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ENGLISH TEACHERS' REFLECTION AND INQUIRY

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LEAH A. ZUIDEMA

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GENRE, TECHNOLOGIES, AND THE INTERN-NET DISCUSSION LIST:
PARAWORK (CON)TEXTS FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS'
REFLECTION AND INQUIRY

By

Leah A. Zuidema

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

GENRE, TECHNOLOGIES, AND THE INTERN-NET DISCUSSION LIST: PARAWORK (CON)TEXTS FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS' REFLECTION AND INQUIRY

By

Leah A. Zuidema

Early-career teachers' need for support, guidance, and continued development—for induction—has been widely recognized in this era of pervasive concern about teacher quality and attrition. The most successful approaches to induction are multifaceted and include external networks that link beginning teachers with knowledgeable educators outside their schools. Teacher educators are uniquely positioned to advocate for, implement, and partner in external networks with beginning teachers.

The Intern-Net e-mail discussion list is an external network that I as an English teacher educator developed for a cohort of English language arts (ELA) teachers in their induction years. This dissertation investigates novice ELA teachers' voluntary participation in informal Intern-Net e-mail conversations. The study focuses in particular on two key types of conversation for teacher learning: reflection and inquiry. There is little research about how to foster these kinds of teacher learning in online forums. Therefore, the Intern-Net study develops explicit, researched-based knowledge of the textual and contextual patterns of discussion list genres for reflection and inquiry. By building on and extending existing work in the field of genre studies, I develop a new methodology for genre analysis that accounts for the role of technologies in shaping online genres for discussion. My analysis of discussion list genres for reflection and inquiry demonstrates the complexity and significance of these online conversations and

also illustrates that technology choices have more extensive consequences than might be readily apparent.

This study also introduces the new concept of parawork. The term *parawork* describes spaces and activities that function alongside, yet also outside, of traditional workplaces such as schools. My research demonstrates how online parawork environments such as the Intern-Net list may support interactions that in turn facilitate novice teachers' professional identity formation, prepare them to accomplish workplace tasks and professional goals, and foster their ability to associate with and transform school and professional cultures. My examination of the Intern-Net list as a parawork environment reiterates the importance of the design of the e-mail discussion list space and activities, and the study highlights the teacher learning and professional development that are possible when such lists are configured effectively.

To Lindsey & Emily, who are among the most inquisitive people I know.
Keep asking questions.

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My deepest gratitude to the Intern-Net teachers, who made this study possible. Thank you for allowing me and the readers looking over my shoulder to glimpse into the early years of your teaching work. It has been a privilege to learn with and from you over the years, and I hope that you know what an inspiration you are.

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lists that have been important to me in my induction into the worlds of professional writing and of computers and composition. Finally, Jeff: it's been a privilege, both in class and in this dissertation process, to learn from someone with such great talent and energy for integrating research and teaching. Your enthusiasm for good scholarship is infectious, and I appreciate your example as well as your advice regarding how rewarding it can be to read broadly and to "be yourself" as a scholar. Thank you for your timely encouragement, for your careful readings of the drafts, and for helping me to see a way to the end of this project.

Others at Michigan State University also helped to make this work possible. Many thanks to Janet Swenson, who provided the Intern-Net list with an official home at the MSU Writing Center and shared with me much-needed advice about how to set up, lead, and study a teachers' listserv. Kitty Geissler and Susan Florio-Ruane gave thorough, helpful responses to early drafts of the methodology chapter, and Ellen Cushman's knowledge of the IRB process proved imminently useful in developing the study. Research grants from the Teachers for a New Era Language and Literacy Working Group and from the Rhetoric and Writing graduate program helped to make possible the data collection and analysis, and I thank Cheryl Rosaen and Malea Powell, respectively, for their assistance in those application processes. I am also grateful for a generous Dissertation Completion Fellowship from The Graduate School, which enabled me to focus on my writing when the time was right. I appreciate, too, the cheerful assistance of Jackie Campbell and Carol Fenn, who helped me time and again with paperwork and procedural questions.

Over the years I have also benefited from the support of those in my home communities—first in Michigan, and then in Iowa. Wendy, thanks for the walks and lunches at the beginning, and for the phone calls and visits at the end. Julie, only a true friend would offer to read dissertation drafts "just because"! To my friends at Mayfair Christian Reformed Church and at Hope Christian Reformed Church: thank you—for the words of encouragement and interest, the prayers, and the time together to relax. I am especially grateful to the many people who took time to provide excellent childcare for my daughters over the years—our "regular" babysitters as well as those who stepped in "just for fun" or in emergencies. Thank you, too, to those in my new academic home at Dordt College: to the English department for cheering me on, and to the top-notch library staff for easing the stress of long-distance graduate studies.

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Introduction

As the [school] year begins to close and the dream of things slowing down

is a fading reality, I wonder what you all think about teachers leaving the

profession within the first five years. The article above ["Half of New Teachers

Quit within 5 Years" (Lambert, 2006)] addresses that issue.

How can we avoid being in that statistic?

—Katie,[1] first-year teacher, in an e-mail to the Intern-Net discussion list (2006)

Katie, a high school English teacher who participates in the e-mail discussion list

that is the focus of this study, poses a critical question. Writing to the other first-year

teachers on the Intern-Net list, she asks, "How can we avoid being in that statistic?" That

is, how can she and her peers avoid being among the many who decide to leave teaching

early in their careers?

Katie is asking the question of her first-year colleagues, and for her, it may be

something of a personal question: a desire to put her education to good use, to fulfill

lifelong dreams, to serve well the students she engages daily in her classroom. But it is a

question that should also be asked more broadly—of anyone concerned with education,

but especially of leaders in education and education policy-making. While there is debate

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[1] Names and other identifying information have been changed for all Intern-Net study participants and for the people and places mentioned in their communications. All data from Intern-Net participants, including excerpts from private communications, is presented with the study participants' informed consent. In quoted passages from Intern-Net e-mails, spelling has been "standardized" except where participants have been deliberately unconventional.

about the precise number of teachers who leave the profession in a given year, even the most conservative estimates are troubling. In their study of turnover among beginning teachers, Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that nearly 3 in 10 teachers change schools or quit teaching by the end of their first year. While acknowledging that some turnover is "normal, inevitable, and even beneficial," they also point out that current "high levels of turnover are costly in various ways, not all equally obvious" (T. M. Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 706).

The most obvious costs are certainly financial. In their June 2007 report on the cost of teacher turnover, researchers for The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future observed:

> In both small and large districts . . . the costs of recruiting, hiring, and training a replacement teacher are substantial. In Granville County, North Carolina, the cost of each teacher who left the district was just under $10,000. In a small rural district such as Jemez Valley, New Mexico, the cost per teacher leaver is $4,366. In Milwaukee, the average cost per teacher leaver was $15,325. In a very large district like Chicago, the average cost was $17,872 per leaver. The total cost of turnover in the Chicago Public Schools is estimated to be over $86 million per year. It is clear that thousands of dollars walk out the door each time a teacher leaves. (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007, pp. 4-5)

But money isn't the only thing at stake, nor is it the most important. When turnover among beginning teachers is high, students also suffer. Linda Darling-Hammond argues that since "teacher effectiveness increases sharply after the first few years of teaching . . . churning in the beginning teaching force reduces productivity in education overall"

(2003, p. 8). Money that could be spent on school improvement is instead dedicated to recruiting, hiring, training, and providing professional support for an ever-new crop of teachers. And since teacher turnover occurs at increased rates in schools where standardized test performance is low and poverty is high, students in these at-risk schools lose out on chances for equal educational opportunity. In such schools,

> An inordinate amount of their capital—both human and financial—is consumed by the constant process of hiring and replacing beginning teachers who leave before they have mastered the ability to create a successful learning culture for their students. Student achievement suffers, but high turnover schools are also extremely costly to operate. Trapped in a chronic cycle of teacher hiring and replacement these schools drain their districts of precious dollars that could be better spent to improve teaching quality and student achievement. (Barnes et al., 2007, p. 4)

Much is at stake in the quest to retain early-career teachers. The struggle, however, is about more than helping new teachers to survive. It is also about helping them to thrive, to be effective, to strive toward student learning and achievement while continuing to learn and grow professionally. To borrow a buzz phrase from current educational politics, it's about teacher quality.

Check any current local, state, or national newspaper or online news service, and whatever the day, the odds are high that a piece on teacher quality will be featured in the news stories or opinion section. Teacher quality has been an especially hot topic in education since at least 2001, when the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed. This legislation targets teacher quality as a primary area for reform. In compliance with

NCLB, the Secretary of the United States Department of Education issues an annual

report focusing solely on teacher quality; in the *Secretary's Fifth Annual Report on*

Teacher Quality, Margaret Spellings emphasizes that "teacher quality is essential for

student achievement" (2006, p. 5). In the White House's recently published Fact Sheet

on NCLB, the number one priority listed in the rationale for President Bush's

reauthorization of NCLB is written in bold, title-style capital letters: **"We Must**

Improve Teacher Quality" (2006).[2] While many in teacher education take issue with

the U.S. Department of Education's views on what counts as teacher quality and how to

measure it (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001; e.g., Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002;

Dudley-Marling, 2005), we certainly share the desire to see good teachers—great

teachers—in English language arts (ELA) classrooms.[3] In fact, within English education

(the field devoted to the education of English language arts teachers), concerns about

teacher quality extend <u>beyond</u> those expressed by the Department of Education. In

several recent publications in the field, English education specialists consider how best to

help teachers who will find themselves teaching in systems and institutions that actually

inhibit quality professional work in teachers' roles both inside and outside the classroom.

For example, in a position piece that emerged from the Conference on English

Education's 2005 Leadership and Policy Summit, leading English teacher educators

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[2] Those who find the tactics and consequences of NCLB to be problematic may, like me, see dark humor in the propaganda-style heading of the section that this Number One Goal is listed in: "The No Child Left Behind Act Has Brought Good Progress—Yet We Still Have Much Work To Do."

[3] See, for example, the "Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English Language Arts," an 84-page document prepared by the National Council of Teachers of English that outlines in extensive detail how teacher preparation programs are to help teaching candidates to develop teaching dispositions, content knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge through course work, field experiences, induction, and other support (2006).

explain the complexities of their work to develop methods courses and field experiences for preservice teachers:

> We needn't belabor the point that the ideals typically encouraged in teacher education courses—authenticity, engagement, justice, equity, inquiry and so on— are often thwarted in the field [that is, in schools] by mandated testing, factoid-oriented curricula, skills-based instruction, cynical faculty, and other factors that comprise the context of field-based preserve experiences. . . . They [preservice teachers] may ultimately struggle if they accept a job in a school in which the values are radically different from those learned in the initial settings of learning to teach. (Dickson et al., 2006, p. 316)

In another article that had its genesis in the same Conference on English Education summit, another group of leaders in English education expressed similar concerns:

> As a professional field, English education has traditionally encompassed the preparation of English teachers for the nation's schools. This focus presents a paradoxical challenge, for English educators must prepare teachers to function effectively in an educational system that we believe they must also try to change and improve. In other words, the field's focus on the preparation of English teachers can be understood as an effort to realize a vision for education that does not yet exist. (Alsup et al., 2006, pp. 284-285)

For English educators, the challenges are many: in addition to preparing English teachers who meet federal standards for being "highly qualified" and who are willing and able to remain in the profession over the long term, we must also educate in such a way that beginning teachers, in the center of the fray about what educational practices are

worthwhile, will be able to negotiate their way through conflicts in order to implement—

and defend—what is best for the students in their unique teaching contexts.

What then, to do—about teacher turnover, about teacher quality, about English

teachers trying "to function effectively in a system that . . . they must also try to change

and improve" (Alsup et al., 2006, pp. 284-285)? In addition to preparing teachers before

they enter the workforce, it is also critical that new teachers continue to learn and develop

professionally even as they take on professional roles and responsibilities. The need for

ongoing support, guidance, and continued development—for *induction*—has been widely

recognized in recent years, with the result that many education stakeholders have become

involved in advocating and implementing teacher induction initiatives. While specific

induction tactics have varying degrees of success, recent research has shown that it is

certainly worthwhile to

> [i]nvest in new teacher support and development. Comprehensive induction
>
> programs have been proven to increase teacher retention and improve student
>
> achievement. The costs of such programs could be offset by the savings achieved
>
> through decreases in the costs of turnover. (Barnes et al., 2007, p. 5)

The benefits from effective induction programs go beyond financial gain. Well-designed

mentoring and induction opportunities also have an educational impact. The early-career

teachers who participate in such programs "not only stay in the profession at higher rates,

but also become competent more quickly than those who must learn by trial and error"

(Darling-Hammond, 2003, p. 11). Additionally, Villar and Strong (2007) found that "for

all intents and purposes, new teacher productivity [for those who participated in

comprehensive induction] was equivalent to the productivity of more experienced teachers with no induction experience" (p. 34).[4]

I have been careful thus far to qualify my support for induction opportunities by emphasizing that these initiatives need to be effectively designed and implemented. Effective teacher induction occurs when all involved adhere to key principles for teacher learning. In their meta-analysis of research on teacher learning and contemporary professional development, Wilson and Berne found that "teacher learning ought not to be bound and *delivered* but rather activated" (1999, p. 194). Additionally, these researchers discovered that teachers are most likely to learn and change when they are helped "to understand their own knowledge" and when they interact in efforts toward critical collegiality—in which they "build trust and community while aiming for a professional discourse that includes and does not avoid critique" (Wilson & Berne, 1999, pp. 194, 195). These are underlying principles for effective induction. But research also sheds lights on the efficacy of various approaches to induction. The most successful approaches are comprehensive and multifaceted (Barnes et al., 2007; McCann & Johannessen, 2005; McCann, Johannessen, & Ricca, 2005). While such initiatives may include options such as beginners' seminars, reduced workload, or extra resources,

> the most salient factors [in reducing teacher turnover] were having a mentor from
> the same field, having common planning time with other teachers in the same
> subject or collaboration with other teachers on instruction, and being part of an
> external network. (T. M. Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 706)

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[4] Villar and Strong's (2007) manuscript is under submission for publication at the time of this writing. The draft cited here is quoted with the authors' permission.

It should be noted that much of the work to address induction issues is being done from within the schools and districts in which new teachers work. Yet induction initiatives need not—and should not—be limited to on-site interventions.

The external networks that Smith and Ingersoll advocate are also highlighted in studies by McCann and Johannessen, who suggest that

> . . . the new teacher can benefit from having a broad network of contacts, inside and outside of the school, including peers, veteran staff, and external resource persons. . . . In the end, the new teacher would [ideally] have several contacts, each serving a separate function: supervisor, mentor, peers, veteran colleagues, friends, former college classmates and instructors, and an objective listener or observer" (2005, p. 54)

The importance of external networks is a key reason for English teacher educators to become involved in the induction process. While our role may once have been limited to preparation of English teachers, it is now critical that we also avail ourselves to new English language arts teachers who are working to transition into—and transform—the schools where they begin their professional careers. We in English teacher education are uniquely positioned to help these teachers to develop (or find) external networks that can provide support, guidance, and opportunities for continued learning. We can partner with teachers who were once our students, working with them in networks that build upon the critically-collegial relationships that we developed during their formal studies, as well as drawing on shared disciplinary expertise and our own access to research and resources in order to make such partnerships productive. These partnerships, of course, have potential for reciprocal benefits. While novice English teachers may appreciate the on-

going support and learning that these networks can facilitate, English teacher educators also stand to benefit through opportunities to learn about the educational contexts, situations, and issues that are at the heart of our forward-looking work with pre-service teachers in our own classrooms.

Both formal and informal approaches to these kinds of external induction networks for English language arts teachers are already occurring. Broadly speaking, the external networks in which teacher educators partner with novice English language arts teachers are built upon the principles for teacher learning identified by Wilson and Berne (1999): through learning communities that work toward critical collegiality, these networks help teachers to activate and understand their own knowledge. In some instances, such networks are initiated by English teacher educators while early-career teachers are still completing their pre-service preparation for the profession; in others, the networks emerge after teachers have graduated, secured contracts, and begun paid work. Teacher educators have partnered with novice English language arts teachers by forming book clubs (Kooy, 2006), leading small groups for research and inquiry (Long et al., 2006), and engaging in e-mail exchanges (Fecho, Price, & Read, 2004). Online networks are increasingly popular, as online communications technologies (OCTs) help to remove some of the barriers of distance, space, and time that would otherwise prevent some teachers and teacher educators from participating (DeWert, Babinski, & Jones, 2003; Scherff & Paulus, 2006). Some of these online networks are facilitated through e-mail discussion lists (e.g., Singer & Zeni, 2004). Intern-Net, the e-mail discussion list that is the focus of this study, is among these online networks.

In 2004, I started the Intern-Net e-mail list as an online induction network for a cohort of preservice ELA teachers who were beginning their professional internships, many of whom I'd had the privilege of teaching in English education courses for the previous two years. Creating the Intern-Net list was a way for me to provide an academic service to the teacher interns (a.k.a. student teachers) and also to nurture professional relationships with future English language arts teachers who were potential partners in service-learning and research collaborations. When I spoke with interns about "subscribing" (that is, about signing up to participate in Intern-Net),[5] I described the list as a forum "intended to encourage and support your professional development as a teacher intern...a place to trade ideas, to ask questions, to share about interning experiences, and to reflect on your teaching practices and professional development." Of the 45 eligible English language arts interns, 36 subscribed to the list when it began, and all 36 have continued through the list's third year—their second year as certified teachers. The list is closed to outside subscribers, and the electronic archives are password-protected to safeguard privacy. Participation is voluntary; the Intern-Net teachers may post as frequently (or infrequently) as they like, and they may write about whatever topics are of interest to them.

In the three years since the Intern-Net list began, it has served as an informal induction opportunity for teachers seeking support, guidance, and continued learning. The Intern-Net list has been an aid to novice English language arts teachers as they seek to do quality work, continue their learning, and transition into and transform their

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[5] *Subscribing* to Intern-Net and most other e-mail discussion lists does not require that subscribers pay a fee. Rather, *subscription* is simply the term used to indicate that a person has agreed to receive the e-mails that are distributed to through the list. E-mail discussion lists work this way: individuals "subscribe" to a list with a group of people. When one person sends an e-mail to the list, everyone who has subscribed receives the message.

schools. It has been an external network for these early-career teachers, a space where

they can interact as critical colleagues with me (an English teacher educator and former

instructor to many of the subscribers) as well as with fellow teachers (who were once

their undergraduate classmates). It has been a place where the teachers can work

together—not only to beat the odds of the teacher turnover statistics, but also to

collaborate in learning, growing, and thriving in their classrooms. And finally, it has

also been a site for research.

The Research Context: Theoretical Grounding and Goals

Having described the context in which the Intern-Net list itself became a reality, I

now discuss the theoretical context in which this research project has emerged. A study

from the Harvard Graduate School of Education presents a review of current empirical

research about online teacher professional development, and its authors suggest that we

have much to learn about the use of online environments for teacher learning:

> The need for professional development that can customize to fit teachers' busy
>
> schedules, that draws on powerful resources often not available locally, and that
>
> can provide real-time, on-going, work-embedded support has prompted the
>
> creation of online teacher professional development programs. However, while
>
> such programs are propagating rapidly and consuming substantial resources both
>
> fiscally and logistically, little is known about best practices for the design and
>
> implementation of these online teacher professional development models. (Dede,
>
> Breit, Ketelhut, McCloskey, & Whitehouse, 2005, p. 3)

In their discussion of the findings from their meta-analysis, the Harvard researchers report that many publications about online teacher learning opportunities fail to offer insights that are developed through systematic research. Instead, they claim that as they reviewed available studies, they encountered

> a fair amount of work that was anecdotal, describing professional development programs or 'lessons learned' without providing full details of the participants, setting, research questions, methods of data collection, or strategies for analysis. Also a great deal of the literature was theoretical, conceptual or polemical. (Dede et al., 2005, p. 11)

This call for more studies that present clearly-stated, explicit research questions and methodological accounts of online teacher learning is one that can (and should) be addressed both through empirical studies and through qualitative research.

The call for more explicit knowledge about online teacher learning is echoed elsewhere, as well. For example, Scherff and Paulus (2006) point out that to date, many online networks for pre-service and early-career teachers have been highly-structured, formal learning environments with participation requirements that may "take the ownership of the space away from the novice teacher" (p. 356). They suggest that past studies of teachers' participation in threaded discussions and e-mail lists "may need to be revisited" and that new studies should analyze the online discussions that occur in environments that depend on more voluntary, informal participation from novice teachers. And although the calls for research I have highlighted here point broadly to the need for research that systematically examines any and all types of online professional development for teachers, by implication, they also call, more specifically, for studies of

online networks for teacher learning—and even more narrowly (and again, by implication) for research that attends to the particularities of specific kinds of online teacher networks, such as e-mail discussion lists.

E-mail lists, sometimes referred to as *lists* or *listservs*,[6] have become increasingly popular among K-12 teachers. Even a cursory search for education lists presents a wide array of options: lists grouped by discipline, grade, region, and language; lists for new, experienced, retired, and substitute teachers; lists focused on curriculum, fundraising, instructional methods, and more (Kelley, 2001). Given the ubiquity of teacher discussion lists, it is little surprise that teacher educators show growing interest in these lists' potential to support teachers and promote their continued learning (e.g., Firek, 2004; Grünberg & Armellini, 2004; Hogue, 2003; Levin, He, & Robbins, 2006; MaKinster, Barab, Harwood, & Andersen, 2006; Singer & Zeni, 2004; Swenson, 2003). Some of these teacher educators' publications do respond to Dede et al's (implicit) call to contribute to our research-based knowledge about "practices for . . . design and implementation" (2005, p. 3) of e-mail discussion lists as sites for teachers' learning and development. For example, Janet Swenson's (2003) extensive research demonstrates that teachers' participation in a list can lead to transformation of teaching and learning; her study also identifies four major traits or behaviors that facilitate such transformations. In "Building Bridges: Creating an Online Conversation Community for Preservice Teachers," Singer and Zeni (2004) share preliminary findings about the benefits that can occur when English teacher educators create and facilitate an e-mail list as a support network for pre-service and early career teachers. While these studies certainly enhance

---

[6]Though the brand name LISTSERV™ technically refers to e-mail discussion lists run by L-Soft International, the term *listserv* is often used as a generic term for any list of this type. In this study I use the term *listserv* only to refer to lists that use LISTSERV™ technologies, such as the Intern-Net listserv.

our understanding of the ways that e-mail lists can contribute to teacher learning, there is much more that we have yet to understand.

Significantly, we know little about the precise nature of the discussion list conversations that enable teachers' learning and contribute to their success. We do not know, for example, what specific patterns in content, rhetorical appeals, structure, style, and diction may facilitate teacher learning. Nor do we know about the roles that teachers take in these conversations—the extent to which they work collaboratively or independently. Yet these patterns deserve our attention. After all, it has long been established that teachers "may learn a great deal about teaching from opportunities to talk and write their ways into new understandings about teaching"(Cochran-Smith, Garfield, & Greenberger, 1992, p. 288), and it is clear that oral and written conversations about teaching can facilitate learning about teaching (Brunner, 1994; Buehler, 2005; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Fecho et al., 2004; Hole & McEntee, 1999; Margolis, 2002; McEntee et al., 2003; Mohr et al., 2004; Stock, 2001). Furthermore, we know that teacher learning communities are formed and maintained—in essence, made possible— by "particular ways of describing, discussing, and debating teaching" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2003, p. 294). Teacher educators, teacher leaders, and others who seek to foster productive discussion list conversations would benefit significantly from research that identifies patterns of written conversation that advance teachers' learning and professional growth.

Additionally, we have much to learn about the roles that technologies play in shaping teachers' online discussions. Online environments (including discussion lists, instant messaging chats, blogs, discussion boards, and more) differ from physical spaces,

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bringing with them new possibilities as well as new challenges for teaching and learning.
As a result, teachers who converse online adjust their language—and their activities—to
compensate. As Lock explains, "A culture shift is required, when conceptualizing
professional development using online communities. The transition to online
communities alters current beliefs, practices, and routings and transforms current notions
of professional development" (2006, p. 675). If teacher educators are to work effectively
with teachers in online environments, we need to understand that

> the selection and use of technology impacts how communities can be fostered
>
> within and beyond the scope and structure of the intended learning environment
>
> and target audience. . . . Therefore, creating and sustaining online communities
>
> that facilitate high quality ongoing professional development needs to be carefully
>
> planned and well supported, if it is to provide a forum for teachers to be active
>
> and long-term members of these communities. (Lock, 2006, p. 670)

The most helpful studies of online networks will attend not only to the conversations that
occur in these forums, but also to the technologies that contribute to the shape of these
online discussions.

The Intern-Net study provides such insights into specific ways in which novice
English language arts teachers participate in e-mail discussion list conversations intended
to provide them with support, guidance, and continued learning as they transition from
their preservice internships into their first two years of teaching. The study focuses in
particular on two key types of teacher learning: reflection and inquiry. Literature on
teacher learning points to significant ways in which education can be enhanced by
reflection (deliberate consideration of teaching-learning experiences) and by inquiry

(strategic pursuit of answers to questions focused on teaching-learning practices and theories). Reflection and inquiry can prepare and equip teachers to make necessary changes in instruction, institutions, and the local and global contexts that affect education (Brookfield, 1995; Buehler, 2005; Dawson, 2006; Fecho et al., 2004; Milner, 2003b; Schön, 1983; Sharp, 2003; Stock, 2005). Furthermore, critical reflection and inquiry about the impact of sociocultural dynamics upon education can help teachers to design curriculum and instruction that are well-tuned to students' needs, interests, and experiences—to work toward pedagogy that is culturally relevant and responsive (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Howard, 2003). These two interrelated approaches to teacher learning help to foster quality in teachers' work; additionally, they help to enable teachers' efforts not only to transition into schools, but also to transform them. In short, teacher reflection and inquiry can pay out powerful rewards.

Although there is strong consensus about the need for more teacher reflection and inquiry, there is little research about how to foster these kinds of teacher learning in online forums. One approach that can help English teacher educators and teacher leaders to promote the textual and contextual patterns that are crucial to online teacher inquiry and reflection is genre analysis. In order to better understand how reflection and inquiry occur in the e-mail discussion list environment, the Intern-Net study examines genre patterns in subscribing teachers' participation in the written listserv conversations. Through genre analysis, I develop explicit, researched-based knowledge of the textual and contextual patterns of discussion list reflection and inquiry genres. More specifically, my analysis focuses on rhetorical genres, examining how patterned interplay

between e-mail texts and the contexts in which they are written and read enables teachers to engage in the activities of reflection and inquiry.

These generic patterns are significant because of the powerful ways in which genres shape human thinking and actions. Scholarship in genre studies has shown that participating in professional genres can facilitate a person's transition into professional roles (Artemeva, Logie, & St-Martin, 1999; Lingard, Garwood, Schryer, & Spafford, 2002; Paré, 2002; Schryer & Spoel, 2005). My approach includes both textual analysis of threaded messages from the e-mail list and thematic analysis of data from discourse-based interviews (Odell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983) with teachers who have been participating in the discussion list for the past three years. By building on and extending existing work in the field of genre studies—especially Amy Devitt's (2004) theory of genre and Anis Bawarshi's (2003) approach to genre analysis—I develop a new methodology for genre analysis that accounts for the role of technologies in shaping online genres for discussion. As I discuss how technology affects teachers' participation in genres for reflection and inquiry on the Intern-Net listserv, I work to demonstrate how seemingly "small" contextual decisions can dramatically affect the structure and function of teachers' online conversations.

In addition to providing detailed insights about online genres for inquiry and reflection, this study also introduces the new concept of parawork. Building from the theoretical context I have just discussed, as well as from scholarship on language and identity construction, I use the term *parawork* to describe spaces and activities that function alongside—yet also outside—traditional workplaces (such as schools). My research demonstrates how online parawork environments such as the Intern-Net list may

support interactions that in turn facilitate novice teachers' professional identity formation, their association with workplace and professional culture, and their readiness to accomplish workplace tasks and professional goals. For English teacher educators and teacher leaders, an understanding of the workings of online parawork environments should aid in efforts to effectively structure and partner in the kinds of extended networks that use online communications technologies to foster ELA teachers' continued learning and professional development.[7]

A review of my discussion of the research context will show that the Intern-Net study is grounded theoretically in three complementary areas of scholarship: teacher learning, genre studies, and computers and composition. The resulting framework is a synthesized approach that enables methodical investigation of the structure and function of written genres and of other dimensions of teacher learning as they occur in e-mail discussion lists. The first theoretical strand, scholarship on teacher learning, underscores the importance of spoken and written conversations that promote teachers' reflection and inquiry. The second strand, genre studies, informs the analysis of patterned conversations for reflection and inquiry, guiding my approach to identifying textual and contextual traits of discussion list genres that facilitate teachers' actions as learners and professionals. The third strand, from scholarship on computers and composition, enables a deeper understanding of the contexts that impact genres of reflection and inquiry in online environments. Intertwining these theoretical perspectives informs my systematic

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[7] Like Swenson, "When I use the term 'professional development' here I am not referring to efforts on the part of someone to teach or train teachers—to impart information or methods. Instead, I use 'professional development' to refer to the ways in which practicing professional educators who already possess a 'tacit knowledge base' continue to engage in critical inquiry into their understandings and practices, the ways in which teachers become 'reflective 'practitioners' (Schön, 1983, , 1987), the ways in which teachers' experiences allow them to reach deeper understandings of their philosophies of education and theories that guide their practice as well as their practice itself" (2003, p. 306).

study of genres for reflection and inquiry as they emerge in an online learning community for novice teachers, the Intern-Net listserv. This theoretical grounding, along with scholarship on language and identity construction, also undergirds my study of the Intern-Net list as an environment that supports online parawork activities.

The underlying question for the Intern-Net research project is this: *What happens when teachers in their induction years (first as interns, and then as first- and second-year teachers) participate voluntarily in a private e-mail discussion list that is intended to encourage and support their professional development as they share ideas, ask questions, recount and interpret their experiences, and reflect on their teaching practices and professional growth?* More specific research questions that are central to this study are as follows:

1. What are textual and contextual characteristics of discussion list genres for teacher reflection and inquiry, and under what circumstances do teachers participate in these genres?

2. What roles do technologies play in teachers' participation in online genres for reflection and inquiry?

3. How may teachers' learning and professional development be facilitated in an e-mail discussion list that is established as an online parawork environment (that is, as a forum that exists both alongside and outside the workplace, and where teachers participate voluntarily and take ownership of the activities that occur there)?

As I explore these research questions in this dissertation, I address my writing primarily to English teacher educators. I explained earlier in the chapter that it is crucial

that we in the field of English education partner with novice teachers in extended

networks during their internships and early years. True, it is not as though a discussion

list or any other kind of network is all that is required to reduce teacher turnover, promote

high-quality teaching, and help novices in their simultaneous efforts to adapt to and

change schools. Effective approaches to induction should be multifaceted and

comprehensive (Barnes et al., 2007; McCann et al., 2005). Still, external networks like

the Intern-Net list play an important role in teachers' induction, for they provide

beginning teachers with opportunities to receive continued mentorship from English

education specialists, to engage in collaboration with peers, and to maintain contact with

knowledgeable educators outside their own schools (T. M. Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). For

English teacher educators who wish to establish and partner in such networks by using e-

mail discussion lists, this study of the Intern-Net list offers insights about the nature and

importance of these types of online conversations. My analysis of discussion list genres

for reflection and inquiry demonstrates the complexity and significance of these online

conversations, underscoring that the threaded e-mail discussions are much more than

"just talk," and that technology choices have more extensive consequences than might be

readily apparent. Additionally, my examination of the Intern-Net list as a parawork

environment reiterates the importance of the design of the e-mail discussion list "space"

and activities, highlighting the teacher learning and professional development outcomes

that are possible when such lists are configured effectively.

　　　　While I write primarily <u>to</u> English teacher educators, I also write as an advocate

<u>for</u> English language arts teachers. Early-career ELA teachers can benefit significantly

from participation in online networks, but in many cases, they do not have the resources

that make it possible for them to establish such networks. Additionally, they may not feel comfortable inviting English teacher educators to partner with them in networks that extend beyond their graduation, believing (mistakenly, I hope) that their requests for continued contact might seem "intrusive" or "burdensome"—and not recognizing that teacher educators would likely value and receive reciprocal benefits from these partnerships.[8] At least initially, many beginning teachers depend on the goodwill and knowledge of leaders such as English teacher educators to make available discussion lists and other external networking opportunities. The Intern-Net study is, in part, an extended argument that we in English teacher education <u>should</u> be involved in promoting and participating in networks that serve teachers in their induction years. But it is also an argument that when we commit to partnering in online networks, we should take seriously the complex—and significant—nature of our computer-mediated conversations and activities. As the Intern-Net study shows, we should not assume that the conveniences afforded by informal e-mail discussion lists (such as participation at times and places that are convenient to us) somehow require less thinking or knowledge than more formal endeavors. When we as English teacher educators agree to become involved, we usually sign on as "senior partners," and the beginning teachers we work with count on us to lead well—to know our stuff and get it right. We have a responsibility to conduct and learn from research that will enable us to be informed leaders.

I make these arguments because I am compelled by what I have learned in my work with the Intern-Net list. But I also do so as a way to amplify the voiced convictions

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[8] See Durst and Stanforth (1996) for discussion of collaborations where "[k]ey differences in status, power, and experience" separate potential partners (p. 59).

of early-career teachers who have participated in these networks. A few months after launching the Intern-Net list, I wrote to the subscribing teachers to ask for their responses to the idea that I study their use of the list and write about it for English teacher educators and others who might become involved either in starting similar discussion lists or in connecting other beginning teachers to existing lists. I soon received several enthusiastic responses. The most memorable, however, were the responses that showed a clear sense of the audience that this research ought to be directed to:

- *I think doing a study would be a great idea! If this helps future interns by affecting their mentors, field instructors, etc., then I'd be more than happy to help.* (Nelvia)

- *I just wanted to express my feelings about you conducting some research on us crazy interns. I not only think it would be an excellent idea, but I think it is imperative. I think that the listserv has been one of the most beneficial things for many of the interns on the list. It would be so fantastic if this resource were to be available for interns next year and beyond. Furthermore, this idea is worth sharing with other universities, making the lives of interns everywhere a little less stressful (big picture thinking!).* (Leigh)

- *Personally, I am always for ways to help future teachers, particularly English teachers as they enter the field. So, I think this is an excellent idea. Anything that also helps pre-service and induction year teachers have a stronger voice is important to me. . . . Thank you for taking on this project and advocating for us.* (Katie)

The teachers who responded to me wanted more than knowledge for its own sake; they wanted this research to benefit other beginning teachers—and to do so by influencing the people who are best positioned to help teachers in their induction years.

Representation

To say I write as an advocate *for* early-career teachers is potentially problematic, and this brings me to issues of representation in this study. Following the lead of Andrea Lunsford and her student coauthors (1996), I consider here my representation of Intern-Net teachers in this study, as well as the ways in which I as author understand my role and the role of this written text in the context of this project.

While novice teachers may rely on English teacher educators and other teacher leaders to argue for, establish, and partner knowledgably with them in external networks such as e-mail discussion lists, they also acquire, through their participation, a practical expertise about what makes these online networks function effectively. These practical insights must inform the efforts of teacher educators if we are to be effective partners in our work with novice teachers. To work on these teachers' behalf without inviting them to have a voice in the process is unethical—and foolish. As DiPardo et al (2006) reason,

> Research that promises to benefit teaching and learning honors teachers'
> sensibilities. . . . [R]esearchers must consult regularly with those whose lives and
> work might be influenced by their research, attending closely to the sensibilities
> of students, community members, and teachers, including those who have
> historically been left out of the process of framing and exploring research
> questions. (p. 300)

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I have sought in this study to learn about the Intern-Net teachers and their use of the list, to learn with them, and also to learn from them. While my own observations and study of the Intern-Net list e-mails have been eminently helpful in this regard, I have also learned a great deal by asking questions—in personal e-mails, in face-to-face encounters, in anonymous online surveys, in "member checking" protocols used throughout the research process,[9] and in formally structured interviews. More than once, I have been humbled when subscribing teachers graciously pointed out the limitations and vulnerabilities of the Intern-Net list—explaining, for example, that conversations I thought would be "great" to hold on the list would, in their view, be "safer" or "easier" to hold in other kinds of forums.

I have done my best to faithfully represent in writing what I've learned from the participating teachers. Where I can—and especially in the chapters analyzing discussion list genres and the parawork environment—I have made every effort to include quotes, paraphrases, and ideas from the written and oral conversations that occur in and surrounding the Intern-Net forum, and to use these in ways consistent with their original intent. (During my drafting and revision process, teachers were invited to review and comment on my representations of their words and activities and to draw my attention to any places where my interpretations were problematic.) Additionally, using a structure adapted from Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) *"Reading Don't Fix No Chevys,"* I have included interchapters, comprised of short profiles highlighting each of the study participants' distinctiveness as teachers and as Intern-Net subscribers. (The profiles themselves are ordered to underscore the diversity of Intern-Net teachers, their teaching

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[9] *Member checking* occurs when researchers " invite research participants to comment on emerging findings and interpretations" (DiPardo et al., 2006, p. 302).

contexts, and their approaches to participation in the Intern-Net list.) The intent of the interchapters is to repeatedly remind myself and my readers that Intern-Net is about people and about making a difference in education, not abstract theory. Including interchapters is a way to acknowledge the individuals who make Intern-Net what it is, to honor with my time and words the teachers I cannot publicly thank by name.

However, in spite of my efforts to honor and learn from the perspectives of the Intern-Net teachers, I recognize that I cannot truly "give voice" to them (Williams, 1996). Yes, I have incorporated many quotes from their e-mails, interviews, and personal communications into this writing. But *incorporation*, as the Latin roots of this word reveal, involves taking these quotes and bringing them into the *corpus* or body of the larger text—my text. I am truly re-presenting their words as I understand them. And so, although the Intern-Net teachers and their words are present in this text, the overall perspective that I share here is, in the end, my perspective.

My presentation of myself in this text is also a re-presentation. My overlapping roles (as listserv owner and participant, researcher, and early-career English teacher educator) have all come into play in my involvement with the Intern-Net list, as well as in writing about this project. In my posts to the list, I as a teacher educator made a concerted effort not to be "the answer lady," although I did consciously model reflection and inquiry tactics in my posts in order to encourage these activities among the subscribing teachers. In my overlapping roles as listserv owner/participant and listserv researcher, I sought to uphold the integrity of the list as well as of the research—to write or keep silent in conversations as I believed I would if I as researcher were not there to analyze and report, and to hold my research gaze steady when list discussions took

directions that puzzled me or created challenges for my analysis. Ultimately, though, my

focus in this text is on the work accomplished by the Intern-Net teachers through their

use of online genres and computer-mediated spaces. In order to center attention on their

use of the list, I have reported on my own posts and off-list interactions only in cases

where doing so helps to further illuminate how the English language arts teachers

understand and use the list.

Lastly, a word about the text. This study is not a "tell all," nor does it purport to

reveal the full story of the Intern-Net list. In several instances, the English teachers used

the list as a forum to help them sort through challenges. In doing so, they sometimes

shared details of their fumbles and, at times, used the list to think through ideas that

needed further development or revision. Out of respect for the teachers' privacy—and to

put the focus upon their on-going learning, rather than on their occasional shortfalls—I

have shared little detail about these moments. Similarly, there are certainly moments

from my participation over the last three years where I would have liked to have had a

"do-over," where I understood later that taking other directions in my posts and

interactions may have been more productive. At some point, I may discuss these as the

focus of another study, but here, they are included only when they add to understandings

about the ways in which the Intern-Net teachers used the list to further their learning and

professional growth. This raises a final point about this dissertation: I have analyzed the

list through one set of lenses, focusing my gaze on the data as it relates to teacher

learning and professional development as understood through genre analysis and study of

the role of technologies. This is one "story" of the Intern-Net list; others are possible.

Chapter Outline

This research story of the Intern-Net discussion list is unfolded in five chapters that build upon one another. Chapter 2, a review and extension of literature on reflection and inquiry, explains the nature and importance of these two types of teacher learning. In this chapter, I discuss the assumptions and ideals that guided my efforts to promote, identify, and interpret teachers' use of Intern-Net for reflection and inquiry.

Chapter 3 introduces my research design and methodology. I explain how my approach to genre analysis extends and revises existing genre theory—particularly the work of Amy Devitt (2004) and Anis Bawarshi (2003). This chapter also provides additional details about the research setting and participants.

The fourth chapter presents the findings from my genre analysis. In this chapter, I closely examine the ways in which Intern-Net teachers participate in discussion list genres for reflection and inquiry. I begin with an account of my analytical work to identify genres, explaining how I predicted four distinct genres in the reflection and inquiry genre set. The pages that follow unfold the nature of these genres. I discuss how texts, contexts, and actions intertwine as teachers work toward professional growth through their participation in the Intern-Net list. The chapter concludes with consideration of the ways in which these genres interrelate with each other and, finally, discussion of their significance for teachers on the Intern-Net list.

In the fifth and final chapter, I turn my attention to other ways in which the technology-supported environment of the Intern-Net list can facilitate teacher learning and professional development. This chapter defines *parawork*, with a focus on parawork enabled by online communication technologies. I review literature pertaining to the

parawork concept and then present a case study that illustrates how Intern-Net supports online parawork. In a case study, I analyze e-mail and interview data from one teacher intern, and I discuss how she uses the e-mail list (including her participation in reflection and inquiry genres) as an aid to construct her professional identity, to ready herself to accomplish workplace tasks and goals, and to transition into and transform school and professional cultures. The chapter outlines conditions necessary for effective online parawork for teachers, and the study closes with implications for future research of teachers' participation in genred learning conversations and online parawork.

INTERCHAPTER
Meet the Teachers (I)

Katie

Katie is an energetic teacher, a leader, and—as one Intern-Net teacher put it—a "news

guru." Often, she forwards to the list the latest news updates and opinion pieces about

education. She is also a true "thinking partner" for all of us on the Intern-Net list. Katie

teaches high school English and speech courses, and she is a whiz at integrating

technology into her teaching. She is also a skilled and ambitious organizer: since Intern-

Net began, she has used the list to pull together a small group for formal collaborative

reflection, a panel for presenting at a national conference, a graduation party for the

Intern-Net teachers, a letter-writing protest campaign, and more. A teacher consultant for

her local chapter of the National Writing Project, Katie has been a featured presenter on

the Teachers Teaching Teachers webcast and has a co-authored article in the works.

Katie is working on an M.A. in literacy and pedagogy.

Michelle

Michelle teaches junior high English classes, as well as a creative writing elective for 12th

graders. Her school is located in a small town in the state where she earned her B.A. In

her first year of teaching, she won her local PBS station's Cool Teacher Award after

being nominated by a student. She finds fun ways to teach mythology to 7th graders, and

students seek her out to read the unassigned writings that they compose on their own.

Michelle is considering a Master's degree in literacy education. When she posts to

Intern-Net, she often shares a word of encouragement, an insightful question, or an idea that shows her creativity.

Mariah

Mariah has a passion for drama, and it shows. Her posts to Intern-Net are frequently related to drama—an announcement about an upcoming, "can't miss it" theater event, or insights about how to integrate drama into English language arts teaching. She reports that she already has her dream job: she teaches drama at a middle school in a Midwestern city. After her first year of teaching, she won a grant that enabled her to combine drama and social work in creative ways. The eighth graders she worked with performed at local elementary schools. Mariah hopes someday to attend graduate school to earn a degree in drama therapy or youth theatre.

