ABSTRACT

JACKSON, ALECIA YOUNGBLOOD. Peer Response Groups Using Electronic and Traditional Communications: A Portraiture of a Class. (Under the direction of Dr. Carol A. Pope.)

This participatory action research project was a qualitative inquiry into the contextual variables that influence peer response groups using electronic and traditional communications. The research participants, students of the teacher/researcher, were twenty-two university freshmen enrolled in two sections of a reading and writing course required for students with low verbal SAT scores. Students wrote five autobiographical stories in the narrative genre. For the first two writings, students paired with the same peer from their class for the face-to-face conferences. For the third writing assignment, students had both in-class conferences with the same peer in addition to an e-mail conference with a peer from the other class. Students used e-mail only to communicate with both partners about writing assignments four and five. Data collection took place throughout the fifteen weeks of the semester and consisted of participant observations, document analysis of students' reaction journals, document analysis of students' first and second drafts of writing (with peer comments), and individual interviews. Findings are presented as a portraiture of the collective classes and a portraiture of a peer response triad. The main theme that emerged from the findings is "acts of negotiation and balance." In general, students depended on the established social relationships with their in-class partners when making revision decisions. Students acknowledged that e-mail exchanges about writing were convenient and widened their audience, but they did not work to establish a relationship with their e-mail partners. Most students valued the complementary aspects of using the two different modes of communication for feedback

about their writing. However, preference for mode of communication was secondary to their peers' possessing qualities of honesty, trustworthiness, and sensitivity. How peers achieved this rapport within their relationships was idiosynchratic to each response group. This study concluded that individual student attitudes, values, and expectations influence and are influenced by multiple contextual variables in the writing classroom (i.e., physical context, social context, mode of communication, the peer response group, and time). A model of reciprocity is proposed to illuminate the complex dynamics within peer response groups. Future research on peer response groups should include more systematic inquiry into contextual forces that contribute to the success or collapse of peer response groups. Teachers should work to understand the inevitable interchanges between individual students and class context in order to assist their students as they grow and develop as readers and writers in peer response groups.

PEER RESPONSE GROUPS
USING ELECTRONIC AND TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATIONS:
A PORTRAITURE OF A CLASS

By

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science

In the
Department of

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

MIDDLE GRADES EDUCATION

Raleigh

1999

APPROVED BY:

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BIOGRAPHY

Alecia Youngblood Jackson, born on December 16, 1968, received her elementary and secondary education in Buford, Georgia. Upon her graduation from high school in 1986, she attended the University of Georgia, where she majored in English education. She was an honor graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree in education in June, 1990.

From 1990 until 1997, she taught English language arts in public middle- and high schools in the suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia. In her seven-year tenure as a public school teacher, she used a reading and writing workshop approach in the 8th, 9th, 10th, and 12th grade English language arts classes that she taught. In addition to her teaching duties, she was also involved in mentoring novice teachers, curriculum planning and development, and technology integration. After her marriage and subsequent move to North Carolina, she was accepted into the Master of Science program in middle grades language arts at North Carolina State University. During her two-year stint as a graduate student, she taught reading and writing classes to University freshmen who struggled with the verbal portion of the SAT. She also worked as a university supervisor who mentored novice teachers as they completed their student teaching.

After her graduation in May 1999, Alecia will attend the University of Georgia to complete her doctoral degree in English education. She plans to conduct research that focuses on the literacy development of minorities.

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Introduction

Composition theorists such as Linda Flower (1997), Lisa Delpit (1997), Sarah W.
Freedman (1992), and Kenneth Bruffee (1985) have long viewed peer response as a
"natural extension of the social/cultural vision of writing" (Flower, p. 704). Teachers
place peer response within the discourse community of the classroom hoping that such
interaction will facilitate both social and cognitive growth: groups affect the cognition of
the individual students; groups intervene within and can affect the writing process itself;
groups create a live audience and shift the focus from teacher evaluation to peer response;
and groups facilitate subjectivity, where writers and responders share roles in their
exchange of ideas about writing.

However, during peer response some students are concerned with maintaining
smooth social relations with their peers, rather than offering evaluative comments on
their peers' writing. A study in two exemplary middle school classrooms revealed that
students spent only sixty percent of their time on task in peer response groups; the rest of
their attention was devoted to social talk, and their thinking was devoted to adequately
filling out the teachers' dittoed response sheets (Freedman, 1987). Other studies revealed
similar problems in peer response group processes: lack of respect among group
members, misconceptions about revision, conflict about text ownership, reluctance to
carry out suggested revisions, and dependence on the teacher for revision suggestions
(Geest and Remmers, 1994; Sengupta, 1996).

In my nine-year history as a teacher of writing to middle school students, high
school students, and college freshmen, I have witnessed the mismatch between my
pedagogical choices in the classroom and the socio-cognitive processes I assumed would

be stimulated by those choices. Each year, I reinvented ways in which to engage my students in peer response, hoping, year after year, that one of the strategies would solve the problems that caused the collapse of some peer response groups. In the fall of 1997, I assembled a focus group of four of my former students who took a developmental reading and writing course that I had taught; in that course, the students had participated in peer response groups on a biweekly basis throughout the semester. The students in the focus group revealed concerns similar to those conclusions drawn by some researchers. They reported that a sheet to complete during the peer revision process kept the focus away from the writing; they also admitted that they felt inadequate to evaluate another's writing and would have preferred to receive critiques from me rather than from their peers. Additionally, they described the time in the group as intimidating and were wary of upsetting their peers with evaluative comments.

The comments from my own students in the fall of 1997 prompted me to think more about the nature of peer revision. If peer response is a social activity that facilitates cognitive growth, what happens if the social foundations collapse as a result of intimidation, insecurity, or inhibition? If my social engineering has little – if any – effect on the quality of response, how can I ensure that useful, evaluative comments and effective revisions will result from peer response groups?

In the fall of 1998, I taught two sections of the same reading and writing course that I had taught the year before. I scheduled my two classes to meet in a networked computer lab because I wanted my students to have access to word processing during each class meeting. However, I realized that my students would also be able to utilize the most current, sophisticated technologies available through the Internet, and, as University

students, they had their own electronic mail accounts. I conceived an idea: What would happen if students exchanged their writing via e-mail for peer response? As I pondered that question and planned the writing activities for the semester, I formulated these three research questions:

- What happens when e-mail communication about peer revision is implemented as an addition to the traditional mode of talk about writing?

- What student attitudes, values, and expectations about peer response groups evolve, shift, and remain fixed over time in both electronic and traditional communications?

- What about electronic and traditional peer response groups do student writers define as influential or ineffectual in making their revision decisions?

With those questions in mind at the beginning of the semester, I asked my students to take a journey with me in discovering the answers. All twenty-two of them volunteered to be participants in this study. I turned to my students to inform me about their individual perceptions of peer response groups. In our fifteen weeks together, we celebrated what worked, analyzed why things did not work, laughed at our mistakes, and vented our frustrations. In the end, we all learned about the complexities of communicating about writing in both electronic mail and traditional classroom environments.

Here is our story.

CHAPTER TWO
Review of Prior Research

Theory of Peer Response Groups

Composition theorist Linda Flower views peer response as a "natural extension of the social/cultural vision of writing," where such interaction will affect the cognitive, social, and emotional growth of the writers and the peer response group (1997, p. 704). Lisa Delpit argues that productive peer conferences have a powerful influence on writers' processes because the response groups function as a real audience (1997, p. 575). In turn, student writers may begin to internalize and to anticipate their audience's needs (Freedman, 1992). Kenneth Bruffee furthers this social vision of writing; he says that in peer response groups, students "gain a stronger sense of the degree to which knowledge, like writing itself, is a social phenomenon, and the degree to which the social context in which we learn permeates what we know and how we know it" (1985, p. 116). Bruffee goes on to assert that the response group has an important role from the beginning of the writer's processes as students work together to negotiate and to construct meaning and thought; the response group is not simply just there at the end of the writing process as the audience.

The Vygotskian premise of cognitive socialization poses the question: How do social interactions impact individual cognitive development? For peer response groups, their conversation is embedded in the context of talk about writing. In this shared task, they assume the roles of both novice and expert, and their goal is intersubjectivity, where the writer and responder share roles in their exchange of ideas, advice, questions, and answers about the writing. In the ideal collaborative situation of readers and writers in

response groups, different students are knowledgeable about different aspects of writing, and each contributes in some way (Freedman, 1992). It is in this social interaction that cognitive actions have a purpose and result in knowledge acquisition.

Problems in Small Group Writing Processes

In spite of the potential cognitive and social growth that peer response groups can stimulate, researchers cite problems that occur in small group writing processes that can deter individual and group progress. Forman (1990) describes student writing groups as informally organized and nonhierarchical; problems arise in group processes because the group members are unfamiliar with each other. Geest and Remmers (1994) observed that some of their students did not respect each other's authority as a peer editor, and students "perceived peer critique as an attempt to outsmart each other instead of as a support in a process of negotiating meaning" (p. 239). They defined multiple problems that surface in small writing groups: misconceptions about revision, conflict about text ownership, and reluctance to carry out suggested revisions.

Two research studies by Marx (1990) and Freedman (1992) documented another problem in peer response groups: students' reluctance to offer evaluative feedback because they are more concerned about maintaining smooth social relations with their peers. Furthermore, Freedman's study revealed that students spent only sixty percent of their time on task in peer response groups; the remainder of their attention was devoted to social talk. The discourse about writing was dominated by resistance to the dittoed response sheets that the students were to complete during the conference; additionally, some students avoided evaluating another's writing negatively, and others resisted helping their peers (especially if they felt unequipped to do so). Flower (1997) argues

that teachers cannot always depend on their social engineering to ensure cognitive growth in student writing groups; more crucial to students are the "interpersonal needs for social affiliation, where acts of evaluation and criticism threaten solidarity" (p. 705).

Similarly, Sengupta (1996) maintains that providing students in peer response groups with evaluation sheets may encourage a "prescriptive stance" rather than a collaborative one. Sengupta also reports that students in her study did not perceive themselves as the real audience of student writing even though they had participated in peer response groups; to them, the teacher was the only reader. Sengupta blames this phenomenon on the deeply-rooted, traditional roles of the teacher and the learner in school curriculum. Unless these perceptions about teachers' roles are changed, she argues, "it is probable that little value will be attached to peer evaluation" (p. 25).

In another, earlier study by Freedman (1987), she reveals that teachers in the traditional classroom believe time constraints work against collaboration and, therefore, make student conferences difficult to arrange with any frequency. Hartman et. al. (1991) note that teachers in traditional classrooms are constrained because logistically it is expensive and time-consuming to reproduce papers for exchanging and sharing.

A Rationale for Using
Computer-Mediated Communication
in Peer Response Groups

These problems with small peer response groups have plagued student-centered writing programs, but a camp of researchers claims that computer technology may help to alleviate some of them. Both synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication overcome the physical barriers of time and space and are convenient (Hartman, et. al., 1991). Students do not have to be in the same place, at the same time,

to exchange feedback about each other's writing. Peers who cannot arrange meeting times because of conflicting schedules can respond at their leisure, and they do not have to wait until class time to offer or to elicit feedback. Computer-mediated communication, especially electronic mail, reduces social context cues that remind people of social definitions (e.g., clothing) and that remind people that they are being evaluated (e.g., frowning). Additionally, since these dynamic social cues are absent, students are forced to focus on how they will phrase their comments in writing so that their feedback is clear (Sirc, 1988). Students who are less secure academically may feel more confident communicating electronically because the atmosphere, characterized by "psychological distance" is less threatening than face-to-face interaction (Mabrito, 1991). Finally, with computer-mediated communication, student writers' audiences expand to encompass more local and global contexts (Hartman, et. al., 1991), and collaborating about writing on the computer is advantageous for students; they become members of the community of the computer literate (Marx, 1990).

Hawisher and Moran (1993) assert that a paucity of research exists on electronic mail in the field of composition theory. In their quick review of the literature, Hawisher and Moran claim that only a few studies describe the medium and suggest ways to use it; other studies focus more on *synchronous* computer-mediated conferencing (i.e. chat rooms, bulletin boards) than on e-mail conferencing. Though electronic mail does not mirror the coexistent, real-time discourse of other computer-mediated conferencing, Hawisher and Moran view e-mail as "a means of realizing a collaborative, social pedagogy" (p. 629). They advocate an e-mail pedagogy that is project-oriented, cross-disciplinary, and that dissolves the "temporal and spatial boundaries of the conventional

classroom" (p. 633). Additionally, they envision the e-mail classroom as one in which students have a great deal of authority as they collaborate and correspond with others. For these reasons, Hawisher and Moran argue that e-mail deserves a place in the curriculum.

**Research on Computer-Mediated
Peer Response Processes**

The seven studies found for the purposes of this review examine peer response groups communicating via *asynchronous* communication. All of these studies were conducted in the late 1980's and early 1990's with students enrolled in courses at universities and colleges in the United States and Europe. Though the researchers were studying the effects of computer-mediated communication on revision processes, all of them incorporated face-to-face communication as either a component or as control in their research method. Data collection ranged from interviews and multiple case studies of the subjects to discourse analysis of reflective writings and reaction journals kept by the subjects. Student writers wrote from three to six papers for response, all in the transactional mode. Most of the studies continued through an entire semester or quarter of the writing class, with the exception of one study, which lasted eight weeks.

The computer software programs used by the students to exchange comments about writing in the majority of these studies were not the powerful e-mail programs that we use on the Internet today. In five of the seven studies, students relied on text-editors such as PREP, *Comments,* and *X-Edit* that permitted them to type comments in the margins of the text; then, the entire document was sent over a network. In five of the seven studies that investigate computerized, asynchronous peer response, students used these text editors to exchange comments about writing. Students in Marx's (1990) study

wrote critique letters that were sent over a network to the student writers. The only study in which students were able to embed their comments within the text was conducted by Duin et. al. (1994); however, the researchers did not investigate the effects of this technique on the writers' revision decisions.

One of the first references to e-mail use in writing instruction was not a study but a teacher's report of how she used e-mail technology as a medium for peer response. Joyce Kinkead's students described e-mail peer revision comments as "fair" and "blunt," and they felt a sense of freedom because the writer was not "right there" during the critique (1987, p. 338). The students also cited flexibility of time to respond as a positive aspect of using e-mail for peer revision. Furthermore, Kinkead observed that writers seemed to take more risks in e-mail interactions than in face-to-face interactions. Kinkead concluded, in this early report on this medium, that e-mail was intrinsically motivating for her students and fostered written communication among them.

A study by Stroble (1988) examined the similarities and differences in the responses student writers received from peer groups communicating face-to-face and by electronic mail. The subjects were twenty English language arts teacher education students, and they used a text editor to enter marginal comments on one another's writing. The results indicated that writers received equal numbers of comments in the two modes of communication; however, in face-to-face communication, writers received a greater number of positive, substantive, text-specific comments. Despite the fact that the comments given face-to-face were of a higher quality, student writers found peer comments in both modes of communication effective; they rated them as equally useful in their revision decisions. Stroble also discovered that writers did not use e-mail for

purposes other than responding to writing (e.g., asking questions, forming relationships).

In general, student writers preferred the synchronous nature of face-to-face

communication over e-mail response to writing.

Marx (1990) conducted a study in which students from Skidmore College and

Babson College exchanged their writings and wrote critique letters in response to the

writings. These critique letters were sent from one college to the other via BITNET's

electronic mail. Marx hoped that imposing distance between the writer and the peer

reviewer would encourage more substantive responses. He found that the students'

critique letters sent via electronic mail were more honest, thorough, longer, and specific

than the letters prepared for in-class exchanges. However, like the students in Stroble's

study, student writers missed opportunities for real "talk" about their writing; their

asynchronous communication did not permit immediate, interactive dialogue, and the

students did not pursue extra e-mail or telephone communication to bridge the gap.

Hall and Hall (1991) researched ways in which students in advanced writing

courses in two Texas Universities used e-mail to exchange comments about their writing.

After writing and receiving comments on four papers, students reported more positive

attitudes toward writing, revising, and using technology. However, students described

feedback from their peers as "pedestrian" and "vague." According to Hall and Hall, these

negative perceptions of e-mail feedback were attributed to the students' preferences for

face-to-face communication; in their asynchronous communication, verbal and nonverbal

signs were absent, and students reported being more accustomed to verbal exchange

about writing.

Geest and Remmers (1994) investigated the problems in and effectiveness of distanced, computer-mediated peer review. One group of students participated in biweekly, face-to-face meetings to give feedback on their peers' writing. Another group used computers as their medium for communication about writing; they used PREP, a text editor that allows readers to create margins on the text for their comments and then to send them to writers via a network. The results from the study were derived primarily from interviews with the subjects, not from the texts they produced. In follow-up interviews, students in the PREP group reported problems with software and access to computers. Additionally, this PREP group was isolated from their classmates and the teacher, so they relied on each other for technical and instructional assistance (as opposed to seeking out help during the available set hours). The PREP group sought other means of communication (i.e., the telephone) to solve problems within their group; therefore, the asynchronous communication, as for other students using this mode, was not enough.

These four studies (Stroble, 1988; Marx, 1990; Hall and Hall, 1991; and Geest and Remmers, 1994) drew similar conclusions. Their subjects were college students enrolled in either writing courses or a teacher preparation program, so they were probably well-versed in both collaborative group work and writing processes. Though these student writers used the technology to their advantage by giving and receiving substantive feedback, they all preferred face-to-face communication. For these writers, "real" social interaction was necessary for them to feel vested in the group process. The electronic medium offered them a novel way to exchange comments about writing, but their feelings of comfort and familiarity with more traditional modes of communication may have hindered their communicating electronically.

Two other studies do investigate how responding to student writing via electronic mail might ameliorate obstacles that keep "less able" students from being successful in a student-centered writing program. Mabrito (1991) analyzed the difference between responding via face-to-face interaction and responding via e-mail for four high- and four low-apprehensive first-year college writers. He characterized high-apprehensive writers as fearful of going public with their writing and hypothesized that the anonymity afforded in an electronic environment would help to create an "atmosphere less threatening than face-to-face interaction" (p. 510). In his study, Mabrito explored the nature and the differences of the writers' discourse in peer revision groups in *both* environments; he also examined the effects of the discourse on the writers' revision decisions. He discovered that high-apprehensive writers contributed more to the e-mail sessions because they "may have felt more comfortable evaluating writing via e-mail" (p. 527). Specifically, high-apprehensives' e-mail comments were substantially more directive than in face-to-face interactions, indicating that they took more risks in their feedback. In addition, the high-apprehensive writers' revision decisions were affected more by comments received during e-mail sessions. For high-apprehensive writers, then, e-mail afforded more positive experiences with peer response than face-to-face interaction.

