unfamiliar with this particular LMS, and I did not expect my presence to be visible to students, so I had planned to keep a detailed login record that could be provided to the instructor and participants at their request, so that the extent of my participation was fully disclosed. An "Activity Report" automatically logged my views of the class, so I did not need to keep a manual record of the dates and times when I logged in, as I had anticipated.

Data Sources

As previously discussed, the qualitative research methods applied to examine the online classroom as a single case were questionnaires, artifact collection, interviews, and observations. These methods provided the sources of data needed to respond to the research questions that ground the study.

This case study involved a group of participants. All students enrolled in the selected online course section, during the semester when research was conducted, were considered potential participants in the case study. The criteria for a student participant's inclusion in the study were enrollment in the designated course section and willingness to participate in the study. The criteria for exclusion from the study were that the student was not enrolled in the designated course and/or a student's unwillingness to participate

in the study. A student's grade earned in the course was not a criterion for inclusion or exclusion. In addition, the class instructor was also a study participant.

Early in the study, during an online synchronous class meeting, I spoke to students about my research and asked for volunteer participants. Students' permission was needed to allow for the review and analysis of their online writing. Immediately after the class meeting, the instructor sent an e-mail message on my behalf to all students enrolled in the class requesting their participation. This recruitment e-mail explained the purpose and scope of the research, the expectations for participation, and the voluntary nature of students' participation. Of the 22 students enrolled in the class, 14 students agreed to be participants, by giving their informed consent to my review of their writing assignments.

Informed consent was obtained from the students by using an online survey service, *SurveyShare.* The initial e-mail to students included a link to an Online Informed Consent & Demographic Survey. The returned questionnaire identified students by e-mail address, but not by name. I was able to match the names and e-mail addresses to the class enrollment information in the LMS to identify the students who agreed to participate. In order to ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms of all participants were used in data collection and analysis and in the written report.

A copy of the Informed Consent & Demographic Information questionnaire is attached as Appendix C. The research purpose and expectations, risks and benefits, procedures for confidentiality, and voluntarily participation in the research study were clearly stated. If a student did not provide informed consent, I did not use any of the student's data (such as discussion postings or assignment submissions) in the report.

The methods used to collect the different types of data pertaining to the student participants' writing in the online course are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Data Collected From Participants Regarding Student Writing

Method	Interviews	Surveys	Student Artifacts	Student Artifacts	Student Artifacts	Student Artifacts
Participant	Student Interview	Online Writing Survey	Forums	Wiki Toolkit	Unit Plan	Clinical Report
Ellen		✓	✓	✓ Group 1	✓ Ellen, Ann	✓
Ann		✓	✓	✓ Group 1	✓ Ellen, Ann	✓
Barbara	✓	✓	✓	✓ Group 1	✓	✓
Anita		✓	✓	*n/a*	✓	✓
Naomi		✓	✓	*n/a*	✓ Naomi, Amy	✓
Amy		✓	✓	*n/a*	✓ Naomi, Amy	✓
Karen	✓	✓	✓	✓ Group 3	✓	✓
Angela		✓	✓	✓ Group 3	✓	✓
Scott		✓	✓	✓ Group 3	✓	✓
Michael	✓	✓	✓	✓ Group 5	✓Michael, Julie	✓
Julie		✓	✓	✓ Group 5	✓Michael, Julie	✓
Joyce		✓	✓	*n/a*	✓	✓
Marie		✓	✓	*n/a*	*n/a*	✓
Megan		✓	✓	*n/a*	*n/a*	✓

The students for whom no student artifacts were collected, indicated by "n/a" in the wiki toolkit and unit plan columns, were in a group with other students who did not agree to participate in the study.

Questionnaires

Two separate online questionnaires were administered to students in the class using *SurveyShare*. The "Informed Consent & Demographic Information" combined a demographic questionnaire with the online informed consent form. The questionnaire briefly addressed the academic background of each student agreeing to participate in the study, in order to gather data about the make-up of the class. (This information was

necessary as part of identifying the three representative student participants for interviews.) Responding to the questionnaire was voluntary, and students were given the option to confirm that they fully understood any risks or benefits of the study before responding to the questions. The results were collected and tabulated on the *SurveyShare* website and were viewable in an aggregate or individual response format.

A separate e-mail with an electronic link to the second questionnaire – "Online Student Writing Survey" – was sent to those students who previously agreed to participate in the study. The same informed consent procedures were followed to administer this survey, using the *SurveyShare* process, as were used with the demographic questionnaire. The Online Student Writing Survey inquired about students' attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and terminology regarding all types of writing they did in their online class. Maxwell (2002) explained that "accounts of meaning must be based initially on the conceptual framework of the people whose meaning is in question" (p. 49). The purpose of this survey was to develop a context for additional data collection. All 14 student participants responded to the survey. The aggregate student responses provided preliminary information about students' perspectives on their online writing. The data was also used to guide the semi-structured interviews by providing a general context for students' perceptions of writing for their class. The survey included a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions. Students were not asked about their understanding of "genre" specifically, but they were asked about the kinds of writing they saw themselves engaged in for their online class. The Online Student Writing Survey is attached as Appendix E.

Artifacts

Artifacts included a range of texts that were incorporated into the class by the students and the instructor. Early in the data collection process, student artifacts were differentiated from course artifacts. Course artifacts were considered as any course related documents – either generated by the instructor or an outside source – that gave context to student writing. The instructor's assignment directions, comments on assignments, grading rubrics, explanation of course content, and course announcements were gathered as course artifacts to provide a context for interpreting students' writing genres. Student artifacts were considered as any writing within the online space that was generated by students for the class. The participating students' writing assignments were gathered as student artifacts in order to analyze students' writing genres, as outlined by the research objectives. This included the wiki pages, unit plan in *Google Docs*, clinical report, and discussion forum posts.

The artifacts were collected from the university's LMS and from links to a wiki website and *Google Docs*. Collecting artifacts entailed downloading files, obtaining screen shots, and copying/pasting text into word processing documents. Artifacts were collected in an original form (downloaded and/or printed directly from the course) or a modified form (copy/pasted into a word processing document**).** The artifact's form was noted on a Data Inventory Chart I created to document and organize the data collection. Throughout the data collection process, I maintained a research journal describing the rationale for artifacts collected from the online classroom. The research journal was also a space for reflecting on significant insights that occurred during data collection, such as

differentiating between types of artifacts and distinguishing artifacts from observation data, which I found to be a key factor in collecting data from an online class.

The artifacts gathered from the discussion forums included the discussion question and responses between the instructor and students who agreed to be participants. The entire discussion thread was examined to give context to the participants' posts. Nonetheless, only the discussion posts of students who completed an informed consent form were used as data reported on for the study. One option for collecting asynchronous discussion board data was to take "screen shots" of discussion threads, since this preserved the image as it was viewed by the students, but this process displayed students' real names. To ensure confidentiality, I chose to copy and paste text from the discussion board into word processing documents, and then replace student's real names with pseudonyms. Reconfiguring the discussion forum data into a word processing document allowed for more usability as electronic files. Formatting (spacing, fonts, colors, icons) was altered; however, no content was manipulated other than changing participants' names.

Interviews

Interviews of the instructor and three students identified as representative of the overall class enrollment were conducted in order to provide deeper insight into the genres identified in the online class. Interviews are a critically important source of data in qualitative studies in order to gain in-depth knowledge directly from participants (deMarrais, 2004). Information was compiled from the student introductions forum, the students' responses to the demographic survey, and the course participation reports to identify students for interviews.

I reviewed data from the "introductions" discussion thread and from the demographic questionnaire to establish the demographic make-up of students in this online classroom. Information obtained from participating students' responses to the "Getting to Know You" student introductions forum showed that these students ranged from experienced mid-career or retired professionals to recent college graduates just beginning their careers, who were seeking academic preparation in order to pursue a teaching career. Results of the demographic questionnaire showed that each of the participants held a Bachelor's degree in fields other than education; their desired subject area for teaching generally related to their undergraduate discipline.

I applied *maximum variation sampling* (McMillan, 2008) as a purposeful sampling strategy to select the students for interviews based on my review of the demographic data and introductions. One criterion for inclusion as a potential interviewee was experience with online learning. I expected that the experience of students who were new to online learning would be different from students who were more accustomed to online learning. In order to explore experiences of students on both ends of the continuum, at least one of the representative students selected was new to online learning and at least one of the representative students was more experienced with the online learning environment. Information about the number of previous online courses each participant had taken came from the demographic questionnaire. Another criterion in selecting interview participants using maximum variation sampling was the frequency and length (highest, median, least) of the students' posts to the five content-oriented discussion forums [Forums 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3B] that had been completed at this point in

the research. An Activity Report generated by the LMS provided the number of each student's posts.

Table 2 demonstrates the student participants' demographic data that was collected and analyzed to identify for interviews those students who appeared to be most representative of the class enrollment.

Table 2: Student Participants' Demographic Data

Name	Years Since Bachelor's Degree	Undergraduate Major	Desired Subject Area	Gender	Prior Online Classes	# of Posts
Ellen	4-7	English	English	F	4-6	40
Joyce	8-10	Computers	Math	F	4-6	21
Naomi	4-7	English	English	F	7+	31
Karen	**4-7**	**Biology**	**Science**	**F**	**4-6**	**33**
Barbara	**11+**	**Government**	**English**	**F**	**0**	**23**
Julie	11+	History	History	F	0	28
Anita	11+	English	English	F	0	21
Ann	4-7	Art	English	F	4-6	29
Michael	**1-3**	**History**	**Social Studies**	**M**	**0**	**17**
Angela	4-7	Biology	Science	F	0	20
Marie	11+	Psychology	Science	F	0	42
Megan	4-7	History	Science	F	7+	*20*
Scott	11+	Physics	Science	M	1-3	*20*
Amy	1-3	Communications	English	F	0	*20*
Total: 14						

Note: Names and demographic information of students selected for interviews are highlighted.

In order to facilitate scheduling interviews, the interview participants were also selected based on their residence within 60 miles of the UNC Charlotte campus and available options for coordinating our schedules. Based on this combined information related to the participants, I identified for interviews eight potential students as representative of the class make-up: five female students with less experience online, two female students with more experience online, and one male student. An e-mail was sent to each of these participants to inquire about their willingness to provide recorded

interviews and to explain the expectations and voluntary nature of their participation and purpose for collecting the interview data. Of these, three students responded: one of the lesser experienced online students (Barbara), one of the more experienced online students (Karen), and the male student (Michael). I followed up with each student by telephone to reiterate the information stated in the e-mail and to schedule the face-to-face recorded interview. The students who agreed to participate in interviews are as follows:

Barbara. Barbara has a Bachelor's degree in Political Science that she completed over 20 years ago. She had a successful career in banking, but she was not employed at the time of the interview. Her plans were to teach high school English. This was Barbara's first online class. Her posts numbered in the median range.

Karen. Karen has a Bachelor's degree in Biology that she completed four years ago. She earned a Master's in Public Health over one year ago, but she had been unable to find employment in the field. She was working on a graduate certificate so she could teach Science at the secondary school level. Karen was experienced with online learning. Her number of posts were in the mid- to high range.

Michael. Michael has a Bachelor's degree in History that he completed within the last year. He was working on a graduate certificate so he could teach Social Studies. This was Michael's first online class. He had the lowest number of posts of the student participants.

Interviews were held at a mutually agreed upon place and time. Barbara's interview was conducted at a local coffee shop at her request. This was more convenient for her than traveling to campus, since she was taking only online classes. Interviews of Karen and Michael were held at in the College of Education conference room at the

university campus, since they each had a class on campus as well as online. The instructor was interviewed at his campus office. Barbara's interview was roughly an hour and twenty minutes, Karen's interview was fifty minutes, and Michael's interview was thirty minutes. Notably, the varied length of the interviews actually corresponds to their activity in the discussion forums. The instructor interview was approximately one hour and thirty minutes. The instructor's elaborations on the various dimensions of this online class are also of note when taking into consideration that he has published a book chapter on the development of the course. Written informed consent forms were obtained from the student interview participants and from the class instructor. The written Informed Consent forms for the instructor and student interview participants are attached as Appendix D.

During the interviews, I used an interview guide that included descriptive and evaluative questions. A descriptive question asks participants to tell "what happened;" an evaluative question asks how the participants "feel" or what they "think" about what happened (deMarrais, 2004). Each of the students interviewed were asked about the writing they did in all aspects of the class. The purpose of interviewing the instructor was to gather information needed to establish a context for the course subject matter and the writing genres present in the course. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Copies of the interview transcripts were provided to the participants to confirm the accuracy of my transcription. The interview guide is attached as Appendix F. As Maxwell (2002) explains, "interpretive accounts are grounded in the language of the people studied and rely as much as possible on their own words and concepts" (p. 49).

Interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended in order to focus on kinds of writing, while giving participants opportunity to elaborate on their responses.

Observations

Observation data was part of developing a context for understanding the genres that students enact in their online writing. Observations were conducted of three synchronous class meetings I attended and recorded in field notes. Archives of the synchronous meetings were accessible from the LMS after the meetings had actually occurred, but the archived files did not preserve the original format of the sessions. An mp3 file of each synchronous class meeting was downloaded from the LMS to provide an audio record. A record of the chat messages for each session, including meetings I did not attend, was downloaded in a spreadsheet format. The slide presentation files for each session were downloaded separately. Observations were also conducted of instructor podcasts and videos and recorded in field notes. Instructor podcasts and videos were downloaded as media files.

An observation checklist was used for the first two synchronous meetings I attended. I used the checklist technique for note taking on two other occasions to conduct observations of asynchronous data – the instructor's "Welcome Video" podcast and the "Getting to Know You" introduction forum. I later switched to a less restrictive technique of recording my observations and impressions of the online course in the research journal that I maintained as an electronic document on my laptop computer.

The sources of data generated from the case study research were subjected to a rigorous and systematic data analysis, described in the following section.

Data Analysis Methods

The data collected from the questionnaire, interviews, observations, and artifacts were analyzed using inductive analysis based on themes and categories that were generated from the research objectives and from the data. Inductive analysis follows an iterative process that progresses from levels of identification to interpretation. Because inductive analysis is applied to written text, this method was appropriate for analyzing the textual data collected in this study of students' online writing. According to Thomas (2003), a general inductive approach is a "systematic procedure for analyzing qualitative data where the analysis is guided by specific objectives" (p. 2). The focus of inductive analysis is identifying categories that capture key themes (Thomas, 2003). A process of organizing data into categories based on themes has also been put forth by Coffey and Atkinson (1996). The themes can be based on the research objectives, on the theoretical framework guiding the study, on specific concepts inherent to the data, or on a combination of these (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Thomas, 2003).

The process of inductive analysis explained by Thomas (2003) begins with identifying text segments that contain meaning units. The next step is to identify and define categories – general upper level categories are derived from the research objectives, and specific lower level categories emerge from multiple readings of the data. Using in vivo coding, codes are created from meaning units or from actual phrases used in specific text segments. Categories are revised as needed to reflect subtopics or contradictory positions (Thomas, 2003).

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) outlined a similar process of identifying levels of categories in order to organize the data and develop corresponding codes. For the first,

most general level, the researcher segments data into broad categories and then codes the data according to these categories. In the next level, subcategories are generated from the general categories, so the data is further segmented and codes are attached. The breakdown of the levels of categories according to this approach is illustrated in Figure 2.

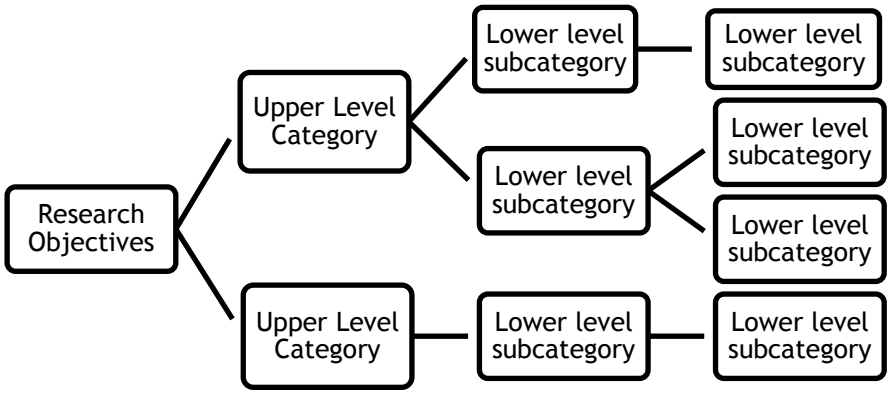


Figure 2: Levels of Categories for Data Analysis

Codes may come from participants' exact words, a summary of what participants are describing at specific points in the data, or a summary of the research interests identified in a specific section of the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The researcher determines from the data what additional levels of detail are necessary. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) emphasized that the researcher must focus on exploring and linking data segments with other segments, not just on labeling data.

Analyzing and Coding the Data

Data analysis occurred throughout the data collection process in order to ensure that the interpretations developed in the analysis would be consistent with the data (Namey et al., 2007). A meta-analysis of the research process was recorded in a research journal that I maintained throughout the entire process of data collection and analysis.

(My research journal took the form of a word processing file that I periodically printed as a paper copy and reviewed.) The research journal also documented how categories and codes were determined. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) acknowledged how analytical ideas are often developed in the process of representing the data.

The process of analyzing the data collected in my study followed the coding strategies explained by Thomas (2003) and by Coffey and Atkinson (1996). Thomas (2003) stated that "the outcome from an inductive analysis is the development of categories into a model or framework that summarizes raw data and conveys key themes and processes" (p. 4). The key themes were derived from the research objectives, and these themes formed the upper level broad categories: Audience, Purpose, Process, Knowledge of Expectations, and Experience. Genre analysis theory pertaining to the research questions informed the levels of categories used to analyze the data.

The analysis involved closely reading and rereading the texts – questionnaires, interviews, observations, and artifacts – to identify lower level subcategories. For example, the research objective "Rhetorical Situations Online" generated the upper level category "Audience." Based on a combination of my close reading and upper level analysis of the data, lower level subcategories emerged from the theme/category of Audience: "instructor," "self," "others," and "classmates." From the subcategory "classmates," more detailed levels of subcategories arose: "all classmates," "specific classmates," and "group members." The same process was applied for the other four themes, or categories – Purpose, Process, Knowledge of Expectations, and Experience. A code chart documented the lists of codes developed from the categories. The research journal and code chart were maintained for purposes of interpretive validity (Johnson,

1997). In the eventual analysis of the data and determination of findings, these upper level categories were expanded into a declarative statement of my finding relative to that theme, and the lower level categories were developed into categories supporting the themes.

For the first level of coding, the codes based on the upper level categories were applied to the text. I coded copies of the interview transcripts by applying the appropriate upper level codes to the data segments using a color-coded highlighting approach. Since the transcribed recorded interviews and other data gathered from the online course were in electronic form, I was able to code some segments of the data – for example, discussion forum postings and grade book comments – by using the "cut and paste" function in a word processing program, where I matched the data segments to the appropriate upper level code. I also utilized the "Find" function in the word processing program to search for and locate specific terms in the interview transcripts. Ultimately, I decided to use a color-coded tab and highlighting system to apply codes to paper copies of data, specifically, the student artifacts and course artifacts.

For the next level of coding, the codes based on the lower level subcategories were applied to the text. I coded the data by handwriting the appropriate lower level codes in the margins next to the highlighted and tabbed data segments. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) emphasized that the coding procedure is reflexive, not linear. A text segment may be coded into more than one category when warranted (Thomas, 2003) and codes for subcategories may overlap (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), and I found this to be the case. The data that had overlapping codes were considered separately relative to the categories that pertained to these different codes.

Codes were compared between different sources within the data to explore similarities and differences (Namey et al., 2007). For example, codes generated from interviews were cross-referenced with codes from artifacts. Connections between codes – whether data-driven or theory-driven – guide how data are reviewed and organized. Writing up the analysis entails building a narrative grounded in the actual data. Including relevant quotes from the textual data, comparing findings to the literature, and graphically illustrating relationships serves to corroborate and provide evidence for the interpretation of the data analysis (Namey et al., 2007). Including quotes from the data further illustrates the meaning of categories (Thomas, 2003).

Limitations

A limitation of the study is that not all of the students who actually are enrolled in the course agreed to participate. Only the discussion posts of participating students were used as observation data reported on for the study, omitting the posts of students from whom Informed Consent was not obtained, which somewhat diminished the context for participants' posts. Another limitation is that codes were not subject to undergoing intercoder agreement, since I was the only researcher coding the data.

Research Reliability

To establish reliability in qualitative research is to affirm the authenticity of data collection and the trustworthiness and credibility of data interpretation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). According to Ezzy (2002), "qualitative research is considered trustworthy and rigorous when the researcher demonstrates that he or she has worked to understand the situated nature of participants' interpretations and meanings" (p. 80). This study utilized multiple procedures that are fully recounted in the research report in order to ensure reliability. Triangulation supported reliability by using several methods to gather

data from different sources and examining the data for corroborating evidence (Johnson, 1997; Creswell & Miller, 2000, DePew, 2007). Member checking of transcripts and researcher reflexivity further served to ensure reliability.

Procedures to confirm authenticity, or descriptive validity (Johnson, 1997), entailed a thorough and systematic process of obtaining a comprehensive data set relative to the research objectives, which for this study included taking screen shots of significant areas of the online classroom, preparing word processing documents to demonstrate discussion threads, downloading writing assignments, taking screenshots of assignments and instructor comments, and recording and transcribing interviews. Procedures to establish trustworthiness and credibility, or interpretive validity (Johnson, 1997), included keeping copies of field notes, method logs, and code books and the techniques of thick, rich description and verbatim participant statements in the report narrative. For Maxwell (2002), "interpretive validity is inherently a matter of inference from the words and actions of participants in the situations studied" (p. 49). Generalizability typically expected with quantitative research is not critical to the validity of qualitative research (Johnson, 1997).

As a qualitative researcher, I needed to be aware of my subjective positions to avoid making connections and interpretations that merely supported my assumptions of how the class unfolded for the students. Johnson (1997) suggested that researcher bias can undermine validity through allowing personal perspectives to direct how data is observed, recorded, and interpreted. Through *reflexivity*, I strived to actively acknowledge my own biases and preconceptions (Johnson, 1997). A strategy for such critical self-reflection was to monitor my perspectives by specifically recording these

impressions in my research journal as they occurred and by including my personal expectations and reactions in interview summaries.

Subjectivity Statement

As a faculty member in the general studies department of a proprietary university geared toward non-traditional students, I have over eight years of experience teaching online and on-ground courses. I recognize that when students take a course in an online platform instead of a classroom setting, students' engagement happens in their writing to the instructor, to each other, and for assignments. I view the online learning environment as privileging print literacy, consequently overly challenging students with strong auditory literacy skills, valuable skills in a face-to-face class but less beneficial online.

Several years ago, I participated in the Summer Institute of the National Writing Project at the regional university where my study was conducted. This experience transformed my understanding of the teaching of writing. I came away from the Writing Project with a powerful sense that writing is a social act that can empower student writers to create their own meanings through their writing. I began valuing student writing differently. I became aware of the importance of looking closely at the language students use to convey their ideas and express their thoughts, to try to understand their motivations for writing. My expectations shifted from evaluating whether student writers adequately reproduced a written piece that conformed to the requirements of an assignment, to whether the students had made an intentional effort to use writing to communicate, to make themselves understood to readers, and to develop their own understanding as writers. I acknowledge that the lens I used to examine student writing is influenced by my

professional experience as an online instructor combined with the pedagogical stance of a "Writing Project teacher."

Risks, Benefits, & Ethical Considerations

Potential risks to the participating students ranged from minimal to non-existent. An ethical consideration was that students were not aware of exactly what I viewed when I was logged into the class. Confidentiality was addressed by using pseudonyms in the research report to protect students' privacy. I obtained Informed Consent and IRB approval for the study (see Appendices C & D). Only data pertaining to those students who gave Informed Consent were part of the research report. The participants did not derive a direct benefit from participating in the study. However, the analysis of the results of this study may guide institutions in making informed decisions about ways to improve instructional practices in online courses based on an analysis of design strategies deemed most beneficial to adult online learners.

Summary

This chapter explained the methodology to examine the online class as a single case study, which entailed utilizing methods of qualitative research to explore the student's perspective of the writing genres students enacted. My researcher role was as a participant observer, since I was able to log in to the class and observe all areas of the online classroom, including asynchronous discussions and synchronous class meetings. Of the 22 students enrolled in the class, 14 students participated by responding to questionnaires and permitting their online activity and writing assignments to be reviewed and analyzed for the purposes of the study. Three students who were deemed representative of the overall class enrollment were interviewed. The instructor was

considered a participant and was also interviewed. To analyze the data, an inductive approach was applied that coded the data into upper level categories based on the research objectives and lower level categories that emerged from the data. Research reliability was achieved through triangulation of the data using multiple data collection methods and a systematic coding and analysis of the data collected.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I present the findings from the data collected for the study. The presentation of the data is organized around themes arising from the research questions.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, I describe the data collected in the study and explain its significance. The writings of students enrolled in an online class were interpreted through a qualitative analysis of data that was systematically collected using an online questionnaire, class observations, teacher and student interviews, and retrieval of artifacts located within the learning management system for the course. A process of inductive analysis was applied by identifying general themes pertinent to the research objectives and grouping data into categories based on these themes and specific concepts that emerged from the data. Chapter Four begins by providing a description of the writing assignments in the online class and a description of the students interviewed. The next section of the chapter identifies and discusses six key themes that emerged from the data. These themes, which reveal the experiences of the online student participants in this case study, are discussed in detail using representative segments selected from the data. The chapter concludes with a summary of the overall research findings.

Description of Writing Assignments in the Online Class

All of the writing assignments were located in an Internet environment – either within the classroom space, outside the classroom space, or both. The assignments were created on screen by students using written text and were presented asynchronously, allowing for anytime access by instructor or students. These Internet tools provided multiple spaces for students' writing within the context of the online class. Students

posted written responses to the discussion forums and electronically submitted writing assignments directly to the Learning Management System (LMS) that was the delivery platform for this online class. Students also created wiki pages and prepared documents in *Google Docs*. Several characteristics were shared by each of the writing assignments: the assignments were focused around a specific topic initiated by the instructor, students were expected to provide written responses, and instructor comments were incorporated into the written documents for the students' review and responses.

The LMS used for the delivery of this course differentiated "Assignments" from "Forums." However, the discussion forums were categorized as an assignment by the course syllabus, instructor, and students. Under the heading "Assignments," the syllabus listed "Course Discussion Forums," "Literacy Toolkit Wiki," "Literacy Integration Unit," and a "Clinical Tutoring Assignment." Course Discussion Forums were assigned weekly. The other three major writing assignments were projects divided into parts spread out over the semester. Both Barbara and the instructor referred to these as "the bigger assignments." Karen described the discussions as "more like your everyday work."

The significance of the writing assignments in this class relative to my study is that each assignment was informed by computer-mediated communication (CMC) to some degree. A breakdown of the computer mediated characteristics of the online class assignments is presented in Figure 3.

Assignment	CMC			
	Where	***When***	***Who***	***What***
Discussions	Internet environment within the classroom space, i.e. Moodle LMS	asynchronous allows for anytime access by students and instructor	viewable by all students and instructor	presented on screen by instructor/ student and student/ student using written text instructor creates text space for discussion within LMS
Wiki	Internet environment outside classroom space, i.e. PBworks	asynchronous allows for anytime access by authorized users	viewable by some students and instructor with login access (student groups & instructor)	presented on screen by students using written text students populate text for discussion within LMS
Unit Plan	Internet environment outside the classroom space, i.e. Google Docs	asynchronous allows for anytime access by authorized users	viewable by some students and instructor with login access (student groups & instructor)	presented on screen by students using written text students populate text for discussion within LMS
Clinical Report	uploaded as a word processing document to assignment function, i.e. LMS	asynchronous allows for anytime access *after student's submission*	viewable by student and instructor *after student's submission*	presented in a word processing document by students

Figure 3: Computer Mediated Characteristics of Online Class Assignments

The students' posts to the discussion forums in the LMS clearly encompassed the elements of computer mediated communication. The Literacy Toolkit Wiki assignment embodied CMC through its very nature as an Internet medium that can mediate different genres.. The wiki project also entailed computer mediated communication through the work group discussion forum, which was set up by the instructor and used by students

specifically for the purpose of communicating about the development of the project. The Literacy Integration Unit Plan assignment reflected CMC through utilizing the web-based applications *Google Docs* and *Jing*. The unit plan project further demonstrated computer mediated communication through the discussion forums set up by the instructor and used by students to communicate about progress on the assignment. The process of preparing the Clinical Tutoring Assignment did not entail computer mediated communication in the same sense as the wiki or unit plan, which students created by using web applications. However, the tutoring report assignment involved CMC after submission of the word processing document to the Internet based LMS made it accessible and viewable by both the student and instructor. An overview of the writing assignments in the online class is shown in Figure 4.