Steve

Steve is a grammar buff who teaches English and coaches baseball at the same rural high school as another Intern-Net subscriber, Lynn. After graduation, he spent a semester as a long-term substitute teaching junior high math—and although his math students enjoyed him and took up a collection for a generous goodbye gift, he is happy to have rejoined the ranks of English teachers. Lately, he has been on the lookout for creative ways to teach mythology. When Steve writes to Intern-Net, he shares teaching practices that have been effective for his students and chimes in on debates about politics and pedagogy. Recently, he promised "a handsome reward" to anyone who helps him to remember the

name of a poem that he read a few years ago: it was "an allegory which compared being born to dropping out of an airplane during a war."

Riane

After graduation and a summer of job searching, Riane accepted a position as an English teacher at an urban high school in one of the poorest parts of a major U.S. city. The following year, she moved to a more suburban district in the same city and now teaches high school English there. The majority of Riane's messages to Intern-Net were posted during her internship year, though she has posted a few times in each subsequent school year. During her internship, she most often used the list to keep up with the business of her overlapping roles as student and teacher, as well as to seek and offer encouragement and advice during the job hunting process.

Sydney

After a year of teaching a range of high school literature and writing courses, Sydney agreed to transfer to her district's new program and building exclusively for 9th graders. She now teaches traditional ELA courses for 9th graders, and she also team teaches another English course for students in the special education program. She has begun an M.A. in education, and in her time after the school day ends, she enjoys coaching the pom squad. In an e-mail sent to Intern-Net in the summer after her first year, Sydney confessed, "I never thought I would enjoy teaching so much. Seriously. I mean, I knew I would love it, but I can't wait to go back right now. It is so exciting and new every day."

When Sydney posts to Intern-Net; her messages are often longer, more prosaic contributions to threads for collaborative reflection.

Nelvia

Nelvia teaches English language arts to 8th graders in a town small enough that it doesn't "have a stop light or a fast food restaurant." Her school serves many students whose families work at farms in the area on a seasonal basis, and during the summer, she teaches in a program for migrant youth. Nelvia is resourceful and generous: when she discovered that her school didn't have enough English textbooks and novels even for classroom sets, she started community fundraisers, used Intern-Net to arrange book-sharing with another school, got creative with her methods for assigning readings, and even purchased numerous books with money from her own paycheck. She is a teacher who prefers to "lurk," or participate more quietly in the Intern-Net list by reading messages without posting responses. But she also values the list and has remarked repeatedly about how much she appreciates it. When Nelvia does write to Intern-Net, her posts often detail creative, hands-on projects that require students to use multiple intelligences in their learning. Nelvia predicts that in 10 years, she will "definitely be teaching."

CHAPTER 2
Assumptions and Ideals:
Reflection and *Inquiry* as Words in Play

Despite the claims of some research to be descriptive rather than evaluative,

all research rests on an assumption of a norm, a standard of measure.

All research presupposes some kind of utopian ideal state, which serves

both as a yardstick for measuring what is happening at the moment

and as the <u>telos</u> for research activity.

Patricia Sullivan & James E. Porter in *Opening Spaces* (1997, pp. 39-40)

My interest in teacher reflection and inquiry and in e-mail discussion lists is

personal, and it shapes the work I do with the Intern-Net list. A story: I joined my first

online discussion list in 2000. I had taken a year-long leave from my work as a high

school English teacher, and I was doing part-time adjunct teaching at a nearby university,

keeping my schedule flexible so that I could spend more time with my infant daughter. I

enjoyed teaching at the college level, but I missed the collegiality with coworkers that I

had enjoyed as a high school teacher. Like so many other part-time adjuncts, my

"connection" to the university campus was simply driving in to the parking lot before

class, walking to my room, teaching, staying after for office hours, and then walking back

to the parking lot again to drive home. No department meetings, no committees. No

daily lunches with other faculty in the lounge; no Ninth Grade Teaching Team to check

in with every week about how things were going for us and our students; no dropping in

on the teacher next door or across the hall to talk shop, seek advice, or laugh together. My professional interactions were limited to hellos in the hallways. Fridays were especially lonely: I taught a first-year writing course that met from 4:00-6:00 in the afternoon, and by the time class finished, the entire building was empty and the outside doors were already locked.

I decided I missed high school teaching—or more precisely, that I missed being with high school teachers. In retrospect, I would say that I missed professional conversations with teaching peers. As an adjunct new to college teaching with "only" a master's degree, it didn't occur to me to think of the fulltime, Ph.D.-holding professors as teaching colleagues. In any case, I decided to go searching for a community of high school English teachers that I could belong to, even if I wasn't teaching on a high school campus anymore. Eventually, I stumbled across the NCTE-HS[10] list and joined in the conversations happening there.

NCTE-HS quickly became an important part of my professional life. The conversations were fast-paced and focused, and participants were friendly and supportive while also willing to debate and to challenge each others' ideas and assumptions. I learned many new (to me) approaches to teaching English and reconsidered many of the "givens" of my teaching. And I learned that my voice mattered, too: I appreciated the occasional personal e-mails from NCTE-HS subscribers thanking me for sharing my

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[10] NCTE-HS was the list sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) for those interested in teaching high school English. The listserv was eventually shut down because of NCTE budget and technical considerations, but in its time, NCTE-HS was a free, open list, meaning that anyone who wanted to subscribe could do so. According to the subscription information page that was online when the list was live, NCTE-HS was intended "for discussion of issues, ideas, and practices pertinent to high school language arts teachers." The majority of the members were high school English teachers, although other subscribers identified themselves as junior high English teachers, undergraduate and graduate English education students and professors, people considering entering the teaching profession, education journalists, and textbook and curriculum writers. Many educators who formerly subscribed to NCTE-HS and other expired NCTE lists now participate in lists from Interversity (see http://www.interversity.org/).

ideas and perspectives. In a graduate paper that I wrote about the potential of NCTE-HS as a site for processes and products of teacher research, I described the list as "an ever-changing community of teachers who value civil discourse and are willing to engage in rigorous self- and peer-analysis." I noted, too, that my own experiences as well as "comments on the listserv indicate that the [NCTE-HS] conversations do lead to classroom change" (2002).

Fast-forward a few years. I joined some additional discussion lists; exchanged the anonymity of adjunct teaching for a new, more connected life as Ph.D. student in English education; and began looking for creative ways to interact with preservice and in-service English teachers. To me, a private list seemed like an obvious choice. I developed the Intern-Net list because I wanted teaching conversations that mattered for my English education students, who were by this time teacher interns. The flier I distributed to recruit participants for the list summed up the goal: I described Intern-Net as a place "to encourage and support your professional development as a teacher Intern…a place to trade ideas, to ask questions, to share about interning experiences, and to reflect on your teaching practices and professional development." Reflection, collaboration, and inquiry were essentials from the very beginning of the project.

While my experiences with the NCTE-HS and Intern-Net listservs make it easy for me to think of teacher discussion lists as places for meaningful conversations that can change what happens in classrooms, many people have not had the benefit of similar experiences and are skeptical about the potential of such lists for teacher learning. In the casual conversations I have about this research project, I frequently encounter raised eyebrows and questions about whether anything "serious" can be accomplished through

e-mail. I'm frequently asked, "What do they do? Just talk to each other? Trade lesson plans?" This project is, among other things, an answer to such questions. I look closely at how teachers talk online and at what it means for their teaching. I am convinced that lists like Intern-Net can function as more than brokerages for lesson plans and "what to do on Monday morning." While online forums devoted to lesson planning do meet an important need, my point is that discussion lists needn't be limited in their function.[11] I believe that e-mail lists can support a variety of important teacher activities: not only the exchange of ideas for curriculum and instruction, but also teacher reflection and inquiry.

It is difficult enough to explain in casual conversation what I mean when I say that I want to encourage and document teachers' reflection and inquiry on the Intern-Net listserv. The challenge for the more formal context of this study is to recognize that these terms are what Jeff Grabill once referred to in a class discussion as "words in play," terms with "meanings both powerful and slippery" that shift as various people use them in differing contexts and for differing purposes. However, in order to proceed in a systematic and (relatively) transparent manner in my study of teacher talk on the Intern-Net list, it is critical that I take the time to explain the assumptions and ideals that have guided my efforts to promote and document teachers' reflection and inquiry.

Words in Play: *Reflection*

Scholarship on teacher reflection typically begins with a chronological historical account of approaches to reflection. Authors frequently trace the roots of current conceptions of teacher reflection to the 1933 publishing of John Dewey's *How We Think*,

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[11] As an example of a valuable planning resource for English language arts teachers, see the peer-reviewed lessons presented at the ReadWriteThink site at www.readwritethink.org (International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English, 2002).

proceed to an obligatory gloss of Donald Schön's seminal books *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (1987), go on to outline more recent work on teacher reflection, and then move along to their own approaches to the subject. I could begin in the same way here, but I think it would be a mistake for me to try to present a linear, monolithic history of approaches to teacher reflection. As with other complex subjects, teacher reflection does not emerge on a neat, clean timeline that we can trace step by step from the past to the present. Rather, approaches to teacher reflection have emerged in a rhizomic manner: tangled, overlapping nodes, connected and related to each other, but each one also exhibiting features that distinguish it from the next.[12]

My work here is not to map fully the rhizomic nature of scholarly approaches to teacher reflection. Others have undertaken aspects of this labor, and I recommend their work to interested readers (e.g., Hatton & Smith, 1995; Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, & López-Torres, 2003; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Michelson, 1996; Valli, 1997). Instead, I describe my understanding of teacher reflection while also clarifying how my efforts draw upon, overlap, and yet are distinct from others' work on teacher reflection. Rather than marching chronologically through the literature on the topic, or even imagining that I can somehow "untangle" the nodes of the teacher reflection rhizome as though it were a simple string of ideas waiting to be unknotted, I instead work thematically to describe the complexities associated with my efforts to identify and analyze reflection as it occurs through the Intern-Net list.

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[12] I am indebted to Deleuze and Guattari for the metaphor of the rhizome as an "antigenealogy" (1987, p. 11).

Time, Space, and Teacher Reflection

A key to understanding reflection as I approach it in this study lies in the etymology of the term. Reflection is most often described in terms of time, so that the Latin *reflectere*, "to bend back," is taken to mean "to look back to the past." For example, in Linda Valli's description of teacher reflection in the United States, she observes that in Dewey's view, "Reflective thought looks back on assumptions and beliefs to be sure they are grounded in logic, evidence, or both, and it looks forward to the implications or consequences of a particular course of action" (Valli, 1997, p. 68). This idea of reflection as a look backward to the past is quite common, and it appears frequently in the literature on reflection, often in the sense of reflection-on-action (Hatton & Smith, 1995). In this sense, reflection has been described as "cognitive and emotional processes of deliberate recall of experience and making personal sense from analyses of those recollections" (Burge, Laroque, & Boak, 2000, n.p.), as a process of collecting stories and exploring their meaning by "thinking and wondering" about "ordinary experiences" as well as "those moments of the day that touch us" (Hole & McEntee, 1999, p. 34). Valli writes about reflection in this way when she describes a reflective person as one "who thinks back on what is seen and heard, who contemplates, who is a deliberative thinker" (1997, p. 68).

Relationships between time and reflection come into play in additional ways for others who discuss reflection as a link among past, present, and future. Boud and Walker (1998) emphasize that "reflection by teachers and learners before the learning event is as important as reflection during, or after, it" (p. 203). Connections between historical contexts, ideals for the future, and present behavior figure importantly into the "proleptic

praxis" concept of reflection promoted by Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, and López-Torres (2003, p. 252). Elsewhere, Killion and Todnem (1991) distinguish among

- o *reflection-on-practice*, or "looking back in time and analyzing,"

- o *reflection-in-practice*, which occurs "in the present" and is based on consideration of "the immediate consequences of . . . actions,"

- o and *reflection-for-practice*—that is, "remembering one's own experiences as one anticipates future experiences" (as cited in MaKinster et al., 2006, p. 546).

Many authors are quite explicit about the role of time in their view of reflection, while others build assumptions about the role of time more implicitly into their work. For example, when Schön (1983) writes that reflection-in-action involves "construct[ing] a new theory of the unique case," (p. 68), he implicitly assumes that there is a disconnect between the old and the new, between past experiences and "the 'action-present,' the zone of time in which action can still make a [present or future] difference to the situation" (p. 62).

While time is certainly one important aspect of reflection, another dimension, space, can also be incorporated into the metaphorical use of the term *reflection*. Michelson (1996) contrasts some current uses of *reflection* with the etymology of the term:

Our use of the word to mean a second-order 'processing' phase casts reflection in chronological terms but etymologically, reflection is part of a vocabulary of bodies, angles and surfaces. It is a metaphor of space, not time. It means to 'turn back, to bend in a certain direction', and in Renaissance usages it often refers to mirrors and the refraction of light. (p. 446)

Bringing a spatial dimension to reflection requires more complex activity than simply looking back while looking also to the present and future. Understanding reflection as a spatial metaphor acknowledges that those who reflect choose an angle or angles (from multiple possible angles) from which to reflect.

Like Michelson, advocates for *critical reflection* call for deliberate attention to viewing teaching and learning from multiple angles. For example, Brookfield (1995) promotes an approach to reflection in which educators deliberately consider their work through four different "lenses": "(1) our autobiographies as teachers and learners, (2) our students' eyes, (3) our colleagues' experiences, and (4) theoretical literature" (p. 29). This is a useful technique, and imaginative teachers might add other lenses to the list, so that they would also consider the teaching-learning scene from the viewpoint of parents, community members, administrators, and other stakeholders. In their introduction to *At the Heart of Teaching: A Guide to Reflective Practice* (McEntee et al., 2003), Joseph W. Check and Grace Hall McEntee also emphasize the importance of reflecting from multiple vantage points. They write,

> For us, reflective teaching is peeling back the layers of our own daily work,
> looking under the surface of our own teaching, making a conscious attempt to see
> our teaching selves as students see us, or as an observer in our classrooms would.
> It also means looking at the wider contexts that affect our teaching—issues of
> social justice, of school structure, of leadership. (p. xiii)

For Check and McEntee, Brookfield, and other advocates of critical reflection (e.g., Jay & Johnson, 2002; e.g., Martin, 2005; Milner, 2003a; Valli, 1997), it is crucial that teachers consider their work from perspectives in addition to their own, recognizing that

there is more than one way to understand a given educational situation. I, too, am interested in this sense of reflection as viewing from multiple angles, and this is one facet of reflection that I have held as an ideal in my conversations with Intern-Net teachers. While I have not expected that Intern-Net teachers will reflect from multiple angles at all times, I am hopeful they will take this approach with some regularity and frequency (both on- and off-list) in order to gain a more complex and holistic understanding of their work.

But there is more to critical reflection—and to Michelson's explication of the spatial metaphor—than mere awareness of multiple perspectives for viewing. It is also important to evaluate the affordances and limitations of any given vantage point, to critique the power relationships and sociocultural structures that reward some points of view while making it difficult to see from other angles. As Michelson points out, understanding reflection as a spatial metaphor has important implications, for then the metaphor

> involves positionality and point of view. The angle of reflection, whether physical or optical, concretely determines how an object rebounds or what can be seen in the mirror. Thus, while the reflected image may appear to be objective, as undistorted as the smoothness of the surface can make it and the product of universal scientific laws, reflection always participates in the social relations of its making. What politics of inspection are being enacted in a given act of reflection? How does relative positionality determine what is and is not visible? Who is looking? Who is being looked at? Who is standing where? (1996, p. 447)

Whether or not they are aware of it, those who reflect on the work of teachers and learners can never fully "detach" themselves from the scene or escape the spatial aspect of the metaphor—the fact that they are positioned (and position themselves) relative to the involved people, activities, and structures. Positioning is, in this sense, metaphorical: power relationships, sociocultural structures and attitudes, and other variables all impact the reflection that emerges when anyone gazes on the teaching-learning scene. It is important that teachers be aware of the ways in which they and others are positioned and position themselves relative to others, and that they consider the implications for teaching and learning (Boud & Walker, 1998; Brookfield, 1995; Howard, 2003; Milner, 2003b). One approach to this type of introspection is what Schön (1983) terms "frame analysis"—careful examination of the underlying assumptions that shape the ways we see and behave in the world. The goal of frame analysis is to recognize "the frame as frame" (Sullivan & Porter, 1997, p. 79), to recognize that alternative frames are possible—and perhaps better (Jay, 1999). This aspect of reflection is another of the ideals that I have held for Intern-Net. Again, awareness of positionality is only one facet of reflection, and I have not expected that it to occur in all instances of reflection. But I have desired that the Intern-Net conversations promote this aspect of reflection in such a way that participating teachers remain "alert to the frame, to its strengths as well as limitations, and to the presence of alternate frames" (Sullivan & Porter, 1997, p. 79).

While spatial positioning can be understood as metaphor, as I have described above, it can also be understood in more concrete, even physical, terms. An important facet of Michelson's (1996) feminist critique is her admonition against approaches that idealize detached, cognitive reflection that is divorced from the knowledge of emotion

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and of personal experience. Michelson suggests that the shift away from a spatial understanding of reflection accompanied the rise of Enlightenment attitudes, which valorized control of the body and emotions (experience) through the rule of the detached mind. The result of this shift, as Michelson explains, is a problematic tendency to treat reflection as a purely rational, objective, disembodied (and therefore non-spatial) activity. A better approach to reflection would <u>also</u> value personal testimony and recognize that "emotional and physical responses are . . . important information . . . no more or less infallible than any other form of knowledge" (Michelson, 1996, p. 450). Scholarship on reflection has continued to develop since Michelson's article was published in 1996, and along the way, there has been a strong trend toward reflection that does incorporate teachers' narratives of their own experiences[13] (e.g., Alsup, 2006; e.g., Fecho et al., 2004; Margolis, 2002; McEntee et al., 2003; Milner, 2003a; Stock, 2005). So although Michelson's concerns are to some degree being addressed, her article is a good reminder about the value of reflection that integrates the logics of the body, emotion, experience, and mind. As Alsup (2006) explains, these logics are "not only intellectual or ideological but also corporeal," built in part through efforts to embody teaching identities inside and outside the space of the classroom (p. 95). Boud and Walker (1998) also bring us back to a perspective on reflection that is, in its essence, spatial. They note that it is important for those who reflect to make meaning from their own (embodied) experiences, and they caution against the temptation to intellectualize reflection. Boud and Walker suggest that creating "a climate in which the expression of feelings is accepted and legitimate" is one way to ensure that reflection is more than simply a cognitive experience (p. 194). These

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[13] For description of a similar narrative turn in the methodology and reporting of research in the teaching of English, see Smith and Stock's (2003) chapter "Trends and Issues in Research in the Teaching of the English Language Arts."

insights were informative for my efforts to identify and promote reflection in the context of Intern-Net. Rather than focusing solely on teacher talk that is abstract and theoretical, I have also considered ways that Intern-Net teachers integrate their emotions and embodied experiences into reflection.

As I consider how, during the initial stages of this project, to define *reflection* for my research of the Intern-Net listserv, I came to appreciate the useful insights Michelson offers regarding the spatial etymology for reflection and its implications for the significance of seeking multiple vantage points, evaluating positionality, and pursuing integrated knowledge. These ideas wend their way into the definition of teacher reflection that I construct in this chapter. Yet I am not fully satisfied with Michelson's concept of reflection. To this point I have concentrated my efforts on the role that space plays in teacher reflection. I want to return here to the role of time.

Strategies, Dispositions, and Teacher Reflection

Though Michelson claims that reflection is a metaphor of space <u>rather</u> than of time (1996, p. 446), I think that the role of time ought not to be ignored. I noted earlier that a number of scholars consider the role of time as they distinguish among types of reflection and seek to determine what defines reflection (e.g., Boud & Walker, 1998; Burge et al., 2000; e.g., Dewey, 1997/1933; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Hole & McEntee, 1999; Killion & Todnem, 1991; Schön, 1983; Valli, 1997). Practically speaking, it is important—in my engagements with Intern-Net as well as in other teacher educators' work with similar discussion lists—to be able to identify <u>when</u> Intern-Net participants are engaged in teacher reflection. At what points does a reflective act begin and end? For that matter, what <u>is</u> a reflective act? Can we identify times where teachers "are

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reflective" and "are not reflective"? To begin to examine this node of the reflection rhizome more carefully, I now consider parallels in the ways that we think about literacy and about reflection.

Among teacher educators, reflection has become an important measure of teacher literacy[14] (Wilson & Berne, 1999). In the same way that people are frequently categorized as either "literate" or "illiterate," it is not uncommon for teachers to be judged either "reflective" or (by implication) "unreflective." For example, Valli (1997) suggests that "not all teachers function as this type of [reflective] professional. . . . We cannot take for granted that prospective teachers will become reflective practitioners with experience" (p. 72). Likewise, Schön (1983) contrasts "unreflective practitioners" with their reflective counterparts (p. 288). And Sumsion and Fleet (1996) set up a similar binary when they question whether there is evidence that "reflective professionals are necessarily more effective than non-reflective professionals" (p. 121, emphasis added).

Contrasts between reflective and unreflective teachers are made with some frequency, yet they may be less helpful than they first appear. In the field of literacy studies, Brian Street (1995) suggests that it is "meaningless intellectually" to use either-or labels (i.e., either *literate* or *illiterate*). To argue his point, Street notes that many people who may be regarded "as 'illiterate' have considerable literacy skill but may be needing help in a specific area" (p. 19). Similarly, I find it unproductive (and unfair) to label a set of teachers "unreflective." Though any given group of teachers—self included—could stand to benefit from help toward engaging in particular types of reflection in certain

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[14] By way of contrast, U.S. federal standards for "highly qualified teachers," as outlined in the legislation known as No Child Left Behind, seem to value an entirely different kind of teacher literacy: the ability to pass content-area exams and to implement scripted, standardized curriculum in spite of the fact that learners, teachers, and teaching-learning contexts are highly varied and unstandardized.

situations, I think it is important to recognize that these same teachers very likely participate with some skill in a variety of other reflective activities at other times. To put it another way, one of the problems that occurs when teachers are labeled "unreflective" is that time seems static. It is as though the unreflective teachers have been that way in the past, are that way now, and—without intervention—will continue to be that way in the future. There is a sense of perpetual, unthinking gloom: the unspoken assumption seems to be that "unreflective" teachers are always, consistently unaware of the meanings and nuances of their work. No allowance is made for teachers to have some moments that are more reflective than others; no acknowledgment is made that teachers may be reflective in a variety of ways—some of them more visible than others.

There are other reasons, too, that the binary labels of reflective/unreflective are problematic. Read Street's description of the ways that so-called "illiterates" are viewed, and apply it to conceptions of "unreflective" teachers: They are wrongly "presumed to . . . be able to think less abstractly, to be more embedded, less critical, less able to reflect upon the nature of language they use or the sources or their political oppression" (Street, 1995, p. 21). The corresponding faulty assumption behind the label "unreflective teacher" is that the teacher in question is less <u>capable</u> of reflection because she doesn't display certain types of observable behaviors at particular moments in time. Yet as Sumsion and Fleet (1996) point out, assessing reflection is a tricky prospect. In this study and elsewhere, I dare not go so far as to label as "unreflective" a teacher who does not appear to engage in what I am define as reflection. Likewise, I want to emphasize that when I use the term *reflective*, I am not in turn implying that some teachers are "unreflective." Rather than looking at reflection as a yes-or-no prospect, I am interested

in types of reflective activity and in how reflection plays out in collaborative conversations.

This brings me back to the question about identifying where reflective activity starts and stops. Joelle Jay's perspective is useful here; she explains that while "reflection is sometimes a strategy[,] it is also a disposition, a way of being, an art" (1999, p. 21). I will take up Jay's remarks about reflection as disposition shortly, but for now, I want to emphasize that there <u>are</u> times when ELA teachers (and teacher educators) approach reflection as strategy, as a "time-bounded project or discrete activity" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 289). For example, it is quite common for undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs to include reflection assignments (such as journals, on-line or face-to-face discussions, and end-of-term compositions) in which prospective and in-service teachers use writing and talk to explore the meanings, significance, and implications of their professional experiences (e.g., Appleby, 2003; Black, 2005; Dawson, 2006; Levin et al., 2006; Margolis, 2002; Martin, 2005; Singer & Zeni, 2004; Sumsion & Fleet, 1996; Tillman, 2003; Wickstrom, 2003). Similarly, in professional development contexts such as National Writing Project sites, it is not unusual for teachers to set aside a designated period of time for written and/or oral consideration and re-consideration of their teaching and learning experiences. (For additional examples of reflection as strategy in professional development contexts, also see Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001.) Whatever the context, when teachers participate in reflection as strategy, they might (and hopefully will) continue to think about insights from their writings and discussions, but there is a tendency to remark that "the reflection" is bounded by the opening and closing words of the designated conversation or composition.

Since the approach to reflection as strategy is so common in teacher education programs, it is not surprising that Intern-Net teachers often associate reflection with strategy. In Intern-Net conversations, the listserv teachers have made numerous direct references to reflection. In several of these cases, the teachers use the term *reflection* to denote a strategy—specifically, a type of writing assignment intended to help their students think about their reading and writing.[15] There are at least six instances in the first two years of Intern-Net conversation where the listserv teachers state that they assign their students to "write a reflection."

E-mail exchanges that occurred off the Intern-Net list also show instances where participating teachers think of reflection as a useful strategy—not only for their students, but also for themselves. In an off-list exchange in which I responded to questions from Nicole about how to handle some technical issues with her e-mail, I also encouraged her to feel welcome to write to Intern-Net about her ongoing experiences with teaching English overseas. Nicole replied that she would like to do so at some point, but she also noted:

> When I come into town I do get time to e-mail but there always seems like there are so many people I need to contact that it takes a long time. Plus I'm really struggling with writing about my experience, even in my personal journal. For me it's like whenever I get a free minute the last thing I want to do is "reflect" on what's happening. (Perhaps too much reflection during college is finally catching up with me?) I realize it's very important to do but I really have to force myself to

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[15] This is consistent with findings from Fecho, Price, and Read (2004), who observe that preservice teachers tend to think of an inquiry stance (which is closely related to reflection) primarily as "a means of working with students" (p. 271).

do [it]. Does this make sense? Who knows... Hopefully, sometime in the next

month I'll sit down and write out a short e-mail to send to the list.

It is worth noting here that I did not use any version of the word *reflect* in my e-mail to

Nicole. Rather, I mentioned that "we'd love to hear more about what you are up to and

what it is like teaching there." It is interesting that Nicole read this as a prompt to reflect.

It seems that in the sense that Nicole used the word *reflection* here, she was regarding it

as a strategy, a deliberate process that takes place as she writes—whether that writing

happens in her journal or in her posts to Intern-Net. As Nicole uses the word here,

reflection denotes time-bounded activity of a sort that she associates with school and the

world of assignments, papers, and in-class conversations. Reflection, from this

perspective, is something one should do periodically as a means toward an end—a

strategy.

There were other instances, too, where Intern-Net teachers approached reflection

as a time-bounded strategy for thinking carefully about their own work as teachers. In

one exciting outgrowth during the second year of Intern-Net conversations, four of the

first-year teachers banded together to submit a proposal to present at a national

conference. Following the plans outlined in their successful proposal, Mariah, Katie,

Drea, and Athena worked together online for almost a year, trying out techniques for

what they termed "collaborative narrative reflection." They used strategies recommended

by Margolis (2002) and by Hole and McEntee (1999), adapting them for online

interaction in order to bridge the distance between them, four cities and two states apart.

I was honored to be included in the conversations and activities, and I took the

opportunity to initiate conversations with them about the nature of reflection. Though I

had not made any references to the role that time plays in reflection, Katie made this astute comment on the subject:

> Have any of you ever gotten so fixated on something going on with a student or in your classroom that you think about it constantly? I had a situation this year that did that for me. I tried to say, ok Katie, now you need to stop analyzing it. You need to let it go and move on. I struggled with this a great deal. But I did want to put that issue on the shelf and *move on from reflecting on it*. I don't know, *maybe teaching forces us to do that* [to reflect] *all the time* . . . . [emphasis added]

Katie's observations are remarkably parallel to Jay's (1999) ideas about reflection as both time-bounded strategy and ongoing disposition. Katie recognizes that there are times when we are deliberate about engaging in reflective techniques (earlier in this thread, she tells about regular talks with a mentor teacher), but she also recognizes that the nature of teaching demands a type of continuous reflection, what Jay refers to as "a way of being" (1999, p. 21).

This view of reflection also appears elsewhere in scholarship on teacher reflection. Schön (1983) touches on the idea with his concept of reflection-in-action. I should note, however, that to understand Schön's reflection-in-action as a continuous disposition, it is also necessary to understand that the "action" in teaching is not limited to the classroom, nor is it divorced from theory or merely <u>informed by</u> theory. Rather, teaching itself must be understood as a way of being, a disposition, an ongoing active state; in this view of teaching, practice and theory are in dialectical relationship—*praxis* (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Freire, 1970; Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003).

A more direct treatment of reflection as disposition appears in Bob Tremmel's (1993) article on reflection as mindfulness, a concept that he borrows from the principles of Zen. Tremmel suggests that engaging in reflection as mindfulness requires teachers to "pa[y] attention" (p. 445). He also draws on discussions of mindfulness from outside of Zen teachings, quoting from Ellen Langer's (1989) psychological research on the topic to observe that mindful reflection requires constant "awareness of the processes of making real choices along the way" (as cited in Tremmel, 1993, p. 445). While I don't generally subscribe to Zen philosophies, Tremmel's explanation of reflection as mindfulness resonates with me. In addition to acknowledging that reflection can be a strategy, I am also interested in exploring reflection as a habitual attentiveness to the ultimate direction of one's teaching, an alertness to the significance of daily details and their role within a bigger picture. Synonyms such as *disposition* and *mindfulness* capture the idea well; the word *stance* also helps to convey the concept. I use the word *stance* here in a similar sense to the meaning outlined by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999): "to suggest both orientational and positional ideas, to carry allusions to the physical placing of the body as well as to intellectual activities and perspectives *over time*" (p. 288, emphasis added).[16] A reflective stance is not a momentary position; it is instead about readiness and responsiveness over the long term.

While earlier in this chapter I could easily point to examples of instances where Intern-Net teachers understand and engage in reflection as strategy, it isn't possible for

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[16] The phrase *inquiry stance* as used by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) is catching on in literature about teacher learning. For example, Fecho, Price, and Read (2004) borrow and build on the idea for their research in "From Tununak to Beufort: Taking a Critical Inquiry Stance as a First Year Teacher," and they attribute the stance concept to Cochran-Smith and Lytle. Elsewhere, Jennifer Buehler writes about the value of taking a "stance of reflection" and a "questioning stance" (2005, pp. 281, 282). It is interesting that this recent use of the word *stance* takes on similar meaning to Dewey's original definition of reflection: "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (as cited in Jay, 1999, p. 4).

me to call up similar "ready reference" examples of Intern-Net as a site where teachers engage in reflection as mindfulness or disposition. Because such occurrences stretch out over time rather than in discrete instances, the examples I present require more extended discussion, and they will be incorporated into the chapters that follow.

Complicating Autonomous Models of Teacher Reflection

In the sea of literature published on the topic in the last twenty-some years, reflection is frequently discussed as a necessarily positive activity, as a given "good." Authors point time and again to the benefits of reflection, and understandably so. There is much to be gained from reflection. The potential benefits are perhaps summarized best by Milner (2003b), who writes that "teachers' reflective thinking could be essential in leading them into deeper understanding around areas that might be ignored, misunderstood, misrepresented, misinterpreted, or unsettled" (p. 173). Reflection can be rewarding in more specific ways, too. Engaging in reflection can allow teachers to gain "a heightened awareness of professional practice" (McEntee, 1998, p. 22). Reflection can help to prepare and equip teachers to make necessary changes in instruction, in institutions, and in the local and global contexts that affect education (Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003; Sharp, 2003). When teaching is difficult, critical reflection can help teachers "to avoid . . . traps of demoralization and self-laceration" and to "start to see that what we thought were unique problems and idiosyncratic failings" of our own are in fact connected to larger systemic problems (Brookfield, 1995, pp. 2, 36). In particular, engaging in critical reflection about how teaching and learning are affected by sociocultural dynamics (such as the roles of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic class, and sexuality) can help teachers to develop curriculum and

instruction that are well-tuned to their students' needs, interests, strengths, and experiences—what Howard (2003) terms "culturally relevant pedagogy" and Gay and Kirkland (2003) refer to as "culturally responsive teaching." Narrative reflection, which begins with the sharing of anecdotes and stories, can blossom into formal inquiry and teacher research (Margolis, 2002; Stock, 1995, , 2001, , 2005). In short, teacher reflection can have powerful, positive effects.

But reflection is neither "natural" nor "neutral." It is a culturally-laden, political endeavor, an activity that can have both positive and negative social consequences. I am reminded here of additional parallels between concepts of literacy and concepts of reflection. James Gee (1996) writes convincingly about the fallacy of "the literacy myth—the idea that literacy leads inevitably to a long list of 'good' things" (p. 42). Gee explains that this idea

> is a myth because literacy in and of itself, abstracted from historical conditions and social practices, has no effects, or at least no predictable effects. . . . Rather, effects are produced by historically and culturally situated social practices of which reading and writing are only bits, bits that are differently composed and situated in different social practices. (p. 42)

I hope that the parallel here is obvious. In too many texts, teacher reflection is abstracted from historical conditions and social practices. It is offered up as a one-size-fits-all solution to education problems—what Brian Street (if he were to agree to the parallels I suggest here) might term an "autonomous model" of reflection that fails to recognize how reflective practices are "inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in a given society" (1995, p. 161).

In the Intern-Net study, I draw upon a more nuanced model of reflection. For this reason, I note here some of the sociocultural considerations that can impact reflection, and I also acknowledge some of the challenges that can arise when educators are encouraged to reflect on the work of teaching and learning. One of the main factors that complicates autonomous models of reflection is the role that culture plays in our expectations of what reflection is like—or should be like. A particularly relevant example for this project has to do with the ways that genre knowledge and expectations can influence writing that is intended to be reflective. Genre theorists such as Jamieson (1975) and Bawarshi, Devitt, Jones, and Reiff (2006) have found that rhetors draw on their knowledge of genres that are familiar to them as they work to communicate in genres that are new or less familiar to them. When this occurs, rhetors are said to be using *antecedent genres*, which serve as "discursive resources" (Bawarshi et al., 2006) that emerge from cultural values and practices.

The role of culture in reflective writing becomes apparent when individual writers who are attempting similar tasks draw upon different antecedent genres. In the two examples that follow, writers with markedly different levels of exposure to academic writing struggle in opposite ways with the impact that antecedent genres have on their ability to "write a reflection." Note first the difficulties faced by a trio of professors well accustomed to writing academic papers:

> The reflective process and the telling of its results were not easy tasks. Our
>
> training to write in a style we describe as "traditional, confident academic
>
> speaking in the third person" pulled at the opposing need to look behind our

professional faces and examine our less confident practitioner selves speaking in the first-person style. (Burge et al., 2000, n.p.)

For these professors, the struggle in writing their reflection was to move away from the distanced, formal, third-person style that is so typical of academic essays. Contrast this with the difficulties faced by a group of undergraduate education students who also attempted to write reflection papers--but were expected to conform to the same academic style that the professors above were hoping to avoid:

[The] students saw the academic context and expectations of essay writing established within the wider institution [the university] as inhibiting their ability and willingness to reflect in an assessable piece of work. The traditional academic genre is characterized by features that are in many ways the antithesis of the personal, tentative, exploratory, and at times indecisive style of writing which would be identified as reflective. (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 42)

These students might have been more successful in their reflective writing, researchers Hatton and Smith suggest, if they had been permitted to make use of writing styles that were more familiar to them, such as the styles used in journal or diary writing (1995, p. 43). It is interesting that both sets of struggling writers believed that successful reflection hinged on the use of a narrative, first-person style—and also that the practices and values that marked their participation in differing sociocultural groups also influenced, in opposite ways, their feelings about writing in the styles that were required of them. The professors found that having to write first-person narrative accounts made their work difficult; the students believed it would have made their work easier if they had been permitted to do so.

This is one minor example of the ways that sociocultural factors can impact reflection. In my research of teachers' reflection as it occurs through the Intern-Net list, I have taken careful notice of such sociocultural considerations. The approach to genre analysis that I have used (described in Chapter 3) investigates the interactions of genres, actions, and contexts, so that this study includes consideration of the ways in which reflection is affected by the contexts of situation, of culture, of technologies, and of genres.

I noted earlier that I also intended to acknowledge some of the challenges that can be associated with reflection. As the preceding examples illustrate, reflection is not always easy. There are times when teachers may feel that reflection is not worth their effort, even times when their attempts at reflection are met with negative consequences. Required or assigned reflection (what I refer to as "reflection on demand") can be especially thorny. As Boud and Walker (1998) caution, teacher educators, administrators, and others who would require reflection of teachers must take care to avoid a wide range of pitfalls—including (though not limited to) prescriptive recipe following, limiting reflection to topics that don't challenge the distribution and use of power, and encouraging inappropriate or risky disclosure. Though the Intern-Net listserv does not require reflection on demand in the same way that can occur in teacher education courses, social factors (including my role as former instructor for several of the participants, and the declared purposes of the list) may result in some teachers feeling pressure to "be reflective" in certain situations. For this reason, I have taken seriously Boud and Walker's advice that "context is perhaps the single most important influence on reflection and learning" (1998, p. 196). In my interactions with Intern-Net teachers, I

have strived to establish the conditions that Boud and Walker find conducive to positive, productive experiences with teacher reflection. That is, I have worked to acknowledge my own limitations, to build and keep trust, to allow for discussion that may challenge me, to avoid allowing my interests and needs to dominate, and to refrain from pushing the Intern-net teachers into disclosures that may put them at risk.

Creating and maintaining a positive environment for reflection is important, but it is not enough to prevent all of the possible problems that can be associated with teacher reflection. As I explained previously, reflection is closely intertwined with action, with emotions and experiences, with sociocultural beliefs and practices, and with power structures. When a teacher engages in reflection, any number of other people can be affected, and this can be unsettling or even threatening to those involved. As Brookfield (1995) explains,

> If we believe in critical reflection, we must give full attention to its dangers as well as its promises. We must prepare people tactically for the political struggles involved in changing colleagues and systems. . . . for achieving critical change in the face of enmity while keeping [themselves] emotionally intact, professionally credible, and employed. (pp. xiii, xiv)

In his chapter "Negotiating the Risks of Critical Reflection," Brookfield identifies four of the primary struggles that teachers are likely to face as they engage in reflection. The first risk that Brookfield addresses is "imposter syndrome"—the fear of being "found out" that arises when teachers gain increasing awareness that they still (always!) have much to learn and worry that others will see them as incompetent and, even worse, will expose their failings.

It is precisely this sort of fear that Katie, Mariah, Athena, Drea and I discussed in another of our off-list conversations about teacher reflection. As our small group deliberated about how much of the pre-conference-presentation conversations to share with the full Intern-Net list, Katie seemed to sum up the feelings of the group when she wrote, "As a new teacher, I often feel torn between wanting to show I am still learning and showing my competency." Lest anyone think that new teachers are alone in their struggles with the imposter syndrome, I share here my own "confession" from our small group's e-mail thread entitled "Vulnerability and listserv posting":

> *I don't know whether this surprises you-all or not, but I too feel vulnerable when I post to Intern-Net. Remember the "grammar shock" post that I started and have yet to finish? That one has been difficult for me to write—precisely b/c of the vulnerability issue. I sometimes feel sort of like a cartoon with a little devil on one shoulder and a little angel on the other. The little devil is telling me that if I admit I'm struggling with teaching grammar, that I'm somehow a failure...that maybe I mistaught some of you who were in my classes . . . , that maybe I'm not enough of an expert to be an English Education prof., that maybe some on the list will think I'm not so bright not to have asked these questions earlier...you get the idea. On the flip side, the other little voice in my head keeps reminding me that being somewhere in my Ph.D. [studies] doesn't mean I know every thing, that I'm still supposed to be learning throughout my career, that the very goal of reflection and of an inquiry stance to teaching is always to leave open the possibility that there are things I could think about differently or do better. I'm betting that even in cases where others on the listserv aren't worried about confidentiality, many of*

us feel pressure to prove that we are knowledgeable, qualified, and so on. It's

part of the role we play as teachers in an era when many people seem to doubt the

work we do. Like our students, [it] can be scary for us to say "I don't know" or

"I'm still learning about that...help me think about it."

The fears that are typical of the imposter syndrome run deep, and they can make it

difficult to proceed with reflection. As I will show in Chapter 4, the Intern-Net teachers'

participation in discussion list genres for reflection has also been affected by their felt

need to present themselves as knowledgeable experts. Brookfield suggests that the most

productive antidote is to recognize—through conversation with other teachers—that this

feeling is common, and then to turn the feeling to our advantage by keeping it under

control while allowing it to be a "productively troubling" reminder of our continuing

need to learn and develop (1995, p. 234). While this is good advice, it is a challenge to

implement.

The fear of negative self-representation is one challenge to online teacher

reflection. There are also other potential difficulties associated with teacher reflection, as

well. Brookfield warns that teachers may experience alienation from supporting

networks and communities when coworkers and supervisors feel threatened by their

willingness to question (and perhaps turn away from) the status quo. Even if everyone

else in their lives is accepting of their reflective work, teachers may still suffer negative

consequences, including grief over lost certainties and a sense of perpetual uncertainty

and limbo (Brookfield, 1995). The powerful effects of the emotions that can accompany

loss of certainty are well illustrated by "Rachel," a high school senior who was unnerved

by her encounters with deconstruction. Deborah Appleman, a researcher who worked

with Rachel and her English teacher, reports Rachel's reaction to an experience with deconstructionist literary theory:

> Why did you teach us this? I'm so sorry I know about this. How could you have told us about this? What are you trying to do—destroy us? How am I supposed to live with this knowledge? You've just demonstrated that everything we've learned up to this point has been a sham. Now what? (as cited in Appleman, 2000, pp. 111-112)

Teachers who take an approach to critical reflection that focuses on identifying problems (without also emphasizing the necessity and possibility of working toward change) may find themselves in a similar panic to that experienced by Rachel. It is important that we remember to undertake reflection as "a hopeful activity" that makes a significant, positive difference over time (Brookfield, 1995, p. xiii).

I have provided here only a brief overview of some of the challenges associated with reflection; I do so to underscore my point that autonomous models of reflection need to be interrogated and complicated. In my interactions with Intern-Net teachers, I have attempted to share, model, and encourage a nuanced view of reflection. And in my analysis of discussion list genres, I have taken care to consider challenges that teachers face when they use a discussion list as a venue for reflection.