Similarly, a telecommunications study by Hartman et. al. (1991) explored student-student and teacher-student interaction via telecommunications and compared this interaction to classes using traditional communications. The subjects were eighty-one college students who were taking a required freshman writing course; the students were divided among four sections of the course – two sections used traditional communications, and two sections used telecommunications. The students wrote three

transactional papers over the course of a semester, and the networked students used electronic text editors and e-mail to exchange comments about writing. Results showed that students with lower SAT verbal scores interacted more often with their instructors and peers about their writing using e-mail. Also, the higher the students' writing anxiety, the less they communicated in the traditional modes. The researchers claim that the technology "redistributed teacher and classmate attention" so that less able students could participate more actively and communicate more effectively in the classroom (p. 107). According to these two research studies, students who struggle with communication – albeit oral or written – benefit from the "equalizing force" provided by an e-mail environment.

The most recent study of using e-mail as a medium for sending feedback about writing was conducted by Duin et. al. (1994). Eight college-age mentors responded via e-mail to twenty-four ninth grade students about their writing. What sets this study apart from the others is the fact that the participants were able to embed their comments about writing directly within the text as opposed to using a text editor. However, the researchers' primary interest was studying mentoring via telecommunications, and they examined only how mentors structured their responses to student writers and how those responses changed over time. From the mentors, the researchers learned that the mentors' struggles with their approaches for responding to students via e-mail reflected the same struggles of tutors in face-to-face conferences: motivating writers and attending to the writers' concerns. Also, they learned that some students' writings improved over time and that some student writers seemed to genuinely care about their writing. But the researchers did not elicit any responses from the student writers other than those revealed

from a pre-study questionnaire that asked them about their technology use, writing skills, and attitudes toward having a mentor for their writing. Therefore, this study does not give a holistic picture of e-mail peer response since it did not examine the revision decisions the student writers made based on comments embedded in their texts.

The Present Study

The previous research reveals some common themes surrounding computer-mediated peer response. First, students generally preferred face-to-face, synchronous communication over electronic, asynchronous communication for discourse about writing. Next, it is inconclusive that peer feedback via electronic mail is any more effective or of any higher quality than peer feedback given face-to-face. Finally, high-apprehensive writers and students with low verbal SAT scores had more positive experiences with peer response using electronic mail than in face-to-face interactions.

Prior research investigates whether e-mail communication can replace traditional communication about writing. One purpose of this study is to understand the students' values and attitudes about peer revision that affect their discourse about writing in *both* modes of communication. The influence of peer comments on writers' revision decisions is not simply a cause and effect matter. Complex social, emotional, and cognitive forces contribute to the way peer response groups negotiate (or do not negotiate) working and personal relationships among participants. In the present study, I explore what aspects of e-mail communication and what aspects of face-to-face communication contribute to the success of peer response groups.

Another goal of the present study is to make more definitive discoveries about the quality of student feedback on their peers' writings. Since students were able to embed

their revision suggestions within text, their comments have the potential to be more text-specific and directive. Whether or not writers use effective evaluative comments is their decision, and the influences of those revision decisions extends beyond the quality of the peers' comments. This study investigates the multiple factors that contribute to writers' revision decisions and the conditions under which students respond positively and productively to each others' writings.

Given the complexity of peer response and the factors which can influence its effectiveness, it is not enough to analyze discourse about writing without understanding the social and emotional interrelationships that function as the undercurrent of all collaborative groups. Bringing together diverse students with different communication styles and needs as well as varied attitudes and expectations about revision practices complicates the peer revision process. Finally, this study seeks to reveal the variables that determine which mode of communication – electronic, face-to-face, or a combination of both – students prefer.

CHAPTER THREE
Methodology

Using qualitative research methods, I investigated the complex dynamics of peer response processes within the context of a semester-long reading and writing course that I taught. Because the research took place in the students' classroom, and because the students engaged in behavior that is natural in a reading and writing course, this study is considered naturalistic. I used an inductive process in gathering and analyzing data; trends and issues unfolded as my students shared with me their perceptions of peer revision. It was important for me to understand the ways in which students made meaning of their roles as readers and writers within intricate relationships in our class. I framed my study with three questions:

- What happens when e-mail communication about peer revision is implemented as an addition to the traditional mode of talk about writing?

- What student attitudes, values, and expectations about peer response groups evolve, shift, and remain fixed over time in both electronic and traditional communications?

- What about electronic and traditional peer response groups do student writers define as influential or ineffectual in their revision decisions?

Action Research

As Bogdan and Biklen (1998) define it, action research is a type of applied qualitative research that is explicitly used to "make practical decisions about, or improvements in, programs and practices" (p. 209). However, making changes in educational practices is complicated. Teachers and students are affected by the change, so it is important to understand the perspectives of the people in the setting. Qualitative

orientation allows the researcher to hear the participants' voices as they deal with the complexities of change.

This participant action research project grew out of my own and my previous students' classroom questions about the value and function of peer response groups. My rationale for conducting research with my own students was twofold: I wanted to critique and alter my own teaching, and I wanted to be immersed in the classroom culture of the research setting. Additionally, I thought it necessary to establish close, emotional connections with my students so that I could obtain a truly emic perspective; since I had taught the class the year before, I knew that this particular population of students – those who struggled with the verbal portion of the SAT – needed to establish close relationships in order to feel more confident as readers, writers, speakers, and thinkers in the classroom. I wanted us to work collaboratively to find the answers to our questions – to take a generative, not receptive stance toward knowledge.

This systematic inquiry into the nature of peer response groups using electronic and traditional communications would alter, not just add to, what teachers and researchers know about peer response in the writing classroom. The purpose of this research study is to not only inform pedagogical practices but also to shape current theory about peer response by illuminating the complex interrelationships inherent to all peer response groups. This study seeks to define the variables that constitute peer response groups and to show, through discrepant cases, how these variables are idiosyncratic to each individual and group.

Research Context

Research Participants. The research participants for this study were twenty-two freshmen who were enrolled in two sections of a reading and writing course that I taught at a southeastern university in the fall semester of 1998. This group of thirteen males and nine females was racially diverse, consisting of twelve Caucasians, seven African-Americans, one Native American, one Vietnamese, and one Indian. (The Vietnamese male and Indian male spoke English as their second language.) Half of the students grew up in rural areas and small towns in the southeast; the other half were from suburbs of major cities in the southeast. All of the students, except for one, lived in on-campus housing at the University.

Each of the students voluntarily signed a consent form that not only assured their anonymity in the report of my findings but also explicitly stated that their grades for the course would not be compromised by their participation in the study. (See Appendix A for Informed Consent Form.)

Research Setting . In the two sections of the course, there were eleven students in the morning section and eleven students in the afternoon section. The classes met on Tuesdays and Thursdays during each week of the semester. The location of the classes was a networked Macintosh computer lab, and the students had access to word processing programs, the Internet, and electronic mail through their personal University accounts.

The course was required for freshmen who scored less than 460 on the verbal portion of the Scholastic Aptitude Test; they had to pass the course before they could take freshman English. In this class, students read and wrote in the narrative mode. Students read autobiographical stories and memoirs, and they wrote five stories about their own

personal, significant experiences. (For further description of the course, see Spires, H. A., Williams, J. B., Jackson, A., & Huffman, L., 1999.) Students learned peer response skills through teacher modeling and whole-class practice, and they worked in pairs and groups of three when giving authentic feedback about each other's writings.

   Participant Pairing.   Since both classes had an odd number of eleven students, there were four response pairs and one response triad in each class. Students selected their own partners for in-class peer response in the third week of the semester, and most of them chose persons of their same gender and/or race.

Table 1. Participant Pairing and Grouping of In-class Peer Reviewers.

Morning class pairs/group	Afternoon class pairs/group
African-American female & African-American male	White male & White male
African-American female & African-American female	White male & White male
White female & White female	African-American male & African-American female
White female & Indian male	White male & African-American female
White male & White female & Native American male	Vietnamese male & White male & White male

   Since there were eleven students in each of the two sections, the e-mail partners were set up alphabetically (e.g. the first person on the class roster of the morning class was paired with the first person on the class roster for afternoon class).

Table 2. Participant Pairing of E-mail Peer Reviewers.

Students in morning class ⟷	Students in afternoon class
African-American female	White male
African-American female	White male
White female	Vietnamese male
African-American male	White male
White female	African-American male
White male	White male
White female	African-American female
Indian male	White male
Native American male	African-American female
White female	White male
African-American female	White male

Since the classes were scheduled at different times of the day, there was little chance of students' meeting their e-mail partners before or after class. The students knew only their e-mail partner's name and gender.

Teacher/Researcher Pedagogical Choices and Rationale. My teacher preparation occurred during the late 1980's, the end of a decade that produced a surge of research and theory on writing process. Galvanized by the works of Donald Murray (1982), Peter Elbow (1973), Dan Kirby and Tom Liner (1981), and Nancie Atwell (1987), I advocate a process approach to teaching writing that recognizes the writer's individuality and power in shaping language. Over the years, I have shaped my role as a writing teacher to be a facilitator and mentor. My aim is for students to become fluent writers who are aware of their individual writing strategies that work for them; also, I help student writers not only change habits of their processes that hinder their writing but also expand their repertoire of effective strategies for composing.

Important to a student-centered writing curriculum are peer response groups. As Peter Elbow (1973) states, "Writing is not just getting things down on paper, it is getting things inside someone else's head" (p. 76). That "someone else's head," according to

Elbow, is not only the teacher but also the writer's peers. Elbow promotes a "teacherless writing class" in which peers share their writing to get feedback; the characteristics of these response groups are (a) meeting weekly for a sustained period of time (two – three months) and (b) getting feedback from the same people so that "they get better at transmitting their experience with reading writing and [the writer] gets better at hearing them" (p. 76).

In the many years of structuring peer response groups in my writing classes, I have used Elbow's model. To encourage students to give concrete suggestions for revision within their response groups, I teach my students a strategy called "Praise-Question-Polish" – "PQP" (Neubert and McNelis, 1991). PQP gives students an organizational technique to use in phrasing their responses to their peers' writing and keeps them focused on content features of writing (as opposed to surface, grammatical features). Students use the following guidelines:

- *Praise* – What is good about the writing? Why is it good?

- *Question* – As a reader, what do you not understand?

- *Polish* – What specific suggestions for improvement can you make? Summarize, at the end of the writing, your suggestions.

Research by Neubert and McNelis (1991) showed that the phrasing of comments as questions turns vague and general comments to specific ones (e.g., "Describe Anna better" to "What does Anna look like? What is she wearing? How does she behave?); students' specific comments on drafts increased from 28% to 60% when they used the PQP strategy. (See Appendix C for a sample of student writing in which the PQP strategy is used.)

Data Collection

Data collection took place in our classroom over fifteen weeks in the fall semester of 1998. In order to establish trustworthiness, I used multiple data collection techniques: participant observations, document analysis (e.g. surveys and students' writings), and interviews.

Participant observations. I observed my students while they were involved in their in-class and e-mail peer response sessions. Observations lasted from thirty minutes to an hour. During observations, I took descriptive fieldnotes of student behavior, activities, and conversations. After observations, I typed my notes into narrative form and reflected on them in an analytic memo. In my reflections, I recorded my evolving interpretations and hunches and noted emerging patterns and themes.

Document analysis. I solicited the following documents from the students and used these documents as data in this study: (a) a technology survey the students completed on the first day of class (see Appendix D); (b) students' electronic journal entries, written at four different times during the semester and containing their reactions to the peer revision process; (c) first drafts of the students' narratives that included their peers' revision suggestions; and (d) revised copies of the students' narratives.

Interviews. During the last three weeks of the semester, after students had completed all of their formal writing assignments for the course, I interviewed three students. Initially, Kyra and James volunteered to be interviewed. I asked Neil to participate in an interview because he was James's in-class peer revision partner. The relationship among the informants is illustrated in the following figure.

Figure 1. Peer Response Triad.

<div align="center">

Kyra   Neil
(e-mail partner)   (in-class partner)

James
(writer)   Note: Names are pseudonyms.

</div>
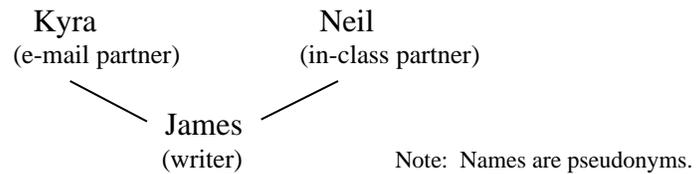
All interviews took place in my office and lasted at least one hour. I prompted the

informants to revisit themes and patterns that had emerged from my classroom

observations and the entire class' electronic journal entries; I clarified and probed their

individual perceptions of these topics. Additionally, emic data emerged as the informants

initiated talk about issues important to their individual experiences with peer revision in

the context of both in-class and e-mail environments. Table 3 summarizes the timeline of

the class activities, data sources, and data collection.

Table 3. Timeline and Description of Data Collection.

Date	Class Activities & Data Sources	Collected Artifacts
Week 1	• Administered Technology Survey • Introduced Internet technology • Observation of students using Internet technology	• Technology surveys • Field notes (descriptive & reflective)
Week 2	• Students wrote about and discussed prior experiences with peer revision • Introduced PQP revision strategy • Observation of whole-class and small-group practice of PQP revision strategy	• Students' freewrites • Field notes (descriptive & reflective)
Week 3	• Observation of in-class peer response pairs/groups on students' drafts of narrative #1	• Field notes (descriptive & reflective) • Students' first drafts of narrative #1 with peers' revision suggestions
Week 4	• Students' wrote narrative #2	• Students revised narrative #1
Week 5	• Observation of in-class peer response pairs/groups on students' drafts of narrative #2 • Students wrote and submitted reactions to peer response	• Field notes (descriptive & reflective) • Students' first drafts of narrative #2 with peers' revision suggestions • Students' electronic journal entries #1
Week 6	• Students wrote narrative #3 • Students practiced using e-mail	• Students revised narrative #2
Week 7	• Observation of in-class and e-mail peer response pairs/groups • Students wrote and submitted reactions to peer response	• Field notes (descriptive & reflective) • Students' first drafts of narrative #3 with peers' revision suggestions • Students' electronic journal entries #2
Week 8	• Students wrote narrative #4	• Students revised narrative #3
Week 9	• Observation of e-mail peer response pairs/groups • Students wrote and submitted reactions to peer response	• Field notes (descriptive & reflective) • Students' first drafts of narrative #4 with peers' revision suggestions • Students' electronic journal entries #3
Week 10	• Students wrote narrative #5	• Students revised narrative #4
Week 11	• Observation of e-mail peer response pairs/groups • Students wrote and submitted reactions to peer response	• Field notes (descriptive & reflective) • Students' first drafts of narrative #5 with peers' revision suggestions • Students' electronic journal entries #4
Week 12	• Interview with Kyra	• Students revised narrative #5 • Transcribed interview and notes
Week 13	• Interview with James	• Transcribed interview and notes
Week 14	• Interview with Neil	• Transcribed interview and notes
Week 15	• Follow-up "member check" interviews (on-line)	• Transcribed interview and notes

Data Analysis

I used a constant comparative method in analyzing the research data. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) describe this process as "pulsating" – first the collection, then the analysis, another collection, then more analysis and theory development, and so on (p. 66). In qualitative inquiry where multiple data sources are used, emerging themes guide data collection. Analysis begins early in the study and continues after the data collection is complete. In analyzing the data from this study, I used a recursive process – I developed questions for journal entries from my participant observations, and I used emergent themes and patterns from both sources in guiding the interviews.

Participant observations. After taking fieldnotes, I examined them for key issues and recurrent events for categories of focus. I also analyzed my reflections for biases or assumptions. From my observations, I generated questions that I had about students' behavior and conversations. I wanted to probe students for their perceptions of the events I witnessed, and I also wanted to "check" my own interpretations against theirs.

Document analysis of electronic journal entries. Students reacted to questions I posed about their peer revision processes. Response writing time occurred during class and lasted approximately thirty minutes. Students submitted their written responses via an electronic form on our class Website (see Appendix E), using code names known only to them to ensure confidentiality. I received the anonymous responses in my personal e-mail and downloaded them into a word processing program. I printed out the document, and read and underlined key words and phrases that were either repetitious among the responses or particularly insightful and provocative (or both). I then developed

overarching categories that represented the types of comments that emerged from their responses. Finally, I coded the document and analyzed it for trends and themes as well as for a wide range of perspectives among the students' responses. I used the same process for all four electronic journal entries. (See Appendix G for coding results.)

Interviews. As an interview guide, I used the themes and patterns that emerged from my observations and the students' electronic journal entries. Instead of using specific questions for the interviews, I gave each informant a list of the topics and asked them to talk about their perspectives. (See Appendix F for interview guide.) From this structure emerged hermeneutic conversations which I taped and transcribed verbatim. After I transcribed the interviews, I read them and added in my own interpretive hunches. I also conducted follow-up, "member check" interviews in which I asked pointed questions to confirm my interpretations of the students' perspectives; these interviews transpired as an e-mail exchange between me and the individual informants. In analyzing the interviews, I coded the transcripts and developed a matrix to organize the data by informant (columns) and themes and patterns (rows).

Document analysis of student writings. After I interviewed the three students, I analyzed first and second drafts of their writings. I wanted to understand how writers made their revision decisions. I examined the writers' first drafts to answer these questions:

1. Did the peers follow the PQP (praise, question, polish) revision strategy?

2. What is the quality and nature of the peers' praises and questions?

As I read the first drafts, I noted how many times the peer reviewers followed the PQP revision strategy. I also recorded the nature of the comment (i.e., a praise about using

effective description or a question to elicit more descriptive writing). I looked at the writers' revised second drafts with these questions in mind:

1. Did the writer use the comments to revise their second drafts, and is there a consistent pattern among the types of comments the writer used?

2. Did the peers' comments change over time?

I counted the number of the peers' revision suggestions and how many of those suggestions the writer used in revising all five narratives. Also, I looked to see if the number of suggestions and the number of revisions either increased, decreased, or remained fixed over time. I charted these results to get a picture of the degree of influence of the peer reviewers' revision suggestions on the writers' revision decisions.

From the data emerged consistent themes and patterns as well as anomalies. I linked these themes and used the anomalies as points of contrast to develop holistic representations of the class and of a peer response triad. Using "thick description" characteristic of qualitative representation, I wrote these portraitures in the narrative genre, and they illustrate the complexities of peer response group processes using both electronic and traditional communication.

Ethical Considerations

Teacher/Researcher Assumptions and Biases. My own excitement and enthusiasm for this action research gave me pause to think more about the assumptions I carried into the research that could potentially influence my interpretations. I kept those assumptions in the foreground of my mind as I collected and analyzed data. Actually, moments when my assumptions were challenged turned into moments of curiosity. I

became even more intrigued by the surprises that emerged in this study; those surprises led me to delve deeper into the "why's" and "how's" of peer response group processes.

Assumptions that I carried into the study, and that were ultimately challenged, centered on students' acceptance and excitement about the combination of writing process curriculum, peer response groups, and technology. I assumed students would have experience with the writing process and peer response (though I did not speculate about the nature of their experiences). I also figured students would have experience using Internet technology. Finally, I presumed that college-age student writers, even though they were novices, would benefit from and enjoy being members of peer response groups.