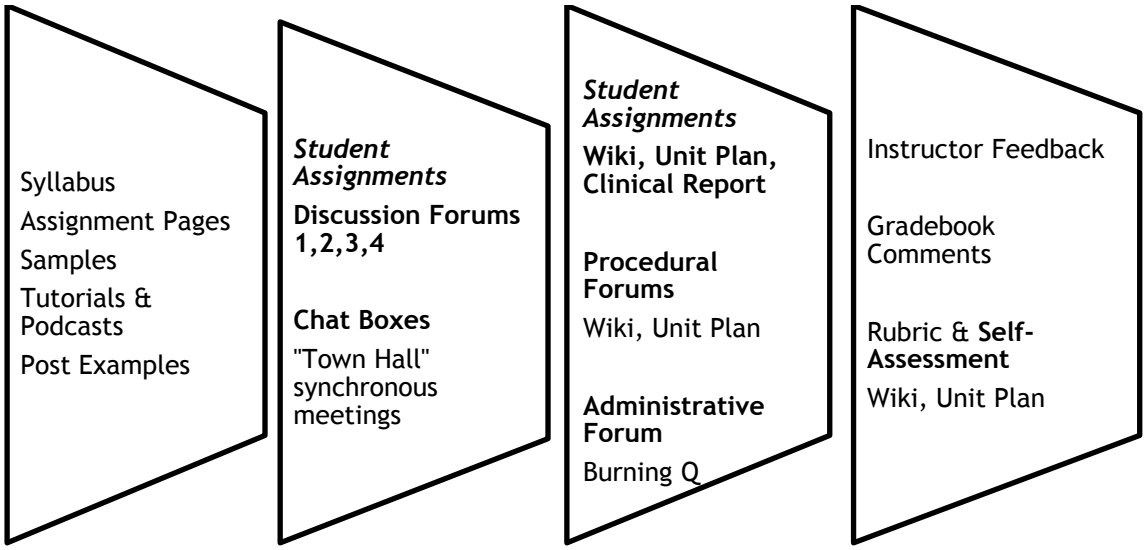


Figure 4: Overview of Writing Assignments in the Online Class

The instructor explained in the recorded interview how the assignments fit together to achieve the course objectives and build upon the learning experience in the previous assignment:

> I really have some key learning goals, in a nutshell to equip the students to be more effective in meeting the literacy and learning needs of diverse learners that they're going to teach in the courses that they'll teach. I look at the assignments as a vehicle for that.

Each of these assignments entailed a significant amount of writing to present the information involved with the project. Detailed descriptions are offered in this section to provide background for the discussion and analysis of the rhetorical aspects of these assignments.

For the Literacy Toolkit Wiki assignment, students created a wiki of instructional ideas and tools selected for a specific subject area. The Literacy Toolkit Wiki project involved students participating in a group discussion forum, creating the wiki webpage, and completing a rubric/self-assessment that was submitted to the LMS. The course syllabus stated:

> The Literacy Toolkit is a wiki of instructional ideas and tools selected by groups of 4 to 5 students for use in one or two subject areas. The core idea behind this assignment is for students in single subject area or related areas to take practical resources into their teaching they can use to support subject-specific literacy and learning. Students will use a free wiki site (PBWorks) to organize strategies to help middle and secondary students with comprehension and vocabulary learning as well as texts and websites useful for teaching and learning. This assignment

> will be graded at two points in time—a midway progress report and discussion with a certain number of required elements to be completed and a final assessment of the entire toolkit.

The instructor viewed the toolkit wiki as "a place to think about, gather, and present teaching strategies and texts and websites and things they could use in their teaching." The wiki, discussion forum, and rubric for three out of the seven wiki groups were reviewed, since data were only collected for students who agreed to participate in the study. Representative features of the students' writing for the assignment are included in the report of the study.

In the Literacy Integration Unit assignment, students created a unit plan to integrate literacy learning into a specific subject area. The Literacy Integration Unit Plan assignment involved students participating in a group discussion forum, creating the unit plan in *Google Docs*, preparing a *Jing* screencast presentation, and completing a rubric/self-assessment that was submitted to the LMS. The course syllabus stated:

> The Literacy Integration Unit provides individual students or small groups of students the opportunity to create a teachable unit for use in their classrooms. Unlike units you may have developed for other courses, this unit does not look at daily lesson plans but rather at key texts, assignments, goals, and assessments for a unit. The focus of this unit will be on unit-level planning with support for literacy and learning (you will NOT be submitting step-by-step daily lesson plans). This grade for this assignment will be broken into three parts: a unit overview/outline, an in-progress presentation of your unit, and a final deadline and assessment.

As the instructor explained, the unit plan provided a means to take the literacy tools from the wiki and "put them in to practice, at least theoretically, in an instructional unit. It's not super heavy on lesson plans, but it's conceptual. It's a conceptual unit." The unit plan, discussion forums, and rubric for three groups and six individual students who agreed to participate in the study were reviewed and analyzed. Representative elements of the students' writing for the assignment are included in this report.

For the Clinical Tutoring Assignment, students prepared a midterm report and final report that documented and described their experience of tutoring a middle or secondary grade student in their subject area. The course syllabus stated:

> Students will document learning by developing a simple lesson plan for each tutoring session and gathering documents from the tutoring. These will be shared in a written report and evaluated at two points during the semester, near the midterm and end of the semester.

The instructor described the clinical tutoring project as a "one-on-one tutoring experience in their content area drawing on some of the teaching and learning strategies that come out of the course in working with kids." The reports for each of the student participants were reviewed and analyzed. Representative elements of the students' writing for the assignment are included in the report of the study.

Although the LMS distinguished between assignments and forums, the course syllabus and grade book categorized discussion forums as an assignment. These text-based discussions were comprised of an initial instructor question or prompt, students' responsive posts, and additional instructor responses. The course syllabus stated:

> Each discussion entry will typically have several required responses including original postings based on the assigned readings or activities and responses to other students' entries. Think of these as in-depth conversations about important topics regarding teaching and learning. As such, each student will contribute their own ideas and respond to the ideas of others.

There were different types of forums in the course – content forums and procedural, administrative forums. The instructor stated, "I see the main forums as the graded ones, which is a kind of participation. Those tend to be the content related ones. They tend to be Forum 1A. I view them as grand conversations."

The four procedural discussion forums facilitated the development of two writing assignments, but these forums were not graded. According to the instructor, the ungraded procedural/administrative type forums "tend to be like groups talking." The discussion posts for each of the student participants were reviewed and analyzed. Representative discussion posts are included in the report of the study.

The instructor's notion of "conversation" was more conceptual for the content forums, implying discourse in the field, whereas conversation within the procedural forums was considered conversation in a more colloquial sense. These different views were shared by the student participants as well, as recounted in their interviews, and relates to ways genres operated in the online class discussions.

The Course Discussion Forums required weekly student posts to discussions based on the readings and key course concepts. In weeks 1 and 2 of the course, Forums 1A and 1B related to the students' personal experiences with literacy and literacy learning. Forums 2A, 2B, and 3B, discussed in weeks 3, 4, and 6 of the course, were

concerned with scholarly and professional articles about the teaching of literacy. In Forum 3A, students discussed their views on the teachability of a book they each had selected based on its appropriateness for young readers. Students also participated in forums called "Book Circles" to discuss their impressions of one of a group of books geared toward young readers. In the next to last week of the course, students' posts to Forum 4 were based on the "This I Believe" National Public Radio website. Students were asked in this discussion to share their beliefs about literacy and teaching.

This range of content discussions represented more than just different topics. Discussion forum prompts called on students to enact a different genre, text type, or register in their responses, relative to the prompt itself. Forums 1A, 1B, and Forum 4 evoked the personal narrative as a text type, but while Forum 1A and Forum 4 suggested students respond with the more traditional essay genre, Forum 1B maximized CMC through its use of a unique web genre – a digital autobiographical timeline linked to a public access website. The three forums focusing on scholarly articles suggested a more formal register, whereas the book discussion forum induced an informal register.

The class also relied on two ungraded administrative discussion forums, one that supported students by providing a forum for student introductions, and one to ask course related questions. The "Getting to Know You" forum was for personal introductions by the students and the instructor. Students actively participated in the introduction forum during the first two weeks of the class semester. The "Burning Questions" forum was used for student questions about the course. The questions posed by students were answered by the instructor, by other students, or both. This forum was active during all 16 weeks of the semester, as students familiarized themselves with the course in week 1

and completed their final assignments in week 16. These different types of asynchronous discussion forums presented a variety of rhetorical situations, so opened up occasions for students to practice different types of genres, text types, or registers in their online writing, depending on what the situation required of students.

For the synchronous sessions, the instructor and most students participated by using audio headsets and a microphone. PowerPoint slides were presented by the instructor, who also used an on-screen white board to highlight screen text. Figure 5 shows a screenshot of a synchronous session I attended. The synchronous sessions simulated face-to-face class meetings by occurring in "real time," so that students could see the white board and slide presentation and hear the instructor speak to the class.

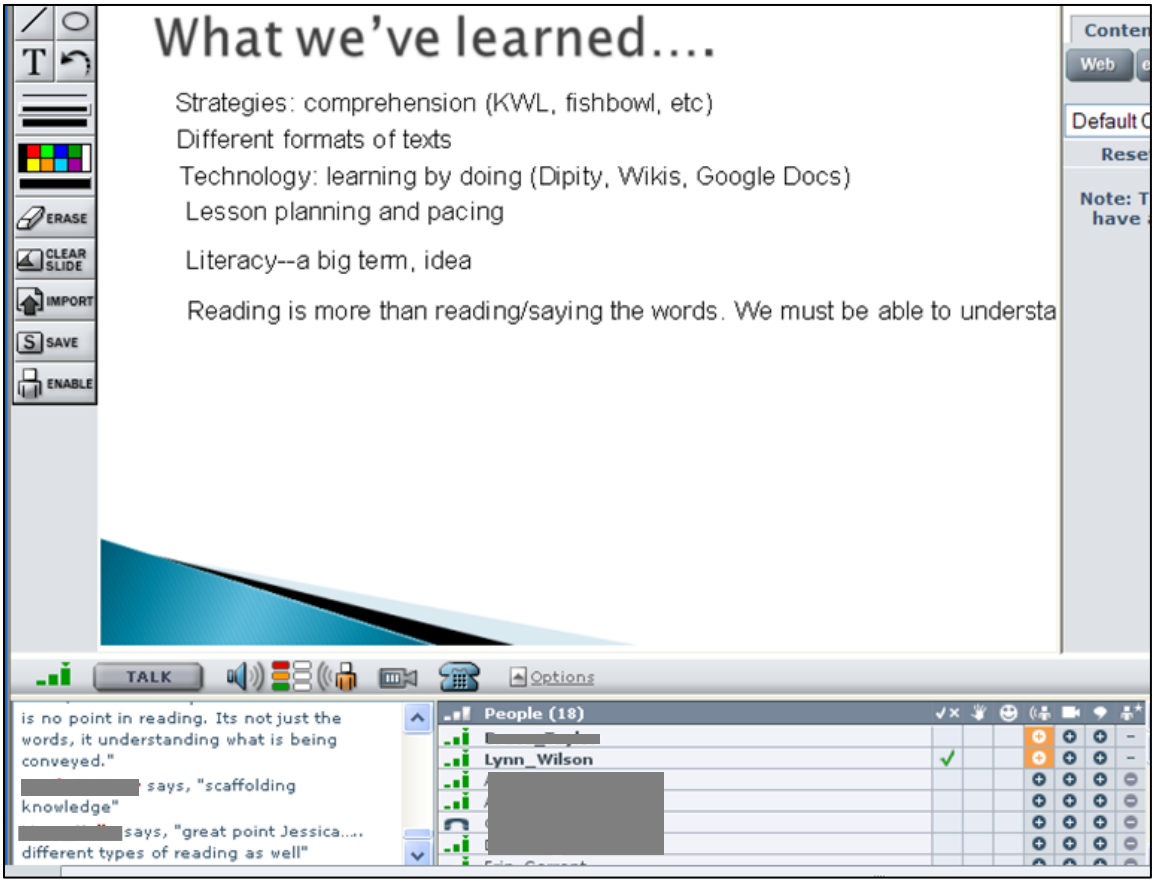


Figure 5: Screenshot of Synchronous Session

Also shown in Figure 5 are two students' responses to each other's chat posts. Many students interacted through the Chat Box, the most significant element of the synchronous sessions in terms of student writing. The Chat Box allowed students to write to each other, to the instructor, or to the entire class in a CMC setting. The Chat Logs retrieved from these class meetings represent a written dialogue between participants with rapid shifts in register.

The instructor explained that he had the option of restricting or limiting students' access to the chat box; however, he chose not to do so. He stated, "I see that as a really vital part of the community that they're able to chat and talk." Using the Chat Box during these sessions was optional, so some students were highly active users, and others used chat less frequently.

As discussed in the methodology chapter, the case study considered the data collected from this online class as a whole, relying on data in the form of questionnaire responses, observations, and artifacts pertaining to student participants in order to arrive at the findings outlined in this chapter. As a means of examining the overall data more closely, three students who were considered representative of the students enrolled in this particular online class were interviewed for the study.

Description of Students Interviewed

General descriptions of the three representative students, circumstances of their interviews, and reasons for taking this online class are provided in this section.

Barbara

The interview with Barbara was held in a coffee shop near her home, since she preferred not driving to campus. Her interview lasted the longest of the three student

interviews, about one and half hours. In part, the lengthiness may have been because hers was the first interview, although this may have also been because she was the most talkative of the three students. Barbara is a very witty, vivacious person. She smiled and laughed frequently during the time we spent together. She is in her early fifties. She has a son away at college, a son in high school, and a son in elementary school. She is originally from El Paso, Texas. She is bilingual, as her mother is from Mexico, and she grew up speaking both Spanish and English. Barbara has a Bachelor's degree in Political Science. She had a successful career in banking, but she was not currently working. Her plans are to teach high school English. She is very well read; she referred several times to a book she was reading by psychologist Erich Fromm, and she spoke knowledgeably about texts related to the unit plan she was creating on the Victorian period.

This was Barbara's first online class, which she was taking for the Master's in Teaching program. She said she would prefer a face-to-face class, since she likes "the spontaneity of a class." She said she has taken many college courses over the years in subjects that interested her. Her reason for taking this course online was convenience, since she lives across town from the university campus.

Michael

The interview with Michael was held in the College of Education conference room at the university where the students were enrolled in this course. Michael lived near the campus, and since he had a class on campus that morning, we met after his class. His interview lasted about 30 minutes and was the third of the three student interviews. Michael is an intelligent, serious person. His demeanor was pleasant and cooperative, but he smiled just a few times during the interview. He is probably in his early twenties.

Michael has a Bachelor's degree in History that he completed within the last year at the same university where he was taking this course. He was working on a graduate certificate so he could teach Social Studies. This was Michael's first online class. His reason for enrolling in the online class was so he could schedule four classes that semester, two online and two on campus.

Karen

The interview with Karen was held in the College of Education conference room at the university where the students were enrolled in this course. Karen lived over an hour away from the campus, but since she had a class on campus that evening, we met prior to her class. Her interview lasted about 50 minutes and was the second of the three student interviews. Karen is a bright, cheerful person. She smiled often during our time together. She is probably in her mid-twenties, and she lives in the small rural town where she grew up, about 45 miles west of the university campus. Karen has a Bachelor's degree in Biology that she completed four years ago. She earned a Master's in Public Health over one year ago, but she had been unable to find employment in the field. She plans to teach high school Biology, and she was in the process of interviewing at area high schools, including the school she had attended.

Karen was taking this course for a graduate teaching certificate. She considered herself experienced with online classes, stating, "I've been familiar with them for quite a while." Karen seemed to be very exact and precise; she referred several times to concerns about formatting problems with the technologies she used in the class. Her reason for enrolling in online classes was convenience, due to her commute.

The perspectives of the students selected for interviews (Barbara, Karen, and Michael) provide a context for analyzing the rhetorical situations for students' writing. I consider what Barbara, Karen, and Michael said in the interviews and survey in relation to what they wrote in their discussion posts in order to establish a framework for evaluating the nature of their writing for the other assignments. The findings pertaining to the three interview participants are compared to selected survey responses, discussion posts, and other writing assignments of the additional 11 student participants to analyze the rhetorical situations for students' online classroom writing.

Research Findings

There were six major themes that emerged in the data that I collected for my qualitative case study: 1) online students' audiences for their writing are shaped by computer mediated communication; 2) online students' purposes for their writing are dependent on personal goals; 3) online students' socialization into academic and professional writing genres is supported by computer mediated communication; 4) online students' perceptions of the genres for their writing are based on perceived purposes; 5) Online students' processes for writing assignments correlate to the medium and genre; 6) Online students enact reproduced, adapted, and novel web genres. These key themes were further divided into categories. To present data, Thomas (2003) suggested reporting the data using the upper-level category labels for section headings and the specific category labels for sub-headings. Following this organizational strategy, the section headings in Chapter 4 from this point forward reflect the main coding categories (the themes), and the sub-headings reflect specific categories. In the following section, the

data representing each of the themes and subsequent categories are described and discussed in the context of the research questions.

Online Students' Audiences for Their Writing are Shaped by CMC

The data that I collected in this case study revealed that computer mediated communication shapes online students' audiences for their writing. In this section, I identify and describe the audience for each of the assignments – wiki, unit plan, clinical report, and discussions – based on course artifacts, student artifacts, and student interviews. Additionally, responses to the Online Writing Survey pertaining to the discussion forums are presented.

The assignments in this class were constructed in a manner that positioned the instructor as the primary audience for students' writing. Group work was required for the toolkit wiki, so the group and the instructor were the audience. Groups were optional for the unit plan, so for this assignment, the instructor was the only audience, other than group members for those who chose a group. The clinical report was an individual assignment, and the instructor was again situated as the primary audience for students' writing.

The discussion forums were the only space within the online class where the entire class was the audience for students' writing. In the discussion forums, each student's interplay with the discussion question and responses was visible to the instructor and other students. While the conditions of the online classroom environment implied a broader audience that included all the students, the perception of the audience for discussions differed among students.

Instructor as audience.

As noted, the instructor was always a part of the audience for the wiki and unit plan assignments, in addition to the group members, since the instructor also had access to the students' wiki page in *PBWorks* and unit plan in *Google Docs*. No other students could view the wiki or unit plan, other than group members.

Karen acknowledged that using *Google Docs* to work on an individual assignment felt somewhat unusual to her. As she explained, "Normally I would go to a Word document when I'm working on an assignment. And so it has been kind of different for me to work on it by myself and know that my professor has access to it at all times, too." She admitted that knowing the instructor had access to her rough draft "does cross my mind a lot as I might be working on it," but she recognized that "he's going to expect me to be going in there and editing and stuff so it doesn't really factor in too much in my thinking." Nonetheless, Karen seemed reassured about writing the unit plan without the pressure of having an audience before her work was ready. She stated, "I don't feel that he'd go in and comment while we're editing. And I don't feel like he really looks at it until the due date, which I think is good." Karen was correct; the dates shown on the instructor's comments were after the assignment due date. However, the awareness of an audience for a work in progress, like the unit plan in *Google Docs*, had been a concern for Karen earlier in the process. In the Burning Questions forum, she posted,

> I have been working on my unit plan in *Google Docs* and know that our Overview, Map, and Outline are due tomorrow. I have also been putting ideas in the other sections of the unit but wondered if we needed delete these notes in our *Google Docs* for the purposes of our Unit Overview due tomorrow--can we just

> separate our "finished" sections via a divider line so we can keep having everything in our *Google Doc*?

The instructor responded,

> Just leave it as is. It's fine to have more than you need in your unit at this point. I will pay attention to the intro, topic, and unit design map. Please, continue to work on other sections.

Writing the unit plan within *Google Docs* established a situation where a student's completed work, ready for the instructor's review, was present alongside the student's unpolished, draft work.

Barbara also completed the unit plan individually, but her perspective of what made using *Google Docs* for an assignment different from writing directly into a word processing document did not concern using *Google Docs* for group work. She said, "The way that it's different is that [the instructor] can see it any time he wants. I don't have to turn things into him like you would in a traditional classroom. He just goes online and says 'I hope she's working on it because I haven't seen anything new lately.' " The instructor did not post any comments before the draft was due, but Barbara explained that it did not bother her knowing the instructor had real time access to her writing. From Barbara's standpoint, "As long as it's a work in progress, I really don't care what [the instructor] thinks. I'm concerned with the final product. If he sees that I've struggled, so what […] He'll evaluate the final product."

Students completed the clinical tutoring project independently. Unlike the wiki and unit plan, the instructor became the audience for the clinical report assignment only

after it was submitted to the assignment function in the LMS. No other students could view the reports.

With regard to the discussion forums, one of the Online Student Writing Survey items asked students to respond to the statement: *I consider my instructor as the audience for my writing in the online class discussions.* Four students disagreed, eight agreed, and two strongly agreed. Michael and Karen agreed, and Barbara strongly agreed, as shown in Figure 6.

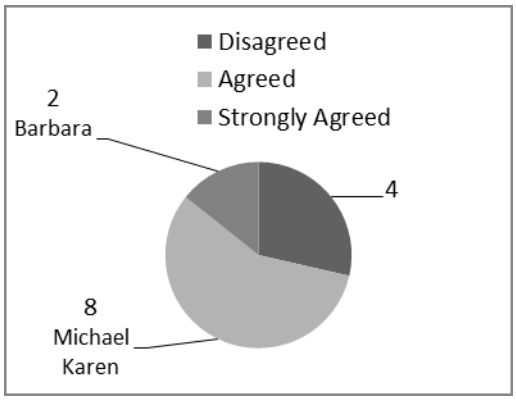


Figure 6: Instructor as Audience

In the interview, I asked Barbara, "Who do you feel is the audience for what you're writing?" She replied, "Number one is [the instructor]. He is my number one audience." Karen said, "my audience for my initial post is more in line with the professor, and then if I'm responding to students, it's more conversational, but I'm also keeping the professor in mind as well." When I asked Barbara and Karen why the instructor was the audience, they both said because the instructor was grading their responses. Despite this perception, neither of these students ever addressed their posts directly to the instructor.

The instructor's statements suggested he did not expect students to view him as the primary audience for discussions. He asserted that he let the students know "This is

not a conversation that I own. It's a conversation that we engage in together. And I say, a lot of times I want you guys talking to each other." The discussion posts to the content forums demonstrated students engaging with each other in the responsive posts, as indicated by the way some students began their posts with a greeting and responded to specific points made by their classmates. However, for students like Barbara, this written exchange was mostly meant for the instructor to grade.

Classmates as audience.

For the toolkit wiki, groups of two to four students who shared a related subject area were expected to collaborate within a free wiki site, *PBworks*. The wiki groups were assigned by the instructor based on shared discipline areas. Group members discussed the process of preparing their wiki toolkit in a forum within the LMS. No other students could view the wiki.

For the unit plan, students had the option of working independently or working in groups they chose themselves based on shared discipline areas. The three pairs that did form to create the unit plan were made up of the same students as for the wiki groups.

Michael worked on the unit plan project with a partner, Julie. He said the knowledge that there was an audience for his drafts "hasn't been a concern at all. I really hadn't thought about it until you mentioned it now." He explained that his reason was because "I can go back and alter it at any time. So there's nothing really out there that I'm afraid of my partner seeing or anything like that. We're kind of on the same page." Although the online environment made writing visible to both audiences, Michael's awareness of audience tended to be his classmates, rather than his instructor.

The instructor did not include a forum within the LMS for group members to discuss the process of preparing their unit plan, as he had with the wiki; however, there was a procedural forum associated with the unit plan that produced a student audience online. In the "*Jing* Presentation Forum," students posted the *Jing* screencast they had prepared to present the draft of their unit plan. The screencast showed screenshots of the unit plan, while the student explained the content and structure, so feedback from classmates was based on what the student writer chose to emphasize. The presentation was only five minutes, so the other students had little chance to actually read what students had prepared. While students were the audience for the screencast, there was not a student audience for the actual unit plan. The writing assignment was created using Google Docs to make students' writing visible to the instructor, but this Internet technology could have been maximized to allow for the writer's classmates to function as a reading audience as well.

One of the survey items asked students to respond to the statement: *I consider my classmates as the audience for my writing in the online class discussions.* Four students strongly agreed, and ten students agreed, including Michael, Barbara, and Karen, as shown in Figure 7.

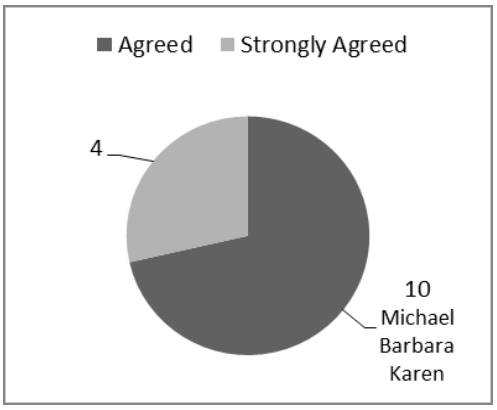


Figure 7: Classmates as Audience

Barbara later said in the interview she considered "potentially all the students" as her audience for her posts, but she also said, "When I'm responding to the person, I'm very cognizant that this person is going to read what I have to say, and I want it to be meaningful." For example, in a post in Forum 1A, Barbara addressed the classmate by name and referred directly to the classmate's post, and then she concluded with an eloquent statement about education:

> The point is, as you pointed out, Marie, that as teachers we will be teaching within the context of the 21st century – and that includes technology. To fail to embrace it would sell our children short …

Barbara's statements and posts suggested that while the instructor was her "number one" audience, her classmates held an audience position as well.

I asked Michael whom he thought of as the audience for his writing in the discussions; he answered,

> At first, like in the beginning of the semester, just the teacher. I didn't care what my peers thought because they don't have a grade book. As I see it, the teacher, from what I've seen – the professor, I should say – as the semester's rolled along, as long as we write something that's not just – that shows the least little bit of reflection and thinking, they're going to be okay with it. They're not going say, I disagree with that, so I fail you. That doesn't count. That was my fear at first because this is my first class of this kind. But now that I see that it's not like that, I write it for the students, my fellow students out there, which is good. So it was about three to four weeks to figure that out and see that it was okay. I don't have

> to be afraid of my professor judging my writing and grading me according to his own value system or belief system, which is good.

Michael described how his perception of audience for the discussions shifted. Early in the course, he considered only the instructor as his audience. He even went so far as to claim: "I didn't care what my peers thought because they don't have a grade book." But as the course progressed, he felt less concerned about the instructor censuring his ideas, and so he shifted his focus to his "fellow students out there," a perspective he saw as positive. As with Barbara and Karen, the instructor was, to some extent, the audience that mattered for Michael, but he reported he became less aware of assessment once he felt the ideas he expressed were not being "judged" by the instructor.

The discussion forums were the only space within the online class where an audience existed beyond the instructor and a small group of students; however, because these were graded, most students still considered the instructor as the primary audience.

Self as audience.

At times, the goals of the assignments constructed the student writer as the most important audience for the writing. Michael had emphasized in the interview that the clinical report was "a fruitful exercise for me to revisit what I'd done and put it down in writing," I asked him if he felt like he was also an audience, and he responded, "Primarily, I was writing for myself." Michael offered a unique view of the notion of audience for discussions, suggesting the value of the student's "self" as audience. "At least this gets someone to voice their opinion. Although it might never be read, because the professor has stuff that he's got to do, too. Still, just to write it down and post it out there means something." For the *Into the Wild* Book Circle Group, Michael wrote,

> I'm not a part of this group but I remember the book and feel compelled to interject. I agree! I'm glad I'm not the only one who finished thinking something was not right with Chris. I think maybe he was angry at his parents and the world, and sought enlightenment in solitude and adventure like he read about in London and Tolstoy. I love those authors and their stories as well, but I'm not going to abandon my life for them! Those authors had issues too …

Michael's posts numbered the least of all the student participants, so he seldom posted more than necessary. He also told me in the interview that he seldom spoke up in class. However, in this case, Michael voluntarily contributed his opinions to the Book Circle discussion, even though he recognized the possibility that he would be the only reading audience for his writing. In this sense, "reflection" rather than "interaction" becomes the purpose for Michael's post, a theme that will be discussed in the next section. Before the interview concluded, I asked Michael if there was anything he wanted to add. His response was intriguing, especially from a teaching perspective. Michael said,

> Sure, one thought. I think it's good – a positive side that I see of it is that everyone has to write something. Whereas in class, I could sit there quietly and have the most profound thought, or someone could, and just sit there quietly and leave it in the class.

This statement from a quiet, introspective student speaks to the potential of CMC within online classroom discussions to enable a range of audiences, and as we will see, a variety of purposes for students' online writing.

Online Students' Purposes for Their Writing are Dependent on Personal Goals

The data collected in the case study revealed that the purposes for online students' writing depended on their personal goals. In this section, I identify and describe students' purposes for each of the assignments – wiki, unit plan, clinical report, and discussions – based on course artifacts, student artifacts, and student interviews. Additionally, students' responses to the Online Student Writing Survey pertaining to the discussion forums are presented.

Because the course was part of a teacher education program, the instructor's purpose for assignments was for students to do the kinds of writing that teachers would most likely be expected to do. The wiki, unit plan, and clinical report provided students with an opportunity to engage in the writing of their future profession. As the instructor stated in the interview, "some of the assignments have real world application. That's my goal." Each of the assignments also fulfilled specific course learning objectives and provided an item for assessment. However, assignments held other purposes as well, especially for the students, such as demonstrating their knowledge to their instructor to earn a grade, developing understanding of concepts, and/or interacting with their classmates.