Additional Assumptions about Teacher Reflection

I have up to this point explored in detail three facets of teacher reflection: the roles of time and space, the nature of reflection as both strategy and stance, and the sociocultural factors and challenges that can impact reflection. Below, I outline a few

other important assumptions about teacher reflection that guided my interactions with

Intern-Net teachers and informed my analysis of discussion list genres:

(1) Reflection requires an acknowledgement that our individual and collective

knowledge about teaching is always tentative and (to some degree) uncertain. A

common thread running through all of the previous points of discussion is that reflection

is intended to improve our work as teachers—which necessarily implies that when we

participate in reflection, we are open to change and aware that our understanding of

teaching is always subject to revision. This doesn't mean that we know nothing; it is

simply an acknowledgement that our practices are ever emerging, that there is always

more to know, and that future knowledge may require us to adjust or even turn away

from current understandings. The questioning, exploratory stance that facilitates

reflection is a primary theme in literature on reflection (e.g., Brookfield, 1995; e.g.,

Buehler, 2005; Burge et al., 2000; Cochran-Smith et al., 1992; Dawson, 2006; Fecho et

al., 2004; Margolis, 2002; McEntee et al., 2003; Schön, 1983; Stock, 2005; Tassoni,

2006). This questioning, exploratory stance has been an important tenet of my study of

the Intern-Net list. During the process of identifying and analyzing Intern-Net threads for

reflection, I watched for conversations that included (among other things) a willingness

to question and to reconsider what the "known."

(2) Reflection may be individual or collaborative. An individual teacher may

engage in time-bounded strategies for reflection as well as assuming an ongoing

reflective stance. An individual model of reflection is at work when, for example,

teachers keep journals, write narratives about their experiences, independently consider

their work in light of their readings of word and world, or mull over their role in local and

global contexts for teaching and learning. Individual reflection frequently occurs in private (as with journals that the writers don't share). However, "going public" with reflection can also be an individuated approach to reflection. When teachers make their work toward reflection available to a group but do not receive—or take into consideration—dialogic responses that further their reflection, they engage in individual reflection. This type of public, individual approach to reflection may sometimes occur in face-to-face forums as well as in some online spaces such as blogs and discussion lists.

Collaborative reflection, like individual reflection, can be approached as both strategy and stance. For example, in approaching collaborative reflection as strategy, teachers may reflect together following scripted protocols (as described by Hole & McEntee, 1999), or they may set times for focused discussions that draw upon individuals' written or oral reflections (e.g., Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Margolis, 2002; Shank, 2006). When teachers approach reflection as collaborative stance, they work over the long term to establish relationships with colleagues who can be depended upon as partners in a mindful, exploratory approach to continued learning about teaching. In "Bowling Together," Elizabeth Spalding and Angene Wilson (2006) depict such a partnership as they describe their collaborative brainstorming, planning, teaching, and research. Though individual reflection can play a significant role in teacher learning, the potential benefits are multiplied when teachers find ways to collaborate in their reflection. These benefits are illustrated vividly in Patti Stock's discussion about the advantages of collaborative reflective inquiry:

> For some time, in the early years of my teaching . . . the lessons I learned from
>
> reflective inquiry into my teaching and my students' learning were personal ones.

They were not enriched as they needed to be in sustained conversation, conversation in which initial observations lead to more focused observations, conversation in which implicit questions . . . lead to explicit questions, conversation in which developing understandings are reviewed, expanded, amended, or corrected by colleagues, conversations in which broadly acknowledged understandings lead to generative practices that benefit students' learning, conversation that makes discourse, discourse that makes knowledge. (Stock, 2005, p. 115)

The irony of collaborative reflection is that although we worry it will make us feel vulnerable and incompetent, it is the very thing that can strengthen and revitalize our professional work. My personal experiences with shared reflection on e-mail lists reinforce my belief in the power of collaboration, and in Chapter 4, I examine how Intern-Net teachers use collaborative reflection to their advantage.

(3) Reflection can be learned, taught, encouraged, and facilitated. While some people might seem to have more of a tendency or propensity to engage in reflection than others, it is not the case that some teachers are doomed to a career void of reflection because they lack an innate ability. While I don't want to speculate about the extent to which specific reflective abilities are influenced by nature or nurture, I can state with a high degree of certainty that reflection is teachable and learnable. Valli, citing studies dating to the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, reports that

research indicates that reflective capacity is not merely a developmental process, but the result of both developmental stages and educational experience. . . . This research suggests that reflection can be developed through carefully designed

teaching strategies: by communicating that domains of knowledge are tentative and incomplete, by modeling reflection, and by providing good practice. (Valli, 1997, p. 73)

As Valli's list of strategies suggests, teaching the act of reflection is more complicated than providing a how-to list. Promoting reflection is particularly challenging in environments like the Intern-Net listserv that function independently from the kinds of formalized teaching and learning that are common to teacher education and professional development programs. In the case of Intern-Net, efforts to teach reflection have been complicated by the fact that I have made efforts to distance myself from my role as teacher or professor to the participants. Instead, I have positioned myself as a co-learner, mentor, or thinking partner,[17] depending on the situation. I have shied away, then, from formally "teaching" reflection in the Intern-Net context. Instead, I have worked to encourage, model, and facilitate reflection. This approach has its merits, as it aligns with Wilson and Berne's (1999) conclusion that "teacher learning ought not to be bound and *delivered* but *activated*" (p. 194).

(4) Reflection is observable. While I hope to have shown that teacher reflection is a complex phenomenon, I wish also to emphasize that it can be observed and researched. There are limits, of course. It would be foolish to think that any researcher could study and observe every aspect of even one teacher's reflective processes, let alone the innumerable facets of the individual and collaborative reflection of 36 teachers scattered around the nation and overseas, networking together through an e-mail list. Reflection is, in part, a personal and inner act, and the mysteries of the private mind and their link to values, practices, beliefs, and social interactions cannot be dissected in the same way that

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[17] My thanks to participant Katie, who uses this phrase—and stance—frequently in her posts to Intern-Net.

an agronomist might pick apart a soil sample. Yet there is much about reflection that can be observed and analyzed. Reflection is a type of social action—and as such, it can occur through a genre or set of genres (Miller, 1984a). The Intern-Net study focuses on genres of reflection. To put a twist on Devitt's (2004) definition of genre, a "genre [of reflection] is visible in classification and form, relationships and patterns that develop when language users identify different tasks as being similar. But [a] genre [of reflection] exists through people's individual rhetorical actions at the nexus of the contexts of situation, culture, and genres" (p. 31, emphasis added)—and, as I contend in Chapter 3, the context of technologies. Genres, including genres for reflection, are not merely about "forms" or texts. While identifying textual patterns is one way to observe genres of reflection, careful research also requires attention to other facets of genres. The adapted definition above provides guidance in identifying a trio of "observables" that are important for studying genres of teacher reflection: (1) individuals' rhetorical actions, (2) texts (the manifestations of genre, made "visible in classification and form, relationships and patterns"), and (3) contexts of situation, culture, technology, and genres. These are the elements that are the focus of the Intern-Net research project.

* * *

My examination of the teacher reflection rhizome has been rather lengthy and complicated, due to the complexity of the subject. Though the concept of inquiry is no less complex than that of reflection, there is significant overlap in my assumptions about the two subjects. Given these overlaps, I turn now to a relatively concise look at inquiry.

Words in Play: *Inquiry*

The word *inquiry* has had varying uses over time, including the denotations "the act of asking or questioning"; "the action of seeking . . . truth, knowledge, or information"; and "a course of inquiry, an investigation" ("'Inquiry, enquiry'," 1989). The sense in which I use *inquiry* for this project is a combination of these meanings. Inquiry is a course of investigation that seeks knowledge and information by asking or questioning. Inquiry shares some defining characteristics with reflection. As with teacher reflection, I assume that successful teacher inquiry involves looking from multiple angles, awareness of positionality, and integrating the logics of mind, body, emotion, and experience. Additionally, I assume that inquiry, too, should involve sensitivity to the role of time, an awareness of sociocultural impacts on contexts and processes, and recognition of associated challenges. Like reflection, inquiry can be individual or collaborative. Furthermore, it requires a questioning attitude and a willingness to continue learning. Inquiry can be learned, taught, encouraged, and facilitated.

I am not alone in using *inquiry* and *reflection* in similar ways. In the literature on teacher learning, the terms *reflection* and *inquiry* are frequently used in interchangeable or overlapping fashion. Buehler, for example, uses the phrase "stance of reflection" as a synonym for *inquiry* (2005, p. 281). Elsewhere, Stock refers to "reflective inquiries" (2005, p. 115), Brunner explains how to use narratives to promote inquiry and reflection (Brunner, 1994), and Fecho, Price, and Read argue that teachers "need to take a reflective . . . or inquiry stance" (2004, p. 265). Given the overlaps and interchangeability between

the two terms, one might ask why it is necessary to use both of them. Why not simply choose one or the other?

In this study, I use the two terms in contrasting ways to distinguish between two related, yet somewhat different, approaches to teacher learning. When I refer to *reflection*, I am signifying teacher learning in which the focus and starting point is teaching-learning experiences—whether they occurred in the past, are happening in the present, or are anticipated to take place in the future. Teachers who engage in reflection seek to learn whatever they can in connection to these experiences, and whatever questions they may take up along the way rise out of their consideration of these experiences. By way of contrast, I use *inquiry* to signify teacher learning in which the focus or starting point is an explicit question (or set of questions). Certainly, the questions may be born out of experience (and very likely are), but the questions—not particular experiences—drive and organize the learning. Teachers' experiences are given consideration as they relate to efforts toward answering the questions. For example, in one book club for novice teachers, participants gathered regularly to discuss novels and other narrative texts that "included some element of schooling and teaching" (Kooy, 2006, p. 664). The teachers began with inquiry as they investigated ways that education is portrayed in various texts. But reflection, too, quickly became part of their discussions as the teachers made connections between the textual worlds and their own lived experiences.

Another example may be helpful here. Earlier, I shared an excerpt from an e-mail in which I alluded to difficulties that I encountered with teaching grammar. My efforts to design instruction that reflected principles for teaching grammar in context (Weaver,

1996) weren't going as well as I had hoped. This prompted me to engage in a fair amount of reflection—as I was working with students, as I planned for subsequent lessons, as I looked back on what had transpired in my classroom. Specific teaching-learning encounters were the impetus for my learning, and I tried to think my way around these experiences to understand what was happening and how I might change it for the better. Given the definitions I use for this project, I would say that at this point, I was reflecting on the situation.

A few months later, *English Journal* published a themed issue entitled "Contexts for Teaching Grammar" (May 2006). I began reading the issue with an eye to answering the specific question, "What theoretical frameworks and instructional methods could be effective for teaching grammar in context to composition students?" I began this inquiry individually, and then found myself wishing for the help of other teachers who might also be interested in investigating ways to answer this question. In the Intern-Net thread "Wanna read EJ grammar issue with me?," I extended an invitation to the Intern-Net teachers to read with me and work toward answering this question together. At least four of us hope to begin this collaborative inquiry soon, and it is likely that in our quest for information and knowledge, we will raise many questions related not only to our common readings but also to a range of varied experiences that we have had. The goal that will guide our inquiry, however, is developing a response to the specific question about teaching grammar in context.

The example that I have offered portrays inquiry as a strategy. This is consistent with the ways that many other educators have approached inquiry. As Dawson (2006) explains, "teacher inquiry is often used synonymously with action research or teacher

research" (p. 269). As with reflection, it is also possible to approach inquiry (as I have

defined it here) as a stance, disposition, or "mode of living" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle,

1999; DeStigter, 2004; Fecho et al., 2004; Meyer & Sawyer, 2006). But because

reflective and inquiry stances play out over the long term and in attitudes or ways of

being (rather than in discrete time-bounded projects or strategies), the two tend to blur

into each other and aren't often distinguishable in any significant way. A teacher who

practices reflection as stance may also engage in inquiry as stance, and vice versa, and in

such cases, the two stances would be so intertwined that it would be practically

impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins.[18] However, since there may be

instances where a teacher noticeably privileges one approach over the other, for the

purposes of the Intern-Net project, I use the phrase *reflective stance* to indicate an

ongoing disposition for teacher learning that is driven by and focused on past, present,

and future experiences, whereas the phrase *inquiry stance* will denote a disposition where

continuous teacher learning is inspired and organized by explicit questions. When I

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[18] In the field studying teacher research, there is debate about whether taking a reflective stance is
equivalent to doing research. Stock (2001), for example, argues that she considers reflective practitioners
to be teacher researchers who "use unfamiliar research methods and forums for publication, methods and
forums that have not yet been recognized as legitimate or authorized to build the base of knowledge that
informs their practice" (p. 111). Stock's current research in National Writing Project sites (as described in
personal communication, August 9, 2006) investigates the workshop as a genre that compels that the work
of reflective practitioners be "intentional, systematic, purposeful, and made accessible for peer critique and
community use" (Stock, 2001, p. 111). By characterizing the workshop genre in this way, Stock defends
against three common arguments employed by those who would maintain that the work of the reflective
practitioner is not research. Stock contends that in workshop genres, the work of reflective practitioners is
(1) relevant beyond the local context, (2) disseminated beyond the local context, and (3) "subject to the
kind of review and criticism that encourages the growth and development of good work and the deletion
from circulation of work that does not hold up under scrutiny" (Stock, 2001, p. 105). From Stock's
perspective, these characteristics of workshop genres elide distinctions between reflective practice and
research. David Franke has made related arguments about other genres used by reflective practitioners. In
his presentation "Practical Genres as Teacher Research: Syllabi, Assignments, and Essays," Franke (2001)
argued that "under-the-radar" writings (such as syllabi, assignments, tests, and rubrics) should be regarded
as research genres. Franke claims that teachers are "not writing [articles, chapters, and books] because
we're too busy writing" in practical genres that ought to be valued as research. While Franke's proposition
does not answer some of the arguments that Stock addresses head-on in her work (as described above), it
does illustrate a broad view in which reflective practice and research may be understood as equivalents.

discuss *collaborative inquiry*, I refer to learning in which two or more teachers work together to pursue <u>a course of</u> <u>question-based investigation</u> that seeks shared knowledge or information about teaching and learning. *Collaborative reflection,* on the other hand, refers to learning in which two or more teachers <u>focus together on their past, present, and/or anticipated experiences</u> with teaching and learning in order to better understand their work.

*   *   *

I opened my discussion of these "words in play" with an admission that it isn't truly possible for me to untie the knots that accompany these terms. Instead, I have attempted to closely examine the tangled, overlapping nodes in a way that lays the groundwork for readers to understand the assumptions and ideals behind the analysis portion of the Intern-Net research project. To that end, I have defined teacher reflection and collaborative inquiry in ways that are both complex and specific. Ultimately, though, I have to caution that these are still words in play—and that the ways that I and others use them will continue to shift and evolve over time.

INTERCHAPTER
Meet the Teachers (II)

Ellen

Ellen, who buys used books by the bagful for her classroom library, teaches English and journalism courses at a small-town high school. She is an enthusiastic teacher who feels that her university education prepared her well for her professional work. Ellen's energy is evident at every turn: in her exclamation-filled posts to Intern-Net, in her leadership with the school newspaper, and also in her coaching work with high school dance and cheerleading teams. Ellen has been among the more steady participants in the Intern-Net list, and she was among the small group who joined in our Intern-Net LIVE instant messaging chat for collaborative inquiry. Her advice to beginning teachers: "You don't need to be perfect in your first year, you just need to try as hard as you can, teach as best as you know how, and keep on learning."

Leigh

Leigh teaches high school journalism and language arts in the suburbs of a major city. She enjoys working with her school's student newspaper staff, and she has begun to assume leadership roles within her department and district. During the summers, she stays busy with church mission trips, counseling at summer camps, and road trips; she can also be spotted singing at local coffee houses. A case study of Leigh's participation in the Intern-Net list is presented in Chapter 5.

Theresa

Theresa has been working as a substitute teacher while searching for a fulltime English language arts position. She acquired a job as a building substitute at traditional public high school, and she also enjoyed a long-term subbing position teaching English at an alternative high school in the same district. She reports that she reads everything she can get her hands on, and she dreams of the day when she will win a grant to buy books for her own classroom…which will, ideally, be located somewhere warm. Meanwhile, she also holds a retail job so that she can support herself while keeping her foot in the door through substitute teaching. Theresa is a fairly quiet participant in Intern-Net, but she reads all of the messages faithfully.

Harrison

Harrison teaches in a large state that he accurately describes as "one of the "Test-McCraziest" places in the nation." His e-mails to Intern-Net are infrequent but thought-provoking and deeply reflective, and in them he often laments the ways that standardized tests are abused and hinder meaningful teaching and learning. He found this state of affairs to be so disillusioning during his first year that he considered quitting the profession; since then, he has become a class sponsor, "met some really amazing kids," and decided to give teaching at least another 3 years so that he can stand by these students. As a first-year teacher, Harrison was assigned reading courses for 9th and 12th graders. The following year, he was able to move into the English department at his school, where he now teaches literature and composition courses—a change he

appreciates, since he missed being able to teach writing and poetry. Harrison is a talented writer and dreams of someday getting paid for his writing work.

Nicole

Nicole has an adventurous spirit; she joined the Peace Corps to teach English language and literature to teenagers overseas. Transportation and access to the internet (and Intern-Net) are tricky, so her posts are sporadic—but always full of edgy humor and, when she has time, interesting details about her work. After her first fulltime year of teaching, she added tutoring to her regular schedule. She noticed that many of the girls she works with have missed out on the educational opportunities given to the boys in her classes, so she now tutors girls after school "to give them a chance to speak some English without feeling shy or embarrassed." Nicole also heads a summer school and camp program that offers students opportunities to extend their studies. She predicts that she will continue to teach in international schools for the foreseeable future.

Marie

Marie teaches English and math courses at a high school in the same suburban district where Leigh teaches. Staying informed about ELA pedagogy is important to her; she has attended conventions sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English. Marie maintains active websites for her classes, and she works to build fun routines into her instruction—including GUM days where she passes out chewing gum to accompany Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics mini-lessons. She posts to Intern-Net less often than

most of the teachers; when she does, it is usually to offer responses to others'

independent inquiry questions.

Rudi

Rudi is a beloved celebrity both on and off the Intern-Net list. After doing very

promising work during his preservice studies and his teaching internship, he accepted a

contract . . . from a major recording company that signed Rudi and his band to make an

album and go on tour. His music fans love him because he's a great performer—his

band's MySpace site gets tens of thousands of hits. We on Intern-Net love him because

he's <u>our</u> famous rock star, and he tells us that we English teachers are his heroes. Rudi's

posts during his internship year reflected on the politics of teaching; since he began

touring with his band, he occasionally sends notes to update the list about his work and to

reminisce about teaching.

CHAPTER 3
Genre Analysis Methodology:
Accounting for Technology
in a Text-Context-Action Approach

"...studying genre is studying how people use language to make their way in the world."

Amy Devitt, in *Writing Genres* (2004, p. 9)

As I explained in Chapters 1 and 2, this study focuses on the Intern-Net discussion list because I seek a richer understanding of how two key types of teacher learning, reflection and inquiry, can be cultivated through written conversations in the online environments that are so important to a great number of teachers. Where does genre analysis fit into the overall goals of the study? In this chapter I explain the research methodology that enables me to build explicit, researched-based knowledge of the textual and contextual patterns of teachers' participation in reflection and inquiry genres. In the theoretical framework that follows, I contend that this kind of genre analysis is important because of the powerful ways in which genres shape human thinking and actions. Teachers and teacher educators have yet to benefit from knowledge about the practical, powerful ways in which genre knowledge can be used online to further teacher learning and professional growth. This chapter explains my approach to identifying and analyzing genres for reflection and inquiry as they occur through teachers' participation in the Intern-Net discussion list.

Theoretical Framework

In the world apart from composition studies, a common shorthand way to define *genre* is to state that the term refers to differing "types" or "patterns" of written texts. Genres are not merely about "forms" or texts, however. As Paré and Smart (1994) explain,

> Until recently the study of written genres focused on textual patterns. When researchers wanted to examine a particular genre, they looked across multiple texts for regularities of form and effect. Over the last decade, scholars in composition studies have been reinterpreting genres as social action . . . This reinterpretation presents a dilemma for the researcher who wishes to observe a particular genre in a specific setting. When conceived as social action, what, in addition to texts, are the observable constituent elements of a genre? And what are the relationships among elements?" (p. 146)

The methodological questions that Paré and Smart are asking here are critical to my project. If I understand genre as something beyond the "forms" that writing takes—which I do—then my theory of genre needs also to be connected to my theory of genre analysis. While Paré and Smart offer a rhetorical theory of genre of their own, the theoretical basis for my approach stems, with some modifications, from the definition of genre developed by Amy Devitt in *Writing Genres* (2004).

Although a definition of genre is not the same as a full-fledged theory of genre, it does offer us a starting point into a discussion of theory. Devitt describes genre in this way:

I propose, then, that genre be seen not as a response to recurring situation but as a nexus between an individual's actions and a socially defined context. Genre is a reciprocal dynamic within which individuals' actions construct and are constructed by recurring context of situation, context of culture, and context of genres. Genre is visible in classification and form, relationships and patterns that develop when language users identify different tasks as being similar. But genre exists through people's individual rhetorical actions at the nexus of the contexts of situation, culture, and genres. (2004, p. 31)

In Devitt's genre definition, we see years of complex work in rhetorical genre theory brought together in a precise, concise paragraph. This definition accounts for prior theoretical work in genre studies while also forging ahead into new territory. It is a definition that I embrace and one that serves well as a heuristic for analyzing the texts, contexts, and practices that work together to constitute genres as social action.

Devitt's definition of genre encapsulates a rich discussion from her chapter "A Theory of Genre" (2004), which serves as the introduction to *Writing Genres*. Devitt begins her definition by alluding to Carolyn Miller's (1984b) characterization of genres as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (p. 31). In the twenty years since Miller first published "Genre as Social Action," her definition of genre has become nearly ubiquitous in scholarship based in rhetorical genre theory. Miller's essay is an argument for the value of classifying discourse, and for doing so in particular ways that account not only for patterns in textual features, but also—and especially—for patterns of rhetorical action. The essay marked a sea change in genre theory, and Miller's definition has come to be so widely accepted by genre scholars that "Genre as Social Action" is

cited in a large majority of North American scholarship on genre theory and analysis. Though many scholars offer their own definitions of genre, most are variations on (or compatible with) Miller's 1984 definition (e.g., Artemeva et al., 1999; Bawarshi, 2003; Lingard et al., 2002; Paré & Smart, 1994; Russell, 2002; Schryer, 2002; Schryer & Spoel, 2005).

While the opening lines of Devitt's definition paragraph may seem to indicate that she rejects Miller's definition ("I propose, then, that genre be seen *not as* a response to recurring situation *but as*. . . " [p. 31, emphasis added]), the discussion in the pages that precede the excerpt suggest otherwise. As Devitt explains, "The relationship of situation to genre has formed the basis of a current rhetorical genre theory, but it needs to be *elaborated* to comprehend more complex views of both genre and situation" (p. 16, emphasis added). Devitt is not rejecting Miller's definition; rather, she is extending and clarifying it. To this end, Devitt incorporates Malinowski's (1952) "context of situation" and "context of culture" into her definition.[19] In doing so, Devitt accounts for the immediate, localized rhetorical situations that shape (and are shaped by) a given genre, as well as for a genre's interactions with ever-emerging social systems of values, beliefs, practices, and constructed knowledge—that is, with culture. Devitt further extends Miller's definition by emphasizing the importance of the "context of genres," acknowledging explicitly "that writers and speakers do not create genres in a generic void, that people's knowledge and experience of genres in the past shape their experience with any particular discourse and any particular genre at any particular time" (p. 28). By naming the contexts of situation, culture, and genres in her definition, Devitt complicates our view of what Miller terms "situation."

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[19] Devitt p. 17.

Devitt's genre definition, in addition to fleshing out our understanding of situation, also elaborates on Miller's approach in other useful ways. Like Miller, Devitt stresses genre's *social* and *active* nature. (Miller highlights these two qualities in the title of her famous article: "Genre as Social Action.") But Devitt's more extended definition also emphasizes the role of the individual. In the concise version of Miller's definition, the individual agent is not explicitly visible.[20] Devitt, however, is forthright about the relationship between the social, the individual, and action: genre is "a nexus between an individual's actions and a socially defined context" (p. 31). This description acknowledges the tension between individual agency and social construction—a tension that is mediated through participation in genres. Devitt's description here echoes a similar characterization of genre put forth by Anis Bawarshi: "Genres exist at the intersection between the writer as agent of his or her actions and the writer as agent on behalf of already existing social motives" (2003, p. 92). Devitt's emphasis is similar to that offered by Bawarshi: her definition highlights the "reciprocal dynamic" between an individual's action and the socially-defined contexts of situation, culture, and genres. Instead of characterizing genre merely as *response* to situations, as Miller does, Devitt posits a bidirectional interaction: in the "nexus" that is genre, "individuals' actions *construct and are constructed by* recurring context[s]" (p. 31, emphasis added). Elsewhere, Devitt also theorizes that "[p]eople construct situations through genres, but they also construct genres through situations" (2004, p. 22). By attending to these reciprocal dynamics, Devitt alludes to the power of genre: not only as a means for

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[20] This is not to say that Miller overlooks the role of the individual in her essay as a whole—for she is clear that "a genre is a rhetorical means for mediating *private intentions* and social exigence" (Miller, 1984b, p. 37, empahsis added). My point is that Devitt is much more direct in drawing readers' attention to the roles individuals play in participating in genres.

responding to recurring situations, but also as a force that can shape our daily experiences and realities.

Devitt's expansions of Miller's genre definition are highly useful. I believe, however, that for scholars interested in genre analysis, further elaboration is necessary. It is also critical to add (to Devitt's contexts of situation, culture, and genre) the context of technologies. While some might argue that technologies are cultural artifacts and therefore already included in Devitt's definition (under "contexts of culture"), I am not satisfied with accounting for technologies in this way. Technologies have more than a passive role in the writing scene. Yes, writing technologies are embedded within cultures and are therefore culturally laden. But technologies have an active role, too. As "nonhuman actors"[21] (Suchman, 2000), technologies work within writing scenes, impacting genres as they occur at the nexus of individuals' actions and sociocultural contexts. Writing technologies are continually shaping and being shaped; they have a

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[21] My characterization of writing technologies (including genres) as nonhuman actors locates my work theoretically near Actor Network Theory (ANT), which attends to reciprocal interactions between humans and nonhuman "actants." Scholars who employ ANT frequently characterize relationships between humans and nonhumans as "symmetrical" (see Latour, 1988). However, Lucy Suchman (2000) argues that it is more appropriate "to preserve the sense of human-machine asymmetry . . . while taking to heart the correctives offered in recent science and technology studies regarding the distributive and performative character of agency and the fallacy of essentialist human-nonhuman divides" (para. 13). Though Suchman identifies human and nonhuman relationships as asymmetrical, she does not dismiss the significance of nonhuman actors. Rather, she works to recognize "the deep mutual constitution of humans and artifacts *without losing their peculiarities*" (para. 14). Suchman takes issue with the move of assigning agency to nonhumans—and to humans. For Suchman, agency is located in interactions and encounters, in technologies-in-use, not independently in either humans or nonhumans. This view is remarkably similar to Devitt's discussion about the power of genre, in which she critiques activity theorists' identification of genre as "tool" and other theorists' discussion of genre as "agent":

> For genre to be a tool alone is to reduce its force . . . to limit the nature of genre to formal formulae, a preexisting, static, material object that people can pick up and use or just as easily set aside. For genre to act as agent independent of human operators is to magnify its force too much, to enlarge the nature of genre to material action that makes people do things or that does things without working through people. It is instead 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, to be both-and. Genres never operate independently of the actions of people, but the actions of some people influence the actions of other people through genres. (2004, pp. 48-49)

This view of the interactive relationships among humans and nonhumans is consistent with my understanding of the roles of online technologies and of genres.

reciprocal dynamic like that which characterizes genres. So I add the context of technologies to Devitt's definition of genre to ensure that the active role of writing technologies is foregrounded. I do this to acknowledge consciously that Intern-Net participants' conversations are mediated in particular ways by specific online writing technologies. The expanded version of Devitt's (2004) definition of genre that I am using reads this way: Genre is

> a nexus between an individual's actions and a socially defined context. Genre is a reciprocal dynamic within which individuals' actions construct and are constructed by recurring context of situation, context of culture, **[context of technologies,]** and context of genres. Genre is visible in classification and form, relationships and patterns that develop when language users identify different tasks as being similar. But genre exists through people's individual rhetorical actions at the nexus of the contexts of situation, culture, **[technologies,]** and genres. (p. 31, bracketed words are my conceptual additions)

> I turn here from explicating and expanding Devitt's definition to discussing in more detail about what I mean by "the power of genre." The Intern-Net study assumes not only that it is beneficial for teachers to engage in reflection and inquiry, but more specifically that early-career teachers (and—by extension—their students) will benefit from participating in *genres* for reflection and inquiry. Why do genres matter so much? The power of genre and the reciprocal dynamics of genre are directly connected. Genres matter because they mediate reciprocal interactions between individuals and socially-defined contexts, simultaneously shaping and being shaped by both individual and

sociocultural agents.[22] On the one hand, the individual who participates in professional

genres may benefit or "be empowered" by achieving desired professional status or goals.

On the other hand, the individual's actions are also shaped through participation in these

genres, because engaging in a profession's genres requires that the individual assimilate,

to some extent, to the social groups and structures from which such genres emerge. As

Bawarshi explains,

> The power of genre resides, in part, in this sleight of hand, in which social
>
> obligations to act become internalized as seemingly self-generated desires to act
>
> in certain discursive ways. . . . Every time a writer writes within a genre, he or she
>
> in effect acquires, interprets, and to some extent transforms the desires that
>
> motivate it. (2003, p. 91)

When teachers write within reflection and inquiry genres, they participate in key types of

teacher learning that may allow them to achieve some of their personal desires and

goals—but they may also internalize the motives and habits of thinking that mark and

facilitate their association with the teaching profession and their assumption of

professional teaching identities. By participating in genres for reflection and inquiry,

novice educators may learn to *become* reflective, inquiring teachers.

Consider what research shows about how genre's reciprocal dynamics play out in

other professions and contexts. Scholarship in genre studies consistently demonstrates

that participating in professional genres can facilitate a person's assumption of

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[22] While it may seem awkward to repeatedly use phrases such as "shape and shaped by," "construct and constructed by," and "reciprocal dynamics," I persist in doing so to continue emphasizing the interactive relationships between texts, actions, and contexts. As Schryer and Spoel (2005) explain, "genre theory does not conceptualize context as simply the space outside of texts or the container surrounding texts but as dynamic environments that simultaneously structure and are structured by the communicative practices of social agents" (p. 253).

professional roles and the construction of a person's professional identity. Paré (2002)

highlights a direct connection between professional genres and professional identities

when he states that "[t]he move into the professional persona is an ideological

transformation that occurs through participation in workplace genres" (p. 66). The genre-

identity connection also is apparent in research undertaken by Artemeva, Logie, and St-

Martin (1999), who use genre knowledge of "regularities across composing processes"

(p. 304) in order to help engineering students learn discipline-specific communication,

thereby enabling their adjustment to coursework as well as their transition into workplace

roles. Likewise, Schryer and Spoel (2005) investigate how genre participation

contributes to the professional identity formation of midwives, and a study of the genre of

medical case presentations illustrates how engaging successfully in particular

professional genres is a crucial component of the development of medical students'

professional identities (Lingard et al., 2002). Racine (1999) observes that workplace

storytelling, a genre of "corporate lore," "links members into a common social reality . . .

[and] shapes members' cultural positions, roles, and relationships" (p. 172). Similarly, in

their study of a listserv for new teachers, Singer and Zeni (2004) find that story genres

"seem to help new teachers adapt themselves for a new role" and to experience "their

first moments of feeling 'right' in the role" (p. 37). Comparable findings are reported by

Jenlink and Kinnucan-Welsch (2001), Kooy (2006), and Shank (2006). And Alsup's

(2006) in-depth study in *Teacher Identity Discourses* presents research on genres "that

can help create a teacher" (p. 15), with the bulk of the text devoted to stories, a genre that

plays a prominent role in the development of teachers' professional identities.

In the case of the Intern-Net discussion list, participating in reflection and inquiry genres is a way for early-career teachers to transform the educational world around them, but also a way to <u>be</u> transformed. Participation in reflection and inquiry genres is a way for teachers to make their way in the professional world, and—to paraphrase Devitt— "studying [teachers' discussion] genres is studying how [teachers] use language to make their way in the world" (2004, p. 9).

I have reviewed research that points to links between genre participation and the development of professional roles and identities. Perhaps, in doing so, I have raised a question for readers—namely, "Why bother with another genre study in this vein?" This study of the Intern-Net discussion list differs from existing scholarship in a crucial way: by attending to roles of technology, especially online writing technologies. Current literature in genre studies does little to account for the ways in which technology use shapes (and is shaped by) texts and contexts. Likewise, current scholarship regarding online teacher learning tends to foreground human interaction and outcomes—without due attention to the ways in which technologies and genres construct (and are constructed by) the ways in which people interact through writing. But educators would benefit from research showing how reflection and inquiry genres may be fostered in online environments—that is, in forums where computer technologies set the parameters for cyberspace interactions.

Scholarship is widely available on productive patterns of <u>offline</u> teacher talk (e.g., Buehler, 2005; Carini, 1986; e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Gilles & Pierce, 2003; Kooy, 2006; Margolis, 2002; McEntee et al., 2003; Shank, 2006). It may seem logical simply to transfer knowledge about patterns of offline teacher communication to online

environments. However, such a transfer would wrongly assume that what happens online replicates what happens offline. Computer technologies have transforming effects, and "computer-based Internet writing [has] a dramatic, even revolutionary impact" on all aspects of communication (Porter, 2003, p. 386). Mere transfer of offline models to the world of online teacher discussion will not suffice. Porter (2003) demonstrates that technologies—as well as the interactions of humans and computers—affect who people are and what they do. Pointing to the constructing power of technologies, Selfe and Selfe (1994) find that "the maps of computer interfaces order the virtual world according to a certain set of historical and social values" (p. 385, emphasis added). In a similar acknowledgement of the importance of technologies as nonhuman actors, Star makes "a call to study boring things" (1999, p. 377). She contends that in order to understand issues such as justice, power, and change, researchers must stop neglecting the impact of "standards, wires, and settings" (p. 379) and start paying attention to reciprocal relationships among technology, people, and language. Cubbison (1999) shows that it is crucial to configure e-mail lists knowledgably, because list settings impact the conversations facilitated online. Additional scholarship demonstrates that it is important to investigate how online technologies impact users' actions and conversations (Bolter, 2001; Grabill & Hicks, 2005; Johnson, 1998; Kress, 2003; Matsuda, 2002; McGrail & Rozema, 2005; Selfe, 1996; Selfe & Hilligoss, 1994; Zucchermaglio & Talamo, 2003). Educators promoting teacher learning online need research that attends carefully to the complicated, contextual role that technologies play in shaping written exchanges online.[23] Current literature about teacher e-mail lists, however, affords little insight into specific

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[23] I have acknowledged the reciprocal relationships between technology use and other constituent elements of genre. In this study, though, my primary interest is on the effects of technology rather than the effects on technology.

ways that technological factors can impact online discussions. By documenting how technology affects genres of reflection and inquiry on the Intern-Net list, I hope to show how "small" contextual decisions can dramatically affect the structure and function of teachers' online conversations. And by presenting a detailed holistic analysis of reflection and inquiry genres, I hope to provide English teacher educators with practical knowledge that enables their efforts to more effectively promote and participate in discussion lists that network them with teachers in the induction process. [24]

A Text-Context-Action Approach to Genre Analysis

I have presented an expanded version of Devitt's definition of genre. This approach to genre is thorough, allowing for a broad understanding of the ways in which genre shapes and is shaped. It also makes possible a precise understanding about what genres may mediate (individual actions and contexts of situation, context, technologies, and genres) and about how this mediation is made manifest (through classifications, forms, relationships, and patterns).

As a researcher, I find this new definition helpful for addressing the methodological dilemma posed by Paré and Smart (1994): if a genre is more than a written form, then what are the "observable constituent elements of a genre" (p.146)? Devitt's definition (with my elaboration) points to three observable elements: (1) texts (the written manifestations[25] of genre, made "visible in classification and form,

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[24] Portions of this paragraph are taken from my chapter "Parawork," which has been accepted for publication in *Handbook of Research on Virtual Workplaces and the New Nature of Business Practices* (Zuidema, forthcoming).

[25] In *Literacy in the New Media Age*, Kress (2003) moves us beyond "our present sense of text [that] comes from the era of the dominance of the mode of writing" (p. 36) and toward a multimodal sense of text as "any instance of communication in any mode or in any combination of modes, whether recorded or not"

relationships and patterns"), (2) contexts (of situation, culture, technologies, and genres), and (3) individuals' rhetorical actions—that is, their use of language with the intent to "achieve certain aims, fulfill certain functions, [and] perform certain actions" (A. Devitt, 2004, p. 169). For this reason, the expanded version of Devitt's genre definition provides a useful framework for analyzing the texts, contexts, and practices that comprise genre as social action. My analysis of Intern-Net genres therefore includes systematic study of texts, contexts, and participants' rhetorical actions.

What does the theoretical framework for genre analysis that I have outlined look like in practical terms? To investigate the texts, contexts, and actions that comprise genres of inquiry and reflection, I conducted both textual analysis and discourse-based interviews. The "Guidelines for Analyzing Genres" developed by Anis Bawarshi (2003) are, to some extent, compatible with the texts-contexts-action view of genre that I take, and I used these guidelines as a starting point for my own approach to genre analysis.[26] However, as I will explain shortly, rather than using Bawarshi's heuristic as the exact script for my analysis, I extrapolated from his guidelines to develop an approach more directly aligned with my understanding of genre and its constituent elements or "observables."

(p. 48). I find Kress's understanding of text to be helpful and have used it broadly in other contexts and situations, asking students to read experiences, films, spaces, and more as *texts*. In this study, however, I use *texts* in the old way: to signify "written entities" (Kress, 2003, p. 48), particularly the Intern-Net e-mail exchanges and documents composed by Intern-Net participants for use in their teaching. Using *texts* in this way permits me to make specific shorthand reference to the writing done on the Intern-Net discussion list.
[26] Anis Bawarshi is a former student of Devitt's, and he has worked closely with her on other genre studies projects (e.g., Bawarshi et al., 2006; e.g., A. Devitt, Reiff, & Bawarshi, 2004; A. J. Devitt, Bawarshi, & Reiff, 2003). I connect their work again in this project by relying first on Devitt's definition of genre and then on Bawarshi's (2003) guidelines for analyzing genres.

Textual Analysis

Bawarshi's (2003) recommendations for identifying and describing patterns in a genre's written features inform my textual analysis of archived Intern-Net e-mail messages. Bawarshi suggests that the first step for genre analysis is to "collect samples of the genre" (p. 159). This instruction is problematic, as it implies that instances of a given genre are concrete objects—mere texts, forms, or types of writing that can be physically "collected." Elsewhere throughout *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, Bawarshi (2003) is clear that he views genre in ways similar to Miller (1984b) and Devitt (2004), describing genres as "sites of action" (p. 19). However, in developing his "Guidelines for Genre Analysis," Bawarshi reverts momentarily (in the first step for his genre analysis guidelines) to treating genres as though they were textual forms. To remedy this problem, I choose my words carefully here and have made every effort to use similar phrasing throughout this project: rather than collecting texts as <u>samples</u> of genres, I collected texts as <u>one</u> portion of the observable evidence of the occurrence of genres for reflection and inquiry. (The other portions of that evidence, as I have mentioned, have to do with the contexts and rhetorical actions that Devitt points to in her definition.) And rather than discussing teachers' "use" of genres (as though written forms were fully equivalent to genres), I discuss teachers' <u>participation in</u> genres of inquiry and reflection, a phrasing that I owe to Paré (2002).

My first step toward textual analysis, then, was not to collect samples of reflection and inquiry genres. Rather, I collected Intern-Net threads (i.e., e-mail conversation exchanges) that make apparent teachers' participation in reflection and inquiry genres. Notice that I use threads as the unit of analysis, not individual e-mail messages. I

consider a full thread (that is, a group of messages united by topic, and often by subject line) to be representative of the written aspects of a genre's occurrence. I take this approach in keeping with Anne Freadman's (2002) assertion that the term *genre* "is more usefully applied to the *interaction* of, minimally, a pair of texts than to the properties of a single text" (p. 40, emphasis added). Freadman uses the term *uptake* to refer to "the bidirectional relation that holds between" texts. As she explains in her essay "Uptake,"

> the text is contrived to secure a certain class of uptakes, and the interpretant, or
>
> the uptake text, confirms its generic status by conforming itself to this
>
> contrivance. It does so, by –say—'taking it as' an invitation or a request. By the
>
> same token, however, the uptake text has the power not to so confirm this generic
>
> status [of the first text]. (2002, p. 40)

Given Freadman's explanation of uptake—and Devitt's explanation of genre as a nexus between the individual and the social—it is important to understand that the first e-mail in a thread is not deterministic of the genre of the thread. Rather, the first post gives a "set of possibles" (Freadman, 2002, p. 48), and it is the uptake message(s) that create the generic reality.[27]

In my analysis of Intern-Net threads, then, I have taken interest in the relational and interactive nature of the threaded messages, in the ways in which a "text is contrived to secure a certain class of uptakes," and in the ways in which uptake messages confirm or contest the first post's "generic status by conforming [themselves] to this contrivance" (Freadman, 2002, p. 40). Although I discuss some excerpts from individual messages,

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[27] Simonsen and Banfield (2006) also use the thread, rather than the individual e-mail message, as the unit of analysis in their research report "Fostering Mathematical Discourse in Online Asynchronous Discussions: An Analysis of Instructor Interventions." Although these researchers use discourse analysis rather than a genre studies approach, they too conclude that action is best analyzed "over the course of the entire thread" (p. 45).

remember that I am at the same time considering them in a larger context: as segments from genred threads. It is the intertextual interaction of messages in a thread that I have in mind when I discuss examples of the written exchanges that occur when teachers participate in genres of inquiry and reflection.

In order to identify threads that make apparent teachers' participation in reflection and inquiry genres (from among the hundreds posted to the discussion list since its inception), I reviewed the messages for salient themes and distinguishing rhetorical moves. For my preliminary selection of *reflection* threads, I chose samples in which Intern-Net teachers engaged in deliberate consideration of teaching-learning experiences. For my preliminary selection of *inquiry* threads, I chose samples in which Intern-Net teachers participated in strategic pursuit of answers to questions about teaching-learning theories and practices.

As Bawarshi (2003) recommends in his genre analysis guidelines, I next focused my analysis on patterns that emerged across the selected threads, including textual regularities in content, rhetorical appeals, structure, style, and diction. Using this approach, I describe patterns in the written aspects of Intern-Net teachers' participation in discussion list genres for reflection and inquiry.

For a concise outline of the steps in the textual analysis process that I employed, see Figure 1 (following).