Conducting research on myself and my students stirs up issues of bias. As the teacher/researcher, I was aware that my subjectivity might cause me to record only what I wanted to see and hear, rather than what was actually there (Bodgan and Biklen, p. 33). Therefore, in addition to my own participant observations, I collected students' perceptions through individual interviews and anonymous reaction writings. In this data, I posed questions to the students to check my own interpretations. I reflected in analytic memos on my own fieldnotes, and I remained open to the many surprises that evolved during this study. Instead of passing judgment on my students' behaviors and attitudes, I sought to understand *why* certain things happened.

Power Issues. In his article "Power and Caring," George Noblit (1993) describes teachers' ethical use of power as creating continuity and connectedness among the members of a class. Even though I was the teacher of my students, and therefore had the so-called "power" and "authority" in the class, I approached the research from a

humanist's perspective. First and foremost, as their teacher, I genuinely cared about their success as students and their lives as older adolescents; secondarily, I was interested in their perceptions of peer revision. On informal occasions during class time, I talked sincerely with them about their transitions to college life, so when I began collecting data, they reciprocated and were open and honest in their opinions about peer revision. In fact, in response to participating in the research study, the students I interviewed mentioned that they felt "honored" to be valued and heard. Also, I have a strong, nine-year experience base in the teaching of writing. This expertise gave me confidence as the interpreter of their attitudes, expectations, and values toward peer revision in an electronic mail environment.

My students were aware that they did not have to participate in the study if they felt uncomfortable with my being both their teacher and the researcher. The consent form they signed guaranteed that their participation in the study would not interfere with their coursework or grades. When they wrote and submitted electronic journal entries that contained their perceptions of peer review, they used anonymous code names so that I could not associate them with their opinions. Students volunteered to participate in individual interviews, and I arranged these interviews around their class schedules.

Rigor. Teacher research has been criticized for its lack of rigor, primarily because teachers' primary duties get in the way of researching. Participant observations proved to be problematic in this "insider" research. When I tried to step back and observe my students at work, I was repeatedly interrupted by students who needed my guidance with either the technology (e.g., saving their documents or checking their e-mail) or the peer revision process. However, I solved this dilemma by circulating the

room and taking notes on what I saw and heard. By moving from pair to pair of students at work, I was able to hear more pieces of conversations and view their individual and group processes more closely. Additionally, I was able to conduct this study over a long period of time, and use multiple data collection methods, primarily because this was my class and I could organize the data collection according to our schedule.

James Banks (1998) calls for teachers to be explicit about the values that support their practices (p.14). I reflected on my pedagogical choices and rationale and looked at how they influenced my assumptions (see above). Banks goes on to argue that teacher/researchers should strive to connect components of objective and subjective knowledge in their "truth" seeking. In my role as a teacher/researcher, I had to be flexible and careful in balancing my "teacher-self" with my "researcher-self." I stepped outside my role as the teacher to become the researcher only when it did not interfere with my students' learning. As the teacher of the class, I was both an "insider" and an "outsider." I had unique insights into my students because I interacted with them twice a week for eighteen weeks; in these interactions, I got to know them as students *and* as people. Also as the teacher, though, I was an outsider – an educated adult with expertise and experience in the teaching of writing. However, my simultaneous existence as an outsider and an insider allowed me to make interconnections between objective and subjective knowledge I was constructing. Combining both perspectives proved to be beneficial to this research study.

CHAPTER FOUR
Findings

The presentation of the findings in this chapter are in the genre of *social science*

portraiture. This form of qualitative representation is illuminated in *The Art and Science*

of Portraiture by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis (1997).

Lawrence-Lightfoot describes portraiture as

> an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience.
> Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the
> people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions – their
> authority, knowledge, and wisdom. The drawing of the portrait is placed in
> social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist
> and the subject . . . The relationship between the two is rich with meaning and
> becomes the arena for navigating the empirical, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions
> of authentic and compelling narrative (p. xv).

Presented in this chapter are two portraitures: a collective one of the classes and

one of a revision triad. These two portraitures are a holistic representation, blending

narrative and description with analysis and interpretation. Since these portraitures

document the evolving, shifting, and fixed perspectives of students who were enrolled in

a semester-long writing course, the form of this narrative follows the classic Aristotelian

structure of beginning, middle, and end.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) describes narrative cohesion in portraiture as "a

building of experiences, emotions, and behaviors that allows the reader an increasing

knowledge and understanding of the scene . . . there is a rhythm between new material

and familiar refrains" (p. 256). Woven within the narrative are stories, examples, and

interpretations that provide complexity and nuance to the students' experiences with peer

revision. As I shaped the narrative from the students' collective and individual

experiences, an overarching theme emerged: acts of negotiation and balance. The

students' acts of negotiation and balance, and the context within which these acts evolved, give the narrative its movement.

Chapters 1 and 2 of this study offered a description of the purpose, rationale, and theoretical framework within which the action of the portraiture took place. Chapter 3 delineated the methodology used in assembling these two portraitures. Drawn from participant observations, formal interviews, casual conversations, and solicited student writings, the portraitures in this chapter weave a credible story that is representative of the students' experiences with peer response. The narrative begins with students' initial experiences and interpretations of peer response; layers accumulate as students' perspectives evolve, shift, and remain fixed over time. Nascent patterns become "familiar refrains" as the students are involved in acts of negotiation and balance from which new patterns emerge. Students' perspectives and interpretations as well as my observations and analyses – all from multiple data sources – interlace to form a seamless, holistic representation of peer response groups in this particular social context.

Portraiture of the Classes

Beginning Acts of Negotiation and Balance:
The Dress Rehearsal

During the second week of the semester, I first introduced peer response to the two classes of twenty-two students who are the subjects of this collective portraiture. Our classroom, a networked Macintosh computer lab, was located on the fourth floor of the building that housed the College of Education and Psychology. When I arrived to class on our first peer revision day, all of the students were already at their computer stations. I was greeted by a dull hum emitting from the sixteen computers and the

clicking sound of some students' typing on the keyboards. From a row of windows in the back of the lab, bright, natural light illuminated the darkened room, and green leaves on treetops peeked through. I decided to leave off the electric lights, mainly because during the previous three class meetings, the heat radiating from the computers, combined with the afternoon sun shining directly in the windows, intensified the warmth of the lab.

All of the students welcomed me with either a smile, a nod, or a verbal, "Hi Mrs. Jackson!" They were all there at least five minutes early, as they had been for each previous class meeting, busily "surfing" the World Wide Web or checking their e-mail. This behavior struck me as their first act of negotiation; just the week before, they had grappled with basic word processing activities such as saving, copying, and pasting. Additionally, I had sent them several e-mail messages during the first week of class, but the e-mail program confounded some of them. Half of the students needed me to guide them through the processes of retrieving, sending, and replying to e-mail.

On a technology survey I administered the first day of class, half of the students revealed that they had never used the Internet or e-mail before attending the University. The other half had used the Internet only a few times, and they did not claim to be proficient users. Also on the technology surveys, several students informed me that they viewed frequent computer users as "geeks," and that only the more academically privileged students in their high schools had utilized the more sophisticated computer technologies. However, in just the second week of the semester, I noticed that having the computer lab as their classroom was becoming a motivating factor in their attendance. For these students who had few, if any, prior experiences using modern computer technology, they had to negotiate their long-held views of themselves as "computer

illiterate." Now that they were at the University and enrolled in a class that used computer technology as one of its modes of communication, they had to redefine their relationship with technology. These particular students had to negotiate a vast dichotomy: being labeled and placed in a "developmental" reading and writing course, but being privileged to attend the only section of the course that met in a computer lab and utilized the Internet for a majority of their learning experiences.

During that second week of class, the students were again involved in other complex acts of negotiation and balance. On the day that I introduced peer response, I decided to begin class with a freewrite. The topic was, "What was your experience with peer response about writing in high school?" They spent ten minutes typing their responses; then we discussed their perceptions as an entire class. All of the students participated in the discussion and indicated that they had some previous experience with peer response in high school. In their words, they defined the task of peer review as helping others to "find mistakes," "correct grammar errors," or "fix misspelled words and punctuation." Only one student described revising as "changing words around so they made more sense." Their conception of revision was more closely aligned with the work of editing. When we discussed their experiences with peer response, a small number of students said that their experiences were negative; either they were not trained to respond or they had an apathetic peer reviewer who did not help them improve their writing. Overall, the class remarked that they believed peer response to be beneficial to their writing since it helped them to improve their texts before the teacher read them. However, when I personally read their freewrites after class, all of the students remarked that they were hesitant to share their writing with the others in class. They did not

perceive themselves to be good writers and, therefore, did not feel secure about sharing their writing with others.

After our class discussion, I attempted to disturb their notions of revision by differentiating between revising and editing. I defined revision as a process of building and shaping the content of writing as opposed to editing, a process of making surface, grammatical corrections to text. I then announced to the students that in peer response, they would focus on using a specific strategy to help their peers revise the content of their writing. My function as the teacher would be that of final editor, and I would read their writings and give feedback specifically about grammar and mechanics.

I used teacher-modeling and careful scaffolding and sequencing of activities in order to ease my students into the peer response process. I positioned myself at the front of our classroom where a presentation station was located. This station included a computer that was connected to a color projector that made the images on the computer's monitor visible on an overhead screen. The entire class viewed a sample student writing, which I read aloud. Then, I discussed what I deemed as strengths and weaknesses of the writing. I followed the "Praise-Question-Polish" strategy (discussed in chapter three), and I used the computer to demonstrate the embedding of praises and questions within paragraphs and after sentences. At the end of the writing, I summarized my comments and questions in a paragraph and offered suggestions for polishing based on my criticism.

After I showed students how to embed their praises and critical comments within the text, students worked in groups of three to practice responding on sample student writings from my previous year's class. I distributed computer disks that contained a writing assignment in which they could practice embedding praises, questions, and

suggestions for polish. As I circulated the room, I noticed that students, despite my modeling, had a propensity to correct more surface errors than look critically at the content of the writing. However, I nudged them to first give praises about what they liked about the writing, then to ask questions about vague sections of the text, and last to give suggestions for polishing the writing. I observed the students' struggle to negotiate their prior beliefs about the processes of peer revision as they corrected members of their group who attempted to focus on grammatical and spelling mistakes. I also watched them adapt to a novel strategy as they reminded each other to keep their comments phrased as questions and to look for the "good" in the writing.

At the end of their group time, we debriefed. They shared the praises, questions, and suggestions for polish they had generated, and we discussed the effect each remark would have on the writer. They put themselves in the writer's shoes and commented on which responses would be most helpful to them in revising. Also, we discussed their first experience with the PQP strategy, and they expressed relief that the burden of finding misspelled words and sentence fragments was lifted from their purpose of reviewing a peer's writing. They commented that they were not experts in grammar and therefore not "qualified" to correct another's writing in that way. They also mentioned the importance of peer reviewers' phrasing criticism in a positive manner; they were readying themselves for authentic responding since they were concerned about being sensitive to writers' feelings.

In this act of negotiation and balance, the students were shifting their perspectives of peer response and their roles as readers and writers. Before the class activity, they held a *laissez-faire* perception of peer review, where they, as readers, stayed on the edges

of collaboration by making surface corrections to text. They had to adjust to taking a more active role as critical readers who would delve into content and rhetorical features of their peers' writing.

More Acts of Negotiation and Balance:
Authentic Peer Response and Writing Assignment #1

During the second week of class, the students continued to work in groups to practice their peer response skills. While they simulated peer conferences by using the PQP strategy to respond to student writings from my previous year's class, they were writing their first narrative outside of class time. Finally, during the third week of class, the day arrived for them to pair up and give feedback to each other about writing.

I began class by telling the students to insert their personal diskettes and open their writing assignment so that it appeared on the computer's monitor. I gave them explicit instructions for the first peer revision session: 1) they would work with a partner of their choice; 2) writers would read aloud their writing from the computer monitor while peers listened; 3) peers would use the PQP strategy to respond, discussing <u>and</u> typing within the text their praises, questions, and suggestion for polish; 4) writers would ask any questions for clarification; 5) then, they would switch roles. One student asked, "Why do I have to type in my responses instead of just telling the writer what I think?" I explained that his embedding them within the writer's text would serve as a record of their conversation for the writer as s/he revised.   I also reiterated that the peer reviewers should type their responses in all capital letters so that the responses would be prominent within the text and easy for the writer to locate. No other students had questions about the process; therefore, I announced for them to begin, and I watched and waited. And

waited. Nothing happened. As I looked around the classroom, I noticed the students'

staring at their writing on the computer monitors, not making eye contact with the person

sitting beside them. Because no student initiated the peer conferences, I walked around

the room and paired off students by proximity.   After I matched six students, the

remainder followed suit and turned to the persons sitting next to them to be their partners.

The week before, when the students were simulating peer conferences, the class

was characterized by noisy chatter as the students discussed writing; however, these first

authentic peer conferences barely produced a low hum. As I traveled from pair to pair, I

heard that they were offering what I considered appropriate feedback and adhering to the

model; they were giving praises and asking questions about the writing. I looked over

their shoulders to read phrases that they typed within their peers' text:

> *I like your introduction. It's very suspenseful and makes me want to read on to see what the end will be.*

> *This is so funny here . . . where you talk about egging his house. I can't believe you didn't get caught!*

> *What did you look like when you were nervous? Were your knees shaking? Did you feel like you were going to pass out?*

> *What went through your mind when you finally realized your father wasn't coming to your graduation?*

Additionally, pairs of students negotiated their expectations and roles in the conferences.

I was standing near Derek and Brian at the beginning of their revision session, and I

heard this dialogue:

> "Hey man, read it and tell me everything. You know, don't hold back," Brian said.
> "Oh yeah, sure, and you do it too. Don't worry about me getting upset. I need all the help I can get with this one," Derek answered.

Brian and Derek negotiated and defined their expectations of each other in their initial revision conference. They explicitly "made a deal" at the start of their conference which set the tone for the remainder of their conferences throughout the semester. They, like other pairs of students in the class, were negotiating trust in a new social relationship.

Even though students were following the revision strategy, absent from their discourse was discussion about implementing revision suggestions. I heard peer reviewers ask questions of the writers, and writers listened to the feedback. However, writers did not ask their own questions about the suggestions, defend or justify their writing, or actually revise during the conference. Writers and readers switched roles only when the peer reviewers finished typing in responses.

These first peer conferences lasted approximately twenty minutes – much shorter than I had anticipated. As pairs of students finished their conferences, they split apart to revise their writing individually. During the remainder of class time, students called on me only to ask questions about grammar and mechanics; on their own, they made revision decisions about their peers' suggestions. The writing assignments were electronically submitted for teacher edit and grading one week later.

Internal acts of negotiation and balance occurred within the students as their perceptions of themselves as writers were shifting. These students were diffident about sharing their writing with peers they barely knew, and suddenly they had to expose their writing, and themselves, to critical feedback. And, uncertain as they were about themselves as "good" writers, they were adjusting to their novel responsibilities as critical readers of their peers' writing. Additionally, in making revision decisions, they had to weigh the veracity of peers' comments while on the unfamiliar terrain of a new

social relationship. Within themselves, students were negotiating their evolving roles as writers and readers with authentic tasks, and they were balancing trust and rapport in negotiating a new social relationship.

The Second Peer Conference:
Internal and External Acts of Negotiation and Balance

Two weeks later was the fifth week of the semester. By this time, students had written a second narrative, and I again devoted class time to peer response. I began class with a five-minute review of the PQP strategy by projecting on the overhead screen a former student's writing. I read aloud the writing, and the students offered praises, questions, and suggestions for polishing. They instructed me where to type in the comments, and we discussed the quality of their feedback. Also, we talked about ways to phrase questions so that they were specific enough for the writer to understand. Students admitted that praising and questioning was easy, but they were still unsure about the "polish" aspect of the revision strategy. I demonstrated, on the projected student writing, how to summarize their praises and questions at the end of the text.

After this warm-up activity, with no extra prompting from me, the students paired quickly with their same partners. In contrast to the first peer conference, this second session was marked with more collaboration. In the first conference, peer reviewers followed the PQP strategy closely, limiting their "talk" about writing to naming their praises and questions followed by typing them within the text for the writers' reference. The first conferences lasted only twenty minutes and were almost mechanical, devoid of writers and peer reviewers negotiating revision strategies.

However, in their second experiences with peer response, all pairs of students engaged in more collaboration, and pairs took an hour or longer to complete their

conferences. All students were in acts of balancing the basic formula of the PQP strategy

with the dynamics of their evolving social relationship. Peer reviewers went beyond just

naming and typing in their revision suggestions; they helped writers devise strategies to

implement their feedback. Also, writers asked questions to clarify their understanding of

the feedback. Frequently, as I passed by pairs of students, I heard social talk woven into

the discourse about writing. Prompted by sharing stories through narrative writing, they

verbally shared aspects of their lives: where they were from, where they lived on

campus, what they had done over the weekend – or they connected with a similar

experience:

> I had an experience like this too, except my aunt was the one who got the
> ticket. We were driving to Florida when it happened. That was a great trip.
> I went my senior year, over Easter weekend. I got so sunburned the first day!
> I had to soak in the tub and didn't even go outside for two days.

Though the students' second peer conferences were characterized by more collaborative

and social talk, the students were not deterred from completing their conferences.

In fact, negotiating their social relationship eased them into more detailed,

generative talk about their writing. Writers and peer reviewers pushed deeper into both

of their texts to make their conferences productive. A conversation between Paige and

Madeline exemplified this:

> "I like this part here," Madeline said while pointing to Paige's computer
> monitor, "but I think you should write it as dialogue. You're just talking about a
> conversation, but we're supposed to write it with quotation marks and stuff."
> "You mean here?" Paige pointed to her computer monitor.
> "No, above that, where you and your friend are talking about getting the
> tents." *[Madeline used the computer's mouse to place the cursor in the
> appropriate*
> *place in Paige's writing.]*
> "Okay. Well, where do the quotation marks go?"
> "Here, look at mine. I did some dialogue. I think it's right." *[Madeline
> and Paige leaned over to look at Madeline's writing on her computer monitor.]*

Madeline did not stop at offering a revision suggestion; she went on to help Paige choose appropriate language for the dialogue. In one instance, while they were focused on Paige's writing, Paige turned to Madeline's monitor to read her dialogue writing as a model. Paige asked aloud, "Here, you're in the car, and then you're somewhere else. Where are you, and how did you get there?" Madeline then moved her attention from Paige's writing to focus to her own. Even though they were collaborating to revise Paige's writing, they took a moment to revise a section of Madeline's. Also, as soon as either one typed in a question, together they took it to task and revised immediately. Madeline and Paige easily shifted between their roles as writers and peer reviewers, attending to each other's needs as the conference progressed; as a result, this negotiation of their roles gave more flexibility to their conference.