Evaluation/assessment.

The content-related forums provided an item of assessment worth 20% of a student's total grade. The instructor explained his rationale for grading the discussions, stating,

> In the online class, it would be easy to disappear, maybe stay in the background and read and not … By grading the discussions, you really push them to be a part

of those conversations, and I think that's appropriate. Otherwise, they would be pretty silent.

Most students earned the full score for their discussion postings. Some students exceeded the posting requirement by making their own post and responding to more than two other students; however, most students made their three posts to fulfill their requirement. The instructor graded the students' posts on quality, which referred to as "depth" in the grade book comments, more than quantity.

The Online Student Writing Survey asked students to respond to the statement: *My purpose for writing in the threaded discussions is to demonstrate my understanding of a topic to my instructor.* Two students disagreed, seven students agreed, three students strongly agreed, and two students were undecided, as shown in Figure 8. Karen agreed, and Michael and Barbara strongly agreed.

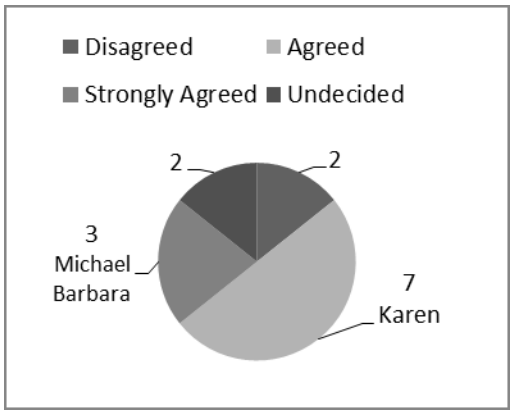


Figure 8: Purpose – Demonstrate Understanding to Instructor

In the interview, Karen admitted candidly, "I'm taking the course and it is participation and you do get graded on your responses." Barbara also admitted that her motivation for participating in the online discussions was to earn a good grade. As she affirmed in the

interview, "[the instructor] is going to give me the grade. I'll be honest. I want to make a good grade."

Though Karen also saw value in the discussion responses as a means of interacting with her classmates, a point that will be discussed later, Barbara voiced a different opinion on the expectation to post responses, when she declared, "we're required to respond to our classmates. And I'm not that interested in responding, but I have to." She justified her reasons why:

> sometimes I have to dig, like what can I possibly respond to this person? They've said it all, or sometimes they've said nothing. So that's a little bit of a challenge, because again, it's not spontaneous. You have to respond to two of your classmates.

Barbara's posts consistently reflected that the purpose for her responsive posts was to fulfill course requirements, not to engage with her classmates. For example, in Forum 2B, even though she incorporated a personal story about a "superb math teacher" into her explanation of effective teaching strategies, the post did not show an effort to connect to the student to whom the response was addressed. Her story seemed mostly reminiscent of her own experience, and her explanation more a presentation of her knowledge. In Forum 3B, her post was more like a summary of her reading, rather than a response to the ideas of another student.

As Barbara asserted, "those forums, it's more like they're assignments. It's not like they're discussions. I'm not having a discussion with [the instructor] about literacy like I would in the classroom. It's just not the same thing. In the classroom he wouldn't be grading my discussion with him." The fact that the discussions occurred in writing in

an online discussion forum seemed to privilege an evaluative purpose that this student deemed inherent to online learning.

Develop understanding.

For the unit plan assignment created and submitted in *Google Docs*, the instructor's purpose was for students to draft unit-level assignments and assessments that could be utilized in their current or future teaching. The assignment fulfilled a course learning objective, such as "Design literacy interventions and programs that are effective in content-area classrooms."

Barbara considered the unit plan as a culmination of her learning in the course. When asked how she knew what to include in a unit plan, she responded, "because that's what [the instructor] has been teaching us from the beginning. It's all been about that. This is the assignment where we apply basically everything we've learned in this course."

The instructor's purpose for the discussion forum assignments, as indicated in the syllabus and the assignment guidelines, was for students to "contribute their own ideas and respond to the ideas of others." The assignment also fulfilled a course learning objective, such as "Understand and articulate current theories and philosophies of reading processes and the teaching of reading within different subject areas at the middle and high school levels." The instructor described the discussion forums as "a set of conversations around a theme or topic that probably involves some readings, but not necessarily exclusively."

Although Barbara did not view her writing in the online discussion forums as an actual discussion comparable to a face-to-face classroom experience, she still considered

the discussion postings as a beneficial component of the course. In the interview, she said,

> I think what the writing helps you do – on the discussion posts – because there's other types of writing – but on the discussion posts is – it helps you reflect on what you've read, or reflect on the discussion.

As Barbara also emphasized about her posts, "I want to be prepared. I want to know what I'm talking about. I want what I say to be pertinent." This desire is evidenced in a post to Forum 1A where she referred to and quoted the reading. Barbara contended,

> I think [the discussion forums] should be there. They keep you very plugged in on a regular basis onto that class. And if you were just reading things and doing assignments and not having that, I think something would be missing. It just keeps – you know for one thing, it keeps you caught up on all the reading, and it keeps – like the class is always uppermost in your mind because every week you have a discussion posting.

In Forum 2A, Barbara wrote, "Reading about vocabulary strategies in the text and learning from the podcast and videos was somewhat of a relief, because you can't expect all your students to be huge readers." In Forum 3B, she wrote, "This was a very novel concept when I first started reading about picture books this week." Barbara's main purpose for posting may have been to earn a good grade, but she also used the posts to react to course material.

Karen also saw the benefits of talking in the discussions about the course content and then applying concepts to the course projects. She contended, "the discussions are very nicely tied in to what we're doing." In Forum 3B, she wrote,

> What a great list of books suggested by the article we had to read and the websites listed. Before reading this material, I had no idea the great books out there for science and in picture books that make the content easy to understand. The student who I am tutoring struggles to read and I tried an animation of mitosis. I was amazed at how well the student related to the visual animation. Therefore, I think picture books really do have a place in the high school science classroom.

Karen's explanation in the post of her use of "animation" referred to a strategy she actually used in two assignments – her clinical tutoring project and her unit plan.

The instructor's purposes for the clinical report assignment, as indicated in the syllabus and the assignment guidelines, were to establish clinical tutoring hours, develop a tutoring plan, and reflect on the experience. Since the course had a clinical requirement of a minimum of 10 hours, the clinical report assignment met an important learning objective for the course, which was actually fulfilled outside of the online classroom space. Students' understanding of concepts relative to their profession was realized in the clinical report through means that relied less on CMC than the other writing assignments.

Reflection.

The unit plan assignment required students to "write a reflection describing what your group thought about this unit." The instructor explained in the interview that the purpose for building the reflection into the unit plan, as well as the rubric self-assessment, was to encourage students to "self-assess."

The clinical report also included a reflection section. As Michael said, "it was a fruitful exercise for me to revisit what I'd done and put it down in writing." He really viewed the entire report as a reflection, stating,

> to put it down on paper you have to think coherently about it and come up with some kind of reflections from it, so in that sense it's definitely reflection. For the midterm report, it was the same assignment basically. It was just your halfway point.

During one of the synchronous sessions, the instructor alternately referred to the clinical report as the Final Report and as the Final Reflection, which seemed suggestive of a dual purpose for this assignment.

Michael repeatedly referred to the discussion posts as "reflections." Even though the grading rubric for discussion posts identified "reflection" as a criterion for each scoring level, Michael was the only student who referred to the discussions as serving this communicative purpose.

Interaction.

Students were asked to respond to a statement in the Online Student Writing Survey: *My purpose for writing in the threaded discussions is to express my ideas about a topic to my classmates.* Two students disagreed, seven students agreed, three students strongly agreed, and one student was undecided, as shown in Figure 9. Michael and Karen agreed, and Barbara disagreed.

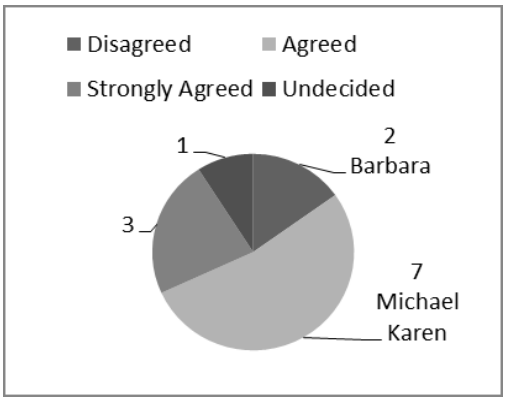


Figure 9: Purpose – Express Ideas to Classmates

Michael described in the interview how he examined his thinking through his discussion posts to his classmates:

> The discussion writing, the responses – made me think a little bit because I had to put it out there for my peers to read. I had to think about what I was going to say and make sure that it was true, that I believed what I was writing. So that was big. That was a fruitful exercise most of the time.

Michael's statement implies the purpose for his writing in the discussion forums is driven by how he represented himself to other students, but also how he represented his ideas to himself.

Ultimately, the discussion forums played a social role for Karen, who stated, "I actually feel a little bit closer to the classmates online than in class because I just don't – cause I talk more." In the interview, Karen described her experience this way:

> K: I actually think there is more interaction in the online – at least for me, I tend to be very shy in class, and online, I can be talking up a storm. I think there's some of that element too. That you can communicate without actually seeing someone or being a little bit conscious.
>
> L: So you feel like in a way you say more in class because you are actually writing more?
>
> K: I guess I'm saying by writing. I guess I'm writing as a conversation. So I actually might – I'll probably contribute more online than I would in class.

For Karen, who described herself as "very shy in class," the anonymity of the discussion forums provided social spaces where she could "be talking up a storm" through her writing.

Barbara, who disagreed that her purpose was to express ideas to her classmates, acknowledged in the interview that she disliked having to post responses to other students in the forums:

> The other aspect is that we're required to respond to our classmates. And I'm not that interested in responding, but I have to. Whereas in a conversation, I would be very interested in responding face to face. I've never been one to stay quiet if something provokes me.

Nonetheless, Barbara explained that she did try to be more interactive with her classmates with her posts. As she stated in the interview,

> in my responses I really have tried to keep it a little bit more stream of consciousness. Instead of just saying, "That was great, I agree with everything you just said, great idea," instead of saying that, I'd say, like you would in class, you know this reminds me of this situation." I might go off on a little tangent and tell a little story about something that's pertinent. So I do try to make it more conversational. Because otherwise, I think you sound a little bit more like a robot if you're just giving kudos.

Barbara noticed that "a lot of the responses, the vast majority, are just giving kudos." Yet, she responded in this way as well, posting in various forums statements such as "Great post," "Good post," "Thanks for a great post," and "Your post really provided a lot of food for thought! Thanks!"

Barbara observed that the instructor "wants us to learn from each other, as much as possible. 'Cause we're all more grown up, and we've all had different experiences, and so I think that's his primary goal." Some of her posts did seem to show an effort to learn

from her classmates. For example, in her post to Scott in Forum 1A, she wrote, “I can really identify with what you said about "fear" of technology. This reflection and discussion has really opened my eyes.” In her response to Marie in this same forum, she wrote, “I was struck by what you said about ‘cultural literacy’. This, I think, is what the NCTE position statement was getting at …” and then she included a quote from the reading for that week. In Forum 2B, although she had already met the posting requirement of two responses, she made another post, where she wrote,

> I wanted to read a math post out of curiosity---even though I will be teaching English, I have always loved math. I think you hit the nail on the head: math is cumulative and you have no control of how your current students were taught before you, and whether they were taught well and really learned the basics ...

In this case, Barbara’s enthusiastic response to a classmate to express her belief about a topic of shared interest suggested more of a willingness to embrace CMC as a means of interacting with classmates.

Barbara commented, “I feel a kind of camaraderie with these people even though I’ve never seen them, but we’re all in the same class, and you kind of feel like you know each other a little bit.” She showed this rapport when she posted to a classmate, “I just want to say, Anita, that I'd love to sit in on your class!!! Cheers!” Barbara’s responses to other students appeared more conversational than her initial posts responding to the prompt. For instance, in Forum 2B, Barbara’s response to another student identified shared goals:

> I completely agree with you, Ann, that a student being able to express his/her comprehension of a unit will be one of the most challenging. They feel unsure

> because the lines between right and wrong answers are so nebulous in ELA […] our job as English teachers will be hugely important because no matter how bright, creative or sensitive a student is --- or how compelling his personal story--- if he can't express it, the world is the poorer for it.

Her post to Scott in Forum 1A seemed to have attempted to connect to a fellow classmate by addressing him by name and in her personal statements:

> Scott:
>
> Great post! I can really identify with what you said about "fear" of technology.
>
> This reflection and discussion has really opened my eyes.

Discussions in the online class fulfilled different purposes for students. Michael saw discussions as reflections, where he felt less restricted by the instructor's expectations. For Karen, writing and talking merged, so that discussions become a means of social interaction. Many of Barbara's posts demonstrated that she more was interested in representing her own knowledge and understanding of the material than interacting with others on the forum, although this student also accepted the potential for CMC to create a sense of community with her fellow students.

Real world application.

The wiki assignment had the purpose of serving as an actual collection of resources for the students or others in their current or future teaching. The assignment fulfilled several course learning objectives, including "Identify and utilize technologies that support teaching and learning across subject areas" and "Identify and integrate technological resources into a content area classroom."

Karen said the experience with creating a wiki was helping with her search for a teaching position. She shared, “some of the interviews I’ve already been on, they were impressed with some of the technology that I’ve been doing. […] Especially like with the wikis. When I mentioned the wikis, they said they were actually using that for their classes.”

While the specific requirements came from their instructor through these texts, the genres came from their field. As the instructor explained, the “writing and the assignments and the feedback” were about “learning this genre of writing in education.” The genres of students’ writing existed both within the boundaries of the online course and beyond the course itself, extending into the students’ professional and academic worlds. Devitt (2004), “It is […] the nature of genre both to be created by people and to influence people's actions, to help people achieve their goals and to encourage people to act in certain ways” (p 48). The students interviewed reported the likelihood of eventually employing these genres in their own teaching practices.

Online Students’ Socialization into Academic, Professional Genres Supported by CMC

The data collected in this case study demonstrated that the Internet technologies of the online class support online students’ socialization into academic and professional writing genres. Becoming socialized into a genre entails developing an awareness of the audience, purpose, and text for writing. In this section, I discuss the ways that students acquired knowledge of what they were expected to write for their course. I identify the various methods offered by the instructor through the learning management system (LMS). I provide examples of some of the comments and feedback students received from the instructor, and I also include comments and feedback provided by the students

to each other on different aspects of their assignments. In addition to these course artifacts and student artifacts, I include statements made by the interview participants.

Reviewing course syllabus and assignment web pages.

The course syllabus, attached as Appendix B, briefly described each assignment. Students accessed the syllabus from a link in the course LMS. The assignment requirements were explained in detail on three separate assignment web pages that students also accessed from links in the LMS.

The first section of the wiki assignment web page, titled "Purpose," stated, "A wiki format allows a small group of students (teachers) to gather strategies and resources for helping students and teachers with the kinds of literate tasks middle and secondary grades students encounter across content areas." The format for the wiki assignment was very specific. Students were instructed to include an introduction describing the focus and organization of their wiki. Students were given specific categories for the wiki sections and a specific number and type of entries to include in each section.

Barbara's understanding of the wiki assignment was that "When we listed each element of the wiki, what we listed were literacy strategies, for the most part, tools for enhancing literacy." The assignment sheet further informed students about the potential for using the wiki medium, stating, "Wikis also foster collaboration and provide students with a resource that can exist beyond this class." This statement suggested the wiki could potentially be accessed by other teachers in the students' discipline areas, thus expanding the audience and reinforcing that students were using an Internet medium capable of conveying multiple genres of their profession.

In order to guide students' writing for a genre typically invoked by teachers, the instructor's directions for the unit plan assignment were also very specific. Students were informed that the unit should include five parts; the overview, design map, outline, learning strategies section, and reflection. The instructor provided an explanation in the syllabus and assignment web page of what each part should include. For example, the purpose of a Unit Design Map was "to provide an overall sense of the texts, goals, assignments and assessments." For the Brief Unit Outline, the instructor informed students, "provide a visual or textual outline of the unit. That is, what you will teach and in what order. Include pacing of key texts and readings, key assignments and assessments." For the Literacy and Learning Support section, students were expected to

> take key texts and assignments and show how you would support students' reading, writing and learning before, during and after engagement with texts. Draw on strategies we have discussed and modeled in class or others that you find helpful. Introduce each item or strategy and include a brief memo or statement about its significance to the unit or students' learning.

The genres of the first four parts of the unit plan were pertinent to students' teaching. Students would likely find themselves enacting these genres in their professional lives. The fifth part – reflection – is a genre that served more of an academic purpose both for the students and for the instructor.

The required format for the written parts of the clinical tutoring report was less specific than the other written assignments. The assignment page listed four assignments associated with the Clinical Tutoring Project. The Midterm Report was a

> Reflection on 'Pre-assessment of Learner's Abilities and Needs in Content Area. This should be 1-1/2 to 2 pages in length double-spaced and include artifacts (at least one lesson plan but could also include student work samples).

Karen's understanding of the Midterm Report was that, "We're supposed to do the introduction, kind of like see where he was at, discussions on what other teachers had said, dislikes, likes of the student." Karen's Midterm Report included these elements under the heading "Narrative." The instructor's guidelines for this assignment were less prescriptive, and as such, Karen made the choice to incorporate the narrative text type into her writing to present the required elements of the report. As mentioned previously, the report also was the least reliant on Internet technologies, since this was basically a word processed document submitted to the class LMS.

For the discussion forum posts, the instructor provided students with a list of "Tips for Creating Quality Forum Posts," such as "For full credit, address all aspects of the prompt" and "Length in and of itself is not the biggest factor in earning a high score in a discussion post. However, answers that are just a few sentences rarely lack the depth required to address the prompt fully." The instructor encouraged students to

> Be honest and thoughtful in your post. When possible connect the topic to your experience in the classroom as a teacher and/or student. Also, think about the subject you teach or want to teach and, if possible, contextualize your answer by connecting to the demands of your subject area.

The student participants' discussion posts consistently demonstrated these elements as recommended by the instructor, and each of the students interviewed reported that they approached their discussion posting in this manner. In the context of the classroom, the

discussion posts have the potential to embody academic genres, yet the instructor's emphasis on the posts "connecting to the demands of your subject area" suggests discussion posts that could possibly invoke professional genres as well.

The syllabus and assignment webpages represented the typical forms of assignment instructions that might be distributed to students as a handout in a face-to-face class. For the online class, students could download these documents and then chose to print them, view them on the computer screen, or both.

Samples of assignments.

The instructor provided assignment samples in the form of links to electronic word processing files. Michael said he referred to the samples, adding "It's still an assignment, and I still want to see what he has in mind. Since I do definitely still think of him as an audience." As Michael further explained, "I refer to his examples and store that in my head kind of like a template, but then I can run with it." A review of Michael's assignments showed that he closely followed the samples. The clinical midterm report and final report used first person point of view and a reflective tone, much like the samples provided for this assignment. Michael and Julie's unit plan followed a format almost identical to one of the sample unit plans, even using the same headings and fonts. The wiki that Michael created was presented very similarly to the literacy wiki the instructor recommended to the students in terms of layout, but with much less content.

For the wiki project, the instructor incorporated into the assignment page four links to examples of wiki pages in the students' disciplines. As Karen noted, "He has some samples, like for the wiki. He had some sample wikis for us to look at." The wiki created by Karen's group does, in fact, follow a format much like the samples provided.

The instructor incorporated into the assignment page six links to examples of unit plans in the students' disciplines, noting that the examples "show the overall qualities of a good unit plan even if the requirements differ somewhat." Barbara also referred to the samples. She stated, "It's great to be able to see what does a good unit plan look like. As a teacher, I'm going to make it a point of doing that for every single major assignment I give. Or what is a good essay – depending on what grade I'm teaching – what does a good one look like." What is implied by this practice is that the instructor's version of the writing assignment is the standard for all students' writing.

While there were samples available for students' review, there was not a required template for the unit plan. Karen said, "I guess it's just kind of based on how you want to fashion your unit plan. He did have some templates you could follow or you could choose not to follow them." Karen's unit plan was actually presented and organized somewhat differently than the samples. She chose to follow a traditional Roman numeral outline format with dense descriptive text and few graphics. On the other hand, Barbara's unit plan was similar to the sample for English, which included a diverse selection of brief descriptions of strategies and various charts.

For the clinical tutoring project, the instructor incorporated into the assignment page two links to samples of a Midterm Report and Final Reflection. Karen did not follow the report samples, but she did find the lesson plan templates very beneficial. As she explained,

> for the clinical tutoring assignment, he even had a lesson plan template, which I really just downloaded as a Word document and have just been using throughout the course and just kind of adapting it to whatever I need and just filling in with

> the information. […] When I did the lesson plan template for the critical tutoring, I had never done a lesson plan before. So, having that template and using that template for the assignment was really, really helpful because I'm like, there's three boxes. I have to fill in the three boxes.

Of the 14 participants, eight students used the lesson plan template provided, two students modified the template, and four students used their own lesson plan template.

The assignment page also included a link to a pdf file called "Forum Discussion Examples" that students could download to review actual discussion responses worthy of a full or partial score. The instructor explained that a "solid post" was one that "fully addresses the question posed. It also brings in the student's experience in the classroom and draws on the article that is referenced in the Forum Discussion Question." An example of a "less thorough" response was one that "does not fully address the Forum Discussion Question and lacks depth. The writer adds little perspective and no personal experience from the classroom as a student or a teacher." All of the discussion posts of the student participants were in the "solid post" range, with only three exceptions.

Embedding Internet links in the course LMS to numerous samples and templates that produced a very practical means of exposing students to the academic and professional genres that students were expected to enact.

Tutorials and podcasts.

Assignment instructions were also delivered through Internet tutorials and the instructor's video podcasts, which covered topics such as how to create a wiki page and how to create a document in *Google Docs*. The instructor provided links in the assignment page to *YouTube* videos on how to use the Internet tools. For example, the assignment pages

listed three links to *YouTube* videos on how to use the wiki site and one link to a *YouTube* video on how to use *Google Docs* for the unit plan. For the clinical tutoring project, the instructor also provided links to Internet resources and strategies for tutoring, including a link to a downloadable word processing file for a lesson plan template. Some of the instructor's podcasts and videos were essentially audio/visual lectures created by the instructor in lieu of a synchronous class meeting.

A post by Barbara in the forum the instructor set up for the wiki group indicated how she utilized the electronic resources the instructor provided. She posted to her group,

> I spent the afternoon today toying around with the *PBWorks* site and also watched the tutorials that Brian posted. So, I basically set up the site the way he suggested.

A few weeks later, Barbara posted to the same wiki group forum,

> I looked over the sample wiki on English Language Arts that [the instructor] shared with us, and noticed most of the tools, such as the comprehension tools, are actually on word documents or PDFs, and there are links to them. Should we do something similar?

The other students in Barbara's group did not respond to her inquiry, and the wiki showed that the students did not create a linked document format similar to the wiki sample shared by the instructor.

Asking questions.

Students used the "Burning Questions" administrative forum to ask questions about the assignments. As Barbara pointed out, "we don't see Brian on a regular basis. We do have that Burning Questions forum. I don't know that I've ever posted anything

there. I prefer to just write to Brian directly and ask him a question […] in an e-mail." Michael chose not to post questions to this forum, although he admitted, "I refer to it because I generally have similar questions. But someone beats me to it, which is good, so I can refer to it without posting anything." Karen explained that her reliance on the Burning Questions forum "depends on if it's very specific or more broad. If it's just like, when's the due date for this assignment, I might post that on the Burning Questions because someone else probably knows that. If it's more like me individually, I might say, I have a question about this." The LMS Activity Reports showed that Barbara viewed the Burning Questions forum 19 times and made four posts; Michael only viewed the forum 15 times and made one post; and Karen viewed the Burning Questions forum 46 times and made 16 posts.

Questions that other students posted to the Burning Questions forum aided Karen in her understanding of the wiki assignment. In the Burning Questions forum, Karen posted, "OK.....going along with how I have seen others on this discussion thread. I am assuming that I need to create a workspace of my own on PBworks ... "

Questions about unit plan. Anita, one of the 11 participants not interviewed, used the public space of the Burning Questions forum to get clarification on the unit plan. During the week after the Jing presentations, Anita posted to the Burning Questions forum,

> I noticed that many people are structuring their Literacy Integration Unit as a week of detailed daily lesson plans. Is that the way you would like us to do it or more like the examples? Or is either way fine? Just wanted to clarify--thanks!!"

The instructor responded,

> I allow for some latitude on how the unit is presented. The most important element to me is the literacy and learning support. My preference is for the pre/during/post format because that way the learning strategies don't get lost."

Anita did not strictly follow the examples; however, the instructor indicated in his comments on the unit plan that this was satisfactory, as displayed in the screenshot of Anita's unit plan in *Google Docs*, shown as Figure 10.

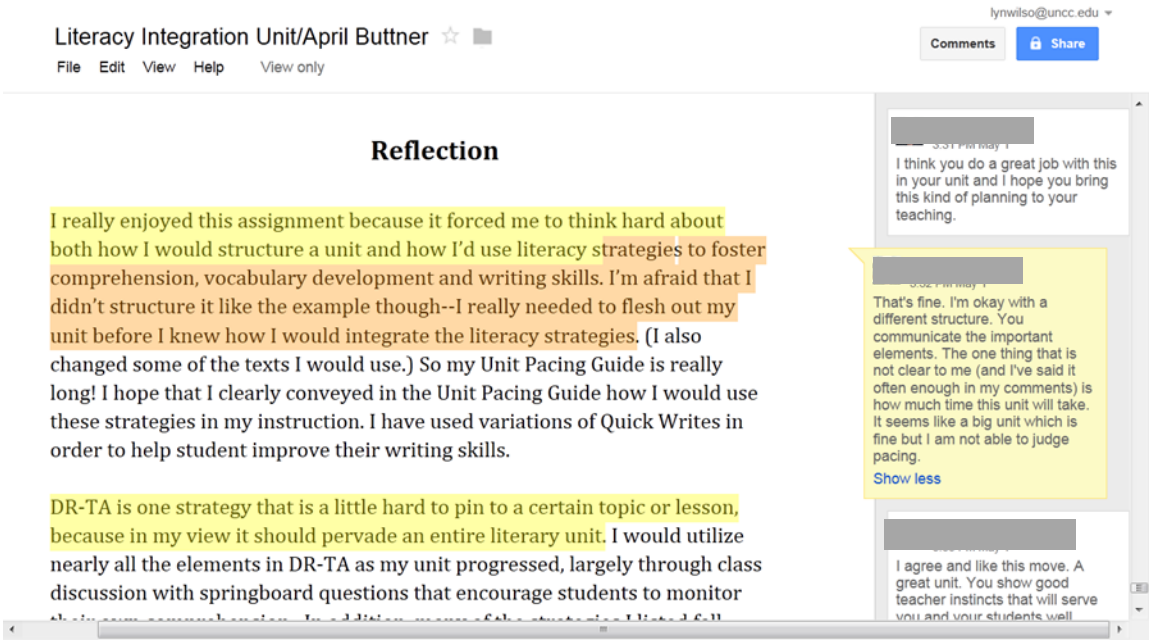


Figure 10: Anita's Unit Plan

Of the 93 posts made by the student participants and instructor, 34 related to the tutoring project. The majority of the students' questions were about finding a student to tutor and completing paperwork. However, Karen posted a question to the instructor about the actual written report:

> […] how are we supposed to complete our lesson plans for the purposes of the progress report and final report? For example, if what is being working in each session is varied depending on what needs to be done (going over test, homework,.); should we use the lesson plan template to tell what was covered during each session and not plan ahead for the tutoring session or should we attempt to provide a prediction on what possible strategies will be helpful during the session?

The instructor responded,

> You ask a great question that boils down to this: am I supposed to tutor the student based on his or her needs or am I supposed to do the lesson plans so that I get a good grade on this clinical tutoring assignment? This comes up each semester and the short answer is this: meet the student at his or her point of need. Do what the kid needs. As for the lesson plans, I am not suggesting you throw those aside but I will make two points about them: 1) lesson plans are a PLAN, a kind of road map from which we may have to take some detours, so don't be slaves to them, 2) your plans should evolve as you get to know the student better to reflect your increasing knowledge of what that student needs.

Karen recognized that her question was general enough to relate to other students situations as well, and the instructor's response expressed his pedagogy for using lesson plans that was for the benefit of all the students.

Devitt (2004) explained that "once genres are established by people, they exist institutionally and collectively and have the force of other social expectations and social structures" (p. 49). With the clinical report, Karen struggled with the conflict over using a

genre for professional purposes or using a genre for academic purposes, as indicated by her question to the instructor in the Burning Questions forum.

Rubrics and Self-Assessments

The grading criteria for the wiki and unit plan assignments were outlined in a rubric that was first scored by the students themselves and later by the instructor. The rubric for these assignments also included a self-assessment. The clinical report was graded with a rubric, but students did not complete a self-assessment for this assignment.

Barbara and Karen both stated in the interviews that they referred to the rubrics as a means of determining the assignment requirements. Barbara mentioned that she read the wiki rubric "very carefully." When I asked Karen about aspects of the class that help her to do those writing assignments, she said, "He gives a rubric for the literacy integration […] he puts all that stuff online for us."