The process for textual analysis that I have described above and employ in this study proceeds through the following steps:

1. Collect written texts that make apparent persons' participation in a particular genre. *For this study, I collected Intern-Net e-mail threads that make visible teachers' participation in reflection and inquiry genres. I chose threads that were aligned with the following themes and rhetorical moves:*
   a. *In reflection threads, Intern-Net teachers engaged in deliberate consideration of teaching-learning experiences.*
   b. *In inquiry threads, Intern-Net teachers participated in strategic pursuit of answers to questions about teaching-learning theories and practices.*

2. Study the genre-based collection of texts to analyze patterns across the writings, focusing on regularities in content, rhetorical appeals, structure, style, and diction. *In this study, I analyzed patterns in the collected reflection threads, and then repeated the process for the pool of inquiry threads.*

3. Use data from the textual analysis to inform more holistic analysis of the occurrence of the genre. Holistic genre analysis requires textual analysis as well as study of the reciprocal interactions among texts, contexts, and individuals' actions. *As I explain in the section that follows, in the Intern-Net study I used discourse-based interviews as a complement to textual analysis in order to achieve more holistic analysis of genres for reflection and inquiry on the discussion list.*

Figure 1: Textual Analysis Process

Discourse-Based Interviews

So far, I have explained my approach to textual analysis. But I have emphasized throughout this chapter that genres are comprised of more than textual forms. As Devitt explains,

> The rhetorical and linguistic scholarship argues that formal features physically mark some genres, act as traces, and hence may be quite revealing. But those formal traces do not *define* or *constitute* the genre. The fact that genre is reflected in formal features does not mean that genre *is* those formal features. (2004, p. 11)

Additionally, I have argued for the importance of accounting for the role of technologies and other contexts in shaping genres and genre participation. For this reason, my study of reflection and inquiry genres extends beyond textual analysis.

In his "Guidelines for Genre Analysis," Bawarshi (2003), too, calls on genre researchers to go beyond textual analysis. He suggests that in addition to collecting and analyzing textual samples, genre researchers should "study the situation of the genre" (p. 159). According to Bawarshi, studying the situation involves seeking answers to questions about the setting, subject, participants, and motives associated with occurrences of a genre.[28] For my purposes, though, going beyond textual analysis takes on a different meaning. As I have explained in my repeated emphasis on the "observables" of genres, it is critical that genre researchers look not only at texts, but also at the interactions among texts, contexts, and individuals' rhetorical actions. For this study, then, I work to shed light on the reciprocal dynamics between texts, contexts, and participants' rhetorical actions by also studying data from interviews with Intern-Net teachers.

The interviews that I conducted were discourse-based interviews (Odell et al., 1983). That is, I prompted participants to "talk me through" copies of texts—specific Intern-Net messages and threads, as well as texts that they created for use in their teaching. The interviewees were asked to reference these texts while commenting on

- their rhetorical actions in generating and responding to Intern-Net messages and threads;

- contexts of situation, culture, technologies, and genres—and their reciprocal tie to participants' participation in genres for inquiry and reflection; and

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[28] Elsewhere, the word *purposes* replaces the term *motives* that Bawarshi uses here. See *Scenes of Writing: Strategies for Composing with Genres* (A. Devitt et al., 2004, pp. 93-94), where Bawarshi's (2003) "Guidelines for Analysis" are reprinted with this change in terminology.

- relationships between their Intern-Net participation (i.e., their rhetorical actions) and their experiences with teaching English language arts during their induction years.

To help the interviewees prepare for my phone conversations with them, I sent each of them instructions about how to access and navigate the online archives. I also sent all interviewees a personalized sheet with a list of approximately 10 threads for them to read, as well as a list of 4 broad questions for them to consider as they did their preparatory reading before the interviews. In the personalized list of threads for each interviewee, I listed both inquiry and reflection threads for their review. Most of the threads were selected because the individual interviewees had participated by posting either initiating (call) or response messages, though I also asked the interviewees to review a few threads for which they had not posted messages. Because some threads change subject lines as they emerge, I was careful to list all of the subject lines that should be reviewed together as one thread. For example, in the instructions that I sent to Athena, I asked that she read the messages listed under "Ellen & Scarlet Letter ideas" along with the messages listed under the subject heading "Scarlet Letter." (See Figure 2 for an example of the list of threads that I sent to the interview participants.)

```
Threads for Athena to Review
November 2004: Ellen & Scarlet Letter ideas; along with Scarlet Letter
September 2005: Narrative & ESL students; along with ESL, spelling
November 2005: read the month's postings chronologically, focus especially on
        o FW: new article on English language learners
        o The Lion, The Witch, & The Atheist
        o Grading and my red pencil in pen
        o Help!! Need a book!
November 2006: NiceNet with Students
December 2006: Knight Cite; along with Knight Cite—a little late in the convo
May 2006: 12-year old tells Steve to f#&@ himself
February 2007: Myths and fantasy
```

Figure 2: Sample List of Threads to Review

In addition to selecting a personalized list of threads for each interviewee to

review, I also asked all of these teachers to read chronologically the postings for the

month of November 2005. All were asked to focus particular attention on the same four

threads, which were again representative of the genres for reflection and inquiry that

occurred on the list. By asking the interviewees to read a common set of threads that had

developed over a one-month period, I was able to ask questions that highlighted the

teachers' varied perspectives on texts that all had reviewed and on conversations in

which all had participated—though in varying ways and from differing individual

situations and contexts. Comparing and contrasting the interviewees' answers to my

questions about the threads all of them had read allowed me to confirm trends in their

responses in ways that were not always possible when I asked them about individual

threads that others had not reviewed. Conversely, considering the differences in the

interviewees' responses to identical questions about a common set of threads drew my

attention to significant differences in these teachers' perceptions and participation in the

list. Also, attending to these differences in responses enabled me to ask productive

follow-up questions that illuminated how the teachers' unique purposes and contexts

shaped their participation in the genres for reflection and inquiry.

The list of broad preparation questions that I sent to the interviewees was

identical—except that, in questions where I listed example threads for the teachers to

consider, I matched the example threads for each interviewee to his or her own

personalized list of threads to review. Figure 3 displays a copy of the preparation

questions that I sent to Athena.

Broad Questions for Athena's Interview

1. There are many different kinds of conversations that have happened on Intern-Net over the past few years. I am especially interested in three types (genres) of threads/conversations:

    a. *Independent Inquiry*—sharing ideas in response to teachers' requests for things that they can consider and perhaps use off-list—whether these be lesson ideas, ways to respond to classroom management issues, resources for curriculum planning and professional development, or ideas about how best to interact with parents, co-workers, administrators, etc. (Examples: 11/04 Ellen & Scarlet Letter Ideas <u>with</u> Scarlet Letter; 11/05 Help!! Need a book!; 11/06 NiceNet with Students.)

    b. *Collaborative Inquiry*—building knowledge together, starting from questions about our common views, roles, goals, philosophies of education, etc. (Examples: 11/05, Grading and my red pen in pencil; 12/06, Knight Cite)

    c. *Collaborative Reflection*—making meaning together about teaching-learning experiences, both inside and outside our own classrooms. (Examples: 11/05 The Lion, The Witch, & The Atheist; 5/06 12-year old tells Steve to f#&@ himself)

    For each of these <u>types</u> of threads, I'm interested to know what motivated you to write, read, or skip over the threads. Also, what roles did technology play in these kinds of threads? (That is, would you have these kinds of conversations elsewhere, either online or off? How would they be the same or different?)

2. In the big picture of your Intern-Net participation, how did technology matter? (e.g., password protection; subscriptions through Leah only; acknowledgments that posts had been distributed to list; attachments allowed; archives there but require password; no message editor; lurkers; message length, etc.) And how did off-list interactions matter to what happened on the list, and vice versa?

3. Compare your visible Intern-Net participation with your "invisible" participation. In what ways do you respond (in the short and long term) that others on the list may not see?

    a. How/when do you share ideas, information, strategies, language, or other things from Intern-Net with others off-list?

    b. Share and discuss examples of documents that you wrote for your teaching (if available)—whether the audience was students, colleagues, administrators, parents, or even yourself. In what ways, if any, are these writings directly or indirectly influenced by your participation in Intern-Net?

4. How do you imagine that your work and identity as a teacher would be different if you had participated in Intern-Net for only 1 or 2 years—or not at all?

Figure 3: Sample List of Broad Questions for Interview Preparation

These broad questions helped the interviewees to anticipate the interview, and they are representative of the more specific questions that I asked during the 45-minute conversations I held with each of the teachers. (For a sample list of the specific questions

that I prepared, see Appendix.) In preparing the lists of specific questions, I divided my queries into three categories consistent with my text-context-action approach to genre analysis: (1) genre as [textual] nexus between individuals' actions and socially-defined contexts; (2) contexts of situation, culture, technologies, and genres; and (3) relationships between Intern-Net participation and approaches to teaching English during the induction years. While the focus on reflection and inquiry genres may not be readily apparent in these specific questions, it is important to remember that these were discourse-based interviews. The Intern-Net threads and messages that I chose to discuss with interviewees allowed for answers about Intern-Net participation in general, as well as responses pertaining more specifically to reflection and inquiry genres. Discussing threads that I selected for textual analysis in the first phase of the research helped to highlight links between texts, contexts, and action in threads for reflection and inquiry.

In my analysis and interpretation of the interview data, I focused on thematic trends in the participants' responses. This analysis affords insight into individuals' rhetorical actions in reflection and inquiry genres, informs understanding of reciprocal contextual relationships, and unfolds connections between listserv conversations and teachers' approaches to their work in and for the classroom. In summary, study of the interview data, along with textual analysis of Intern-Net threads, has enabled rich descriptions of

- the textual patterns of teachers' participation in reflection and inquiry genres,
- the reciprocal contextual dynamics of these genres, and

- relationships between teachers' rhetorical participation (actions) in these genres and their experiences as teachers of English language arts during their induction years.

Findings from the textual analysis and the interviews are integrated to present a more holistic portrait of Intern-Net teachers' participation in genres for reflection and inquiry.

Participants

Although 36 teachers subscribe to the Intern-Net list, five elected at the inception of the project not to participate in this formal study. Accordingly, I have not presented passages from their e-mail posts in this study, and I have not aggregated data about their individual participation (such as the number and rate of their posts). These teachers have continued to participate in reading and writing Intern-Net messages.

The 31 teachers who have given their informed consent for me to study their participation in the Intern-Net list are fairly representative of the ELA teacher cohort from which they graduated. Of the participating teachers, 26 are women and 5 are men. There are more fulltime high school teachers (19) than middle school teachers (6). And although 23 of these teachers have held teaching contracts for the full two years since they graduated, 5 worked as substitute teachers or filled part-time positions for at least one year, 2 sought other employment (one as a touring rock musician; the other as a school counselor), and 1 left the profession due to serious illness. Among those currently teaching fulltime, 18 do so in the state where they attended university together; another 7 are spread across 5 additional states around the nation. Three of the Intern-Net teachers have taught (or continue to teach) overseas: one each in Asia, Africa, and South

America. Over the past three years, Intern-Net teachers have posted approximately 1300 messages to the list.

As I have already noted, the texts that serve as primary sources from this research are the archived e-mails from the Intern-Net list. In the genre analysis chapter that follows—and throughout this text, names and other identifying information have been changed for all Intern-Net study participants and for the people and places mentioned in their communications. All data from Intern-Net participants, including excerpts from private communications, is presented with the study participants' informed consent. (In quoted passages from Intern-Net e-mails, spelling has been "standardized" except where participants have been deliberately unconventional.)

The discourse-based interviews were conducted via telephone, since the Intern-Net teachers are now scattered across several states and, in a few cases, overseas. The interviewees (Lynn, Steve, Sue, Harrison, Athena, Drea, Katie, Leigh, and Evelina) were selected after I had completed my textual analysis and had a sense about the differing ways in which teachers participated in list conversations for reflection and inquiry. Of the 9 teachers that I interviewed:

- 7 are women, and 2 are men;

- 8 teach high school, and 1 teaches middle school;

- 8 currently teach fulltime; 1 has accepted sort-term and long-term substitute teaching work over the past two years; 1 taught part-time for a year and is now teaching fulltime; and 1 worked outside the profession for a semester, then worked as a long-term teaching substitute for a semester, and has now taught fulltime for a year;

- 6 have taught for two years in the state where they attended university together; 2 have taught for two years in other states; 1 taught for one year in an "outside" state and then for one year in the "home" state; and 1 has taught for a semester overseas;

The demographics for the teachers that I interviewed roughly correspond to the demographics for the Intern-Net list overall. Additionally, these teachers' participation in the list is also roughly representative of the varied ways in which the Intern-Net teachers participate overall: some are more likely to participate in reflection threads than in inquiry threads (or vice versa), and some write frequently while others rarely post. For more information about the interviewees and other teachers who consented to allow me to study their participation in the Intern-Net list, please see the individual profiles that serve as interchapters throughout this text.

INTERCHAPTER
Meet the Teachers (III)

Lynette

Lynette teaches English at a diverse high school in a large city. She says that although some teachers might consider her situation "undesirable" (since her school accepts many students expelled from other schools, struggles to meet standards for Annual Yearly Progress as required by NCLB laws, and fails to receive community support for bond votes), she does not "want to leave this situation or these kids." Lynette is beginning an M.A. in curriculum and teaching. When she posts to Intern-Net, it is usually to respond to others' independent inquiry questions.

Athena

Athena is an enthusiastic and thoughtful teacher, and it is obvious from her online and offline conversations that she enjoys working with young adults. Her first-year job was at a diverse school in the suburbs of one of the largest U.S. cities. She taught English as well as courses for struggling readers who had to repeat their ninth grade year. The majority of the school's students were Latino, and Athena worked with many English language learners. During that first year, several of her posts focused on her desire to develop curriculum and pedagogy that would align with her students' needs and interests. Athena moved to another state the following summer, where she accepted a position teaching English at a rural school. The change in classes and context was big enough that she once described it as being like another first year. Athena enjoys writing and keeps a journal. Keeping professionally connected is also important to her; she has attended and

presented at conferences. Recently, she participated in a summer institute that was

conducted by a chapter of the National Writing Project.

Evelina

After her graduation, Evelina spent a summer overseas teaching elementary students.

She returned to the U.S. too late to find a fulltime English position, so she spent her first

school year after graduation doing substitute work in both on-call and long-term

arrangements. In the summer following that year, a member of her immediate family

suddenly passed away, and Evelina again missed out on the hiring season. She spent a

second year working as a substitute teacher and also held down another job to pay the

bills. She is determined to have a classroom to call her own when her third year begins.

For Evelina, the Intern-Net list has been a way to stay connected to the teaching world.

She learned about some of her long-term substitute positions through the list, and she

views the conversations as opportunities for her to stay aligned with "smart teachers" and

to increase her awareness of the politics of daily life in teaching. Evelina is among the

more active participants on the list, and she is equally successful at sparking critically

reflective conversations and at initiating and responding to inquiry threads.

Dan

Dan is the Humanities teacher at a charter middle school in a large coastal city. He has a

sharp sense of humor and doesn't shy away from controversy: at the end of his very first

post, he closed with these words: "Some of you will probably disagree with me, please

do." While his e-mails to Intern-Net are infrequent, he has continued to post

intermittently. Dan is currently pursuing a Master's degree and stays extra busy during the school year with weeknight and Saturday classes.

Sue

Sue teaches world language and English courses at a large, open-campus high school. In her first year at this job, she accepted a part-time contract so that she could have work in the same city where her husband is pursuing a graduate degree. Although she was "part-time" on paper, Sue kept busy with coaching speech and debate teams, advising a world language club, and serving as a planner and tour guide for study abroad tips with her language students. Her schedule became hectic when an emergency situation resulted in her to taking over the remaining world language courses at her school. Sue is now a fulltime teacher at the same school and continues with her many extracurricular responsibilities. She is passionate about helping students to have fun while they learn, and in her posts to Intern-Net, she often alludes to her efforts to develop hands-on learning activities for them. Sue is quick to participate in Intern-Net conversations of all kinds, and her posts shine with her enthusiasm for teaching.

Ashlyn

For two years, Ashlyn has taught English and yearbook courses at a suburban high school. She would also like to teach newspaper journalism courses, but this seems unlikely to happen at her current school, so she is watching for openings elsewhere. She hopes that in the future, she will be able to teach university journalism education courses to prospective journalism teachers. Ashlyn participates in the Intern-Net list for a variety

of purposes. She writes about the challenges of her teaching context, shares methods information with other teachers, and uses the list to research professional opportunities that interest her. Ashlyn was recently admitted into a Master's degree program in education.

Jo

Jo began her career teaching literature in a private high school overseas. After a year there, she returned home to the U.S. The timing of her return made it difficult for her to secure fulltime teaching work for her second year, so she accepted a position as a tutor and substitute teacher at a middle school. She hopes to return to fulltime English teaching in her third year. Jo could be classified as a "lurker" on the Intern-Net list. Yet she also makes it clear that the list is important to her. At least once a year over the past three years, Jo has sent e-mails explaining that she reads the discussion threads and wants to see the Intern-Net list continue.

CHAPTER 4
Discussion List Genres for Reflection and Inquiry

We need "research projects that combine contextual and textual approaches.

We need genre research that provides both participant accounts

as well as analytical, close readings of texts that instantiate genre.

Based on such accounts, I believe that we will be able to more closely document the

resources available to a genre and interrogate the way agents strategically use genres

and their resources in specific contexts. Consequently, we will be able

to see more clearly the relationship between genres and issues of power.

Catherine F. Schryer, in "Genre and Power" (2002, p. 74)

Each genre, then, has a different trajectory, a different potential

for producing world views and representing human agency.

Catherine F. Schryer, in "Genre and Power" (2002, p. 85)

This chapter closely examines the ways in which Intern-Net teachers participate

in online genres for reflection and inquiry. I begin with an account of my analytical work

to identify distinct genres, explaining how I predicted four distinct genres in a reflection

and inquiry genre set. In the pages that follow, I unfold the nature of these genres; I

discuss how texts, contexts, and actions intertwine as teachers work toward professional

growth through their participation in the Intern-Net list. The chapter concludes with

consideration of the ways in which these genres interrelate with each other and discussion of their significance for teachers on the Intern-Net list.

Identifying Genres: A Critical Moment

The process of identifying the four distinctive genres discussed in this chapter was a complex task. Since my work is an extension of Devitt's (2004) approach to genre theory, and her approach is in turn based upon Miller's (1984b) understanding of genre, I looked to these theorists to inform my efforts to identify distinctive genres and to classify the Intern-Net threads accordingly.[29] Simply put, I searched for "typified rhetorical actions" (Miller, 1984b, p. 31) in the Intern-Net threads, for genres made "visible in classification and form, relationships and patterns . . . [and] exist[ing] through people's individual rhetorical actions at the nexus of the contexts of situation, culture, and genres" (A. Devitt, 2004, p. 31)—as well as an additional context that I argued for in this Chapter 3: the context of technologies. While many kinds of typified rhetorical actions are evident in the Intern-Net conversations, the genres that I focused on for the purposes of this project were those associated with the distinctive acts of reflection and inquiry (as detailed in Chapter 2 of this work).

At the time that I began the first analytical phase of this project—scrutinizing the Intern-Net e-mail texts—the list had been active for over two and a half years. The participants (myself included) had together generated nearly 1200 messages, and there was plenty of data to sift through—and more e-mails being generated every week. I

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[29] Readers may recall that I analyze e-mail threads, rather than individual messages, as instances of genre. As I discussed in Chapter 3, this approach stems from Anne Freadman's (2002) insight that the term *genre* "is most usefully applied to the interaction of, minimally, a pair of texts than to the properties of a single text" (p. 40).

reviewed a month's worth of messages at a time, working first to sort messages into threads, or sets of topically-related call-and-response conversations.

Identifying the individual threads was more complicated than I had expected. I had anticipated that I would be able to go into the online archives and quickly accomplish this task by using a handy function of the LISTSERV™ interface: the Sort by Topics button, a tool that makes it possible to sort messages by subject line with the click of a mouse. I soon learned, however, that sorting by subject line was by no means the same thing as sorting by actual thread. For example, when the Intern-Net posts for the month of October 2005 were sorted topically with the LISTSERV™ Sort by Topics tool, it appeared that there were 15 threads for the month (as shown in Figure 4).
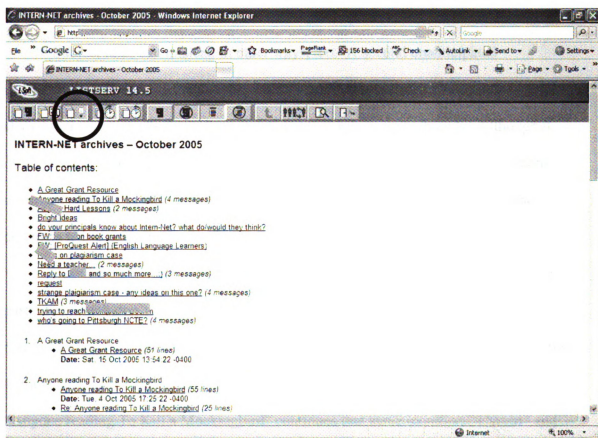
Figure 4: Intern-Net Archives—October 2005[30]

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[30] In this figure, Intern-Net participants' names and the archives URL have been marked out.

In actuality, some of the messages that appeared to be unrelated (because of their differing subject lines) ought to have been grouped together. Upon more careful analysis, it became clear that there were in fact 10 topical threads during that month. Consider the thread "Strange Plagiarism Case," which is built from messages with three different subject lines. The messages in the groups "strange plagiarism case—and ideas on this one?," "Athena on plagiarism case," and "Reply to Katie and so much more...:)" all belong to the same thread. The thread opens with Katie posting details about a problem with academic honesty and the integration of sources in a student's writing. Even though the subject lines change as the thread progresses, the e-mails in this set all respond directly to Katie's questions about how to handle the situation. It is the topics, not the e-mail subject lines, that connect common messages.

Subject lines can mislead in other ways, too. A second unanticipated complication with sorting the threads was that there were instances when messages that shared identical e-mail subject lines in fact belonged to separate threads. Although it didn't happen in the month of postings shown in Figure 3, this was a fairly common occurrence, since some writers would "Reply" to a message on an "old" topic when posting a message on a new topic.

Another challenge for identifying threads was the fact that threads that start in a particular month don't always end in that same month. Therefore, it was important to read with an eye toward connecting messages in threads that carried over from one month to the next. For example, the thread that starts in October 2005 with the subject line "Anyone reading To Kill a Mockingbird" continues that same month as "TKAM" and then carries over into November 2005 as "TKAM and reflection."

A final complication I encountered in the thread-sorting process was that grouping the messages into threads required more than looking for common topics. It also required looking for interrelated messages—calls and responses. The thread that begins with the posts in "Anyone reading To Kill a Mockingbird" is a good example of this. Although there were at least 48 Intern-Net messages over the course of 2½ years that made mention of the book *To Kill a Mockingbird*, only the 8 messages on this topic in October and November of 2005 are related to a post in which Katie invites other teachers to set up an online exchange where they and their students would dialogue about Harper Lee's novel. It is these 8 messages, a call-and-response set, that are appropriately grouped together as a thread.

As these examples suggest, sorting the Intern-Net messages into threads required careful reading. While this process was time-consuming, it also had the benefit of enabling me to note some of the social actions and textual patterns that might mark different thread genres. Working from this preliminary analysis that I conducted while reading through the posts chronologically and grouping the messages into threads, I then sorted the threads into two broad categories: reflection and inquiry. Using the categories that I established in Chapter 2, I labeled as reflection threads those in which the Intern-Net teachers focused on relating teaching-learning experiences and making meaning of them by examining assumptions and considering multiple perspectives. The label of inquiry was reserved for those threads in which Intern-Net teachers considered teaching-learning questions together in a way that again included examining assumptions, considering multiple perspectives, and acknowledging the always-tentative nature of individual and collective knowledge about teaching and learning.

As I completed this preliminary sorting, I noticed many interesting trends in the threads in the reflection and inquiry categories. However, it was a third set of threads—a group that didn't seem to fit into either category—that soon started to attract my attention. I couldn't help but notice these threads. They seemed to dominate Intern-Net conversations during the internship year and continued to be an important part of our listserv exchanges thereafter. For lack of a better term, I at first called these threads "problem-solving" threads, because that is what I assumed teachers were asking of each other: solutions for their problems. Unlike the threads that I had been categorizing as reflection or inquiry threads, these so-called problem-solving threads didn't appear to involve critical tactics such as examining assumptions, considering multiple perspectives, or acknowledging the tentativeness of our teacherly knowledge.

Such critical approaches seemed conspicuously absent in the initiating or "call" messages for these threads, which were unlike any that I had sorted into the reflection and inquiry categories. Instead of beginning with detailed, reflective anecdotes about classroom events or rich, lengthy descriptions of the teaching-learning contexts and situations that generated particular inquiries, these threads generally started with a brisk description of a problem, accompanied by a direct plea for help. Consider the following initiating messages from threads begun on the list early in the teachers' internship, November 2004:

- Ellen tells about learning over the weekend that a student from her school has committed suicide. After giving two sentences of background, she asks, "*I just wondered if anyone had any suggestions for dealing with this particular situation. There is grief counseling available all day but many students want*

to talk to the teachers so I just wondered if anyone had any suggestions or had a similar situation occur at their school."

- Sydney starts a new thread with a brief e-mail that begins, *"I am having a situation that I need some help on."* After a few sentences telling about an incident in which students failed to hand in work on time, she writes, *"Mostly, my problem is that I don't like to be harsh. . . . I guess I just want to have some suggestions of how to be more of a hard-ass (pardon the language)."*

- Drea is particularly efficient in presenting her problem to her Intern-Net colleagues. Here is her call message, in its entirety: *"Hey guys, I'm just wondering if anyone had any suggestions for collecting homework. It seems like whenever I go around to check for everyone's homework the class gets very loud and unfocused. It's hard for me to get them back on track. Any suggestions? -Drea ."*

Early in my analysis of the call messages for these kinds of threads, it occurred to me that perhaps it was the topics themselves that led to such brief call messages. After all, most of the threads I had examined up to that point concerned general classroom issues, rather than specifics about teaching English. However, as I continued to study the threads, I noticed that even when the topics changed, the style of the "problem-solving" call messages remained the same. As the teachers made their way through the internship year and their concerns with classroom management and day-to-day business subsided, they began seeking discipline-specific ideas for curriculum and instruction. By early spring of their internship year, in February 2005, the teachers regularly took up questions specific

to the teaching of English. However, the style of the call messages for these "problem-solving" threads remained unchanged.

- Nelvia opens a new thread by posing this concise pair of questions: "*Hi all! At the end of February, I'll be starting The Diary of Anne Frank with my 8th graders, but I'd really like to do literature circles and add two different books (with the same theme, possibly about the Holocaust still). Any ideas? I've never done lit. circles, so any input on the actual organization would be helpful as well. Thanks! Nelvia.*"

- Leigh suggests a book to Nelvia and then sets out her own succinct request for help: "*Also, while we are bopping around ideas, our English department is attempting to revamp the curriculum a bit to include some novels that actually end happy as well as more novels with female protagonists. These would be targeted toward 9th and 10th graders and would need to at least loosely be considered a canonical text. Any great ideas? I would appreciate any suggestions. ~Leigh*"

- Phoebe, too, asks quickly for help in addressing a planning problem that she faces. After a cursory hello, she moves on to the business at hand: "*Anyway, I am in the middle of teaching narratives right now, which is a very broad topic, a bit too broad as I am discovering. I have mostly been focusing on the literary elements, showing not telling, and structural possibilities of narrative. My classes have read various arrangements of narratives and have been writing pieces as well. Now that I am in the middle of it, I am wondering which direction to head in from here with my class. I would like to hit a new*

topic or 2 before wrapping it up. I was wondering if anyone had experience

with teaching narrative and if you could offer any suggestions on this, it

would be greatly appreciated!"

Although the topics shifted as their teaching concerns changed over time, the Intern-Net

teachers continued to post threads with openings in this vein. As I reviewed these

messages, it was clear to me that the teachers were posing questions that were important

to their work, but I was puzzled about the call messages and why they seemed to lack the

nuanced descriptions that were characteristic of opening messages for reflection and

inquiry threads.

Likewise, the e-mail responses to these initiating call messages differed

noticeably from the responses in the threads that I had classified as reflection and inquiry.

In what I referred to as the problem-solving threads, responses to others' queries were

often formulated as lists—or, in some instances, they read like instructions, directives, or

even commands to be followed. As I initially understood them, these threads appeared

to be antithetical to the kinds of critical, reflective work that I was hoping the Intern-Net

list would elicit. There didn't seem to be much textual evidence in lists or in do-it-like-I-

did e-mails that the teachers participating in these threads were thinking critically,

considering multiple vantage points, or embracing a questioning or reflective stance.

It didn't seem that way…at first. But a critical moment in my analysis of these

threads allowed me to see the so-called "problem-solving" threads in a different light. As

I reread thread after thread in this category, trying to understand the relationship to the

reflection and inquiry threads that I had identified, I noticed something curious in a very

short thread that had apparently met a dead end on the list. It was the shortest of

threads—a single message, what I had been referring to as a "dropped" thread, since it appeared that no one had responded to the writer who posted the initial call.[31] The writer, Evelina, had taught overseas briefly after her internship, and as a result, she had missed out on the American teacher-hiring season in her first year after graduating. A death in her family prevented her from actively searching for a full-time job for the second year after her graduation, and she found herself taking on long-term subbing positions in order to "keep her foot in the door" and stay viable in the job market. In October of 2006 (for most teachers on the list, the beginning of their second year of fulltime work), Evelina posted this brief request:

> *Hi all, I am in the process of composing a Beginners JRN [Journalism] class - I*
> *am not teaching yet, however I might as well be doing SOMETHING right?*
> *Anyway, I was wondering for those of you teaching JRN already, could I bummer*
> *info. off of you. I have my outline and what I would like to cover. However, I am*
> *interested in seeing what others have been able to cover in a semester or*
> *trimester. So essentially I don't need lesson detail as much as I need to see a*
> *break down of what will be covered, say a syllabus? :) Any help would be much*
> *appreciated. I would like to add this to my portfolio, but as I said before I need*
> *some frame of reference since I have not done anything with Jrn since the end of*
> *my MSU days. Thanks, Evelina   Oh and my address: ********@*****.com*

It hit me as I read the words "I need some frame of reference" in Evelina's message: she wasn't asking anyone to solve her problems for her, to give her the answers, to do her work. She was doing research: asking significant questions, gathering possible answers,

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[31] I learned later, in an interview with Evelina, that her post to Intern-Net had resulted in an off-list conversation that responded to the questions she had written to the group.

and then quietly, critically, and independently evaluating the possibilities "off-list." The full critical evaluation of the ideas she received wouldn't be visible in the Intern-Net e-mail texts. But her work, like that of the others who wrote in this genre, was inquiry after all. I'd misread these threads because I was looking for a particular kind of collaborative inquiry. Whereas I had coded as inquiry the threads where teachers were working through questions and deliberating critically about the answers together in the Intern-Net listserv space, I had overlooked the possibility that individual teachers might begin an inquiry process through Intern-Net and then continue off-list the more deliberative work of making sense of possible answers.

Evelina's post called to my attention an important possibility: that genres for reflection and inquiry might be distinguished not only by typified rhetorical actions (A. Devitt, 2004; Miller, 1984b), but also by the roles taken by participants in the genre—and the extent to which those roles involve collaborative or independent engagement in the symbolic action of the texts.[32] When I began to analyze the threads with this possibility in mind, it quickly became apparent that the Intern-Net teachers, if they chose to do so, could use any of four distinct genres for inquiry and reflection: independent inquiry, collaborative inquiry, collaborative reflection, and independent reflection. In the analysis

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[32] Upon further review, I learned that Paré and Smart also use "regularities in social roles" as a defining feature of individual genres (1994, p. 149). They argue:

> Roles and the networks of relationship that connect them are often generic—they serve to regularize the social interaction, as well as the writing and reading, involved in the production of knowledge.
>
> The roles related to a given genre are defined within certain parameters, such as responsibilities, levels of relative power and influence, division of labour, channels of and access to information, and the obligation and freedom to report. These generic characteristics of role and relationship determine what can and cannot be done and said by particular individuals, as well as when, how, where and to whom. (p. 149)

While I agree to an extent with Paré and Smart's sense that roles "determine" how individuals participate in genres—and therefore also influence the very shape of the genres themselves, I would emphatically add that the relationship is reciprocal. That is, genres also influence the roles that are available to individuals as they participate in particular genres.

that follows, I discuss these genres, analyzing the interactions of text, context, and rhetorical action for each genre. Since some of the genres figure more prominently than others, my treatment of each varies accordingly. The chapter concludes with a look at the interactions of the genres in this set and discussion of the significance of these genres as they emerge in the technology contexts of the Intern-Net discussion list.

Independent Inquiry

As I indicated previously, threads in the independent inquiry genre (which I had originally thought of as problem-solving threads) are a frequent occurrence on the Intern-Net list. During the teachers' internship year, this kind of thread accounted for about half of the conversations in the inquiry and reflection genre set. What is the nature of these threads, and why do they figure so prominently in Intern-Net discussions?

I have already depicted a few key features of threads in this genre. As I noted earlier, these threads typically begin with an e-mail presenting a succinct description of a problem and a direct request for help, followed by equally direct e-mail responses in the form of lists and/or directives. However, there are also many other interrelated features of text, context, and action that make this genre distinctive.

More than Meets the Eye: Critical Evaluation that Occurs Independently, Off-list

The interviews that I conducted with nine of the Intern-Net teachers confirmed what I had suspected when I read Evelina's call for "some frame[s] of reference" for designing her journalism course: that one of the vital purposes for initiating threads in the independent inquiry genre is to use the list for collecting ideas that individuals can then consider more carefully off-list. In these threads, responsibility for the role of

inquirer is assumed primarily by the individual who posts the call message. Participants

expect that the teacher writing the call message (and any others who hope to benefit from

the inquiry question) will gather the responses and then make decisions about them

independently, rather than engaging others on the list in extensive conversation that

debates the merits and limitations of the suggestions that have been proffered.

This point was illustrated with particular clarity in my interview with Drea, who

shared a play-by-play account of the ties between her writing and her off-list activity in

connection with the thread "Help!! Need a book!" Drea initiated this thread with the

following call message during her first year as a fulltime teacher, in the fall of 2005:

> *Hey guys,*
>
> *We had a professional development day today and my principal explained that*
>
> *she wanted us to have our students read at least 2 books. I planned on having*
>
> *them read To Kill a Mockingbird, but the more I think about it I would like them*
>
> *to focus on some simpler themes. We read Monster last trimester and they liked it.*
>
> *I am unsure of what books to have them read next. Any suggestions????*
>
> *Thanks, Drea*

A reader who didn't understand this genre might worry that Drea was ready to abdicate

her teaching responsibilities and allow other Intern-Net teachers to select texts on her

behalf. But as Drea made clear when I spoke with her, to look at the textual (e-mail)

record alone can be misleading. She explained that whenever she posed a query like this

one to the list, she thought of Intern-Net as her "starting place," not as an answer machine

or the place to get the final word. After posting her question, she would wait for a variety

of responses and then do more research off-list to help her make a decision about how to

proceed. In many instances, she would talk off-list with others that she knew as a way to sort through her options. For this particular thread, when other Intern-Net teachers suggested a number of books that might interest her, Drea collected the titles and then worked independently to learn more about each book and author. She considered which texts were the best matches for her own students—and her decisions were the result of careful investigation, not just taking someone else's word for it. When one Intern-Net teacher named a few titles and suggested that they were appropriate for 9th graders, Drea looked at the texts herself to evaluate the reading levels. She explained her reasoning: "Just because they're at the level for Katie's 9th graders didn't mean they were at a level for my 9th graders." Her "invisible" work for this thread wasn't unique. Drea observed that her standard practice when she initiated this kind of thread was to post a question to the list and then to do "further analysis" off-list with the answers that she received.

The other interviewees described similar approaches to this genre. They noted that they did much more behind-the-scenes work with independent inquiry threads they'd initiated than what was often apparent in their written messages. However, this is not to say that teachers' off-list actions were entirely invisible in the written threads. In this genre, references to off-list work frequently (though subtly) find their way into the threads.

Sometimes, the teachers posting the call message will make clear that posting questions to Intern-Net is only one step in their independent inquiry process. Nelvia, for example, wrote to the list when she learned that her classes would be short on resources.

We hardly have anything; not enough books (textbooks or novels) for a class set. . . . these kids deserve to at least have enough books so that they don't have to read

over each other's shoulders! What suggestions do you have for applying for

grants? ***Are there other places I can be looking?*** *Any advice would be*

wonderful. :) [Emphasis added.]

Likewise, in a post about learning how to teach English language learners, Athena

expresses her dismay at feeling unprepared to help her students and indicates a similar

willingness to extend her research process beyond a post to Intern-Net. She writes,

As I was grading, the knot [in my stomach] was increasing because I just don't

even know where to start in my instructions. What skills to teach, how to do it

and how to even diagnose where they are in their English learning process. ***I***

have begun looking in English Journals and past readings for class, but do any

of you know other resources to find that information? *texts? websites? your own*

experiences? [Emphasis added.]

In these two examples, the work that teachers expect to do independently off-list is

apparent in the call messages. In other instances, the off-list activity that accompanies

the independent inquiry genre is evident when the teacher who initially posted a call for

help sends a follow-up message. Though such messages are optional for independent

inquiry threads, when they do occur, they typically include a note of thanks for the

suggestions offered and an explanation about what how the inquiring teacher put selected

ideas to use. For example, in the thread "Emergency situation," which appeared during

the internship year, Nicole posted a call message on a Sunday afternoon about how to

handle classes on Monday, in light of the news that one of her students has died in a car

accident over the weekend. She received a series of messages giving her ideas about

what to do and what to avoid. She then closed the thread on Tuesday by thanking

everyone who wrote in and explaining briefly which ideas she chose to use or adapt:

> *I've essentially turned this week into a "independent study" week for my two*
>
> *honors classes (one of which [the student] was in). Last week, thankfully I handed*
>
> *out a schedule to them of what we were going to do (which included reading the*
>
> *majority of Hiroshima). We are still sticking to that schedule, however the*
>
> *students that were the most affected by the tragedy have been given extensions*
>
> *until after spring break. The majority of the assignments and activities the*
>
> *students can do at home so I'm being very lenient and flexible this week (two*
>
> *things I rarely am in my honors classes, ask any of the students...heh).*

Nicole's follow-up message alludes to a few of the suggestions she received through

Intern-Net. It is readily apparent to teachers who participated in the thread that Nicole

made decisions not to use some of their ideas, and that she chose to "tweak" others.

As it turns out, Nicole isn't the only one who used the Intern-Net messages in this

thread to support her independent inquiry. In a message that is also near to the end of the

thread, another teacher who interned at the same school also wrote a note of

acknowledgment to the list:

> *thanks for all the advice. it is really good to hear different perspectives on how to*
>
> *best help our students cope.*
>
> *Athena*

Though it is short, this message, too, hints at off-list, independent activity. Athena's use

of the phrase about "hear[ing] different perspectives" suggests that she, too, sorted

through the advice that others gave and is thinking critically about what ideas may be

best suited to her situation. She and Nicole share an interest in learning from this thread, but any collaborative efforts to evaluate or make decisions about the suggestions that emerge in the "Emergency situation" thread occur outside the Intern-Net space. The symbolic action that is achieved through this thread remains as independent—rather than collaborative—inquiry.

So far I have discussed how call and follow-up messages point to independent inquiry activities. Further evidence of critical thinking that occurs at a deeper level off-list is built into the texts of independent inquiry threads in another way. In this genre, both the teachers who write call messages and those who write response e-mails work to include evaluation criteria in the threads. In some cases, critical consideration is built into the thread when the caller states criteria that will lead to satisfactory responses. This can happen in the initiating message, as when Leigh starts a thread by noting that she is searching for

> *novels that actually end happy as well as more novels with female protagonists.*
> *These would be targeted toward 9th and 10th graders and would need to at least*
> *loosely be considered a canonical text.*

Sometimes the teacher who initiated a thread will adjust or clarify whatever criteria were initially offered. In the thread introduced above, when Leigh starts to receive responses that won't fit her needs, she posts another message about her criteria:

> *To clarify the "canonical" comment, I teach at . . . a very traditional school in a*
> *very traditional district. We don't have a lot of breathing room as far as text*
> *selection goes. The parents are very involved in what is being taught (which is*
> *almost always beneficial), including desiring their kids to read the same stuff they*

had to read. Everything must be considered a classic. These books are often

older, are recognized around the country for being excellent books, etc. There is

definitely room to throw in some contemporary lit, but it must be arguably a

classic. Some examples . . . are. . . .

Another Intern-Net teacher picks up on the importance of these criteria and gives a new

subject line to the thread that Leigh has started. This subject line draws explicit attention

to Leigh's criteria: "Happy, female-centered, canonical texts."

In some instances, the criteria for satisfactory replies are not so obvious in the call

messages that initiate the threads. Yet it is clear that respondents who participate in these

threads anticipate that the teachers who posted the call messages <u>will</u> critically evaluate

the ideas offered, judging them off-list against particular standards—even if these

standards aren't explicitly stated. In these cases, the responding teachers work to draw

out the criteria from the person who posted the call, so that the standards emerge over the

course of the thread instead of appearing directly at the start. For example, when Drea

initially posted her call for help thinking of books to read with her students, she

mentioned only that she wanted books with "simpler themes" than *To Kill a Mockingbird*

and that her students had already read *Monster* and "liked it." The first response, from

Katie, starts with a question asking Drea to establish more context: "What grade?" The

second response is from me, and it includes only questions that ask for more context:

Hi Drea,

What themes, strategies, ideas, and/or skills are you hoping to teach with the text

you choose? Also, can it be anything, or are you limited to something your school

already owns?

Leah

Drea replies to the list so that all potential respondents are aware of her more specific

criteria:

> *It can be any book. I am hoping to build their reading and comprehension skills. I*
>
> *want them to be challenged but not overwhelmed. I am not necessarily choosing a*
>
> *book on themes, but if I had to I would like coming of age as a theme.*
>
> *PS They are 9th graders.*

Though Drea has given additional information, Katie wants to know more. She writes,

> *I think The Watsons and The House on Mango Street are awesome for that grade*
>
> *level. Do you have specific objectives for this text? I'm curious about the*
>
> *challenged aspect you mention. I am not sure that the two texts I recommend are*
>
> *that challenging, but I think what you do with them could be challenging. I also*
>
> *teach ninth.*

As the thread continues, more of Drea's criteria emerge through the interactions of all

who write in. When Evelina suggests the novel *Speak* (Anderson, 1999), Drea asks

whether boys will enjoy it. Katie and Lynn note that the boys they teach were engaged

with the book, and then Katie asks whether "language issues" (i.e., vulgarity and

profanity) will need to be taken into consideration for the text selection process at Drea's

school. What is clear throughout this exchange and others like it is that Intern-Net

teachers expect each other to think critically when they make decisions about the ideas

set forth in the independent inquiry threads. These threads aren't about a simple "give

and take" of information; they are about expanding possibilities and creating options for teachers who are willing to do further investigation on their own.

Writing criteria into the threads helps to ensure that the possibilities and options that are offered are useful to the teacher conducting the independent inquiry. Yet it is unlikely that any of the replies will be a perfect match for what is being requested, due to the uniqueness of each teaching situation and to the brevity of these posts (which require a minimal time commitment from readers and writers alike and therefore increase the number of participants). The teachers I interviewed concurred with Lynn, who remarked to me that it sometimes seemed that it was impossible to provide "enough specifics" in her call messages. As a result, she frequently got back "neat ideas, but not good fits," and she had to sort through the options and pick out or adapt the things that best fit her teaching persona and situation. Threads in the independent inquiry genre involve more critical evaluation of ideas than the e-mail texts alone would suggest.

Content that Relates Directly to Classroom Practice

As I mentioned previously, this genre supports a broad range of content. But as varied as the subjects may be, they do have one thing in common: they are closely tied to classroom practice. The teachers who initiate these threads are conducting inquiry that will help them in the near future as they interact with students (or, in a few cases, as they secure jobs so that they can work with students). Harrison, in a note following his interview, put it simply: these threads are about "classroom ideas."