Another pair of revision partners, Neil and James, negotiated the dynamics of their social relationship to include playful banter. Neil had a keen sense of humor that seeped into his writing; his first two topics were about embarrassing situations that happened to him, and when James read each story, I heard boisterous laughter coming from both of them. Neil's sense of humor also filtered into his communication style. As I passed by them in their second peer conference, Neil stopped me and pointed to James's computer monitor. Neil said, "Look, Mrs. Jackson: James is stealing my idea of writing dialogue leads." James lightly jabbed Neil's arm, and they laughed. I asked Neil to explain this comment, and he told me that he had started his stories with characters' talking to each other. Neil went on to inform me that James had begun to use the same writing strategy. James laughed at Neil's accusation and admitted, "I'm guilty. I just like the way Neil's stories start with dialogue, so I decided to do it too." Neil replied,

"You're still a thief." Despite the raucous nature of their conferences, they learned from each other. Each time their noise drew me to their conferences, I heard them giving valid praises and asking probing questions – with a touch of humor. Consequently, they had established a rapport that fostered James's adopting one of Neil's writing techniques. Like others in the class, they balanced the PQP strategy with their individual communication styles to make both work for them.

In the second revision conferences, the pairs of students were involved in both external and internal acts of negotiation and balance. Their second conferences were marked with significantly more collaborative talk, so some of their external peer relationships were evolving. As writers, they no longer expected just to receive revision suggestions that they had to implement on their own, and peer reviewers took a more active stance in helping writers revise. Therefore, from the first revision conference to the second one, the students were reinventing their internal perceptions of peer revision to include more collaborative discourse about revision strategies.

Students' Self-Portrayals of Roles in Peer Response Groups:
Electronic Journal Entry #1

From my perch as the teacher/researcher/portraitist of the class, I watched my students deal with evolving and shifting roles, expectations, and dynamics in their peer conferences. After five weeks of my observing them in class, and after their two experiences with peer revision, I wanted to enter the boundaries of the students' conferences. I took the stance of what Davis calls the "supplicant learner" to understand their personal knowledge and perspectives that were beyond my purview (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 176). In order to hear the students' voices, I elicited anonymous reaction writings from them in the form of electronic journal entries.

The class meeting after the students' second peer revision conferences, I began class by directing the students to the "Submit Assignments" page on our class Website (see Appendix E). This page was an electronic form that delivered students' assignments to my personal e-mail account. I showed them the text area on the page in which they were to type their electronic journal entries. I assured the students of their confidentiality; they would use anonymous code names known only to them. To submit their reactions, they only had to click on the "submit" button at the bottom of the page.

After students understood the features of the electronic form, I instructed the students to write their first electronic journal entries in response to their two experiences with in-class peer revision. The questions I posed were:

- Think about your role as a reviewer in peer response conferences. What are your reactions to giving feedback to a peer about his/her writing?
- Think about your role as a writer in peer response conferences. What are your reactions to receiving feedback from a peer about your writing?

I emphasized that I valued their honest reactions to the peer revision conferences and explained that I would not remain in the lab as they typed their responses. I did not want the students to be intimidated by my presence, and I wanted to give them the space necessary to feel comfortable about voicing their opinions. I waited in a small library across the hall from the lab, and after thirty minutes, one student let me know that they had completed their responses.

When I arrived home that afternoon, I checked my e-mail. I had received electronic journal entries from all the students. I read and analyzed the entries (see Appendix G for coding results). Their reactions not only confirmed my observations of

their behavior but also revealed other issues central and peripheral to the students'

experiences with peer revision. As their perceptions unfolded, their internal and external

acts of negotiation and balance became more complex and layered. There were harmony

and discord in their voices, shadows and depth in their self-portrayals.

     Balancing Honesty and Sensitivity.   Students asserted that, as peer reviewers,

they were to ask questions; to give criticism, suggestions, and praise; and to be objective.

As writers, they were to be open to the comments. Students were clear about the nature

of discourse and roles in a revision conference; however, some students wrote about their

complex struggle to balance honest feedback with sensitivity to the writers' feelings.

These students – taking the position of peer reviewers – revealed concern for upsetting

the writer. While reviewers believed that honesty and sincerity were crucial to good

criticism, some were wary of making a writer angry by their feedback:

> *An important thing to remember about giving peer feedback is the person*
> *giving the feedback has to be sincere and focused on helping that writer*
> *improve his paper.*

> *The only thing about peer revision that I don't like is that I might have to*
> *say something bad about their paper. I do not want any one person to be*
> *mad at me the way I get mad at teachers when they tell me to change*
> *something that I thought was really good.*

> *Sometimes I don't want to express my feelings honestly towards his paper*
> *because I don't want to be negative. Then I'll say that the paper is good*
> *and it really isn't, just because I feel bad.*

> *I must be sincere in my commentary. If I think something is bad I must*
> *tell them about it, in order for them to fix it.*

However, this balancing act becomes more complex when the writer's perspective is

layered in. While some students felt insecure about giving honest feedback that might

hurt the writers' feelings, all of the student writers <u>wanted</u> and <u>valued</u> any criticism that

helped them effectively revise their papers – regardless of their peers' comfort in offering it. All students agreed that writers should be receptive to all feedback; this writer's voice was representative of the others':

> *Getting feedback does not bother me, even if it is criticism. Everybody makes mistakes and everybody knows that, so I don't take it personal if my paper gets critiqued. They* [peer reviewers] *are just trying to help me become a better writer, which in the long run is what I am looking for.*

These reactions demonstrated the complexity of the students' social relationships. Most students were unaware that they had to be explicit about defining their roles within and expectations of peer conferences to allow rapport to evolve. The fact that some peer reviewers wrote about wanting "permission" to be honest about their feedback indicated that either their partners had not sanctioned such feedback or they were naturally worried about offending their partner. The lack of communication and gauging of these expectations had the potential to inhibit trust and rapport in their relationship.

Building Trust and Rapport. Only a few students, in their first electronic journal entries, discussed the importance of building trust and rapport in a revision conference. They felt that after having collaborated on revising two narrative writings, it was easier to share their writing because they "felt comfortable" with each other; one student wrote, "I trust my partner now more than I did during the first conference because we've gotten to know each other better." Also, in peer conferences in which the participants had good rapport, student writers had a sense of audience, and students were motivated to revise after a productive conference where both participants felt vested:

> *I got really involved when giving feedback to my friend's writing. I wanted to read her final copy to see what changes she made based on my suggestions.*

> *I like working with my partner because he tells me how to change my paper to fit the reader's needs. Others are going to read my writing, so I have to get it*

> *ready. I really trust his comments because he is the reader and knows what needs to be done.*

Also, these students believed that empathy helped to build trust and rapport in their relationship. They reported feelings of being "on the same level" and "able relate to situations" they are writing about; students explained,

> *We are all students, and our experiences are similar.   We give better feedback because we know what questions to ask. And, I will use my partner's comments because I understand what he's trying to get me to do with my revisions.*

> *My partner and I relate to each other, and that helps us take criticism from each other better than we would from strangers or the teacher. Sometimes I don't understand what the teacher means, but I always do when my partner tells me. She really seems to understand me.*

> *My partner knows what I am going through – in my experiences as a person and as I'm writing my paper. Therefore, I trust his feedback because he's going through the same thing. He understands my stories and knows what works and what doesn't.*

These were deviant voices in the reactions to two peer revision conferences. Only a small number of students wrote of the trust and rapport that was developing in their relationship. This surprised me; I had observed more collaboration between students in the class. However, I anticipated that over time, more students would remark about the developing trust and rapport as they negotiated they dynamics of their evolving relationship. And, if trust and rapport did not ensue, I hoped to learn what contributed to the shutdown of their relationship.

Balancing Confidence and Insecurity. Another pattern that emerged from the students' reactions to peer conferencing was the internal conflicting emotions of confidence and insecurity. Sometimes, participating in peer revision made them feel confident as writers, readers, and critical thinkers; other times, sharing writing raised feelings of inadequacy to the surface.

Many students wrote about how peer revision made them think and helped them to revise their own writing. They cited instances of "feeling smarter" when giving feedback; one student responded, "Catching mistakes in my peer's paper helps me to expand my knowledge of writing. After I help him with his writing, I feel like I can do the same to my own." Students felt valued when they gave their partners revision suggestions, and as writers, they were motivated to revise:

> *I enjoy giving feedback. It makes me feel special to be able to give input on someone else's paper. It caused me to want to get more involved with my peer's paper instead of my own.*

> *I feel great when my partner is stuck and he comes to me for assistance.*

> *As a peer editor, I feel I have a very important role. Being able to help my peers with their writing makes me feel helpful.*

> *Giving comments makes me feel good about their final copy because I know that I helped get it where it ended.*

> *When I receive positive feedback from my peers which makes me feel good about my paper, I continue to write.*

Conversely, some respondents wrote about feeling inadequate as editors, afraid of giving "bad" feedback that would result in the writers' receiving a lower grade; these feelings of insecurity corresponded with their self-perceptions as writers:

> *I feel uncomfortable telling someone 'this' and 'that' should be changed. I wouldn't want an inexperienced writer (like me) telling me what to do and how to change something.*

> *I do not really feel that comfortable editing my peers' paper . . . I do not really know how to edit that well for I cannot even edit my own paper.*

> *I don't feel comfortable editing someone's paper. I may tell them to do something that I think is good but isn't good at all.*

These comments not only showed students' resistance to giving feedback but also their lapsing into their prior views of peer response. Though they did not clarify what they meant by the word "edit," their word choice revealed that they did not discriminate between the terms editing and revising. Also, some writers resisted sharing their writing because they did not like to write or they viewed themselves as "not the best writer in the world."

Some students struggled to redefine themselves as writers and peer reviewers who made valuable contributions to others. Their histories as "developmental" writers and readers had both positive and negative effects on their participation   For some students, these peer conferences may have been the first time their input was honored, valued, and appreciated. Other students grappled with the conflicting perceptions of themselves. Because of their feelings of inadequacy as writers, the call to speak with some authority about writing reinforced their perceived deficiencies. In addition to the conflicting internal emotions of these students, others were attempting to reconcile prior, negative experiences with their most recent experiences with peer revision.

Reconciling Past and New Experiences. A small number of students referenced high school experiences with peer response in their first electronic journal entries. They commented that, in their past experiences with peer response, their partners did not seem to care and therefore gave very general comments that were not helpful. They felt "cheated" when they had worked so hard as editors and did not get the same in return as writers. The students who made these references did not say if their current partners were ineffective, but they were coming to this new experience dubious about peer response. This same anomalous group of students wrote of the futility of peer conferences, claiming

that teacher feedback was "the only thing that made a difference" in their writing. All of the students who described peer revision as futile were the same ones who wrote of their inadequacies as readers and writers. However, they admitted that they liked the PQP strategy and would work to change their attitude about peer response while enrolled in the course.

A holistic look at the emergent themes and patterns in the students' first electronic journal entries showed the strata of individual conflicts that contribute to the complexity of peer revision relationships. Students portrayed their roles in peer revision as evolving and shifting as they defined – and redefined – their writer and reader selves. They were learning to scaffold their working relationship with honesty, sensitivity, trust, and rapport. Also, some students were attempting to let go of their prior, negative notions of writing and responding to embrace the new experiences to come.

Negotiating Chaos:
The Transition from In-class to E-mail Peer Response

I made the decision to introduce e-mail peer revision later in the semester – as opposed to in the beginning – for two reasons. First, I hoped that having an in-class partner would help the students become comfortable with responding to a peer's writing, and these in-class conferences would serve as a point of comparison or contrast in reacting to e-mail feedback. Second, I wanted to ensure that students were proficient at using the e-mail technology before they exchanged their writing via e-mail. Therefore, at various times during the first six weeks of class, students practiced using their personal e-mail accounts in conjunction with the word processing program. They typed messages in the word processing program, saved them to their diskettes, copied them from their diskettes, pasted them into their e-mail, and sent them to me. I wanted students to be able

to complete each step of the task independently and efficiently, and by the seventh week of class, all students were able to do so. Additionally, I took an informal survey of the class and learned that all students had daily access to their e-mail through either 1) their personal computers in their dorm rooms, 2) computer labs located in their dormitories, or 3) close proximity to our classroom computer lab that was opened daily and on the weekends. No students indicated that they would have problems (e.g. time constraints or access) with responding to their peers' writing.

The first e-mail peer revision conference transpired seven weeks into the semester. Students had completed two peer revision conferences with the same in-class partners. For their third narrative writing assignment, which they had written for homework, they would have two peer reviewers: their same in-class partner and a new, anonymous e-mail partner. They would have a conference with their in-class partners during class time, and they would send their writings via e-mail for feedback from their out-of-class partners. I prepared the students for this transition by mentioning this to them over the prior two weeks, so they were anticipating the e-mail exchange.

Students arrived to class on a Thursday with their third narrative writings saved to their diskettes. I explained to them that they were going to use their personal e-mail accounts to send their writing to their e-mail partners. The e-mail peer reviewers would use the PQP strategy to respond to their writings before the class meeting on the following Tuesday. On that Tuesday, during class, they would retrieve their writings from their e-mail and revise them. I asked the class if they had any questions, and Kyra, an African-American female, raised her hand and asked, "Do I have to send this writing? It's very personal, and I don't even know my e-mail partner! I know he's a guy, and I

don't think he's going to want to read my story!" I heard similar protests from a few other students. I remembered how hesitant they were about the first in-class conferences, so I attempted to mollify them by saying, "Let's give it a try and see what happens." Other students were enthusiastic about the novelty of using e-mail to widen their audience for their writing; their eagerness was evident in such comments as "This is going to be cool!" and "Can we send it to more than just one person?"

All students were able to copy their narrative writings from their diskette and paste them into their personal e-mail without my assistance. They sent their writing to their e-mail partners, and they left class that Thursday with instructions to check their e-mail that afternoon. Their homework over the weekend was to use the PQP strategy to give revision suggestions on the writing that they would receive in their e-mail. I asked students to send me an e-mail if they did not receive a writing from their e-mail partner; the exchange went smoothly, however, and I did not receive any messages that students had any problems with the technology.

The following class meeting, Tuesday, students retrieved the comments about their writing received from their anonymous peer reviewers. One student immediately chimed, "I want a new e-mail partner!" Another student remarked, "I don't think my partner read my writing at all. The comments are all BS!" Variations of these outcries resonated among all my students that first day. My observations of them as a group were disrupted because I spent all my time negotiating the chaos that eventuated from the e-mail exchange. I spent the class time:

- Clarifying questions they had about comments on their writings. Students had trouble understanding questions posed by their e-mail partners, so I had to give verbal explanations about what I thought the peer reviewers meant.

- Soothing the damaged egos of the writers. The student writers were initially shocked and skeptical about their e-mail partners' comments. They asked me to read a question posed by the e-mail peer reviewer, and then they defended their writing, claiming that they believed their writing to be clear and correct.

- Protecting and validating their e-mail partners' comments. In all the conversations I had with individual students, all the revision suggestions by e-mail partners that I read were valid. They were phrased as they should have been and appropriate as revision suggestions.

The remainder of class time that day, students worked with their in-class partners to revise. However, because I was working with individual students for the entire hour, I did not observe what ensued in these conferences. I heard some writers asking their in-class revision partners to look over their e-mail partner's comments to confirm or to deny their validity; none of the writers chose to e-mail their revision partners with their questions and concerns about the feedback, despite my encouraging them to do so. At the time, I did not observe how often the writers based their revision decisions on their e-mail partners' comments, nor did I observe their in-class partners' influence on their revision decisions. Students did revise their writings and later sent them to me for teacher editing and grading.

Negotiating Needs and Expectations:
Electronic Journal Entry #2

I planned to elicit more of their reactions to the first e-mail peer revision conference in their second electronic journal entry, which they wrote the class meeting after they had participated in the first e-mail peer conference. I wanted to know more about their emotional reactions to the first e-mail revision conference, so I proffered this topic:

- Describe your initial reactions to the electronic mail peer revision conference.

I stepped out of the lab as students wrote for thirty minutes, and again they sent their anonymous reactions to my e-mail via an electronic form on our class Website.

Defining Communication Needs. In this inchoate stage of e-mail peer revision, all students wrote about the breakdown of communication in the e-mail conferences. Students felt that they could not get the same immediate feedback from their e-mail partners as they did from their in-class partners. If they did not understand a comment or suggestion given by their e-mail partners, they could not discuss it with them. Students wrote that e-mail feedback was not immediately gratifying and did not foster a genuine rapport in peer conferencing:

> *The hindrance with e-mail conferencing is that if I don't understand something, I have to go through the process of e-mailing a question and waiting for a response.*

> *I cannot understand what my e-mail partner is wanting . . . I cannot feel the emotion that the other person is showing when fixing my paper to see if they like it or not.*

> *It's hard to understand my e-mail partner's questions, so I might either ignore them or e-mail them back, which is a waste of time, I think.*

When my e-mail partner reviews my paper through e-mail and suggests changes, she can't really clarify <u>why</u>. She can't sit down and tell me face to face <u>why</u> the change is really necessary.

Students defined their communication needs by contrasting e-mail communication to in-class communication. A few students explicitly stated that they preferred in-class, face-to-face discourse over asynchronous e-mail communication about writing. If they had not realized it before, they valued the nonverbal cues in face-to-face communication. Levels of rapport and trust increased as in-class peer reviewers' written feedback was reinforced by their facial expressions and voice intonations:

When my e-mail partner sends me his comments, I don't know how he really feels. He may have said he liked it, but I couldn't make eye contact with him to trust him and his comments.

I can tell from my partner's facial expressions and voice if she likes my writing. She will smile or laugh if she likes it and frown and shake her head if she doesn't. With e-mail, I don't get that!

I like to see my partner's reaction to my writing. I can also tell if he thinks I should change something by his tone of voice. He'll sort of hesitate to tell me something, and that's a clue right there that I definitely need to change it.

My partner's face tells me how terribly bad or extremely good my paper really is.

I observed during class students' struggling to understand some of their e-mail partners' comments. In their electronic journal entries, they expressed a need to *talk* about their writing, to clarify reviewers' questions, and to see the peer reviewers' facial expressions as they read their writing. The students were attuned to those powerful nonverbal cues from their in-class peers that spoke to them about the effectiveness of their writing – a smile when the peer found the writing particularly compelling, or a frown if the peer was confused about part of the text. An emotional connection stemmed from their sharing writing and stories, and their levels of trust and rapport had increased.

However, in shifting to e-mail peer revision, writers had to redefine their prior

expectations of communicating about writing to include those verbal and nonverbal

expressions that they sorely missed in the e-mail exchange.