For the self-assessment, three reflection questions were answered on behalf of the group in a word processing document and submitted to the assignment function within the LMS. Students earned a group grade for the entire wiki project. The first question on the wiki self-assessment was "What are the strengths of your Toolkit wiki?" The response of Wiki Group 3 (Karen, Scott, Angela) was a general summary of the rubric language and assignment requirements:

> The greatest strength of this toolkit is that all three pages are very specific on how the resources can be used for science. This wiki is organized, easy to navigate, and contains an extensive list of literacy strategies, technology features, and literature/media sources. Each page has been enhanced with graphics, and contains examples, templates, trailers, and links so teachers, students, and parents

can obtain information and determine if the material is relevant or appropriate for their class.

The response by Wiki Group 1 (Barbara, Ellen, Ann) to the same question was "The wiki is neat, well organized, and easy to navigate. Plenty of robust literacy tools for both teachers and students are offered in each section." These comments reproduced the language of the rubric, which called for literacy tool entries that "include robust support" and a toolkit that is "well organized, neat, and readable." Notably, in the Wiki Group 1 Forum, Ellen and Ann had posted detailed suggestions for the self-assessment responses. The wiki forum posts indicated that Barbara completed and submitted the rubric/self-assessment on behalf of the group, but she did not incorporate her group members' suggestions in any way. Instead, the self-assessment reflected the language of her instructor, rather than the language of her peers.

The second wiki self-assessment question asked students "What area(s) could be improved or strengthened?" Wiki Group 3 wrote, "We would like to see literacy attachments that have been used in the classroom, as well as "Inspiration," "Webquest," and "Dipity" projects that were actually completed by students." For the last question, which asked for general comments, Wiki Group 5 (Michael, Julie) said, "The creation of this wiki was a great exercise in technology – from creating it to researching for it." These responses reflected a positive reaction to the technologies the students had been introduced to in the course.

For the unit plan, students answered two reflection questions in a word processing document submitted to the assignment function within the LMS. Students who worked in groups earned a group grade for the unit plan assignment.

The first question on the unit plan self-assessment was "What do you see as the key strengths of your LIU?" Karen wrote, "As I mentioned in my reflection, the main strengths from my unit are visual materials such as animations. I also believe the unit is organized well and is formatted in a clear manner to the reader."

The second question asked "What might you do differently or could you strengthen in your unit plan?" The rubric/self-assessment submitted by Michael and Julie stated, "Formatting in Google Docs can sometimes be frustrating, perhaps in the future we might try a different medium for collaborative lesson planning, (such as PB works, which runs more like a website than a linear presentation.)"

Scott worked on the unit plan individually, but his comments were similar to the statements made in the self-assessment of the wiki group in which he participated. Scott wrote,

> The unit could possibly incorporate activities which utilize technology, such as students completing a web quest, or working in groups to create a podcast or power point presentation. Also, perhaps stretching the unit a couple of days to incorporate more collaborative work so that these technological projects can be incorporated would be an excellent change to the unit as well.

As with the wiki, these responses reflected students' reactions to the technologies they had been introduced to in the course. While Michael and Julie's response indicated frustration, Karen and Scott wrote more positively about the technologies they incorporated.

The Course Discussion Forums assignment page included a grading rubric, shown as Figure 11. The grade book showed that of the 14 student participants, only 3 students earned a score of 8 or 9 for a discussion; all other scores were 10.

Note: Discussion Forums are a vital and important part of class. I grade them using the rubric below and give serious thought to my assessment of these assignments. A grade of 9 or 10 is not a given. Discussion Forums are graded holistically using the following rubric. Discussion Forums may be graded on a 5 point or a 10 point scale:	
9-10 points **--or--** **5 points**	Entries provide a clear and comprehensive reaction to each discussion prompt or assigned reading(s). Entries provide evidence of **"deep" reflection** and understanding. Makes a significant contribution to the discussion.
7-8 points **--or--** **4 points**	Entries provide an articulate reaction to each discussion prompt or assigned reading(s). Entries provide evidence of **reflection** and/or reasonable understanding. Makes a **solid** contribution to the discussion.
4-6 points **--or--** **3 points**	Entries provide a reaction to the discussion prompt or assigned reading(s). Entries provide some evidence of **reflection** and/or understanding. Makes a contribution to the discussion but may **lack depth**.
1-3 points **--or--** **1 to 2 points**	Entry or entries address the discussion prompt or assigned readings but only superficially. Entry lacks evidence of **reflection** and/or understanding. **Lacks depth** or does not make a meaning contribution to the discussion.
0 points	Did not participate in discussion by due date.

Note: Highlighting added.

Figure 11: Discussion Forum Grading Rubric

The detailed grade book feedback the instructor gave students was generally, but not entirely, based on the rubric. Although each of the criteria included a statement that the posts provide "evidence of *reflection*," this quality was not mentioned in any of the instructor's grade book comments. The rubric stated that to earn a score of 9 or 10, "entries must provide evidence of 'deep' reflection." Grade book feedback for eight of

the 14 students specifically referred to the “depth” of the post, for which students earned a 10. Grade book feedback for three students referred to their posts as “solid,” which according to the rubric was worth a score of 7 or 8; however, these three students earned a 10. The instructor feedback to Ellen, one of the students who earned a 9 in Forum 1, was “I want to push you to go into more depth in these discussions.”

Michael earned a score of 8 in Forum 2; the instructor’s feedback stated, “I’d like to see you push for more depth in your response – especially for a topic like this.” The discussion prompt was:

> Now that you've read chapters 4 and 5 of Improving Adolescent Literacy talk about what you see as the key challenges to comprehension that arise in learning in your subject area. […] Then, identify things you would do to help students with that. Also, feel free to think about the role of short and long term memory and schema as discussed in recent podcasts and Town Hall meetings.

Michael’s brief post responded in a very general way to the items in the prompt:

> The biggest obstacle I see to comprehension in Social Studies classes is the automatic dislike most students have for the study of history. Before they are seated in the classroom, many students have already decided they won't learn anything because "who cares about a bunch of names and dates of dead people." I can't empathize with that mindset, I've never been there myself, but I do remember automatically turning off my brain when I went into math class, so I guess that is more or less the same thing. Jennifer suggested read-alouds, to break up the expected monotony. Also beginning classes with some open obvious

questions to get students thinking and talking, like "so why do we have a government? Why do we have laws?" before a Civics lesson.

In contrast, other students' posts were much lengthier, describing several challenges and identifying specific strategies.

Instructor and student feedback and comments.

The feedback from the instructor as well as comments offered by classmates provided students with the knowledge needed to write their assignments. Barbara said there was "pretty constant feedback along the way" for the assignments. However, she also acknowledged the "time lag" when communicating online: "It does take a certain length of time for people to respond something you might say, but still, it worked well for our wiki, and I think it's working well for the Literacy Integration Unit with [the instructor's] feedback."

The wiki toolkit assignment was submitted on the *PBworks* website. The instructor had access to the wiki pages to make comments using a comment feature, and the instructor could access the group forum and the assignment function in the LMS. Within the wiki, the instructor's comments resided alongside the students' comments. A screenshot of Wiki Group 1's wiki page is shown as Figure 12.

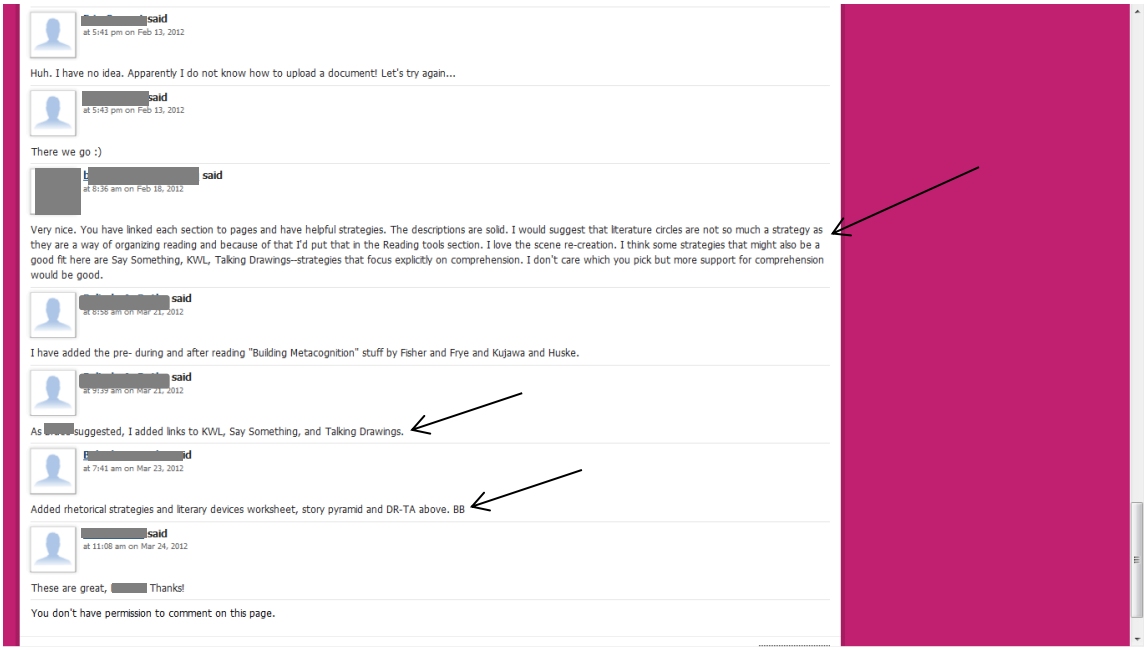


Figure 12: Screenshot of Instructor's Wiki Page Comments

The instructor's comments stated,

> Very nice. You have linked each section to pages and have helpful strategies. The descriptions are solid. I would suggest that literature circles are not so much a strategy as they are a way of reading and because of that I'd put that in the Reading tools section. I love the scene re-creation. I think some strategies that might also be a good fit here are Say Something, KWL, Talking Drawing – strategies that focus strictly on comprehension. I don't care which you pick but more support for comprehension would be good.

The instructor noted similar comments in the grade book for all three students in the group.

Barbara posted comments on this same screen about one month later, before the final wiki was due, stating "As [the instructor] suggested, I have added links to KWL,

Say Something, and Talking Drawings." The instructor and student comments provided an archive of the progression and collaboration on the students' wiki page.

The outline and final unit plan assignments were submitted on the *Google Docs* website, and the overview (*Jing* screencast assignment) was submitted to a designated discussion forum. The instructor made very general comments in the grade book in the LMS for an outline, overview, and final unit plan. To supplement these comments, he utilized a variety of Internet features to communicate with students about their work on phases of the assignment – the comment feature on the actual assignment in Google Docs, posts to the discussion forum, and a video screencast linked to the grade book.

For Ellen and Ann's unit plan outline, the instructor noted in the grade book: "Great start to your unit. *Read my comments in your Google Doc*" [emphasis added]. A screenshot of Ellen and Ann's unit plan is shown as Figure 13. As with the wiki, instructor comments were adjacent to student comments. The instructor responded directly to Ann's question about their writing for the introductory paragraph by stating, "There is enough for the initial overview. You might flesh this out with a few more details later but yes, good for now."

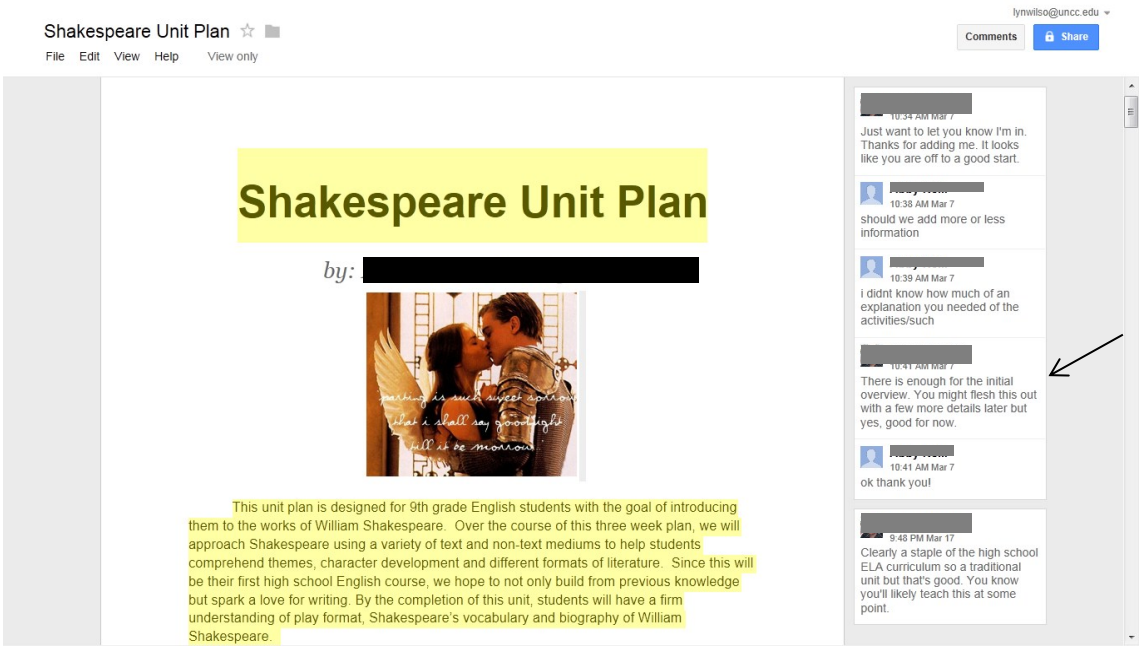


Figure 13: Screenshot of Instructor's Unit Plan Comments

For the second phase of the unit plan assignment, Ellen and Ann uploaded their *Jing* screencast overview on their unit plan into a designated discussion forum. The grade book comment on the screencast overview was "Great overview of your unit. I posted comments in the Forum Discussion." The instructor's post in the Forum Discussion stated,

> Nice technology connections and some active participation in the reading through reenactments which I think is a nice move to make with drama (make it dramatic). […] One thing I would think about is to ask if there is enough support for concept/vocabulary learning. This will be a challenge so think about that. You ask the question why these are still read today and I'm tempted to say because we English teachers still teach them. However, you make a good case for something more than that here. […] Nice job.

The instructor's comments in the forum post were both positive and directive, praising Ellen and Ann on their efforts to contemporize the teaching of a work in the English canon, while motivating them to incorporate strategies required by an effective unit plan.

Students also had the opportunity to make comments in the *Jing* discussion. One comment made in the *Jing* discussion was on the unit plan's actual teaching strategies. Michael's response to Ellen and Ann's *Jing* was

> I commend you for using some of the technology stuff we have used in this class, Dipity in particular. You seem to have integrated a good, diverse variety of activities and learning strategies into the unit, and it looks like it could be very effective, well done!

Other comments were by another student, Julie, who seemed enthusiastic about teaching Shakespeare. Julie's response to Ellen and Ann's *Jing* was

> Great job on your unit plan. I especially like that you included *The Taming of the Shrew*. I think that teachers sometimes put a lot of emphasis on the serious plays like *Romeo and Juliet* and *MacBeth* and not enough on Shakespeare's funny and light hearted writings. *The Taming of the Shrew* is one of my favorite Shakespearean plays. I think that students would throughly [sic]. enjoy it.

It was notable that Michael and Julie were two of three students who commented on Ellen and Ann's Jing overview. Michael and Julie teamed up to work on the unit plan, and it was Michael, the more technology "savvy" of the pair, who mentioned the technology tools used by Ellen and Ann.

For Ellen and Ann's final unit plan, the instructor stated in the grade book:

> Please see my comments in Google docs. You have a great concept for your unit but some key pieces are missing. Here is a jing video with some comments to help: http://screencast.com/t/rh4dYSB3c0u. Please revise and resubmit and I can regrade the unit.

In the *Jing* screencast video recording, the instructor showed the students their unit plan and pointed them to specific areas that need revision or expansion. He then showed them the assignment web page in the LMS and pointed out the requirements that their unit plan had not fulfilled. The instructor brought up on the screen the sample unit plans he had provided and then showed their submitted rubric. In the *Jing* screencast, he told the students "You don't discuss the moves you make" in the unit plan. Ellen and Ann were given the option of revising their unit plan.

Additionally, the instructor's *Google Doc* comments, shown in the screenshot as Figure 14, stated "Nice range of texts. However, you don't include the outline called for in this assignment."

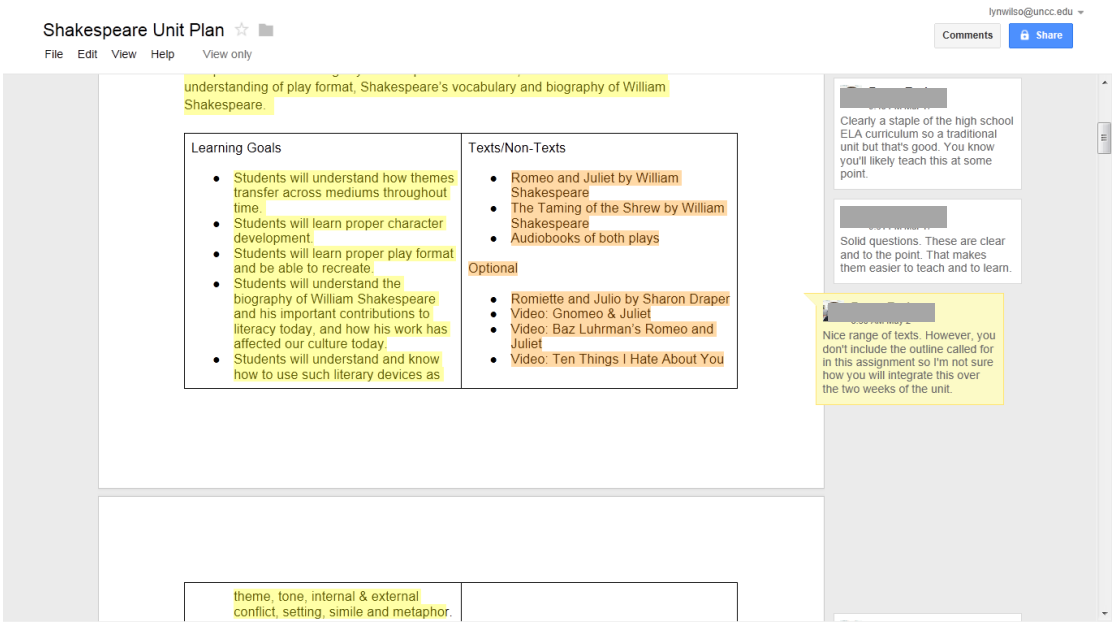


Figure 14: Screenshot of Instructor's Comments on Final Unit Plan

More instructor comments are shown in the screenshot in Figure 15. The comments mentioned some teaching strategies covered in the course that were not incorporated into the unit plan, for example, “What I don’t see is much visible or acknowledged support for comprehension and vocabulary learning – two big topics we tackled this semester.” The comments also referred to assignment requirements that were not fulfilled, such as, “You have a brief introduction […] you don’t have description of the kinds of learning supports that this assignment calls for and that are featured in the examples provided in the assignment description in Moodle.”

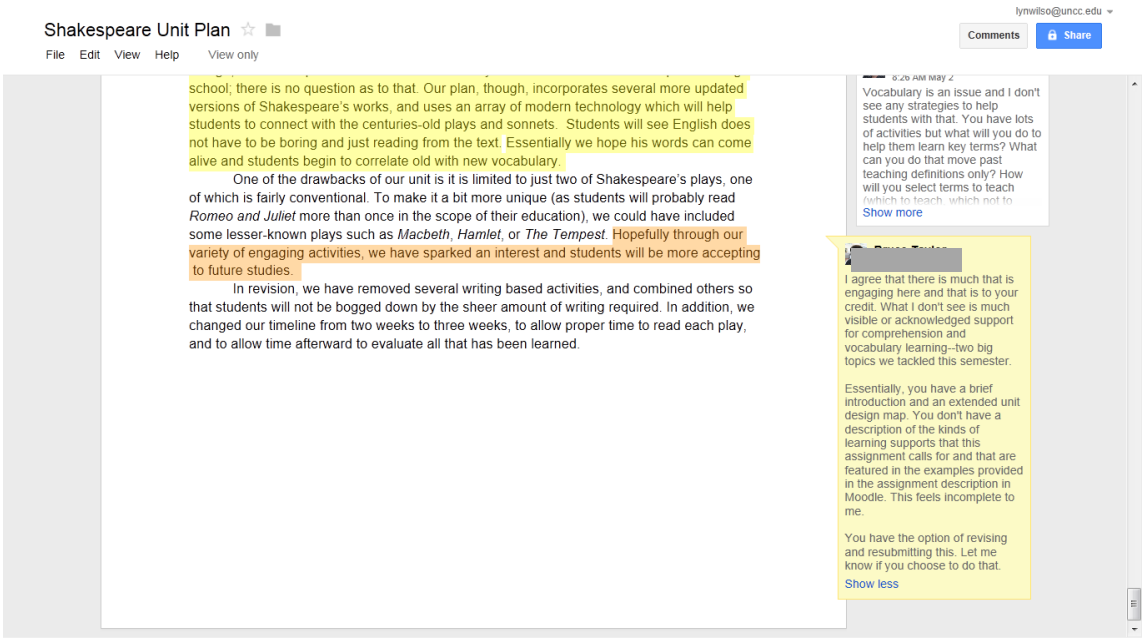


Figure 15: Screenshot of More Instructor Comments on Final Unit Plan

After the students made the recommended revisions, the instructor’s comments in the grade book stated, “Revisions strengthen the unit and make much more clear issues of pacing and how you support needs of students. This is a very smart unit. Well done.” The

instructor again made specific comments in *Google Docs*, shown in the screenshot as Figure 16, such as "This section helps so very much" and "It is more clear …"

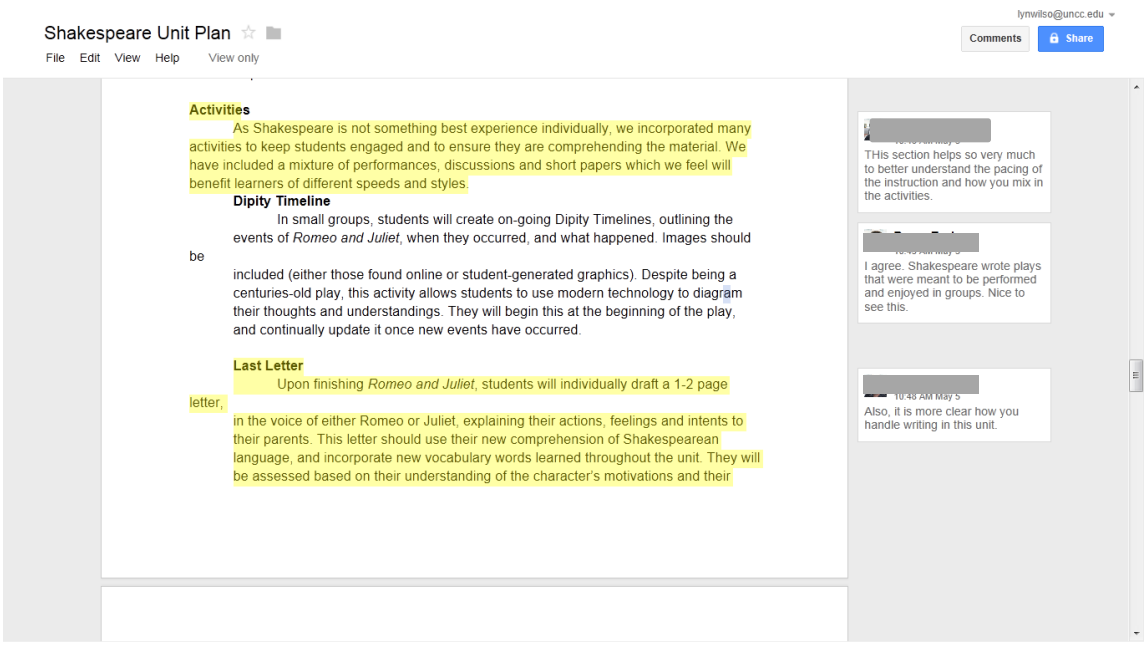


Figure 16: Screenshot of Instructor's Unit Plan Comments on Revisions

During a Town Hall synchronous class meeting, the instructor told students to leave his comments instead of deleting them, to show what revisions were recommended and if the changes were made. With *Google Docs,* the instructor's comments essentially became embedded into students' documents.

As mentioned previously, each individual student or student group posted the *Jing* screencast to a discussion forum for other students to view and to post comments. The screencast gave a five minute unit plan overview. Karen explained,

> we had a phase where we did a screencast on it with Jing and gave it to our group, no [sic] our class, to kind of give feedback on it. […] and we respond to that feedback, and it's my impression that if we completed it so far and gotten it

> working, we shouldn't have to do too much more depending on what the feedback is.

Since the instructor gave his screencast feedback in the same discussion forum, students' feedback was present alongside instructor feedback. Most students' posts modeled the instructor's conversational and complimentary tone and followed the instructor's basic format – opening with a positive statement, commenting on a specific element, suggesting a possible improvement, as demonstrated by Anita's response to Michael and Julie's *Jing*:

> Your unit sounds perfect for an election year! You might have a bit much to cover in a 4-5 day unit--instead of entire texts you might want to pick key selections from each to focus on. Your activities are nice and varied--such as having the students make their own campaign brochures. You touch on the media with the Larry King clip, but I would suggest expanding that to address how the media influences election results. (i.e. the infamous Katie Couric interview with Sarah Palin!) You could have the students bring in newspaper articles (or print off if they only get their news online!) that are obviously slanted towards one candidate or another, so the students understand that everything you read has an angle--it's not the gospel truth, especially when it comes to politics!
>
> I think your supporting texts are sound and you have lots of opportunities for discussion. What about a debate? Especially since debates are a key part of the election year drama! And you might want to expand on your literacy strategies for struggling students, although you have chosen three very solid ones.

Most students' posts were comparable to the instructor's posts in that they were detailed and consisted of several short paragraphs, like Anita's, though some were much shorter.

A unit plan is a genre that already exists within the teaching profession, and as indicated by the instructor's statement in the syllabus description, "Unlike units you may have developed for other courses," it is a genre with which students may have had some familiarity. However, the instructor influenced how the students' performed this genre by informing them what to include and exclude – for instance, the unit would not contain daily lesson plans, but would focus on unit-level planning. The instructor further influenced students' production of the unit plan by encouraging them to implement in the unit plan the literacy tools presented in the wiki assignment. When Barbara was asked how she knew what to include in a unit plan, she responded, "This is the assignment where we apply basically everything we've learned in this course." The students' enactment of the unit plan genre in the course, and potentially, the enactment of the genre in their teaching, was impacted by the instructor's assignment guidelines and by the instructor's comments.

Students created the clinical report in a word processing document and submitted it through the LMS. This assignment was not reviewed by the instructor as a work in progress, like the toolkit wiki and the unit plan in *Google Docs*. The students submitted the clinical report as a final product. The instructor used the grade book comment function to give detailed feedback on the clinical report. The comment feature in *Microsoft Word* would have been an option, but this tool was not utilized, since the writing assignment did not undergo a continuous revision process directly involving the instructor. The grade book referred to specific aspects of the students' reports, although

the comments were geared toward improving students' overall teaching performance, rather than their written document.

The instructor's grade book comments on Karen's midterm report stated, "You provide a thorough introduction to your student," although Karen actually had difficulty with this part of the assignment. She said in the interview, "We've so far done a midterm and that was introduction, which I kind of found difficult because my student didn't like to talk a lot." The instructor's grade book comments on Karen's final report stated, "Your lesson plans follow this focus and provide nice detail." Karen said in the interview how much she appreciated the lesson plan template, since she had no experience preparing a lesson plan.

Michael's impressions of the clinical report writing assignment were in line with the grade book comments on his final report, which stated,

> You make clear in your analysis that you both gained from this […] I was struck by the power of this statement and what it says about your take-away: "More than anything else, my take away from this assignment is the crucial importance of allowing students flexibility and space in fulfilling the requirements of Social Studies assignments."

Likewise, Michael said in the interview that he felt the assignment was worthwhile, since it gave him the opportunity to reflect.

The instructor's grade book comments on Barbara's final report stated, "you provide a thorough account of your work […] clearly the big success was in his application of this kind of thought to writing. That is a great moment in your reflection." Barbara said in the interview,

> a part of this was exposing the inconsistencies in his thinking, which is the way you should – when you proofread something, you need to be able to step outside yourself, put yourself in someone else's shoes reading your essay or whatever. So that was a lot of fun, and he did really well.

For the instructor, Barbara conveyed this perception well in her writing for the clinical report.

Except for two students, each of the student participants earned full points for the midterm and final reports. The instructor deducted 7% from Marie's score for not including a lesson plan with the midterm report. The instructor deducted 12 % from Joyce's final report score, stating, "I understand less about the impact on N— because you do not include many specifics about that. That would be helpful. However, on the whole you have solid report."