When the Intern-Net teachers began their internships, threads in this genre tended to focus on classroom management issues, such as community-building, establishing routines, and dealing with problems that included fighting, hate speech, disrespect, and

plagiarism. Conversations that focused on unexpected events affecting curriculum and instruction also recurred with some regularity during the first 15 months, and they included threads about local, regional, and national events. When students or colleagues suffered injury, illness, or worse, teachers wrote to Intern-Net for ideas about how to respond. When regional or national news highlighted teenagers who perpetrated or were victims of violence, these incidents also became conversation topics. In these cases, the underlying question was, "To what extent and in what ways should these news events enter into my work with my students?" Over time, these kinds of threads occurred with decreasing frequency. The teachers I interviewed noted that as they gained more experience, they were less likely to discuss these issues over Intern-Net because they had dealt with them before. They now had their own ideas about ways to head off behavioral issues, their own sense about appropriate responses for some of the unexpected events that may alter teaching and learning dynamics.

When the Intern-Net teachers took on full responsibility for planning lessons, units, and courses, it was planning that became the hot topic for independent inquiry threads. The teachers asked for help with developing effective approaches toward particular texts, literacy practices, concepts, and student demographic groups. They asked for help locating resources: books, poems, grants, technologies, partnerships, policy information, and the like. They asked for help brainstorming gateway activities (also known as "hooks") and for tips on employing particular strategies effectively. The one thing they did not ask was for anyone else to do their work. Requests for full-blown lesson or unit plans were a rarity—and were usually met with silence from the list. Lynn, in her interview with me, summed up the general feeling about such requests. She noted

that everyone on the list had an excellent education and was trained to prepare and implement good plans that were tailored to their students' needs and interests. "At this point," she said, "it's like, 'Write your own plans!'"

Appeals to the Shared Values of Helpfulness, Relevance, and Reciprocity

In large part, the independent inquiry genre succeeds only because participating teachers value the qualities of helpfulness, relevance, and reciprocity—qualities that tend to counterbalance each other productively. These common values become the basis for persuasive appeals in the independent inquiry threads. In some cases, Intern-Net teachers make explicit rhetorical appeals to these values, persuading each other to participate in particular ways by writing pleas for helpfulness, relevance, or reciprocity directly into their messages. In other instances, the importance of these values is not remarked upon until someone needs to be especially persuasive or wants to call attention to behavior that is contrary to these values.

Appeals to the shared value of helpfulness are written into both call and response messages in independent inquiry threads. It is not unusual to see the word "Help!!!"—followed by a number of exclamation points—in a subject line. (One of my favorite subject lines, and probably the most direct appeal in this vein, is from an e-mail that Nicole sent to the list: "*I need your help! C'mon you know you wanna . . .*") Variations on the word "help" are also worked into the call messages, with phrases synonymous to "Any help would be much appreciated" used as a popular close to the call messages. In the response messages, too, teachers are likely to indicate that they "hope this helps" or some similar sentiment.

While appeals to the value of helpfulness can facilitate successful independent inquiry, most writers also make appeals to the shared value of relevance—though most of these appeals tend to be implicit in the messages rather than stated directly. The vast majority of independent inquiry threads are relevant to the purposes of the Intern-Net list (i.e., "to encourage and support" subscribers' professional development teachers). As a result, it can be a challenge to see the priority given to relevance—until someone violates the tacit agreement to "stay on topic" and posts an inquiry, meant to be helpful to the writer, that isn't aligned with the purposes of the list. In these (rare) instances, the teachers who initiate the independent inquiry threads will include an apology, not unlike this one,

Sorry for turning the list into a social planner!

which Drea included in a thread she started to help plan an end-of-the-internship bash for the teachers on the list.

To appeal to the value of relevance, not only must messages be of topical interest to the other discussion list teachers, they must also strike the right balance between being either too general to be helpful to the person who posed the question or being so context-specific as to be of little use to anyone else on the list. Take call message questions as an example. On one end of the spectrum, some questions are phrased so vaguely that, as Lynn put it, they simply ask "too much." In a personal communication, she illustrated her point by noting that a question such as "Does anyone have any ideas for *To Kill a Mockingbird*?" could be narrowed to questions that show the author is trying to think for him- or herself, such as "What other pre-reading activities do you have for this novel?" The revised question would be more helpful to the writer, would demonstrate that the
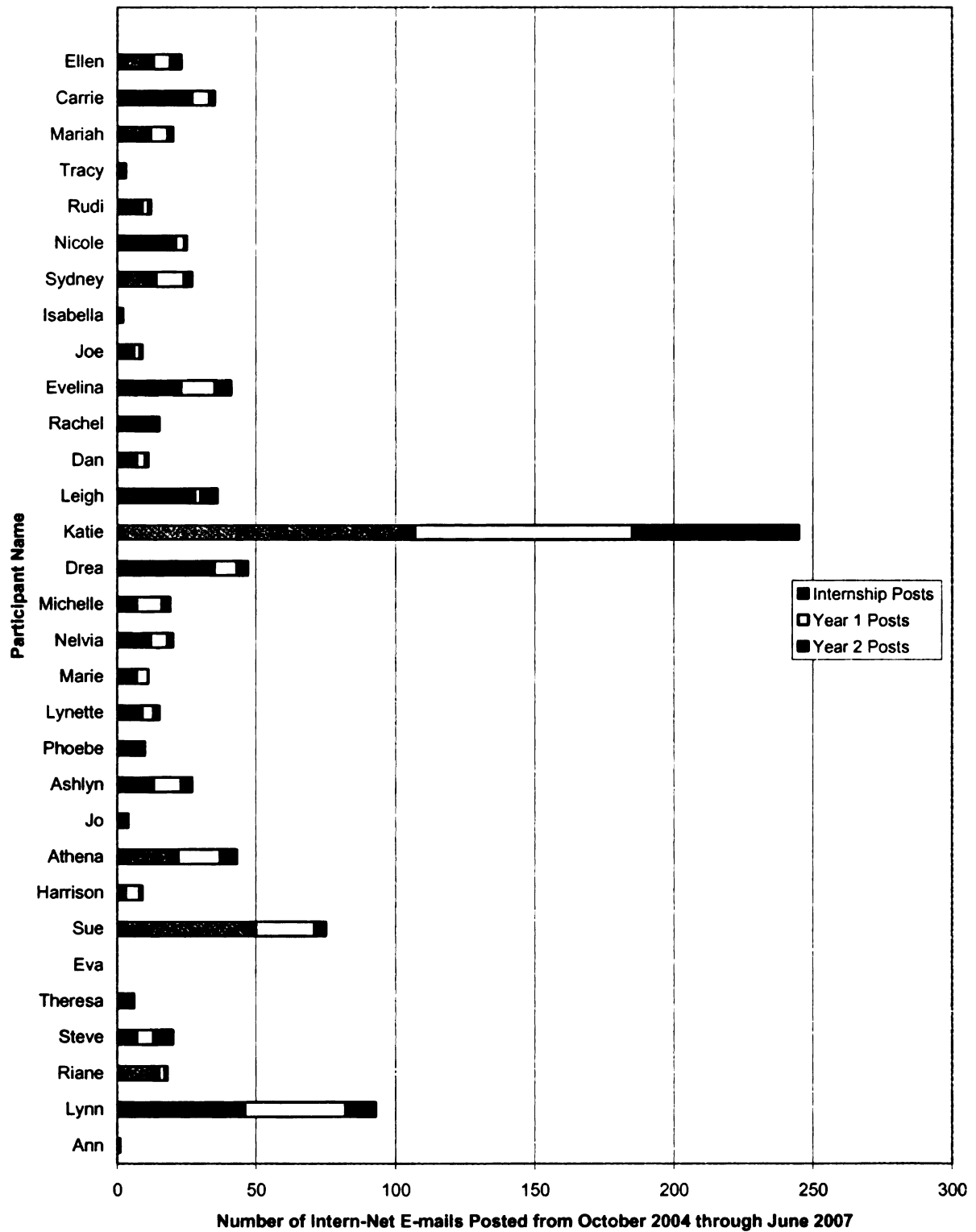
teacher is taking responsibility for the lesson, and would still be of potential interest to others on the list who might have similar questions. On the other end of the spectrum, some questions could be so particular to one person's work as to be irrelevant to the rest of the list. The difficulty, of course, is that what may seem overly individualized to one teacher might seem to have good potential for generalizing to another.

The contrasting perspectives of two Intern-Net teachers, Harrison and Katie, help to illustrate this point. Harrison—who wrote only nine messages in all, and only one in an independent inquiry thread—explained to me (in so many words) that the issues of relevance and generalizability had a major impact on his participation. He noted that he sometimes sent individuals his responses off-list, but that he tended to avoid sending responses to the list because he wanted to do so only if they were "encompassing enough for everyone to use." He noted that "Sometimes people reply in a voice as if they're writing only to one person. And I think those kinds of posts should be sent only to one person." Contrast this with Katie's view. A prolific Intern-Net participant, Katie's posts accounted for about 19% of the Intern-Net messages (244 e-mails and counting). She tended to see potential relevance for her own teaching in much of what she read, and she kept many of the e-mails so that she could return to them later. Using Outlook Express™ to read and manage her e-mail, she created folders for storing messages. Along with folders for specific texts (e.g., *Romeo and Juliet*) and for particular teaching approaches (e.g., literature circles and Socratic seminars), she also created a folder titled "Revisit." In this folder, she stored messages that included ideas she wasn't yet ready to use but that she felt might have potential for her work in the future. Katie welcomed a broad range of discussions, and she operated under a generous definition of *relevance.*

While Harrison and Katie's contrasting approaches to independent inquiry threads may illustrate the far ends of the spectrum rather than the middle ground, they do shed light on the difficulty of setting an objective standard for what might count as "appropriate" or "effective" posting behavior. Two measures of successful posting, as I have just discussed, are the degrees to which independent inquiry messages appeal to the values of helpfulness and relevance. A third shared value that Intern-Net participants also appeal to is that of reciprocity: the idea that those who ask for help should also extend it, and that those who frequently offer help should in turn receive the assistance to which they are entitled.

The importance of reciprocity may come as a surprise, considering there are some teachers who write to the list much more frequently than others. If all of the 36 teachers and I were to post with equal frequency, then each participant would be responsible for about 2.7% of the Intern-Net e-mails. As it stands, the range of participation is much more varied. (See Figure 5: Intern-Net E-mails Written by Each Study Participant.)

Figure 5: Intern-Net E-mails Written by Each Study Participant

X-axis: Number of Intern-Net E-mails Posted from October 2004 through June 2007

Y-axis: Participant Name

Legend:
- Internship Posts
- Year 1 Posts
- Year 2 Posts

Although there is a great deal of variation in the number of times that each person posts, the participants judge who is using the list fairly based not on raw numbers, but on a sense of whether or not individuals are making at least as many contributions as requests. The teachers who write frequently are especially conscientious about making sure they are working toward an online version of fair trade. As Katie stated in her interview,

> I respond if I can. . . . Even if it takes me a long time. . . . I will leave it in my
>
> inbox until I get to it, especially if I have a big response. . . . [though] if lots of
>
> people have said what I would have said, I'll leave it at that.

In the other interviews, the teachers were quick to point out that although Katie posted more often than most participants, they appreciated her posts because, as Athena observed, she regularly "gave good responses" and shared helpful ideas and information.

The value placed on reciprocity was a recurring theme in the interviews, but it is also apparent in the texts of the independent inquiry threads. It is not unusual to see posts in which teachers respond to one independent inquiry and then, in the same message, spend the inquiry capital they have just earned, immediately beginning another independent inquiry thread. For example, in the thread "Nicenet with students," Athena asks for pointers about using Nicenet,[33] noting that she is thinking about using it when she teaches *Touching Spirit Bear* (Mikaelsen, 2001). Nelvia, after offering a few Nicenet tips to Athena, writes,

> *On a side note, I'm also teaching Touching Spirit Bear for the 2nd year and my*
>
> *kids LOVE it! I'd love to hear what kinds of things you're doing :)*

---

[33] Nicenet (http://www.nicenet.org/) is a free, web-based service that is designed to be used as an online classroom space that supplements face-to-face environments.

The request for Athena to share about how she is approaching the novel appeals directly to the value of reciprocity. Teachers who share their ideas aren't afraid to make requests, and most who make requests also make an effort to share.

When there is a sense that reciprocity isn't happening, Intern-Net teachers notice. In her interview, Lynn noted that she frequently gave help and was happy to do so. But in one instance where she needed ideas and got no response, she felt "robbed." Expressing a similar sentiment, Katie noted, "I do wish some people would speak up. . . . When I talk or e-mail with someone and learn that they've been reading everything but not replying, I think, 'How about the reciprocal part?'"

Katie's question is probably rhetorical, a commentary on aspects of "lurking" (reading messages but not posting) that are problematic—at least as they pertain to reciprocity. But her question also echoes a more straightforward question that is worth considering: is there something about the independent inquiry genre that encourages some list subscribers to become lurkers? I will return to this question shortly, as part of the following discussion about another characteristic of the independent inquiry genre.

Appeals to the Logic of Experience

Another notable characteristic of threads in the independent inquiry genre is the prevalence of appeals to experience. In both call and response messages, a teacher's experience with an idea or strategy is cited as evidence that the suggestions she or he offers will be worthy of other teachers' consideration. In call messages, for example, queries typically includes a phrase such as, "Has anyone used...?" or "Does anyone have experience with...?" The following examples are representative of this type of appeal:

o In "Nicenet with students," Athena writes, "*Hi Katie :) or anyone who has used nicenet. Quick question. Do you use nicenet with your students? I am thinking about using it as we read through Touching Spirit Bear. Are there any glitches you've found when using it in your classes? (i am assuming that you have.) Let me know. :)* [Emphasis added.]

o Michelle starts the thread "Creative Writers" by addressing her e-mail to "everyone" and explaining that creative writing is "not [her] forte at all." She describes how some of her students have been asking for her to respond to writings they've done on their own time, observing that some of the writings are as long as 20 pages, and that some put her in an awkward situation because they are "really bad." Michelle follows this snapshot of her situation with a request for help that is addressed to a more narrow (and experienced) audience: "*So creative writing teachers...what have your experiences been responding to extra-curricular pieces? What do you think students are looking for when they ask me to read these?*"

o After Riane accepted her first teaching job, she found that she felt "very excited and also pretty nervous." Her e-mail initiating the thread "Inner city advice?" explains her situation and makes an appeal for help: "*I student taught at [a suburban high school] last year which was made up of upper class white kids. The school I'm teaching at is 99.3% Black in one of the poorest parts of [a major city]. Feel like I need any kind of advice that people who taught in the city can give me.*" Riane, who self-identifies as "a Southern white girl," addresses her next question directly to one of the African American teachers on

the list: *"Also, Drea—I remember you talking in [Professor X's] class **about your experiences** as a student in high school. Any advice you can give . . .?"*

[Emphasis added.]

In these and other independent inquiry call messages, the writers solicit the help of others on the list who can speak from experience. Athena's closing comment, "Let me know," is often used as a conventional way to close an informal correspondence presenting a request—but it can also be read here as a request to "let me have the benefit of your knowledge," of your experience.

Likewise, in the response messages, writers regularly cite their experiences as a way to emphasize the validity of the recommendations and suggestions that they make. A message that Lynette posts is a telling commentary on the importance of validating claims in this genre with appeals to experience. Her response to Ellen, who has asked for advice on implementing literature circles, makes the unusual move of beginning with a reference to a book she is reading:

I'm starting a variation on lit. circles this marking period also. To prepare, I'm reading Harvey Daniels/Nancy Steineke's Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles.

Notice, though, that in the next sentence, Lynette immediately suggests that the ideas in the text (by an author widely regarded as an expert on the subject) are worthwhile only to the extent that they will be validated by the experiences that she and other teachers have. Referring back to the book, she writes,

It's been very helpful, although I'm not sure how the ideas will work in practice. I'll keep you posted on successes/problems that arise, and I'd love to hear how it works for you too.

Lynette is clear that the standard used to verify her claims will be "how the ideas will work in practice"—namely, experience.

The interviewees I spoke with also emphasized the importance of appeals to experience for the independent inquiry genre. Several of the teachers spoke directly about feeling that the best responses in independent inquiry threads were those where ideas could be backed by claims made from experience. In some cases, interviewees reflected that their lack of teaching experience relative to a given topic inhibited them from posting responses. When I asked Athena how she decided whether or not to post a reply to an independent inquiry query, she reflected that in some instances, "I didn't have enough background to be able to answer, so I just read others' answers." In his response to the same question, Steve explained that for this type of thread, "unless it was really in my wheelhouse in terms of what I knew, I pretty much refrained" from posting replies to others' questions.

These comments helped me to think about the practice of lurking in a new way. While in some cases lurking may be a sign that subscribers are undervaluing reciprocity, it seems that in many instances, the pressure to speak from experience motivates silent or invisible participation in independent inquiry threads. Personal communications from various Intern-Net subscribers seem to bear out this theory.

Some background: from the time that Intern-Net started, I tried to keep updated records showing where all participants were working and what sort of positions they had acquired. In most cases, I was able to track this information by reading messages where Intern-Net teachers made announcements to the list about new jobs, recent moves, and the like. Periodically, though, I also sent private e-mails to a few of the quietest

subscribers in order to learn about their work and to invite them to participate more vocally in the list conversations. (I assumed, too, that some subscribers might take this as an opportunity to unsubscribe, although to date, that hasn't happened.) I was delighted to receive replies from some who I'd thought had either gone "missing in action" or lost interest in the list. These e-mails frequently told similar stories: the writers were, for personal or professional reasons, either working as substitute teachers or working in other professions while waiting to find teaching jobs. They continued to read the Intern-Net messages, but they felt unqualified to write to the list because of their (relative) lack of teaching experience. Notice, in these personal communications, the allusions to the importance of experience:

- o Theresa wrote to me in March 2006, informing me that during the first portion of the school year after her internship she had worked as a building substitute, and that recently, she had found a position as a permanent (long-term) substitute for someone on leave. She added, "*I hope that this finds you well and thank you for continuing to keep the Intern-Net. I like to read the updates and questions posted, even though I rarely post anything myself. It's not that I don't want to, but I sometimes like to observe rather than participate. However, **with this new position I bet I will have questions and observations of my own to contribute now.***" [Emphasis added.]

- o Jo sent a similar note the following spring. In response to my request for an update, she replied that she had taught overseas for a year and then returned home to the States due to "unexpected events," arriving too late to enter the teaching job market for that school year. Then, like Theresa, she added some

unsolicited remarks about Intern-Net: *"I am amazed at your dedication to the INTERN-Net. As crazy busy as you are, you always find time to respond to everyone. I commend you. Even though I haven't been replying, I read the emails.* **I guess I don't respond to the INTERN-Net because since I am not teaching, I don't feel like I have much to offer. Anyway, hopefully that'll change next year.** *"* [Emphasis added.]

Statements like these may suggest to some that relative inexperience necessarily diminishes written participation in the discussion list conversations. It is true that many of the most reticent Intern-Net subscribers were those who worked as substitute teachers for a year or more (at least 6 teachers, or about 17% of the Intern-Net cohort), along with those who found work in other fields (such as Rachel, who went to graduate school to earn a counseling degree, or Rudi, who hit the road as a touring rock star). However, it is also true that for some of these subscribers, their work as interns or as substitute teachers became the basis for their appeals to experience. The two cases that follow demonstrate that relative inexperience need not preclude written participation in threads for independent inquiry.

Evelina, you may recall, taught overseas for one summer after her internship, and then, in the two years that followed, accepted work as a substitute teacher and in other fields. Yet her rate of written participation in independent inquiry threads (i.e., writing either call or response messages) remained fairly consistent over time, and she posted with greater frequency than several of the teachers who had secured fulltime positions. Significantly, her posts in this genre continued to make appeals to experience, even as she continued her search for a fulltime teaching position.

In Steve's case, the details are different, but as with Evelina, it is clear that confidence in making appeals to experience is what enables written participation in the independent inquiry threads. After his internship year, Steve spent one semester continuing to work at what had been his summer job before taking a long-term subbing job as a math teacher. The following year, he landed a job as a high school English teacher. Yet during that "in-between" year of doing subbing and other work, Steve continued to post to Intern-Net at a steady rate, and his posts in the independent inquiry genres continued to stem from his experience. Remember that during his interview, Steve remarked on the importance of being able to write from his "wheelhouse." The word *wheelhouse* is a baseball term for the hitter's power zone. Steve coaches baseball at his high school, and his mention of the wheelhouse offers poetic insight into the importance of experience for this genre: appeals to experience are what put independent inquiry messages into the "power zone." Yet as Evelina's and Steve's cases show, it is not the <u>amount</u> of fulltime teaching experience that facilitates written participation in this genre; rather, it is the writer's <u>confidence</u> in appealing to his or her classroom experiences that makes possible written participation in independent inquiry threads.

Patterns in Structure, Style, and Diction

To this point I have examined several characteristic interactions of texts, contexts, and actions as they occur in the independent inquiry genre. By now, it should be clear that this genre is about much more than "form" or textual patterns. But textual patterns are also an important part of any discussion about genre, as it is textual patterns that are often the most readily apparent clue that writers are participating in particular genres—

whether they be familiar genres or new and unnamed. For this reason, I focus now on a few textual patterns in the independent inquiry genre that are also worth noting.

Structure. Threads in the independent inquiry genre are typically structured like a folding fan. Picture an opened handheld fan:

> Starting at the base, the *rivet* is a pin which provides the structural pivot point for the folding fan. The rivet is inserted through the head of the *sticks*. The two outermost sticks are called the *guards*, and are of a sturdier construction in order to protect the fan while folded. As the sticks narrow and enter the leaf, they are called *slips or ribs*. The flexible fabric, paper or vellum which is used to join and cover the framework of slips is known as the mount or fan leaf. (Maxson, 1986)

Each thread in the independent inquiry genre is much like the fan as a whole, comprised of individual response messages (like the sticks or slips) that are all directly connected at one end—to the call message (or rivet, if you will). The response messages don't include much crosstalk or interactive group conversation—like the sticks of the fan, they are laid out next to one another without overlap. Respondents avoid repeating each other but may reinforce each others' responses. They generally answer to the caller—as seen by addressing the caller by first name in greeting with occasional parenthetical additions such as "(and all)." Like the material that covers and connects the sticks of the fan, common topics and themes overlay the messages in an individual thread so that the e-mails work purposefully together in united rhetorical action.

Style. These threads are more likely than other types to include posts built on short answers (such as book titles) rather than full sentences. As Harrison put it in his

interview, "Intern-Net is pretty conducive to this kind of thread, because you can just list things [in the response messages]. You don't have to go into the philosophy; you don't have to explain things." When response messages are written as full sentences, suggestions are often presented in lists—written in the imperative mood—that ramble off one idea after the next, sometimes with the aid of numbering or bullets.

Diction. Call and response messages in the independent inquiry genre typically make liberal use of first and second person pronouns. When writers are describing their own experiences, they frequently employ the first person singular, *I.* When callers are asking for others' ideas, they ask directly: "What would *you* do? What resources can *you* recommend?" And when respondents move from discussing their own experiences into offering suggestions, they achieve the imperative mood by using *you* ("You should do this . . .")—often in the form of the understood *you* ("Do this . . .").

Another pattern in this genre is that teachers posting the call messages often use phrases such as "I was just wondering," or "I just wondered," or "I was wondering." These kinds of phrases are generally paired with requests for "some suggestions" or "any ideas," along with assurances that responses will be "greatly appreciated" or "much appreciated." (Sometimes, writers instead follow a request for suggestions with a simple closing to express appreciation: "Thanks!") Phrases like "I just wondered" and "some suggestions" are further indication that the purpose of these threads is to facilitate the call writer's independent inquiry. The verb *to wonder* suggests questioning, curiosity, and an interest in searching something out—qualities that are consistent with the nature of inquiry. And nouns like *suggestions* and *ideas* have a level of tenuousness about them:

in contrast to solid *answers*, the suggestions and ideas are *possibilities* that may need further development or may even end up being rejected.

The textual attributes I have described are easily spotted and can help to signal that independent inquiry is occurring. But there is also a less visible component of these threads that deserves attention. An examination of the interacting texts, contexts, and actions of the independent inquiry genre is not complete without attention to the role that the context of technologies plays in these threads.

Participation Facilitated—and Limited—by Online Communication Technologies

It is important to note that here I discuss the role of technolog<u>ies</u> (in the plural) because there are multiple technological influences that can affect a given independent inquiry thread: what type of internet access a subscriber has, what e-mail account she uses, how the LISTSERV™ settings for Intern-Net are configured, which list subscription options are selected by the subscriber. All these variables and more can shape participation in this genre.

At the most general level, technological factors can impact who does or not participate in specific individual inquiry threads, and whether there are some subscribers who opt out of this genre all together. In some cases, limited internet access also means limited Intern-Net access. For teachers living in rural areas, this can be especially true. During her interview, Athena explained that an important factor in her decreased Intern-Net participation in her second year of teaching was the fact that she moved from a major metropolitan area to a very rural district and now lives, as she described it, "out in the woods." She can no longer get cable or satellite internet. She instead has dial-up at home, and checking her e-mail is now a relatively time-consuming process. "I checked it

way more last year when I was on wireless," she admitted. Athena's school computer isn't really a better option for her. Her computer there is "slow," too, and—like many of the other Intern-Net teachers—she prefers not to read or write list messages at school.

Access to the internet—and to Intern-Net—is about more than hardware. It is also about finding or creating physical, off-line space that is conducive to participating in professional interactions in cyberspace. In Athena's case, the decision not to "do Intern-Net" at work is about staying focused on the numerous tasks she needs to complete each day while she is there. "I don't want to read stuff at school. I get so much tunnel view—I'm just not good at getting out of my school task mind set." For some, avoiding Intern-Net participation at school also means avoiding prying eyes. Only two teachers subscribe through their work accounts (which are subject to monitoring), and these teachers rarely write to Intern-Net. The other teachers could access their private e-mail accounts at school, but doing so in the "public" space of their classrooms means that they will also have to be willing to put up with "live" audiences such as students or colleagues who wander near their computers. Athena and I have occasionally used instant messaging (IM) to discuss teaching-related matters, and even though we chat long after her school is out for the day, students still venture into her room and wonder who she might be talking with. A few of the Intern-Net independent inquiry threads also remark on the presence of students. In one message that she wrote during her internship, Drea closed with this note:

> *I'm unable to continue this thread because some students are demanding to know*
>
> *if I am e-mailing my boyfriend. So friends, I will continue this thread later.*

While fending off curious students may seem to have little to do with living "out in the woods," what all of these cases have in common is that the Intern-Net teachers'

participation is affected by their need for internet access at a time and place that is both convenient and sufficiently private. When teachers with limited or insufficient access post call messages, they have fewer chances to write clarifying notes about the criteria for helpful responses. When they do access their Intern-Net e-mails, the lag time between the posting of others' call messages and the date at which they are reading may be great enough that new responses would be outdated or even irrelevant. When subscribers have fewer opportunities to check their Intern-Net messages, they are less likely to participate through writing in the independent inquiry threads.

In some cases, how often subscribers read and write Intern-Net messages has less to do with hardware or space than it does with how individuals configure the technologies that they rely on. Tracy, who has posted one message each year over the past three years, has by far been one of the "quietest" Intern-Net teachers. Soon after the creation of the list, when subscribers often posted several messages in a day, Tracy contacted me to ask whether she could subscribe to a "digest" version of the Intern-Net e-mails. I helped her to configure her subscription in this way, and she now receives all of a day's messages compiled into a single message. While the digest setting can make reading the messages more convenient, it can also make it a bit trickier to respond to individual messages. In some e-mail clients, clicking "Reply" on an individual message in a digest is not an option. Rather, to respond, the writer has to start a new e-mail, type in the e-mail address for the discussion list, and then—to make sure that the reply is connected with the correct thread—copy the subject line and any bits of the original message that may need to be included in the response so that others understand the context. After successfully posting such a message, it may be a full day before other's responses to the message appear in

another digested e-mail, so that a good deal of lag time finds its way into the "digestion" process.

Not all technical choices result in delays and participation declines. Some have quite the opposite effect. For instance, the e-mail account that is used to subscribe to a list can be associated with bolstered written participation in the list. Shortly after the end of the internship year, Evelina intentionally switched her subscription from her school e-mail account to a private account. During her interview, she emphasized that it was "very important" for her to subscribe through her Yahoo™ account. She had heard that the university might, without notice, close her student e-mail account after she graduated, and she wanted to ensure that she didn't miss or lose Intern-Net messages. She now receives and sends her Intern-Net messages at the same time as her other e-mails, and as a result, the list is readily accessible to her. This accessibility factors into her participation: Evelina posts to the list more frequently than other teachers. (Her e-mails account for 3.1% of the listserv messages, while the average mean for individual teachers is to post 2.1% of the Intern-Net messages. Keep in mind that the "fair share," if everyone were to participate equally, would be 2.7% of the messages posted by each teacher; therefore, the percentage difference between Evelina's participation and the average mean for the teachers is significant.) The frequency of Evelina's posts suggests that she takes advantage of the ability to do independent inquiry with minimal hassle.

By way of contrast, several of the Intern-Net teachers continue to subscribe to the list through the university e-mail accounts they held as undergraduate students. A potential problem with these university accounts, as Sue explained in her interview, is that they are frequently targeted with "spam and junk." Having to wade through the

accumulated garbage in the account can be overwhelming to the point that users stop

checking these accounts on a regular basis. For example, Leigh used her old university

account, but she stopped checking it regularly because of the amount of spam she

received. Eventually, I began receiving messages that Leigh's account was rejecting

Intern-Net messages because her university e-mail inbox was full. After I contacted

Leigh about the error messages and let her know that I could help her switch her

subscription to another account, she chose to change her Intern-Net subscription to a

more active personal account that was not so susceptible to spam. In the month after she

made the change, Leigh posted more messages (including some in independent inquiry

threads) than she had posted in her first 20 months of fulltime teaching.

Other teachers who have switched their subscriptions to private accounts have

also increased their written participation in the list. In fact, analysis shows that in the two

years after their graduation, there is a marked contrast in the written participation of two

groups of teachers: the 19 teachers who subscribe to Intern-Net via their old university

accounts, and the 17 teachers who subscribe through other accounts or—as in Katie's

case—who have their university account messages automatically forwarded to their home

accounts. In the two years after graduation, the teachers who continued to use their old

university accounts each sent an average of 4.2 posts—or 1.1% of the Intern-Net

messages posted by teachers during this two-year span. During the same time period, the

teachers who subscribed through (presumably more active) home or work accounts each

sent an average of 17.8 messages—or 4.6% of the Intern-Net messages posted by

teachers during the same two-year span. The type of e-mail account that a teacher uses is

a much more reliable predictor of written participation than factors like years of fulltime classroom experience.

The _extent_ of a teacher's written participation in the list discussions is not the only thing influenced by technologies; the _nature_ of that participation is also affected. In the interviews I conducted, several teachers commented on ways that independent inquiry threads were enhanced by the ability to attach documents to their e-mails (a feature that is disabled on some discussion lists). One of the examples that interviewees most frequently cited was related to a post in which Cory attached a Microsoft Word™ copy of materials he'd developed to facilitate students' participation in Socratic seminars. Although the message that Cory posted was a response to an independent inquiry that Katie initiated, other teachers on the list took interest. While they had little background knowledge about teaching with Socratic seminars, the teachers found enough detail in Cory's attachment to help them understand the basic rationale and procedures for this approach. In her interview, Lynn pointed out that having Cory's materials in Word™ format (as opposed to pasted into the e-mail text) made it easier for her to read—in fact, it contributed to her decision _to_ read. This decision had far-reaching implications for Lynn, who explained,

> The Socratic seminar came exactly at a time that I was thinking about discussion,
> so I ended up changing the way I do discussion in AP [Advanced Placement
> courses]. And THAT got me thinking about why I do discussion in AP, but not
> other classes, and I started thinking about doing discussion in those other classes.

Lynn expressed clearly the importance of this particular attachment for her teaching.

However, while teachers found attachments like these to be useful and even inspiring, factors beyond utility affected decisions about whether or not to attach documents to their messages. As was mentioned earlier in the chapter, the teachers' adherence to the principle of reciprocity and to teaching mores about "doing your own work" both placed limitations on the number of attachments that were shared with the list as a whole. (However, it is important to note that the teachers I interviewed all pointed to instances in which they participated off-list by sending or receiving attachments related to independent inquiry threads.) But additional technological factors also played a role in decisions about whether or not to use attachments. Athena pointed out during her interview that "doing Intern-Net" from home meant that she didn't have ready access to files stored on her school computer. She had to be highly motivated to send as attachments any materials that she had prepared for her classroom use. In most cases, she found it more convenient to type out a brief description of her approaches to teaching. "If someone asked for a lesson plan and I had a lot of time and I was energized, I would send it. Otherwise, I wouldn't go dig it up to send it."

Athena's comment about the amount of time and energy required for her to send attachments brings me to discussion of one final way in which the Intern-Net independent inquiry threads are affected by technological factors: the use of password protection to guard entry to the archives. When I first began the list and had to make choices about how to configure the LISTSERV™ settings in ways that would be most beneficial to the subscribing teachers, I made it a priority to minimize the risks (perceived and actual) that can occur when educators ask questions, seek support, and reflect on their teaching.[34] I

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[34] For more on risks associated with reflection and inquiry, see Chapter 2. Additionally, Brookfield (1995) is highly informative about the nature and significance of such risks.

set the Intern-Net list to "Subscription by Owner" so that I (as list owner) could verify

that only the teacher interns in this English Education cohort would join the list. I made

the list "Confidential," which means that it is not listed in directories on the World Wide

Web. And I set up "Private" archives—that is, archives that are also "unlisted" and

password protected.

While these "maximum security" settings had advantages that I will discuss

shortly, some of them had unintended consequences. Most notably, the password

protection of the archives became a barrier to usability for the subscribers. On two

occasions during the internship year, I wrote posts to Intern-Net that mentioned the

searchable archives as an additional tool the teachers could use in their searches for ideas,

information, and resources. I pasted into my messages a direct link to the URL that I

used to access the archives. I didn't realize, though, that this link worked only for me—

because I (as the list owner) had already set up my Intern-Net password and was

automatically logged in whenever I visited the online archives. The rest of the

subscribers, on the other hand, faced the screen shown in Figure 5 when they tried to

follow the link that I had provided.
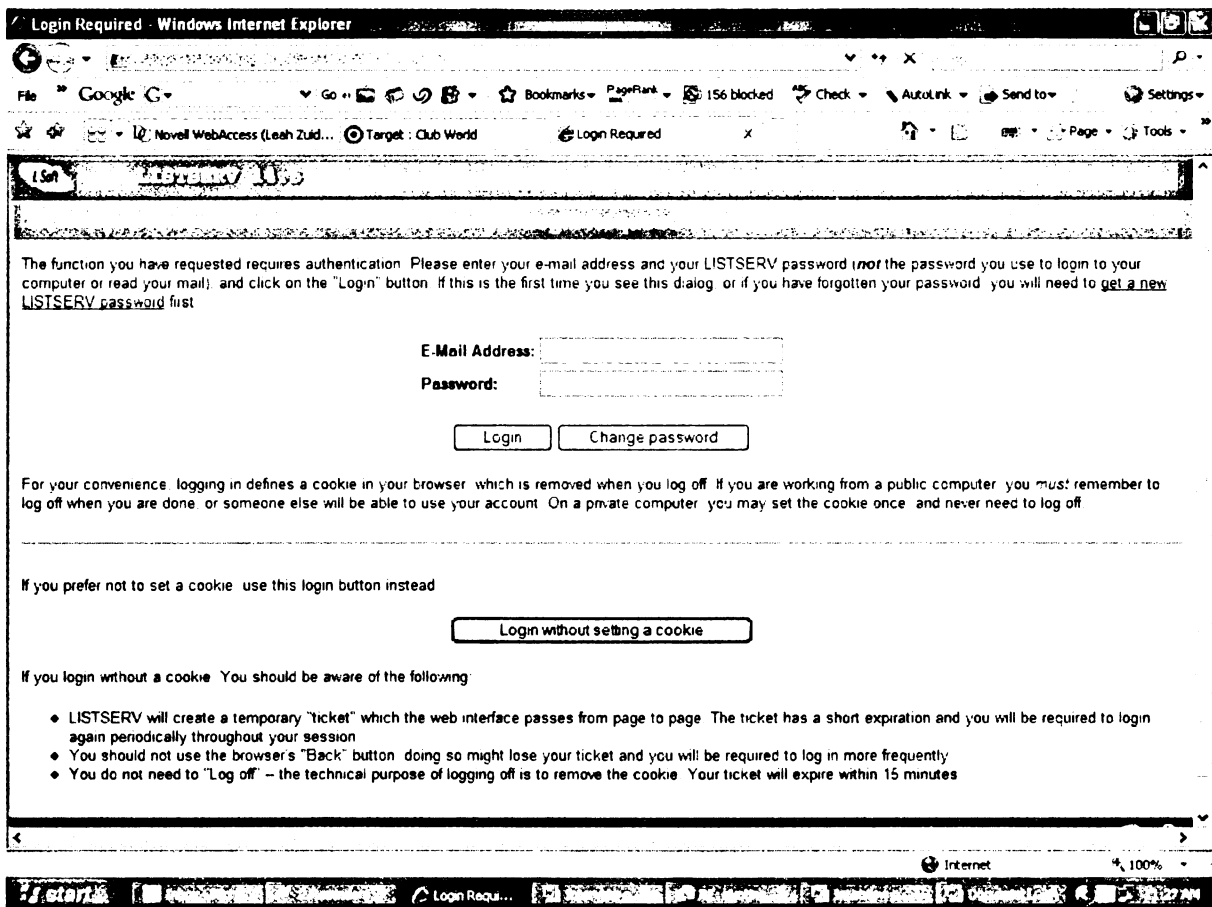
Figure 6: "Login Required" Archives Entry Screen

All of the subscribers who had intended to enter the archives found this screen daunting.

After trying their university e-mail passwords and finding that they failed, all gave up.

Because of the placement of the two main buttons (<Login> and <Change password>),

they assumed that their "quick and easy" options were to login (which had already failed)

or to change their passwords (which they didn't have and therefore couldn't change).

And because of their desire to get through the password gate with minimal time and

effort (a reasonable goal in this instance), all overlooked or ignored the smaller line of

print above the login boxes: "If this is the first time you see this dialog, or if you have

forgotten your password, you will need to get a new LISTSERV password first." Had a

third button labeled "New Password" been placed next to the others, perhaps the interested teachers would have gone on to enter and use the archives. Or perhaps the delay of filling out the information required for obtaining a new password would still have been too much of a hurdle. (Though it seems this is not the case. In advance of the discourse-based interviews that I conducted, I prepared a short tip sheet that outlined three steps for "quickly finding and reading the threads." Each step was illustrated with a screenshot much like the one that appears in Figure 5, and interviewees remarked that with the help of the tip sheet, they had "no trouble" getting quickly into the archives. One even mentioned that once she got in, she found rereading the posts "addictive.") In any event, this aspect of the Intern-Net listserv configuration meant that independent inquiry threads were shaped differently than they might otherwise have been. Conversations that may otherwise have included references to the archives did not; instead, teachers who responded to independent inquiries either wrote messages that repeated earlier ideas—or they kept silent. Additionally, had the archives been easy to access, some teachers may not have posted calls that essentially repeated earlier queries.

Other effects of the privacy protection settings for the Intern-Net list were more positive. The most significant: knowing that supportive peers were the only subscribers to the list—and that inquiries could be conducted away from the evaluating gaze of supervisors and more experienced colleagues. This knowledge created an open environment for asking questions and pursuing independent inquiries. Intern-Net teachers pointed this out repeatedly in the interviews I conducted. One teacher was quite direct in her assessment: "For me, reflection and inquiry takes place online, because there's no one in my school I can talk with." Other teachers also expressed similar

sentiments—both in the interviews and in their e-mails to the list. Nicole, with her gift for words, probably put it best. In her follow-up to an independent inquiry that she initiated (about how to teach after a student in her class passed away in an accident) she explained how she made sense of the suggestions that others shared with her. But first, she wrote:

> *What up ya'll,*
>
> *First off I want to thank everyone for their support during the past couple of days.*
>
> *I really appreciate it and would like to reiterate again how important this space*
>
> *is. Because really there's no better place for a virtual freak out than right here.*

No better place.

Collaborative Reflection

The independent inquiry threads that I have described constitute one genre in the set of discussion list genres for reflection and inquiry. One other genre also figures prominently in Intern-Net discussions: collaborative reflection. As with the independent inquiry genre, I present here an analysis of the texts, contexts, and actions that are intertwined in the enacting of this genre.

Collaborative, Critical Consideration of Experiences and Events

The name of this genre highlights its defining characteristic: in collaborative reflection threads, participants together work toward critical consideration of teaching-learning experiences and events. This genre stands in contrast to the independent inquiry genre. In the independent inquiry genre, teachers who post call messages want to receive replies from others on the list—and yet they also want to be sure not to inconvenience

others by monopolizing their time or requesting long, involved responses to their queries. Teachers who participate in such threads generally take their critical thinking work off-list, acting independently to evaluate how ideas from the response messages may be useful for their teaching contexts. In the collaborative reflection genre, however, those who initiate the threads aim to engage others in more extended, on-list conversations in which they use writing to share the work of critical thinking about the ideas and situations under discussion. The participants achieve these aims through a constellation of key moves: sharing anecdotes, contemplating multiple perspectives, examining assumptions, questioning what is known, and making meaning.

Sharing anecdotes. In the collaborative reflection genre, threads begin when individual teachers share anecdotes—either about experiences that have occurred in their teaching work, or about events that are anticipated to have future effect upon what will happen in their work as teachers. While the phrase *anecdotal evidence* is often used to dismiss a narrative account as insignificant or irrelevant, this is precisely the opposite of my intent in referring to *anecdotes* here. Rather, I use the term as Patti Stock does: to signify important narratives that are shaped and shared with both system and purpose (1993, 2001). As Stock emphasizes, these narratives act as "thick descriptions" that "call out for response, for interpretation" (2005, p. 108). Furthermore, the very act of telling or writing the anecdotes—of selecting, ordering, and emphasizing details—is one of interpretation, of shaping "a problem for study" (2005, p. 112). In the Intern-Net environment, authors share anecdotes as a way to think via the acts of narration and commentary, as well as to invite other teachers into a process of thinking together with them.

The anecdotes that inspire collaborative reflection occur at the beginning of such threads, in call messages that are generally longer than those in the independent inquiry genre. Sometimes these call messages link together a series of related events, as in this e-mail that Rudi posted to the list during the internship year:

Wow,

I try to read most of the experiences people post on this list and try to feel grateful about my placement.

I knew something was weird when I started off the day checking papers during an off hour in the library and another teacher who I don't even know asked me to make copies for her?! I just about choked. Because I'm an intern I'm obviously not doing anything important! I politely declined her request, but I did proctor a test she was giving in another part of the library so she could make her own copies.

Phone Call #1 - Yesterday I received a paper from a student with an upper elementary school reading level that was 4 pages MORE than what the assignment asked for and used elevated language that even I found challenging to read. Call me crazy, but I asked the student if he had any help. The student told me his dad "helped" him and then went home to complain that I accused him of plagiarism. His dad called me to strong-arm, I mean, set the record straight that his son did the paper on his own.