     Building Trust and Rapport. Refrains of balancing honesty and sensitivity were

present in their reactions as some students wondered how to build trust and rapport in an

electronic relationship. Some thought that anonymity freed them to be more open in

giving and receiving honest feedback:

> *In the e-mail conference, the person let everything spill out about my writing
> since he doesn't know me. In face-to-face, my partner might have said it
> differently because he doesn't want to make me feel bad.*

> *When I am not sitting face-to-face with my partner, I feel freer to tell her
> something through e-mail.*

> *I can be more honest when responding via e-mail because I'm not sitting right
> there next to the student revising her paper. Sometimes students get offended
> when other peers criticize their work.*

However, others described anonymity as a deterrent in establishing an emotional

connection that was necessary in a good working relationship:

> *I felt that my e-mail partner did not really care about my paper since
> he responded to my paper after I had already responded to his.*

> *If a person does not know me how can they tell me to change something? And
> I felt bad every time I asked them to change something . . . I could not give the
> response I wanted to because I did not know who he was. We knew nothing
> about one another.*

For some students, building trust and rapport with their e-mail partners was a complicated

task. They had to find new ways to make connections with these new partners whom

they could not see or hear. And, in turn, they did not feel vested enough to be honest or

sensitive in their responses. However, other students perceived the emotional burdens of

sustaining a collaborative relationship as less prevalent in e-mail. For those who were

insecure as writers and critical readers of texts – those who did not want to risk exposing their writing and ideas to others – anonymity in e-mail was a deflecting device. They felt less pressure to balance honesty and sensitivity and were less concerned about building trust and rapport because their connection with the person was limited.

Searching for the Positive. Students did acknowledge that the e-mail exchange expanded the audience for their writing. They commented that it was helpful to have one more person read over their writing. However, at this point, this was the only positive aspect of the e-mail exchange on which the students reached a consensus. A couple of students mentioned the convenience of using e-mail for peer revision; they were not limited to the time and space of classroom meetings to give feedback. Overall, though, students' perceptions of the positive aspects of e-mail emerged as anomalous to their electronic journal entries.

At this early stage in e-mail conferencing, the students preferred in-class communication over the asynchronous dialogue of the e-mail exchange. While students were still forming their in-class relationships, the e-mail exchange unfolded more intricacies in their negotiations of the peer revision process.   Their communication and emotional needs emerged in the foreground of their reactions. Some students realized that the trust and rapport they had worked to establish with their in-class partners was absent in the e-mail exchange; however, they attributed this lack of communication to the medium, not to the novelty of the situation. These students highly valued verbal exchange and nonverbal cues to express themselves and to understand their peers; therefore, since these features were absent in e-mail communication, none of them imagined that trust and rapport would build, over time, with their e-mail partners.   They

had grown accustomed to collaborating on revision, and e-mail did not offer the same sort of working, social relationship. Anomalous to these responses were the voices of students who found value in anonymity. These few students felt less inhibited to communicate more honestly and effectively about their peers' writing, and they believed that they received more honest feedback in return. Comfortably hiding behind the anonymity of e-mail made them worry less about offending their peers. Also, anonymity "protected" them and their writing; they did not mind so much sending their writing to others for critical review if they did not have to face their peer reviewers.

These mixed reactions, disproportionate as they were, illuminated the complexity of negotiating peer revision relationships in face-to-face and e-mail communication. The mismatch or accord of communication needs, priorities, and expectations determined the respective shutdown or failure of productive, collaborative discourse about writing. Students had a prodigious task in negotiating and balancing their roles and values in peer revision to fit both their own and their partners' needs and expectations.

Making Meaning:
Peer Response and Writing Assignment #4

At this point in the semester, the students had written three narratives. Students had received in-class peer response on all three of the writings and e-mail peer response on the third writing only. I wanted to see if shifts occurred in the students' relationships with their in-class peer revision partners if they began using e-mail as their primary mode of communication. Therefore, I devoted no structured class time to face-to-face peer conferences about their writing; the students sent their fourth writing to both their in-class and e-mail partners via e-mail.

The first draft of writing assignment number four was due on a Thursday, and the students e-mailed their drafts to both their in-class and their e-mail partners at the end of class time on that day. For homework, they had to respond to the writings they received from their own in-class and e-mail partners before our next class meeting on the following Tuesday.

When students arrived to class on the following Tuesday, none of them reported technology or access problems with this second e-mail exchange. I instructed them to check their e-mail for their peer-reviewed drafts, and I gave no other guidelines for the remainder of the class time. I watched to see how they reacted.

I heard no outbursts like the ones that characterized the first e-mail exchange. Students individually checked their e-mail; some printed out their drafts and highlighted their peers' responses, and others worked directly from the drafts on the computers' monitors to make their revisions. Students began by revising independently, but after twenty minutes, all students paired with their in-class revision partners. I walked around the room to ascertain the nature of the collaborative talk between the pairs. The discourse consisted of writers' asking their in-class partners questions about the comments that they had sent via e-mail; if student writers needed clarification about comments from their in-class partners, they conveniently turned to them for help, as in these questions that I heard:

> *Did you mean for me to add the description in this paragraph above or in the next paragraph?*
>
> *What do you mean by this?*
>
> *Does this mean that the way I wrote my introduction is too boring?*

The student writers searched for the *meaning* behind their peers' comments, as their questions showed. They were accustomed to understanding their in-class partners' feedback in their face-to-face communication about their writing; however, e-mail made them feel less sure of their abilities to interpret the meaning behind their peers' feedback. Missing from the student writers' questions to their in-class revision partners was *why* they asked a certain question or offered a particular suggestion. And, similar to the first e-mail exchange, student writers asked me and their in-class partners questions about the veracity of their e-mail partners' responses; again, no one opted to e-mail their partners for further explanation of what they described as "vague" feedback. Nevertheless, students revised their writings the entire class time and later submitted their revised drafts to me for teacher editing and grading.

Shifting Attitudes, Expectations, and Values:
Electronic Journal Entry #3

I became curious about how students discriminated between "vague" and quality feedback and about what types of responses they valued and used in their revision decisions. Also, I wondered if their attitudes were shifting toward using e-mail for peer revision conferencing. After they completed their revisions on their fourth writing assignments, I asked students to submit a third electronic journal entry. The questions were:

- What types of responses do you expect from both of your partners when communicating about writing using e-mail?

- What types of responses do you actually receive and value from both of your partners when communicating about writing using e-mail?

As with earlier electronic journal entries, I stepped out of the computer lab as they spent thirty minutes writing anonymous responses that were sent to my personal e-mail via an electronic form on our class Website.

Shaping Expectations. Students were using e-mail as their only mode of communication, and they had clear expectations of both peer reviewers. All of the students wrote that they expected their peer reviewers to give honest criticism to help them to improve their writing. They did not want their peers to "hold back" when giving evaluative feedback. Students expected their peers to be "thorough" when offering suggestions for revision, and they expected criticism to be "clear" and "easy to understand." Student writers wanted their e-mail partners to give the same sort of feedback as their in-class partners. This student's comment summarized the others' who voiced comparable expectations:

> *I want my e-mail partner's full opinion of my paper. I want him to be honest and critique my writing as if we were in class together.*

A few students expressed a desire for their peers to praise their writing, to connect with the events in their stories, and to share ways that their writing affected them as readers and writers. These students expected to make emotional connections with their readers, regardless of the mode of communication.

Students were clear and consistent in expressing their expectations. Their electronic journal entries showed that, over time, they had internalized the PQP strategy used in peer response. Their perceptions evolved to include expectations that were grounded in experience. Only one student still expected revision partners to edit instead of offering revision suggestions about the content of writing; this student wrote, "I expect to get feedback about grammar, but for some reason my partners overlook my spelling

and punctuation errors." This particular student did not shape his/her prior notions of peer response to fit the expectations of the class. This student did not distinguish between editing and revising, even though all students were guided to respond by avoiding commenting on grammar. The other students understood their tasks in peer response and focused on revising content. This student's expectations were mismatched with others' in the class; therefore, his/her expectations were not met.

Defining Values and Transposing Attitudes. The types of valuable comments that the students described as "helpful" were those that prompted them to add more detail and description, to organize their ideas, and to clear up confusing parts of their narratives so that readers would understand their stories. One student expressed,

> *I have learned that I enjoy my own stories, but others have to enjoy*
> *them as well. Sometimes what I write may not be as clear as I thought,*
> *so my partners' opinions help a lot when I start to revise.*

All students expected and valued honest criticism that helped them to improve their writing; however, not all of them actually received what they considered quality feedback. In their minds, the mode of communication affected the quality of peer response. For some, e-mail helped with communication about writing, and for others, e-mail hindered the process. In fact, I noticed a shift in their attitude toward using e-mail for peer revision. In the previous electronic journal entry, most of the students believed that e-mail peer conferencing neither fostered genuine rapport and trust nor elicited honesty. However, in their reactions, half of the students associated more truthful comments with the anonymity afforded in e-mail communication:

> *I have learned that people who don't know me tell me the truth about my*
> *writing. Through e-mail, my partner gives me honest feedback and is able*
> *to criticize freely.*

I really like to have others who do not know me read my writing. They are very blunt and truthful.

I like that there is someone I don't have to see reading my paper because they do not think that they have to be less judgmental. They do not have to sugar-coat everything so that it doesn't hurt my feelings.

I value the honesty of the comments from my e-mail partner. He doesn't tell me things to make me feel better because he knows me and we are friends. He doesn't know me at all, so he doesn't have to be afraid to say what he really thinks about my writing.

Another shift in students' attitudes was apparent in their explanations of the benefits of using e-mail for peer conferencing. In contrast to the students' previous reactions, many students wrote that they liked using e-mail for peer response because it was "quick" and "convenient"; they were not confined to the time and space of class meetings to respond to each other's writings. Also, more of them thought that the e-mail exchange offered another's valuable perspective about their writing. They balanced the feedback from both of their peers in their revision decisions:

Getting two different types of feedback – one in class and one out of class – helps because I can compare them and see if they have some of the same comments. If they do, then I know I need to change it.

Another person reading my writing catches things that my in-class partner didn't see. Those may be just what I need to improve my writing.

One student was explicit about her changed attitude toward using e-mail for peer revision and attributed this change to her e-mail partner:

In the beginning, I was not positive about sending my writing over e-mail. I thought it was going to be the worst thing that could happen. He would be able to read about my life and criticize it. And, he was the opposite sex of me, so how could he understand my life? Then, after receiving the second response, I realized I did like it. It appeared to me that he seemed to be more interested than I had originally thought he was going to be.

Conversely, while many students were beginning to appreciate the benefits of using e-mail for peer response, a small number of them voiced concerns similar to the groups' initial, somewhat negative reactions to using e-mail. Even though this was their second experience with e-mail peer response, these students revealed that the quality of their peers' e-mail responses still did not meet their expectations. They argued that the feedback they received was inferior to in-class comments because there was no established social relationship. In their reactions, this group of students wrote about the mediocre responses they received, responses that were "just okay," "vague," or "not helpful":

> *My e-mail partner isn't reliable. I don't think he takes his time. I think the comments aren't good because it is e-mail. My in-class critique is what makes my paper better.*
>
> *I don't get good feedback from my e-mail partner. Since I don't know her, she doesn't work as hard – especially since I don't have to communicate with her in person. I receive a lot less than what I expect. She gives me just a little bit of advice, and it seems like she doesn't even read it. In psychology class, I learned that the more personal, emotional distance between two people, the more they will do what's easier instead of what's right for each other. I think that's what is happening with me and my e-mail partner.*
>
> *With e-mail, I do not always get as much feedback as I need, but I do get enough to work with. I think that my e-mail partner rushes because it is not important to him. He doesn't give a good response, whereas with my in-class partner, we talk about the problems with my writing. We take our time to get it finished and to get it right.*

Overall, the students were growing aware of the benefits of both distance and face-to-face communication; they were negotiating ways that they could take advantage of the positive features of both modes to make their revision decisions. Most of them received the quality feedback they valued and expected of their peers; therefore, these students transposed their attitude toward e-mail communication. For some of them,

however, e-mail remained an insufficient mode for communicating about writing. They quality of e-mail feedback did not meet their expectations, so their attitudes toward e-mail communication remained fixed as negative.

Seeking Clarity:
Peer Response and Writing Assignment #5

In the tenth week of the semester, for their fifth and final narrative, students followed the same revision guidelines as they had for their fourth narrative: they used e-mail as the vehicle for peer response about their writing with both in-class and out-of-class partners. Again, a first draft of the fifth writing assignment was due on a Thursday, and the students e-mailed their drafts to both revision partners at the end of class on that day. They responded to the writing on their own time before our next class meeting on the following Tuesday. After the e-mail exchange, none of the students informed me that they had problems with access or the technology; all students responded on time, and during Tuesday's class meeting they retrieved revision suggestions sent by their peers.

During Tuesday's class, I told the students that they could spend the entire hour revising their writing. As they worked individually and in pairs, I noticed that they continued to rely on their in-class partners for assistance and advice. They asked even fewer questions of me, which gave me the opportunity to move about the room, having informal conversations with them as they revised. I wanted to know more about the comments they used for revising and how they judged the value of those comments.

I was able to talk with ten students, and each of them told me that the comments from their e-mail partners were "just okay" or "getting better." (All of the students' replies to this question were accompanied by a shrug of the shoulders or a flip of the hand, in an insouciant manner.) None of the students were galvanized by their e-mail

partners' feedback; they said that the comments from their e-mail partners were not crucial to their revision process. Conversely, they told me that they looked forward to receiving feedback from their in-class partner regardless of the fact that the responses were being transmitted via e-mail.

They informed me that they did use the feedback from both partners, however. According to the students, they revised based on *all* the comments received *if* they understood what their peers were "asking for." If they did not understand a comment sent via e-mail from their in-class partner, writers followed-up during class. Again, writers revealed that they did not send e-mail messages to clarify feedback from their e-mail partners; instead, when confronted with vague or confusing comments from their e-mail partners, students reportedly either "just ignored them" or "asked someone else for help."

I also wanted to know how student writers grew to trust and to rely upon the comments they received. As I roamed about the class, I asked a few individual students about their negotiation of trust and confidence in their partners' comments. When I asked them this question, individual students revealed that if they understood the suggestion, they used it. Therefore, they simply discriminated about the quality of the feedback based on its clarity. Three students pointed out that none of the suggestions they had used "hurt" their grade, and as one student said, "I need all the help I can get with my writing"; the four students sitting nearby this student who heard his comment nodded their heads in agreement.

As I wandered from student to student, I watched them periodically lean over to their in-class partners to ask questions about their in-class peers' suggestions that were

sent via e-mail. I listened to their dialogue and oftentimes heard a writer request an

audience to determine if a revision "worked," as this conversation between Dewayne and

Renee illustrated:

> "Hey Dewayne – what do you mean here when you ask, 'How did you cry?' *[Renee pointed to her computer monitor to show Dewayne which of his comments she did not understand.]*
> "Well, I just mean you explained *why* you cried – that you were upset about your grandmother – but you don't show me what you *do* when you cry. I mean, are you, like, sobbing and boo-hooing, or do you just have a tear or something. Just describe how you look when you cry." *[Dewayne continued to type on his keyboard and revise his own writing as he talked to Renee.]*
> "I don't know how I look. I don't know how to describe me crying." *Renee typed a couple of sentences, then said*, "What about this: 'I plopped down on the curb, buried my face in my hands, and started wailing.' Does that sound better?"
> *[Dewayne leaned over to read from Renee's monitor.]* "Yeah, that's more descriptive, but what are your feelings?"
> "My feelings?"
> "Yeah, like, what's running through your mind? What are you thinking about?"
> "I don't know. I guess I'm scared she's gonna die."
> "Okay, well, put that in there, then." *[Dewayne turned back to his own computer and continued to type. Renee did the same.]*

During class that day I noticed the ways in which the student writers were

balancing their revision practices:

- They valued all comments, but only if they understood them.

- They communicated with their in-class partner about vague comments, but not with their e-mail partner.

- They worked diligently on their revisions, but not without some instances of support.

These complex acts of negotiation and balance were mediated by the mode of

communication and the proximity of their revision partner. If they could talk to their

partner face-to-face, they were more likely to make sense of the revision suggestions and

implement them in their writings. They did not disregard their e-mail partners' comments, but they did rely on a person with whom they could physically and verbally interact to understand the comments. Therefore, in many situations, student writers' in-class partner became a "sage" who elucidated vague comments; ironically, trust and rapport was deepened with their in-class partners as a result of the limited relationship with their e-mail partners.

Idealizing Peer Response:
Electronic Journal Entry #4

Since the students were finished with their last narrative for the semester, I thought it necessary to learn what they would take away from their experiences with peer revision. I wanted to know what features of their peer conferences shaped their perceptions of peer revision in future writing courses. For the fourth electronic journal entry, I posed the question:

- In future writing classes, what will be your ideal situation for peer response?

As usual, I left the computer lab and gave students thirty minutes to write a reaction which they submitted anonymously via an electronic form on our class Website.

Defining their Ideal. In their reactions, the students described not only their ideal situation but also their ideal partner. In their words, an ideal revision partner would:

> *Critique my writing freely.*
>
> *Take an interest in me and my writing.*
>
> *Be trustworthy.*
>
> *Be positive about the way he phrased his comments to me about my writing.*
>
> *Communicate and explain herself so that I could understand.*

Make me feel secure about sharing my writing.

Be my friend as well as my peer revision partner.

Take their time when giving suggestions.

Really care about helping me and wants me to improve my writing.

Truly want to help me, not just give comments because they have to.

Be someone I can work well with.

Almost all of the students referred to their current peer response partners when describing their ideal; they disclosed that they did indeed have their ideal partner embodied in either one partner or a combination of the two (in-class and e-mail). Some of these students named one partner as their ideal but *did not identify* the partner as either their in-class or e-mail. Others combined the strengths of each partner in characterizing their ideal: they wrote about the ways in which their two partners complemented each other in their revision suggestions. One student described,

> *My ideal partner would be good at asking questions about confusing parts*
> *of my stories, like my in-class partner, and would be good at helping me*
> *with my introduction, like my e-mail partner does every time.*

These students went on to admit that their general perception of their e-mail partner grew from negative to positive over time.

A small number of students idealized their peer response partner as someone different from their actual partners. Of these students who did not have their ideal peer revision partners, most blamed it on the mode of communication: e-mail. They wrote that their partners "limited and rushed through their comments because of e-mail," "didn't seem to care because it was on e-mail," and "didn't communicate because we never saw each other." Another student was frustrated for reasons other than

communication. Because "she was having problems with her writing, too," this student

writer did not trust her revision suggestions. Actually, this student was so dissatisfied

with both partners that s/he reportedly "never used any of their comments."

Genderizing their Ideal. Three students referred to gender when describing their

ideal revision partner. Two of them wanted females as their revision partners because

they believed that females were "better in English," were "hardworking and always

wanting to do their best," and would "not hold back and tell the truth."   Another student

preferred a male revision partner because females "tend to justify too many things rather

than getting straight to the point and telling what doesn't work in a paper." Since these

reactions were written anonymously, and since the writers did not reveal their own

gender, I could not discern the identity of these writers. However, I was fascinated by

their perceptions of females being better in English and having more expressive

communication styles.

Shaping their Ideal.   Almost all of the students wrote that their ideal situation for

peer response would be to have both an in-class and an e-mail partner. All of them

reasoned that both an in-class and out-of-class partner would widen their audience and

would increase the quantity and quality of the feedback. They valued being able to

interact with a peer, to establish trust, rapport, and friendship, but they also appreciated

another's "point of view" for comparison and contrast:

> *Your in-class partner may find something in your paper that your e-mail partner*
> *did not see, and vice versa.*
>
> *My in-class partner looks at my writing in one way, but my e-mail partner*
> *sees it totally different. I like having these two different perspectives because*
> *they give me ideas about expanding different parts of my paper.*
>
> *I like having two partners because if one doesn't really care about helping*

you, then you have the other partner to depend on instead of being stuck with someone who is slack.