Students were informed in the assignment guidelines that "all assignments will be graded for content and grammar/mechanics per the university guidelines for writing intensive courses." This statement was not included in the guidelines for the other assignments. While points were not deducted, the instructor did point out grammar/mechanics errors in the grade book comments. For example, in Barbara's midterm report grade book comments, the instructor asked, "what do you mean by 'a 1½ rough draft'? Is it one and half pages? Not a big thing but I wondered." For Angela, the grade book feedback indicated, "One minor note. Check the spelling of 'therefor' in the first sentence. It should be 'therefore.' " As the instructor stated in the interview, "I'm not above pointing out when they need to pay attention to some things in the mechanics."

For several students, the instructor reiterated in his grade book comments a statement from the students' report. For example, to Marie, the instructor noted,

> This statement caught my attention: "Most importantly I have learned that these students who are 'failing' are pretty smart and will achieve – and want to achieve- with more support and encouragement." I am so glad you have as a take away from this. Great job on your clinical tutoring report.

To Naomi, he commented,

> You capture this in this statement in your narrative: "My primary goal was that she understood what it meant if someone said it to her but made her understand that it wasn't absolutely necessary she remember the word to use. If she came up with a similar word with the same meaning, it was okay." Yes, it is okay. Meaning making and communication are the goal.

This practice of replying directly to the students' writing resembled a dialogue between the student and instructor that arose out of the text.

In terms of grade book feedback on discussion posts, the instructor's comments were very brief. More substantive feedback on student posts was found in the instructor's responses to students.

> Jill,
>
> I like that in your post you move from the past--how we've been taught--to the present and future--what we can do to teach more effectively. The strategies you list and the examples of their use are powerful. […] Thanks for sharing your observations and thoughts here. Bruce

According to Barbara, the discussion forum was also a place where the instructor redirected students toward a better understanding of the course material. She explained, "say you'd read something, and you took it in a different way, then [the instructor] comments on that, on your discussion posting. And he'll say, "I think you're looking at it – what was really meant was this." For example, Mark wrote,

> I want to counsel prudence and balance in maintaining pride of place for "traditional" novels and written words, where the reader's mind does the work in creating the images. Our brains are unlimited in what they can do with a powerful book, and sometimes pre-supplied images can get in the way or force the mind down one particular path.

The instructor responded,

> I do think that the category of picture books has expanded to include longer works and books for older readers. I agree that we want readers to be able to form pictures on their own but I don't think picture books are going to take the place of novels in the classroom. However, they might help students who struggle with a longer work to see those pictures.

Mark did not reply to this post from the instructor.

However, not every student received a responsive comment from the instructor. As he stated "I tell them Day One, I am not going to respond to all of your posts. This is not a conversation that I own. It's a conversation that we engage in together. And I say, a lot of times I want you guys talking to each other." The instructor made a total of 77 posts to the content discussions.

As Barbara emphasized, “You’re supposed to have very sort of relevant comments. It’s not just praising. He wants it to be more conversational.” She further explained, “he has said, when you respond to your classmates, don’t just say, “What a good job, I agree.” Go into more details.” The comments and feedback students received from the instructor and from each other, through the discussion forums, provided students with the knowledge of the expectations for their writing in the class.

The instructor informed students about the nature of various professional and academic genres through the assignments presented in the syllabus descriptions, assignment web pages, and samples. Interpreting and formulating approaches to writing assignments can be challenging for students (Nelson, 1995). The students interviewed said they benefitted from the detailed assignment information the instructor provided through the LMS. Goodfellow and Lea (2005) emphasized the importance of supporting students to be mindful of the audience, purpose, and text for their writing with respect to varied situations. The students and instructor also interacted with these genres through the Burning Questions forum and the online comments.

On the whole, genres are established and sustained by their users. The course assignments were opportunities for students to learn the writing genres of their profession, such as lesson plans and unit plans. Students also practiced academic writing genres in the self-assessment responses and the reflections that were embedded in several assignments.

Online Students' Perceptions of Genres for Their Writing are Based on Perceived Purposes

The data that I collected in this case study indicated that online students' perceptions of the genres for their writing come from their perceived purpose for their writing. Genres are co-constructed by the users to fulfill social purposes. Devitt (2004) explained,

> Genres do not exist independent of people, though the generic actions of some people influence the actions of other people. To say that genre is a social action is to say that people take action through their conceptions of genres [emphasis added]; genre is a human construct … (p. 50)

Barbara, Karen, and Michael disagreed with the statement in the Online Student Writing Survey: *My writing for my online class is the same for my discussion board posts, assignment submissions, or questions to my instructor*.

Each of the course assignments – the wiki, the unit plan, the clinical report, and the discussions – called on students to vary their writing for these different contexts. A question on the Online Student Writing Survey asked students: *What kinds of writing do you do in the online class?* From a list of 43 items, all 14 student participants selected "assignment," and all 14 student participants selected "discussion." In Table 3, the first two columns show the number of student responses to the various kinds of writing included in the list. The third column shows the writing assignment in the online class that I identified as corresponding to the particular kind of writing students identified in the survey.

Table 3: Responses to Online Writing Survey Question

# of Student Responses	Kinds of Writing	Online Class Writing
14	Assignment	Wiki, Unit Plan, Clinical Report, Discussion Posts
14	Post	Discussion Posts
12	Wiki	Wiki
9	Essay	Clinical Report, Discussion Post
8	Post	Discussion Post
8	Summary	Wiki, Unit Plan, Clinical Report
8	Critique	Undetermined
7	Presentation	Jing
7	Biography	Introductory Discussion, Literacy Timeline
7	Review	Undetermined
6	E-mail	Discussion Post, Messages to Instructor & Group members
5	Paper	Clinical Report
5	Question	Burning Questions Forum
4	Bibliography	Wiki, Unit Plan
3	Report	Clinical Report
3	Outline	Unit Plan
3	Journal	Discussion Post
1	Memo	Wiki

The Online Writing Survey asked students to respond to an open-ended question: *How is writing for your online class <u>similar</u> to other kinds of writing that you do in your life?* Barbara stated, "Try to express myself as clearly and succinctly as possible." Likewise, in the interview, Barbara asserted, "I want to be prepared. I want to know what I'm talking about. I want what I say to be pertinent." Michael answered, "There is still a main idea to each piece." He explained in the interview,

> I think it's more formal if it's responding to a prompt, like an opinion on some issue in education, because it should be. I feel like it should be more professionally written as opposed to my reaction to a book. That's going to be more free flowing thinking.

Karen replied, "fairly similar, I like to write out my response and then edit it in a Word document prior to posting my writing. However, responding to posts is different. My responses are less formal."

The Online Writing Survey asked students to respond to the open-ended question: *How is writing for your online class different from other kinds of writing that you do in your life?* Barbara responded, "The issues are different...more academic, sometimes more abstract or esoteric." As she explained in the interview,

> because the questions are on the readings, I want to reflect that I've read the readings and that I understand them, and if I don't understand them I go back. If what I'm thinking is not making that much sense, I'll double check it.

Barbara's responses demonstrated a drive for excellence in her writing and also a sense of perfectionism that she applied to all of her course work.

Michael responded, "Less focused on a goal, more sponanteous [sic]."

Karen responded, "The assignments are not any different but writing as a way of discussing with classmates is different with regards to discussion boards/posts. The writing is more semi-formal or a nice mix of formal and informal writing."

Other students gave a range of responses to this question. Some students referred to the academic aspect of their writing. For example, one student commented, "Writing papers is much more formal and requires deeper thought than other writing I do." Other students referred specifically to the online aspects of their writing. Scott acknowledged how online learning lends itself to using information technologies; he responded, "Several of my online classes have exposed me to new technologies that I have not used before such as Webquest, Google Docs, Dipity, and Inspiration." Angela seemed to

recognize the presence of CMC elements, stating that "Much of the writing is not in the form of writing. For example, creating wikis, video podcasts etc. I consider this a form of writing as it is communication but it is not pencil/paper or keyboard type writing."

The asynchronous online discussion forum provided a rich source of textual data generated by students. Students typically posted over a one week period to an asynchronous discussion board located within the LMS. Each student's interplay with the discussion question and responses was in full view of their instructor and their classmates. I viewed the discussion forum as a medium for students' engagement with the course content through writing, but I did not know how students viewed the discussions.

In the interviews, I asked Barbara, Karen, and Michael to tell me about their experiences of writing in the online class; each of their responses referred specifically to the discussions. Barbara stated,

> A lot of our writing happens around the discussion forums which happen once a week. There'll be some reading assigned, there'll be some questions we need to answer, we'll post them to the site, and everyone has 24 hours to comment.

Karen also responded, "Well, we have discussion forums. I have to write for the discussion forums. He has us post, and then we have to do two responses, two or three responses in groups." Michael said, "The majority of it is responses. That's the majority of the prose writing, I guess. […] When I think of writing in class, that's what we spend most of our time doing."

Of the three students interviewed, Karen had the most discussion posts, followed by Barbara, and then Michael. This data was consistent with the comments these students made in the interviews about their experiences of writing for the online discussion

forums. Table 4 presents a comparison of the forum posts of Karen, Barbara, and Michael.

Table 4: Comparison of Forum Posts of Interview Participants

Forum	Karen	Barbara	Michael
Burning Questions Q & A	16	4	1
Getting to Know You Introductions	7	3	3
Forum 1A Literacy and Learning	6	4	3
Forum 1B Literacy Timeline	9	6	4
Forum 2A Teaching Vocabulary	6	1	3
Forum 2B Comprehension	6	5	4
Forum 3A Independent Book	9	3	3
Forum 3B Short texts with adolescents	6	3	5
Book Circle Group	3	6	3
Jing Overview Forum	7	4	3
Forum 4 This I Believe	4	3	3
Total	63	42	35

Karen not only frequently posted to the content forums, but she also regularly participated in the Burning Questions forum to a much greater extent than Barbara or Karen. In the Burning Questions forum, Karen asked questions about the course assignments, and she also answered questions posted by other students.

In response to a question in the Online Writing Survey which asked students: *How do you view your participation in the online class discussions? as talking, as writing, as fulfilling a class requirement, other*, Barbara was one of seven students who

chose “as writing," as shown in Figure 17. Michael was the only student who chose “fulfilling a class requirement." Karen was the only student who chose “other."

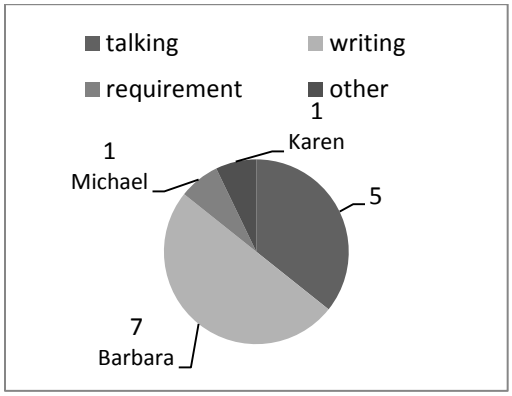


Figure 17: How Students Viewed Discussion Participation

Discussion as reflection.

When I asked Michael in the interview whether he viewed his participation in the online class discussions “as talking, as writing, or as fulfilling a class requirement,” he answered,

> All of the above, but mostly writing […] This class, his are more reflection style. Reflect on the book you read for this assignment. I guess it’s more like a roundtable discussion about a book or something.

Michael commented at one point in the interview, “This stuff in [the instructor’s] class feels often like a reflection from the beginning, then fleshing that out or hashing that out amongst our peers.” He explained that “in the reflection stuff, it can be more like just writing one’s thoughts down in a journal or something.” In viewing the discussions as “reflection,” Michael’s perception was actually more aligned to the discussion rubric criteria.

Discussion as "writing an essay."

Michael said the writing for the online class that was similar to other writing he might do was like:

> Responding to an issue, like an opinion piece, so to speak. It's kind of like writing an academic essay, with a little bit less intensity. You don't need reasoning books or to cite a bunch of stuff, but it's kind of like that. Like I start out with a point, a thesis, and try to make it so everything I say points back to that, confirms it.

Barbara described in the interview her perception of participation for the discussions:

> B: In terms of the individual posting in response to the question, to me, it doesn't feel anything like talking. *It's much more like writing an essay* [emphasis added].
>
> L: Your initial response?
>
> B: Yes. I do the reading, and I may refer back to the reading. And I may even cite, if I feel it's appropriate. I feel like it's much more like I'm writing an assignment when I write that discussion forum. *It's as if I'm submitting an essay for a grade* [emphasis added].
>
> L: You said it doesn't feel like talking. Does it feel like a written conversation?
>
> B: No, because that would imply a lot more spontaneity. This is really just like writing an essay, where you look things up in the dictionary, you think about your thoughts. You might have a little outline, at least mentally. I don't think I've ever written down an outline, but mentally you think, "okay how am I going to organize my thoughts around this," and then I do the posting.

Barbara's posts to the prompt for the content discussions for Forums 1A, 2A, 2B, and 3B did exhibit essay elements. For example, her initial post to the prompt in Forum 1A had

an introduction, conclusion, body paragraphs, transitions, topic sentences, examples, and details. For 2A and 3B, she gave an essay response to each question asked in the instructor prompt. Her initial post to 2B also was essentially an essay based on the assigned reading.

Discussion as "conversation."

Barbara shared in the interview, "I don't want them to think I'm a bitch when I do such formal writing, so I will interject some humor in there to sort of soften the blows," and then she laughed. At the time, my response to Barbara was intended to join in the humor of the moment, but our dialogue offered more:

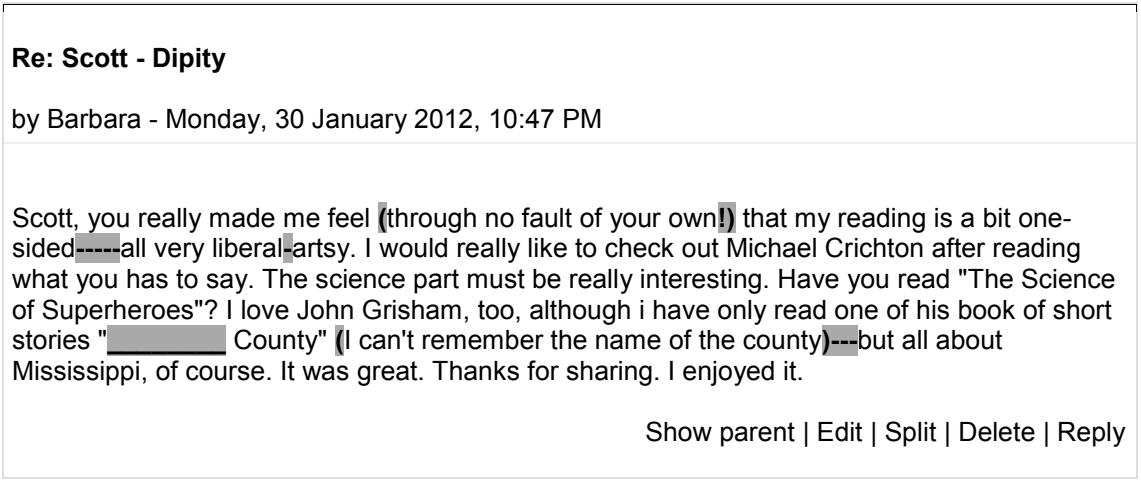
L: But I have to ask this – do you think they think it's funny?

B: Sometimes I wonder.

L: The reason I say that is the generational thing. Often I wonder …

B: See, this is the thing about the online courses. You have no idea what they think of you. Think about when you talk to a person in person. There are all these cues as to whether they enjoy being around you, they like you – their eyes, whether they laugh. You don't have any of that.

Barbara used punctuation effusively in her posts, possibly to compensate for the lack of visual cues in online communication, as shown by the highlighted items in the post reproduced as Figure 18.



Re: Scott - Dipity

by Barbara - Monday, 30 January 2012, 10:47 PM

Scott, you really made me feel (through no fault of your own!) that my reading is a bit one-sided-----all very liberal-artsy. I would really like to check out Michael Crichton after reading what you has to say. The science part must be really interesting. Have you read "The Science of Superheroes"? I love John Grisham, too, although i have only read one of his book of short stories "_____ County" (I can't remember the name of the county)---but all about Mississippi, of course. It was great. Thanks for sharing. I enjoyed it.

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply

Figure 18: Punctuation in Barbara's Post

Karen's explanation to the survey question, "*How do you view your participation in the online class discussions?*" was "I would say most of the time I consider it 'fulfilling a class requirement' but I also consider it to be a discussion or conversation with my classmates." When I asked Karen this same question in the interview, she said,

> I guess it just depends on what the topic is. If it's something that I'm interested in, I might go in a little more than my required responses. A lot of stuff is, if I've fulfilled the course requirement, I may go in there and read other responses, but I may not respond unless I really understand what people are saying or if I really feel like I can contribute to something.

However, for every discussion forum, Karen actually responded more than what was required. After fulfilling the requirement, she always responded at least one more time and usually between three and six more times to her classmates. In the interview, Karen said "If I've met my requirement, I might be like, That's a great idea, and that might be all I put. At times it can be formal or informal." In fact, she never wrote a response as

brief as "That's a great idea." Her responses consistently began by affirming the other student's comments, and then she continued by offering her own thoughts on the topic.

The multiple ways Karen characterized the discussions seemed to reflect her answer of "other" to the survey question asking how she viewed her participation. She said the responses to the discussion and the Burning Questions were "similar to e-mail." But then she added,

> For me they're kind of a writing in and of themselves. I kind of think of them as entries, journal entries maybe that you have to do for a class […] Rather than having homework every day that you would in high school, you have these discussions posts where you have to contribute to the discussion and give some input on. Kind of a way of having a conversation with others and getting input on what they think about it.

In this series of responses, Karen characterized the discussions in four different ways – as "e-mail," "a writing in and of themselves," "journal entries," and "a conversation." Karen went on to describe the discussions in an entirely different way, as a "case study:"

> K: The best way I can describe it is in grad school we had some case studies. This was in person, and we had to read an article. We'd have like a case study, scientific journal article, and we'd have some questions about it. And we'd meet in small groups and discuss the questions, and we'd decide on an answer.
>
> L: The group answer?
>
> K: The group answer, but we each had to come up with our own answer before the group. I kind of see these discussions posts as like a case study like that.

> Where you have your assignments and your readings, and you come together and respond to what your assignment was with some guidance from the professor.

With an undergraduate degree in Biology and a graduate degree in Public Health, Karen drew on her science background to compare the discussions to a form of writing that was familiar to her. She viewed the discussion posts as fulfilling multiple purposes, depending on the situation, as indicated by the different descriptions she offered.

The differences in Karen's posts reflect her view of different purposes for her writing within the discussions, depending on her intended audience. According to Bawarshi (2003), "genre becomes the site for the exchange of language and social interaction" (p. 552). For Karen, identifying posts as "journal entries," a "case study," or an "e-mail" suggested writing to fulfill assignment requirements. Describing posts as "a conversation" or "a writing in and of themselves," implied writing to satisfy social connections.

Differences in initial and responsive posts.

Barbara said she tried to keep her responsive posts "more stream of consciousness" and "more conversational." In contrast, Barbara's initial, "essay-like" posts were more polished, final products. Likewise, each of Michael's initial posts to the discussion prompts consisted of at least three or four paragraphs, but his responses were just a few sentences.

Karen remarked about the writing for her discussion posts, "if I'm responding to students, it's more conversational." For example, one of her responses referred to classmates by name, gave praise, and used colloquial phrases:

> I agree with Angela. You did a great job Megan of describing science difficulties. Science is abstract and needs a lot of visuals. When we are first learning these concepts, we can't wrap our mind around the terms because we can't see them. How do we know something is in us like DNA?

However, Karen's initial response to the prompt used more academic language intended for the instructor:

> I have to say I found Chapters 4 and 5 difficult for me to understand. I find this difficulty somewhat ironic since we are talking about comprehension here. However, my main difficulty is trying to figure out what these chapter concepts look like in the science classroom. I did not find the science examples very helpful. Nonetheless, there were a few points I would like to make as far as difficulties in science and what we as teachers can do to help with them.

There is a distinct difference between the purpose of these two discussion posts, even with the same discussion forum.

Connections between discussions and other writing assignments.

I asked each of the students in the interviews, "How do you see those discussions fitting into the course for you?" Karen answered,

> This course, the discussions are very nicely tied in to what we're doing. […] This course does really well. This has been one of my favorite courses so far because is organization online is very clear. It's easy to use. He ties it nicely. The discussion is tied in nicely.

Karen viewed the assignments as the application of the ideas presented in the discussions. She stated, "I feel like the assignments are more kind of a result of – it's kind of like,

You've talked about this, now let's do it." She further stated, "it's more like the discussions and the readings would be more like your everyday work. And then you might have a project. Okay we've discussed this, let's go more on that."

Karen said that for the Final Reflection, "we're giving the rest of our lesson plans, maybe what the student learned, what we learned." Karen's Final Reflection stated, "I feel I gained more experience and learning than J--- and other students I tutored during these sessions."

I asked Michael, "How do you see those discussions fitting into the course for you?" He responded,

> Usually, almost all of class, it's been effective. Our thoughts that we write down and read from others will come back in the eventual assignment. Things like the wiki, the literacy integration unit. What we write down. The one that's due next is called "This I Believe." I haven't looked at that yet. But that will be interesting, and I'm sure that will find its way into my clinical tutoring thing that I turn in, the literacy integration unit, and the overall evaluation of ourselves. I'm sure that that will work its way back in those thoughts.

The Clinical Tutoring assignment final report and Literacy Integration Unit had already been submitted prior to Michael's post to Forum 4, the "This I Believe" discussion. Michael wrote in his Final Reflection, "For me it has been a meaningful learning experience about what does and does not work in motivating and engaging students with Social Studies content" and "I hope to one day implement what I have learned here in engaging and empowering future generations of students." Despite what he had said during the interview, there really was not much connection between these assignments

and his post to Forum 4. In response to the "This I Believe" discussion forum, Michael posted,

> I believe that in order to be a good teacher, I need to be a better learner. The day I stop learning is the day I become ineffective as a teacher. These classes, along with tutoring and observations have taught me how important it is to never stop learning, and to pass along the passion for knowledge to students.

Michael posted on the last day this forum was open to students, and his post was much shorter than other students' posts. The instructor grade book comments noted "A very brief post," but Michael still earned the full score.

In response to the question, "How do you see those discussions fitting into the course for you?" Barbara explained,

> Usually the questions have to do with how would you apply that in the classroom. So it's basically reflecting and thinking of – there's some regurgitation, and then the other part is application, so, that's how it fits in. Then, the bigger assignments will be really tangible application, not just theoretical.

For example, Barbara recounted in her discussion post in Forum 2B the strategies she had used in her first tutoring session; these strategies were then recorded in her Midterm Report. Barbara's initial post to this forum stated, "I would begin with short poems […]. After modeling the thought process involved in analyzing several poems, it would be the students' turn." In the Clinical Midterm Report, Barbara wrote, "We worked on why his answers were wrong and had him use reasoning to find the right ones. We did a shared reading in which I demonstrated how to read a poem." In this same content discussion forum, Barbara responded to another student,

> Good post, Naomi. It made me think about the student I am tutoring currently. He is extremely bright and makes very good grades except in English because he is so bored. My big challenge will be to get him enthused about reading.

Interestingly, Naomi's post did not mention tutoring at all; it was Barbara who brought up the matter of tutoring. Her response to Naomi was dated the same day as her Clinical Midterm Tutoring Report, and the points she made in the post were reflected in her report, which stated,

> He enjoys math and science but English is his least favorite subject because it is 'boring.' I talked to him about how essential it is to read and write well, and also said there were some great things to read but he had to find something he was interested it.

She further stated in her midterm report her plan to "Suggest books about science, math, geography or sports that may help to get W— interested in reading for pleasure. Get him happy to read!" In a content discussion forum that asked students to talk about "key challenges to comprehension that arise in learning in your subject area," Barbara's initial post stated,

> The key challenge that arises in English Language Arts is that, short of conventions of grammar and language usage and some definitions, there are no right or wrong answers per se – only defensible understandings. Students must be taught to arrive at the meaning of a text when it is almost never explicit, but requires careful analysis.

The concepts Barbara described in her post on subject area challenges were represented in her final report submitted nearly two months later, which stated,

> I counseled him to focus not so much on a right or wrong answer as on what he thought and why he thought that. He still needs to defend his opinions. And in the process of working through those opinions and examining them, he would become a better thinker.

While this particular writing assignment did not represent the dimensions of computer mediated communication to the same degree as the toolkit wiki and unit plan in Google Docs, Barbara appeared to have drawn upon the online interaction in the discussions to develop the narrative in her clinical tutoring report. Barbara's post to Forum 2B also described several specific teaching strategies that were discussed in assigned readings that were not referred to in her reports.

Barbara said the final clinical report was "a reflection on the experience of tutoring somebody, of tutoring a middle school student, what that was like." The concluding paragraph of Barbara's Final Reflection stated,

> The most important thing I learned was how much I like to teach writing. If self-confidence could really be taught, I think writing would be one way to do it. Overall, tutoring was a very useful experience for me. It was harder than I anticipated keeping the sessions productive and the student engaged.

Barbara considered the toolkit wiki "a great assignment," especially since the toolkit could be used later for her teaching. She explained, "When you're building a lesson plan, and you have a few students who are struggling in their reading, there are tools in there that you can use to bring everybody up in terms of reading skills." Her description of her writing for the wiki was that

most of it was summarizing, being able to summarize. We would do links to either a webpage that showed this worksheet, for example. So we had to summarize what that worksheet was and why it was good. So most of the skills in that was being able to summarize. Now the paragraphs, the introductory paragraphs, were again, like essays, little short essays justifying our choices of tools, and our organization.

From Barbara's perspective, writing for the unit plan was "mostly summarizing." She stated, "in terms of writing, your goal is to let [the instructor] know exactly what you intend to do without writing a book about it, in other words, just a few short sentences." Barbara appeared to have effectively achieved this expectation, as demonstrated in the screenshot of her unit plan, shown in Figure 19.

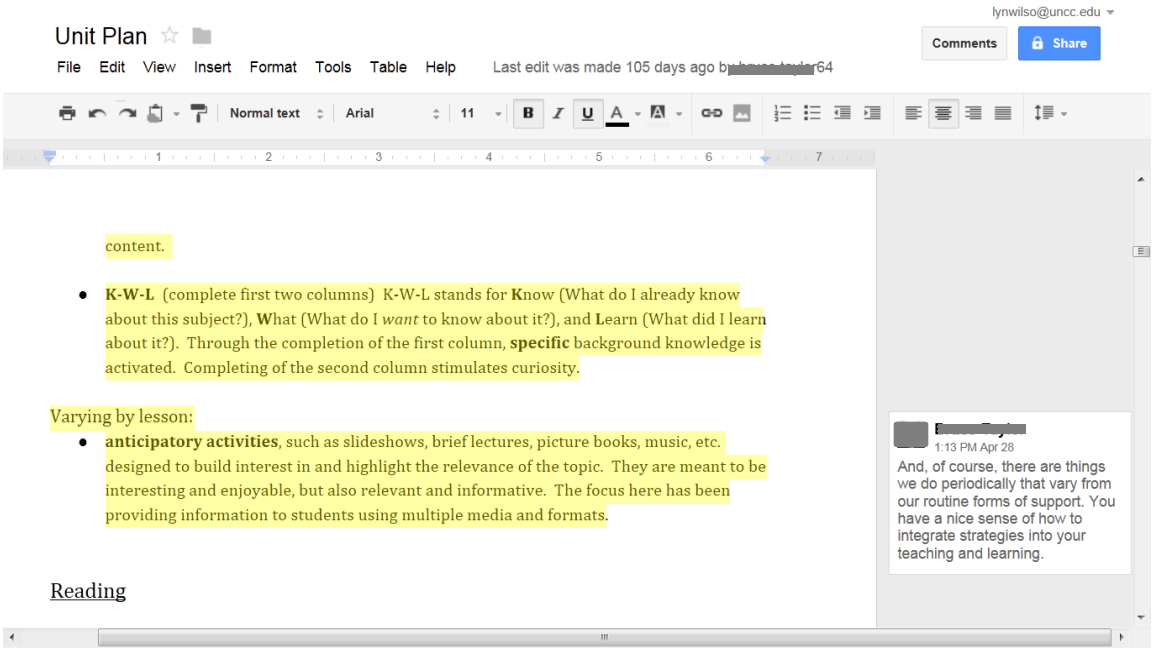


Figure 19: Barbara's Unit Plan

She presented her brief summaries of the learning activities as required, and the instructor positively commented on the information she provided, stating "You have a nice sense of how to integrate strategies into your teaching and learning."

Online Students' Processes for Writing Assignments Correlate to Genre and Medium

The data that I collected in this case study indicated that online students' processes for writing assignments are connected to genre through CMC. The processes for creating assignments varied considerably depending on the type, particularly since the assignments included components that relied on different Internet technologies. The wiki assignment entailed navigating the functions of a free wiki site to write about teaching resources. The unit plan assignment involved accessing *Google Docs* to write segments of a teaching unit in the student's subject area and preparing an overview of the unit using *Jing* to present a screencast. The discussion forums demanded responding within the course LMS. The clinical report required submitting a written report to the assignment function in the LMS and possibly downloading a lesson plan template. In this section, I identify and describe students' processes for performing the writing assignments – the wiki, unit plan, clinical report, and discussions – based on course artifacts, student artifacts, and student interviews.

Means of utilizing the wiki.