Phone Call #2 - I have a student who does about 10% of what is asked/required of

him and the rest of the class. He NEVER turns in assignments, so I was pleased to

see he turned in a paper on time. I had been e-mailing with mom after she finally

responded to my phone calls. The paper was nothing more than a book report - a

short one at that. I felt I was being generous giving him [##] points out of 100

with an option to RE-DO the paper for the average of the two grades,

complimenting his writing, but asking him to see my comments and make

adjustments. Well, mom left a nasty message on my mentor's voice mail asking

"how much longer this STUDENT (that's me, by the way) was going to be

teaching the class" and arguing that her son "spent hours typing his paper" and

deserves an "A". I haven't been able to reach her, but I'm looking forward to that

conversation tomorrow.

There is a teacher in the school who never fails a student - EVER. No matter what

the student does or does not do. He told me I should do the same because "the

administration and parents are going to find a way to screw me" - advice I didn't

understand at the time. I'm hoping I can smooth things out with this parent before

a complaint gets sent to the principal. I guess I'll have to wait to have high

standards until I get tenure?

WooHoo!

As Rudi's post illustrates, call messages in the collaborative reflection genre differ

significantly from those in the independent inquiry genre. The length and his use of

narration and commentary are among the obvious differences. Another important difference is that rather than asking for resources or ideas (as in the independent inquiry genre), authors using the collaborative reflection genre instead initiate conversations in which they can share their reactions to a situation (or, in Rudi's case, a set of related situations) while also thinking with others about what it may mean. Rudi used his e-mail to Intern-Net as an opportunity to think about how various incidents in his internship experiences were related to one another. Even without the sarcastic commentary that weaves the four anecdotes together, his grouping and ordering of the incidents, along with the title that he gives to the thread ("I didn't think it could happen to me..."), draws attention to the themes he is emphasizing. The narrative accounts that Rudi shares are provocative, and they soon set a thread in motion.

Linking related anecdotes is one way to invite collaborative reflection on teaching experiences. Another approach to initiating threads in this genre is to begin a call message with a single anecdote, as Lynn does in this post:

> *Today all the staff at my school got an email from the principal informing us that on Friday we would be celebrating Constitution Day. For those that don't know, President Bush apparently chose September 17 as a national holiday: Constitution Day. Since this falls on a Saturday, we are celebrating on Friday. At my school, one of the history teachers has designed something to be read over the PA during every hour. We are all supposed to make sure we have flags hanging in our room and tomorrow we supposed to be receiving some sort of poster to hang up. One thing that is a little weird to me, is that at the beginning of 4th hour, I am supposed to put the Preamble to the Constitution on the overhead and we*

(students and teachers alike) are supposed to stand and recite it together as a class. This feels oddly cult-ish to me! Teachers and students (but teachers especially) are encouraged to wear red, white, and blue also.

Lynn continues her message about Constitution Day by moving away from narration in order to make a few other moves, which I will discuss shortly. But her message—and the thread as a whole—focus on the Constitution Day issue that she raises through the telling of this single anecdote.

In some instances, the anecdotes that teachers share recount events or experiences that, although they occur outside of the school setting, have an impact on their professional work. Consider the anecdote that Michelle shares in initiating the thread "20/20 myth: teachers are underpaid?" Although she embeds into her call message an outline of the premises put forth in an episode of the television show *20/20* (Stossel, 2006), the overall structure of the message is that of an anecdote: a retelling of her experiences watching the show, including her narration of the events of that watching, a description of her reactions as she watched, and commentary about the show and her viewing of it.

This made me so angry! After working another long week (7:00-5:00 days and then taking papers and planning home at night) I settled on my couch Friday night to grade some vocab quizzes (yes still working) and I turn on 20/20 to hear this guy say that it is a myth that teachers are underpaid for their work!

The first argument was that the average teacher salary is $45,000 which I guess might be true, but in my rural district, I'm going to have to work for at least 15

years and get a master's degree to reach that mark. He also said this was $7000

more than the national average...so that makes me think that right now with my

college degree, I make $9,000 less than the average national wage.

The next argument was that this is a 9-month salary...PLEASE! I'm so tired of

people thinking we have a cushy job because we have "summers off." I don't think

they take into consideration that a normal working week is not 40 hours during

the "nine months we're working." Or the fact that we have to keep taking classes

to stay certified (which, last time I checked, I have to pay for...but if this is wrong,

let me know because I don't want to pay for grad school) :). Also, I know I'm

going to have to get some kind of job this summer because after a year of

teaching, I still can't make ends meet (let's thank that year long unpaid internship

for that).

I was so upset after this newscast because it made teachers seem like lazy, money

hungry workers who don't care about kids. And maybe I sound superficial

complaining about money, but it's really about respect. I'm so tired of hearing "do

it for the kids!" I am teaching for the kids, but no one seems to recognize that. I

don't want to find another job that pays more money, I just want to be respected

for the real work I do. With all the bashing we get from test scores and failing

children, I couldn't believe this broadcaster had the audacity to add to the fire by

saying we get paid too much! Anyway, am I being too sensitive? Is it just the end

of the year and I'm worn out? Read the article below and let me know what you

guys think.

Enjoy your weekend! (although my guess is that everyone will plan at least one

lesson or grade one paper on their "free time")

your disgruntled teacher friend, Michelle

Notice that Michelle is telling a story here, first setting the scene and then describing the

events of her embittered evening of TV viewing and talking back to John Stossel, who

hosted the episode of *20/20* that she refers to. Like Rudi, Michelle shares her anecdote as

a way to think through the incident, but also as a way to invite others to consider it with

her.

Contemplating multiple perspectives, examining assumptions, & questioning

what is known. After an initiating anecdote is shared, the collaborative work begins.

The author joins with others who participate in writing the thread in order to reflect

critically upon the anecdote that has been shared. Some of this critical reflection is built

into the initiating message. The commentary that facilitates critical reflection may be

embedded into the anecdote itself, as when Rudi offers sarcastic comments about the lack

of professional regard and the low standards for students that he encounters in some of

his interactions at school, and when Michelle offers counterarguments to the *20/20*

episode's claims even as she outlines the assertions that Stossel made on the show. In

other instances, critical commentary and invitations to collaborative reflection may

follow directly on the heels of the narrated account of events. This is the case in the

"Constitution Day" thread that Lynn initiated. After chronicling the events that inspired her post, Lynn writes,

Is anyone else's school doing anything for this new holiday[, Constitution Day]?

I'm also curious to see if we will do anything at all for Hispanic Heritage Month, Black History Month, Women's History Month, the Anniv. of Pearl Harbor, etc, etc....I' betting we won't do anything like this, as a whole school.

Also, how do you guys feel about being "subversive" (for lack of a better term) as a first year teacher. Personally, I don't support the current administration and their decisions so I have a hard time participating in a patriotic activity (even tho I understand that the flag and constitution can be viewed separate from the Bush administration). Either way, it is a politically charged time what with accusations of racism/classism following Hurricane Katrina, the war in Iraq, high gas prices, a floundering economy. I'm sure I will have students that are uncomfortable just as I am. But, at the same time, I know I have students with siblings or parents overseas and I have kids who are planning to join the military after college...an activity like this may be very important to them...

I guess I'm just curious about your thoughts about any of this: School-sponsored patriotism, Constitution Day, refusing to participate (in anything) as a first year teacher, or any other "rules" you've been handed from above that you may find questionable.

share! share!

The rhetorical moves that Lynn is making here are typical of what happens in the call messages for threads for collaborative reflection. She makes an effort to consider the situation from multiple vantage points: her own, that of students who may appreciate Constitution Day, and the perspective of students who are critical of the possible motives and effects of such a holiday. She acknowledges her own biases and the ways in which they may affect her views. And she invites—even urges—other teachers on the list to think with her, to "share! share!" their perspectives on this specific situation and related broader issues.

These same kinds of critical thinking moves are built into the response messages for collaborative reflection threads. In her response to the Lynn's "Constitution Day" posts, Carrie injects an alternate perspective into the conversation and questions how it may change Lynn's framing of the issues:

> *Just a note...the idea for Constitution Day was actually proposed by Sen. Robert Byrd (D.-WV). Not that it's a big deal (easy mistake)...but I wonder if this changes your opinion of the day itself, since it is actually not the brain child of the Bush Administration?*

Carrie's post is short, but it adds to the conversation and helps Lynn to isolate one factor (who sponsored the bill) and to consider possible connections to her response to the situation. (For the record, Lynn posted again later in the thread and noted that "even if it came from a Democrat I guess it bugs me that the school is requiring it.")

Similar moves—introducing alternate perspectives, drawing attention to assumptions, and questioning conclusions—are evident throughout the response

messages in other inquiry threads. For example, after Rudi shared the four scenes in which he was frustrated with others' responses to him in his role as teacher intern, a few of the other subscribers posted similar anecdotes of their own to continue the thread and agree with Rudi's sense of the situation. In additional posts that followed, however, writers suggested a variety of other possible ways to "read" these kinds of situations. Since this was one of the first threads to open up possibilities for collaborative reflection, I tried to model how to look questioningly at the situation from a variety of vantage points. An excerpt from my contribution to the thread:

> *Is it fair to say that so far, with messages about how teachers/students/parents have treated interns, we've "read" these as situations where interns are being disrespected or undervalued? I think that's how I've been reading them up to this point; I shouldn't speak for anyone else. But I'm also starting to remember that maybe I should swallow some of my own teaching medicine here and try to read things from a number of angles. So...*
>
> *What happens if we also consider other (additional OR alternate) ways of reading these situations? For example, I wonder how much of what goes on is about people not being informed about what interns' responsibilities are? Is it possible that some of the parents/students/teachers really are just trying to figure out how this interning thing works and who's in charge—and to what extent? If that's the case, what could be done to help them be more informed?*

I'm also wondering how much of the behavior that you've witnessed is based out

of others' fears? Teacherly fears about looking bad to

colleagues/students/administration/field instructors; students' fears—about trying

to figure out how to please both you and your mentor teacher (and which is more

important when); students' fears—about ways to escape their parents' reactions to

poor grades; parents' fears—that their kids won't succeed or won't be treated

fairly or will somehow be used as guinea pigs? I'm NOT saying that these fears

are well-founded or that you've done anything to cause any of these fears. NOT

saying that!

But I've been a student for a long, long time (yikes!), and I know that I still find

each new teacher a little bit scary, just because I don't know quite what to expect

of them, and sometimes it takes me more than a semester to figure that out. I've

been a teacher for about a decade now, too, and there are fears that go with that

and with how others—teachers/administrators/students/parents—see me and how

they'll judge the work I do. And now I've been a parent for a few years, and that is

sometimes the scariest of all! The teacher part of me wants to be rational, but the

parent part of me is thinking, "If you do ANYTHING that hurts my baby...!" and

"How do I know I can trust you with my kids?"

. . . . Are there still other ways to read some of these situations?

There's still the possibility that some people are just plain disrespecting and

undervaluing, I know. You'll have to judge in each of your own contexts, since you

are there. But I'm hoping that asking some of these questions will open up a few

more options for ways to respond to these situations.

In the response above, there is an effort on my part to try to open up additional views, to draw attention to the ways that differing students, teachers, and parents might be approaching the situation. In my e-mail, I phrase these possibilities as questions, and I take care to point out that our understanding of the situation needn't be "either/or," that it could instead be that there are multiple "right" ways to understand the circumstances that have been described in this thread.

Whether it was my modeling, a sense that these kinds of moves were "permissible," something else, or a combination of factors (most likely), the Intern-Net teachers began effective use of perspective taking and critical questioning in the remainder of this thread and the other collaborative reflection threads thereafter. A few days after I had posted the long response above, Katie shared her take on the situations that Rudi and others had described:

One other way that I've been thinking about it is this way. That as hard as it is to

acknowledge, sometimes we are the easy target. Let me explain.

In general, I think about what it would be like if we weren't at our placements.

Your teacher would still probably get calls from parents with complaints when

needed and have to deal with them. The parent or whoever else that is calling may

get the negative comments, but it would have a different spin. I mean the problems

would most likely be there, just directed differently.

An example from my experience this year. . . .

In this and the many other collaborative reflection threads that followed, Intern-Net teachers crafted responses to one another in which they challenged assumptions that they and others held, worked to "read" situations from a variety of angles, and took a questioning approach to ideas—old and new.

Making meaning. In collaborative reflection threads, the acts of sharing anecdotes, contemplating multiple perspectives, examining assumptions, and questioning what is known all coalesce toward a broader task that is at the heart of this genre: making meaning. Each of these individual actions is part of the meaning-making process, and together they make possible an enriched understanding of teaching and learning. This understanding is more than cognitive comprehension: it is a multidimensional knowing that involves interconnecting the logics of mind, body, emotion, and experience. In these collaborative reflection threads, teachers weave together telling and retellings of their experiences, of their emotional and physical responses, of their thoughts and beliefs—all in order to co-construct understanding. They work to understand the immediate, particular situation that sparks a given thread, but they also work toward a generalizing understanding—to be able to think about what the anecdotes, questions, and challenges in a thread may mean for their own teaching work as well as in other contexts and situations. Katie, explaining during her interview how she benefits from collaborative reflection threads that begin with others' anecdotes, said, "I take the information and

conceptually transfer it—just like I would from conferences . . . and readings . . . and I apply it to my life as a teacher." Collaborative reflection threads aren't about giving advice or simple answers to the person who wrote the call message. Rather, participation in this genre is a means of constructing knowledge—individual and collective—about the continual process of learning to teach.

The importance of this approach to multidimensional, collaborative knowledge building is evident in the Intern-Net e-mails. A good illustration of the way that complex understandings can emerge through the collaborative reflection genre is the thread "School shooting today in Minnesota." This thread began atypically: instead of starting with an anecdote about an Intern-Net teacher's experience, it began when Katie posted a news alert about a student in Red Lake, Minnesota who had killed relatives, students, a teacher, a security guard, and himself. To frame the brief list of details that she shared, Katie wrote:

> *In case you haven't checked headline news yet, I wanted to alert you to a school shooting that occurred today. . . . I imagine our kids will be concerned about this, so I thought I would let you know.*

Following Katie's post, other teachers wrote in to express shock, horror, and other emotions, as well as to thank Katie for the update. Several of the participants looked to help the list think in general terms about what "we as teachers" could do in response. Riane urged us to "learn from it" and shared lesson ideas she had used; Katie and Lynn shared about how important it is for teachers to keep up with the news in order to make informed decisions in their interactions with students. Some of the writers also shared tips on accessing the news quickly and easily.

Remembering how the news from Columbine and other school shootings had affected me as a young teacher, I wanted to open a conversation with any who might wish to discuss the day's events from a more local or personal perspective. In the evening, I sent this short message to the Intern-Net list:

> *How did the day go with your students today, in light of the shootings in*
>
> *Minnesota?*
>
> *--Leah*

In response to this question, some of the teachers shared anecdotes about how the news had or had not changed the day for them and for their students. Evelina, after noting that there had been little discussion of the event at her internship school, added this commentary:

> *There was hardly any info being passed around my school. But I honestly think*
>
> *that this is a good point about the power of journalism. Remember Columbine?*
>
> *Who doesn't? It was played constantly while everyone sat at home and watched -*
>
> *horrified. It wasn't the first time a school had been shot up, but it was one of the*
>
> *first to be shown to the public. I personally am glad that there isn't a whole lot of*
>
> *talk about the event. That only spurns on followers. –E*

Evelina went beyond the anecdote in this post, moving into opinions about what she thought about media coverage and how it filters into schools. Her post opened a new vein of dialogue in which Intern-Net teachers shared opinions about the news media's approach to the Red Lake tragedy. As is typical in these threads, the participants used their written interchanges to contemplate multiple perspectives, to examine assumptions, and to question. For example, Rudi responded to Evelina in this way:

Interesting point, E...

To a point, I completely agree that minimized student alarm is a good thing. I can't help being a little bit cynical about the news media, however. I realize that post Columbine, post 9/11, post Iraq war, the "death toll" in Minnesota is not as staggering. However, it makes you wonder what the media coverage would have been like if the cameras had captured some great "footage" or if this tragedy had happened at a school in a middle-class white community, instead of one of the poorest Indian reservations in the state. It seems to take away some of the "shock" that corresponded with Columbine.

That said, I am glad it has not been sensationalized in the way Columbine was. It was a sad day when we were told to report anyone who "looked different" for fear of safety concern.

Rudi's response offered a different perspective on the news coverage, one that questioned assumptions about causes and effects of various media approaches to the event. Lynn picked up on and extended some of Rudi's ideas, especially his final comment about the problem of equating difference with danger. She wrote,

I am also bothered that these stories always describe the victim as dressed in black, teased by classmates, and interested in Nazism... maybe that is true, but it seems like that is the new stereotype for "dangerous" students. So if a student has a genuine interest in World War II we should immediately report it? Come on. I had two students spend about 5 minutes of a study hall trying to figure out how to draw a Nazi sign.... not because they are going to blow up the school, but b/c

apparently the geometry of the shape baffled them... I think I'm rambling now, but

my point is simply that I'm annoyed with the media for making these issues so

black and white. The shooter had these characteristics and we are all supposed to

say "oh, well that explains it."

As the thread evolved, the participants continued to explore this theme and share

anecdotes about how they and their students dealt with the news. In an e-mail that took

the thread in a new direction, Sue shared that her students

haven't said a word about the school shooting to me. They were more shaken up

by . . . a local . . girl's kidnapping and murder. Some of my kids grew up with

her. Many of my students were a little worried because that tragedy hit

uncomfortably close to home.

Sue's e-mail post moves the thread from discussion about an event "out there" to a focus

on local connections and meaning. In her message, Sue considers how the particulars of

her local context and situation affect the ways in which she and her students respond to

the news from Red Lake. Up to this point in the thread, most of the teachers have been

considering the meaning of the shooting in Red Lake—focusing specifically on that event

as well as critically interpreting the media coverage of that event, but doing so without

making connections to their own schools. Sue's post, however, helps her and her readers

to start thinking about what the events in Red Lake and the ideas in this thread may have

to do with their own teaching work in diverse educational contexts and situations. For

Sue, the Red Lake event and this thread become an opportunity to think about local

violence and its effect on her own students. Her post prompts Harrison to reflect on his

own local teaching context. In addition to considering his individual teaching situation,

Harrison urges others to think about how his anecdote may be relevant for their teaching. He eloquently connects the themes of school violence, media coverage, and local perspective in his post:

Hey - How about some talk about some good home-grown media coverage?

Maybe some of you that live in [this] area saw that Channel [##]'s top "news story" yesterday was about a fight that occurred at [my high school] during the day. I teach at [High School X] and my second floor room has huge windows that peer out into the front of the school - right where the fight took place. I saw a group of about 200 to 300 students watch a few fights take place on the street that leads to the school. This was right before lunch was over. Imagine trying to teach students while they have a beautiful view of nine cop cars and a news crew right in front of the school - One of our windows doesn't have a blind at all. Later on, during 5th hour, another altercation took place (the one that the news crews so "deftly" caught) where 5 students were arrested.

I've tried my best the past day and a half to turn these incidents into teachable moments. I've talked about proper ways to handle situations, and to make sure that my students knew that they were there at [High School X] because people cared about them and wanted them to feel safe and to learn. Much of the material I'd had planned has been put on the back burner. Mostly I've been trying to instill positive attitudes (while taking on negative issues), but many students are still cynical - probably for good reason.

. . . . Truthfully, no one was injured in the fights - no real blows were even landed.

But [High School X], being an urban school seemed like an ideal site for

sensationalism to take place. I guess my main point is I think Rudi and some

others have a good point. Any school is a good place to discuss with the students

what the perceptions of their school are, and how they might hinder or help them.

I know many a time this year I've been a bit annoyed with family members,

friends, and even fellow student teachers, because after I tell them I'm teaching at

[High School X], they raise an eyebrow and say something to the effect of "that

must be tough, huh?" Our perceptions of our school and of others affect the media

- so don't be so quick to assume that this is something that is outside of ourselves,

and takes place in a far away land like Minnesota - it's an issue that strikes home.

Harrison's last line points to the meaning-making heart of his post and the thread as a

whole: while the events at Red Lake and media's role there may seem far away, there are

underlying issues that strike close to home, and it's critical that teachers and students

look with eyes to see them. Thinking together with other teachers through the course of

this thread—through the multidimensional activities of sharing emotions, anecdotes,

challenges, questions, and insights—allows the Intern-Net teachers to co-construct

particular kinds of meaning. They are collaboratively building an enriched understanding

of connections between the world and their classrooms, critically constructing both

individual and collective knowledge about how best to interact with their students.

This meaning-making process is ongoing, and the knowledge that teachers co-

construct through the collaborative reflection genre cannot be wrapped in a tidy package

when a thread wends its way to a close. Harrison explained it when I asked about his

participation in another collaborative reflection thread. He indicated that he was not

disappointed that he didn't receive a clear-cut answer to the questions he posed; instead,

he said, "I don't think that I really ever expected a direct answer." The motive for

engaging in collaborative reflection is about journeying through ideas together. Katie

recognized this in her posts in this genre, frequently signing off with a variation on this

phrase:

> *Please talk back to this issue and me. . . . Thanks for being my thinking partners.*

Harrison, in his interview, expressed a similar sentiment, stating that he participated in

these kinds of threads because he "wanted other people's viewpoints, their ideologies. . . .

The conversation is what mattered—the chance to think out loud, know what other

people said. That's the collaborative reflection thing."

Content that Relates to Teachers' Roles and Responsibilities

The collaborative reflection genre, like the independent inquiry genre, lends itself

to a variety of topics. Yet the threads in this genre are also linked by a common theme:

what it means to be an English teacher, both inside and outside the classroom.

As might be expected, many of the collaborative reflection threads that emerged

since the inception of the Intern-Net list were focused on teachers' roles and

responsibilities within their classrooms. Together, the Intern-Net teachers thought

through issues tied directly to their disciplinary home in the English language arts,

conversing together about the place of citation makers in their curriculum and instruction,

about their responsibilities in teaching literature with religious themes, about their roles

in responding to extracurricular writing. They reflected together about interactions with

students (as in the thread "12 year old tells Steve to f#&@ himself") and about their need

to be kept informed about students' well-being by guidance counselors (e.g., in "A teacher's right to know"). Being—and feeling—prepared for the first days of the school year, for the pre-prom "be safe" speech, and for other routine events was considered in threads such as "That pit in your stomach" and "End of the year thoughts." The structure of schools, school days, and schooling was addressed in threads about trimesters and about differentiated instruction.

While some may imagine teaching as an apolitical activity, the Intern-Net teachers found it otherwise, and the political dimensions of their teaching roles and responsibilities were foregrounded in many of the threads. Conversations about external pressures on their work were especially likely to take a political bent. Intern-Net teachers wrote to one another about administrative mandates, parental pressures, and the self-censorship that they sometimes felt was necessary to keep their jobs and good standing. Standardized tests—especially as they have been used and abused in this No Child Left Behind era—were a hot topic of conversation in threads such as "Teaching to the test," "MEAPed Out"[35] "Bonuses tied to test scores," and "[Kylene] Beers on the testing craze." In these threads and others like them, teachers critically evaluated the influence of politicians and policymakers on their work.

Another popular topic was conversation about the many interactions that occupy teachers' time outside of the classroom. In the thread "Reflecting and wondering" (in which Intern-Net subscribers pondered the qualities of good teachers), Sue wrote,

I think that people looking at our career from the outside see a teacher alone with

a group of students. What people don't see is: administrators, people observing

---

[35] MEAP: Michigan Educational Assessment Program, the name of Michigan's state standardized test for elementary and secondary students.

our practice (I have a woman that comes in WEEKLY), phone calls, paperwork,

teaming, meetings, professional growth, supervisions, clubs, and many more

things I am missing.

Discussions tended to intertwine emotional response with anecdotal accounts, as when

Ashlyn related in the thread "First year surprises" that she felt humiliated, appalled,

shaken, and disenchanted by a particular incident with her official mentor. While there

were mentions of inspiring mentors, colleagues, and supervisors, this type of thread was

more likely to elicit discussion about interactions and relationships that were puzzling,

challenging, frustrating, or even discouraging. The tenor of these conversations was

professional—if at times indignant. Non-teachers' perceptions of and attitudes toward

teachers were an ongoing concern. Sometimes this surfaced in critiques, as in the many

threads about media portrayals of educators (e.g., "New [TV] show Teachers," "School

shooting today in Minnesota," and "20/20 myth: teachers are underpaid?"). In other

instances, conversations sought to be more proactive than reactive, as when Marie

initiated the thread "A positive note" in this way:

> *Positive recognition in our schools seems quite secondary to public/political*
>
> *complaints in the media. In what ways can we and our schools share positives*
>
> *with the community?*

> *Here's one positive: I found out that Michelle had a student nominate her for*
>
> *PBS's "cool teacher" and they won for the month of May! Congratulations*
>
> *Michelle!!*

This message inspired Mariah to share some good news from her school, as well as to invite others to reflect on the positives in their work:

> *What are the other positives in your schools? And Marie, what a great topic to start a conversation about. This feels really good!*

As this thread illustrates, the collaborative reflection genre threads are invitations to reflect together on the many complexities of teaching—whether they be challenging, rewarding, or (as in many cases), a complicated mixture of challenge, reward, and much more.

Appeals to Shared Feelings

As I discussed previously, references to physical and emotional feelings are widespread in the collaborative reflection genre. In their e-mails to the list, Intern-Net teachers mention numerous feeling words: tired, afraid, guilty, cynical, bothered, annoyed, impressed, disturbed, uncomfortable, sad, frustrated, fired-up, amazed, upset, angry, disgruntled, ticked off, lost, pressured, and inspired.

While these feelings are important topically and thematically, the naming of feelings—and the fact that they are shared—is also an important means for participants to make persuasive appeals. These appeals are used by those who initiate the collaborative reflection threads to encourage others to enter into the written conversations. In the call messages, appeals to physical and emotional feelings demonstrate that it is "permissible" to talk about these things, that the expertise required to enter the conversation may simply be based on being able to relate to or empathize with the writers' feelings. Likewise, teachers who write response messages in these threads make appeals to shared feelings in order to show that they are connecting with the call message, to demonstrate that they can

respond both knowledgably and supportively to the feelings and ideas expressed in the thread. It is as though identifying a shared feeling is a pass into a conversation that is also about events, ideas, politics, ideologies, and the like. For example, early in the internship year, Drea initiated a thread that she titled "I'm tired." She began with these lines:

I'm not sure if anyone else is feeling this way but, I'm tired. . . .

She went on to describe her physical and emotional exhaustion with the internship, and she worried about what these feelings might mean and what to do about them.

I feel awful that I feel this way. I know that my attitude will reflect in my lessons, and I'm worried that I will lose my students' motivation that I worked so hard to achieve.

While discussing feelings might seem like a risky or taboo thing to do in North American workplace culture, doing so within collaborative reflection threads on the discussion list serves as a conversational touchstone. References to commonly held feelings are starting points that foster further conversation about the kinds of recurring situations that spark such feelings. The Intern-Net teachers may find themselves in differing circumstances, but they can relate to each others' feelings and extend their conversations from there. In threads where appeals to physical and emotional feelings figured prominently in the initial call messages, the other teachers' written responses frequently include references to connected feelings. In the "I'm tired" thread, for example, Lynn began her response by connecting her feelings with those that Drea had expressed:

Thanks for sending that email! I feel the same way. . . .

Rachel followed by sharing similar sentiments:

I am SO GLAD that I am not the only one who feels this way. . . . Thanks for

admitting your feelings, because it prompted me to own up to and be honest about

mine.

In these e-mails as wells as others in the thread, naming common feelings is only a start

to the conversation. Doing so, as Rachel pointed out at the close of her message that is

excerpted above, makes it possible for the teachers to look for other commonalities in

what they are experiencing, to work together to construct understandings that will

benefit them individually as well as collectively. Drea made a similar point in an e-mail

that she posted near the end of the thread:

It's so funny how different we all are as teachers, how different we are as people,

and how different our schools are but, we still are able to share the same feelings.

This is very helpful and I'm glad we're relatively comfortable with each other and

able to share our feelings.

Being able to share our feelings has given me the opportunity to reflect on myself

as an intern teacher but, also as a person.

Drea continued her message by articulating some of the things that the collaborative work

of the thread had helped her to understand. When I interviewed her—a few years after

she participated in this thread—she reiterated the importance of sharing feelings in this

kind of thread. Remembering the "I'm tired" conversation, she said,

It felt so good that other people felt the same way. . . . I remember that really

helping. I remember that actual day, and how it felt to check those e-mails and

get those responses; I went on there 5 or 6 times that day.

The inclusion of feelings in the thread was an integral part of the conversation for Drea.

It allowed her to feel connected with others and also, as a result, to engage in the

meaning-making that ultimately emerged through this conversation. Other teachers that I

interviewed also emphasized the importance of appealing to common feelings in the

collaborative reflection threads. In her interview, Sue explained why, when she was

suddenly asked to double her teaching and preparation load to cover the classes of an

injured colleague, she shared her feelings about being overwhelmed:

> I was just searching for anybody to sympathize, empathize, support—anything.
>
> Rereading [that thread now,] it refreshed how frustrating it was, doing all that
>
> work. Since I was so new and nobody really knew me, there wasn't really much
>
> support at school. That's why I was like, 'MUST write to Intern-Net.'"

For Sue and others, appeals to shared feelings were a starting point. These appeals made

it possible to open discussions, to make connections, to share anecdotes, and to make

more holistic meaning of their situations in an environment that felt welcoming,

understanding, nonjudgmental, and inclusive.

Patterns in Structure, Style, and Diction

As with other genres, there are patterns in the forms that typical collaborative

reflection threads take. These patterns of form help to signal readers and writers about

the kinds of interacting texts, contexts, and actions that are likely to emerge through these

threads. Some of the most noticeable formal patterns include trends in the structure,

style, and diction that are typical of threads in this genre.

Structure. In the collaborative reflection genre, messages within threads are

connected to one another much like a linked chain necklace. An initial posting, or call

message, begins the chain, and it is followed by messages that build successively, one after another. This linking and building occurs in the response messages in at least two ways. The first is when a teacher copies the most recent message in a thread into his or her own post. In most cases, this happens at the end of the new message when the writer uses the "reply" function and has the e-mail client set to automatically include a copy of the message being responded to. In some cases, this copying is a more conscious decision and happens when a writer manually copies the previous message (or an excerpt from that message) and pastes it somewhere within the new post to emphasize that the two are connected.

The second way that those who write response messages link to preceding messages in a thread is by integrating brief references to the message(s) to which they aim to connect. To do this quickly and efficiently, the teacher writing the new post may refer to the author of the earlier post by name, quote a phrase from the earlier post, allude to a theme or idea from that post, or combine the aforementioned approaches. In a thread where numerous messages build upon each other in succession, it is possible to trace something like a passing of the baton as each message is connected to the next. For example, in the thread "20/20 myth: teachers are underpaid," Michelle (as you may recall) shares an anecdote about the aggravation she experienced in watching John Stossel in an episode of *20/20*. Twelve messages follow her post, and each new message is linked to the one that precedes it. Katie is the first to reply, and she opens her message by making this connection:

> *You are not alone in being royally ticked off about this, Michelle. . . . The line that got me fired [up] was this. . . .*

Michelle replies in the next message, indicating that she is responding directly and extending the conversation:

> *Thanks Katie! The chemists, physical therapists, etc line made me angry too because. . . .*

After Katie responds again and includes a question to prompt further conversation, Athena adds her voice to the conversation while also affirming what the others have written:

> *Amen! I stumbled across the stupid show as well. I am royally upset about it too. . . . . I am with you both. . . .*

The chain continues when Lynn posts a message that acknowledges the criticisms of the show that have been posted up to this point in the thread, while also suggesting another way to look at the issue:

> *One "positive" to **all of this** (well, it's really a mental mind game) is to tell yourself. . .* [emphasis added]

The messages that follow continue to be linked in similar ways. Eventually, Harrison enters the thread and sends the conversation in a new direction. Instead of agreeing with all who have posted before him, he writes a counterargument in a message with the new subject line "Stossel's advocate," which plays on the phrase "devil's advocate" and alludes to the fact that Stossel has been demonized in the preceding posts. Although Harrison's approach turns the thread in a new and unexpected direction, he is careful to show that his post is sparked by what has come before:

> *Of course I think I'm underpaid. I'll be in debt probably until I die.*

But, I thought this argument was getting a little one-sided, so I figured I would

offer a counter-argument . . .

At this point in the thread, additional teachers write in, provoked by Harrison's argument and anecdotes to share their perspectives on the issue. The chain link pattern of references to preceding messages continues. Steve, whose post is next in line, explains that he agrees with some aspects of Harrison's argument and disagrees with others:

I really like what Harrison said about his side of the argument, but I disagree

with the fact that. . . .

Then, as occasionally happens in the collaborative reflection genre, a post appears in which the author links not only to the most recent message, but also to others that have preceded it. In his e-mail to the list, Dan acknowledges what Steve has written. But he also signals that he is responding directly and indirectly to others who have participated in the thread, and that he is aligning his argument with Harrison's. He opens this way:

To the underpaid and overworked—

Dan's salutation addresses all who have contributed to the thread so far by encapsulating the main arguments that have been presented, using them as labels that name and address his readers. He then follows with other lines that connect his writing with the others:

*. . . . Firstly, I'd like to comment on how clever **Har's email subject line** was.*

*Secondly, **does anyone know**. . . .* [emphasis added]

By addressing his comments in ways that include all who have to this point participated through their writing, Dan links back to the first messages in the thread, bringing the chain full circle and creating what might be called a "closed" thread. This closing of the circle is not uncommon in the collaborative reflection genre (and is often done by the

person who opened the thread), but it is also optional. In many cases, threads link one message after another until conversation fades out. Such threads could be referred to as "open" threads.

Style. As I observed earlier, messages in the collaborative reflection genre are generally longer and more prosaic than those in the independent inquiry genre. Two other stylistic traits are also noteworthy. Interestingly, both of these traits serve the same purpose, which is to enable authors to express qualified disagreement with other Intern-Net teachers.

One of the stylistic tools for expressing this qualified disagreement is the use of compound and compound-complex sentences in which two clauses are joined (respectively) with the conjunction *but* or with conjunctive adverbs that show contrast (e.g., *however*). The opening line of Steve's contribution to the "20/20 myth: teachers are unpaid?" thread bears repeating here as an example of the typical structure of such sentences:

> *I really like what Harrison said about his side of the argument, but I disagree*
> *with the fact that. . . .*

Expressing disagreement through these types of sentences is fairly conventional in the collaborative reflection threads (as well as in many other genres). However, there is another stylistic tool that is frequently put to use in this genre in order to facilitate the expression of qualified disagreement—a tool that is perhaps used less frequently elsewhere and therefore more interesting to examine here.

In many of the collaborative reflection threads where Intern-Net teachers engage in disagreement or debate, they also include small talk, jokes that others on the list will

understand because of their insider status, self-deprecating humor, and complimentary remarks about one another's ideas. While these conversational techniques are not themselves used to convey the disagreements that run through collaborative reflection threads, they help to make way for teachers to air differences of opinion. The humor, small talk, and compliments help to show that any disagreements are limited in extent— that the participants still value each other, want to work collaboratively together, and hope that their remarks will not cause social difficulties for them within the group.

Further analysis of the "20/20 myth" thread shows how these stylistic techniques—especially humor—can function. When Harrison injects his devil's advocate counterargument into the thread, he uses a play on words in his subject line, referring to himself as "Stossel's advocate." After this humorous opening, Harrison is fairly direct with his counterargument, sharing anecdotes about a few dismal teachers with whom he has the misfortune of working—such as one who

> *leaves their . . . class alone while they go out the back door to sit in their truck*
>
> *and smoke cigarettes and talk on their cell phone,*

Having made his point rather forcefully, Harrison then lightens the mood of his post with comic imagery and expressions:

> *Do you think these teachers are underpaid? I would say that teachers like this*
>
> *make up a pretty clown-sized portion of the makeup at my school. So, as we*
>
> *advocate for ourselves, make sure to keep in mind the teacher next door in room*
>
> *###.*

Harrison reinforces the stylistic aim of his humor with some qualifying remarks—also presented in a casual, conversational style:

By the way, I know this is a shitty argument because. . . .

The overall effect of the message is that Harrison expresses dissent, but he does so using stylistic techniques that indicate he wants to win the others to his position rather than alienating them.

Humor plays a similar role in Dan's post, which falls in with the minority opinion in the "20/20 myth" thread. As you may recall, Dan opened his message with the greeting, "To the underpaid and overworked." An excerpt from the remainder of his e-mail on the subject shows that he, too, employs humor as he makes his argument:

Every time I tell someone what I do they make a face like they have just sucked on a lemon soaked in turpentine, and say, "I would never do that!" My own father even said, "Don't you just want to smack all those little twerps" (and he's a pretty gentle man). In fact, my brother who spends his days and sometimes nights as a narcotics officer said after speaking to my class about his job, "I have only two words for you: Get out!"

Now, I realize that this is all anecdotal and coming from members of my family (no gene-pool jokes necessary), but does a screwball like Stossel really represent what the people think?

I hope not. I once saw him argue that we don't need the FAA because the "market" would magically take care of issues like safety and air-traffic control.

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I know this: There is not a single candidate for California governor, Republican

or Democrat--or porn star (it's true, check the ballot) campaigning on reducing

teacher's wages, or giving less money to schools.

Sleep well teachers. . . . you do work no one else wants to—for less money than

most would take.

The overall tone of the post is humorous. But it also makes a serious point, and by

getting his readers to laugh, Dan persuades us to keep reading and to consider his case.

   Diction. One final pattern of textual form that merits discussion is the use of

diction. In the collaborative reflection threads, patterns in diction mark rhetorical moves

and attitudes that are key to the genre.

   The pronouns that teachers use in the collaborative reflections threads are

matched to the purpose of this genre: to work <u>with</u> others to think through experiences

and events in order to better understand and make meaning of them. When teachers share

anecdotes and interpretations of their experiences, they rely on first person pronouns.

Initially, as they relate what is unique about their situations, they choose singular

pronouns: "Here's what happened to *me*"; "Here's how *I* feel and what *I* think." But as

the threads progress and teachers began to identify connections across their feelings,

experiences, ideas, and interpretations, the plural first person pronouns become more

prevalent: "These are situations that happened to *us*; *we* could think about them in these

ways." The use of the second person *you* is rare, as these threads are not primarily about

giving advice, pointing others to resources they should explore off-list, or making

suggestions to anyone about "what you should do." When the pronoun *you* does appear,

it is typically to ask "What do you think?" or to acknowledge the value of others' contributions by saying "Thank you."

A related pattern also underscores what collaborative reflection threads are (and are not) intended to accomplish. Teachers thank others for thinking with them—but there is no mention of *answers*, *solutions*, or *advice*. Instead, writers acknowledge each others' *responses* and *replies*, frequently using phrases such as "Thanks for the replies" and "Thanks for the responses." In one of her posts to a collaborative reflection thread, Katie wrote, "Thank you so much for replying. . . . It's good to hear your perspective." Her final comment reinforces the idea that these threads are about the consideration and development of perspectives, rather than quick fixes to problems.

One additional pattern that is common in the diction of the collaborative reflection genre also emphasizes that these threads are not about definitive solutions, answers, or final words. In these threads, teachers frequently use what Martha Kolln (2007) refers to as *hedging terms*. These include words like *perhaps*, *possibly*, *seem*, *might*, *may*, and *could*, and their use suggests to readers that the ideas an author is presenting are tentative and are open to debate or revision. They are a useful way for writers to indicate that they are willing to consider others' perspectives. As Kolln explains, hedging terms send a message from writers to readers:

> I don't want you, the reader, to be stopped by a bold statement when it may not be valid in your case. And I certainly don't want you to lose confidence in my authority to write on this topic. (p. 121)

The overall effect of these hedging terms is not to undercut the credibility of the author. Instead, as George Dillon points out, hedges alert readers that the writer is "modest,

careful" (as cited in Kolln, 2007, p. 121) and can be trusted to engage in thoughtful

discussion and debate. By regularly using hedging terms in the collaborative reflection

threads, Intern-Net teachers indicate to one another that they are willing to listen to one

another, to consider and be influenced by each other's ideas as they reflect together on

their teaching lives.

Participation Shaped by Interacting Contexts of Technologies, Situations, Cultures,
and Genres

As with the independent inquiry genre, participation in the collaborative reflection

genre is both facilitated and limited by online communication technologies (OCTs).

Multiple factors influence who participates, how often, and in what ways. Subscribers

are more likely to participate in both genres when they have a high-speed internet

connection, access to a computer workstation that is convenient and private, and

discussion list and e-mail client configurations that enable them to quickly and easily

read and write messages and search the archives. I addressed these factors in some detail

in relation to the independent inquiry genre, and since the overlaps with the collaborative

reflection genre are substantial, I will not discuss them here. However, there is a related

factor, which I did not discuss at length earlier, that also pertains to both genres and that I

take up now: the ways in which participation is shaped by interacting contexts of

technologies, cultures, situations, and genres.

To help explain how these four contexts interact, I will reiterate one element in

the context of technologies and show how it links, in turn, to the contexts of cultures,

situations, and genres. As readers may recall, I as owner set the Intern-Net listserv to

"Subscription by Owner" so that I could limit participation to a group of secondary

English teacher interns who had studied together as undergraduates, continued to take courses together during their internships, and then eventually dispersed to teaching jobs at schools across the United States and overseas.[36] (Those who subscribed to the Intern-Net list were not required to do so; there was no university "credit" for writing or reading the list e-mails.) Since I elected not to enroll any other subscribers, no professors, administrators, mentor teachers, or others who would supervise and evaluate the interns were privy to the conversations. Configuring the Intern-Net list in this way affected the culture of the list, which in turn affected the ways in which teachers participated in collaborative reflection threads.

Limiting subscriptions to Intern-Net as I did meant that those who chose to subscribe were likely to have had several English and English Education courses together. This in turn meant that the subscribers had many shared educational experiences (many of the same courses, professors, texts, assignments), and it also meant that to some extent, they knew (or at least knew of) the other Intern-Net subscribers. In the nine interviews I conducted, teachers consistently pointed to these as two important factors that influenced their participation in the collaborative reflection threads.

One advantage the interviewees emphasized was that their common educational backgrounds made it possible for them to share about experiences and interpretations without having to "explain everything" about how they had arrived at particular conclusions or developed certain perspectives. Katie put it this way:

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[36] Had I decided to do so, I could instead have set subscriptions to the "Open" option so that anyone anywhere who wished to subscribe could sign up for the list without any intervention on my part. During the internship year, one person who was unknown to anyone on the Intern-Net list did e-mail me and ask that I as owner subscribe him to the list. Since he was not a member of this English Education cohort, I denied his request.

Context, I think, is huge. I have felt more at liberty to post to this listserv [than

other teacher lists] because I don't have to provide as much context. . . . I think

that's because we came from the same cohort and know each other individually.

Sue offered more specific insight about how sharing common educational experiences

has affected her participation in collaborative reflection threads now that she is in her

second year of teaching:

Here in my school there are so many colleges represented [among the faculty] and

they all have such different backgrounds in how they teach English. . . . To be

able to talk with people [through the Intern-Net list] and not have to take the time

to explain what a [theory, methods, or research] book is about is helpful. . . . It's a

comfort zone. And, we have the same jargon and terminology. . . . At my school,

there were 7 new English teachers my first year, and it took a while to figure out

who I could trust or who had the same philosophies of teaching English as me.