A couple of students did not describe their ideal peer revision situation as a combination of in-class and e-mail communication. One student preferred only e-mail peer revision: "My partners on e-mail would not have to know who I am and could therefore be truthful when commenting on my writing." The other student wanted only teacher comments since "the teacher always knows where things need to be changed."

From the fourth electronic journal entries, I discovered that the students were emphatic about the benefits of both modes of communication, especially when used in combination. Students weighed the strengths and weaknesses of their current collaborative relationships to shape a definition of their ideal peer revision situation; they compared or contrasted their ideal to either one or both of their current partners. Students advocated having two revision partners – regardless of mode of communication – because the strengths of one would balance the deficiencies of the other.

Most of the students still preferred face-to-face discourse about writing, and they required that at least one revision partner be someone with whom they could physically and verbally interact. For them, mode of communication was secondary to their partners' possessing ideal qualities of honesty, trustworthiness, and sensitivity. However, despite the consistencies among the students' descriptions of their ideal situations and partners, nuances emerged in their journal entries. These subtleties showed how individual preferences, attitudes, and expectations made negotiating ideal relationships a complex – sometimes elusive – process.

Endings. The end of the class portraiture represents the close of the narrative. The next portraiture, one of a peer response triad, offers a peek inside the complex dynamics of peer response groups. Their portraiture is meant to illuminate processes particular to their synergy, not to represent the other peer response groups in the class. However, what can be understood from their portraiture is how individual values, expectations, and attitudes contribute to the negotiation of collaborative relationships.

Portraiture of a Peer Response Triad

This portraiture weaves James's, Neil's, and Kyra's reflections on their experiences as writers and peer reviewers; they shared their perceptions in individual interviews during the final weeks of the semester, after their writing assignments and peer response sessions were completed. This portraiture edifies individual and group acts of negotiating tensions and building solidarity specific to James, Neil, and Kyra. Also portrayed are individual idiosyncrasies that affected the processes of the group. Their relationship is illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 2. Peer response triad in portraiture.

Neil   Kyra
(in-class partner)   (e-mail partner)

                                      Note: Names are pseudonyms.
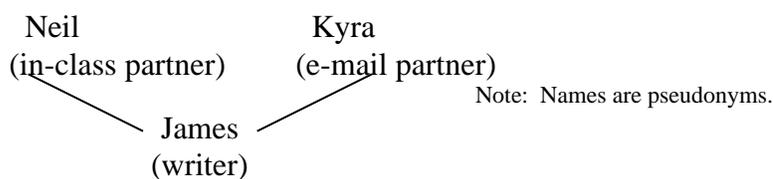
James
(writer)

James and Neil, in-class response partners, sat beside each other from the first day of class, and they got to know one another before peer response began. For them, proximity and familiarity helped them to choose each other as their peer response partner. Kyra, an African-American female, was James's e-mail partner because each was the eleventh student on their respective class rolls.

Negotiating Relationships. James and Neil, in individual interviews, spoke of the

ways in which their social relationship evolved as a result of their being in-class revision

partners. They quickly connected because, as Neil said,

> I found out James knew my uncle, and our relationship progressively got better. In fact, a lot better than I thought it would. It's unusual that we got along so well especially since we had never met each other before. When in class, we did what we had to do, but we also talked outside of class. And if needed, we helped each other with our papers outside of class, too.

James also perceived his relationship with Neil as positive and productive. Both James

and Neil admitted to engaging in social talk unrelated to their writing during peer revision

conferences, but they asserted that this socializing helped them to establish trust and

confidence in each other. For them, becoming friends was crucial to successful peer

revision conferences. James revealed,

> I trust Neil's comments because we are also friends. By building this friendship, we were able to understand and relate better. And more than that, I trusted him, and I believed that his comments were honest and sincere. I think he really took his job [as a peer reviewer] seriously because he was my friend.

> Kyra, James's e-mail partner, raised similar issues of friendship with her in-class

partner, who was also an African-American female. Like James and Neil, Kyra and her

in-class partner became friends as they participated in peer revision conferences.

Furthermore, their friendship strengthened as they worked together on their writing, and

in turn, their writing improved because of their friendship. Kyra described the reciprocity

between their friendship and writing in this way:

> You know how you usually make friends – you tell about yourself, tell stories, and talk about past times. Well, we write about our personal experiences in this class, and she [in-class partner] knows most of my stories because of our conversations as friends. I'll write my paper for class, and she'll read it and say, 'You didn't tell about the part when this happened.' So she remembers stories I've already told her, and when I write them for class, she helps me to remember parts of it. At first, I thought her being my friend and my revision partner

wouldn't work, but I like it because she tells me the truth and I respect her opinions.

Kyra went on to say that she and her in-class partner wrote their first drafts together, so the revision process occurred as they wrote collaboratively, not after they individually completed a first draft. Despite the importance Kyra placed on the role of friendship in peer revision, Kyra admitted,

> In some stories I tell her, I don't reveal my inner feelings. But in writing them, I have to because that's the format of the paper. So she will read them and say, 'You never told me this' and I feel bad because I held back. And then other times she'll give me criticism about my writing, but she's also criticizing my feelings and experiences, and I'm like 'Those are my inner feelings' and I think she shouldn't do that.

Kyra struggled with being protective of her writing while staying open to her friendship. However, her tension was not an obstacle to having both productive in-class peer conferences and a satisfying friendship. Kyra reported that it was her responsibility to balance the two, and she believed that, over time, she found that balance. She said that, by the end of the semester, she had made a conscious effort not to be too sensitive about her friend's criticism. Kyra wanted the honesty and sincerity her in-class partner and friend offered, so she relinquished her more negative emotional reactions to the feedback. Kyra reflected,

> I feel better when she reads my papers because she knows me. She tells me, 'Kyra, you know that's not really you.' She knows what I've been through, and she knows how I feel about things. At first, I resented her telling me how to change my writing because she felt free just to take over my whole paper. But now, I take her comments seriously because she knows me so well. I get the truth from her, and that's more important than me being, well, being resistant to what she tells me to do with my writing.

Both James and Kyra valued friendships that evolved with their in-class response partners; they explained that being able to talk with their partners – about their social

lives and about their writing – helped their in-class relationships evolve. However, they did not think that a relationship between them ensued from their e-mail communication. In individual interviews, James and Kyra spoke at length about their relationship with their in-class revision partners; they each laughed and smiled when referring to positive experiences with them. But when I asked them about their e-mail partners, they did not offer much insight. Of his relationship with Kyra, James said, "I don't really have a relationship with her. I know how she writes, but that's it." Kyra was hesitant to share her writing with James because he was not her friend. She was accustomed to sharing stories with her in-class partner and friend, but she felt guarded about expressing herself fully in her writing to James. About this initial reluctance, Kyra said,

> When we first got the e-mail partners, I was like, 'I don't know if he [James] will want to read about this. I don't know if I should reveal too much of myself because he isn't my friend, and I'll probably never meet him anyway.'

However, time altered Kyra's perspective of her relationship with James. By the end of the semester, even though she still did not think of him as a friend, she felt a sense of familiarity because they had shared so many stories with each other through their writing. She confessed,

> I do think I know him a little bit, and he knows me a little bit, based on our writings. He wrote one story about not swearing, another about making good grades, and another about his family. So I know he works hard in school, and grades are very important to him. He probably has a good family background and morals, too.

I interviewed Kyra before James, and with her permission, during James's interview, I read aloud her description of him. He smiled when I read it, and he attested that she was correct in her hunches about his personality and value system. Yet James felt insecure about offering an interpretive description of Kyra. I continued to probe him during the

interview, and he uttered phrases such as, "I don't know. I figure she's shy, and maybe

has had a hard family life. I don't really know her. I don't know." For both James and

Kyra, e-mail limited their communication and, therefore, their social relationship. The

ways in which they negotiated their in-class relationships were not applicable to

developing their e-mail "relationship." James and Kyra needed to be in the physical

presence of their partners to establish trust and rapport, and they needed to make

connections through talk and sharing stories to build a collaborative relationship.

Defining Benefits. James, Neil, and Kyra valued the friendship and rapport with

their in-class partners, but they were less enthusiastic about their relationship with their e-

mail partners. Nevertheless, all three of them agreed that having established partners for

the duration of the semester benefited them as writers and peer reviewers. They cited

social, cognitive, and affective merits of conferencing with the same e-mail and in-class

partners over time. For them, these dimensions were almost inseparable; they usually

mentioned one merit in conjunction with another.

The social and cognitive dimensions of peer revision were interlaced as James and

Neil conferenced about writing. Neil illustrated this by saying,

> James got to know me as a writer and a person. He knows how I write and
> could always detect the mistakes I made because I usually made the same
> ones every time. And then when I got better, James always noticed. And as his
> peer reviewer, I could do the same. He knew my personality and knew what
> to say to me and how to say it so I wouldn't get offended. We could joke
> around, but I knew what he said about my writing was serious. We helped
> each other put our personalities on paper because we knew each other so well.
> James and I had a bond, and we related to each other. I couldn't give someone
> really good, detailed suggestions on their paper if I didn't have a bond with them.
> To tell you the truth, I wouldn't really care to do more than just simple
> suggestions that probably wouldn't help – mainly because I wouldn't know
> them and wouldn't know *how* to help.

I observed in class Neil's and James's "joking around" and understood it as their way of communicating and relating to each other. Because they were so comfortable with one another, they trusted that each other's revision suggestions were valid. As Neil put it, they had a social "bond" that motivated them to *want* to learn from each other. James confirmed Neil's testament of the social and cognitive processes that evolved over time from their in-class peer conferences. Similar to Neil, James felt that having an established partner helped him because he knew "what kinds of mistakes to look for in Neil's writing." James went on to say that, in turn, Neil knew his own writing strengths and weaknesses; therefore, Neil based his revision suggestions on this knowledge.

Kyra shared this view of the benefits of established, consistent peer reviewers of writing. She too mentioned the reciprocity between social and cognitive processes in peer response. She believed that both her in-class and e-mail partners knew her and her writing; therefore, they anticipated mistakes and noticed improvements in writings. Kyra advocated established, consistent partners because, as she put it, "changing would be confusing, and conferences wouldn't be as in-depth." She asserted that her partners gave her revision suggestions based on what they knew about her as a person and a writer, and a different partner each time would be at a disadvantage since the new partner would "have nothing to draw from." Kyra added another layer to the socio-cognitive dimension of peer revision when she talked about the affective benefits she received from conferencing with established in-class and e-mail partners:

> I like being able to express my opinions about their writing. I feel like
> I'm helping them out, and it makes me feel good to do that. Because I know
> them, I *want* to help them and see them do well. Also, they tell me
> things that they like about my writing, and I have more confidence to work
> on my final copy because of that.

For Kyra, an established social relationship served as a foundation for her cognitive and affective growth as a writer and peer reviewer. She felt valued in helping those with whom she had a good rapport, and, in turn, she was motivated to learn and improve as a writer and reader. Also significant was that Kyra mentioned that both James and her in-class partner knew her and her writing. She did not distinguish which peer reviewer knew her more or gave her higher quality revision suggestions, but she did acknowledge the benefits of having both reviewers – regardless of communication.

James, Neil and Kyra realized and valued the social, cognitive, and affective benefits of working with consistent revision partners over time. They emphasized the importance of friendship with their revision partners, and they cited face-to-face communication as the ideal medium in which to develop this rapport. In interviews, they also offered specific comments about ways in which their face-to-face discourse fostered more substantial, explicit "talk" about writing.

Nurturing Conversations. James, Neil, and Kyra preferred face-to-face talk about writing over the asynchronicity of e-mail communication. All three students acknowledged the value of being able to take their time and talk through revision strategies. In individual interviews, James and Neil reported that, since they worked together in person, they had time to negotiate revision suggestions. James expressed,

> When Neil gives me feedback, I like to be able to defend myself. What he suggests may not make sense to me, or I may not want to use his suggestion, so we have to convince each other. We both might say, 'No, that's not right,' but then we talk it out. It takes awhile to sit there and explain either my writing or my comments on his writing, but it's worth it. I can't do that in e-mail, and it's frustrating.

When James mentioned this, I remembered how he and Neil took active roles in their jobs as peer reviewers. Their talk about writing was characterized with playful banter

that caught the attention of me and the other students. Their revision suggestions to each other were punctuated with teasing, laughing, and jesting, but in my observations and in their confessions, their talk about writing during class time was productive. They valued their relationship and therefore worked collaboratively on their revisions.

Kyra also mentioned that in-class conferences with her partner were beneficial because, as she stated, "We sit there and take the time to talk about things in detail." Kyra said that she enjoyed being asked questions by her in-class partner that prompted her to talk about sections of her writing that might be vague or confusing. She reasoned,

> If I wrote something, and it's confusing, I can't see how to rewrite it because I think it makes sense. But if I talk it out, I can see how it is confusing to the reader. When I talk about it with my partner, in person, it becomes clear, and I see what I left out. Then I just put it in there.

Thus, Kyra recognized talking about writing as a way to think through her stories. She admitted that she communicated more effectively in storytelling than story writing. She also realized she was not distanced enough from her writing, so the opportunity for an audience served her well.

James and Kyra were in agreement that their e-mail "talk" about writing was not as advantageous as their in-class discourse. In his interview, James did not elaborate on the ways in which he and Kyra "talked" about writing in their e-mail exchanges. He shrugged his shoulders every time I probed for more response from him and said,

> It's just not the same. I can't defend myself when I get her comments; I can't explain why my writing is okay the way it is. And I can't ask her what she means about her suggestions. So, it's not really a conversation – it's just there. Kyra's comments are the same every time. I don't really care who my e-mail partner is, as long as someone else reads my writing.

Kyra expressed similar reactions to e-mail discourse between her and James. She contrasted discourse between her and her in-class partner with the lack of communication

over e-mail between her and James. Because she could not communicate sufficiently

with James, she began to doubt herself as a writer:

> In e-mail conferences, James doesn't write a *whole* paragraph about what's
> wrong with my writing. If I don't understand the comment, I'm like, 'What
> am I supposed to do with this?' And sometimes I think I've already covered
> what he's suggesting, but then I start thinking, 'Well maybe my writing isn't
> clear, or I didn't explain enough. Should I change it? Should I leave it? Maybe
> he really didn't understand? Or maybe he just didn't read it carefully?' So I
> wonder what to do. I'm not sure because I like my writing the way it is, and
> I kind of start doubting myself because I haven't had a really good conversation
> in person about my writing.

Kyra needed "good conversation" about writing to feel confident in making revision

decisions. Asynchronous communication did not meet her needs; she was not able to

participate in a verbal exchange of questions and ideas to confirm and to clarify her

revision decisions. This absence of discourse left her feeling unbalanced and unsure of

herself as a writer, and she had to find ways to reconcile her indecision. She said that

when in doubt, she turned to her in-class partner for support. Neither Kyra nor James

initiated further discourse with each other about writing by sending subsequent e-mail

messages, despite their reported frustrations. Instead, because they valued the trust and

rapport they established with their in-class partners, they relied on them for support.

Making Revision Decisions

In an individual interview, James revealed the influence of Neil's and Kyra's

suggestions on his revision decisions. James discussed the nature of their comments and

how those comments changed over time. To validate James's perceptions of his peer

reviewers and his revision decisions, I analyzed Neil's and Kyra's comments on his first

drafts of writing. Then, I compared James's first drafts to his second drafts to examine

his revisions and the peer reviewers' revision style. (See chapter three for details of the

analysis.) James's first two writing assignments contained only Neil's revision

suggestions that were completed in face-to-face conferences during class.   For writing

assignment three, James and Neil had a conference during class, and for the first time,

Kyra used e-mail to send her comments to James. Writing assignments four and five

included Neil's and Kyra's revision suggestions that they both sent via e-mail to James.

All were to follow the revision strategy of "Praise, Question, Polish" (PQP) when

responding to their peers' writing.

Table 4. Schedule of James's Peer Reviewers.

WA#	Peer Reviewer	Mode of communication
#1	Neil (in-class partner)	Face-to-face
#2	Neil (in-class partner)	Face-to-face
#3	Neil (in-class partner) Kyra (e-mail partner)	Face-to-face E-mail
#4	Neil (in-class partner) Kyra (e-mail partner)	E-mail E-mail
#5	Neil (in-class partner) Kyra (e-mail partner)	E-mail E-mail

James and Neil

James reported that, as a writer, he implemented all the questions that both Neil

and Kyra asked him about his writing. Even though James previously revealed that he

preferred face-to-face discourse about writing, he claimed that unsatisfying discourse did

not always deter him from using both reviewers' suggestions when making revision

decisions. He rationalized, "Everything they write I do something with. They don't say

anything that will hurt my paper, so I use them all, as long as I can understand them."

Also, James liked that using technology for peer review made the process faster

and neater. He said,

I like the question being right there in the text instead of written all over

>the paper and in the margin, which is hard to read. With computers, we can put in right there in between sentences. That way, I know exactly where to make the revision.

The feature of embedding questions within the writing made revision comments and questions more text-specific and directive. To revise, James simply answered the question. As peer reviewer, James found embedding questions just as effective. He added, "I can read the story, and when I have a question about Neil's writing, I just type it in." James even went beyond a critical reading of his peers' writing in his efforts to learn from his peers' mistakes.

> Sometimes I find mistakes on Kyra's or Neil's paper, and I'm like, 'I think I did that on mine.' So I go back and look, and I usually did, so I change it. I also use my own problems with writing to evaluate theirs. If I had trouble with a certain section of my paper, like the conclusion or something, I'll automatically check to see if they did theirs correctly.

James furthered his vision of revision; he did not limit his revising to those direct questions asked by Neil and Kyra. He evaluated their writing critically and then turned those same critical skills to his own writing.

Neil was also enthusiastic about phrasing his revision suggestions as questions that were embedded within the text. He thought that thinking of questions to elicit more descriptive or clear writing from the writer seriously disrupted his prior assumptions about the function of peer response. He was accustomed to editing peers' writings for grammar mistakes, but with the PQP strategy, he posed questions so that "James had to think about the best way of answering the question to make the writing more clear." Neil positioned himself as the writer in this comment:

> The questions make me think. When I get stimulated to think about what I did wrong in my writing, I try much harder to make it correct. "Correcting" and "thinking about" what I did wrong are totally different. I feel like if I just correct it, I am more prone to do it again. But if I have to really think hard

about the revision, I won't make the same mistake twice.

He referred to his prior notions of revision as editing without my prompting him and attributed his attitudinal shift to the PQP strategy. As Neil stated earlier, he was used to receiving his drafts of writing with corrections on them, and he used little mental power to make those surface changes. As a writer, he valued the PQP strategy because it forced him to think more about choosing language to communicate clearly. Neil imposed his values on James; Neil realized the value of "thinking about" his mistakes and phrased his revision suggestions so that James would be prompted to do the same.