The wiki provided a space for small groups of students to engage in collaborative writing on a project relevant to their career interests. Barbara discussed the benefits of doing group work in an online class, when she emphasized,

> The other assignments are like assignments in a face to face classroom, only *better*. Because you collaborate more easily because you're doing it online, like

> the wiki. We didn't have to travel to get together. And we actually said "Let's all get together in this forum at a certain time." We did that on one occasion.

To arrange the *Wimba* session, the wiki group made up of Barbara, Ellen, and Ann used the wiki forum set up by the instructor. In a post in the Wiki Group 1 Forum, Ellen remarked on the collaborative aspect of the wiki:

> I like the idea of each person being responsible for adding a few items to each section. It feels more like collaboration than each person being responsible for a section, and, like you said, it would allow each of us to get exposure to each part.

Karen, who was in a group with Angela and Steve, described during the interview the collaborative writing that happened with her wiki group:

> One of my group members was responsible for the vocabulary section. She'd write the strategies out, how you did the strategies, and I would go in there and try to incorporate some science material in there. And we had one person doing the technology section, and then I did book selections and movie selections. And so we would all kind of throw out some ideas, but most of us were responsible for one section of that.

Karen said her group "really loved working with [the wiki]," and their responses to the required self-assessment questions reflected a positive collaborative writing experience. For the last question on the self-assessment, "Other comments about your wiki?" the group wrote,

> Our group members have worked well together and have created a wiki that compiles literature, technology, and strategies to use in the classroom. […] As a group, we have done a great job in keeping deadlines, organizing how we wanted

> [to] complete the assignment, planning meetings to discuss our thoughts, and communicating updates as we created the wiki. While each of us took charge of updating a particular 'section' of the wiki, *all of our thoughts and ideas are equally represented* throughout the site. Great group members and organization! [emphasis added]

For some students, the collaborative process was a significant factor in their online classroom writing, especially when utilizing the wiki medium.

Other students approached the wiki assignment less collaboratively. The attribution dates in the wiki created by Michael and Julie showed they delayed their efforts until a few days before the due date, and the dates of their activity and wiki forum posts indicate that they worked separately on the wiki, not together. Although Michael said he and Julie communicated using e-mail, instead of the wiki forum, they actually posted to the forum 11 times over five days, so some degree of cooperation occurred between them. As the instructor stated, "Because I think teaching happens so often in isolation, I think it's beneficial when we do get to talk with others and think out loud." For an online assignment like creating the wiki pages, students' opportunity to "talk with others and think out loud" mostly emerged in a written format through the group discussion forums and wiki comment functions.

Method of using Google Docs.

The unit plan was prepared in *Google Docs*, a free word processing and document repository site. Karen saw benefits in using *Google Docs* only for collaboration. She said, "It's a great way to do group work. As far as individual work, I like doing a Word document better. […] I'm more familiar with it, the formatting. I still don't trust the

online saving." Since Karen was working individually on her unit plan, she preferred *not* to have used *Google Docs*. She stated, "I really don't like Google documents if it's individual. I like more the Word document since I'm more familiar with it. […] I know that it is on my computer as a copy. Rather than being out in little cyber space." Karen posted to the Burning Questions forum about other problems she had working with *Google Docs*:

> Yeah, the formatting was all wrong when I put it in a Word document an [sic] then Google Docs was doing some weird formatting as well while I was making revisions. Thankfully, I was able to get it completed in Google Docs but I am afraid if I move it back to a Word document it will return to the formatting it had there.

Barbara, on the other hand, used a more traditional method for creating her unit plan. She said, "All the composition that I do takes place in a big yellow tablet, and then I'm typing it in *Google Docs*." Using this approach, Barbara avoided problems of importing or exporting documents, but that was not her rationale. As she explained, she preferred the tactile and visual experience of writing with a pen in hand and seeing what she had written on paper, before transferring her writing to the screen.

Michael did not express any concerns about using *Google Docs* for writing the unit plan. He said, "For *Google Docs* you can paste stuff pretty easily, so it depends on the program. So I've learned to evaluate the program, figure that out early on, and act accordingly." Michael collaborated on the wiki with Julie, who also planned to teach Social Studies. For Julie, who described herself as "technologically challenged," partnering with Michael had practical benefit as well.

Procedures for creating the Jing screencast.

Students created a *Jing* screencast that gave a five minute overview of their unit plan, and then they posted the screencast to a discussion forum for other students to view and offer feedback. Barbara wrote the script for the screencast in advance, but said,

> by the end I really wasn't reading that much, I was glancing, and pointing, so there really was a little more ad libbing going on. I would have tried to read the whole thing, but it's just not possible because you're scrolling down, and you're pointing to things.

Michael prepared and delivered the screencast for the unit plan he and Julie created. He did not write the script before recording the screencast, and he seemed uncertain about whether the instructor expected him to approach the assignment this way, stating, "that's not really how we're supposed to do it. He didn't really say how we're supposed to do it." Karen also said she did not "write it out beforehand;" instead, she just did practice screencasts. She described a *Jing* assignment for another class where the instructor expected her to write out the script first, a process she found helpful, but not necessary.

Process for writing the clinical report.

Students wrote a midterm report and final report on their experience of tutoring a student in their subject area. The report was written as a word processing document and submitted to the assignment function in the LMS. Some students created their own format for the lesson plan. Some students downloaded a lesson plan template from the assignment webpage in the LMS and included the completed tutoring lesson plans with their report. Some lesson plans were handwritten; others were typed. The lesson plan template included a space at the bottom of the page where the students recorded their

reflections about the tutoring session. The students' written reports were not a verbatim duplication of the lesson plan reflections, but it was clear by the phrases present in both documents that students referred to the lesson plan notes to write the comprehensive final reflection. Most students wrote a new introduction section for the final report, whereas Karen incorporated her entire midterm report into her final report as the introduction section, which she called "Narrative."

Process for posting to content discussions.

Students typically posted over a one-week period to the asynchronous content discussion forums in the LMS. Students were required to make their own initial posts to a discussion prompt during the week between Monday and Sunday, and then respond to two other students' posts by the following Monday.

Michael described his method for posting to the discussions: "What I do is I – they usually have some kind of prompt or question, and I copy and paste that into a Word document, so I've got it there, and write my response to it that way, and then paste it to Moodle." He said that for his responses to other students, "Those I just write there on Moodle because I've got it right there to read." Each of Michael's initial posts to the discussion prompts were lengthy, at least three or four paragraphs, while his responses were brief, only a couple sentences.

Karen's method for posting was similar to what Michael used. She answered in a survey question, "I like to write out my response and then edit it in a Word document prior to posting my writing. However, responding to posts is different. My responses are less formal." Likewise, she remarked in the interview, "My initial posts are prepared in a Word document. And then when I go in to respond to other students, I don't prewrite

that." Karen explained that her reason for typing her response in a word processing document first was to avoid losing her post if she lost her Internet connection. Karen also proofread her posts before submission. She stated, "I check grammatically a lot of stuff in spell check. Of course, I try to do that with my other responses, too, but it's more so with the initial posts." Karen's process of preparing her initial posts outside of the LMS and her responsive posts within the LMS is connected to the formation of her discussion responses as different genres.

Barbara also outlined her process for revising her posts before submitting to the discussion forum:

> I go back and reword, tweak, delete a sentence or something, because after I post it – this is another difference with conversation – after I post it, I re-read it to make sure that, well – so I don't have typos, and that I'm making sense, that I'm clear, because sometimes I could ramble, so I need to put another – like a segue in there so that people are very clear what I'm trying to say, that type of thing.

Barbara's attention to revision supported her concern about her audience and her view of the discussion as an "essay" or "assignment."

For Barbara, the expectation to respond to two other students' proved to be challenging. She described how she approached fulfilling the requirement to respond to her classmates:

> usually you can find something to say, not always. But sometimes I have to think about it. I'm running out of time, I have to post, and I want to go to bed, and today's the last day, so I just come up with something.

Barbara's response at 10:21 pm on the last day for posting to Forum 3B seemed to show her effort to come up with something to say, when she simply affirmed statements in her classmate's post:

> K----:
>
> You make a good point about keeping in mind the goal of reaching all learners in our classrooms. […] And yes, great photographs have a way of saying things that words can never quite get at […] Thanks for a great post, K---.

This is not to say that Barbara's praise and recognition of the other student's post was insincere. However, these statements appeared to be an example of the situation Barbara described as she attempted to fulfill the course requirement for discussion posts.

When talking during the interview about his writing for the course, Michael's comments resonated with the elements of a methodical writing process, such as prewriting, main idea, and supporting evidence. For his literacy timeline, he said "It was writing in that sense, but there was no prewriting or anything like that." He described his approach to writing as, "I start out with a point, a thesis, and try to make it so everything I say points back to that, confirms it." Michael remarked that his discussions should be "well argued, with good evidence, as opposed to my reactions to a book, which is I'm not as worried about maintaining my main idea and providing evidence to support it." Since he had just finished his undergraduate degree the previous semester, it is notable that Michael was still following the steps in the writing process taught in typical Freshman Composition courses.

Whether the student was writing collaboratively or individually, each assignment called for a different approach according to the medium the assignment relied on and

genre the assignment embodied. Online students' processes for writing assignments were connected to the genre and medium. Ultimately, the student's process of writing for the online course was shaped by the type of assignment and medium for delivering it.

Online Students Enact Reproduced, Adapted, and Novel Web Genres

The data that I collected in this case study demonstrated that online students' enact reproduced, adapted, and novel web genres through CMC. While most genre analyses have traditionally referred to print genres, the social nature of genres on the web has been recognized by Santini (2006, 2006a, 2007), who identified web genres as reproduced, adapted, novel, and emerging. The means of achieving the goals of genre production were realized through the computer mediated communication of discussion forums in the class learning management system and Internet public access software tools such *Google Docs*, *PBWorks, Jing*, *Dipity*, *Prezi*, or *Wimba*. As Herring (2011) noted, the point of interest is not the latest web application; the significance is utilizing CMC to fulfill the intended aims, using the Internet technology available.

I found that the online class represented a multi-generic space for reproduced, adapted, and novel genres enacted by students. Figure 20 identifies the genres of the assignments according to their respective web genres.

WEB GENRES		
Reproduced	**Adapted**	**Novel**
assignment: clinical report genre: report web features: electronic, word processed submitted to LMS	*assignment: unit plan* genre: teaching plan web features: unit plan in *Google Docs* comments in *Google Docs*	*assignment:* *unit plan overview* genre: audio/ visual presentation web features: screencast in *Jing*
	assignment: *literacy autobiography* genre: timeline web features: text and images in *Dipity, Prezi*	*assignment: synchronous class participation* genre: chat web features: textual messages in *Wimba*

Figure 20: Web Genres in Online Classroom

The clinical report is a reproduced genre, in that is merely replicated on the web within the LMS. The digital timeline is an adapted genre. The unit plan is also an adapted genre, which was previously discussed. The Chat message is a novel genre existing only within a CMC environment. The unit plan overview in *Jing* is another novel genre in this course,

The wiki assignment in this particular class resides in the *PBWorks* website, functioning as a medium for multiple genres – in this case, tools for literacy teaching.

This online class utilized several Internet technologies to facilitate the delivery of the course; however, two tools in particular stand out with regard to making students' writing visible to audiences through computer mediated communication. One of these tools was the Chat Box, located within the synchronous class meetings, used for real time messages between students. The other tool was a digital timeline application like *Dipity* or *Prezi*, used to create students' autobiographical literacy timelines.

The range of experiences of Barbara, Michael and Karen with writing for the discussion posts was comparable to their different perceptions of the benefits of chat in the synchronous class meetings. Barbara said, "I've chatted a little bit. Some people do nothing but chat. I use my microphone." During the seven synchronous sessions, she made only 29 chat posts. Her explanation for why she did not use the Chat Box was, "It's just not me. I'm just not like that. Not that there's anything wrong with it."

Michael said he did not use the microphone during the synchronous class, nor did he frequently post to the Chat Box. Michael made 45 chat posts over the seven synchronous sessions he attended. He stated, "I don't really get involved in it. I was never good at *Instant Messaging* or *Facebook*." Although this was not an activity he tended to engage in himself, he offered this perspective on students' use of the chat function:

> I'll bet the people who are really good in the Moodle forum? I'll bet those people were really active in the AOL thing. Cause it's the same deal. It's just like: thought, thought, thought. Occasionally I'll put something in there, but it's lost in the high speed discussion.

Figure 21 is an excerpt from the Chat Log for a synchronous session, where Michael, Karen, and Barbara participated. This sequence of 22 Chat posts occurred over a time span of 8 minutes, 29 seconds.

Michael	**I also explore Pyongyang on google earth!**
Ann	i have never thought to look at a new country on google earth.
---	---
Michael	**because its forbidden**
Angela	I read that one...
---	---
Barbara	**or they can't afford to fix their car...**
Joyce	wasn't there a book by a guy who did the same thing?
Karen	**hahaha**
Joyce	Scratch beginnings .. just googled it
Karen	**is this an experiment she did**
Karen	**or was she trying to support family?**
Joyce	sorry that was Charleston, SC
Karen	**oh ok**
Karen	**heard of it**
Ellen	love east of eden
Michael	**East of Eden yes!**
---	---
Karen	**grapes of wrath**
Anita	grapes of wrath
Michael	**you beat me to typing it**
Ellen	hahah

Note: Posts by students not participating in the study are indicated by dashes (---)

Figure 21: Excerpt from Chat Log

Karen also did not use the microphone, however, she consistently participated in the Chat Box. She shared in the interview, “I don’t really like to use the microphone that much. I don’t necessarily know why. I’m pretty self-conscious of a Southern accent.” In marked contrast to Barbara and Michael, Karen had 468 chat posts over the seven sessions. She said, “I’m used to messaging in general online with my friends. That’s very comfortable for me, I guess.” Her explanation echoed Michael’s view of students who tend to be involved in the online Chat Box.

With regard to the content of the chat discussions, Barbara commented, “A lot of it was kind of humorous.” For Karen, “the Chat Box is pretty informal. I found that out. I tend to be, from my past online courses, be pretty formal. But with this class, I’ve seen people’s responses, and I’ve been like, This is completely informal, and I’ll pick up on

that." Figure 22 is a screenshot of the Chat Box during a synchronous meeting, where Karen and Ellen chatted together. While their posts referred to a novel read for the class Book Circles, their chats seemed like two friends having fun, their writing intended to make each other laugh.

Figure 22: Chat Box During Synchronous Meeting

Karen remarked, "It reminds me of when the teacher is lecturing in a high school classroom, and you have all these conversations breaking out among the students as far as passing notes in class." Her impression reflected the view of the instructor, who asserted,

> if you think about what goes on in a face to face class, the teacher is talking, you're having a conversation, students are talking back, there's the formal kind of turn taking, but then there's a lot of side conversations, notes, or just lean over a and say something to someone. This happens all the time, and guess what? It as part of the social life of the class. I think the Chat Box is great for that.

In the textual world of online learning, this social interaction is realized through the unique, novel genre of Chat.

Autobiographical timelines.

One assignment that was incorporated into a discussion forum was a digital timeline where students documented their personal experiences with literacy. In the

interview, the instructor explained, "I have them do the autobiographical piece where they think about how they learned to read and write. […] And we talk about that because I want them thinking about kids in their classes." He said he had previously asked students in face-to-face classes to write an autobiographical essay describing their experiences, but after he became familiar with Internet applications such as *Dipity* and *Prezi*, he introduced the digital timeline to his classes. For the "Literacy Timeline" assignment, the Forum 1B discussion prompt stated: "I want us to look at our own lives and how we have come to be the readers and writers we are today. To do that, think about seminal experiences in your life regarding reading and writing." The prompt further stated:

> To capture this, please create a simple timeline or visual using Dipity.com, VoiceThread.com, or Prezi.com. Make sure you use settings that allow others to see your creation and post the link to this forum along with an introduction. I will begin by sharing a few of my experiences in this discussion.

Students were asked to post their own timeline and introduction to the forum and comment on at least two other students' timelines.

Barbara said the literacy timeline was "a very neat assignment." She explained that,

> In this case we were writing about our experiences, our personal experience with literacy. […] People did different categories. What I did in mine was really books that I read that sort of changed me, or books that I remember, or even events like my sister taught me how to read, my big sister.

A screenshot of a segment of Barbara's *Dipity* timeline is shown as Figure 23.

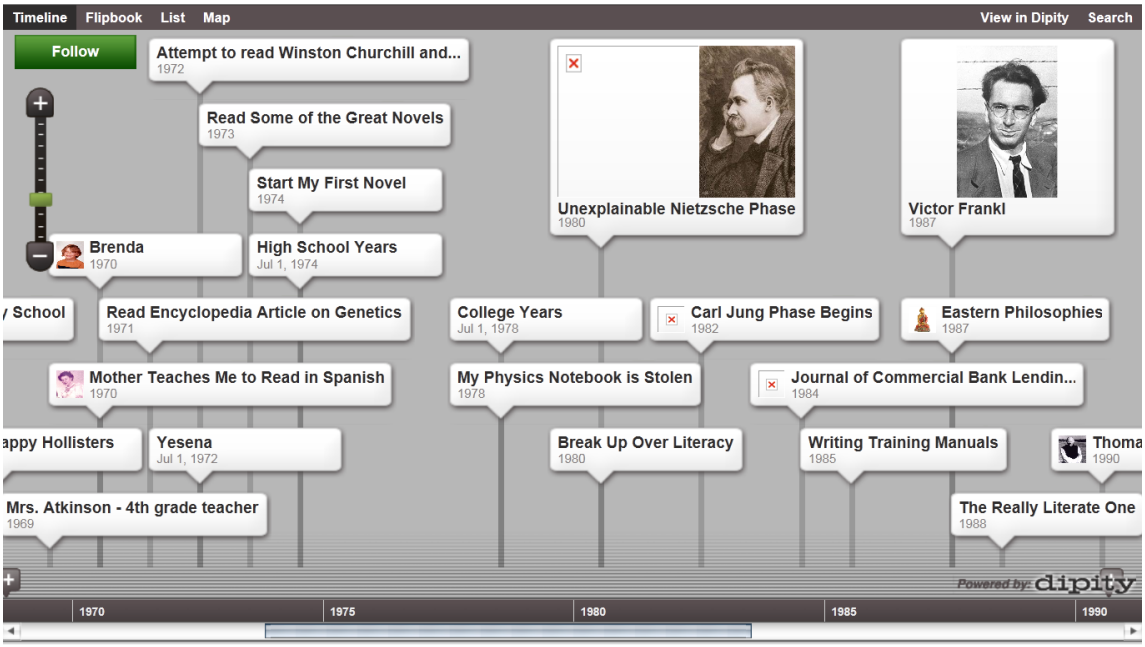


Figure 23: Barbara's Literacy Timeline

To create her timeline, she said, "What I did, I more or less remembered the year, or I estimated, and then I would post a picture of say, Erich Fromm, and the books that I read, and the impact that they had on me." An example of an expanded item inserted in Barbara's timeline is shown as Figure 24.

Figure 24: Expanded Item in Barbara's Timeline

Barbara felt the audience for her literacy timeline was "kind of the world, in a way." However, she also felt like she was the audience, "since it was a creative thing to a big extent and you put pictures in there, it was kind of yourself." Barbara expressed, "I really enjoyed reading other people's. And when you read other people's, then you think, Oh yea, I read that too, but maybe you didn't include it in yours, but you see so many similarities." Unlike most other students and despite the instructor's directions, Barbara did not include an introduction in her post that gave the link to her timeline.

During the interview, I asked Michael if there was anything he had written in the class that felt was the most meaningful for his learning. He responded,

> Our personal, like our literary histories, our reading histories. That was kind of profound. It was kind of like taking inventory of your life, like going back – cause my reading's always been a huge part of philosophies and life and what I believe and stuff. That was pretty profound to go back and post those things up for others to see.

Michael used *Prezi* to create his presentation. He explained that he posted a picture and then wrote what he remembered about reading the book. A screenshot of a segment of Michael's *Prezi* timeline is shown as Figure 25.

Figure 25: Michael's Literacy Timeline

Michael said he looked at the timelines for other students, "because I felt like that was really important. What someone reads can tell a lot about a person. And so I did look through quite a few of those."

Karen found creating her literacy timeline with *Dipity* a frustrating experience due to formatting problems. She stated, "I had a hard time with that Dipity timeline, trying to figure out exactly what I needed to put in there, or the formatting of it." A screenshot of a segment of Karen's *Dipity* timeline is shown as Figure 26.

Figure 26: Karen's Literacy Timeline

Karen stated, "I had not done the Dipity before and it was kind of – I didn't really know what to put in it, and then sometimes I'd put something, and I'm like wait, I don't want it to show up like that." An example of an expanded item inserted in Karen's timeline is shown as Figure 27.

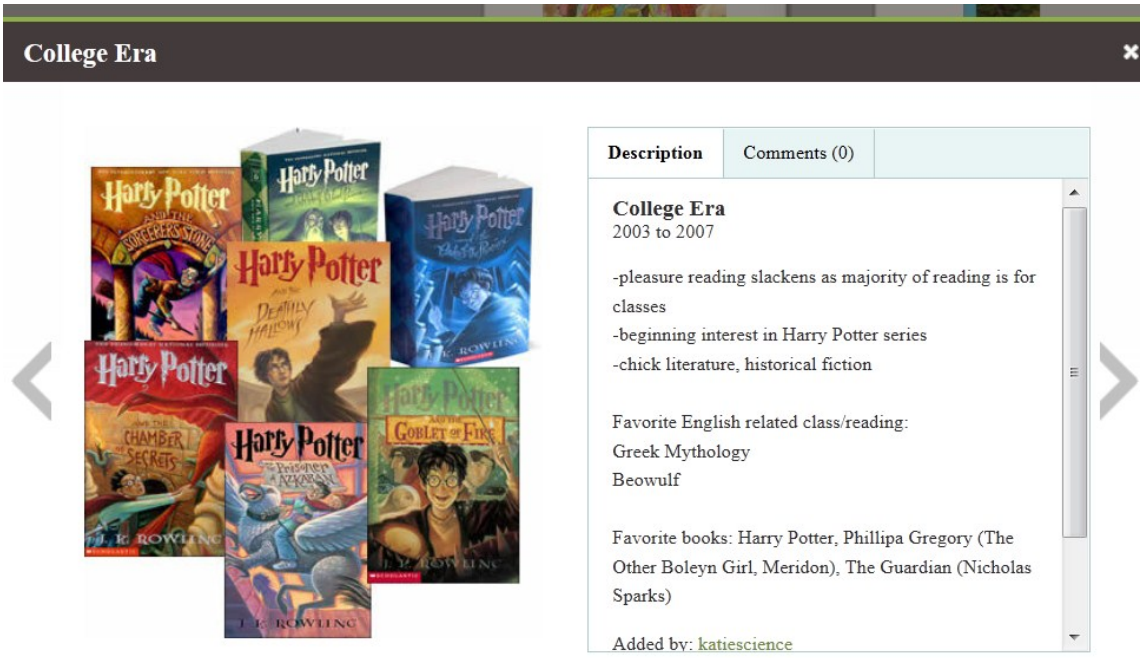


Figure 27: Expanded Item in Karen's Timeline

Karen's expanded items are more of a bullet point list than the brief narratives shared by Barbara and Michael. In contrast, the introduction to her post that provided the link to her timeline is much more personal and reflective than her actual timeline:

> As long as I can remember I have loved to read. This assignment has been thought provoking but also difficult for me as it is hard for me to set dates to points in my life where reading has been important or an interest. I cannot pick a starting or end point as it seems reading has always been with me as a hobby. Additionally, I have had several favorite books. At times reading was rather slow but it has always been a relaxing pastime for me. While reading has been fun for me, writing and pronouncing has been a difficult path for me even though I briefly kept a journal in elementary-middle school. I never liked dissecting poems and while spelling was not hard when I was younger, it is now harder even though I find that writing is easier. While I was growing up, my parents always supported

> my interest in books and as an only child, it was a way for me to entertain myself. From an early age, I have loved trips to libraries and bookstores. For me, going to a library is fun. Yes, I am a total bookworm. Therefore, in this dipity timeline I have tried to estimate different reading interests in my childhood to adulthood life as well as approximate the time frame in which I read certain books.
>
> One difficulty I have found with this assignment is that I am constantly wanting to edit my timeline as I remember more or think back to different books *even when about to post*. [emphasis added]

In the interview, Karen commented that her difficulty was formatting the timeline. The post introduction suggested she continued to interface with the technology to represent her literacy experiences to her classmates.

Students added a link in a discussion forum to their timelines, so that others who chose to read their post and to go the link became their audience. This autobiographical piece was unique is this regard, since this was the only writing assignment students created in the course that situated all students as a potential audience. The assignment was also distinctive in that students combined both text and images to connect with their audience through CMC. The digital timeline is an adapted genre, since it is just a linear timeline with words and pictures; however, embedding links to the items included might redefine the digital timeline as a novel genre.

Summary

This single case study focused on a classroom online where written communication took many forms and had different purposes, and therefore, represented various genres. The writings for the discussions and other assignments were examined as

a way to explicate and contextualize the interview and survey responses. As discussed in this chapter, the findings pertaining to the three interview participants were compared to selected survey responses, discussion posts, and other writing assignments of the additional 11 student participants to expand this exploration of students' online writing experiences.

Six major themes and corresponding categories emerged from the data that I collected for my qualitative case study. 1) *Online students' audiences for their writing are shaped by computer mediated communication*, indicated by the categories: instructor as audience, classmates as audience, self as audience. 2) *Online students' purposes for their writing are dependent on personal goals*, represented by the categories: evaluation/assessment, developing understanding, reflection, interaction, real world application. 3) *Online students' socialization into academic and professional writing genres is supported by computer mediated communication*, demonstrated by the categories: reviewing course syllabus and assignment web pages, samples of assignments, tutorials and podcasts, asking questions, rubrics and self-assessments, instructor and student feedback and comments. 4) *Online students' perceptions of the genres for their writing are based on perceived purposes*; represented by the categories: discussion as reflection, discussion as "writing an essay," discussion as "conversation," differences in initial and responsive posts, connections between discussions and other writing assignments. 5) *Online students' processes for writing assignments correlate to the medium and genre*; reflected by the categories: means of utilizing the wiki, method of using *Google Docs*, procedures for creating the *Jing* screencast, process for writing the clinical report, process for posting to content discussions. 6) *Online students enact*

reproduced, adapted, and novel web genres. The findings of my research study illustrate the ways that computer mediated communication shapes the writing genres of online learning.

Chapter 5 presents the study's conclusions and recommendations for future practice and further research in the area of writing genres of online learning.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I present my conclusions based on my analysis of the data from the online class. In addition, I make recommendations for future practices in online education and further research on the genres of students' online writing.

Conclusions

The primary goal of the research study was to understand students' experiences of enacting the multiple writing genres in an online class. The research questions are:

1. What are the rhetorical situations for students' writing in an online classroom?

2. How do students acquire knowledge of the conventions of the multiple genres of online classroom writing?

3. What are students' experiences of enacting the multiple writing genres in an online classroom?

The study revealed students' awareness of their own rhetorical choices through the enactment of particular writing genres online and how their writing was shaped by computer mediated communication. Themes generated from the research objectives and data represent the study findings. Conclusions were developed in the context of theories of computer mediated communication (Herring, 2002, 2004), writing genres (Devitt, 2004; Soliday, 2011), and web genres (Santini, 2006a, 2006b). To illuminate the social aspects of the writing genres in the online class, I discuss the writing assignments examined in my study within the framework of Devitt's (2004) principles of genres, in

particular, genres' social functions for groups; interpreting social function through genres' discourse features; ideologies through genres (Devitt, 2004). These ideas "characterize the social nature of genres, how they interact with one another, how they develop and operate within group settings, and how their use in turn affects their groups and social structures" (Devitt, 2004, p. 63). This theory views genre as the connection between the individual actions of genre users and the varied contexts for using genres. Devitt's theory has resonance with respect to the focus of my study – the *student's experience* of writing genres online. I discuss in this chapter the ways these principles served to conceptualize my conclusions.

Rhetorical Situations for Online Students' Writing

Determining what genres were enacted in the online class involved considering the rhetorical situation for students' online writing in terms of the audiences, purposes, and texts. The *audiences* for student writing ranged from other students in the class as a whole, to other students within groups, the instructor, and the student writer. Since students also engaged in writing for their discipline during this course, the audience could potentially be other readers in their profession. The *purposes* varied depending on the assignment or activity created by the instructor. The *texts* depended upon the learning activity created by the instructor. Class assignments generally encompassed the instructor's motives for the assignment and the language and content of the discipline. The roles for the writing assignments in the course were underscored by the instructor, who stated, "It's really about learning this genre of writing that comes up in our profession, which is lesson plan writing, unit plan writing, working with kids, thinking about how to meet their needs."

Project-oriented assignments like creating the unit plan, developing the clinical report, and developing teaching strategies in the wiki pages provided students with opportunities to experience and practice these professional writing genres for themselves, which was the primary purpose of the assignment. Students tended to closely enact these genres to the instructor's expectations.