As Sue observed, the shared educational background of the Intern-Net subscribers means

that in collaborative reflection threads on this list, teachers can assume others are (at the

very least) familiar with particular philosophies and perspectives on teaching English,

and—in many cases—that most subscribers are in agreement on major tenets regarding

the teaching of English. Having shared educational experiences enables a shortcut into

the collaborative reflection threads, as ideas that would otherwise need to be explained

and defended are already known and accepted by many in the group. As a result, the

collaborative reflection threads on the Intern-Net list may contain less talk about

perspectival backgrounds than might be found in threads in this genre on lists in which

the participants come from more diverse educational backgrounds.

Over time, the shortcutting advantages of this shared educational background have to some degree been mitigated by at least two events: (1) the subscribers have found teaching positions in settings that are highly varied and (2) they have continued their formal graduate education in diverse settings. Both of these events mean that the subscribers are being exposed to a wide range of educational perspectives and experiences. Steve explained, during his interview, what this has meant for his outlook on teaching:

> My ideals have changed—now that I have a real job, but also because of where I'm working. [The university we attended as undergraduates] is fairly liberal. At my school, there have been some people I've worked with who are diehard right wing, and they bring up some decent points about things. . . . It was a little more one-sided at [the university], and now, I hear educated people making other arguments. ·

Like Steve, Sue found her ideas changing as she adjusted to her position as a teacher. However, her reasons for doing so differed slightly from Steve's:

> In the first year, I was more brazen. I had my ideas and was going to do them. But now I'm more in line with my district and what is expected there. By the second year, if you're going to stay with the school and get tenure, you have to align more with the school than the university. You can still have your own ideas, but it's partially learning the politics.

Sue, Steve, and the other subscribers have, over time, been introduced to a variety of new ideas. Many have reconsidered perspectives and ideals that they may have embraced or rejected during their undergraduate years. As a result, they may now have to do more

explaining of their perspectives in order to participate productively in the collaborative reflection threads. Some subscribers may find this need for additional explanation places too much a burden on their time and may eventually participate in such threads less frequently.

In addition to emphasizing the ways in which their shared (and now diverging) educational experiences have shaped their participation in the collaborative reflection threads, the teachers I interviewed also highlighted the ways in which their participation has been shaped by knowing the others in the cohort. As Drea pointed out, "All of us on the listserv had classes together from our sophomore year—we had relationships. That was pretty important."

In many instances, these relationships enhanced participation in the collaborative reflection threads. Katie, for example, reflected during her interview on her participation in a thread in which she felt somewhat "vulnerable" because she shared an anecdote in which she wrote "with a critical eye to [her] own practice." Katie suggested that "knowing the people" on the Intern-Net list gave her a sense of how her message would be received. "If I didn't feel like I already had respect, I never would have posted that," she said. Other teachers shared this sentiment. Athena observed that "having been in class together can be a great thing" for fostering list conversations, and Harrison claimed, "If the 36 of us saw each other tomorrow, we'd all go crazy. It would still feel the same: a collaboration of really good teachers."

While having relationships that extend back to the undergraduate years can facilitate participation in the collaborative reflection threads, it can also, at times, be an impediment to such conversations. One of the teachers I interviewed noted that

occasionally, she refrained from sharing an alternate view on particular issues because she felt that some on the list had been hostile to her views when those same issues had been discussed in undergraduate courses. Others felt that at times during their undergraduate years they hadn't "fit in" with certain social groups that formed within the cohort; one said she held back when she felt that a conversation on the list belonged to a particular social group. She reasoned, "I felt like I would have been butting in if I were to respond." In these instances, the cultural context of Intern-Net (which was in part determined by the technical configuration of the listserv settings) had a dampening effect on teachers' written participation in some of the collaborative reflection threads.

Aspects of the context of situations had similar positive and negative effects on the threads in this genre. Near the end of their internship year and into the summer that followed, the subscribers found themselves in the situation of competing with each other for jobs. Some of the teachers noted in their interview conversations with me that during their job searches, they felt a need to distance themselves from the list in order to stay competitive. And because of a variety of other situations, securing jobs didn't necessarily increase these teachers' willingness to write posts in the collaborative reflection genre. For example, some of the teachers maintained close friendships with other teachers from the cohort, and in these cases, discussions about teaching tended to occur off-list. I learned during my interviews that even though Phoebe and Dan rarely posted to Intern-Net after they graduated, they continued to talk with each other and with Harrison about their teaching experiences (by phone, through e-mail and MySpace, etc.). In fact, Harrison flew cross-country to meet the others during one of his breaks, and he and Dan visited Phoebe's classroom and observed her teaching. This group of teachers

found ways other than Intern-Net to participate in collaborative, reflective conversations about their teaching. In addition to talking with each other, they also developed relationships with other teachers from their schools. Harrison commented in his interview:

> The professional relationships and collaboration at our schools are starting to kick in, and we don't need Intern-Net so much. All my good friends are teachers. . . .
>
> We talk about teaching. The more we talk offline, the less we talk online.

Not participating in the collaborative reflection threads on Intern-Net didn't necessarily mean that Harrison or the others were missing out. Instead, it was a result of a positive situation: they'd found other venues that enabled similar types of activity.

Other situations also resulted in some teachers posting less frequently to the list. Some of the teachers found themselves working together in the same schools or districts, sharing housing, or taking graduate courses together. Several of these teachers noted that at times, they were less likely to post in collaborative reflection threads because they could talk in person with an Intern-Net teacher about the issues that they might otherwise have written about. At other times, these same teachers censored themselves because they worried about the impressions that their Intern-Net posts might make on the subscribers they saw day to day (or on those who they might work with in the future, if others from the list were to fill openings at their schools). One interviewee who admitted to some of this type of self-censorship pointed out that collaborative reflection involves "questioning your teaching" and noted she thought it risky to give the appearance of "always questioning your teaching." Another concurred, noting that for her, the perceived risk of appearing inept or unprofessional to those she regularly encountered

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off-list was what suppressed her written participation in certain collaborative reflection threads.

So far I have discussed how this teaching cohort's shared culture, as well as particular situations connected to participants' off-list lives, had an effect on the subscribers' participation in the collaborative reflection genre. It is important to remember that both these factors—the contexts of culture and of situation—were directly affected by the context of technologies and the decision to limit participation to this cohort through the "Subscription by Owner" setting. Likewise, this technical setting also played another role in shaping the collaborative reflection threads that developed on the list. The "Subscription by Owner" setting meant that I could limit enrollment to those English majors in the department's undergraduate programs whose studies prepared them to teach in secondary schools. The Intern-Net subscribers, in addition to belonging to this specific English cohort and its culture, are therefore also part of the larger teaching community and culture. As members of this broader community and culture, they have expectations about what teachers ought to be like—what values they ought to embrace or reject, what actions they should take or avoid, and so on.

In some cases, the teachers' sense about their roles and how they ought to enact or perform them had the effect of fostering regular and in-depth participation in the collaborative reflection threads. Katie, for example, told me that she sees participation in these threads as a way to practice being—and presenting herself as—a teacher who is reflective and thinks critically. Her perceptions about the characteristics and activities of good teachers help to encourage her participation in the collaborative reflection genre. However, other participants held contrasting ideals for teachers, and these had the

opposite effect on subscribers' willingness to write in collaborative reflection threads.

Some of the teachers told me that they felt pressure after they'd finished their internship

year to show that they fully knew what they were doing—to demonstrate (by not publicly

asking questions or admitting to facing challenges in their work) that they were "highly

qualified." This pressure developed in part from their experiences in schools, where they

felt that there would be negative consequences for admitting that they had questions or

were still learning about teaching—that they would be "punished" for what they didn't

know instead of rewarded for what they were learning. Whether or not it was intentional

on the part of the schools, the message these teachers were getting was that ideally,

teachers will show others that they have the answers. While these teachers weren't

willing to abandon collaborative and reflective work, they found it less risky to have

these kinds of conversations in groups that were smaller, more private, and self-selected.

One teacher explained,

> There's not a single one of those people [on Intern-Net] that I dislike, but there's
>
> still—like, you don't want to open up to 35 other people. I've never had a whole
>
> lot of trouble doing that, but I don't want to burden them with my stuff and have
>
> them be like,
>
> "Why is this [person] writing to us?"

Even though the Intern-Net community is small, it can still seem like a fairly large and

perhaps even "impersonal" audience (as one interviewee described it) for the activity of

reflection. For some, a venue of this size is less than ideal for discussing teaching

questions, challenges, fears, and the like. A second teacher accounted for her hesitance to

write in the collaborative reflection threads in this way:

For me it hits a nerve, and I didn't want to put myself out there in a vulnerable way. . . . If it were just three people . . . but in a group like that, no. . . . There are lots of problems I would love to talk to teachers about, but I want to select the people I talk to about it.

While the teacher I've quoted above was hesitant to use the collaborative reflection genre on the discussion list, it is important to note that she didn't reject the broader idea of collaborative reflection. In fact, her participation in the Intern-Net list was for her a catalyst into other off-list opportunities for collaborative reflection. She and three of the other Intern-Net teachers formed a small group expressly for the purpose of reflecting together. They used a different online tool, NiceNet, to post password-protected narrative reflections on their teaching work. They responded in writing to each others' posts and used questions, connections, and additional anecdotes and commentaries so that together they could make meaning of their experiences. In essence, they employed a related (but distinct) genre for collaborative reflection, one that they could use in addition to or in place of the Intern-Net collaborative reflection threads.

In this segment of my analysis, I have attempted to demonstrate that the contexts of technologies, situations, cultures, and genres interacted in complex ways that influenced the Intern-Net teachers' shaping and use of the discussion list genre for collaborative reflection. It may surprise some readers that I have not been highly technical in my arguments about the importance of technologies for shaping participation in this genre. Indeed, the only technical item I have considered in this portion of my analysis is the decision to set the listserv to "Subscription by Owner" (vs. "Subscription: Open"). A crucial point, however, is made by giving in-depth attention to the effects of

this single "small" technical decision. The technical configurations of an e-mail discussion list may seem like minutiae that are irrelevant to consideration about how teachers may use such a list (for reflection, inquiry, or any other activity). Yet the online conversations—what gets talked about, by whom, how, and even the genres through which the conversations are accomplished—are shaped in significant ways by "minor" technical decisions that are made behind the scenes, unseen or forgotten before the written talk really begins. Those who would consider establishing a discussion list (or other online forum) in the hopes of fostering collaborative reflection, independent inquiry, or other types of teacher learning would do well to consider carefully the significant ways in which "little" decisions will affect contexts of technologies—and, in turn, influence the genred conversations that will follow.

Genres for Collaborative Inquiry & Independent Reflection

Having explored in detail the nature of the two genres for reflection and inquiry that are most prominent on the Intern-Net list, I now turn my attention to two genres that are interesting because they occur so infrequently. It is important not only to study what happens on the list, but also to consider what doesn't happen. For these two genres, independent reflection and collaborative inquiry, I shift away from describing the nature of the typical threads (which would be problematic, since such threads are rare) and instead focus on what their near-absence may reveal about the workings and purposes of teachers' participation in the Intern-Net list.

Early in this chapter I described the processes that I used to sort messages into threads and then to sort threads into genres. I noted that in addition to distinguishing

genres by the actions they were used to achieve (reflection, inquiry, or other), I also considered the locus of that action (either individual or collaborative) and the corresponding roles that teachers took as participants in that action. Using this model, I predicted that the discussion list should be able to support at least four genres for teacher learning: independent inquiry, collaborative reflection, collaborative inquiry, and independent reflection.

As I sorted the reflection and inquiry threads into these four categories, however, I began to feel a bit like an astronomer involved in the search for the hypothetical Planet X: the models may predict that certain unseen objects will be there, but observation of reality suggests otherwise. As I sorted the threads by genre, I found many, many examples of threads in the independent inquiry and collaborative reflection categories. But where were the threads that I had anticipated I would classify in the two other genres? I reviewed the threads again, wondering whether I had missed something. Then I returned to review the model that had guided my coding, as well as the definition for genre that was the basis for my approach. Soon, it became apparent why the collaborative inquiry and independent reflection threads had "gone missing."

While the model predicted four genres for reflection and inquiry that <u>could</u> be used on the e-mail discussion list, it could not predict which of these genres <u>would</u> be used. The possible genres were determined by participants' potential actions and independent or collaborative roles. But the teachers' decisions about whether and how to use each genre—that is, to take particular rhetorical actions—were influenced by the interacting contexts of culture, situation, technologies, and genres. Since each "genre exists through people's individual actions at the nexus of [these] contexts" (A. Devitt,

2004, p. 31), the contexts play a significant part in determining which genres teachers select as most useful to their purposes as participants in the Intern-Net forum.

An illustration pertaining to each of these two genres may help to clarify my point here. In the case of the independent reflection genre that I had predicted as one option Intern-Net teachers might use, I watched for threads in which teachers wrote messages sharing about their own experiences and then used their writing (within initial or subsequent posts) to try to better understand their own individuated experiences—without having others on the list step alongside them in their interpreting and meaning-making endeavors. I did not find any such threads, and in retrospect, it is no surprise. The primary purpose of a discussion list like Intern-Net is, obviously, discussion. To use the list for independent reflection would be akin to standing in the middle of a crowded room and shouting aloud narratives and commentaries about one's experiences—with the intent that no one should respond in conversation. It would be like a public performance rather than a dialogue. Using the list for independent reflection in this way is highly unlikely given:

- the cultural context (that the teachers already feel vulnerable and at risk when they engage in reflection—and therefore have little or no interest in calling attention to themselves by doing independent reflection as public performance);

- the technological context (that the reflection would be sent to the list as an e-mail, and that users' past experience with e-mail—as well as the presence of the "Reply" button—push us to reply to others' messages); and

- the context of genres (that Intern-Net teachers believe—as the interviews

  revealed—that independent reflection is something best done in a private

  genre, such as a journal, or an anonymous genre, such as a blog or other

  online forum—especially one where the author uses a screen name or

  pseudonym).

While there are other discussion list genres where writers post messages and don't expect

a reply from others on the list (as when teachers post announcements about job openings,

conferences, changes in education policy, or the like), those threads are comprised of

short messages that have obvious relevance for most subscribers. Independent reflection,

on the other hand, would require writers to "be long" (as Harrison described it)—a

violation of unwritten list protocol for threads in which authors act in their own

independent interest—without counterbalancing that length with ideas, resources, or

questions that are clearly engaging and relevant to the other subscribers.

Furthermore, Intern-Net teachers understand the activity of reflection as something that

should, if it is to occur on the list, involve dialogue. In the few instances where teachers

initiated reflection threads and collaborative responses were slow in coming, those who

had authored the call messages sent follow-up requests for dialogue. In a few instances,

teachers even wrote to the list or privately to me to express dismay or embarrassment,

worrying that "the silent treatment" was an indication that they should not have posted

their call messages as they did. In her interview, Athena—who had not had this

experience—worried aloud about what it might mean if she did. When I asked her to

discuss some of the challenges she associated with online reflection, she named this fear:

"What if people didn't respond and I had put a lot out there?" The independent reflection

genre doesn't fit well with the purposes and contexts associated with the discussion list, and for this reason, it isn't a genre that teachers choose to use in the Intern-Net environment.

As for the collaborative inquiry genre, its infrequent appearance on the Intern-Net list is also related to issues of purpose and context. As I watched for collaborative inquiry threads during my coding process, I looked for threads in which conversations centered on questions about teaching and learning, and in which the participating teachers worked together in their writing to identify possible answers, to critically evaluate them, and to explore their implications for both their localized and collective work. Such threads did occur, but they were quite rare. The topics for collaborative inquiry included discussions about the use of "study guides" (e.g., SparkNotes and CliffsNotes) and about teacher "timesavers." There were several instances in which teachers attempted to start collaborative inquiry threads, but their invitations were not taken up by other participants. Why? While the list is a good match for the purposes of collaborative inquiry—that is, for teachers who wish to work together to address questions in which they share an interest—the interacting contexts of culture, situation, technologies, and genres must also (again) be taken into account. In the case of the collaborative inquiry genre, these contexts discourage teachers from using the discussion list as their primary venue for this type of activity. Factors that render the list impractical for collaborative inquiry include:

- The cultural and situational contexts. Early-career teachers are so busy learning about their new work and workplaces—as well as participating in formal professional development and graduate programs and other professional responsibilities—that many have little time or energy to invest in

extended informal inquiry conversations. In the interviews, several of the teachers emphasized that they often feel pressed for time. Evelina, who had started a full-time substituting position just days before I spoke with her, commented, "There is so little time to think and eat right now." It was difficult for her to imagine taking on one more thing in her schedule. Lynn, now in her second fulltime year of teaching, agreed. During the school year, she said, the demands on time make her schedule so hectic that she is just "trying to survive." The busyness of the teachers was also evident as I worked to schedule the interviews. One teacher generously agreed to speak with me on the one weeknight she had available in a three-week time span; the other evenings, she would be busy attending graduate classes and professional development workshops, watching and helping with extracurriculars at her school, and planning and grading . . . not to mention her personal commitments. Another teacher graciously consented to be interviewed on a Saturday evening, since he was coaching and scheduled for practices and games throughout the week as well as three games during the day on that Saturday. Scheduling the interviews reminded me of the impact that off-list busyness can have upon the on-list business of collaborative inquiry. On a related note, Athena reflected in her interview on the intense energy that teaching requires. She remarked, "I really still feel so much demand in the classroom that if I have 10 minutes that I don't have to be working, I don't want to be checking a teaching e-mail." The collaborative inquiry genre requires relatively involved participation over the long term, as working with

others to find (or develop) and evaluate answers to questions about teaching

issues isn't something that can be done "quick a minute" in written,

asynchronous exchanges.

- The contexts of technologies and genres. It is difficult to engage in

    collaborative inquiry when participants have to write in enough detail to

    (simultaneously!) think through and explain their precise questions, findings,

    critiques, or ideas; anticipate and address the other collaborators' questions;

    and acknowledge and respond to others' ideas and feedback. Not being able

    to receive immediate feedback on the smaller ideas that link together to

    comprise such posts also complicates matters. (Imagine, for example, the

    frustration of composing a long message only to find that others have

    questions that cause the author to change the premise on which the rest of the

    post is based!) On the Intern-Net list, the messages in the few collaborative

    inquiry threads tend to be long and involved in order to accomplish all of

    these tasks, and the threads extend over several weeks—or longer. And, as I

    observed above, extra time and energy are in short supply for many early-

    career teachers, so the demands of the genre and the limitations of the

    technology are a deterrent to participation in collaborative inquiry threads on

    the discussion list.

Given the contextual challenges, it is impressive that the Intern-Net teachers ever use the

list for collaborative inquiry. I would suggest that their willingness and attempts to do so

testify to their dedication to continued learning. In fact, I have seen evidence that when

the contextual challenges are addressed, teachers <u>are</u> eager to engage in opportunities for the activity of collaborative inquiry.

In February of 2007, when most teachers were midway through their second year of fulltime teaching, I organized (with conceptual and technical help from Katie) a synchronous instant messaging chat for interested Intern-Net teachers. We called the event *Intern-Net LIVE* (or *LIVE*, for short), and four teachers participated. Athena, Ellen, Katie, Steve, and I "talked" via writing for 2½ hours. Each teacher brought one "big" question about integrating creativity into curriculum planning and instruction, and we worked together through processes of collaborative inquiry. While the patterns of our conversation differed noticeably from the discussion list genre for collaborative inquiry, using synchronous technologies enhanced our ability to dialogue and accomplish our inquiry-based goals. The LIVE chat participants have expressed interest in holding more of these sessions at intervals throughout the year. They named several advantages of doing collaborative inquiry in a chat forum. Steve commented that working with such a small group makes it easy to get feedback and to follow or shift the conversational lines. Athena suggested that working with a small number of people, for a set period of time, while focused on single question or set of questions increases the likelihood that she will have the time, energy, and motivation to participate. Lynn, who did not participate in the first LIVE session, noted that she would appreciate the chance to do so during the summer. As she sees it, collaborative inquiry conversations are opportunities to think conceptually about the big picture of her teaching. Holding a LIVE session or two during the summer (as opposed to during the school year) would be best, she claims, because "that's when I <u>want</u> to be thinking about theories and changing."

While this project has revealed that the Intern-Net list is a generative forum for independent inquiry and collaborative reflection, it also suggests that different online forums might be productive venues for other teacher learning activities, such as collaborative inquiry and independent reflection. Additionally, the Intern-Net study shows that discussion list conversations can play an important role in promoting and facilitating opportunities for a discussion list's subscribing teachers to engage together in these additional activities.

Stepping Back to See the Big Picture

For the purposes of analysis, I have to this point discussed each of the four reflection and inquiry genres as distinct entities. I should emphasize, however, that two or more discussion list threads in differing genres may emerge and overlap during the same period of time. For example, while one conversation centers on a teacher's specific independent inquiry, another may focus on collaborative reflection about an entirely different topic. Some of the teachers may engage in both these threads, so that their participation overlaps the two genres as well.

Additionally, some threads that begin in one genre may eventually shift toward another genre. Once again, contexts and purposes together play a role. For example, in some of threads where the initiating authors invite others into collaborative inquiry processes, others on the list do not respond to the invitation (perhaps because of issues of time or interest). If the initiating authors repeat their invitations but still fail to engage others in collaborative inquiry, they may either withdraw from the threads or shift tactics and instead approach the inquiry projects on their own, soliciting other teachers'

suggestions for resources, ideas, and the like in threads that shift toward independent inquiry.

In sum, teachers can work in multiple threads within a genre, participate in more than one genre at once, and even shift genres. Whether we are zooming in to look at genres under the microscope or stepping back to see the big picture, what becomes apparent is that teachers on the discussion list use reflection and inquiry genres in order to further their learning.

The Intern-Net study indicates that participating as readers and writers in reflection and inquiry conversations affords several benefits to early-career teachers who are networked through discussion lists:.

(1) Meeting teachers at the point of need. Whatever the time, place, or situation—if Intern-Net teachers have something to reflect or inquire about and wish to do so through conversations with others, the discussion list is available to them.

(2) Confidence-building. In the interviews, several of the teachers echoed a comment that Steve made about the importance of the list for his teaching. He explained, "Sometimes it helps with confidence because when I can bounce an idea off other people first, it definitely makes me feel more confident in presenting it to the kids." Harrison agreed: "More than anything, it adds to confidence," and Lynn observed that she appreciated how others on the list were supportive when she "needed affirmation." The teachers gained confidence by reading others' responses to their ideas. But they also benefited from thinking through their writing. Katie volunteered that the act of writing for an audience is sometimes what is most helpful to her. As an example, she explained that when she is preparing to advocate for or defend a particular curricular or instructional

choice, writing her Intern-Net messages gives her "ideas for rationales." She emphasized that even when the rationale she officially presents (to administrators, parents, or students) will be verbal, "I write to be prepared verbally."

(3) Grounding. Another important benefit of participating in the reflection and inquiry conversations: teachers found that it helped to integrate and recognize relationships between theory and practice. When I asked Sue how participating in Intern-Net had affected her as a teacher, she responded,

> It kept me grounded in [our university's] education and philosophies. It
>
> constantly reminded me of things we'd done that I'd forgotten about, getting me
>
> back into doing it. It was like, 'Hey, you learned to do it this way, why are you
>
> falling into old habits? Do it that way!'"

Though I hadn't used the term *grounded* in my interview questions, it resurfaced when I asked Katie about Intern-Net reflection and inquiry dialogues and their role in her work. Her words were remarkably similar to Sue's: "My opinions have become more grounded because of the nature of this list." It is notable that Katie, Sue, and other Intern-Net teachers are using the discussion list conversations as a means to integrate their in-service approaches to education with the theories and methods they studied as pre-service teachers. Additionally, the high value that these teachers place on continuing to be grounded in what they learned in their undergraduate teacher education programs speaks to universities' critical role in preparing—and continue to partner with—these early-career professionals.

(4) Answering unasked questions. It may appear that reflection and inquiry threads are of primary benefit to those who initiate them. Indeed, the authors who start

independent inquiries are guided to resources and ideas that help them as they research

answers to their teaching questions, and those who begin collaborative reflection

conversations gain others' insights on their unique teaching situations. Although the

teachers who initiate these threads do benefit, frequently, such conversations are helpful

to many more subscribers as well. Others on the list may not have asked the questions—

or even thought to ask the questions, but when a thread is posted, they may realize that

they, too, are interested in the inquiry or reflection under consideration. Many of the

Intern-Net teachers (including several that I did not interview) mentioned to me that they

printed and saved e-mails that they thought were—or would eventually be—useful for

them in thinking about their teaching. Some of the interviewees noted the importance of

reading threads that they didn't participate in as writers. Reading "others'" threads

exposes teachers to ideas and resources that they may not have been looking for. Athena,

for example, told me that the list increases her awareness of new ideas, methods, and

strategies. She pointed to Katie's intermittent posts about podcasting as an example of

something that she wouldn't have searched for on her own, but learned about through her

Intern-Net reading. Steve made similar claims, noting that reading the Intern-Net threads

"keeps me up to date on some of the updates on education" and also is good for "keeping

my knowledge base up to date."

(5) Reinforcing the value of asking questions. Participating in the Intern-Net list

not only provides teachers with resources and leads for answering their questions, it also

promotes the idea that it's okay to ask them. Elsewhere I have noted that that school

structures and teachers' own perceptions about how they ought (ideally) to act dissuade

them from asking questions. As Sue observed, "Sometimes it's embarrassing to ask

questions of school colleagues—and you don't know them as well yet, so it's a crap

shoot." When teachers engage in Intern-Net conversations, however, they learn that it's

normal—even normative—for teachers to ask questions. For Drea, this was one of the

more important advantages of participating in the reflection and inquiry conversations on

Intern-Net. She explained, "It kind of instilled in us the thought of 'We need to go share

ideas.' I'm not afraid to go ask co-workers or anybody for help."

(6) Promoting and facilitating additional opportunities for continued learning

and collaboration. Announcements about conferences, workshops, and other teacher

learning opportunities don't often find their way into discussion list genres for reflection

and inquiry. However, these types of announcements are an important part of the life of

the list. And because the Intern-Net teachers engage in thinking conversations together in

the inquiry and reflection threads, they come to trust others' recommendations about

opportunities for professional growth that will be worth their investments of time, energy,

and money. The teachers' take seriously each others' reviews of graduate programs,

workshops, conventions, and more. Additionally, some of the teachers partner with each

other in planning, having students exchange writings, and other endeavors. Because

other Intern-Net teachers whom she respects gave high praise about the summer institutes

offered at National Writing Project sites, Athena is enrolled in such a program this

summer. For her, one of the most important aspects of Intern-Net is that it has helped her

"to advance my teaching career and continually develop professionally."

(7) Fostering teachers' political awareness and their ability to talk about it with

others. In the interviews, I neglected to raise questions about the political dimension of

teaching. In spite of this unfortunate oversight on my part, the teachers I spoke with

reminded me of the crucial role that Intern-Net dialogues have played in this aspect of their teaching lives. The political dimension was important for a range of teachers, from those who still seeking fulltime work to those who are already emerging as leaders in their schools and the broader teaching community. Evelina, who is hoping to land her first fulltime job soon, said that the list conversations provide her with an awareness of the politics of daily life in teaching—things such as censorship and the problematic side of teacher bonuses that are tied to test scores. She remarked, "Oftentimes I'm commenting [to others off-list] about stuff on the listserv. . . . For me it's just part of my vocabulary because it's part of my life." Katie, who is already a teacher consultant for the National Writing Project, has teaching experiences that are much different from Evelina's. Yet she, too, emphasized the importance of the list in this regard: "The political nature of my teaching became more prevalent because of the kinds of issues I was drawn to write about, and because of reading them in others' experiences. . . . As I get farther in my career, I'm beginning to care less about putting it [my political side] out there." Katie went on to explain that this didn't mean that she wasn't concerned about the political elements of her teaching work. Rather, she found herself more willing to acknowledge and integrate the political dimension into her teaching work and identity. She also felt more confident in her ability to discuss educational politics with others. Lynn told me that she had experienced similar growth, both through her participation in Intern-Net conversations and her writing for a website she maintains. She claimed that she now has "an addiction to talking about education." Such an "addiction" is surely a good thing, as it means that she is becoming equipped to speak persuasively about practices and pedagogies that will serve her and her students well.

Beyond Genre

Discussion list genres for inquiry and reflection, though complex, are also flexible. These genres support a wide range of conversations about questions and experiences that hold great significance for the work of participating teachers—both writers and readers alike. These genred conversations, however, are not the only important activities occurring on the Intern-Net list. In the final chapter, I examine how the Intern-Net environment also enables other activities that are critical for participants as they transition away from their roles as university students and into their work as early-career teachers.

Meet the Teachers (IV)

Drea

Drea teaches at a new charter school whose mission is to prepare urban students for university studies. She began her teaching there in small classes with ninth grade students, and she will "follow" these students as their teacher until they graduate. When Drea announced her new job to the Intern-Net list, she stated that she was proud to be involved in a project to "revolutionize urban education." She hopes to someday do administrative work in a school system much like the one she now teaches in, and she has already taken steps toward that goal by enrolling in an elite M.A. program in school administration. Over the years, Drea has used the Intern-Net list as a way to stay connected with other teachers from the cohort. But for reflective conversations, she frequently turns to Tracy, an Intern-Net teacher who she has known and been friends with since the two were in their early teens. Drea once remarked, "If I'm not putting it on the listserv, it's because me and Tracy are talking about it."

Tracy

Tracy teaches at the same school as Drea, and each year, she develops new curricula as she follows her students from one grade to the next. Like Drea, she is pursuing an M.A. in school administration. Although Tracy hopes to do administrative work in the future, she enjoys teaching right now and says that "I am a lot more emotionally tied to my kids than I thought I'd be." Tracy has a digest subscription to Intern-Net, and she posts to the list infrequently.

Joe

Joe began his career teaching English to 11th and 12th graders at a high school on the East coast. He enjoyed the work but wanted to return to his home state, so in his second year he took a position that he "really likes" as a middle school teacher in a school closer to home. Joe is an avid sports fan, and his school duties have included some coaching responsibilities. After two years of teaching, Joe's main worry is that his current district is facing budget cuts and he may once again find himself searching for another teaching job. Predictably, Joe has used Intern-Net over the years as a network to aid him in his job searches.

Phoebe

Phoebe teaches middle school in the same large district as Carrie, who is one of the high school teachers on the Intern-Net list. After she accepted a position as a language arts instructor at her newly-established school, Phoebe wrote: "I am so excited, it's a brand new school opening this fall, so I will get to help develop the school culture, some of the curriculum, etc." Phoebe wrote to participate in Intern-Net inquiry threads during her internship but since then has rarely posted.

Rachel

After graduating, Rachel went directly into an M.A. program in counseling. She graduated after two years and is now looking for a fulltime position in a school. In an e-mail update that she sent to the list, she explained that she was applying for counseling and teaching jobs, since she enjoyed both. Rachel has occasionally added a counselor's

perspective to list conversations, but for the most part, she participates as a reader and uses the list to gather information about certification requirements.

Carrie

Carrie teaches upper-level English courses at a high school in one of the largest school districts in the nation. She loves British literature and is an avowed Jane Austen fan, and one of her professional goals is to earn a Ph.D. in literature and teach at the collegiate level. When she writes to the Intern-Net list, it is usually to respond to other teachers' independent inquiries or to offer a word of encouragement. She offers this advice to beginning teachers: "Go with your gut. Stand up for what you believe in. Most times, you'll be supported. And if you aren't, then you aren't in a good environment."

Lynn

Lynn teaches writing classes and an integrated literature, arts, and history course at the high school from which she graduated. Lynn claims that she is "addicted to talking about education." She is among the most active Intern-Net participants, and her posts frequently invite collaborative reflection on thought-provoking topics. Lynn is especially attuned to the political dimensions of teaching. She has initiated Intern-Net conversations about everything from mandated teacher drug tests to students who sexually harass teachers to inadequate funding for public schools. She links herself into professional conversations of all kinds: in addition to her Intern-Net posts, she maintains a web blog and regularly attends professional conferences. Lynn also talks about teaching with

Steve, another Intern-Net subscriber, who joined the English faculty at her school a year

after she began teaching there.

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CHAPTER 5
Online Parawork for Teachers[37]

"...and he's like, 'What's the listserv again?'

For me, it's just part of my vocabulary, because it's part of my life."

Evelina, Intern-Net teacher (2007 interview)

Evelina, during her interview, encapsulated in one pithy sentence the point that I've been working toward for four chapters and scores of pages. As a teacher in the induction process, she values the Intern-Net list because "it's part of [her] life."

I opened Chapter 1 by highlighting the need for comprehensive, multifaceted induction processes that help early-career teachers to continue in the profession, to meet standards for teacher quality, and to thrive in the classroom even as they try to bring change to the schools in which they work. An online network that is external to teachers' schools, such as the Intern-Net list, is not in itself a comprehensive or multifaceted approach to induction. But lists like Intern-Net, which partner ELA teachers with peers and with English teacher educators, can certainly play an important role in beginning teachers' transition from their roles as students into teacher internships and then into their early years as education professionals. As this study has shown, discussion lists such as the Intern-Net listserv have potential for much more than "just talk." These online

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[37] This chapter presents a revised and extended version of my chapter "Parawork," which was accepted for publication by Idea Group Inc. in the forthcoming book *Handbook of Research on Virtual Workplaces and the New Nature of Business Practices* edited by Pavel Zemliansky and Kirk St. Amant.

forums can, through genred conversations, facilitate "informal" approaches to reflection and inquiry that are in fact quite complex and systematic.

By actively participating in external networks such as the Intern-Net list, novice teachers themselves take steps toward addressing the concern that Katie voiced:

I wonder what you all think about [half of new] teachers' leaving the profession within the first five years. . . . How can we avoid being in that statistic?

But, as I have emphasized in preceding chapters, most beginning teachers also depend on English teacher educators and other teacher leaders to argue for, initiate, and partner with them in discussion lists and other forums that serve as external networks for induction.

In this final chapter, I argue that English teacher educators who implement and partner in e-mail discussion lists must take into account how contexts of technologies affect the structure and function of these lists and the genred conversations that can occur within them. More specifically, I contend that facilitating particular kinds of online spaces and activities—spaces and activities for *parawork*, as I have come to call it—can effectively foster continued learning and professional growth among preservice and beginning teachers immersed in the induction process.

This chapter defines *parawork*, with a focus on parawork enabled by online communication technologies. I review literature that supports and informs understanding of online parawork, and through case study of one teacher's participation in the Intern-Net list, the practical realities and possibilities of online parawork are considered. Whereas in Chapter 4 I analyzed excerpts, themes, and patterns in the collective work of many Intern-Net teachers, here I focus more longitudinally on one teacher's participation in the Intern-Net list. My analysis in Chapter 4 focused directly on genres for reflection

and for inquiry; in this final chapter, I take a more holistic perspective, introducing the theoretical concept of parawork in order to examine and explain how teacher learning and induction (including reflection, inquiry, and other approaches) can emerge through an online forum such as the Intern-Net list. As I analyze the case e-mail and interview data, I discuss how Leigh, an Intern-Net teacher, used the discussion list to construct her professional identity, to ready herself to accomplish workplace tasks and goals, and to foster her association with—and transformation of—school and professional cultures. In short, the chapter illustrates how Intern-Net, a list designed for parawork, became part of one beginning teacher's life and aided in her induction processes. The chapter closes with conclusions about conditions necessary for effective online parawork for teachers, as well as implications for future research.

Defining Parawork

A few years ago, *The Atlantic Monthly* began running a column called *Word Fugitives*. In this column, and in her book by the same title, Barbara Wallraff identifies phenomena that are familiar to many people and yet have no corresponding name. Wallraff invites readers to propose new words to fill some of English's linguistic gaps, and she features some of the more creative and appropriate monikers in her column. I take up a similar task here—although in a style quite different from that achieved by Walraff. The nameless concept I am interested in is this: the spaces outside of traditional workplaces where people meet with others, and the interplay of personal, social, and professional activities occurring within such spaces that can contribute to a person's

ability to accomplish work-related tasks and professional goals. The term I have coined to label these spaces and activities is *parawork*.

The definition of *parawork* that I construct is built upon the etymology and uses of the prefix *para-*. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term *para* is a form of an ancient Greek word meaning "alongside of, by, past, beyond." In contemporary English, the prefix is used to give the meaning "analogous or parallel to, but separate from or going beyond, what is denoted by the root word" ('"para-', prefix[1],", 2005). In a general sense, then, *parawork* refers to that which is analogous or parallel to, but also separate from or going beyond, work.

The term *parawork* can refer both to spaces and to activities. If we take *work* to denote a place (as in, "She takes the bus to work"), it becomes apparent how *parawork* can be a spatial referent. When *parawork* is used to indicate place, it describes environments that can facilitate activities related to a person's work, spaces functioning alongside—while also outside and beyond the bounds—of traditional workplaces. Parawork spaces are not owned or regulated by the workplace; often these spaces are otherwise associated with personal or social activities. Offline parawork sites include golf courses, restaurants and coffee shops, and planes, trains, and automobiles—places where people may (or may not) choose to engage with each other in work-related talk and activities. In parawork environments, people expect to blend personal, social, and professional roles, to go "beyond' or "alongside of" their work. The tasks they accomplish may be described as "work-related" or seen as somehow contributing to their professional lives, though these tasks are not regarded as precisely the same as the sorts of "work" that people take up at actual workplaces. In parawork spaces, people expect to

juggle and perhaps even integrate multiple personal and professional roles. There is an understanding that it is acceptable, even desirable, to use parawork spaces for a combination of social and professional pursuits.

Parawork refers not only to spaces, but also to the intertwined professional, social, and personal activities that people engage in within parawork environments. Given the definition of *para-* that I employ here, these activities are not just ordinary instances of work. Rather, they have unique characteristics that situate them "alongside of" or even "beyond" what is traditionally regarded as work. Specifically, people who participate in parawork activities have opportunities to interact with others in ways that contribute both to their performance of professional tasks and to their ability to manage professional and personal roles. When parawork takes place, the most visible actions may seem distinct from what we tend to think of as work, but the accompanying conversations focus on topics related to work and may contribute significantly to individuals' accomplishment of professional tasks and development.

A brief example. For years I commuted to graduate classes, driving an hour each direction. There were times when my car was a parawork place, and times when it wasn't; times when parawork activity occurred there, and times when it didn't. Parawork was most likely to happen when I carpooled with other graduate teaching assistants (TAs) in programs related to mine. Conversation would often meander through talk about our family and social lives, our views on the latest news and politics, and our plans for the weekend. But our conversation also included extended talk about what was happening in our teaching and in our work as students, and by the time we reached school or arrived home, my understanding of my roles and work as a graduate student and TA was

different from what it had been before we left. Perhaps strengthened or clarified, maybe expanded or complicated, but changed nonetheless. I was contributing to my work (and to my working identity and ability to do my work), though not precisely <u>doing</u> my work. This was parawork.

Carpooling, however, didn't inevitably lead to parawork. For a time while I was completing coursework in English education, I carpooled with two neighbors. One was beginning a program in civil engineering; the other was a medical student. So far as we knew, we had little in common in terms of professional interests and responsibilities, and our conversations rarely touched on our professional fields or school work. Instead, we talked politics, dissected National Public Radio shows, and chatted about our kids. Our professional roles and tasks rarely came into play in these conversations, and for the most part, we didn't engage in parawork.

I share these examples to help clarify the defining characteristics of parawork spaces and activities. Parawork occurs outside of traditional work spaces, in environments where people's professional roles come into play, but away from the places where they typically "get work done"—where they get paid to perform in certain ways or to generate specific products. Parawork happens in places where it can be "good form" to blend or overlap the social and the professional. When parawork takes place, people may not appear to be accomplishing much, and yet they may experience changes to their professional identity and understanding that have significant impact on their work.

Theoretical Grounding

Parawork is a new term, but the concept can be connected productively with existing theories and research from diverse fields. This section establishes how online parawork differs from virtual work and then discusses literature that supports and informs ways to understand, apply, and research the online parawork concept.

Virtual Work vs. Online Parawork

To this point I have defined *parawork* in a general sense and have referred only to offline examples. I now focus on parawork enabled by online communication technologies (OCTs). Today, many terms point to work spaces that are relocated through the use of OCTs (e.g., *homeworking, hybrid workspace, remote work, telework, telecommuting* and *virtual office*). As Hill, Ferris, and Märtinson (2003) point out, any of these terms may take on slightly different meaning from one study to the next, depending on context and authors' preferences. In most cases, though, such terms are used to indicate that tasks normally completed in traditional workplaces are being relocated elsewhere through the use of OCTs (Halford, 2005). The emphasis is on moving the work, usually with the understanding that outcomes and products ought to be much the same as (if not identical to) those that would emerge at corresponding traditional workplaces (Crandall & Wallace, 1998). Additionally, in virtual or "remote" work, there is an expectation that those who telecommute or work from so-called "virtual offices" will keep their personal and professional lives separate. Remote workers, especially women, feel great pressure to prove that they can put in the same number of hours and accomplish the same tasks at home as at the office, and in accounting for their time and efforts, they tend to be "especially scrupulous in separating work time from family time"

(Halford, 2005, p. 26). While it is acknowledged that relocation of work through virtual workplaces may impact how workers use their time (Halford, 2005; Hill et al., 2003) and that relocating work may lead to changes in workers' personal and family lives (Halford, 2005; Moore, 2006), virtual work, like traditional work, is still paid labor that is completed in response to stated job requirements or required workplace tasks.

Online parawork activities differ from virtual workplace tasks. Online parawork is not a relocation of work; it is going beyond, alongside, and apart from work. To participate in online parawork, people use e-mail discussion lists, instant-messaging chats, interactive blogs, and other OCTs to interact informally with others who share their professional interests. Instead of being paid to complete work-related duties (as in the virtual workplace), people such as teachers voluntarily use online parawork spaces for their own purposes, often "off the clock," in efforts:

- o to find collegial support as they adjust to new professional roles or respond to workplace issues and challenges;

- o to learn information or strategies that will help them to succeed professionally; and

- o to connect with others with similar professional interests.

In online parawork environments, participants are generally accepting of overlaps between social and professional roles, as these overlaps help to promote collegiality and to lend an informal feel to parawork interactions.

An example may be useful in illustrating differences between online ("virtual") work and online parawork. Consider the activities of those who teach in so-called "virtual high schools" (such as the Kentucky Virtual High School). These teachers use

OCTs to accomplish many of their workplace tasks: presenting curriculum, facilitating student learning, providing feedback to learners, assessing students' work, and so on. In these instances, we could say that teachers are participating in online work. They are completing workplace duties, are directly compensated for their efforts, and would face serious consequences for failing to do their work. While these educators must participate in the virtual workplace in order to keep their jobs, they may also engage voluntarily in online parawork. Some may elect to subscribe to one of the many discussion lists available for teachers in specific disciplines (e.g., engteach-talk, for English teachers). Others may join online forums for those who teach with OCTs at the high school level. In these parawork conversations, the educator who teaches in the virtual high school may ask other teachers for advice about how to balance personal schedules with time spent giving feedback to students and answering their e-mail and IM questions. The teacher might also inquire about resources that will help her to implement a particular teaching strategy, reflect on a thought-provoking interaction with a student, circulate work-related humor and anecdotes, share information about professional development opportunities, converse about current events that affect online education, congratulate others on professional accomplishments or personal milestones, discuss an interesting book or article, and so forth. However the conversation emerges in parawork spaces, it occurs informally and voluntarily in an environment that is not under the jurisdiction of workplace supervisors and evaluators. Participants are not paid to engage in parawork, though they may benefit professionally from parawork activities.