Both James and Neil thought that embedded questions within the text helped them to make more specific revisions. Also, James was of the opinion that the quality and quantity of Neil's comments did not change over time and were not negatively affected by changing from face-to-face to e-mail communication. However, analysis of Neil's comments on James's drafts of writing show the opposite.

Table 5. Neil's PQP Strategy and James's Revision Decisions.

WA	Communication	Praises	Questions	Revision Decisions
#1	Face-to-face	Neil offered 2 praises	Neil asked 2 questions	James used 2 revision suggestions
#2	Face-to-face	Neil offered 2 praises	Neil asked 3 questions	James used 2 revision suggestions
#3	Face-to-face	Neil offered 2 praises	Neil asked 3 questions	James used 3 revision suggestions
#4	E-mail	Neil offered 2 praises	Neil asked 1 question	James used 1 revision suggestion
#5	E-mail	Neil offered 2 praises	Neil asked 1 question	James used 0 revision suggestions

Writing Assignments One, Two, and Three. The first three peer review sessions took place during class with Neil's reading James's writing from a computer monitor. Even though they discussed face-to-face Neil's praises and questions about James's writing, Neil typed the questions and comments within the text so that there would be some record of their conversation.

In responding to James's first three writings, Neil adhered to the PQP strategy that he had learned in class. Neil offered general praise for James's descriptive writing techniques as well as the organization and flow of his stories. Neil phrased his suggestions for revisions as questions; he asked James to add dialogue and more description in certain sections of the writing. For example, in his story about his first summer job, Neil prompted James (in all caps) to add dialogue in an appropriate place:

> *This was the perfect opportunity to get a job. I rushed over that day to the site where the golf course was being built. I met the supervisor and received an application from him.* [WHAT DID YOU SAY TO HIM? WHAT DID HE SAY BACK?] *Of course, I went home and got my dad to help me fill out the application.*

James, prompted by Neil's suggestion, changed one sentence ("I met the supervisor and received an application from him") into eight lines of dialogue and description that showed the conversation between him and the supervisor. This revision gave the readers more insight into the supervisor's personality that affected James's attitude toward his first job. In his first three writing assignments, James used all of Neil's revision suggestions in this manner, except for one: When Neil asked James to add more description of a person, James chose not to extend the description because had already written two sentences.

Writing Assignments Four and Five. In writing assignments four and five, Neil responded to James's first drafts via e-mail instead of face-to-face. In these two responses, Neil continued to offer praises; he focused on James's use of dialogue to illustrate conversations between characters. Because the majority of Neil's previous revision suggestions to James focused on adding dialogue, he noticed and praised James's efforts to incorporate effective dialogue in his writing. During class many weeks

before, I had noticed Neil teaching James to begin his stories with dialogue; Neil used this same writing technique, and James admired it. Neil informed me, "James is stealing my idea of dialogue leads." Neil laughed when he said it, and James laughed too. On James's writing assignment five, Neil wrote after the introduction, "Way to start out with dialogue, you thief." The nature of their face-to-face discourse had spilled into their e-mail exchange. This joke characterized their communication, given the jesting I had observed during James's and Neil's face-to-face conferences.

With e-mail responses to the fourth and fifth writing assignments, the quantity of Neil's questions per draft decreased from the number he asked in writings one, two, and three. On James's first three writings, Neil averaged three questions on each; on writings four and five, Neil posed only one question on each. On James's writing assignment four, Neil asked him to add some description for clarification:

> *Many teachers and friends I went to school with stopped the bad habit of swearing just because I pointed it out to them.* [HOW DID YOU POINT IT OUT TO THEM? WHAT DID YOU DO?]

James revised this section extensively; he decided to illustrate this process by describing his influence on just one person instead of "many teachers and friends." He changed the entire focus of his story from being general about his effect on others' cursing to a specific incident involving him and his teacher. Although Neil sent this one revision question to James via e-mail, James revealed, in his individual interview, that he and Neil worked on this revision together during class after the e-mail exchange.

On James's writing assignment five, Neil asked James only one question: "Shouldn't you use a comma here?" Even though Neil followed the question strategy, the content of his question showed that he lapsed into prompting James to correct a

punctuation error instead of focusing on the content of the story. James did not add a comma in the sentence. The other revision suggestion that Neil offered was at the end of the draft where he was supposed to summarize his revision questions as polishing suggestions. This suggestion was vague, and nowhere had he previously phrased it as a question: "The conclusion needs a little work. Add some more description to it." James did not revise the conclusion; he was not prompted by a specific question to help him zero in on the part of the conclusion that needed revision.

In face-to-face conferences, Neil followed the PQP revision strategy. He offered James praises and questions and summarized his comments as polishing suggestions. In the first three writing assignments, James used all but one of Neil's revision suggestions. However, in the last two writing assignments, completed via e-mail, the quality and quantity of Neil's revision suggestions decreased, and James used only those suggestions that were phrased as questions and that were clear to him. In a follow-up interview with James, I asked him why he thought Neil's revision suggestions decreased over time, and James admitted that he had not noticed the change. James explained, though, that he and Neil continued to talk about their writing with each other during class even after their e-mail exchange.

> Neil and I found it easier to make general comments on each other's papers
> than to explain it more thoroughly in person. It was easier for us to explain being
> face to face than trying to explain ourselves through e-mail.

James and Neil knew that they would be able to talk about their writing during class, so they depended less on e-mail to exchange their revision suggestions. Because they placed such high value on talking about writing face to face, they did not allow e-mail communication to substitute for their established social relationship.

James and Kyra

In individual interviews, James and Kyra revealed that e-mail discourse did not afford them opportunities to exchange ideas about their writing in the same way as face-to-face communication. Both James and Kyra valued the verbal exchange that accompanied face-to-face discourse in the peer response conferences. With their in-class partners, James and Kyra confirmed their peers' comments by "talking it through" with them. However, James claimed that unsatisfying discourse did not always deter him from using Kyra's suggestions: "Everything they [Neil and Kyra] write I do something with. They don't say anything that will hurt my paper, so I use them all, as long as I can understand them."

Similar to James and Neil, Kyra valued the specific revision strategy (PQP) that she used when reviewing James's writing and revising her own. Kyra was aware that she was not the only reader of James's writing, so she asked questions to prompt him to clarify parts of his stories. Also, she said, "Using the PQP strategy is like I am having a conversation with his stories." For her, in asking questions, she was interacting with the text; she was not only asking questions of the writer but also of the writing. Like Neil, Kyra saw value in prompting James to think deeper about his writing so that he communicated clearly to his readers. She asked the writing, "What is wrong here?" in order to articulate her revision suggestion to James.

Because Kyra realized the importance of asking specific questions of the writer, she expressed a preference for being asked questions that would help her to clarify or to elaborate on vague parts of her writing. She said,

Questions let me know that my story isn't clear to others. In my last paper,

> I wrote about a bunch of my friends. And after I named one of them, James wrote, "Who is this girl?" And I was like, "Dang, I didn't even tell who she was or why she was there." So, I had to answer that question in the paper, and it cleared everything up.

She went on to differentiate between asking questions and giving comments, and her reasoning echoed Neil's:

> Questions are better because you have to answer them. Comments are things like, "I don't know who this girl is" and I'm like, 'So what?' But questions force me to clarify. Comments – I can just take them or leave them.

Kyra also valued the praise she received from her revision partners. She said that she remembered praises and went on to add, "When they praise my writing, I make sure I use the same strategies in later papers." She specifically mentioned her e-mail partner James when she talked about how praise motivated her to revise:

> At the end of my paper, James usually tells me something like, 'I like this story – you're on your way to a good grade,' and I'm like, 'Well, good – I'll keep revising and finish my paper.'

James mentioned, without my asking, that he did use this strategy to motivate Kyra to revise. He confessed that sometimes Kyra wrote about personal topics, and he made an extra effort to be sensitive when responding:

> Kyra wrote one paper about her mom, and she put a lot of emotions in it. But it was hard to follow the actual story. I didn't want to hurt her feelings, so I had to be careful about the way I phrased my questions so she wouldn't get discouraged. That way, she still felt like revising.

When I asked James if he thought Kyra's comments changed over time, he said, "Well, the comments have been different because I've written different papers. But it's been consistent." I examined the comments on James's first drafts of the three writing assignments they exchanged over e-mail and compared them to his second drafts. I

noticed that Kyra's comments improved with time, and James progressively used more of

Kyra's revision suggestions.

Table 6. Kyra's PQP Strategies and James's Revision Decisions.

WA	Communication	Praises	Questions	Revision Decisions
#3	E-mail	Kyra offered 2 praises	Kyra asked 3 questions	James used 1 revision suggestion
#4	E-mail	Kyra offered 2 praises	Kyra asked 3 questions	James used all revision suggestions
#5	E-mail	Kyra offered 3 praises	Kyra asked 3 questions	James used all revision suggestions

Writing Assignment Three. On James's third writing assignment, Kyra followed

the PQP strategy when giving him revision suggestions. She praised James's description

of his feelings about receiving his first 'C' on a report card as well as the overall flow of

his story. Two of the three questions that Kyra asked were ones that were to prompt

James to describe more of his emotional reactions to different parts of this experience;

however, he did not revise his writing based on these two suggestions. He did revise by

answering one of Kyra's questions about description. In his first draft, he wrote:

> *I laid down my report card in front of him.* [WHAT WAS HIS FACIAL
> EXPRESSION? HOW DID HE REACT?]*Then he told me I would have
> to start studying more, since I was in high school.*

His second draft showed this revision based on Kyra's question:

> *I laid down my report card in front of him. As he read it, his face began to tell the
> story. His eyes widened, and his face turned redder and redder. He suddenly looked up
> and me and said, "James, you are in high school now. You are going to have to start
> studying more."*
> *"But dad," I complained.*
> *"No 'buts', James! This report card tells me you are not studying enough!" he
> yelled.*

The fact that James revised based on only one of Kyra's suggestions – contrasted with

using both of Neil's – showed that James valued and found more credible Neil's

feedback. In this first e-mail exchange, James was unsure about the veracity of Kyra's

revision suggestions. He did not have the same trust and rapport with Kyra as he did with Neil, and this manifested itself in James's revision decisions.

Writing Assignment Four. On James's fourth writing assignment, Kyra praised James in two places for his descriptive writing. The questions she asked James were focused on the content of his writing. In two sections, his organization confused her, so he rearranged some sentences to make the paragraphs more clear. Her other question asked him to describe more of his emotional feelings in response to his experience; in response to James's story about his strong moral beliefs about not swearing, Kyra asked, "How did you feel when you stood up for yourself?" This time, James chose to add extensive descriptions of his feelings in response to Kyra's question, though he did not follow her advice in the previous writing. However, Neil had asked James a similar question about his emotional reactions in the same section of his writing. Therefore, I found it difficult to ascertain whether James based his revision decision on Neil's or Kyra's question. Maybe James found Kyra's question more credible because Neil's comment reinforced the veracity of hers, or maybe time was a factor and he was beginning to trust her more with the second e-mail exchange.

Writing Assignment Five. In James's fifth writing assignment, Kyra's comments were even more expressive than the previous ones. In her praises, she went beyond just describing what she liked about James's writing; she connected with his experiences by comparing them to her own. For example, James wrote about time when he was outnumbered by his sisters in choosing a restaurant for the family dinner. Kyra responded, "I know how you felt here. I have younger brothers and sisters, and they always got their way." Also, like Neil, she praised James's effective use of dialogue, and

she encouraged James to continue describing his feelings; she wrote, "I liked the way you talked about the different emotions that you went through when the accident happened." Kyra asked three questions to compel James to clarify vague parts of his story. He used all three questions and revised by adding details that made those sections easier to understand.

      Balancing Preferences. In their individual interviews, James, Neil, and Kyra said that although they preferred face-to-face communication about writing, they did like using a combination of both modes. James stated, "E-mail is great because it's convenient and quick, but I wouldn't replace it with face-to-face. Having both is a good way to get two perspectives." Neil agreed that having two peer reviewers was beneficial. He said,

> The critiques from my two partners were very similar. Having the same comments by both partners helped me get through my head what I was doing wrong. James was honest with me because we were friends and had the same goal to make good grades on our writing. My e-mail partner was good because he either found the same mistakes as James or he found something that James missed.

      Kyra also liked having two revision partners. For her, the issue was more complex because her in-class partner was female, and her e-mail partner was male. She gave this insight:

> Because James is the opposite sex of my face-to-face partner, I get both sides. Certain things a female understands, a male might not understand. So I was probably vague with some parts of my writing, and he helped me get a different perspective.

Since both Kyra and her in-class partner were African-American females, as well as friends, they were able to connect with each other in ways that she and James could not. However, Kyra valued James's "outsider" perspective as important in her revision

decisions. She also advocated using the two different modes of communication for peer

revision. Honesty was important to Kyra, and she believed that using both face-to-face

and e-mail would ensure that at least one peer would be honest and sincere in their

comments:

> I didn't mind sharing my personal stories with my friend, and I knew that
> because she was my friend, she would be honest with me. But then, with
> e-mail, James is never going to see me, so he was honest too.

CHAPTER FIVE
Discussion

Nothing endures but change.
Heraclitus

The portraitures of the collective class and of a peer response triad bring to full awareness the ways in which individual attitudes, values, and expectations about writing and reading contribute to the cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions of peer response groups. In turn, the complex forces that are the undercurrent of peer response groups influence the individual as a writer and reader. Modes of communication, classroom setting, and even the teacher's values and expectations are other influences that contribute to the complexity of peer response groups. Therefore, answering my original research questions is a complicated task.

- What happens when e-mail communication about peer revision is implemented as an addition to the traditional mode of talk about writing?
- What student attitudes, values, and expectations about peer response groups evolve, shift, and remain fixed over time in both electronic and traditional communications?
- What about electronic and traditional peer response groups do student writers define as influential or ineffectual in making their revision decisions?

My answer to all these questions is, "It all depends on the context." For example, what a student writer defines as influential in making revision decisions depends on multiple factors, and those preferences and influences vary from writer to writer and from group to group. In drawing conclusions about research findings from my study, one-dimensional, cause-and-effect rationalizations are inappropriate. The reciprocity of the contextual variables is what matters most. Therefore, I propose a model of reciprocity, based on Richard Lerner's theory of developmental contextualism, that conceptualizes the dynamic interactionism of the contextual variables in peer response groups.

Richard Lerner's Theory of
Developmental Contextualism

With its roots in symbolic interactionism, developmental contextualism focuses on the interaction between the growing, changing individual and the context within which that person is changing (Muus, p. 339). Lerner's theory emphasizes the idea that dynamic interactions and reciprocal relationships between a person and the context always exist and therefore shape development (Muus, p. 342). However, the term "context" goes beyond setting; a theoretical understanding of the nature of context in developmental contextualism requires an awareness of the Four Meanings of Context (Dannefer, 1992):

- The physical setting (the surroundings, the environment).

- The social components (significant people who influence and are influenced by the individual.)

- The developing person. Not only are developing individuals influenced by the physical and social contextual variables that surround them, but also they change the context (including people) in which they function.

- Progression of time. The context inevitably changes and takes on different meanings for the developing person because of time and new experiences.

Therefore, developmental contextualism can only be understood as a dialectic process in which settings, social systems, and the individual have a reciprocal, bidirectional ($\Longleftrightarrow$) influence on each other, and these components change over time.

As a theory, developmental contextualism does not "postulate general developmental rules, stages, tasks, or milestones; general rules of development neither exist for nor apply in the same way to all social settings or individuals" (Muus, p. 345).

Instead, the theory accentuates all the reciprocal forces that shape development, and it emphasizes individuality, diversity, uniqueness, and the complex interconnections between individual and context.

Model of Reciprocity

Lerner's theory of developmental contextualism – or, more specifically, contextual relativism – is not limited to human development; it can be applied to generate other theories that take a postmodernistic stance toward change. In our class, individual students' development as readers and writers within their peer response groups was mediated by different contextual variables. Building upon Dannefer's (1992) Four Meanings of Context – the social context, the physical context, the individual, and time – I added the variables of the peer response group and the mode of communication. Here is a description of all six contextual variables particular to our class.

The Individual. Individual students brought with them to the peer response groups contextual variables that were particular to their histories as readers and writers. Prior experiences with peer response, gender, race, self-perceptions as readers and writers, ability levels, communication styles, and personalities all contributed to their level and type of participation in peer response. In our class, students had both positive and negative prior experiences with peer response; the class was gender and racially mixed; and students had generally low self-perceptions and abilities as readers and writers. These individual attributes shaped their initial attitudes, expectations, values, needs, and preferences, which, in turn, were influenced by other contextual forces in the class. As individual students' attitudes and expectations shifted and remained fixed over time, the other contexts of the class changed as well.

The Social Context. I as the teacher and the other students were part of the social context of the class. My own values and expectations influenced the ways in which individuals reacted to peer response, and these individual reactions shaped my pedagogical choices. When they hesitated to pair on the first day of authentic peer response, I had to adjust my expectations to give them more time to be comfortable. Reciprocally, my flexibility and patience gave them more space to negotiate their social relationships. The other students in the class were members of collaborative groups. How students related to each other depended on their individual attributes, and this determined reciprocity and rapport within their groups. In turn, growing rapport within groups led to changes in the individual's attitudes, values, and expectations of peer response groups. Given the number of students who came together, their dynamic interactionism was complex, and the ways in which they negotiated their social relationships varied from group to group.

The Physical Context. The physical context of our class included the setting, the genre of writing, the response strategy and training, ability grouping, and pedagogy. Meeting in the computer lab as our classroom changed the nature of peer response groups; individuals adjusted their attitudes and expectations based on using technology, and their levels of communication were affected as well. Narrative writing, the genre students wrote in, is more personal in nature, so students' attitudes and values about sharing and reacting to their stories – and their "selves" – were influenced. Training students to use the PQP response strategy, and the strategy in and of itself, changed some students' prior notions of peer response groups. This training and specific strategy altered the ways in which they communicated about writing and therefore influenced

their collaborative group. Also, the class was a homogeneous group of students; some liked being "on the same level" with their peers – in writing ability, age, and experience; others did not trust their peers' revision suggestions for that very reason. Finally, pedagogy was a contextual variable: using the writing process, getting peer feedback on first drafts, and responding face-to-face before responding via e-mail were all contextual influences on the individual's attitudes, expectations, and values in peer response groups.

The Mode of Communication. The various modes of communication students used to exchange ideas about writing were verbal, nonverbal, and written, and these modes transformed individual students and response groups in different ways. Some students preferred synchronous, verbal talk (mixed with nonverbal cues) about writing; other students favored the convenience and anonymity of asynchronous, written communication. Some students liked a combination of both. Mode of communication influenced the functions of the response groups, and the functions of the response groups influenced the individuals' attitudes, values, and needs. Individuals made choices about their communication preferences based on this reciprocity.