On the other hand, the discussion forums were intended for students to engage in professional discourse, what the instructor called "grand conversations," about relevant topics. However, the purposes for the discussions were contingent on what the student wanted to achieve, more so than what the instructor expected from these textual conversations. Different perceptions of the ways CMC influenced "conversation" were held by several participants in this study, specifically, the instructor, Barbara, and Karen. For the instructor, computer mediated communication enabled "conversation," which he viewed in a *conceptual* manner. For Barbara, CMC limited conversation, which she wanted to experience in a literal way. For Karen, CMC enhanced conversation, which she preferred to encounter *virtually*.

A rhetorical situation specifies the audience to be addressed. The discussion forum assignments allowed the student writer more flexibility to specify with whom he or she wanted to communicate, and moreover, to choose the genre and register for the written responses, as demonstrated by the data. Devitt (2004) asserted that "genre should be redefined rhetorically according to the people who participate in genres and make the forms meaningful" (p. 5). A comparison of the various student responses to the rhetorical situation of each assignment to the instructor guidelines for the assignment indicated when the student performed a genre according to the instructor's expectations, and when

the student performed a genre according to his or her own rhetorical choices. Based on the study findings, I concluded that student writers in the online class form unique perceptions rhetorical situations for assignments, and consequently, their writing is informed by the genre for an intended audience in order to achieve their own purposes.

Online Students' Acquisition of Knowledge of Genre Conventions

Students mostly acquire knowledge of the conventions of the multiple writing genres for their online classroom writing from their instructor, through course materials, samples, and feedback. Students sometimes acquire knowledge of generic conventions from fellow students, by asking questions.

The ideology of a group is reflected by its genres. Devitt (2004) maintained that "a genre reflects, constructs, and reinforces the values, epistemology, and power relationships of the group from which it developed and for which it functions" (p. 63). The writing assignments in this course provided students with opportunities to develop both their academic writing (writing as a student) and professional writing (writing as a teacher). The extensive instructions and models offered by the instructor represented a particular ideology about what it means to perform professional writing or academic writing at the most basic level, i.e. "students write this way" and "teachers write this way." A study by Lea (2004) that considered all of the written texts in an online classroom emphasized the importance of designing courses that incorporated opportunities for students to develop their academic literacies. The class under focus for my study clearly demonstrated these qualities, and since the course was intended to educate future teachers, developing professional literacies was a beneficial outcome as well. Lea (2004) argued that all "reading and writing – literacies – are cultural social

practices, and vary depending upon the particular context" (p. 740). Students' engagement in the cultural social practices of their online writing exemplified the ideology represented by the instructor and also their own ideologies, depending upon the genres they invoked in particular rhetorical situations of their online course.

In a later study, Lea (2007) identified students' efforts to demonstrate authority over the making of meaning in discussions. Lea (2007) determined that "course design privileges the written texts created during online communication, and the nature of these texts – continually visible throughout the life of the course – leads to their being regarded as authoritative by both students and tutors" (p. 84). Within the online space, the teacher's writing is juxtaposed with students' writing. However, Lea's study (2007) did not recognize how the teacher's authority online might influence students' writing. Both the students' words and the teacher's words usually appeared together as text on the screen not only for the discussions, but also in the wiki and unit plan, where instructor's comments were embedded into these online texts. Because the unit plan was written within *Google Docs*, the student's completed work, ready for the instructor's review and comments, was present alongside the student's unpolished, draft work, which potentially impacted their actions in terms of their approach to writing the unit plan. *Online* Students' Experiences of Enacting Multiple Writing Genres

It is important to acknowledge that the writing assignments in the online class could likewise function in a face-to-face class. The online delivery method of the class is not what makes this online writing; the way students engage with the assignments is what establishes this writing as distinct writing genres informed by computer mediated communication.

It is also important to distinguish between discussions and other assignments because of the different ways that computer mediated communication functions for these assignments within the online classroom. The other assignments are student writing informed by CMC; the discussions are online classroom writing defined by CMC. Students and the instructor seem to have different understandings of the genre called for in this writing situation.

Engaging in writing with classmates and the instructor takes various dimensions and fulfills different purposes for students. The multiple purposes for writing in the online class were realized through multiple genres. For most of the writing assignments in this online class, the generic expectations were emphasized by the instructor, who guided students to fulfill the requirements of writing for their academic lives and professional lives. The project-oriented writing assignments had "real world" applications. The instructor made it very clear that students had to follow certain generic constraints in their individual realizations of the genre. These assignments were informed by the discussions – a connection that proved beneficial for students.

For some students, online discussion offers a means of interacting with classmates without the discomfort of face-to-face interaction. For other students, discussions provide an avenue to demonstrate their knowledge, but in a manner that may be less fulfilling than face-to-face interaction. Discussions could be just as valuable for on ground classrooms as for online.

Project-oriented assignments encompassed the other types of students' online writing. Guidelines for writing assignments can be the same regardless of course delivery mode (online or on-ground). The potential difference rested with the types of student

writing for online discussions – and when generic features of some types of student writing influenced and became incorporated into other kinds of writing students did for the class. That data showed that the discussion forum posts influenced features of the academic writing students produced for the class. The converse was also true; writing for major assignments or projects submitted to the online course shaped writing in discussion forums.

Social functions for online student groups.

The social functions for groups that I observed within the online class were collaboration, reflection on ideas and experiences, and analysis of concepts. According to Devitt, (2004),

> Explaining genres' functions […] encourages embedding genre within both rhetorical purpose and social contexts. As complex and multiple as groups are, so are the goals they have and the genres through which they achieve those goals. (p 51)

The communities, collectives, and social networks present in the online class performed various social functions. These groups formed independently or at the direction of the instructor to achieve particular goals through the enactment of particular genres.

An important social function for a group in the online class was collaboration on a project, such as planning work and sharing ideas. Khine, et al. (2003) observed that online learning encouraged interaction and collaboration. Because of the convenience and productivity offered by computer mediated communication, working in groups online was preferable to working in groups in a face-to-face class, at least for Barbara and Karen. Conversely, a study by Ke and Carr-Chellman (2006) found solitary learners

preferred individual writing assignments over the collaborative nature of class discussions. While Barbara preferred online classes for group work, she still preferred individual assignments overall.

The wiki assignment provided a space for small groups of students to engage in collaborative writing on a project relevant to their career interests. Although only the students within each project group (and the instructor) could view the actual wiki assignment, the goal for this project was to create a collection of resources that students could utilized in their future teaching. The students' collaboration as a writing community was facilitated by the computer mediated communication component inherent to a wiki. The instructor's collaboration in a collective with the students was also enabled by CMC. For the instructor, utilizing the wiki medium to enable students to collect and display preferred teaching strategies served the social functions of encouraging student groups to collaborate in their production, with each student contributing individual elements to the project as a whole, even if some students worked on the project separately, instead of together. The social function of the complied resources exhibited in the wiki could potentially be expanded beyond the learning goals associated with a course assignment if utilized by others as well, in a social network of teachers supporting other teachers with effective strategies.

For the unit plan, students had the option to work in groups or individually. Since the unit plan was created in *Google Docs*, the same benefits as the wiki existed for collaboration between students in a CMC environment. For students writing the unit plan individually, using *Google Docs* seemed incongruent with the application's collaborative functionality. While creating the unit plan as a writing community fulfilled the same sorts

of social functions as the wiki groups, collaboration and sharing resources were not the main goals of the unit plan assignment. The instructor's primary goal for this assignment was for students to produce the unit plan genre in a manner consistent with the learning goals of the course. Collaboration did occur, though, within the instructor-student collective, as represented by the instructor's inserted comments via the *Google Docs* comment function and the students' revisions and additions to the unit plan.

Discussion forums can also serve as a space for collaboration through writing. A study by Lin (2007) suggested that collaboration was the goal of students' online writing in discussions. Lin (2007) points to three critical areas of online learning that students should experience in their online learning: independent inquiry, collaborative inquiry, and formative inquiry toward expert knowledge. Independent inquiry happens through the student's own desire to engage with ideas independently, without interruption (Lin, 2007). The "essay" genre of the posts written by students like Barbara or Scott, usually in the initial post, represents this form of independent inquiry by the student. On the other hand, collaborative inquiry occurs when there is an interplay and exchange of ideas between students (Lin, 2007). The students' responsive posts, which Karen identified as similar to e-mail, illustrate collaborative inquiry. The discussion forum itself is not a form of collaborative writing in the sense of a unified piece, such as with the wiki or unit plan students created in designated groups. Formative inquiry results when students apply their developing expertise gained through independent inquiry by interacting with others through collaborative inquiry. The notion that online discussion forums function as a "case study," for which multiple students combine ideas to produce a group response (as in the scenario Karen described), demonstrates a formative inquiry. Students offering

guidance and interpreting concepts, which occurred both in the Burning Questions forum and in the discussions, is another area of formative inquiry within this online class. When students responded to their classmates' *Jing* screencast of the unit plan, the formative inquiry advocated by Lin (2007) directly transpired between students. In instances where the discussions helped shape students' project assignments, an indirect condition of formative inquiry occurred within the social network of this online class.

Groups in the online class demonstrated the social function of writing assignments through reflection on ideas and experiences. Within the wiki self-assessment, a group reflection enabled students to consider the effectiveness of their content and cohesiveness of their group in fulfilling their goals. Built into the unit plan was a separate section for reflection, in addition to reflection questions within a self-assessment. Students seemed to perceive the unit plan reflection and reflection questions as performing the same generic function, since similar statements were repeated in each text. The social function of the clinical report, which all students completed individually, was not only to report tutoring activity to the instructor in a collective group, but also to reflect on their own intellectual development during the tutoring process. The lesson plan template included a space at the bottom of the page where the students recorded their reflections about the tutoring session.

Swan (2005) saw discussions as an opportunity for written reflection. Garrison (2003) emphasized the importance of students' reflective inquiry made possible by written communication in discussions. From the instructor's standpoint, the grading rubric criterion for discussions stated the posts must "provide evidence of ;deep; reflection and understanding." From the student's standpoint, Barbara acknowledged in

the interview that writing for discussions "helps you reflect on what you've read, or reflect on the discussion." Her responses to other students were personal reflections on her experiences or on the course material. Another student, Michael, also saw the discussions as "more reflection style" which he compared to "writing one's thoughts down in a journal or something.

An important social function in the online class was analysis through explaining and examining concepts. The assignments were constructed in a way that promoted a deepened analysis of the concepts examined in the previous assignment. The wiki groups examined and explained teaching strategies for the wiki toolkit. The students working in groups or individually on the unit plan analyzed the strategies selected for the wiki and explained how these strategies were effective in fulfilling the goals of the unit plan. As new student groups or individual students developed the unit plan, the wiki genre enabled access to concepts analyzed in a prior group formation, allowing students to draw on concepts examined by others as well as themselves. The students writing the clinical report further analyzed these concepts by explaining how these teaching strategies were employed in their tutoring. The wiki, unit plan, and report genres exemplified this analysis of the concepts in which the respective genres were based.

Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) emphasized the possibilities for online learners to develop critical thinking through writing for discussions. The students interviewed reported that their writing in the discussion forums afforded a means of thinking more deeply about the concepts in their readings for the course. Students encountered course concepts presented in their readings of the various texts supplied by the instructor, and then again in the written discussions of their classmates. As Herring

(1999) recognized, “persistent conversation aids the user's cognitive processing” (para. 53). The discussions offered the students in this online course the experience of “writing one’s way into understanding” that Lapadat (2002) described.

Interpreting Social Function through Online Discourse Features

The discourse features of students’ writing reveal the social function of the assignment genre; conversely, the assignment’s function identifies its genre. According to Devitt (2004), “a genre commonly reveals its social functions with characteristic discourse features, but interpreting those features may require active participation with the genre” (p. 54). The discourse features of the writing assignments were directed by the instructor, by the students, and of course, and by the genre itself. Soliday (2011) asserted that “because genre is a social practice, an assignment must be aligned with the larger social motives the genre performs for readers in the first place” (p. 11). Lea and Street (2006) advocated the “academic literacies model” in order to make students more aware of discourse features of certain genres and the notion of *genre switching*, whether in the process of developing a written piece or when moving from one writing situation to another. To evaluate how effectively students moved between genres, Goodfellow and Lea (2005) compared course assignments in two graduate level online classes, noting that challenges “arise from a contrast between the dialogic form of writing generated in the exchange of messages online and the more monologic requirements of the formal essay genre which tend to characterize the assignments” (p. 264). I actually anticipated that I would observe similar challenges, since I had also considered whether students found this shift challenging. However, the students participating in my study did not appear to experience the phenomenon described by Goodfellow and Lea (2005). Students were

generally successful navigating between genres in the course, at least as indicated by the instructor's comments and course grades. The students interviewed recounted how reflecting on concepts through their writing for discussions supported how they executed the project assignments. If anything, students found it more difficult to shift from the monologic form of writing for assignments, employing genres such as the essay or journal or even case study for their discussion posts, which the instructor preferred to embody more dialogic writing.

While Friesen (2009) contended that posts showed students' perceptions of the discontinuation and continuation of writing that happens with letters, the posts in this class were marked by a sense of *continuation* more than discontinuation. Participation in discussions revealed a sense of immediacy and presence, especially since students were communicating over a brief one-week time frame. The temporality Friesen (2009) referred to, in terms of descriptions of conditions concurrent with the reading or writing of the message, was exhibited in students' discussion posts, but the Internet medium dramatically reduces the time lapse that occurs with sending letters. Also, the discussion posts all reside in the same connected space of the forum LMS, so all students are potentially receivers of the message. Even when posts transpired between specific students, other students at times joined the exchange and addressed two students in the same post.

Friesen's (2009) study noted that students' posts reflected assumptions and shared understandings between writer and reader, demonstrated by fragmentation and missing words. This quality was evident more often in the procedural and administrative forums than the content forums. The reasons likely relate to the audience and purpose for these

forums. The procedural forums functioned as spaces for small groups to come together to achieve assignment related tasks, and the administrative forums had the same purpose, even though the audience was the entire class. The instructor read these forums, but students' posts were ungraded. The content forums, however, were graded, since the purpose was to demonstrate knowledge of concepts and to interact with other students in a dialogue about the concepts. In these forums, students assumed only that others had viewed the same material. Recognition and acknowledgement of shared understanding of concepts was indicated in students' posts as a way of deepening the student's own understanding, but not in a manner of an assumption of shared experiences that may be present between letter writers. Therefore, I contend that rather than an epistolary genre that Friesen points to, the posts in this class embodied the genre directly related to the purpose for the student's writing in that post.

A discourse feature of posts that could not exist for a paper letter writing genre was the manner in which the students utilized Internet technologies to add hyperlinks and screen shots to their posts, in order to share information pertaining to the discussion topic with their classmates, a process also observed by Lea (2007). Notably, however, only particular students tended to apply this online technique to their posts; most students did not incorporate outside material into their posts.

The study by Lea (2007) noted that personal anecdotes were used often in students' discussion posts, reflecting a practice demonstrated in the course content. In this class, personal anecdotes and reflections were a typical feature of students' posts, both in the initial post in response to the prompt and in students' responses to others. The instructor modeled the personal narrative in several aspects of the course. Specifically,

the personal narrative as a text type is present from the outset of the course in the syllabus and "Getting to Know You" introductions forum, is represented in texts such as the autobiography time, and culminates in the "This I Believe" discussion as the course concludes.

The implications of the discourse features of personal narrative in the context of online discussions are suggestive of a more informal register within the discussion posts. The question of whether discussions are "written talk" was raised in a study by Lapadat (2002) that compared face-to-face classroom discussion with online asynchronous discussion. Lapadat (2002) considered that the technological dynamics of online discussions "endow participants' textual contributions with an interactivity and continuity that have the 'feel' of conversation" (para. 10). I found that the students' perception of the discussions depended on the audience and purpose for the particular discussion forum and for the particular discussion post. Within the ungraded procedural and administrative forums, where the purpose was to share practical information rather than concept knowledge, students' posts were much more conversational and informal, especially in the small group procedural forums. For the graded content forums, where the perceived audience was primarily the instructor, students' posts were more intellectual and formal, specifically for the initial posts responding to the instructor's prompt. Initial posts exhibited the discourse features of a formal essay, complete with an introduction, main idea, conclusion, and even section headings. Responsive posts were more interactive, more dialogic than monologic, yet still maintained a higher degree of formality, considering that these graded posts fulfilled a course requirement for students.

Lapadat (2002) asserted that there is a sense of permanence inherent in online discussions that allows participants to refer to and re-read the written discussion of other students (Lapadat, 2002). Students are able to incorporate the words and phrases of their classmates or instructor into their own written statements in ways that do not require the formality of citation. The students interviewed stated that they did refer to and re-read the posts of their classmates, but primarily to develop their responses during the week the discussion was assigned. Students did not refer back to discussion forums in previous weeks as a means of reflecting on prior material or aiding their understanding.

In Lapadat's (2002) study, a student example of a segment of the transcribed classroom discussion used more colloquial language, fillers, and generalized statements, yet a reproduced online discussion of the same student on the same topic clearly demonstrated a more thorough, detailed explanation. Lapadat (2002) attributed these substantive differences to the ability to reflect, revise, and edit. Students in my study reported a similar experience with how they approached their posts. However, as Barbara pointed out, an instructor would not grade students' actual statements made in classroom discussion, even when students earn points for class discussions. Ultimately, when students' discussion forum posts function as transactional spaces, the posts present discourse features of informal conversation, but when posts in discussion forums function as assessments, the posts present discourse features of formal assignments. As Devitt (2004) asserted, the social function of a genre can be interpreted through its discourse

Ultimately, the discussion forums were multi-generic spaces where students wrote essays, personal notes, or reflections. The different genres present in the discussion forum responses were not a matter of the formality or informality of *register.* Karen did refer to

discussions this way, but that is because of the ways the discussions functioned for her. The multi-genres of the discussions were a matter of the rhetorical situation for the individual post – the audience, purpose, and text – as perceived by the student writer, not by the instructor or even the other students. This was indicated by the interviews, survey responses, and post artifacts. In the discussions, students write using the genre they choose to use; even if it means choosing the genre they think they are supposed to use, students are still making that choice.

Herring (2002) observed that the temporality of synchronous and asynchronous communication influences the use of *synchronous modes* for social interaction and *asynchronous modes* for problem solving. Because the text-only quality of CMC may seem less socially present, it is often considered better for delivering factual information rather than building social relationships (Herring, 2002). For Barbara, who saw writing and talking as very separate actions, discussions embodied academic language used to demonstrate her knowledge to the instructor. Still, users have found ways to adapt the text-only aspect of the CMC medium to express personal and social meanings (Herring, 2002). This is partly achieved through the e-grammar of CMC, which visually records shifts in register (Herring, 2011). This is evidenced by students' effusive use of punctuation, such in the example of Barbara's post. Despite the lack of traditional forms of feedback, CMC users have established means of signaling listening and turn-taking within conversation (Herring, 1999). A technique like using greetings and salutations in posts is one way this is seen in students' posts.

Friesen (2009) affirmed that students' familiarity with the letter writing genre supported their engagement with online posts. Friesen (2009) also argued that more

narrative than critical inquiry was seen in the postings because narrative is more comfortable for students. Posts characterized as "narrative" reflected elements such as describing, defining, or reciting, while posts characterized as "critical inquiry" demonstrated elements such as questioning, examining, or analyzing. Friesen's (2009) explanation for more narrative posts implies that conditions outside the online class have a more significant influence over genres of students' posts than conditions inside the class, arguing that familiarity with certain generic expectations may be a factor.

I contend that conditions both within and outside the online class determine the genres students actually use for their writing in the discussions. Barbara wrote her discussions as an essay because of the way she recognized and interpreted the instructor's prompt and grade – conditions within the class – influenced her to write in a genre with which she was familiar (from outside the class).

Recommendations for Practice

Questions about the social function of online writing and genre have broad applications to online teaching and course development. Instructors and course developers should consider ways to maximize computer mediated communication within the online classroom environment to encourage and expand students' opportunities for a writing audience.

The collaborative, communicative functions of online writing facilitate and make the writer's access to the reader. I contend that the audience for students' writing was limited in this particular class, despite the capabilities for an expanded notion of audience made possible by computer mediated communication. For most of the writing assignments, the audience was primarily the instructor, even though there were

possibilities in the online class for opening up the audience beyond just the instructor. As Soliday (2011) suggested,

> students may have a better chance of fulfilling their readers' expectations if the students participate in the situation in some way. By participation, I mean either that students respond to well-defined communicative situations or that they have the opportunity to practice rhetorical skills in ways that approximate how we know experts acquire genres. (p. 9)

For the wiki assignment, the audience (in addition to the instructor) was at least a small group of two to four students, but the link to other groups' wikis was not shared with the rest of the students in the class, who were also planning to become teachers, and therefore, might have benefited not just from the resources, but also from observing different ways of presenting information in the wikis. For students who chose to work in groups on the unit plan, the audience for the unit plan was the instructor and the group members. For students who worked individually, the audience was just the instructor. As with the wiki, allowing other students to view the unit plan assignment could have been beneficial to both the student writer and to the student readers. The *Jing* screencast overview of the unit plan offered a unique form of peer review, but this was somewhat limited, since students chose the parts of the unit plant to present; the other students did not have direct access to classmates' unit plan. For the clinical reports, the audience was only the instructor, who read the report, offered comments in the grade book, and assigned a grade. The constant presence of an audience in the online class configured the rhetorical situation for the assignments in a manner specific to computer mediated communication. When the texts were presented in the online classroom space, it created

the potential for an audience, but that potential was not realized as fully as it could have been.

What distinguished writing for the project assignments from the discussion assignments is that the discussions included responses from other students, and the other assignments did not. However, the project assignments could potentially include responses from students. This would create the scenario that Soliday (2011) posed:

> Because a prompt embodies a social practice, we would not give assignments as much as we would try to enact them in our classes. Ideally, we would provide our students with access to a situation where they could interact with readers and be exposed to their expectations in some way. (p. 3)

Students learned the generic conventions of writing for their profession from the course concepts that are represented in the writing assignment. The online format could invite students to participate in the kind of reader role the instructor takes on, in order to see the genres in action, enacted in ways that are different from or the same as what the other students produced, yet similar enough to be recognized as exemplars of the same genre.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative case study contributes to filling the gap of existing literature that acknowledges the intersection of online learning, computer mediated communication, and writing genres. More research is needed to examine the genres present in students' online writing, particularly in relation to computer mediated communication. Researchers must continue to explore and develop reliable methods for conducting research in the virtual world of the online classroom.

Research Methods in Online Education: Some Considerations

The research methods chosen to collect data depend on the research objectives. With online classroom research, the methods selected for collecting and analyzing this data hinge on the objectives, even when looking at the same data. For example, researchers looking at student and professor interaction may want to consider the discussion forums as observation data, if the intent is to explore the dynamics of the responses between participants in an online discussion forum. If the intent is to examine aspects of the actual post produced by the participants, the researcher may want to consider the discussion forums as spaces to collect artifacts. The flexibility of qualitative research allows for the research methods to adapt to the circumstances encountered by the researcher. During the course of my research, as my understanding of the writing happening in the online class shifted, the method for how I intended to contextualize the discussion forum data changed from observation to artifact collection – even though my actual process for gathering the data stayed the same.

I initially considered observation of online classroom discussion forums as similar to an observation of a face-to-face classroom, using field notes and an observation checklist to document the activity in the forum. My rationale for applying the observation method was because I initially viewed students' interaction with other students and with the instructor in the discussion forum in a similar context as interaction in a face-to-face class. The process of distinguishing students' writing for discussions from other writing in the course related not only to genre differences but also to the qualitative approach to gathering and analyzing data. Contextualizing discussion as observation data situated the discussion board as part of the ongoing activity of the classroom, so suggested an

ethnographic technique like observation. Yet, the written nature of online discussions raised the question of how to interpret the posts – and whether the posts constituted a unique genre. I realized that in order to contextualize these written responses as genres, which was the focus of my study, the students' posts to the discussion forum had to be collected and analyzed as artifacts of students' writing. I defined the students' posts as "Student Artifacts" and the instructor's posts as "Course Artifacts."

I think that because I saw the written posts as so significantly different from other written assignments, that I believed an entirely different research method was warranted. The differences between discussion postings and other writing assignments reside in the *generic differences* between these types of student writing, not just the notion of *interaction*, which is what I believed originally. Certainly, qualitative research is not about disproving a hypothesis, and that was not my intention. However, my personal experiences with online teaching influenced my initial perceptions of online discussions, which guided the research methods I initially proposed at the outset of the study.

Questions for Future Research

Questions for further research could examine the connections between students' discipline and the discourse features of their writing for online discussions. An extension of such a study could also look at how different disciplines influence the formation of particular web genres. An exploration into web genres might investigate the connections between the type of prompt and the genre of students' discussion responses. In terms of academic literacies, research is needed to determine what kinds of genres are privileged over others in online classes, and what strategies support students in enacting these genres successfully.

The results and analysis of further research may influence institutions to take a more informed approach to improving instructional practices online in general and writing practices online in particular.

Summary

As online learning continues to develop throughout higher education, understanding the experiences of the online student writer will become increasingly important. This qualitative case study contributes to filling the gap of existing literature that acknowledges the intersection of online learning, computer mediated communication, and writing genres by documenting and illuminating the social experiences of students in an online classroom. Genre serves as a lens to examine the writing practices of its users. Conclusions revealing the ways online students invoke multiple genres for to achieve their own learning goals may be beneficial to instructors and course developers seeking to maximize the potential benefits of computer mediated communication in the online classroom. Ultimately, computer mediated communication in an educational setting is not about distinguishing between an online class and a face-to-face class. CMC in education is about *writing online* – using technology to create interactive and collaborative writing spaces. Educators must use technology to expand communication between students and instructors to explore and experience the genres of their academic and professional lives.

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APPENDIX A: TIMELINE FOR RESEARCH

Before Study	Meeting with instructor to provide overview of study and obtain permission to access online class
Week 1 (March 4-11)	Class observations, collected course artifacts and student artifacts
Week 2 (March 11-18)	Class observations, collected course artifacts and student artifacts Attended synchronous session to introduce study to students Online Informed Consent & Demographic Survey link sent to students from instructor by e-mail
Week 3 (March 19-25)	Attended synchronous session Requested access to *Google docs* from participants Class observations, collected course artifacts and student artifacts
Week 4 (March 26-April 1)	Class observations, collected course artifacts and student artifacts
Week 5 (April 2-April 8)	Online Writing Survey link sent to participants by e-mail Recorded interview of instructor Identified student participants for interviews Contacted students to request and schedule interviews Class observations, collected course artifacts and student artifacts
Week 6 (April 9-April 15)	Recorded interview of student (Barbara) Class observations, collected course artifacts and student artifacts
Week 7 (April 16-April 22)	Attended synchronous session Recorded interviews of students (Karen, Michael) Class observations, collected course artifacts and student artifacts
Week 8 (April 23-April 29)	Class observations, collected course artifacts and student artifacts
Week 9 (April 30 – May 6)	Class observations, collected course artifacts and student artifacts
Week 10 (May 7 – May 13)	Class observations, collected course artifacts and student artifacts

APPENDIX B: COURSE SYLLABUS

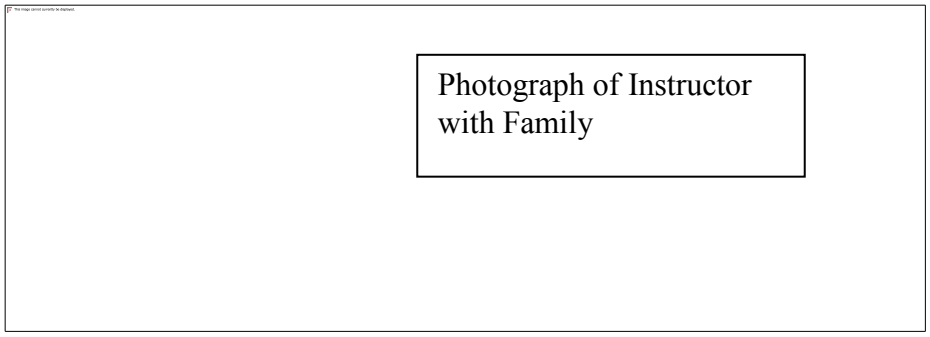
[redacted] Integrated Reading and Writing in the Content Areas

[redacted], Ph.D.
Director, The Center for Adolescent Literacies at [redacted]

Associate Professor of Reading & Elementary Education
Office: COED 384
[redacted] (office)
[redacted] (cell)
[redacted]@uncc.edu

Instructor's & course website: **http://education.[redacted]/**
Office Hours: Tuesdays from 8:30 to 9 p.m. via Wimba for online students, Thursday 1 to 4 p.m. in my office or by appointment.

I have often reflected upon the new vistas that reading opened to me. I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life. As I see it today, the ability to read awoke in me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive. (Malcolm X)



Course Perspectives

In this course, we will examine the importance of reading and writing as tools for learning within and across subject areas. Students encounter diverse texts which place varied demands on them as readers, writers and learners. However, as students move through school, many of the traditions of teaching provide little support for complex and specialized ways of reading and writing. Literate skills, which are important for learning in K-12 classrooms, are vital for negotiating personal, social, and political contexts of life, family, and work in an increasingly diverse and global world.

It is my belief that this course is strengthened by the diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and backgrounds that students bring with them. It is my goal that the diverse learning needs of students be met in and out of class. I will conduct this class in an atmosphere of mutual respect. I encourage your active participation in class discussions. We may have differing opinions on the various topics of class discussions. The conflict of ideas is encouraged and welcome. The orderly questioning of the ideas of others, including mine, is similarly welcome. However, I will exercise my responsibility to manage the discussions so that ideas and argument can proceed in an orderly fashion. Please let me know if I can improve the effectiveness of this course for you or other students.