As I suggested previously, the most notable outcome of parawork (online or offline) is not "getting work done" in the sense of accomplishing the explicit tasks for

which one is paid (as it is in the virtual workplace). Rather, what makes parawork

significant is its potential for impacting workers: their professional identities, their

ability and willingness to adapt to professional cultures, and their readiness to accomplish

workplace tasks and goals. Writing about parawork in online environments, then,

requires going beyond scholarship on virtual workplaces. Therefore, in the brief

literature review that follows, I draw on scholarship pertaining to space and online

forums, to language and identity construction, and to collegiality in online forums for

professional development.

Space and Online Forums

Workplaces are not arbitrary backdrops. Spaces matter; they affect who we are

and what we do. In the case of work spaces, Halford (2005) finds that working across

multiple types of spaces ("spatial hybridity") "changes the nature of work, organization,

and management in organizational space, cyberspace and domestic space, resulting in

distinctive practices, experiences and relationships in all three spaces" (p. 25). Likewise,

in a study contrasting professional success for women in two different types of "out-of-

office" spaces, Morgan and Martin (2006) find that interactions with customers in

"heterosocial" and "homosocial" settings impact female salespersons' careers in differing

ways (p. 113). Essentially, physical spaces act upon the people who inhabit them by

constraining certain types of behaviors while permitting or even promoting other

behaviors (see Latour, 1988). But spaces are not static or impervious to change. Gregson

and Rose (2000) demonstrate that spaces are complex, uncertain, and unstable; spaces

can act upon us, yet they are "brought into being through performances and as a

performative articulation of power" (p. 434).

Like physical spaces, cyberspace forums shape and are shaped by the people who inhabit them. In Chapters 3 and 4, I demonstrated critical ways in which contexts of technologies can alter the structure and function of online conversations, pointing to literature on the constructive role of technologies (Cubbison, 1999; Porter, 2003; Selfe & Selfe, 1994; Star, 1999) as well as to extensive data from Intern-Net teachers' discussions in reflection and inquiry genres. In order to fully understand online parawork sites, then, it is important to pay attention to the role of online "spaces" in shaping parawork activities. In offline environments, the physical spaces themselves are important, as are the ways they shape and are shaped by human inhabitants. In online forums, the technologies that set the parameters of cyberspace interactions are significant, as are the interactions among technologies, people, and language.

Language and Identity Construction

Online parawork is facilitated by OCTs, but it is accomplished, in large part, through written language. In the last few decades, substantial energy has been invested in exploring links between language and identity construction, with scholars from a range of fields and disciplines building upon and extending the work of Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard (Cerulo, 1997). Much contemporary work on identity construction depends upon an understanding of speech and writing as "performative acts" (Searle, 1969) wherein words aren't merely descriptive, but also functional—they get things done through the "elision of discourse and action" (Hodgson, 2005, p. 54). Though theories and research on language and identity construction extend in widely-varied directions,

one unifying principle is the tenet that persons' identities shape and are shaped by language.[38]

Links between language and identity formation are evident in scholarship on genre[39] and on stories,[40] but the literature most relevant to this chapter underscores relationships between discourse and identity. James Gee (1996), in his sociolinguistic work, writes about discourses in general ("ways of being in the world") as well as about the importance of particular Discourses: "A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize" (p. 127). The roles that Discourses allow people to "take on" may in some cases be professional roles. Hodgson (2005) offers insight into how a discourse identity kit might be used for learning professional roles when he notes that "the processual *enactment* of professionalism" can be equally important to professional knowledge in achieving a professional role (p. 53). Simonsen and Banfield (2006), too, call attention to the importance of discourse in constructing professional identities. Their work to foster mathematical discourse in an online forum for math teachers is built on the assumption that using such discourse will contribute to teachers' professional identities, and therefore to their ability to do their professional work.

The literature on language and identity construction has important implications for study of parawork in online forums for teachers. In online forums, the language that

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[38] Note the parallels to space and technology, which can also be said to shape and be shaped by interactions with people, as discussed earlier.

[39] Scholarship in genre studies has consistently shown that participating in professional genre can facilitate a person's assumption of professional roles and their formation of professional identity (Artemeva et al., 1999; Lingard et al., 2002; Paré, 2002; Schryer & Spoel, 2005).

[40] Research on a particular type of genre, stories, also points to connections between language use and professional identity construction (Alsup, 2006; Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001; Racine, 1999; Singer & Zeni, 2004).

contributes to identity construction is most often written language. Study of the written

texts that contribute to online parawork helps to make visible the rhetorical actions

through which teachers construct their professional roles. Whether the focus is on

discourse, genre, story, or some other unit of language, textual analysis can highlight the

ways in which written online parawork exchanges contribute to teachers' efforts to build,

transition into, and perform professional identities.

Collegiality in Online Forums for Professional Development

One additional strand of literature that I wish to discuss here is scholarship on the

use of online forums to facilitate professional development and continued growth. Much

of the literature on this topic emphasizes the importance of collegiality in online forums

for professional development. And while scholarship on the importance of collegiality in

online professional development can be found in research focused on a wide range of

work, this literature includes a great number of studies focused upon collegiality among

teachers. Collegiality is understood as a means for fostering workers' identification with

their professional culture and for increasing their willingness to consult with others as

they prepare to accomplish workplace tasks and goals. As Wickstrom (2003) describes

it, teacher collegiality involves peer relationships based on "openness to the idea of

sharing" as well as "a sense of thoughtfulness" (p. 420). Grünberg and Armellini (2004)

agree that collegial behavior among teachers includes "attending to the work of others,

engaging in intellectual reciprocity, providing timely feedback to colleagues, being open

to peer review . . . and sharing new ideas and . . . materials" (p. 598). Collegiality may

occur as the result of online interactions—though it isn't a "given" in online venues

(Grünberg & Armellini, 2004; Matsuda, 2002; Swenson, 2003; Wickstrom, 2003).

However, when collegiality does occur, it can help teachers who write to one another in online forums to identify with one another (Singer & Zeni, 2004), to socialize more personally with one another (Halford, 2005), and "to make sense of their corporate [or organizational] life" (Racine, 1999, p. 170). Furthermore, collegiality can enhance teachers' willingness to use each other as resources as they go about conducting independent and collaborative inquiries. While asking for help or advice may be viewed as a sign of weakness or incompetence in the culture of many schools, online forums can be places where teachers are committed to sharing and learning with each other (Singer & Zeni, 2004; Swenson, 2003). In parawork environments, which are separate from their school domains, teachers who have escaped the surveillance of administrators and other supervisors may feel comfortable risking questions that can help them to learn more about their work and how to go about it.

Leigh's Case: A Study of Online Parawork

In the case study that follows, I examine how Leigh used the Intern-Net list as a parawork site that helped her to construct, transition into, and perform her professional identity as a teacher. In keeping with the literature reviewed above, I analyze the ways that Leigh's written e-mails function as performative acts. Furthermore, I study the written posts not as isolated texts, but as visible aspects of the interactions of collegial teachers, language, and technology-enabled spaces. The case study takes up the following questions: *What online parawork activities are visible through texts? How can online parawork activities impact a teacher's professional work?* And finally, a look

at the critical role that technologies play in supporting parawork: *How do teachers, language, and technologies interact to enable parawork online?*

To address these questions, I focus on Leigh's use of the Intern-Net listserv as a space for parawork activities. Following principles of rich feature analysis (Barton, 2004), I examine Leigh's e-mail messages from the electronic Intern-Net archives, discussing how Leigh accomplishes parawork through the use of patterned features in the function and structure of her discourse. The analysis also includes data from an interview that I conducted with Leigh. In this discourse-based, semi-scripted interview (Odell et al., 1983; Prior, 2004), I asked Leigh to look back through her Intern-Net posts with me. I used scripted questions to elicit comments related to particular features of her texts, as well as allowing for Leigh to talk open-endedly through memories and reflections that were evoked as she reread her e-mail messages. The scripted questions focused on Leigh's perspective about conditions that may have contributed to her willingness and ability to use Intern-Net for parawork and on the impact of Intern-Net conversations upon her offline professional life.

Using the textual analysis and interview data in tandem, I address the research questions above, exploring the realities and possibilities of parawork in online writing environments for teachers. This integrated analysis reveals how Intern-Net, as an online parawork site located outside the bounds of the workplace, can facilitate parawork activities that contribute to a teacher's professional development and success:

- constructing professional identity by negotiating and reflecting on role overlaps, role conflicts, and role transitions;

- preparing to accomplish teaching tasks and professional goals by conducting independent inquiry and initiating off-list collaborations; and

- fostering association with—and transformation of—school and professional cultures.

Constructing Professional Identity through Negotiation and Reflection

In her process of building her teaching identity, Leigh used the Intern-Net listserv to negotiate and reflect on role overlaps, role conflicts, and role transitions.

(1) Role overlaps. This work toward constructing Leigh's professional identity was a primary focus of her participation in the collaborative reflection genre. A prominent pattern in Leigh's reflective e-mails to the discussion list during her intern year is her explicit attention to her many roles and responsibilities. In a message posted during the first week of Intern-Net conversation, Leigh wrote,

> *That's one thing that I have been struggling with as this 'real world' lifestyle takes over - how to maintain composure in the face of so many things going on at one time ([a relative] passed away last weekend, re-working that [assignment for Class X] - does anyone understand that?!?, keeping up on the reading for three different classes and planning for one, trying to maintain friendships, etc.). It is so difficult to stay on top of it all! I have been telling people that student teaching is going well, but that it is extremely challenging to be a 'student' as well as a 'teacher.'*

In this paragraph, Leigh identifies herself as a family member, a student, an observer who must keep up on high schoolers' course readings, a teacher who must plan lessons, and a friend. Roles are clearly on her mind, and Intern-Net is a site where Leigh can attend to

multiple roles at one time. Likewise, in a message posted the following spring, roles again feature prominently as Leigh uses a numbered list to work her way through items pertaining to three of her differing roles. In this second role-focused message, Leigh asked for information about a university meeting that she had to miss, then invited discussion about a professional conference for teachers that she and several others on the list attended, and finally, announced her upcoming musical performance at a local coffee house.

In our interview conversation, which occurred approximately two years after Leigh first began posting to Intern-Net, she emphasized the importance of the discussion list as a place where she could work reflectively through the challenges of being "always an intern and a college student at the same time." Offline, Leigh had to alternate between roles, first foregrounding one, and then the next: her role as college student was most important when attending her university classes, but her role as teacher mattered most at the high school where she completed her internship. The parawork environment of the Intern-Net listserv, however, allowed Leigh to overlap and freely perform multiple roles within the same time and place.

(2) Role conflict mediation. Although an intern may be more of a student or more of a teacher in some contexts than in others, neither of these roles can be conveniently forgotten or made to disappear at a given time. Juggling roles in this complicated way can lead to difficulties, as we see in this message that Leigh posted midway through her internship year:

I have a class-related question for those of you that have [university] class with

[Instructor A]. I missed the last class because it was Records Day [at my

internship school] and there were way too many papers to grade! I was

wondering if anyone could provide me with a clear explanation of what the

expectations are for class.

In many schools and universities, teacher interns are referred to as student-teachers, a

label that recognizes their hyphenated identities. As Leigh indicated in an earlier post, it

is difficult to balance life on a hyphen. In this case, the two schooling institutions in

which she participates are vying for her time; she cannot overlap her roles and

successfully complete all of the required tasks in the time available. The teacher role

takes precedent in this case. But Leigh doesn't "drop" her student role; she uses the

discussion list to help her catch up so that she can continue to juggle her student and

teaching responsibilities.

     As a parawork site, Intern-Net literally helped Leigh to <u>mediate</u> conflicts between

roles during her internship year. Leigh claimed in her interview that "the honesty you

can put forth on Intern-Net is like no other place during that year." She explained that

interns have to "put on the professional guise" in front of their supervising teachers at

their internship sites, and that interns also feel great pressure "to look competent" to the

university professors who evaluate interns' work. For Leigh, the discussion list was a

safe place to navigate through some of the conflicts that typically occur during

internships. She knew that Intern-Net was a supervisor-free zone, that the discussion list

was private and password protected, and that her colleagues on the list were going

through similar experiences and would therefore be understanding and supportive. In

other words, Leigh understood Intern-Net as a space that was both outside and alongside

her workplaces. These conditions made Intern-Net a parawork environment where

Leigh—without risk of looking incompetent to supervisors and evaluators—could seek others' help as she worked out the glitches in her efforts to manage multiple, sometimes conflicting, roles.

(3) Role transitions. While the discussion list as a parawork site enabled Leigh to mediate conflicts between her roles, it also assisted in her gradual transition away from the student role and into new professional identities. Leigh's internship year posts show her growing in confidence and acting on values, beliefs, and practices that she believes to be essential to good teaching. In her first messages to Intern-Net, Leigh seems most comfortable in the role of student, acquiescing to her mentor teacher's wishes in order to keep the peace:

> *I have found myself in a couple of predicaments [with my mentor teacher] that have made me uncomfortable because I don't want to ruin our relationship, yet I don't want to compromise my beliefs about education. For the time being, I have tended to basically just do what she wants. I want her to learn to trust me as a teacher, and, as time passes, perhaps she will be persuaded into allowing me to do more of what I want to do. At the end of the day, as my field instructor often reminds me, it is my mentor teacher that will be writing my evaluation, so it is good to try to stay on their good side throughout the course of the year, and enjoy the freedom of having my own classroom next year. Have any of you found this balance to be difficult?*

It seems here that Leigh can imagine herself as someday being a peer to her mentor teacher, as someone who can do what she "want[s] to do" when she "enjoy[s] the freedom of having [her] own classroom." Yet for the present, Leigh recognizes that her

mentor teacher is in a position of power and authority over her; she remarks that as an intern she is "basically just do[ing] what [the mentor teacher] wants" in order to "stay on their good side."

As time passes, however, and Leigh continues to make posts to Intern-Net, her embrace of her identity as teacher becomes more and more apparent. In an e-mail posted a few months after the message above, Leigh details a conflict with a teacher in her building, asking Intern-Net list members about how to enact the role of teacher in a way that will satisfy several different groups. Just before her closing remarks she writes,

My struggles now are in dealing with the wide range of responses [from the people involved]. First of all, how do I continue to deal with the students that heard the confrontation? What do I say when they make comments about [Teacher X] being a mean teacher? Secondly, what do I do about the fact that there is definite tension between the two of us, and we have to work together everyday? What do I do about the fact that she is spreading crap about me around the English department (though [other teachers] have already commented that I did the right thing, and that they are sorry that I took the brunt of [Teacher X's] insecurity attack)? Finally, what do we as English teachers do about [students' poor study habits]? How do we convince kids that they are selling themselves short?

While this situation was difficult for her, writing about it to her Intern-Net peers seems to have been a catalyst toward Leigh's gaining confidence in assuming more fully the identity of teacher. Whereas in earlier posts Leigh alludes to the overlap and juxtaposition of varying roles and tasks, in this message, Leigh consistently refers to

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herself as a teacher. Early in the message she remarks, "I had one of the most intense days of my teaching career." Additionally, in her series of questions asking advice of the Intern-Net list, Leigh suggests a set of professional ideals: that she will respond in an appropriate way when students make judgments about another teacher, that she will "work together" with Teacher X in spite of "definite tensions," and that she will be prepared to take steps to safeguard her professional reputation. The move that most fully marks Leigh as a teacher, though, is the way in which she circles back to talk about how to instruct students and—in the process—names herself and the other Intern-Net participants as English teachers: "Finally, what do we do as English teachers...?" Instead of merely deliberating about how to be a teacher (as in her first Intern-Net post), Leigh uses the list to step into her teacher skin and prepare for a kind of teaching work. She assesses her students' learning needs in relationship to her educational goals for them, and then she begins to consider how to meet those needs through curriculum and instruction by asking questions about what can be done. In this way, Leigh begins to use the discussion list not only for identity construction, but also to ready herself to accomplish workplace tasks and goals.

When I talked with Leigh about the professional transition that I observed in the series of posts above, she spoke pointedly about the importance of the Intern-Net listserv for facilitating her transition from student to professional. She commented on the "unique" nature of the discussion list environment and on the ways in which its functions related to, but occurred outside of, her work (and workplaces) as student and teacher. Leigh noted that apart from the Intern-Net listserv, she wouldn't have been willing to engage in transitional conversations like those excerpted above. She was willing to be

vulnerable in the Intern-Net space because of her sense that it was a low-risk environment where she could experience collegiality by interacting socially, giving and receiving encouragement and advice, and trading resources, materials, and ideas. These parawork activities were all enabled by the unique nature of the discussion list as parawork space.

Preparing to Accomplish Teaching Tasks and Professional Goals

Leigh and other teachers participated in two different kinds of conversations that helped them prepare to accomplish teaching tasks and to achieve professional goals. They conducted independent inquiries, and they also used the list to initiate off-list collaborations.

(1) Conducting Independent Inquiry. The independent inquiry genre described in Chapter 4 is highly useful to teachers as they prepare for their classroom work and other tasks. Analysis of later posts shows Leigh beginning to engage in additional parawork activities, employing the discussion list as a resource to gather ideas and expand her repertoire of strategies for carrying out professional responsibilities. Notice the repeated independent inquiry queries that emerge in Leigh's posts over the next few months, as evidenced here in three excerpts from a series of messages requesting others' ideas:

- *Does anyone have a good way to teach writing book reviews? I need to come up with an assignment sheet, and I am having trouble deciding which components are important to assess. Let me know!*
- *Anyone have any great ideas for teaching [Novel A] or [Novel B]? Let me know.*

o   *...our English department is attempting to revamp the curriculum a bit. [Goes*

   on to describe specific selection criteria and grade levels for use.] Any great

   ideas?

Leigh's posts suggest that for her, Intern-Net can function as a type of English teachers'

information exchange. Leigh isn't asking others to <u>do</u> her work for her; instead, she is

asking for information that she can "take to work" with her, for ideas that she can

critically evaluate on her own terms and—using her professional judgment—adapt to fit

her students' needs in their unique learning context and situation.

Leigh participates not only in requesting information, but also in sharing it.

During the same period of time when she begins to ask others for their ideas, Leigh

regularly responds to others' requests for assistance by sharing ideas and resources that

she has developed. There is no formal trading agreement in place (e.g., "I'll give you a

lesson plan on research writing if you'll give me a lesson plan for introducing

Shakespeare), but there is evidence of "commitment to collegiality" (Swenson, 2003) and

to the values of reciprocity, sharing, and thoughtfulness.

When I questioned Leigh about the time and effort required to respond to other

interns' requests, her replies shed additional light on the nature and significance of Intern-

Net as a parawork site. One essential motivator for Leigh was what she referred to as a

"we're-in-it-together mentality." The technical settings of the Intern-Net listserv were

configured to exclude supervisors, administrators, and evaluators. This kind of

technically-enabled exclusionary policy can act as a double-edged sword. The setup

affords privacy and safety for beginning teachers, but it also meant that during Leigh's

internship year, I was the only experienced teacher on the list. Since I had positioned

myself as a co-learner who would not be "the answer lady" for all questions raised on the discussion list, Leigh felt that she and the other interns needed to pull together in order to make Intern-Net a place that was safe not only for asking questions, but also for trying out answers.

A second motivator that Leigh cited when she discussed her willingness to share ideas and advice was also related to the technical configuration of the discussion list. Leigh observed that it has been quick and easy for her to attach documents that she already has, that it takes "very little to help people" when time and space are compressed as they are by online technologies. Additionally, e-mail discussion list technologies allow users either to "reply to all" or to respond privately to a single user. Leigh noted that Intern-Net allows her to pose a question to a large group of subscribers, but then to continue the conversation more privately, only with those who express interest in her initial post. During her internship, Leigh sometimes began exchanges with interns whom she might not otherwise have approached, and she was able to begin and carry on these discussions with a minimal amount of imposition on others who might not be interested in her topic—as well as a minimal amount of "risk" that others would be judging or evaluating the quality of her work. The configurations of the discussion list (along with the collegial habits of the subscribers) made it possible for Leigh, with little effort, to exchange materials, resources, ideas, and encouragement with her peers. These types of exchanges occurred outside of the school where Leigh worked, yet they heightened her readiness to engage in workplace tasks and could therefore be characterized as parawork.

(2) Initiating Off-list Collaborations. While Leigh and others used the independent inquiry genre to prepare for teaching tasks, they also readied themselves to

accomplish teaching work and to achieve professional goals by engaging in another type of conversation: threads in which they initiated off-list collaborations. Leigh, for example, used the Intern-Net list to advertise English language arts openings at her school and to invite other teachers to join with her in teaching there. Other Intern-Net teachers used the list in this way as well, and also to initiate other types of off-list collaboration:

- o to set up partnerships in which their students wrote to each other about common texts and topics,

- o to invite audiences for writings that they and their students had published online,

- o to set up planning sessions for courses and units,

- o to continue paired, in-depth inquiry into topics of professional interest,

- o to request co-participation in teacher research projects, and

- o to invite others to attend regional and national conferences with them—and, in some cases, to submit proposals to co-present at such conferences..

In addition, the Intern-Net list was also used to make arrangements for the LIVE chat instant messaging sessions (discussed in chapter 4) in which teachers were able to engage synchronously together in sustained collaborative inquiry conversations on topics of their choosing. In all of these instances, the teachers who initiated off-list cooperation had imagined ways in which their teaching work and professional development could be enhanced through collaboration. When they didn't know who else might be interested in the kinds of collaboration they were envisioning, they used the list to invite Intern-Net teachers—whom they trusted would be excellent co-partners—to work together with

them. Rather than approaching potential partners one at a time or being intimidated by the thought of approaching more experienced teachers in their own schools or on more public "open" discussion lists, the Intern-Net teachers were able to be efficient and confident in their efforts to invite and establish collaborations with each other. Because the Intern-Net list was configured as a parawork environment for peers who valued collegiality, teachers who posted invitations for collaboration were frequently successful in developing the partnerships they sought.

Fostering Association with—and Transformation of—School & Professional Cultures

Leigh's internship posts also facilitated another type of parawork activity: fostering her association with her school and with the professional culture of English language arts teaching. A striking feature of Leigh's posts from her internship year is her increasing tendency to use plural rather than singular pronouns. This trend begins in a post excerpted earlier, where Leigh asks her Intern-Net peers what "we as English teachers" ought to do about students' poor study habits and how "we" ought to go about it. This use of *we* (as ELA teachers) appears frequently in other messages as well, and the pattern that becomes apparent is that Leigh is using the parawork space to try on language that aligns her with her professional culture.

At the same time that Leigh uses the discussion list as a parawork site where she begins to identify with her profession, she also uses list conversations to show that she is associating more closely with the people and activities at her school. Again, plural pronouns help her to accomplish this parawork task. The messages from early in Leigh's internship typically refer to what "they" do at the high school and to what the mentor teacher ("she") or department chair ("she") wants as opposed to what Leigh ("I") does or

expects. For example, in one early internship-year post to the list, Leigh describes her relationship with her mentor:

> *On the one hand, I get along really well with my mentor teacher. She is [young and] lots of fun . . . However, it is difficult to not step on each others toes when we are in the classroom. She has a very traditional mindset about teaching . . . She has an obsession with the 5 paragraph essay. . . . I have found myself in a couple of predicaments that have made me uncomfortable because I don't want to ruin our relationship, yet I don't want to compromise my beliefs about education.*

In this post and others like it, Leigh uses pronouns and contrasting descriptions to set herself apart from those at the school where she interns. As time passes, though, she begins to shift her language in order to include herself as an integrated member of her internship school. In her later messages to the list, Leigh frequently refers to what "we at [High School X] do" or to what happens in "our English department." Through her written parawork posts to Intern-Net, Leigh begins to associate herself with the other teachers at the school, to identify with the culture of her workplace instead of setting herself apart from it.

The language that Leigh used in these e-mails not only marked her association with her workplace and professional culture; it also helped to facilitate it. Leigh observed during our interview session that there was an extended period during the first portion of her internship when she felt distinctly separate student and professional identities. Writing to her Intern-Net colleagues, she explained, helped her to find ways to integrate these identities, to become a student of teaching rather than someone who was split between being student and being teacher. "It wasn't until [these identities] merged that I

was able to be—or feel—successful," noted Leigh. Her use of written language, including her shift to plural first-person pronouns, was a way for Leigh to begin identifying with her workplace and to include herself as a member of the teaching profession. The opportunity that the discussion list afforded for Leigh to use language in this way is yet another example of the ways in which an online environment like Intern-Net can enable parawork.

Leigh's transition into teaching has been about more than merely assimilating into the culture of her school. Her participation in the Intern-Net list has also aided her in transforming her department, her school, and her district. When I interviewed Leigh, she told me that she greatly appreciated the many articles on pedagogy, policy, and education research and news that were forwarded to the Intern-Net list by Katie. Leigh told me that she regularly read these articles, and that as a second-year teacher, she had gotten into the habit of printing out the articles, sharing them with other educators, and engaging in discussions about them. In her e-mail response to a follow-up question I sent about this use of the Intern-Net list, Leigh explained in detail how this process had worked over the past year:

> Most frequently, I would share the articles with members of my department. I have an amazing mentor teacher, and when we would meet to discuss my progress there would definitely be times where I would show her an article and get her more seasoned perspective. I also took on a leadership role in planning and leading district-wide departmental meetings (all high school English teachers in the district meet). I brought in one or two of the articles for those meetings as ice breakers to get discussion going. Finally, a few of the articles I printed and placed

in my principal's mailbox. She seemed to be appreciative of my sharing, because she likes to back up her actions with theory, etc., especially since our staff can be really slow to make change happen.

It is exciting to think about a second year teacher who is doing much more than "surviving" and meeting standards for teacher quality. Leigh has found a professional home in her school. Instead of just settling in, she is creating opportunities to help shape her school and the teaching-learning activities that happen there. As she went on to explain in further detail in the remainder of her e-mail response to my follow-up questions, Leigh's efforts have made a difference—in the ways that others perceive her, as well as in the ways that they respond to her contributions:

> These articles were an avenue to open up discussions with teachers [at my school] that I respect and trust. Also, they helped me to develop relationships with teachers on a regular basis. I think it also helped more experienced teachers see me as a truly passionate teacher, rather than a flighty new teacher that doesn't know what I am talking about. . . . My department trusts me to head meetings and be our representative at district meetings, and I feel that at least a small part of that is my thirst to continue to learn (rather than being the complacent teacher). At times, the articles that I printed off for my principal would lead to a discussion between the two of us . . . I have noticed that she continues to provide more back up at staff meetings when she is discussing change and what is best for the kids that we encounter.

Leigh has used the Intern-Net list and the articles that are forwarded there as one way to stay connected with her university preparation and to continue her learning. By

extending the conversations and resources available to her in the parawork environment of the Intern-Net list, she is emerging as a teacher leader at her school and making a difference in education.

Conclusions: Essential Conditions

Leigh's case demonstrates that online sites like the Intern-Net listserv can support teachers in parawork activities as they construct their teaching identities, prepare to accomplish teaching tasks and professional goals, and begin to associate with and transform their school and professional cultures. These parawork activities, as Leigh's case illustrates, are not themselves paid teaching "work," but they do impact teachers' professional lives in significant ways, making it possible for them to step more fully into their teaching identities and to perform professional roles and responsibilities with greater skill and confidence. The teachers who participate in online parawork are not the only ones to benefit. Their students, colleagues, and the schools and districts in which they works also gain when early-career teachers transition smoothly into new roles, respond effectively to workplace issues and challenges, increase their knowledge base, expand their repertoire of skills and strategies, adapt productively to local and professional workplace cultures, and emerge as leaders who are willing and able to work toward needed change.

Leigh's case highlights conditions essential for supporting online parawork spaces and activities that benefit beginning teachers in their induction processes. Parawork on the discussion list is made possible by the unique interaction of genred conversations, collegial peers, and the configurations of the technology-enabled online space. Since the

impetus for establishing successful discussion lists as external networks for induction

falls largely on English teacher educators, an in-depth understanding about why the

following conditions are significant—and a practical knowledge about how to achieve

them—is imperative. This study has offered detailed insights into these conditions;

broadly speaking, a parawork discussion list for beginning teachers will be an

environment that is a low-risk, enables role negotiation and reflection, and responds

flexibly to teachers' needs and interests.

A Low-Risk Environment

At least three factors relating to perceived risk and to safety impacted the Intern-

Net teachers' willingness to use the discussion list for parawork.

(1) Subscription closed to supervisors. One essential condition that Leigh and

other Intern-Net teachers highlighted repeatedly during our interview conversations was

the fact that they participated more freely because the list was open only to their ELA

cohort teachers. Since the Intern-Net list excluded administrators, supervising teachers,

their current professors, and others whose evaluations of their performance might affect

their ability to get or keep a teaching position, they did not have to worry that their

judgments about their conversations would negatively affect them as students or as

teachers.

(2) Collegiality. A second and closely-related condition that enabled Intern-Net

to succeed as an online parawork environment was the high level of collegiality among

those subscribing to the list. This collegiality was rooted in the Intern-Net teachers'

educational and personal connections through their undergraduate cohort, in their

relationship with me as an English teacher educator and "thinking partner," and in their

commitment to the stated purposes of the discussion list. Because of this collegiality, the Intern-Net teachers were more motivated to cooperate, support, and help each other than to withhold questions, information, resources, reflections, and critiques.

(3) Safeguarding privacy. Deliberate safeguarding of privacy was another important condition contributing to teacher's willingness to use the Intern-Net list for parawork. For Intern-Net, this has meant that the list is closed to new subscribers, that archives are password protected, that names and other identifying information are changed in research presentations and publications about the list (as well as in some messages posted by subscribers), and that there is an explicit agreement that discussion list conversations are not to be forwarded or discussed elsewhere without the permission of the subscribers.

An Environment that Enables Role Negotiation and Reflection

For an online (or offline) parawork environment to succeed, the space itself, as well as the people interacting within the space, must send a clear message that it is "good form" for participants to interact as more than professionals (that is, to be people who also enact other roles). This message may be communicated explicitly or implicitly, so long as it is sent consistently. In an induction parawork environment for new teachers, participants must be permitted—and encouraged—to work through and think about the ways in which their roles overlap, conflict, and require transition. This is especially true of the roles of teacher and student, but other roles—such as those of friend, family member, community member, and the like could also be considered in relationship to teaching roles. A space that allows new teachers to interact with each other while engaging in a variety of roles allows for them to share a range of interests and

experiences, to relate to each other in diverse ways, and to build trust through multiple connections. Leigh noted during our interview that the times when she felt strong common bonds with Intern-Net subscribers were also the times that she was most likely to post messages to the discussion list and to engage in the types of activities that I have identified as parawork.

A Space that Responds Flexibly to Teachers' Needs and Interests

Finally, it is key that online and offline parawork sites be able to support diverse activities that reflect users' needs and interests. For Intern-Net, this has meant that the list has been used by teachers as a site to engage in collaborative reflection, conduct independent inquiry, exchange resources and materials, seek out guidance and support, organize social events, request information, and provide personal updates to the social group (such as news about moves, weddings, etc.). These needs and interests might vary in other parawork contexts. One constant across parawork spaces, however, is that activities should be driven by users. While novice teachers who use parawork spaces may choose to take up activities suggested by mentors or even supervisors, doing so must be completely voluntary. Mandating that anyone use a parawork site—or do so in a particular way—results in an environment that is no longer fully "outside" the workplace. This makes it impossible for the space to function as an environment shaped by users to support them "alongside of" their professional work. For novice teachers, mandating participation in an external network such as an e-mail discussion list would alter the very contexts that shaped Intern-Net teachers' online conversations, undermining participation in genres for reflection and inquiry as well as participation in other parawork activities. In short, mandating or regulating participation would take the "para" out of parawork.

A personal e-mail from Leigh illustrates the importance of teachers' voluntary participation. When I was first considering studying the Intern-Net listserv, I asked the subscribing teachers what they thought about my proposed research. Leigh wrote to encourage me to proceed with the study. But her supportive message included one caveat:

> My only concern with the success of the listserv is that it will become something that is mandatory. . . . The most wonderful thing about the listserv is that it is there for you when you need [it]. . . . It is a fantastic set-up that allows for genuine responses. If this were to ever become required, I think it would lose its authenticity.

Leigh's point is critical. Teacher educators who worry that early-career teachers will not continue learning through reflection and inquiry unless it is somehow assigned would do well to remember that

> [m]uch as we would like to, we cannot mandate learning, only attendance. All professional development programs confront this challenge; even when attendance is voluntary, teachers arrive at professional development programs with clear ideas of what kinds of 'knowledge' are most helpful and relevant to their ongoing learning. (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p. 198)

If we as English teacher educators have done our work well, our graduates will be equipped with the ability and desire to continue the reflection and inquiry practices into which we have apprenticed them. And if we design online forums for parawork appropriately and partner in them effectively, these early-career teachers will have spaces that foster their continued learning. We can, through modeling and coaching, employ our

knowledge of genres for collaborative reflection and independent inquiry to aid new teachers as they learn how best to participate in these kinds of conversations. We can work to spark conversations that match participating teachers' needs and interests. But the conversations themselves should be voluntary and flexible—opportunities for beginning teachers to engage, in ways that cannot occur outside the parawork space, in discussions and activities that correspond to their needs and interests during their induction into the profession.

A final point about the issue of responding to teachers' needs and interests. Teacher educators who partner with early-career teachers in networks like the Intern-Net list may be inclined to despair when they notice that some subscribers appear, through their "silence," not to be participating, or to be writing less frequently than they once did in reflection and inquiry threads. Numerous examples in this study have shown, however, that quiet participation is not the same as nonparticipation or being disengaged. In fact, Leigh's use of Intern-Net messages to promote conversations and transformations at her school occurred during a period when she posted to the list only infrequently. But her continued willingness to read and talk off-list about the messages helped to facilitate her needs and interests—that is, her work as she transitioned into her school and became a teacher leader and an agent for change. Ultimately, that is what external induction networks for teachers are about: fostering transition and transformation. When our efforts to implement online parawork networks are successful in responding to novice teachers' needs and interests, we will have played an important role in the development of experienced teachers who have "grown out of" our induction networks to become leaders in their schools, partners with us in research and inquiry, and, in a few years,

formal and informal mentors for interns and beginning teachers who are newly immersed in their own induction into the profession.

Implications for Future Research

This study of Intern-Net has examined some of the realities and possibilities of e-mail discussion lists as induction opportunities for teachers' continued learning and professional development. Specifically, I have examined how a list such as Intern-Net can support new teachers' participation in genred conversations for reflection and inquiry. Furthermore, I have considered how English teacher educators can apply knowledge of discussion list genres and technologies to implement successful online parawork networks—spaces that foster inquiry, reflection, and other activities that promote new teachers' learning and aid their transition into roles as experienced, highly-qualified teacher leaders positioned to change schools.

Yet this study is limited in scope, both as it applies to discussion list genres for teacher learning and, more broadly, to the concept of online parawork sites and activities for teachers. Although I have provided a detailed analysis of discussion list genres for collaborative reflection and independent inquiry, there is still much to learn about other genres for teacher learning that occur through e-mail discussion lists. And holistic, technology-conscious studies of genres for inquiry, reflection , and other types of teacher learning as they occur in other online parawork spaces would yield a deeper understanding of how to use additional networking technologies to support beginning and experienced teachers. More in-depth insights into additional contexts that shape genres for teacher learning would also be valuable. For example, in what ways do cultural

contexts of gender, race, and class affect teachers' participation in online genres for inquiry and reflection?

Further research is also necessary in order to understand more fully the precise nature of online parawork spaces and activities for teachers. It will be important to identify which aspects of parawork remain stable across differing contexts—and which characteristics change in response to varied contexts. It would be beneficial, for example, to learn how teachers' experience levels and the relative stability of their professional roles affect their participation in online parawork. Could we expect that experienced teachers adapting to new roles and tasks would use parawork spaces much as Leigh and the other Intern-Net teachers have? Would teachers with relatively stable professional responsibilities take advantage of online parawork spaces in a manner much different from Intern-Net teachers' approach to the discussion list?

It would also be useful to understand more fully the impact of school and professional cultures on the activities that emerge in parawork spaces. Many Intern-Net teachers stated emphatically that they felt uncomfortable asking too many questions of (or in front of) supervising teachers, professors, and administrators, so that the discussion list became an important place for them to reflect without risking the appearance of incompetence. How might parawork activities evolve differently for teachers who don't feel so vulnerable to the evaluating eye of supervisors?

Investigating the role of still other variables in the overall context of the parawork scene would also enhance our understanding of online teacher parawork. The Intern-Net study shows parawork occurring within a discussion list configured in a particular way, with an exclusive and voluntary membership guarded by passwords and other privacy-

protecting settings. How might teacher parawork evolve differently on a discussion list with alternate settings, in an "open" discussion list, or even through a different kind of online space such as a discussion board, a chatroom, a blog, or a virtual world similar to Second Life? And if an essential quality of parawork spaces is that they exist and function alongside but also <u>outside</u> the bounds of the workplace, to what extent could schools become involved in "sponsoring" a parawork site without also becoming involved in the regulation and oversight of that space and the activities that occur within it? Lastly, I have concentrated here primarily on beneficial aspects of online parawork for teachers. What conditions might contribute to parawork sites and activities having a detrimental effect on teachers and their relationships with their schools?

These are challenging questions. They demonstrate that neither the intricate nature of discussion list genres nor the complexities of online parawork for teachers will be pinned down easily or uncovered through a single study. Yet my hope is that, to the extent I have begun to unfold some of these intricacies and complexities in this study of the Intern-Net list, I will have also clarified the importance of this type of research, reinvigorated and initiated productive conversations, and inspired further studies that will aid English teacher educators in our work to prepare English language arts teachers and partner with them throughout their careers.

APPENDIX
Sample List of Specific Interview Questions
(Prepared for interview with Athena)

A. Genre as Nexus between Individuals' Actions and Socially-Defined Contexts

1. Frequently, teachers post to Intern-Net with requests for ideas that they can consider on their own off-list—whether these be lesson ideas, ways to respond to classroom management issues, resources for curriculum planning and professional development, or ideas about how best to interact with parents, co-workers, administrators, etc. (Examples: 11/04 Ellen & Scarlet Letter Ideas with Scarlet Letter; 11/05 Help!! Need a book!; 11/06 NiceNet with Students.) If there are times where you asked for this kind of help, what motivated you to post? And what did you do off-list with the replies you received? (Or if you didn't receive replies?) What motivated you to respond to others' requests for help—or not to respond? To what extent would it be accurate to call these kinds of threads "Independent Inquiry"—teachers gathering resources on the list and then making meaning from them on their own off-list? What roles did technology play in these kinds of threads? (Would you have these kinds of conversations elsewhere, either online or off? How would they be the same or different?) In these kinds of threads, what made you more likely to use "I statements" or "you should" language in different cases?

2. There were just a few threads over the last three years where Intern-Net teachers engaged in collaborative inquiry—building knowledge together that started from questions about our common views, roles, goals, philosophies of education, etc. (Examples: 11/05, Grading and my red pen in pencil; 12/06, Knight Cite) What does (or would) make you more or less likely to participate in these kinds of threads on the Intern-Net list? How would your participation change if we were using a chat/IM environment? An online discussion board? A smaller e-mail group? A face-to-face conversation in a room with the same people?

3. Our Live Intern-Net chat in February: was it more like the independent inquiry described in #1 above, or more like the collaborative inquiry in #2? How would you compare/contrast our IM chat conversation with the Intern-Net threads that followed, like 2/07 Myths and fantasy?

4. In several other threads, we worked together on collaborative reflection: making meaning together about teaching-learning experiences, both inside and outside our own classrooms. (Examples: 11/05 The Lion, The Witch, & The Atheist; 5/06 12-year old tells Steve to f#&@ himself) What motivated you to read/write these threads, or not? When you posted, what kinds of information did you purposefully include or omit, and why? What roles did technology play in these kinds of threads? (Would you have these kinds of conversations elsewhere, either online or off? How would they be the same or different?)

5. Also...how do you understand the relationship between Intern-Net and your work (via NiceNet) with Katie, Mariah, and Drea in preparation for presenting at the national conference?

6. What value, if any, did posting and reading the responses to The Questions have for you (summer 2006)?

7. Talk about using the list to build an audience for your students' writing. Did other Intern-Net teachers respond? What do you think about this? To your knowledge, how does this compare with other attempts to build partnerships for teaching, research, reflection, etc.?

8. When were you most likely to choose your words very carefully, and why?

9. Ideally, how would you and the other Intern-Net subscribers have used the list in your internship year, your first year, your second year? In reality, how was the list used during these times? Any surprises? Disappointments? If we were to go back and start Intern-Net from scratch again, how would you change it? What would you keep the same? What are your thoughts about the future of Intern-Net?

B. Contexts of situation, culture, technologies, and genres

1. When and where do(n't) you write/read Intern-Net messages, and why?

2. Are there times when you reply to the individual who authored an Intern-Net message, rather than to the full list? Discuss examples (if available) and what influences your decisions.

3. How does your role (as a teacher, substitute teacher, or aspiring teacher) impact your participation in Intern-Net?

4. What do/don't Intern-Net teachers value or believe? What assumptions do you think are part of Intern-Net culture, and how do you know?

5. How do the values, beliefs, and expectations of others on (and off) the list affect your participation and response?

6. If you posted and rarely received e-mail response from other participants, what would you think or feel? What if, although others did not respond, you were able to confirm that others were reading your messages? That others appreciated your messages?

7. How did the technology of the listerv matter? On a scale of 1-5, rate the importance of the following: password protection; subscriptions through Leah only; acknowledgments that posts had been distributed to list; attachments allowed; archives there but require password; no message editor; lurkers.

8. Sometimes the listserv didn't cooperate for you, so that your messages didn't go out to the list, etc. Talk about that and how it affected your participation.

9. What e-mail accounts have you used to subscribe to Intern-Net, and why? In what ways does this affect your participation in the list?

10. When you write and read Intern-Net messages, do you use plain text or html formatting? In what ways does this affect your participation?

11. What makes you more/less likely to follow links that others post to Intern-Net? To share links?

12. Do you receive individual Intern-Net messages one at a time, or do you subscribe to a digest version? How would it change your participation to switch your subscription?

13. What other kinds of writing that you do (or have done)—either online or offline—inform the ways you write and read Intern-Net posts? Discuss examples.

14. How have offline relationships and online relationships affected each other over the last 3 years?

C. Relationships between Intern-Net participation and approaches to teaching English

1. Compare your visible Intern-Net participation with your "invisible" participation. In what ways do you respond (in the short and long term) that others on the list may not see?

2. How/when do you share ideas, information, strategies, language, or other things from Intern-Net with others off-list?

3. Share (if available) and discuss examples of documents that you wrote for your teaching—whether the audience was students, colleagues, administrators, parents, or even yourself. In what ways, if any, are these writings directly or indirectly influenced by your participation in Intern-Net?

4. How do you imagine that your work and identity as a teacher would be different if you had participated in Intern-Net for only 1 or 2 years—or not at all?

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