The Peer Response Group. Social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of peer response groups added to the contextual variables of the class. These dimensions were reciprocal in nature and differed from group to group. Some pairs of students matched well: they shared similar backgrounds and personal attributes. For them, negotiating their social and emotional relationships was less difficult than for other students who were mismatched for various contextual reasons. Furthermore, successful social and emotional relationships did not always guarantee cognitive growth; for example, those students without emotional attachments to their peers trusted the honesty of their

comments. Reciprocally, mode of communication affected the dimensions of the response group which shaped the individual's reaction to both. In turn, the individual influenced the function of the response group. If the individuals' expectations and needs were met through the desired communication medium, the more productive the response sessions. The more productive the conference, the more vested the individual, the stronger the peer response group, and so on.

Time As Context. In contextual relativism, time is a variable. In our class, over the course of fifteen weeks, students' attitudes, expectations, and values shifted or remained fixed to accommodate changes in the other contextual variables. These variables were influenced by the students' evolving perspectives. The social context, physical context, mode of communication, and response groups all took on new meaning for individual students as they interacted with and within the multiple contextual features of the class.

The six contextual variables of our class – individual attributes, social, physical, mode of communication, peer response groups, and time – reciprocated to cause dynamic interactions between and among variables. To understand the complexity of these relationships, I propose a Model of Reciprocity that is a visual representation of the dynamic interactionism in peer response groups. At the center of the model is the changing individual, and surrounding are the other contextual forces that shape and are shaped by the individual. The encircling variable is time, showing that all of the factors change as a function of time. The bidirectionality of the influences is represented by the double-arrows; these influences were operative, often subtle, and proceeding in a circular, continuing fashion, *ad infinitum,* over time.

Figure 3. Dynamic Interactionism and Contextual Relativism in Peer Response Groups:

A Model of Reciprocity.
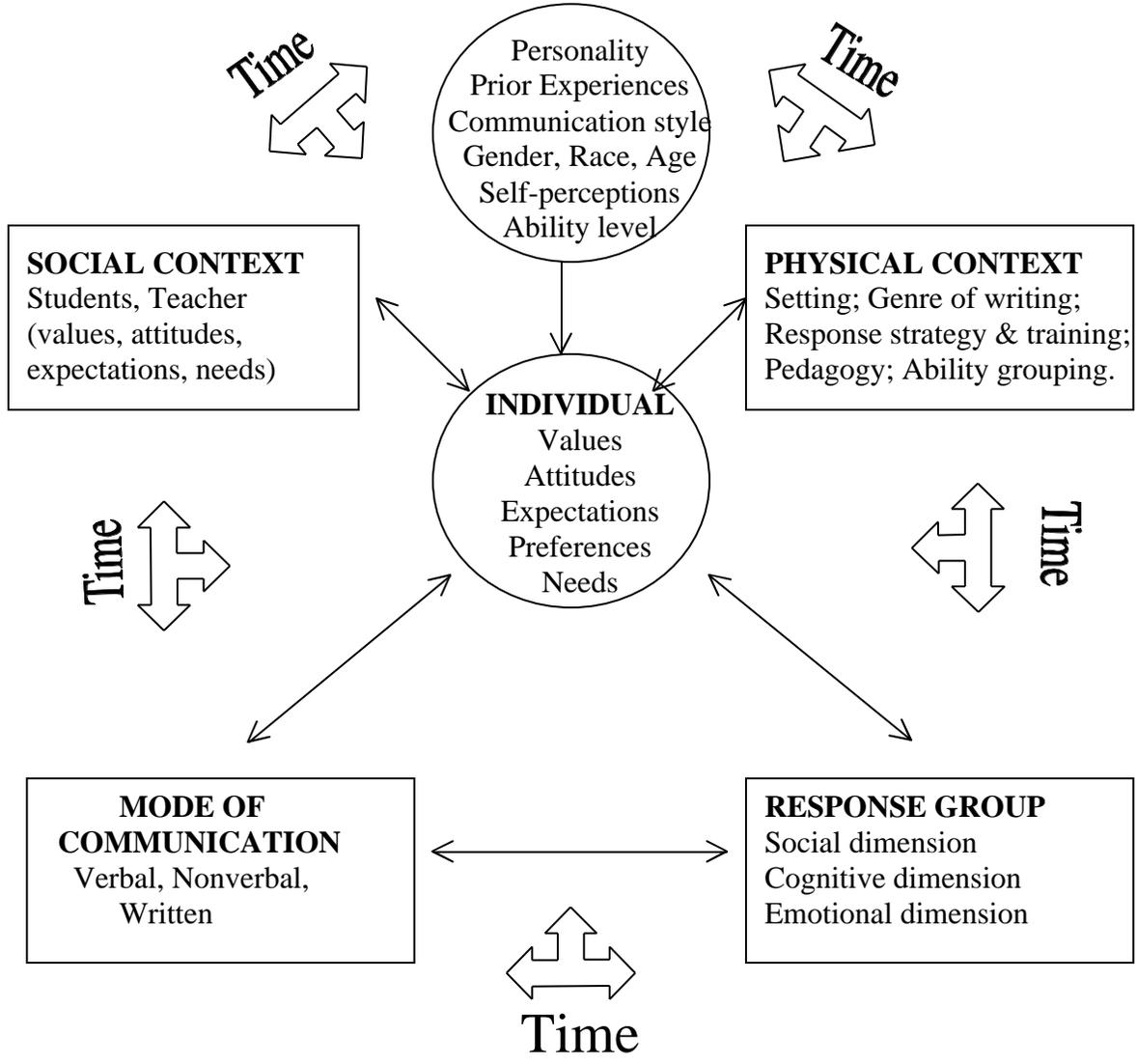
Implications for Future Research

The Model of Reciprocity that emerged from my research can be used to generate other research studies that examine reciprocal relationships in peer response groups. Researchers should move beyond just focusing on one contextual variable (e.g., an individual's prior experiences or gender) to understand how and why that one variable influences the others. Given the multiple contextual variables that are interconnected, reciprocal, and affect writers' and readers' growth and change, it is inappropriate to study linear, cause-and-effect relationships in peer response groups; this study shows that they simply do not exist. Future research studies should take place in different contexts so that multiple levels of dynamic interactionism in peer response groups can be understood as a function of those particular contexts. The model is meant to be a holistic representation of reciprocity in reading and writing groups, so it can be applied and expanded to inform other research studies that seek to illustrate complex, interactive relationships in collaborative classrooms.

Implications for Pedagogy

Teachers who intend to implement peer response groups in their writing classes should be aware of the multiple, influential contextual variables that exist in the classroom. Teachers should carefully match students so that their individual attributes are either in synch or complementary of one another. Students should examine their values, attitudes, and expectations going into peer response groups, and they should monitor the shifts in these over time through reflective discussion and writing. Also, individual students should be explicit about their expectations and needs to teachers and members of their peer response groups; student writers who are aware of their

expectations may take a more active role in ensuring that their expectations are met, and peer reviewers may have a clearer concept of their purpose in the conference.

Teachers should thoughtfully examine the physical and social contexts of peer response groups. The genre of writing, students' training in using certain revision strategies, and ability grouping all affect the dynamics of peer response groups. Students read and respond to narrative writing and expository writing in different ways, so specific revision strategies should reflect the purpose of the task. Students need to understand the differences between revising and editing, and they ought to be trained using scaffolded activities before participating in authentic peer response. Also, teachers should consider their own values and expectations before implementing peer response groups in their classrooms, and they should be flexible and patient as they make adjustments to their pedagogy to fit the class context.

When teachers structure peer response groups, they should consider what mode of communication might best fit their students' needs. Some students benefit from anonymous, electronic communication, while others need to establish more of an emotional and social connection through physical and verbal interactions. Again, taking into account individual students' values can help teachers in their selection of mode of communication. A realization of the complex reciprocity among the social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of peer response groups will also keep teachers from structuring groups haphazardly. As students negotiate these dimensions, they should reflect on them and keep the teacher apprised of their shifts in values, attitudes, and expectations. In turn, the teacher can intervene and make adjustments to other contextual

variables (e.g., mode of communication or response training) to make the students' time in peer response groups are more productive.

Finally, teachers need to be aware that time is an important contextual variable in peer response groups. Students need time to learn to respond, time to practice, and time to participate in authentic response. Furthermore, their involvement should be longitudinal and consistent over many months so that students can negotiate and balance their individual attributes with the groups' dimensions as well as other contextual features of the class.

Dynamic interactionism in peer response groups is complex and reciprocal. It is also a function of context. Teachers who understand the inevitable interchanges between individual students and the class context can assist their students as they grow and develop as readers and writers in peer response groups.

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Appendix

Appendix A
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Peer Response Groups Using Electronic and Traditional Communications: A Portraiture of a Class

Principal Investigator: Alecia Jackson   Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Carol A. Pope

You are invited to participate in this research study, which will occur during our class. The purpose of this study is to understand the nature of peer conferencing using electronic mail and traditional communications.

INFORMATION
You will be paired up and will function as partners for the semester to read and critique each others' writings. Comments made by peer reviewers will be used to examine the themes and patterns that emerge during your electronic mail peer conferences. Additionally, you will write anonymous reflections about your perceptions of the peer revision process. Finally, I will ask three students to participate in one-on-one interviews at the last weeks of the course, at your convenience. I will audio tape the interviews for transcription and analysis. None of these activities which produce research data will be graded or credited toward your course grade.

RISKS
There are no potential risks connected with this study. No personal or sensitive information will be requested from you, and no offensive or degrading materials will be presented to you.   There will be no personal risks or deceptions in this study.

BENEFITS
The results of this study will contribute to the research about peer response in an electronic environment.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. The data I collect will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

COMPENSATION
There is no compensation for participating in this research study.

CONTACT
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Alecia Jackson at 528B Poe Hall, or 515-9378. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Gary A. Mirka, Chair of the IRB Committee, Box 7906.

PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT
I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's signature:_____   Date:_____

Appendix B
Course Description and Objectives

As you begin your career at the University, you are entering a new *academic discourse community* in which your professors have certain expectations about how you use language, in both oral and written formats. These expectations may be very different from what you were exposed to in previous school settings. In fact, expectations about language may differ from major to major as well as from course to course within the University. A key to academic success is becoming aware of these different expectations and knowing how to use language for a variety of purposes and situations.

This process centers around learning how to learn, and specifically addresses successful ways of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking at the University. It is important to realize that feelings of anxiety, intimidation, and frustration are inherent in adapting to new academic situations and demands. This course offers a community of support as well as appropriate learning strategies to help in adjusting academic life.

Objectives of the course:

- To understand and effectively apply the psychological processes involved in learning.
- To gain access to the language and methods of the University.
- To think critically (e.g., analyze, synthesize, evaluate) with oral and written academic discourse.
- To process academic texts in ways that will positively contribute to the learning process.
- To use computer technology for written communication and inquiry.
- To gain confidence in expressing ideas both in written and oral formats.
- To experience a positive self-concept within an academic context.

Using a seminar format, you are expected to develop your own ideas and theories on a subject and to share what you learn with your classmates through written and oral expression. The subject for this seminar is "Growth and Change in Adolescence," and you will read and write in the genres of memoir and autobiography. The seminar format is intended to allow you to develop expertise with activities essential to academic success: reading, writing, interpretation, critical analysis, and discussion. Your classmates as well as the instructor will support your efforts by listening and providing suggestions as you develop your ideas.

Writing Assignments. Writing assignments 1-5 are biweekly assignments. The topics will spring from discussions of ideas and theories of the reading selections and will be written in the narrative mode. Drafts are expected to be done independently by the writer while in-class feedback is expected from all readers; we will be using electronic mail and conferences during class time to elicit responses from each other. Writings 6-8 are extensions of the earlier writings and will culminate in a memoir.

Reading Assignments. There will be several reading selections due each week. You are expected to participate in class discussions about the readings. Your ideas and observations are important. You should take notes, listen to others, offer suggestions, and volunteer information.

Appendix C
Writing Sample with PQP Revision Strategy

Draft One of *The Indian Way*

"So Brian what are you doing this weekend?" my best friend Jason asked.

"Well I have a Pow-Wow to go to in Fayetteville this weekend. We are supposed to sing and drum there," I replied.

"Man all that you do is go to them so called Pow-Wows. What do you get from those things anyway? You mean that you would rather go and beat on a drum singing and jumping around than to party with your friends?" he replied.

"Yes I am. I am going to that Pow-Wow no matter what you say. You have been partying about 6 years of your life, but these Pow-Wows have been around for ages," I said in a defensive loud voice. (GREAT INTRO. WITH DIALOGUE. YOU SET UP THE CONFLICT SO I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOUR STORY IS ABOUT)

During my adolescent years I didn't notice that I was living in an diverse age. I thought as a young child that everyone went to Pow-Wows and participated in Native American activities. Color meant nothing to me as a young child. I thought that everyone was equal. But that all changed when I started in the integrated school system. (WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN? WHAT GRADE? HOW OLD WERE YOU?) People were very different than I was. Their morals and values were different than mine. They disrespected the teachers and didn't care about anyone but themselves. (HOW THEY DISRESPECT THEIR TEACHERS? WHAT DID THEY DO THAT SHOWED THEY ONLY CARED ABOUT THEMSELVES?) But I wasn't about to change to please anyone.

I was raised to respect my elders and to respect every human being. I thought different from everyone else. I wanted to do good in school to please my parents and to make a name for my people because I was the only Native American there at that school. But I made friends very easily and everyone seemed to accept me for who I was (WHY DO YOU THINK THIS HAPPENED EVEN THOUGH YOU WERE DIFFERENT?). Still I was different in many ways.

High school was where the full impact about being Native American hit me with full force. Also I was beginning to understand more about the Pow-Wows and what they mean to me. They were a place where all the Native American people could gather and celebrate our heritage and keep the tradition of dance and music alive. (THIS IS A GOOD DESCRIPTION OF A POW-WOW, BUT WHAT IS IT ABOUT THEM THAT MAKES IT MEANINGFUL TO YOU?) I was proud to be Indian and everyone knew it.

Being the only Indian in the school had its ups and also its downs. I was given the nick name Chief on the baseball team and everyone knew who I was. I was everybody's friend. But it was hard to get any money for school or help because I was the only one in the whole school. (WHY DID YOU NEED MONEY OR HELP FROM THE SCHOOL?) However I was not ashamed to be Native American.

One time in high school some of my friends became mad because I was hanging out with my own kind than with them (WAIT – I THOUGHT YOU WERE THE ONLY INDIAN IN THE SCHOOL?). I told them that I felt more comfortable with my own kind because I was raised with them all of my life.

As I look back on my life I am thankful that the Lord made me Native American because we are a special people and we work hard at anything that we do. We are humble yet strong. (GREAT SENTENCE. IT'S SHORT BUT SAYS A LOT) I have learned a lot from being Indian and I am thankful for that.

GOOD SUBJECT TO WRITE ABOUT - BEING DIFFERENT AND HOW IT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE. I ALSO LIKED THE WAY YOU DESCRIBED BEING INDIAN. I THINK THAT YOU SHOULD ADD EVEN MORE DESCRIPTION OF YOURSELF. ADD MORE EXAMPLES OF HOW YOU ACTED AND HOW YOUR FRIENDS ACTED THAT WAS DIFFERENT. AND HOW THEY TREATED YOU AS A RESULT.   YOU JUST NEED A FEW REVISIONS TO ADD DETAIL AND TO MAKE THINGS LESS CONFUSING, BUT THIS IS GOING TO BE A GREAT STORY. I LOVED READING IT.

Appendix D
Technology Survey

Please circle the word or phrase that best describes the frequency of your personal and academic technology use before attending the University:

Use of any word processing program **before** attending the University:	Never	2 – 4 times per month	1 time per week	2 – 6 times per week	Daily
Use of Internet **before** attending the University	Never	2 – 4 times per month	1 time per week	2 – 6 times per week	Daily
Use of E-mail **before** attending the University	Never	2 – 4 times per month	1 time per week	2 – 6 times per week	Daily

Please circle the word(s) that best describe(s) your current comfort level of technology use:

Word Processing	Uncom-fortable	Still learning	Average	Comfortable	Expert
Internet	Uncom-fortable	Still learning	Average	Comfortable	Expert
E-mail	Uncom-fortable	Still learning	Average	Comfortable	Expert

Please write anything below that tells me about your prior experiences with technology use (e.g. the types of computer labs your high school had, any computer courses you took, etc.).

Appendix E
Electronic Submit Form

Appendix F
Interview Guide

For the informant:

These are topics that emerged as important from the class' electronic journal entries. I would like for you talk freely about each of these topics. I am interested in hearing how these topics pertain to you and your in-class partner, and you and your e-mail partner. You can make comparisons and contrasts between prior experiences and new experiences, both partners, and individual topics.

- Attitude
- Expectations
- Honesty
- Trust/reliability
- Relationship/friendship
- Communication - talk about writing
- Communication - social talk
- Nonverbal communication
- Quality and quantity of feedback
- Confidence
- PQP strategy
- Revision decisions
- Preferences

Appendix G
Coding Results from Electronic Journal Entries

Table 7. Coding Results from Electronic Journal Entry #1.

Topics:
- "Think about your role as a peer reviewer in peer conferences. What are your reactions to giving feedback to a peer about his/her writing?"
- "Think about your role as a writer in peer conferences. What are your reactions to receiving feedback from a peer about your writing?"

Category	References
Nature of discourse (questions, criticism, help, objectivity, praises)	22
Perceptions of writers' role	13
Perceptions of reviewers' role	9
Trust/rapport/empathy	6
Empathic relationship	11
Sensitivity/honesty/sincerity	11
Cognitive benefits	10
Affective benefits	7
Motivation	2
Sense of audience	3
Feelings of inadequacy/insecurity	8
Apathy/Futility of revision	6

Table 8. Coding Results from Electronic Journal Entry #2

Topic: "Describe your initial reactions to the electronic mail peer revision conference."

Category	References
Communication (verbal)	16
Communication (nonverbal)	7
Anonymity (positive)	7
Anonymity (negative)	5
Efficiency	2
Inefficiency	22
Trust/rapport	13
Sense of audience	14
Prefer FTF conferences	4

Table 9. Coding Results from Electronic Journal Entry #3

Topic:

- "What typesof responses do you expect from both of your partners when communicating about writing using e-mail?"
- "What types of responses do you actually receive and value from both of your partners when communicating about writing using e-mail?"

Category (Expectations & Values)	References
Honest criticism that helps to expand/improve content of writing	22
Praise	4
Emotional engagement w/ text	3
Editing	1

Category (Positive Attitude)	References
Honesty & anonymity	11
Extended audience	10
Efficiency	9
Gets expectations	15

Category (Negative Attitude)	References
Communication	5
Trust/rapport	5
Quality of feedback	3
Inefficiencies	2
Does not get expectations	7

Table 10. Coding Results from Electronic Journal Entry #4.

Topic: "In future writing classes, what will be your ideal situation for peer response about writing?"

Category	References
Both in-class & e-mail partners	20
Wider audience	12
Named one as ideal (but didn't identify)	9
Named both as ideal	9
Created ideal from contrast	4
References to gender	3
E-mail only	1
Teacher only	1