I find as a teacher that I am constantly learning. It is one of the joys of teaching that students bring as much to the class as the instructor. It is my goal to help create a community of learning that fosters inquiry, reflection, and collaboration. Please let me know early in the semester if you have any needs that will help you in this class. I hope I have the opportunity to visit with each of you this semester one-on-one, so please drop by my office or make an appointment so that we can talk about the course.

This syllabus contains the policies and expectations I have established for READ 5255. Please read the entire syllabus carefully before continuing in this course. These policies and expectations are intended to create a productive learning atmosphere for all students. Unless you are prepared to abide by these policies and expectations, you risk losing the opportunity to participate further in the course.

The standards and requirements set forth in this syllabus may be modified at any time by the course instructor. Notice of such changes will be by changes to this syllabus posted on the course Moodle or when possible by email or in a course online meeting.

Course Objectives: Students will be able to…

- Understand and articulate current theories and philosophies of reading processes and the teaching of reading within different subject areas to students at the middle and high school levels.
- Differentiate "learning to read" and "reading to learn."
- Discuss policy issues as they relate to middle and secondary literacy education.
- Outline the strengths and weaknesses of readability formulas and other tools used to assess texts.
- Utilize trade books, picture books, and other diverse texts across the curriculum.
- Identify and utilize technologies that support teaching and learning across subject areas.
- Recognize the importance of prior knowledge in reading, writing, and learning.
- Recognize the importance of vocabulary knowledge in teaching students to learn.
- Understand how to apply teaching strategies in comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, and studying that will allow teachers to address the unique needs of learners.
- Recognize the interrelationships between reading and writing.
- Reinforce the pursuit and enjoyment of lifelong reading for all students.
- Understand the unique needs of exceptional students, including culturally and linguistically diverse readers.
- Identify and integrate technological resources into a content area classroom.
- Design literacy interventions and programs that are effective in content-area classrooms (for example, as teachers).

Conceptual Framework for the College of Education

Professional Educators Transforming Lives, the Conceptual Framework for Professional Education Programs at [redacted], identifies the proficiencies that our graduates will demonstrate. During coursework, early field experiences, and clinical practice candidates have multiple opportunities to develop the **knowledge, effectiveness,** and **commitment** necessary to transform the lives of the learners with whom they work. This course seeks to develop the proficiencies that are highlighted below.

Core Proficiency: Knowledge.

- K1: Knowledge relevant to life in the 21st century
- K2: Specialty area knowledge
- K3: Pedagogical knowledge
- K4: Knowledge of learners and their contexts
- K5: Self-awareness
- K6: Knowledge of policies, laws, standards, and issues

Core Proficiency: Effectiveness.

- E1: 21st century skills
- E2: Planning, implementation, and evaluation
- E3: Research-based practice
- E4: Research skills
- E5: Culturally competent practice
- E6: Response to diverse learners
- E7: Reflective practice

Core Proficiency: Commitment.

- C1: Positive impact on learners
- C2: Ethics
- C3: Leadership
- C4: Collaboration
- C5: Advocacy
- C6: Professional identity and continuous growth

The core proficiencies of knowledge, effectiveness, and commitment are fully aligned with the North Carolina standards for teachers, school executives, and counselors. This course seeks to develop the North Carolina standards that are highlighted below.

North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards (2007):

2) Establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students, 4) Facilitate learning for their students, 5) Reflect on their practice.

College of Education Technology Statement

Professional education programs at [redacted] are committed to preparing candidates for success in the 21st century through an emphasis on knowledge, effectiveness and commitment to technology integration and application. Preparation in the integration and application of technology to enhance student learning is essential for all candidates. Programs across the professional education unit, including the College of Arts + Architecture, College of Education, and College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, reflect this commitment in coursework, early field experiences, and clinical practice which includes student teaching and/or the capstone/internship phase of the respective programs.

Religious Accommodations

[redacted] provides reasonable accommodations, including a minimum of two excused absences each academic year, for religious observances required by a student's religious practice or belief. Such reasonable accommodations must be requested in accordance with the procedures in this Policy, and include the opportunity for the student to make up any tests or other work missed due to an excused absence for a religious observance. Students wishing to request a religious accommodation may refer to the information found at

Disability Accommodations

If you have a disability that qualifies you for academic accommodations, contact the Office of Disability Services in [redacted] or call [redacted] at the beginning of the semester. Some requests for accommodations cannot be honored without supporting documentation from the Office of Disability Services. All information shared with the instructor concerning a disability will remain strictly confidential unless otherwise specified by the instructor.

Online Student Course Evaluation Process and Confidentiality

Beginning spring 2012 all courses in the College of Education will be evaluated through an online evaluation survey process. Student course evaluations provide an important source of feedback for faculty regarding course design and instructional effectiveness. The online course evaluations will be administered at the end of the term, most likely in the final two weeks (prior to final exams). You will receive an email announcement alerting you when the survey period opens. Periodic reminders will be sent during the time the survey is open. Please be advised that this process will be secure and confidential. The technology used will ensure anonymity of participants as well as confidentiality. The College of Education is committed to excellent instruction and student support. Please help us in continuing this commitment by participating in the course evaluation process.

The College of Education Commitment to Diversity

The College of Education at [redacted] is committed to social justice and respect for all individuals, and it seeks to create a culture of inclusion that actively supports all who live, work, and serve in a diverse nation and world. Attaining justice and respect involves all members of our community in recognizing that multi-dimensional diversity contributes to the College's learning environments, thereby enriching the community and improving opportunities for human understanding. While the term "diversity" is often used to refer to differences, the College's intention is for inclusiveness, an inclusiveness of individuals who are diverse in ability/disability, age, economic status, ethnicity, gender, language, national origin, race, religion, and sexual orientation. Therefore, the College aspires to become a more diverse community in order to extend its enriching benefits to all participants. An essential feature of our community is an environment that supports exploration, learning, and work free from bias and harassment, thereby improving the growth and development of each member of the community.

College of Education Technology Statement

[redacted]

Professional education programs at [redacted] are committed to preparing candidates for success in the 21st century through an emphasis on knowledge, effectiveness and commitment to technology integration and application. Preparation in the integration and application of technology to enhance student learning is essential for all candidates. Programs across the professional education unit, including the College of Arts + Architecture, College of Education, and College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, reflect this commitment in coursework, early field

experiences, and clinical practice which includes student teaching and/or the capstone/internship phase of the respective programs.

Required Texts

Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2012). *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Strategies at Work*, 3rd Ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education. (0132487128). *This is the primary text for this course. We will read and discuss most chapters in this book.*

Wood, K.D., & Taylor, D. B. (2005). *Literacy Strategies Across the Subject Areas*, 2nd Ed. New York: Allyn & Bacon. *This is a strategy book that is a valuable resource to students. It provides ideas useful for the Toolkit Wiki, Literacy Integration Unit, and Clinical Tutoring assignments.*

Choice Texts (These texts will be discussed in class. Do not purchase until after you talk with the instructor.) *Students will select and read two or three of these during the semester. One will be read independently and one in Book Circle groups (small reading groups).*

Anderson, L. H. (1999). Speak. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Chevalier, T. (2004). Girl with a Pearl Earring. New York: Plume (0452287022)

Delisle, G. (2007). Pyongyang: A Journey in North Korea. Drawn and Quarterly (1897299214)

Ehrenreich, B. (2001). Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America. New York: Owl Books.

Enzensberger, H. M. (2000). The Number Devil: A Mathematical Adventure. New York: Owl Books.

Gaiman, N. (2008). The Graveyard Book. New York: HarperCollins (0060530928)

Hesse, K. (1997). Out of the Dust. New York: Scholastic Press.

Hickham, H. H. (1998). Rocket Boys: A Memoir. New York: Delta.

Jacobson, S., & Colon E. (2006). The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation. New York: Hill & Wang (0809057395)

Jones, L., & Newman, L. (1997). Our America: Life and death on the south side of Chicago. New York: Pocket Books.

Lowry, L. (1993). The Giver. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

McDonald, J. (2006). Harlem hustle. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Myers, W. D. (1999). Monster. New York: Harper Tempest.

Paulsen, G. (1995). Nightjohn. New York: Laurel Leaf.

Rapp, A. (2003). 33 Snowfish. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

Sacco, J., & Said, E. (2002). Palestine. Fantagraphics Books (156097432X)

Riggs, R. (2011). Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children. Quirk Books. (1594744769)

Satropi, M. (2004). Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood. New York: Pantheon (037571457X)

Schlosser, E. (2002). Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal. New York: Perennial.

Spiegelman, A. (1986). Maus I and Maus II. New York: Pantheon.

Williams, L. A. (2000). When Kambia Elaine Flew in from Neptune. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks.

Course Requirements

Participate in all aspects of the course:

Learning is discursive and social. Our class is comprised of diverse individuals, each having his or her expectations, perceptions, skills, abilities, experiences, and prior knowledge. As such, we all have much to offer and learn from each other. Therefore, it is expected that you will participate fully in each and every course activity and requirement. Share the wisdom! **For group assignments, I will check throughout the semester on participation. It is expected that each member of a group do their fair share.**

Assignments

A. Course Discussion Forums- (40 pts total)

You are asked to participate in online discussions and activities. These will cover "big ideas" in the course that include readings and discussion topics assigned by the instructor. Online discussions will "travel" electronically as part of Moodle Forums and may take place over one, two or three weeks. Each discussion entry will typically have several required responses including original postings based on the assigned readings or activities and responses to other students' entries. Think of these as in-depth conversations about important topics regarding teaching and learning. As such, each student will contribute their own ideas and respond to the ideas of others. These Discussion Forums will be introduced in the Course Moodle weekly calendar blocks with directions to students for participating in each. These are an important and required part of the course and cannot be made up after-the-fact. Discussion Forums are graded holistically using a rubric.

B. Literacy Toolkit Wiki- (50 pts. total—graded with a rubric)

The Literacy Toolkit is a wiki of instructional ideas and tools selected by groups of 4 to 5 students for use in one or two subject areas. The core idea behind this assignment is for students in a single subject area or related areas to take practical resources into their teaching they can use to support subject-specific literacy and learning. Students will use a free wiki site (PBWorks) to organize strategies to help middle and secondary students with comprehension and vocabulary learning as well as texts and websites useful for teaching and learning. This assignment will be graded at two points in time—a midway progress report and discussion with a certain number of required elements to be completed and a final assessment of the entire toolkit.

C. Literacy Integration Unit- (50 pts. total—graded with a rubric)

The Literacy Integration Unit provides individual students or small groups of students the opportunity to create a teachable unit for use in their classrooms. Unlike units you may have developed for other courses, this unit does not look at daily lesson plans but rather at key texts, assignments, goals, and assessments for a unit. The focus of this unit will be on unit-level planning with support for literacy and learning (you will NOT be submitting step-by-step daily lesson plans). This grade for this assignment will be broken into three parts: a unit overview/outline, an in-progress presentation of your unit, and a final deadline and assessment.

D. Clinical Tutoring Assignment- (40 pts. total)

Each [redacted] student will tutor a middle or secondary learner (grades 6-12) in one of the subject areas for which they seek licensure for a minimum of 10 hours and eight sessions throughout the semester. Students will evaluate the learner's strengths and weaknesses in the subject area and will develop a tutoring plan to meet that learner's needs. Students will document learning by developing a simple lesson plan for each tutoring session and gathering documents from the tutoring. These will be shared in a written report and evaluated at two points during the semester, near the midterm and end of the semester.

E. Participation Evaluation- (20 pts. total)

Collaboration is at the heart of discussions and key assignments in this course and because of this participation is critical. Each student's participation will be assessed using a simple format that allows for self assessment and peer assessment by others who have worked in groups together. This will help assess participation and provide accountability for sharing responsibilities on group assignments.

Evaluation & Grading

Detailed handouts are provided for each assignment and will be graded according to the objectives and goals of each as explained in the handout. Credit or a grade for each assignment is assigned so that you will be able to assess your progress through this course. I encourage you to email or call me to discuss specific assignments, concerns, or questions about your grade in this course.

I accept late assignments at my discretion and only under circumstances that I determine merit consideration. Students should contact me before an assignment is due if they need a deadline extension. Failure to request an extension usually results in a zero for an assignment.

Grades will be earned as follows:

93% to 100% = A

85% to 92% = B

78% to 84% = C

77% or below = U

Professionalism & Academic Integrity

Teaching is a profession and as such establishes standards and expectations for its members. As in-service and pre-service teachers, we most hold ourselves to these standards. Such

expectations include respect for self and others. Here are just a few of the ways which we show that respect:

- Be active in all aspects of this online course including discussions and assignments
- Respect others even when you disagree with him or her
- Be a thoughtful and reflective practitioner

All students are required to read and abide by the Code of Student Academic Integrity. Violations of the Code of Student Academic Integrity, including plagiarism, will result in disciplinary action as provided in the Code. Definitions and examples of plagiarism are set forth in the Code. The Code is available from the Dean of Students Office or online at: [redacted]

A course such as this is always a work in progress. With that in mind, I reserve the right to modify the standards and requirements set forth in this syllabus at any time. Notice of such changes

Clue #2 for the [redacted] Scavenger Hunt

Go to the [redacted] Assignment Due Dates page in the top block of the course Moodle. Take a look at the due dates for the course assignments (remember that the Forum Discussions are not posted on this page). Plug the due dates into your calendar, Outlook, or whatever you use to organize your life. Clue #3 for the Scavenger Hunt is on this page. It will tell you what to do next.

Important Registration& Payment Dates

Jan. 4, 2012 and Jan. 19, 2012- Deadline to pay tuition. Students who have not paid will be disenrolled after 5 p.m. on these days. Note: this is a new policy to have two payment deadlines.

Jan. 19, 2012- Last day to drop or add a course on the web.

Jan. 23, 2012- CENSUS DATE.Last day to add a course with a special request. **Special requests after this date are ALMOST NEVER GRANTED.**

March 19, 2012- Last day to withdraw (drop) from a course with a W and retain other courses.

Last modified: Wednesday, 4 January 2012, 12:06 PM

APPENDIX C: ONLINE INFORMED CONSENT & DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Informed Consent & Demographic Information

Online Informed Consent Form for Students

Project Title and Purpose

The Multiple Writing Genres of Online Learning: Students' Experience of Writing in the Online Classroom Space will be a qualitative case study involving one graduate online class, its teacher, and students enrolled in the class. This study will examine the nature of writing in an online class through an analysis of writing genres. The researcher will administer surveys, conduct interviews, perform classroom observations, and collect artifacts in the form of student papers and class assignments in order to investigate how students enact various genres for their online writing.

Investigator

This study will be conducted by Lynn A. Wilson, M.A., and Ph.D. Candidate. The responsible faculty member is Dr. Ron Lunsford in the Department of English, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Eligibility

You have been selected to participate in this study because you are a student in the participant teacher's online class in which the study is focused at this institution. Your participation in this study would cease if you were no longer a student in this teacher's class.

Overall Description of Participation

Case study methodology will be used in this study. You will be asked to participate in online surveys and classroom observations. The first survey will request general demographic information. A second online survey will ask questions about student writing. Classroom observations will take place between February and April 2012. Field notes and "screen shots" of the online asynchronous classroom will be taken. Synchronous observations of class meetings will be facilitated via the online technology utilized by the course. Artifacts in the form of student writing and projects/assignments will be collected from the online class.

You may be asked to volunteer to participate in recorded interviews. Participation in the interviews is voluntary. Agreeing to participate in the study by permitting the researcher to collect data that relates to you in the online class does not obligate you in any way to also give a recorded interview.

Length of Participation

The first online survey will be conducted in February 2012 and take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The second online survey will be conducted in March 2012 and will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Classroom observations will begin in February 2012 and will officially end in April 2012. Observations of the asynchronous course will occur periodically in February, March, and April 2012. Synchronous observations will occur beginning February 2012 and thereafter, whenever these class meetings are scheduled by the teacher.

If you are selected and are willing to give a recorded interview, the initial interview will be conducted in March 2012 and a follow-up interview will be in April 2012. Each interview will last approximately 1 hour and occur at a time and location that is convenient to you and conducive to recorded interviews.

Volunteer Statement

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently in any manner if you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once you have started.

Your instructor will not be informed of whether you participate in the study or how your respond. Your participation will not impact your final grade in the course in any way.

Confidentiality Statement

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is completely confidential. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality:

1) All survey responses, observation screen shots, field notes, artifacts, and transcripts collected as data will omit or redact your name.

2) A pseudonym (first and last name) will be used in all data collected, in the dissertation written report, and in any professional publications of the research study beyond the dissertation report.

3) In any publication of the research results, your school's identity will be masked.

4) If you give a recorded interview, upon request you will be sent an electronic copy of interview transcripts for review. You will have the opportunity to remove all or parts of the interview transcripts.

5) Only people directly involved with analysis of the data will have access to the survey responses, observation screen shots, field notes, artifacts, audio files, and transcripts.

* Responses to the online surveys transmitted over the World Wide Web may not be secure. Participants should be aware that the survey is not run from secure https server, so there is a small possibility that responses could be viewed by unauthorized third parties.

Statement of Fair Treatment and Respect

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the university's Research Compliance Office (704-687-3309) if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the actual project or study, please Ms. Lynn A. Wilson at (704-906-6291; lynwilso@uncc.edu) or Dr. Ron Lunsford (704-687-4223; rflunsfo@uncc.edu).

Approval Date: This form was approved for use on Month, Day, Year for use for one year.

Participant Consent (for participants who are at least 18 years of age)

I am at least 18 years of age. I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research project.

I understand that clicking on the "I Agree" button indicates my acceptance of the Informed Consent form.

Clicking the "I Agree" button will advance to an online survey. Question #1 asks you to enter your e-mail address, city and zip code. The survey will also ask four (4) general demographic questions. Your responses to these questions are voluntary and confidential.

E-mail: [?] [?]

I Agree Continue Saved Survey

Informed Consent & Demographic Information

1) Please enter the information below – city, zip code, and e-mail address associated with your online course.

City:

Zip:

E:mail:

2) How many online classes have you taken before this one?

- 0
- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7 or more

3) How many years ago did you complete your Bachelor's degree?

- 1-3
- 4-7
- 8-10
- 11 or more

4) What was your undergraduate major?

5) In what subject area(s) are you most interested in teaching?

Finish Save and Continue Later

APPENDIX D: LETTER OF CONSENT FORMS

Informed Consent Form

for Students (Interviews)

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
9201 University City Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28223

Project Title and Purpose

The Multiple Writing Genres of Online Learning: Students' Experience of Writing in the Online Classroom Space will be a qualitative case study involving one graduate online class, its teacher, and students enrolled in the class. This study will examine the nature of writing in an online class through an analysis of writing genres. The researcher administer surveys, conduct interviews, perform classroom observations, and collect artifacts in the form of student papers and class assignments in order to investigate how students enact various genres for their online writing.

Investigator

This study will be conducted by Lynn A. Wilson, M.A., and Ph.D. Candidate. The responsible faculty member is Dr. Ron Lunsford in the Department of English, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Eligibility

You have been selected to participate in this study because you are a student in the participant teacher's online class in which the study is focused at this institution. Your participation in this study would cease if you were no longer in this teacher's class.

Overall Description of Participation

Case study methodology will be used in this study. You will be asked to participate in online surveys and classroom observations. One survey will request general demographic information. A second online survey will ask questions about student writing. Classroom observations will take place between March and May 2012. Field notes and "screen shots" of the online asynchronous classroom will be taken. Synchronous observations of class meetings will be facilitated via the online technology utilized by the course. Artifacts in the form of student writing and projects/assignments will be collected from the online class.

You will be asked to participate in interviews. Initial interviews with students will be conducted in April 2012. Final interviews with the students will be conducted in May 2012. All interviews will be recorded.

Length of Participation

The first online survey will be conducted in March 2012 and take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The second online survey will be conducted in April 2012 and will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Classroom observations will begin in March 2012 and will officially end in May 2012. Observations of the asynchronous course will occur periodically in March and April 2012. Synchronous observations will occur beginning March 2012 and thereafter, whenever these class meetings are scheduled by the teacher.

An initial interview will be conducted in April 2012 and a follow-up interview will be in May of 2012. Each interview will last approximately 1 hour at a time and location that is convenient for you and conducive to recorded interviews.

Volunteer Statement

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently in any manner if you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once you have started.

Your instructor will not be informed of whether you participate in the study or how you respond. Your participation will not impact your final grade in the course in any way.

Confidentiality Statement

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is completely confidential. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality:

1) All survey responses, observation screen shots, field notes, and artifacts collected as data will omit or redact your name.

2) A pseudonym (first and last name) will be used in all data collected, in the dissertation written report, and in any professional publications of the research study beyond the written report.

3) In any publication of the research results, your school's identity will be masked.

4) Upon request you will be sent an electronic copy of interview transcripts for review. You will have the opportunity to remove all or parts of the interview transcripts.

5) Only people directly involved with analysis of the data will have access to the survey responses, observation screen shots, field notes, artifacts, audio files, and transcripts.

Statement of Fair Treatment and Respect

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the university's Research Compliance Office (704-687-3309) if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the actual project or study, please contact Ms. Lynn A. Wilson at (704-906-6291; lynwilso@uncc.edu) or Dr. Ron Lunsford (704-687-4223; rflunsfo@uncc.edu).

Approval Date: This form was approved for use on *February 24, 2012* for use for one year.

Participant Consent *(for participants who are at least 18 years of age)*

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the principal investigator of this research study.

_____ _____

Participant Name (PRINT) Date

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

_____ _____

Investigator Signature Date

Informed Consent Form
for the Instructor

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
9201 University City Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28223

Project Title and Purpose

The Multiple Writing Genres of Online Learning:Students' Experience of Writing in the Online Classroom Space will be a qualitative case study involving one graduate online class, its teacher, and students enrolled in the class. This study will examine the nature of writing in an online class through an analysis of writing genres. The researcher will administer surveys, conduct interviews, perform classroom observations, and collect artifacts in the form of student papers and class assignments in order to investigate how students enact various genres for their online writing.

Investigator

This study will be conducted by Lynn A. Wilson, M.A., and Ph.D. Candidate. The responsible faculty member is Dr. Ron Lunsford in the Department of English, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Eligibility

You have been selected to participate in this study because you are a graduate **teacher** of an online course at this institution. Your participation in this study would cease if you terminated your employment at this school and/or moved to another school.

Overall Description of Participation

Case study methodology will be used in this study, so you will be asked to participate in interviews and classroom observations. Classroom observations will take place between February and April 2012. Field notes and "screen shots" of the online asynchronous classroom will be taken. Synchronous observations of class meetings will be facilitated via the online technology utilized by the course. Artifacts in the form of student writing and projects/assignments will be collected from the online class.

You will be asked to participate in interviews. An initial interview with the instructor will be conducted in February 2012. A follow-up interview with the instructor may be conducted in April 2012. All interviews will be recorded.

Length of Participation

Classroom observations will begin in February 2012 and will officially end in April 2012. Observations of the asynchronous course will occur periodically in February, March, and April 2012. Synchronous observations will occur beginning February 2012 and thereafter, whenever these class meetings are scheduled by the instructor.

An initial interview will be conducted in February 2012 and a follow-up interview will be in April of 2012. Each interview will last approximately 1 hour at a time and location that is convenient for you and conducive to recorded interviews.

Volunteer Statement
You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently in any manner if you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once you have started.

Confidentiality Statement
Any information about your participation, including your identity, is completely confidential. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality:

1) All survey responses, observation screen shots, field notes, and artifacts collected as data will omit or redact your name.
2) A pseudonym (first and last name) will be used in all data collected, in the dissertation written report, and in any professional publications of the research study beyond the written report.
3) In any publication of the research results, your school's identity will be masked.
4) Upon request you will be sent an electronic copy of interview transcripts for review. You will have the opportunity to remove all or parts of the interview transcripts.
5) Only people directly involved with analysis of the data will have access to the survey responses, observation screen shots, field notes, artifacts, audio files, and transcripts.

Statement of Fair Treatment and Respect
UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the university's Research Compliance Office (704-687-3309) if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the actual project or study, please contact Ms. Lynn A. Wilson at (704-906-6291; lynwilso@uncc.edu) or Dr. Ron Lunsford (704-687-4223; rflunsfo@uncc.edu).

Approval Date: This form was approved for use on *Month, Day, Year* for use for one year.

Participant Consent*(for participants who are at least 18 years of age)*
I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the principal investigator of this research study.

_____ _____
Participant Name (PRINT) Date

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

_____ _____

Investigator Signature

APPENDIX E: ONLINE STUDENT WRITING SURVEY

Online Student Writing Survey

Welcome to the **Online Student Writing Survey**. This survey involves questions about the kinds of writing you do in your online class. You will answer a series of questions on the computer using an online survey tool. Participation in the survey will take about 10-15 minutes. You may save your responses and continue at a later time if you choose.

This **Online Student Writing Survey** is part of a research study conducted by Lynn Wilson, a Ph.D. Candidate in the College of Education, and it is supervised by Dr. Ron Lunsford, a professor in the Department of English. The survey has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at University of North Carolina at Charlotte. No deception is involved, and the study involves no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., the level of risk encountered in daily life). Participants should be aware that the survey is not run from a secure https server, so there is a small possibility that responses could be viewed by unauthorized third parties.

You have been provided with the link to this survey because you completed an Online Informed Consent form agreeing to participate in the study. Your participation in the research study and in the survey is voluntary. Your responses to the survey will be kept confidential. You will not be identified by your actual name in the data collected or in the written report.

The instructor will not be informed of your responses or whether you respond to the survey. Your responses to the survey will not impact your final grade in the course in any way.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, contact the UNC Charlotte Office of Research Compliance at (704)687-2291. If you have questions concerning the study, contact the principal researcher, Lynn Wilson at (704)906-6291 or by e-mail at lynwilso@uncc.edu.

If you are 18 years of age or older, understand the statements above, and freely consent to participate in the survey, click on the "I Agree" button to begin the survey.

E-mail: [?] [?]

I Agree Continue Saved Survey

Online Student Writing Survey

1) Please enter your e-mail address associated with your online course.

E:mail:

2) What word best describes the writing you do in the online class discussions?

- homework
- postings
- participation
- e-mail
- other

3) How do you view your participation in the online class discussions?

- as "talking"
- as "writing"
- as fulfilling a class requirement
- other

4) I consider my instructor as the audience for my writing in the online class discussions.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

5) I consider my classmates as the audience for my writing in the online class discussions.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

6) My purpose for writing in the threaded discussions is to demonstrate my understanding of a topic to my instructor.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree

- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

7) My purpose for writing in the threaded discussions is to express my ideas about a topic to my classmates.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

8) My writing for my online class is the same for my discussion board posts, assignment submissions, or questions to my instructor.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

9) I write differently for my online class because I know my classmates might read my writing.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

10) What kinds of writing do you do in the online class? Check all that apply.

- abstract
- agenda
- announcement
- article
- assignment
- bibliography
- biography
- blog
- chart

- critique
- discussion
- editorial
- email
- essay
- exam
- exercises
- instructions
- journal
- letter
- list
- memo
- minutes
- news report
- outline
- pamphlet
- paper
- post
- poster
- presentation
- proposal
- question
- quiz
- report
- resume
- review
- slides
- speech
- summary
- survey
- test
- web page
- webliography
- wiki

11) How is writing for your online class similar to other kinds of writing that you do in your life?

12) How is writing for your online class different from other kinds of writing that you do in your life?

Back Finish Save and Continue Later

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview Guide

Teacher Questions

- Tell me about how you see your role in the online class.
- Tell me about the kinds of writing you ask your students to do in the online class.
    - What do you think are the reasons or purposes for the writing students do in the online class?
- Tell me about a typical discussion thread in the class.
    - How do you view the discussions? (writing? talking? fulfilling a class requirement?) What aspects of the discussion make you think of them this way?
    - What do you think is the purpose for the threaded discussions?
- Tell me about a specific example of a writing assignment from your online class.
    - Do you think the discussions help students prepare for the formal writing assignments?
- Tell me about how you think technology plays a role in/is a part of students' writing.

Interview Guide

Student Questions

- Tell me about what the experience of writing in the online class is like for you.
- Tell me about what kinds of writing do you in the online class.
    - What do you think is the reason or purpose for your writing in the online class?
    - How is the writing you do in this class similar to other online classes you've taken (if any)?
    - What kinds of writing in the online class is the most meaningful to your learning?
    - What kinds of writing in the online class seem similar to other kinds of writing you do in your life, online or in general?
- Tell me about a typical discussion thread in your class.
    - How do you view the discussions? (writing? talking? fulfilling a class requirement?) What aspects of the discussion make you think of them this way?
    - How do you see your role in the online discussions?
    - What do you think is the purpose for the threaded discussions?
    - How do the discussions fit into the rest of the course for you?
    - What makes the online discussions meaningful for you as a learner?
    - Do you ever refer back to the discussions later in the course? If so, why?
- Tell me about a specific example of a writing assignment in your class.
    - What aspects of the course help you to do the writing assignments?
- Tell me about how technology plays a role in/is a part of your writing.